

# **Transformational, Inclusive and Multicultural or Empty rhetoric? Perceptions and Experiences of International Academic Staff.**

**7999 Words**

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Using a bi-dimensional, fourfold model as a thinking tool to contemplate acculturation strategies we analyse the intercultural experience of international academic staff (IAS) in the United Kingdom higher education. The literature suggests that IAS feel undervalued as a professional group and that institutions do not capitalise on their diverse contributions. We position IAS within the strategic sphere of ethnocultural groups and the institution within the larger society. In a single case study, we analyse IAS acculturation strategies and their perceptions of how their institution accepts diversity. Findings show that IAS are willing to integrate, but do not aim to remove all traces of their own culture and values, adopting integration strategies. Their

perceptions are that the larger society does not seek to segregate IAS; however, it does not provide the conditions for IAS to flourish in professional practice, especially at the early stage of transition.

**Keywords:** academic acculturation, academic work, identity, academic staff, internationalisation, intercultural

## **Introduction**

In an increasingly competitive global higher education (HE) market, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the United Kingdom (UK) have developed a strategic approach to internationalisation. The rhetoric in many UK universities suggests a desire for transformative internationalisation processes which produce institutional change. Therefore, if internationalisation is to become a reality, it should permeate and transform the functions and practices of the whole HEI (Robson, 2011). One strategy to facilitate in this occurrence is to change the workforce demographic by recruiting international academic staff (IAS). Hristov and Minocha (2017) argue that IAS can provide a source of enrichment for the sector because they are able to bring a global perspective to a range of HE disciplines. IAS are thereby considered to be integral to the maintenance of an international dimension within HEIs (Knight, 2015).

In 2017/18, the Higher Education Statistics Agency documented that of 211,980 academics employed in UK HE, 64,880 (30%) were non-UK nationality (categorised as those from other EU countries and those from non-EU countries) (HESA, 2019). They offer the potential to strengthen cultural diversity, connect with international students, enhance research collaborations and pedagogical practices (Green & Myatt 2011). However, the integration of IAS within UK HE has not attracted

much attention from academia to date. Given the growing number of IAS in UK HE (Universities UK, 2018), we feel IAS deserve much wider consideration.

The aim of this article is therefore to examine the intercultural experience of IAS, specifically in UK HE. Through a single case study of an HEI in England, we analyse the lived experiences of IAS who have been recruited from outside the UK to work in UK HE. Using Berry's (2008) model of *Intercultural Strategies in Ethnocultural Groups and the Larger Society* as a conceptual tool, we analyse the acculturation strategies adopted by IAS as they transition into a new work environment, and their perceptions of the institution's acculturation strategy. The study aimed to shed light on the following; firstly, to understand the subjective experiences of IAS joining a UK HEI and the process of acculturation. Secondly, if they feel their HEI is open and inclusive in its orientation towards cultural diversity; and finally, the extent to which IAS feel able to contribute to the development of University life. For example, advances in pedagogical approaches or structural/systematic changes. In order to investigate this further, we explore existing studies that have focused on IAS to understand the current landscape.

### **International Academic Staff: An analysis of the Literature**

There is a growing body of literature that voices concern over the lack of research focused on IAS experiences and integration (Minocha, Sheil & Hristov, 2018; Walker, 2015; Saltmarsh & Swirski, 2010). Those which do focus on international academic recruitment highlight the impact that overseas employment can have on individuals, indicating that they are required to reconfigure their professional skills and abilities (such as pedagogical approaches) to suit the new context. However, Balasooriya, Asante, Jayasinha and Razee (2014) report that many IAS feel undervalued in their new

working environments and unable to contribute as effectively as they would like, to teaching and learning agendas. As employers, universities seem to expect conformity to existing patterns rather than creating a working environment that encourages and supports the new ethical and ideological values of their international community. For IAS, adaptation may not be sufficient for them to be able to make any meaningful contributions to the institution.

Further research concurs, suggesting many international academics feel HEIs have little interest in tapping into their previous experiences and accomplishments (Kreber & Hounsell, 2014). This notion resonates with the work of Maadad (2014), who argues for greater cultural training for both students and staff, blaming a lack of institutional support as one of the barriers that prevents healthy interactions between students and staff, and staff and staff. Although many studies document the existence of informal support networks (Saltmarsh & Swirski, 2010), many also report a lack of formal institutional support or departmental guidance on arrival. Hsieh (2012) comments that institutions need to actively learn from their international academic staff members, by regarding them as a rich educational resource rather than expecting them to 'passively 'fit in' to their environment' (2012, p. 381). A key reason for employing IAS is the diverse contributions they can make to university life, teaching and research. It is these different values and beliefs that 'underpin programme design, curriculum delivery and teacher-student relationships' thereby creating 'transformative internationalisation' (Robson, 2011, p. 621). However, whilst Clegg (2011) suggests IAS have a set of capabilities that they could draw upon to negotiate power within their new cultural environment, Harrison, (2015) argues that access to such power derived from an internationalised HE is not always distributed equally. The sense of being unfamiliar with the cultural context and norms

leaves IAS uncertain about what issues may be open to critique and more particularly how to question or challenge these norms. This reinforces a sense of powerlessness beyond that felt by most new employees, with IAS suggesting they have 'limited agency' to positively influence things within their HEI (Lai, Li & Gong, 2016).

Further analysis shows that IAS feel that their previous experiences and cultural backgrounds are not valued enough to enable them to make significant contributions to pedagogy or relationships. Yet by drawing on their international academic and knowledge capital, Kim (2010) suggests IAS can assist in the development of pedagogy, as well as pastoral support systems for international students, thereby benefitting their employers. IAS have the potential to provide students with international dimensions to HE, such as intercultural awareness, cross-cultural knowledge- transfer, and contextual comparisons; however, it would appear that this potential is not fully unlocked in the current conceptualisation and that more must be done to nurture and support them (Walker, 2015).

Research also indicates that IAS often forgo their prior experiences, cultural heritage, and identity to 'fit' into the culture of their HEI, "giving up" particular identities' (Trowler & Cooper, 2002, p. 226) developed in other cultural settings. IAS may therefore find themselves re-positioned in terms of roles and responsibilities. Although Trowler and Cooper (2002) suggest institutions that employ IAS must ensure all staff employed at the institution participate in readjusting themselves, in terms of their 'thinking, practices and sense of self in order to accommodate and be accommodated within the new culture' (p.226), it is not clear how individual thinking and practices need to change in order to accommodate other ethnicities or what the new culture refers to. Nevertheless, their work suggests that institutions that employ IAS must take responsibility for creating environments that encourage mutual

accommodation, not simply relying on IAS to absorb the values and beliefs of the “dominant” HEI community. Berry (2005) maintains ‘integration can only be “freely” chosen and successfully pursued by non-dominant groups when the dominant society is open and inclusive’ (2005, p.705).

This further leads us to the role HE institutional cultures play in ‘the transitional experiences of academics working outside their country of origin’ (Saltmarsh & Swirski, 2010, p. 291). Green and Myatt (2011) suggest university culture plays an important part in facilitating IAS member knowledge exchanges, as well as encouraging them to share ideas that come from their previous overseas experiences or from their cultural background. Institutions therefore need to create ‘inclusive and synergetic learning and teaching environments’ (Hsieh, 2012, p.381) if they are to benefit from cultural diversity and improve institutional and pedagogical practices.

To assist in this process, Saltmarsh and Swirski (2010) suggest HEIs should focus on improving their ‘recruitment planning, workplace and other ‘staff development’ programmes (2010, p.291). However, navigating new academic systems requires an understanding of the organisation’s culture, which is often deeply grounded in local knowledge and practice. Pherali (2012) argues this can often create barriers that prevent IAS from making effective use of the information being provided to them by the university. He argues that as HEIs employ greater numbers of IAS, generic support systems operating within universities can become problematic.

The lived experiences of IAS are not dissimilar to that of international students who travel overseas for their education. Lomer (2017) states that international students bring their own cultural and knowledge capital, as do IAS. She continues to explain how assumptions are made by many HEIs regarding students’ prior learning experiences, and their readiness or preparedness to acculturate into the dominant

culture. Both IAS and international students are therefore often expected to *adapt to the institution* rather than institutions making changes and addressing the cultural differences which exist. As Brisset, Safdar, Rees Lewis and Sabatier (2010) observe, adapting to a new cultural environment can cause students anxiety and emotional instability. For example, adjusting to new teaching styles, where a shift from rote learning to critical thinking may be required, can be one of many acculturative stressors that affect student wellbeing and interactions (Smith & Khawaja 2011). Walker (2015) concurs, arguing that IAS have similar stressors. She states that anxiety and confusion are often observed, caused by unfamiliar 'pedagogical, epistemological and philosophical paradigms' (p.65). Educational challenges not only face the student but also the academic, where many teachers struggle to adapt to the "student centredness" of Western HEIs.

Whilst clear similarities exist between these two groups, there are areas that impact on IAS more acutely. Pherali (2012) suggests the cultural context of the learning environment can pose a 'real challenge to the effective integration of the academic community' (p.315). To teach in a different socio-cultural situation requires a great degree of transferability of pedagogical knowledge and skills. Moreover, learning for the IAS requires them to be reflective cross-cultural practitioners, coupled with the constant development of the local language and culturally sensitive interpersonal skills. The linguistic concern for IAS has both a professional and sociocultural ramification, particularly when it comes to teaching students from multiple linguistic backgrounds who are themselves unfamiliar with certain terms and protocols. It therefore seems fair to argue that IAS management is a complex phenomenon that requires significant support and understanding, beyond that of treating staff like students, for it to have positive effects on the student experience

and IAS wellbeing. Institutions should develop a 'needs-based approach to standard support mechanisms aimed at IAS' (Pherali, 2012, p.329), designed to develop the necessary aptitudes to perform their new jobs effectively. Moreover, due to the differences between international students and IAS, it is illogical to expect IAS to attend sessions developed for the purposes of supporting international students, as is sometimes the case. This would evidence a lack of understanding by the HEI as to what is required to be a successful practitioner in a new educational environment.

There also appears to be a power differential between IAS and students. Unaccustomed to being challenged, and seldom questioned in class in their home country, IAS are in a position of power (Walker, 2015). However, it seems fair to suggest that students in the UK now position themselves as 'customers' and that their relationship with HEIs has changed to a more consumerist approach to education. There has been a shift in power dynamics because of this and through their expectations students possess a sense of entitlement (Minocha et al.,2018). This can be witnessed in the way HEIs offer a substantial amount of support services to students to improve their academic chances, and also give them a sense of "value for money". Yet this has not manifested in a shift in the way IAS are perceived and there appears to be a huge discrepancy between the student and the staff experience of power.

Whilst previous research evidences how IAS can make positive contributions to HEIs, it also serves to highlight the challenges managers face within HEIs in terms of changing institutional cultures and mindsets. Certainly, cultural diversity with the academic environment brings with it a host of opportunities, ranging from cross-cultural learning and awareness to challenges such as linguistic barriers and pedagogical approaches. However, although previous studies assist us in



understanding some of these complexities, what is less understood is if HEIs are making concessions and changing their policies and practices to accommodate their IAS. Moreover, how are these changes perceived by IAS, and to what extent do they influence the choices made by IAS in terms of their own willingness to integrate and contribute to academic life? Unless HEIs actively create working environments that support and include IAS, then, as previous research implies, many IAS will not be able to make contributions that positively develop the educational environment.

### **Acculturation: Developing a Theoretical Framework for IAS Research and Analysis**

The framework utilised in this study is that of John Berry. His bi-dimensional, fourfold model of acculturation has been used in the study of sojourners, refugees and native peoples (Ward & Kus, 2012). Berry (2008) defines acculturation as:

A dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members. At group level, it involves changes in social structures and institutions and in cultural practices. At the individual level, it involves changes in behavioural repertoire (p. 698-699).

His model *Intercultural Strategies in Ethnocultural Groups and the Larger Society* (figure 1) therefore provides a useful “thinking tool” with which to contemplate the acculturation strategies of both IAS as ‘non dominants’ and those of the ‘dominant society’ (UK HEI).

Figure 1

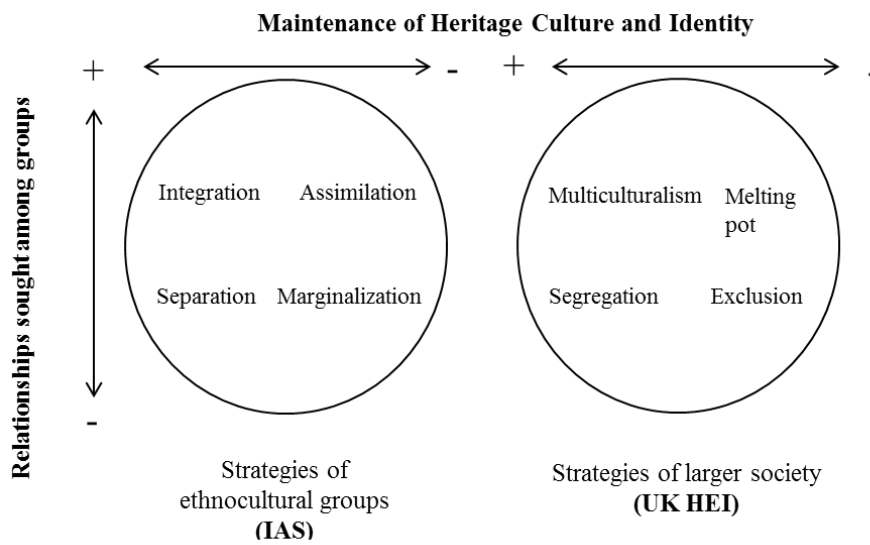


Figure 1: Berry (2008) Intercultural strategies in ethnocultural groups and the larger society, (p. 332)

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By labelling *strategies of ethnocultural groups* as '**IAS**', and *strategies of larger society* '**UK HEI**', it becomes possible to use Berry's model as a way of exploring IAS acculturation in relation to the new culture in which they find themselves. Here, IAS are considered the 'non-dominant group'. Berry (2005) defines this group or individual as the 'acculturating people(s)', who face four acculturation strategies, derived from two basic issues. These two issues are based on 'the distinction between orientations towards one's own group and those towards other groups' (p.704). Based upon the preference of either maintaining one's cultural heritage and identity, or a preference to connect and participate in the larger dominant society, IAS can adopt one of four strategies. IAS perceptions of the UK HEI acculturation strategy, as the dominant society, also play a significant part in the strategy IAS choose to adopt. Mutual accommodation and acceptance are required by both the UK HEI and IAS if IAS are to

integrate successfully (Berry, 2008). Berry's model therefore enables us to consider the extent to which IAS feel:

- a. Able to maintain their existing culture and behaviour, while engaging in day-to-day interaction within an evolving civic framework (*integration*).
- b. Unwilling to maintain their cultural identity, preferring to acquire the dominant group characteristics (*assimilation*).
- c. Separated from other cultures & able to maintain their values (*separation*).
- d. Enforced cultural loss or unwilling to have relations with others due to discrimination or isolation (*marginalization*).

In relation to IAS perceptions of their employer, Berry's model enables us to consider if IAS feel:

- a. Their HEI embraces and embeds openness and diversity as a key feature of the HE environment and shows willingness in terms of process and policy modifications (*multiculturalism*).
- b. Their HEI seeks to assimilate, creating a fusion of nationalities and ethnicities (*melting pot*).
- c. Their HEI forces their separation (*segregation*).
- d. Their HEI imposes marginalisation on them (*exclusion*).

## **Methodology**

This research focuses on a case of a single 'Post-92' HEI.<sup>1</sup> Out of 181 IAS on the university payroll, 20 were interviewed, meaning 11.5% of the institution's IAS

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<sup>1</sup> This refers to a former UK polytechnic given university status through the UK Further and Higher Education Act 1992.

participated. To be eligible for the study, the participants needed to be an IAS member with less than five years teaching experience in UK HE. The purposive sample composition can be observed in table 1.

**Table 1**

Participant P(x)	Gender	Country of Origin
1	Male	Greece
2	Female	Greece
3	Male	Pakistan
4	Female	Israel
5	Male	Jordan
6	Male	Germany
7	Male	China
8	Male	France
9	Female	France
10	Male	Poland
11	Male	Ghana
12	Female	Sri Lanka
13	Female	Italy
14	Male	Iraq
15	Male	Romania
16	Male	Cameroon
17	Female	Saudi Arabia
18	Male	Palestine
19	Female	Iran
20	Male	Spain

A qualitative research approach was adopted, employing semi-structured interviews to gather data about the participants' experiences, including; time in UK HE, qualifications, previous and current roles and any challenges they had witnessed during their employment. Interview questions were devised in order to elicit the extent to which integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalisation were evident in each participant. Throughout this study, the British Education Research Association (BERA) guidelines were followed. It was made clear from the outset that participants

would be treated with respect and that the research undertaken would be carried out with integrity. We were mindful of the potential challenges and tensions that participants faced and that they may feel vulnerable about being asked questions linked to culture and their working environment. We gave a great deal of thought to our research aspirations and design. Participants were reminded that: confidentiality and anonymity were assured; involvement was voluntary, they could opt out and withdraw at any time. (BERA, 2018). Participants chose to answer all questions and none withdrew.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed and coded using a thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Questions were designed to leave the direction of discussion to the participant and did not directly specify topics that may have been sensitive or which they felt uncomfortable discussing. To arrive at a closer understanding of the relationship between participant's individual experiences as the non-dominant group, transcripts were read repeatedly in order to search for meanings and patterns in relation to Berry's model. Themes pertaining to the events, realities, meanings and experiences of the participants were identified and coded.

### **Findings and Discussion**

The data uncovered some wide-ranging responses relating to their experiences, acculturation, and their employer. The interview data highlight a range of strategies used by IAS in order to help them transition into their new environments. IAS described the ways in which they attempted to use their previous educational experiences, cultural identity, and heritage to help them feel comfortable in their UK HEI. Throughout discussions with participants, it became clear that there were

commonalities in the types of discourse used, but also unique or less-common forms or narrative. The findings enabled data to be categorised under two broad themes:

1. IAS acculturation strategies.
2. IAS perceptions of their HEI openness and inclusivity.

### ***IAS Acculturation Strategies***

It was clear that a common pattern expressed by the IAS was the need to try to develop an understanding of UK culture. All agreed that adaptation is not an easy process, requiring considerable work, whereby many must discount previous practices, and accept new processes that are often strange and alien to them (Pherali, 2012; Trowler & Cooper, 2002). Many IAS commented on bureaucracy within the HEI, where they felt that they had little autonomy in the institution. This was more than simply learning new administrative procedures; it also affected their professional interactions with students. For example, participant 19 referred to a “lack of guidance around processes and procedures when dealing with UK students”, and this seemed to create anxiety amongst IAS.

For a significant number, different approaches to teaching and assessment made it difficult to fully acculturate, as did balancing the requirements of teaching, research, and administration. We note that this may be true for all new academic staff, irrespective of their cultural background; however, here it was perceived as being an issue created by cultural differences.

Participants 18 and 3 expressed a desire to assimilate and adapt to suit new situations they found alien and disorientating. They highlighted the challenge of understanding UK practices by discussing student satisfaction and feedback respectively:

...[I]t was new to me, in Palestine I didn't do it, I didn't have student satisfaction, you know forms and things like that, but here it was what we do. (18)

Here a lot of attention is given to students' feedback. How can you take students feedback seriously, they're not even serious about their studies! Most of them anyway, but it happens here so... I will deal with it. (3)

For participant 3 the comparison carries an implicit value difference. He suggested that in his home culture, students thrived through "survival of the fittest", whereas students in the UK needed to be "spoon fed".

Terms synonymous with adaptability were often used in the discussion. For example, participants spoke of the need to "compromise" and be "flexible", with participant 11 discussing the need to adjust their behaviour if they were to "survive in their new environment". Participant 2 claimed that to survive, international staff needed "to prove their value", with participants 1 and 14 further illustrating how IAS adaptation was deemed crucial to survival:

...you have to find in-between ground, the university cannot change... so you have to adapt...you have to integrate, you have to lose some of your core. You need to be adaptable ...flexible ...or there will be a problem. (1)

You need to adapt, you can't resist the environment, they will isolate you, detach you from things that are very important for UK development. I'm not saying I was forced to do it, I've been attracted to do the things that they are doing because I think that's for healthy environment. (14)

Further findings suggest that self-directed behaviour played an important part in assisting IAS understandings of their new educational environment, with evidence to suggest a strong desire to feel connected. Many participants acknowledged the need to build relationships with other faculty members. Vocabulary such as being "polite" and "out-going" were evident in the data, whereby these behaviours were used to develop and then lubricate new relationships they had forged with both home,

and other international staff members. The approach of participants 2 and 4 is typical of the type of strategies adopted by many participants:

I tried to create stronger relationships with individuals...and then you have to look at ways that... engage different kind of people. (2)

I tried to go out with English people outside of work...perhaps knowing a bit more of their social life and how they live would help me understand how to be different, or more accepted at work. (4)

The participants referenced how developing such strategies enabled them to feel part of the dominant culture. By adapting, being polite and willing to participate in projects and tasks, findings suggest that IAS forged better connections with the dominant group. As participant 3 suggested:

I gradually learnt ...to be more polite, I was not that polite earlier. There are many different dimensions to being polite so I had to learn all those different things which obviously in Pakistan I did not have to...This really helped me to settle. (3)

Furthermore, IAS stated that having a sense of “belonging” within their new environment was important in making them feel welcome and comfortable. They therefore appeared to recognise the need for assimilation, and that adaptation was a key part of this process. Moreover, self-directed behaviour was also identified as being necessary in adapting to the new professional culture; as participant 1 explains:

... at times I thought it would be great if there was some kind of manual...because there were things where I didn't know what I needed to do in terms of where I find the form. I just wondered where do I need to go if I need X, Y, Z... who do I need to ask about this...you just have to work this out for yourself. (1)

When discussing academic and administrative support, participants 4 and 8 suggested that:

...[I]t wasn't organised...when I asked for help, I received it, but it was me asking for moral support... I did not have any support in terms of making me



feel confident that it's okay, that I am from a different country, and they want me to stay here. (4)

I needed help with a couple of administration things, because this is quite bureaucratic and I think this is the help that should be given by organisations. So, it's more the practical things... (8)

A particular strategy used by some participants in their transition and orientation into their new UK workplace was to forge relations with a good-natured colleague within their department/school on whom they could rely. As participants 1 and 2 pointed out:

Most of my colleagues are good-hearted and are generally polite and they make up for what the institution may not do... to actually tackle integrating newcomers. If you have good people around you, maybe they can compensate for this. I'm happy to say that I had these kind of individuals around. (1)

I was lucky enough that I had a good head of department...I learn so many tricks, on how to survive the job...it was up to some old colleagues to show us some of the ways of the university...how the teaching and the administration works. (2)

Similarly, participants 12 and 18 suggested that:

I developed my skills because my colleagues helped me. But it was informal... It wasn't something from the university that made me adapt to the system, but the colleagues when I had any issues... (12)

I usually ask my colleagues here...they were so very helpful; they gave me some tips. (18)

Initially, this appeared to be a fruitful strategy for some of the participants, with colleague(s), on the whole, being particularly good natured and supportive of international colleagues. However, it seemed clear that the relationships that were fostered, were in the main, not formally initiated by the UK HEI. International academic staff took recourse to this action, out of necessity, in order to help them transition from one HE culture to another. This is illustrated by participant 13:

I had no institutional support, but I had very good colleagues so I could go and see how they were doing best practice... so I could adopt their way. It wasn't something from the university that helped me adapt to the system but the colleagues... when I had any issues they helped me to address them. (13)

This resonates with the work of Saltmarsh and Swirski (2010) who discuss the existence of informal support mechanisms but highlighted a lack of formal initiatives initiated by institutions. Whilst initially comforting for IAS, it seems that informal relationships can become somewhat problematic for colleagues. Although participants 2 and 12 acknowledged the value of having “self-appointed” supportive co-workers, they also expressed how over reliance on a helpful colleague(s) could be eventually construed as being somewhat overbearing and overwhelming. Therefore, relationships that informally develop between colleague(s) to assist IAS transitions may create tensions across and within teams or departments, whereby IAS become reluctant to ask for help. The attitude of participant 13 is particularly telling:

Sometimes I'm a bit shy, sometimes I didn't ask – though they wouldn't say no – it's the feeling I'm asking too much, maybe sometimes it makes me feel maybe not myself. I used to Google things sometimes just to avoid the asking...asking was the last resort. (13)

Although establishing informal relationships between co-workers enables IAS to become more autonomous, there is evidence that perhaps in the long term, IAS feel uncomfortable continually seeking advice from good-natured colleague(s). This potentially disempowers IAS as it positions them as not knowing rather than enabling them to draw on their experience. A degree of *separation* is therefore evident, whereby IAS may choose to avoid interaction with others in an attempt to seem competent and familiar with their new environment. This is evident in the testimony of participants 6:

Usually I asked my subject area leader, but at one point I felt “oh God I can’t go to her again”, I mean she’s going to be so annoyed with me...when I started, I had tons of questions everyday about some really trivial stuff, but I just didn't know where to look. (6)

By not seeking support, IAS may revert to their previous educational practices in order to guide their decision-making process. Yet, this may not align with UK practices, and therefore there is potential for misunderstandings and procedural difficulties. Furthermore, participants discussed not having an awareness of the correct institutional language, evidencing unfamiliarity with the UK’s cultural norms, such as schooling systems, institutional hierarchies, functions, and procedures. As a result, certain participants found themselves in discrete groups, amongst, but not in groups with domestic colleagues. As participants 17 and 20 explained:

I don’t think they are very accustomed to people from different cultures...When it comes to work, I don’t think that they [UK colleagues] open up that much. They try to be nice and friendly, but what I learnt from work is draw a line in between work and life. (17)

I think British people tend to keep to themselves...work is work they don't take it home with them. (20)

Finally, a common opinion of the participants alluded to a lack of support for pedagogical practice. This was particularly evident as many of the participants were educated in teacher-centred and not student-centred pedagogical environments. Although Pherali (2012) implies that the offer of support to IAS is a sensitive issue, which may be viewed as a threat to one’s professional status and identity, our findings suggest IAS were *actively* looking for academic support. A significant number referred to the problems they encountered both in a practical and ideological sense. The attitudes of participants 2, 11 and 16 are typical of the viewpoints held by participants:

...my colleagues are not aware of my experience as a foreigner or how much my experience as a foreigner differs from theirs and so I’m not saying it’s an

intentional overlook of a problem, sometimes I feel like they don't even realise the level of difference and how challenging it is for me to transition into this system of teaching. (2)

...[T]hey don't even consider that I as a foreigner, might have a different view on what a lecturer is meant to do, what a student is expected to do. There is support when I do a mistake... telling me this is not the way it works, but the main issue is that my colleagues are not aware of my experience as a foreigner or how much my experience differs from theirs. (11)

I had to think about every word coming out of my mouth, actually, because every sentence I was saying could turn to a challenge. (16)

As Balasooriya et al., (2014) suggest many IAS seem to feel undervalued in their new working environment. Our findings concur, and as a result many of our participants felt unable to contribute to teaching and learning in the manner they had hoped, with IAS implying that the UK HEI was not capitalising on their previous experiences and accomplishments, as identified by Kreber and Hounsell (2014).

Overall, findings suggest that the majority of IAS chose to adopt an *assimilation strategy* (Berry, 2008), whereby they seek to *interact with other cultures and understand their values and traditions to improve integration and acceptance*.

However, it seems that at times their desire to understand and connect may lead to relationship breakdowns, that could eventually (if not monitored and controlled) lead to IAS choosing to adopt *separation* strategies over time.

Furthermore, although the majority of IAS acknowledged the importance of *integration*, findings suggest that this was not a strategy currently being employed by any IAS participant interviewed. Many seemed happy to *assimilate* and retain a sense of cultural identity but were not looking to remove all traces of their heritage and values. However, the findings are consistent with the view that IAS are not 'freely' choosing to adopt an *integration* strategy because the dominant group (UK HEI) is not as accommodating in its orientation towards IAS, with processes that hinder

integration. The following section therefore discusses IAS perceptions of their UK HEI in relation to their integration.

### ***IAS Perceptions of their HEI Openness and Inclusivity***

The data suggest that the Case Institution, as the 'dominant group' (Berry, 2008), influenced the way in which the acculturation processes and acceptance took place, and that its approach, to some extent, constrained the choices available to IAS.

Overall, every participant interviewed felt that diversity was accepted and encouraged in the HEI, with many referring to international student recruitment and international campus activities, as examples. However, many also believed that international student comfort and support was a higher priority to the UK HEI than their own.

Furthermore, although some participants suggested that the UK HEI did make some attempts to aid the assimilation of staff within the university through, for example, initial inductions; this was unlike the comprehensive and ongoing range of support offered to international students. Participants 4 and 8 implied that IAS did not receive much additional support from their employer:

There hasn't been a transition as such...it was really on the job, that's your job, that's what you should be doing... (4)

I would like help to settle down, within this new place...I realise this is a lot to ask from a university and I'm not sure this is their role actually. (8)

Certainly, many of the participants expected much more from their employer, arguing that further work could be done to help IAS acculturate. Some suggested that greater consideration should be given to IAS in terms of what it means to join an overseas institution, with a more formalised support structure, with participants 9, 11 and 13 illustrating this point:

Transition was not very easy... if I was asking any question it was really on the job, that's your job, that's what you should be doing and just ask if you need anything. A more formal approach to this would have been really helpful. (9)

[S]ometimes I feel like they don't even realise the level of difference and how challenging it is for me to transition into this system. (11)

I believe if the university is really into internationalisation there should be at least someone sitting there in one of the offices to support those lecturers to settle down for a year. (13)

Other suggestions included peer-mentoring schemes, prolonged inductions, staff development that embraced cultural differences (for both home staff and IAS) and social events:

...it's very challenging to get a tutor from overseas to join the university he/she might need a six-month induction. But we don't have this system in place. Because the expectations are if you are coming to teach in this university you have to get directly engaged with the system. I don't know how. (5)

Some events could be organised [for IAS], which are important to certain communities. Instead of just sending an email that the Chinese New Year is happening in this room. That sort of thing needs more promotion and could be very helpful to us [IAS]. (7)

I would say maybe there should be an induction all year, about how the education system works, maybe a briefing about how students are taught, not in the university but before that...because I haven't been brought up here. (13)

All participants outlined the need for resources that would enable them to demystify procedures and procedural language, as well as support that helped them to settle into the local area. This was illustrated well by participant 15 who suggested IAS should be:

...made aware by some information found in the drive on a computer...Some kind of manual would be very useful...not just for work, but about the local area too. (15)

This resonates with the work of Saltmarsh and Swirski (2010) who suggested that to improve the transactional experience of IAS, institutions needed to improve their

workplace inductions and staff development programmes. Although most participants did not appear to feel unwelcome or marginalised by the UK HEI, many felt they wanted expectations to be clearer from the outset, and that without this, it was difficult to cope and engage in professional life. Furthermore, it seemed to affect IAS ability to positively contribute to University life:

I wanted somebody to explain to me the way they work, what they expect... what is my role. I discovered it through my experience, it might take me six months to describe what is my position actually, what I need to do, what they expect from me and what are my benefits here. How I make a difference. (17)

I'm expecting the university to help me to understand the culture of students...to offer me some sort of guidance from somebody... to buddy up with somebody because this is completely outside my knowledge. I've got no idea what to expect, this is a big ask and I don't know how I can help. (8)

Based on the aforementioned data analysis and using Berry's (2008) model as a framework for analysis, it emerged that many IAS develop their own informal support networks to assist them in their cultural transition. These networks seemingly consist of willing and supportive colleagues, which enable conversations to flow and connections to be forged between IAS and established co-workers. However, an over reliance on these networks can lead to *separation*, with certain IAS choosing to avoid interaction to reduce tension and perceived burdensome behaviour.

*IAS integration* requires a *multiculturalist* society, whereby 'the larger dominant group' is 'open and inclusive in its orientation towards cultural diversity' (Berry, 2005, p, 705). Our data show that the IAS perceive the dominant group to not be providing the conditions for IAS to flourish in professional practice. It seems that whilst IAS are willing to adopt the values of the dominant society and interact with other cultures daily (*assimilate*), the UK HEI itself does not lend itself to full *integration*. To create a truly *multiculturalist* and harmonious society, the whole

dominant group needs to show a willingness to accommodate and accept new values and ideologies.

Whilst there is no evidence to suggest IAS perceive their HEI are *segregating* or *excluding* them, findings indicate that the UK HEI could be more forthcoming in changing its practices in order to create greater cultural and ethnic fusion. We therefore conclude that the UK HEI is neither enhancing nor diminishing the lives of its IAS, but more could be done to embrace their cultural and social capital by adapting institutional processes and procedures to accommodate the complex needs of IAS. Notwithstanding the affect this would have on enabling IAS to make beneficial contributions to the educational environment overtime.

## **Conclusion**

Firstly, it is acknowledged that this research is limited in its ability to generalise by the nature of the research methodology adopted and the composition of the sample. Nevertheless, the research has provided a glimpse at some of the challenges that surround IAS. The next step would be to apply these insights to a much larger study across multiple institutions to see if these themes resonate across a wider IAS research spectrum.

This research aimed to better understand the acculturation strategies adopted by IAS, their perceptions of their UK HEI in regard to its openness and inclusivity and how this influences their contribution to the development of University life. Clearly, movement between countries and institutions gives rise to adjustment on several levels. It is a complicated picture of change and progress. The levels of adjustment which any individual makes are affected by their own identity and personality, previous professional experience, exposure to new and alternative systems,



interactions with colleagues in the institution and their personal domestic experiences. This highly nuanced picture is encapsulated in much of Berry's (2008) model, applied herein.

Given that 30% of the UK academic staff are international (HESA, 2019), it is imperative that UK HEIs establish structures and systems that allow 'non-dominant groups' or individuals to freely pursue integration strategies (Berry, 2008). Our data suggest that IAS are willing to integrate and adopt the basic values of the larger dominant group, but they are not necessarily looking to remove all traces of their own culture and values. Therefore, many do not seek full integration but prefer *assimilation* as a method of finding belonging in their new institution.

Findings further evidence the willingness of IAS to adapt and adjust to fit into their new academic surroundings. Many IAS described how their previous teaching and research experiences seemed to have little academic capital within the new HEI, mirroring the findings of Balasooriya et al., (2014) and Trowler & Cooper (2002). Of those interviewed, the majority perceived that the UK HEI was doing little to change its practices to meet the needs of a diverse, international group of scholars working together. This affects the contributions IAS feel they can make to the development of the educational environment overtime.

Many participants discussed the need for additional support in terms of staff training and development, to negotiate the new structures and process inherent in their institution (Pherali, 2012). This finding resonates strongly with research focused on international student acculturation, whereby support mechanisms are viewed as imperative in reducing anxiety and increasing wellbeing (Brisset et al., 2010). Although all staff, regardless of background, go through the standard induction processes, our participants suggested that these inductions are too generic, vague, or generally

insufficient. Some IAS felt that there was clear prejudice against their 'otherness', with many barriers to *assimilation* evident in the data. Yet these barriers are not uniform in size or structure. They differ from simple enactment tasks such as knowing about the correct forms to use for administration purposes, to more significant matters such as differences in teaching and learning methodologies.

IAS have shown that they have harnessed their own sense of agency in terms of working towards integration and assimilation but have encountered significant barriers *en route*. From the data, there is an almost unanimous call for these barriers to be acknowledged and for systems to be put in place which support movement towards integration. To some extent there is a benign neglect, whereby the HEI assumes that IAS will negotiate new cultural norms independently and that somehow (without relevant support), they will become integrated into the new society through exposure to the same transition processes as domestic academic staff. The findings show that the HEI assumes that the implicit expectations of UK HE are easily accessible and that there is no need to make specific adjustments for IAS.

Participants have called for norms to be demystified and for the institution to engage in a process which enables them to work successfully and efficiently. They rely on willing colleagues to give them the informal support that they perceive should be delivered formally from the HEI itself. This unfortunate benign neglect leads us to assume that the HEI is perhaps unsure of its own acculturation strategy, which in turn, may unconsciously impede the acculturation process of their IAS.

To fully create a multicultural society, Berry (2008) argues that the core processes and work ethos of 'the larger dominant society' need to adjust. However, change such as this requires the dominant group to develop a level of reflexivity and

willingness to learn from the experiences of their IAS, which has not been evidenced in the data collected here.

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