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# **Enculturation & Acculturation: an exploration of international student experiences in western learning cultures through individual Case Study research**

**Paper presented at the Business, Management, Accountancy and Finance Annual Conference 10 May 2011**

**By Gillian Bishop and Dr Annie Yeadon-Lee of the University of Huddersfield**

## **Abstract**

This small scale exploratory study examined the Post Graduate International student experience in a UK Higher Education Institution. The study was conducted by interviewing students and asking them about the initial experience on arrival in the UK, what their experience was like in the early weeks of the FTMBA programme, the issues they faced and the participants to the study were asked what factors supported the transitions made. Five students took part in the study using a semi structured interview process. The country of origin of the participants were India, Jordan and Australia. Generally, participants to the study, experienced some degree of acculturative stress in making the transition required to the UK way of learning. Participants, where English was not their first language, did appear to experience a greater level of acculturative stress. In order to prepare these students to be graduates of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century a range of employability measures were suggested by the participants such as work placements, internships, paid or unpaid and the opportunity to develop good UK work ethics.

## **Introduction**

Universities have continued to increase their drive to recruit international students to study in the UK. The general trend towards internationalisation in countries like the UK have made it evident that programmes in Higher Education need to learn to accommodate students transitions from Eastern perspectives to Western perspectives. As Ryan & Carrol (2005:5) note:

*Home students also find the transition to Higher Education taxing, until they become accustomed to academic language and conventions, independent learning and class participation. However, international students must deal with these things and more.*

Valeinte (2008) points out the context in which individuals learn, work and live has an important influence on creating and modifying the individual's expectations. Religion, ideology and social patterns e.g. Islamic, Confucian have to be considered for a successful understanding of different cultural configurations and their evolution. Cultural factors, values and manners are analysed in order to understand and enhance the behaviour of students and teachers during the learning process.

In order to prepare students to become global citizens, there is a need for universities to understand the student's prior knowledge, indigenous learning culture, expectations of the learning process within their host universities and ultimately their actual experiences within the host university. From this, there is the opportunity for individual universities to learn how to adapt to internationalisation and create global classroom. As Hyland et al (2008) stated the cultural diversity of the University sector provides us with a rich opportunity to learn from each other.

## Rationale

This paper looks at the challenges that international students face when arriving at a UK university. It specifically focuses on the Post Graduate Full Time Master of Business Administration (FTMBA) Programme. The research explored the student experience from the perspective of the international student in order to understand the enculturation and acculturational stress the international student experiences when making the transition to the social and academic life in a UK university. Through in depth interviews with five international students, we have gained an appreciation of the impact of the international student's individual enculturation process. This knowledge is useful as both authors are involved in the course leadership and recruitment of international students. There is an immediate and practical benefit to this research in terms of recruitment strategy and management of the learning experience for the students.

## Definitions and literature review

Terms used within the paper are defined in this section, specifically referring to the terms enculturation, acculturation, international students, western and eastern learning traditions.

### ***Enculturation***

Enculturation is the process by which a person learns the requirements and behaviours of the culture by which he or she is surrounded. An individual acquires values and engages in the behaviours that are appropriate or necessary in that culture. Enculturation is the process where the culture that is currently established teaches an individual the accepted norms and values of the culture or society in which the individual lives. Most importantly the individual knows and establishes a context of boundaries and accepted behavior that dictates what is acceptable and not acceptable within the framework of that society. It teaches the individual their role within society as well as what is acceptable behavior within that society, Grusec and Hastings (2007).

### ***Acculturation***

Valiente (2008) referred to acculturation as the integrative process of awareness towards one's own culture and other's culture. Acculturation happens on the basis of understanding of what is required in different environments and for different tasks. An adaptation or acculturation occurs as equivalent to the 'cultural transposition explained by Hofstede (1984). Motivation for learning in a multi cultural environment must involve tolerance and self confidence in the use of alternative unfamiliar

approaches by themselves and others. A student confronted with conflicting demands subjects, staff and institutions, in an alien culture will need to learn how to employ diverse abilities, knowledge and behaviour to identify and cope with conflicts in their original set of values and interpretations (Hughes-Weiner, 1986, Mc Millen et al, 1997, Kennedy, 2002). The process of acculturation is probably more difficult to accomplish for those students belonging to societies with little tolerance towards uncertainty and disagreement and where saving face is essential, characteristically in East Asia.

### ***International students***

According to Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD 2011), international students are those who travel to a country different from their own for the purpose of tertiary study. The definition of international students varies in each country in accordance to their own national education system. For the purpose of this research 'international' is used to refer to students from countries outside the UK, especially those coming from different cultural, language and religious backgrounds, some of which are very different from the UK culture.

### ***Eastern & Western learning styles: Confucian versus Socratic Traditions***

The two key traditions explored in this study are those of East Asia's collectivist educational and the Western world's individualist educational tradition. The philosophies behind the origins of these traditions; East versus West can be viewed as almost opposites

East Asia's collectivist educational tradition (emanating from the Confucian philosophy) views learning as a one-time process for the young as a collective group. Confucius believed that education had the power to make people equal, offering both a means of upward mobility and freedom from poverty, whilst also curbing any propensity to act unethically or antisocially. Asian education principally entails rote learning and memory. With Western academics believing that students with Confucian philosophies often leads to such problems as Plagiarism and consider that the student only engages in surface learning, so, seen, from a Western perspective, as a far less effective form of learning (Chan & Drover, 1997). However, numerous researchers have argued that, what Western researchers mistake for rote learning, is in fact learning through memorisation that often involves deep learning strategies (Wing On, 1996; Chan & Drover, 1997). Valiente (2008) cites the impression of learners, particularly coming from East Asia, as passive, obedient and non critical, this could be a misunderstanding of other factors, including cultural and communication difficulties. Lack of confidence and poor language skills are a primary limitation on the articulation of questions and answers in an open setting such as a classroom or a public discussion. These problems are exacerbated by the existence of a different model of communication and the lack of socialisation with students from other cultures.

Valiente (2008) points out that for most CHC (Far East) being critical before absorbing the content of the topic could be rather confusing and premature pursuit rather than this being perceived as a lack of analysis and lack of participation in debates. Therefore the UK system of questioning and debate in class can be deemed

bad manners and a lack of respect. International students may be more participative when 'safe environments' are provided.

In contrast, the Western world's individualist educational tradition, which emanating from the Socratic philosophy of asking questions views this approach as a life-long process for individuals (Barker, 1997) and the educational culture from which the both authors originate. In this culture students are encouraged to be active learners in the classroom. An environment where students give and share their ideas, which is maximizing their role as students in creating the effective learning and teaching activity (Joyce Lin, 2008). Students are very much encouraged to think and voice their views when they are involved in group discussions or writing assignments.

Kingston and Forland (2008) cite that styles of working in the UK are unfamiliar for many students coming from cultures where the teacher and lecturer relationship and learning can be very different. This experience of a new culture of learning appears to be one to which students generally react positively to once they have had time to acculturate and reflect on the differences between their previous and current experiences of learning. Hyland et al (2008). Therefore, group work and allocation of international students to the practice of group work needs to be carefully managed within the assessment process.

## **Methodology**

An 'interpretivist' philosophy underpins the research framework adopted in this research project. Interpretivism has more utility as a research approach as it offers rich insights into the nature of the individual's experiences of studying on the MBA at the University of Huddersfield Business School. The data was captured by means of a semi structured interview with five overseas students. The students were from Jordan, Australia and India. The students are at different stages of the FT MBA Programme delivered in the Business School of the University of Huddersfield.

The aim of the research was to explore the student experience from their point of view questioning the participants of how they felt on arriving in the UK, their experiences early in the programme, the differences and acculturation process they underwent, taking from the participants any suggestions on how the experience could be improved from the international student perspective. Issues that were not explored but could compliment the study would be to compare the views of the international student with the home student experience to determine whether some of the issues identified also affect UK home students.

In securing the participants to the study then the authors acknowledge that there may be an issues in relation to the validity and reliability of the data in that each student was approached by the Course Leader to request their agreement to take part in the research. This was reflected upon and for later interviews these were carried out by the co author, who was not known to the participants in the study and who had no involvement in the full time post graduate programme.

The data was analysed using thematic analysis and was influenced by Huang's (2008) research on the experiences of international students This framework supported the thematic coding using the following headings: practical challenges; emotional and affective issues; cultural adaptation and integration; English language acquisition and

competence; pedagogical difficulties; curriculum and assessment and performance and outcomes

## The Research Findings

The results of the study have been collated and analysed through the use of concept cards to draw out the themes of the research supported by the categories cited above by Huang (2008)

### Practical challenges- Accommodation

Participants were asked about their first impressions when arriving in the UK. Students obtaining a place at the University are directed to the accommodation service. The accommodation service, although located within the University campus, works independent of the university. The accommodation service supplies students with details of the accommodation which includes a hall's of residence, which is around four miles outside of the main University campus and the town centre. Although there are regular buses to transport students to and from the University two of the participants in the study considered this a disappointing experience for international students. Participants described their experiences when first arriving, stating that:

*When I came here it was snowing and I had around 4 to 5 bags of luggage....as I didn't have any accommodation, I didn't know how it works over here...and they just gave me Halls, which for post graduate students are not quite good.*

*.. it was snowing so I wasn't used to the weather...And I was really tired because of travelling from London to here...plus the accommodation pressure and everything was quite...it was too heavy for me.*

The participant in the study was clearly disappointed with the location of the accommodation and did not appear to have experienced a good first impression of the university. The weather was unexpectedly cold resulting in the student travelling under difficult and confusing conditions on an unfamiliar transport system.

A further issue which two of the participants to the study commented upon was being accommodated alongside undergraduates. This was a view held by two of the participants to the study, in that the UK undergraduates have a different culture to the post graduate international student.

One participant described an issue with the other students who shared the accommodation, saying:

*...it wasn't that good...trying to get to sleep at night and everyone was going crazy...People knocking on the door, just didn't sleep until I remember it was 6 o'clock in the morning...*

Differing social cultures exist in university life, and it appears that this was the case in the accommodation block of the above participant cited above, in that he was allocated to accommodation populated by mainly UK undergraduate students who

enjoy a different form of socialising. This account highlights the differences in cultural customs and practices.

Conversely, one of the more mature, experienced students who was Australian did not have the same experience when arriving to start the course as he had been located in Huddersfield some time before the programme start date. He said:

*'...well we'd been here for quite some time before then... ( the start of the course). We'd been here several times.'*

Interesting to note from this interview the use of 'we', this participant had come to the UK along with his family and did not appear to suffer the same level of accultural stress identified by the other participants. Furthermore as supported by Kagen and Cohen (1990) fluency in the English language may influence cultural adjustment.

### ***Emotional and affective issues***

#### *Emotional support*

Some participants to the study cited emotional and affective issues experienced when first arriving in the UK and starting the programme. It was noted that inevitably, some people became homesick and missed the support of family and friends. One participant said:

*'It was really difficult to leave my family, my wife, my daughter and my parents, especially my daughter because every time I speak to her on the phone she tells me to come back.'*

*'...the first thing I felt was lonely, I never had contact until I went off to read...I don't have any friends over here and I didn't get any contact of any kind of university members and I didn't have any kind of job so I need to sit in the University for 8-10 hours a day...so I started doing it for all my stuff and it takes a little bit of time for the new students when they arrive in the UK in terms of education and in terms of finance.'*

#### *Networking*

In terms of overcoming the emotional aspects of arriving in a strange country to live and study, participants said they had taken steps to deal with this issue. One way was to be involved in the use of social networking sites. The social networking sites are cited as a useful support mechanism for students on the programme from both a support role academically and socially. One participant stated that:

*..they (the students) were into social networking and facebook and they eventually got some student's who were already on facebook and already in Huddersfield doing different courses... (facebook) that used to help ...I didn't realise until that time that social networking was that important.*

Another participant in the study cited the use of university facilities to act as a way of creating a network of friends in order to gain emotional support:



*...if you don't adapt to this climate then it's a big problem and you can end up with stress, so what I did was join the University gym. So that was a good experience because you have good contacts with people and you can have a lot of friends when you do some exercise then people will help you....I think people should start with something because if you are feeling lonely that could lead to stress and you won't be able to do your studies properly so it is very important. There are lots of facilities in the university, you can go to yoga and get rid of your stress.*

*...it is important when international students come to a new place (they take up the opportunities available in the University), back in their own country they have a lot of support from their friends and family and when they come here with their studies they struggle a lot..*

### **Cultural adaptation and integration**

A number of studies suggest that creating a suitable environment in the classroom facilitates cultural adaptation, this is achieved by having tutors who understand the issues of acculturation and, by having local students working with the international students to guide and advise them of UK based academic practices.. Collins and Lim (2004) emphasize the lack of socialisation and interaction with native students and the added pressure of part time jobs are specific obstacles faced by international students. For international students there are many systems and procedures they have to familiarise themselves with alongside generally having to learn about their studies in a foreign language. The students have to understand the university systems on arrival in the UK particularly in respect of the visa requirements, as well as the university policies in respect of course work and trying to find suitable accommodation

One participant detailed the issue he had with understanding the difference between extenuating circumstances and a request for a deadline extension. The policies surrounding the granting of extensions is part of the induction process but from the feedback received either the students interviewed did not attend the induction or if they did attend the induction then they were not always in a state of health to take in the detail of what is being explained to them. One participant in the study explained this below:

*...knew about extensions but I didn't know about extenuating circumstances.*

### **Pressure to succeed**

Within the research it was important to learn and appreciate the contributory factors to accultural stress when working with particular students. In these cases the students bring with them family expectations that require them to succeed. In some cultures, for a student not to succeed, this can have a high cost in terms of losing face. As one participant explained he was the first of his family to travel outside the Asian continent and in the event that he should fail then this would have high costs in terms of disappointment within the family and community.

Valeinte (2008) suggests that the network of mutual obligations and 'face losing' affect more than one generation of the student's relatives. These relatives could be making considerable financial contributions to help the student through HE education, especially to go abroad. Relatively high levels of family responsibility and fear of failure may prompt student's to adopt an approach that focuses on surface ( usually defined as rote learning), achieving ( using resources to attain performance) and low risk ( considered safe) strategies for coping with their studies ( Biggs, 1987, Entwistle 1988, Biggs and Moore, 1993, Watkins 1996a ). The following quotation is an example of this:

*I want to succeed....cause I know if I fail then I'll let my family down and I'll let myself down.. I was the first one of my brothers and sisters like to travel outside the Asian continent...if I fail this like big big disappointment...and everytime they call you , they say alright you have to succeed do 200% of the things.*

### **English language acquisition and competence**

The participants in the study cited language acquisition as an issue in that not all students have good English skills. Kirby et al (1996) suggest that difficulties in the command of the English language in the discipline and in the writing style of academic material imply that the weakest students may turn to copying and memorizing well known passages of text books and lecturers notes that express the required ideas in flawless English language. Although one would have expected the language acquisition would be a problem from the interviews undertaken there was not too great an emphasis on this aspect. Two of the quotes below illustrate the key points made in respect of language acquisition which may have been as a result of the participants interviewed in this study:

*The biggest problem is the language problem. People from a few countries are ok with their English, especially in India because English is a first language in most of the schools but people from Arabic countries I wouldn't say their English is poor, but the way they speak a lot of people can't understand because their accent is different. Language is the biggest problem.*

One of the participants in the study cited the issue for international students in that many students do not speak English fluently which means the support staff can sometimes have difficulty providing the required level of support, another added:

*I think it perhaps more often than not it's like the English as second language students who probably need that support more...., but they're often hooked up with somebody who can speak their home tongue more often than not.*

### **Pedagogical difficulties**

Students were asked about their experiences in respect of the learning styles adopted by the University and how this compared with experiences in their own country, participants stated that:

*..It's a different type of education, so it is kind of scary...in the early hours scared a lot.*

*..this makes you stressed, even if you start reading some of the books you will not be reading in a proper way so you aren't able to analyse what you are reading rather you start thinking about what I am going to do the next day.*

*...We all have concerns about some of the assignments we get and it can be pretty daunting. Or even just for someone to clarify look this issue with plagiarism is not as scary as it seems.*

From the participants in the study it was clear to see that some students had experienced a didactic style of teaching and found adapting to the UK methods of teaching and learning challenging. Valiente (2008) explains that the process of acculturation is probably more difficult to accomplish for those students belonging to societies with little tolerance towards uncertainty and disagreement and where public image is of great value, as is characteristics in East Asia. The participants in this study confirmed that they were used to exam style assessment and also had an expectation that they would be taught what the right answers were and they were expected to memorise that information, this is illustrated by participants who said:

*...in my university, in my country, the university teaches you and then they ask you to write a test and exams about what you have learned ...so you don't get practical exposure ...in post graduate we used to get a little bit of practical experience but not real exposure as to how you critically think about it, how to reflect on it.*

*In my education system it doesn't work like that, you need to read and then write it, you never think about what will be in future reflection or how you critically analyse your points. And second struggle is the Harvard Referencing System because we don't have any kind of references...*

*..it's pure examination based...we never had assignments and we never used computers.*

The participants cited the newness of learning how to think and write critically as being something they hadn't previously experienced. There was some fear in relation to making mistakes. Some of the feedback from the participants in the research was reassuring in terms of how students had adapted to the new way of learning and the benefits they gained from using a more applied way of learning. Once the participants to the study understood this approach to learning then they appeared to appreciate how this better served their need to become independent learners, they stated:

*...so what I found here was that it was more practical and you had to go through books and you learn a lot just because you go through different articles....there is Summon here in the university and you just explore*

*Summon for a single subject....because you know what the subject is and how you are using things practically so that is very good.*

*..you have a case study which you explore more through the subject which helps you to finally deal with things practically when you work...*

New approaches to learning including action learning and reflective practice were identified as new concepts to the participants. They developed an appreciation of new methods of learning and realised its value for future personal and professional use, he stated:

*..there are a few subjects which are quite different like action learning, which really helped me out because initially I was thinking 'it doesn't make sense' but when I studied the entire subject and studied the assignment I thought 'yes, I need to change myself accordingly to the surroundings' which I did and then I thought this is a good subject because it is a reflection and you just rectify those mistakes in your life....*

*What I find is that I can reflect properly on a lot of things...*

*...my supervisor gives me guidelines of what to do and what not to do and where I'm going wrong and every week I'm meeting him and it's quite productive. But it's all my own work and I've never done something like this ever in my life.*

Post graduate programmes across the school have developed an academic skills support package to help post graduate students. There is an introduction to academic writing skills within one of the core modules early in the programme and then further work developing academic skills in the context of assessment is embedded into one of the modules, close to the assessment deadline, to draw out the need to develop critical thinking skills when required. The post graduate students have the opportunity to seek individual, one to one support, with the Learning Development Tutors as and when students require this help. The type of work involved includes support with the academic skills of critical writing, use and practice of the Harvard Referencing System and practical sessions to support and guide in assignment writing. In order to support students in the early part of the programme experience has shown that this needs to be a timetabled activity. Often students cannot appreciate the usefulness and relevance of this part of the programme until there is a need to submit work for assessment. The participants in the study confirmed the importance of this support early in the programme;

*it was very good that my tutor told me about the Harvard Referencing System*

### ***Pastoral and academic support***

Pastoral support is provided by the course leader for the post graduate programme who can refer students to a wider range of specialist university academic support functions. What typifies the international learners, when living in a foreign country, is that due to the substantial and generalised differences extending to all spheres of their lives, the pressure to survive may overwhelm the internal need for deep

learning. (Pratt et al , 1999, Tweed and Lehman 2002) Students cited positive examples of the academic and support staff within the university which made the difference between a positive and negative experience. Participants to the study have regularly cited the support of academic staff in the form of the course leader saying:

*I find myself really closer to you (course leader), than any other teacher in that you were supporting me in each step, like sending me emails, and I came to you with my problem, I had swine flu and the depression ...*

Module tutors, support staff, the international office, careers, job shop, library and IT support were all cited in the study as provided positive support to the international student. Participants are quoted as saying:

*The staff are very clever that they remember people's names...you can always go and say hello to somebody...like (CL) I just wanted to stick my head in the door, and say look can I make a time to come and see you...I was having issues with the visa....she got back (to me with) email...things like that;*

*....and even in the library if I have problems I used to go to (Business School Librarian) and she used to help me as well*

*.I learned from a woman in the library services ....she helped me to make presentations...how to give presentations and she was good support*

### **Mentoring**

Peer mentoring was identified as a positive aspect of support for the international student experience. Students attending the staff student panel meetings confirmed that mentoring of new international students took place and contributed to helping the international student make the transitions necessary to the practices operating in a UK higher education institution.

Informal mentoring is supported by the Course Leader for the programme and the FT MBA post graduate community. This is facilitated through 'senior' students agreeing to be mentors and when new students arrive they are given details of the 'senior' students willing to support them through mentoring.

Students and staff have discussed whether mentoring would be a useful way of supporting students through the acculturation and enculturation process. A mixed response to this was gathered from the participants within this small scale study. Some senior students ( a term used by the FT MBA community to denote students who have about 1 years experience on the programme) expressed a willingness to be mentors to new students and considered that a mentor at the start or even prior to arriving in the UK would be beneficial and one participant to the study took this role extremely seriously, whereas another participant to the study claimed that this was not necessary as the support was either already available through the tutors and support staff in the University or that the participant was sufficiently mature enough not to need this type of guidance.

*I don't see that (mentoring) as being an issue...it's a difficult issue because those coming through the MBA are a bit older, would probably feel what do I want a mentor for?*

Alternatively the other participant considered that mentoring would be a useful support tool in terms of someone to direct concerns to for example in respect of assignments and meeting standards of academic conduct i.e. plagiarism. It was also noted that in terms of the informal mentoring that took place that it may be more relevant to the international students where English was not their first language and that they tended to find students who spoke their language to help them through the early stages of the programme.

*it would have definitely worked for me, in the sense that it would have actually given me an idea of what exactly I am doing, and how my senior batch have performed, and what are the key things that I need to do to...if I need help*

*I am helping him with referencing as in I'm showing him the book...and if he has any problems he can contact this person..*

This aspect of the research resulted in a range of views as to how and whether mentoring can assist the international student in the enculturation process.

### ***Curriculum and the Assessment Process***

The induction to the programme takes place at the very start of the course but the international student is often late arriving due to visa issues and therefore is not able to receive the benefits of a full and comprehensive induction programme. The induction experience then becomes a compressed overview of the issues the course leader considers important to basically allow them to start the catch up process, which is not generally to the rigour of the planned programme. The detail and extent of the induction is dependent upon the time the international student arrives in the UK HE institution and the availability of the course leader to give out the necessary information. A key part of the induction process is to introduce the course participants to one another and help them form supportive groups, which is lost when students arrive intermittently to join the Programme.

It is interesting to note from the research that even when students do arrive in time to attend the full induction programme four out of the five students interviewed experienced a level of accultural stress. This can be seen to reduce the impact and the ability of the international students to appreciate fully the assimilation of the information being provided. Other research suggests that the health issues students experience on arrival are part of the acculturative and enculturative process that students experience and that even the students that attend the induction sessions often fail to find this a useful experience in terms of preparing them for the academic and social aspects of the programme.

At induction consideration needs to be given to the distance that the students have travelled, the change in time zones, change in diet and the anxiety and stress

associated with making the transition to the UK based education system. The MBA programme has two start dates, September and January. The students who arrive to take up their place in the January cohort experienced issues associated with bad weather conditions which were noted by two of the participants in the study.

Participants cited the following in terms of the induction programme, these included:

*...there were only three people, one guy from India and another guy from the USA... after three days there was another girl from Pakistan.*

*'He (a tutor) told us that there were students coming in but due to bad weather and due to visa problem... a lot of students couldn't come here. '*

The participant who had only recently joined the programme when interviewed cited the level of organisation in the classroom as a positive and supportive factor on the programme. He was impressed by the opportunity to view all lecture materials on the Blackboard site prior to and after the class. He had originally requested the opportunity to tape record each session but once he was aware of the course documents available he was confident to relax and interact in the session rather than have to devote the time to taking down notes.

*..everything goes exactly on time....the classes, the teachers, helping us, giving us the materials in class...I don't have to write in the class – I get the slides, so I like to give 100% of my attention to the tutor and not be like writing- trying to catch up with her, so I remember I asked if I could bring a recorder to the class.. I was like, I was almost afraid that I have to write and listen and that I would not be able to do it....But I don't have to write I just have to listen and just think and interact with my teacher.*

From the pedagogical perspective, this participant to the study, found the use of information technologies through the Blackboard system a positive factor in his experience.

### ***Performance and outcomes***

Most of the participants to the study acknowledged that the learning experience on the post graduate MBA programme supported the individual in experiencing transformational learning.

Of the five students interviewed three were coming to the end of the FT MBA programme. A fourth student was mid course and the fifth student had recently started the January 2011 intake. Therefore the performance and outcomes did tend to vary depending upon the stage on the programme they were at.

Students coming to the end of the programme were able to cite a number of positive transformations having undergone the process of enculturation whilst on the full time MBA programme. They cited factors such as transformational change in respect of different ways of thinking. This was identified through a deeper understanding and

appreciation of different cultures, custom and practices, and how the knowledge of different ways of learning continues to support the participants on their return to the business world. The participants to the study cited examples of how the programme helped them develop interpersonal skills, relationship building, the higher level thinking skills, appreciation of the hierarchy within organisations and how to use these experiences effectively. The participants cited the course as being practical and applied and not too 'bookish'

*..what I find now is that I can reflect properly ...*

*From my MBA course it is leadership skills because every student gets the chance to perform...*

*The MBA programmes a person (to) think differently.his mental level changes especially you get exposure with international students...*

The positive aspects of group work were cited and the different teaching and learning styles were made reference to in a positive manner.

*...there's a lot of group work, a lot of interaction which is much better than having a didactic approach...*

*...his approach (the tutor) is he just sits on the bench and just talks to you...no notes...oh sometimes he has overheads, but generally no notes, so very relaxed style, keen to have interactive approach*

## **Conclusions and discussion**

The findings from the small scale study illustrate that in most of the participant experiences the international students' do experience accultural stress and that in order to make the transition required to succeed in a UK higher education institution they rely upon the university, through its academic staff and support staff along with 'senior students' to help them through the transition process. Of the participants to the study all but one participant cited examples of experiencing accultural stress when undertaking the FT MBA programme.

The conclusions drawn can be related back to the themes developed using the concept cards and some of the suggested themes outlined by Huang (2008). This related in to the practical challenges such as accommodation and change in climate; emotional and affective issues; cultural adaptation and integration; language; pedagogical issues; curriculum and assessment and performance outcomes.

As this was an exploratory study opportunities were taken to investigate what factors would contribute to improving the overall experience and to meet aspirations for our international students. Overwhelmingly the students participating in the study explained their aspirations of employment opportunities within the UK in terms of placements, internships, voluntary and paid work experience and employability skills for future careers.



The location of the accommodation offered to the post graduate international student was not generally sensitive to the needs of the international students particularly in terms of where the accommodation offered was located. This was emphasised by a number of participants in the study. Hyland et al ( 2008) cite the difficulties international students face when arriving in the UK, in respect of understanding the UK culture of going to the pub and 'parties' leading to a drinking culture among the British students. From an acculturation and enculturation viewpoint then the physical location of the accommodation and the citing of post graduate students within predominantly undergraduate halls of residence needs to be a future consideration when preparing for the arrival of international students.

Furthermore the adverse weather conditions experienced by students arriving for the January intake of the programme can affect students ability to acculturate. Adverse weather conditions can impact on the induction experience and flexibility needs to be considered to overcome the impact this has on international students.

Emotional and affective issues were experienced by the majority of the participants to the study. This confirms the need to acknowledge emotional issues associated with the enculturation process. As Neild and Thom (2006, Wu 2002,) support the view that being a tutor is about tapping into parenthood and motherhood. The mother substitute is highly visible initially, but in time the tutor /parent role can be internalised and independence can develop for the international student. Initially some international students will require a high level of support and encouragement to promote the enculturative process. Students found engagement with other students by means of social networking sites a useful aid to the enculturation process from both an academic and social perspective.

A learning point for staff is the need to appreciate the international student perspective and how individual international cultures affect the motivation and drives underpinning the need to learn and be successful. Traher, 2007, Sanderson, Hayes and Inrona 2005, support the view that we do not generally embrace the experiences of students from different cultural backgrounds and consider how we might learn from them about the complex and culturally situated influences on teaching and learning. Students in the Hyland et al ( 2008) study identified as positive teaching strategies where lecturers gave examples from their own countries and negative experiences as having no opportunity to discuss what is happening in their own countries. A further point of note is the pressure some international students are under in order to succeed. In their own culture then not to succeed is to lose face in their families and communities.

This is further reinforced through the international students appreciation and understanding of different learning styles. It is evident that international students tend to feel overwhelmed and anxious in a learning environment and teaching style that disregard and greatly deviate from their previous learning experience and in some cases contradict and threaten their existing cognitive framework. Kirby et al (1996) point out that students' may use memory when

they feel unable to employ the specialist language required by written academic assignments, or they may not understand the subject under study.

It is heartening to note that once students do make the transition to the new way of learning they find the change to be transformational and appear to see the benefits of this. The participants to the study cited the positive benefits achieved through the use of action learning and reflective practice techniques developed whilst on the programme. Pastoral and academic support is a key part in supporting this transition. The role of the course leader and a range of support services, such as the library service, are important factors in the early acculturative and enculturative process. Time spent giving support early in the programme does appear to impact upon the success for the student and future word of mouth marketing of the student experience. Students work with the University's International Office to promote word of mouth back in their own countries.

In terms of the curriculum and the assessment process, taking into account the acculturation and enculturative process that international students in the study experienced there needs to be a better understanding of the issues faced by international students when arriving in the country and an appreciation of the effects this has on their ability to absorb the information provided at induction and in the early parts of the modules studied.

Staff teaching and supporting international students need to appreciate more the background of the international student, the practical challenges they face, the emotional and affective issues, the level of pastoral support required to help make the transition to different ways of learning. From the study and the research undertaken to find out how to support a richer and more positive learning experience then international students appreciate lecturers who allow discussion of issues and strategies with respect to the international students' country of origin. Furthermore the pedagogy and assessment process needs to incorporate opportunities for small group/ one to one tutorial sessions to encourage this new way of learning without students being seen to 'lose face.'

The learning points arising from the study relate to the students initial experience on arrival, how the students obtain accommodation and the induction experience. The learning points for staff are about the acculturation and enculturalisation that takes place between arrival and in the early stages of the programme. The study confirms the implications for staff development in the university. Staff need to appreciate the journey the international student has to take in adopting a different style of learning University staff need to allow the international student time to develop confidence in their knowledge before they expect the international student to take part fully in class discussions and presentations. University staff need to support and encourage the international student to develop the confidence to take part in class discussion which takes time to develop.

There is a place for staff development to raise awareness from the University's perspective for staff in understanding the acculturation process for international students along with an understanding of international student expectations for employability skills, internships and placements whilst undertaking the FT MBA programme. An appreciation of, not only learning styles, but why international students require help in building confidence their confidence in academic writing and

the use of a referencing system that they have not used before. Careful attention to the right type of encouragement, support and the use of formative assessments on an individual level is an important step forward, so preventing allegations of plagiarism and academic misconduct. The suggestion by de Vita, 2004 and Ridley, 2004, emphasise the need for on going dialogue and collaboration in the form of one to one support based on formative assessment to integrate, apply, extend and critique knowledge. Hands on experience with input from a tutor is recommended to illustrate how students might extend or alter what they are doing and assist them in drawing ideas from the literature and developing informed opinions.

It is clear from the positive feedback that participants to the study have enjoyed the post graduate experience, they are genuinely proud to have studied at a UK university. The participants to the study confirmed that staff are supportive and the MBA student body themselves show a high commitment and pride in being involved in the Business School initiatives through the social networking site.

A final question of the study was to explore with the participants what their aspirations and expectations had been from a UK University and whether these had been fully met. The results of this part of the interview tended to focus on expectations in relation to the employability aspects of the programme and the opportunities available to obtain work experience in a UK company. Participants in the study made suggestions ranging from opportunities to network with business people, opportunities for short internships, paid or unpaid work experience and voluntary work. Should the University pursue this avenue then it would be prudent to examine opportunities to include within the modules a toolkit of business skills and an understanding and appreciation of UK business work ethics and expectations of UK employers.

The study has promoted a deeper understanding of the acculturative and enculturation process that many international students face and it is acknowledged by the researchers that the findings from the small scale study should be shared with academic and support staff who are in contact with international students. It is important that university staff involved with international students appreciate the features associated with the enculturative process in support of international students. Adapting to the UK Business School culture is demanding and can impact upon the health and ability to take part in student activities, this can result in low moods and depression as well as influencing the confidence and ability levels of the international student.

It is important that staff be made aware of the value placed upon education by international students and their families and the pressure placed on these individuals to succeed. It is important for some international students that they are seen not to fail as this means 'losing face' back home in their communities. Measures should be put in to ensure that early assignments have formative as well as summative assessments with the inclusion of tutorial support style sessions at appropriate intervals to allow for one to one checking that students understand. The one to one sessions or small groups allows the students who may not wish to ask questions in a full class situation, the confidence to air that fears and concerns in a non threatening environment.

## **Recommendations**

There is a need to raise awareness with academic and support staff of the enculturation process international students' face when arriving in a UK higher education institution, particularly when the university's mission is to increase recruitment of international students.

There needs to be further work and attention paid to the aspirations/ expectations that international students have of the UK Higher Education system, particularly in respect of employment and the opportunity to improve employability skills in a UK organisation. From the research undertaken funding streams will be explored to support the piloting of initiatives to determine whether and how these expectations can be met within the university.

Further consideration needs to be given to the pedagogical aspects of the post graduate programme to include more flexibility in the delivery of the induction over the first semester rather than block delivery at the start of the Programme. There is also a need to provide more one to one, or small group sessions providing hands on practice to integrate, apply, extend and critique knowledge using formative assessment methods to illustrate to students how they might extend their knowledge drawing on ideas from the literature and developing informed opinions with tutor input.

At a strategic level there is a need to acknowledge the importance of creating a culture that values the international student experience and creates appropriate plans for supporting the international student in the process of acculturation and enculturation dealing with the issues of transition that the international student general has to face when undertaking a post graduate qualification in a UK university. As supported by Koutsantoni (2006,) the majority of HEI's address internationalisation from the perspective of recruitment strategies but only two of the fifty one strategies acknowledged the importance of creating a culture of equality and diversity in their international plans.

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