

Academic mobility, language and cultural capital: The experience of transnational academics in British Higher Education institutions¹

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Abstract

This article is concerned with the experiences of transnational academics teaching and researching in British higher education institutions (HEI). Although there is a plethora of studies related to the issues of international students and Western academics teaching abroad, very little has been written about the recent global phenomenon in which academics from non-English-speaking backgrounds move to English universities. This underresearched area is explored drawing on an in-depth study considering the cases of seven international academics in five different universities. The study identifies a range of their distinctive experiences which constitutes an exigent “field” in their struggle to adapt to the new cultural setting. The “logistic challenges” may exist but are transitory. Although providing an opportunity for professional development is helpful, “the offer of support” is a sensitive notion and may be perceived as a threat to both their status and identity.

Keywords

academic mobility, higher education, culture, international academics

Introduction

The process of educational internationalisation has resulted in the increased mobility of a skilled workforce across national borders (Kim & Locke, 2010; Poole & Ewan, 2010; Dunn & Wallace 2006). Theories of international migration mainly focus on economic, political, demographic and sociological aspects of transnational movement (Wang, 2005; Castles, 2002; Taylor et al, 1996; Massey et al, 1993). More recently, connections between academic mobility and international migration have also been explored within the theme of international education (Kim & Locke, 2010; Hoffman, 2009; Tremblay, 2005; Mahroum, 2000). While the economic factor of international migration is generally relevant and well researched (Castles, 2000; Taylor et al, 1996; Massey et al, 1993; Stark, 1991), a sociological analysis in particular is useful for understanding the challenges relating to social, cultural and linguistic integration of international academics in the environments of receiving countries. The transnational movement of academics in recent years is attributed to both the educational

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expansion of Western universities internationally and more recently the 'magnetic' nature of universities that attract international staff to enhance their academic strengths (Bennion and Locke, 2010; Hugo, 2005). These developments exhibit two explicit patterns of transnational academic mobility – internationalisation for business and academic migration. The former is concerned with academic expansion mainly with business motives and generally requires temporary relocation of the academics with their offshore teaching assignments. This demands new and sometimes 'unusual' sets of skills from the international academics who are involved in the transnational educational delivery (Gribble & Ziguras, 2003; Eldridge & Cranston, 2009). The second pattern of mobility is generally the choice of the individual academics to relocate themselves permanently as academic migrants. The paper will briefly draw upon the literature on transnational teaching generally (Poole & Ewan, 2010; Gribble & Ziguras, 2003; Dunn & Wallace, 2004; Garson, 2005), but the main purpose here is to highlight professional as well as sociocultural adaptation of academic migrants in the UK. This is not to suggest that experiences of international academics in the UK are uniquely distinct from those in other countries but to indicate that themes, which emerged in this study, might be relevant in similar international contexts. The professional experience of international academics may be viewed in relation to enhancing 'student experience' as well as identifying the impact of their teaching and research on the changing nature of pedagogic environments in universities today. Additionally, such an analysis could complement the process of 'conceptualising the internationalisation' of education in the globalised world (Luxon & Peelo, 2009, p. 649).

A plethora of literature analysing the issues of teaching and research abroad mainly deals with potential challenges encountered by academics from English speaking countries who are assigned offshore teaching projects (Poole & Ewan, 2010; Gribble & Ziguras, 2003; Dunn & Wallace, 2004; Garson, 2005). However, the 'international and transnational mobility of university academics' in a period when higher education is increasingly becoming global

'is under-researched and 'little is known about international academics' lived experiences' (Kim & Locke, 2010, p. 32).

This paper draws on an exploratory study examining this gray area in-depth by considering the cases of seven international academics who came from non-English speaking backgrounds from four different countries and were working in six different subject areas in five UK universities. The data were collected qualitatively by employing in-depth interviews and analysed thematically developing categories of key themes, which emerged from the narratives of the participants. The analysis utilises Bourdieu's theoretical notion of 'forms of capital' particularly cultural and academic capital (Bourdieu, 1984) to locate some of the tensions of transnational academic movement revealed by this study.

The paper will initially provide some theoretical debates around transnational teaching and then examine the issue of adaptability in internationalisation of pedagogies. Then the methodological approach is discussed followed by key findings that mainly focus on cultural disconnections of the international academics and sensitivity around what may be considered a legitimate 'support mechanism' for new staff in the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Drawing on the participants' distinctive professional experience, it is argued that the cultural context of the learning environment poses a real challenge to their effective integration into the academic community. The 'logistic challenges' of the move may be difficult initially but are transitory and considered trivial. The availability of the generic staff support system in the university is problematic when set against the heterogeneous experiences of these individuals while 'the offer of support' is essentially a sensitive notion and may be perceived as a threat to their professional status and identity.

Transnational Teaching: Some Necessary Analysis

Learning to teach can be regarded as acquiring any other professional skills. The global adaptability of 'skills to teach' in a formal setting can be interrogated from the perspective of 'situated learning'. Lave and Wenger (1991, p. 35) argue that learning is embedded in

activity, context and culture and therefore 'is an integral part of generative social practice in the lived-in world', the process called 'legitimate peripheral participation'. However, Anderson, Reder and Simon (1996) contend that the claims of 'situated learning' theory are overstated and have misguided implications for education. They suggest that:

...while cognition is partly context-dependent, it is also partly context-independent; while there are dramatic failures of transfer, there are also dramatic successes; while concrete instruction helps, abstract instruction also helps; while some performances benefit from training in a social context, others do not. (Anderson, Reder & Simon, 1996, p. 10)

Teaching in a distinct sociocultural context requires a great degree of transferability of pedagogical knowledge and skills. It is rather more relevant in the process of globalisation of higher education (Spring, 2009) in which the transnational movement of teachers has become a more significant element than ever before. Alongside the most essential professional skills, the need for better preparation for teaching abroad has also been recognised (Bodycott & Walker, 2000; Gribble & Ziguras, 2003). Despite induction and professional planning, the challenges of adjustment with new teaching environments and cultural settings may still remain formidable. Bourdieu's (1986) notions of *field* and *forms of capital* are relevant here in explaining disconnections between agents' (international academics) embodied dispositions and their new professional setting in the receiving country. The *field* is a setting in which agents and their social positions are located and the position of each particular agent in the field is a result of interaction between the specific rules of the field, agent's *habitus* and their social, economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Bourdieu, 1984), an influential set of concepts which are referred to in more detail as the findings of this study are discussed later. Chiswick (1979) also notes that 'human capital', acquired by international immigrants in the country of origin does not always transfer entirely due to differences in language, culture and economic system in the new atmosphere. Apparently, almost one-third of corporate expatriates assigned to foreign-based

projects cannot perform adequately and almost 25% repatriate before completing their tenure abroad (Lublin, 1992). The main reason for this failure is cited as the inability of the expatriates 'to adapt to the culture of the host country' (Garson, 2005, p. 322). Even though this may not specifically reflect the issues of transnational teaching, the results of the corporate sector survey do indeed provide provocative insights into the concerns of transnational teaching in higher education.

While the internationalisation of higher education has resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of students studying abroadⁱ, the local institutions in South-East Asia (e.g. Singapore, Malaysia, Taiwan, Hong Kong and China) have also imported significant numbers of foreign academics into their classrooms (Bodycott & Walker, 2000). Gribble and Ziguras (2003) argue that international academics need to be adequately prepared for distinct academic and cultural encounters (i.e. students have different sets of knowledge bases and are accustomed to different teaching and learning styles that are located in the unique cultural setting of the institution). Garson (2005, pp. 322-323) indicates that there is 'a dearth of research or training available for expatriating professors and their families' which may generally result in a difficulty adjusting in the distinct cultural and educational settings abroad. Yet another pattern somewhat unrecognised in the scholarly literature is the movement of academics either as post-study international graduate employees or direct recruitment of international staff by Western universities. This process is facilitated by varied immigration schemes in different countries aiming to attract a *skilled workforce*ⁱⁱ from the international market (Tremblay, 2005). This trend also contributes to the process of globalising and changing the nature of education in the knowledge economy, which Dale (2005, p. 117) argues as education today being asked to 'do different things in different ways rather than the same things in different ways'.

Badley (2000, pp. 246-249) suggests that 'globally-competent university teachers' should take a 'transformatory and democratic approach to education' substantiated by 'an ethnographic stance' to transnational teaching. The 'democratic approach' to teaching and

learning radically transforms the notion of 'teacher as an expert' and considers the learning, as an *interculturally sensitive* collaborative venture encountered in a non-hierarchical and socially contextual environment. However, the recommended 'ethnographic approach' to teaching abroad ironically contradicts the idea of a 'globally-competent' teacher against what might be perceived as globally-adaptable in light of appreciating what cultural anthropologists would call the *emic* view to pedagogy. The *emic* approach to teaching may be characterised as 'domestic, mono-cultural, structurally derived, relative and contrastive in reference to a system' (Pike, 1967, p. 37) which is created through localised knowledge-base, research culture and established pedagogical practices. Whereas the '*etic*' approach is 'nonstructural but classificatory in that the analyst devises logical categories of systems and units' without essential reference to the broader structure of language and culture in which the particular form of practice is situated (Dundes, 1962, p. 101). Transnational academics, with their cross-cultural and predetermined view of pedagogy would have to negotiate their *etic* categories with the *emic* nature of pedagogical practices. Hence, transnational adaptability for international academics does involve constant engagement as a participant observer with meaningful detachment from the cultural setting in order to enable cross-cultural reflective learning. In such a 'transitional' identity, neither 'habitus' nor 'field' can be taken as a given.

The above approach to learning for transnational academic work requires persistent engagement, knowledge of local language and more importantly, culturally sensitive interpersonal skills. The linguistic challenge of transnational teaching is therefore twofold – professional and sociocultural. The off-shore instruction of Western university courses predominantly takes place in an English medium which may disadvantage local students from fully engaging in academic discourse in the class (Bodycott & Walker, 2000). While this can be hard work for the English-speaking teacher who might very well be constrained due to a lack of cultural understanding, the heavier responsibility of linguistic proficiency rests on the students who opt for learning in an English medium. International academics with

English as a second language, working in Western universities are additionally disadvantaged while teaching home students representing distinct 'socio-cultural values and beliefs' in their native academic environments (Badley, 2000, p. 244). Hence, this category of international academics may encounter linguistic and educational challenge both at professional and sociocultural levels.

Internationalising Teaching and Learning

Transnational teaching and learning provokes debates around pedagogical practices in the international context. There is a vast amount of literature around the issues of how international students adjust in English-speaking universities and grapple with teaching and learning strategies that are generally different from their previous education (Ballard & Clanchy, 1984; Liu, 1998; Andrade, 2006). The problems of international students in English-speaking universities are most visible in relation to their ability to engage effectively in learning activities. It may be concerned with the level of English proficiency and/ or their distinct learning styles which can differ considerably from those which the HE teachers in these universities are generally used to. Bodycott and Walker (2000, p. 84) note the culture of conformity among Chinese students in Hong Kong who 'were extremely reluctant to question others' opinions'. They were more inclined to respond to 'factual-recall' questions rather than the ones that required logic and critical thinking which Ballard (1997) calls a 'reproductive' approach to learning involving activities such as 'summarisation' and 'imitation'. Evans and Tregenza (2002) note that Asian students struggle with the concept of learning critically and analytically and find it difficult to conceptualise the role of teacher as a 'moderator or facilitator' of successful learning. Considering the distinct culture of international education, the significance of understanding of these nuances cannot be overstressed. The most crucial issue is as noted:

Current [offshore] teaching practices seem to be mainly confined to adding local examples and case studies to the learning materials designed for domestic students,

and while some academics use a range of teaching approaches, they are not confident that they are appropriately adapted for transnational students. (Dunn & Wallace, 2006, p. 368)

This limitation may not necessarily be viewed as an academic deficiency by the students whose aim is to gain elements of a foreign education in their homeland. More interestingly, the influence of globalisation largely complements the notion of Western supremacy and implicitly escalates a thirst for Western knowledge conveniently supplied in the form of off-shore university programmes. When educational programmes are exported by Western universities, the quality assurance, administrative procedures and academic standards are all set and enforced by the Western institution whether the programme is delivered collaboratively or independently. These 'imported educational commodities' are required to ensure the 'exclusive' market value by maintaining their original framework and practice. Here, the transnational movement of academics is a part of the globalisation of the Western education system.

However, the migration of international academics to English universities is rather an individual movement within an established system that implicitly requires them to integrate while making some distinctive contributions to the programmes drawing on their international academic capital. So, adopting the teaching and learning culture in their new workplace becomes the topmost priority for this category of international academics. At practical level, their prior academic skills (both teaching and research) are carefully negotiated with standard expectations of the setting before they are delivered. The process of adaptability can sometimes be stressful and contentious posing a challenge to internationalisation of pedagogies. This paper explores some of these tensions revealed by the respondents in the study.

Methodological Approach

The study employed a phenomenological hermeneutic approach to understanding the meaning of participants' lived experiences (van Manen, 1990) both as a 'foreigner' and academic member of staff in a British university. The researcher's role in this study was both as the investigator of the phenomenon and a participant of the study, more like a reflexive 'insider' in the inquiry whose experiences contributed to illumination and conceptualisation of the stories gathered in the form of data (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). The insider researcher is a member of 'specified groups and collectivities or occupants of specified social statuses' (Mercer, 2007, p. 3) and therefore, has a 'lived familiarity with the group being researched' and enjoys 'privileged' access to particular kinds of knowledge (Griffith 1998, p. 361; Merton, 1972).

My own experience as an international academic member of staff has informed how such a cross-cultural educational dilemma is experienced and managed by an academic in an English institution. Most universities today have a large component of teaching that requires international HE teachers to possess research informed knowledge as well as effective teaching skills, a repertoire which Badley (2000) suggests requires both an ability to take an 'ethnographic stance' and 'democratic approach' to teaching. My educational experiences in Western countries including Australia and the USA provided me with a great deal of 'individual awareness of attitudes toward culture, learning and change' (Bodycott & Walker, 2000, p. 83). For example, during my first year, I found it difficult to sustain informal talk with my undergraduate students (I did not know much about the *X Factor*, a TV talent show, and *the Premier Football League*) and more importantly, my four-year long experience of English language teaching and extensive travel and foreign education in English medium was all but negated by the *Scouse* accent of Liverpool. This resonated with Braine's (2002) description of his friend who despite having several years of ESL teaching experience in his native country became traumatised when asked to do a yearlong full time ESL course before being allowed to take up a graduate course in an American university. Gradually, I was able to adapt to the *local accent* and build rapport with students through 'informal chat' which

provided me with better confidence during lectures and tutorials. However, there are still occasions both in the social and work environments where I find myself unhelpfully different on account of my background as an international member of staff who grew up and previously worked in a culturally different context and speaks English as a second language. Hence, the whole research process evokes the researcher's epistemological and ontological assumptions in which the meaning of the phenomenon is 'co-constructed' (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009; Crotty, 1998). It is significant here that such ontological and pedagogical transitions undermine the usefulness of Bourdieu's categories of 'habitus' and 'field'. These notions deal better with 'fix' than with 'flux'.

The data for this study were collected through interviews with seven international academics who were working in five different universities in North West England. My own background as a 'traveller in the same boat' developed each interview not as an 'attempt to treat respondents' accounts as potential 'true' pictures of 'reality' rather as a process of co-constructing or generating 'plausible accounts of the world' (Silverman, 2010, p. 225). The participants represented three different countries (two from Iraq, two from Germany and two from Nepal and one from Greece) and were involved in teaching and research in diverse subjects including Health, Psychology, Physics, Computer Science, Business Studies and Biology. See the description of the participants in detail below:

Participant A: Originally from Nepal, he gained his MSc in Physics before securing a scholarship to pursue another Masters degree in Japan. Upon successful completion of this higher degree in Japan, he studied in the International Institute for Theoretical Physics in Italy. Then, he completed his doctorate in Physics from Germany. Following the completion of his PhD, he returned to Japan where he worked as a Research Fellow in a prestigious university for four years. In 2007, he succeeded in securing a highly competitive EPSRC funding grant worth half a million and moved to a prestigious British HE institution with a contract of research fellowship for five years followed by a permanent membership in the faculty. This academic is well published and holds extensive research experience in his area but did not have prior teaching experience in an HE institution.

Participant B: Born and brought up in Germany, this participant completed all her education including PhD in her native country. With an expertise in Biological Sciences, she worked as a research fellow researching birds and their behaviour in Germany before moving to the United States for her international research career. Having worked in the US for two years, she succeeded in securing the lectureship in the British HE institution in 2008. As with Participant A, Participant B

comes from non-teaching background but with substantial research experience and is well published in her area of expertise.

Participant C: This academic came to the UK some twenty years ago to pursue his doctoral study in Computing. He had completed his MSc in Computing from a prestigious university in his native country, Iraq and had already worked as a lecturer for one year before moving to the UK. He completed his doctorate in Computing from a UK university and then lectured in the same field in the United Arab Emirates for two years. He returned to the UK as an IT consultant and later secured a position as a lecturer in a UK HE Institution. He had worked in the UK HEI for over seven years.

Participant D: This participant was born and educated in Iraq. The main cause for immigrating to the UK for this academic was to escape atrocities and persecution of the dictator in his native country. As he waited for a safer political environment to be able to return home, more than two decades had passed since he had arrived in the UK with his family and it virtually became impossible to return to Iraq permanently. He studied engineering in the university but made his career in social work. He lectured on social care but also worked as a mental health practitioner with the National Health Service in the UK. He had worked as a lecturer in the UK HEI since 2000.

Participant E: This lecturer decided to move from Germany in 2008 after he was offered a job as a Senior Lecturer in Psychology. He gained all his educational training including his PhD in his own country and worked in a native university as a lecturer and researcher. This academic had a shorter period of experience working overseas (three years) as compared to other research participants.

Participant F: This academic was born and brought up in Greece and came to the UK as an undergraduate psychology student. She also completed her second degree at one of the prestigious universities in Scotland before embarking on a post as a research assistant in a university in the West Midlands of England. Then, she moved to another university in the North West to work as a teaching assistant. She had gained almost nine years of work experience in the UK academic environment.

Participant G: This lecturer had worked as a banker for over five years in Nepal before moving to England. With an MBA degree, he had been the Head of various departments in commercial banks. He had won national level recognition for his academic achievement in Nepal and had also worked in the Middle East as a part of his overseas assignment. In England, he first completed an MA in International Banking followed by a PhD in the same subject area. Then, he embarked upon a teaching position in a university- affiliated college in North West England.

Table 1: Background of the participants

Six of the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim and one interview was not taken with the transcript validated by the respondent. The interviews were semi-structured

and primarily focused on the participants' personal and academic backgrounds, experiences in the UK as academics, social and cultural challenges of adjustment in the UK society and the support they had received from their employing institution as international staff. The interviews mostly unfolded in the form of narratives that embedded meanings of their experiences in the UK institutions (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The data were coded and further categorised into common themes which in turn are used as headings to report the findings from the study. A range of participants' diverse experiences was also considered to allow for further in-depth analyses and interpretation of the data.

Academic Capital and International Academics

The transnational movement generally replaces the original cultural setting, where the academics have acquired their academic capital, with an environment that, to a large extent, exhibits nonconforming cultural characteristics. Bourdieu (1984) suggests that academic capital is gained through educational qualifications but it is the combination of cultural capital inherited from the family and cultural transmission gained from the education system that one attends to. The interviews reveal that the international academics are accomplished individuals in their own countries and some of them have rich international academic and professional experiences. Three of the respondents had worked in more than one country before coming to Britain and had a number of research publications and several years of teaching experience in HE. All of them were the high achievers in their previous degrees even though they had gained only a limited amount of English training in their native countries prior to their first degree. Bourdieu (1984, p. 80) argues that the education system 'governs the conversion of inherited cultural capital into educational capital', but 'does not have monopoly on the production of cultural capital'. Hence, the interactions between cultural capital and individual's educational experiences characterise academic capital as a contextually situated asset that may provide insights into a transnational educational setting but not necessarily represent the quality of absolute transferability.

The narratives of international academics indicate that they can bring different perspectives and approaches to teaching and research in the UK universities. Their professional and academic network can potentially contribute to research, enterprise and pedagogical dynamics of the university. In an increasingly globalised world, international academics with foreign education, upbringing and life experiences are able to share unique but powerful accounts of global realities with university students. This is especially true in the area of social sciences such as education, sociology, politics and social work, where real life experiences offer a valuable exposure and can have a remarkable impact on students' learning. This broadens students' horizons of understanding and facilitates the process of conceptualising complex ideas. An academic working in the area of Social Work comments:

I teach anti-racist, anti-oppressive or mental health needs of asylum seekers or refugees and victims of torture... I am, for example, a victim of torture and I have been to prison. So, when I teach something that I have gone through, I relate to my own experiences. This is always appreciated and it does have huge impact on them. Social work is value driven. Values are most important facets of social work education because when we are dealing with the people from different culture, different societies, giving up our prejudice is important. [Social Work Lecturer]

This resonates with my own upbringing and life conditions in a developing country where I had to walk two hours through the forests, across a river and paddy fields to get to school every morning. In addition to attending the distant school six days a week, I was expected to assist my parents in the day-to-day agricultural work. School conditions were meagre, severely lacking learning resources, trained teachers and basic infrastructure. This experience, continuously deepened through my research involvement in my native country, can encourage students to use these real life stories to critically re-examine their predispositions about the world. This can be seen through the students' essays, posters and group presentations (undertaken as part of their assessment) in which they demonstrate a critical understanding of these global issues. This is clearly an indication of the

transferability of learning (Anderson, Reder & Simon, 1996) in the globalised society where national borders have become fuzzier and education is no longer an exclusively local entity (Spring, 2009). Hence, academic capital is not gained solely from educational qualifications but can also draw on the individual's cultural capital.

Social and Cultural Experiences of International Academics

The participants reported that the experience of sociocultural dissimilarity was pervasive both at work and in the communities they lived in. Lave and Wenger (1991, p. 29) offer the theory of 'situated learning', suggesting that 'learners inevitably participate in communities of practitioners and the mastery of knowledge and skills requires newcomers', [international academics in this case] 'to move towards full participation in the sociocultural practices of a community'. Bourdieu's (1984) notion of *field* also explains a distinctive cultural setting (university) created by the 'agents' (local academics and administrators) and their 'social positions' (class, educational backgrounds, gender and race). Bourdieu suggests that the position of a particular agent in the field is conceived from the interaction between the agent's *habitus* and their social and *cultural capital* with the specific rules of the field. Hence, the position of the international academic can become substantially incomplete due to the lack of adequate 'interaction' with the field. Their distinctive *habitus* and *cultural capital* become largely extraneous in the transition to a new *field*. Potential remedies such as pre-departure orientation and on-arrival induction aiming at facilitating adaptation to a 'new community of practice' are most likely to expose limitations.

One of the key themes emerging from the study is that the cultural nuances of the language are a key barrier to integration to the university's working community regardless of time in the country. This may be reflected in various guises including 'jokes', for example:

Sometimes they [local staff] crack jokes and you may think that's bad. This may be cultural difference but I knew it before. The English people have amazing sense of

humour. You understand some but not other bits. You may understand just the words. (Biology Lecturer)

Or, as the participants indicated it could be about concern about encountering cultural misunderstanding or 'embarrassment' in social events or 'getting it right' in their communication:

On my first visit to a friend's wedding party, I was asked by the barman to pay for the drink. Unfortunately, I had no cash in my wallet, as I did not see the need to because we never pay in an invited party in Nepal. It was an embarrassing experience as the groom then came forward and paid for the bill. (Business Studies Lecturer)

When you operate in second language environment, you always have back in your mind - Am I going to make a *faux pas*? (Computer Science Lecturer)

Thus, even though they may have a proven knowledge of English in their subject area, this proficiency hardly supplements their local cultural knowledge and may not always translate into effective participation in non-academic gossip and 'small talk', which are crucial for maintaining collegiality at work. The informal conversations, potentially on unfamiliar topics, that are culturally nuanced and compounded by the casual use of local vernacular make the international academics feel quirky and 'demoralised'. An international academic who had spent three years in the UK University revealed:

I still feel quite uncomfortable spending time at the staff room while having morning tea or coffee. At the beginning I was demoralised due to the lack of understanding of what people were talking about. I still find it so hard to spend thirty minutes at the coffee break. I am not sure whether it is my English or the topic of the coffee gossip is the problem. (Physics Lecturer)

It was also revealed that the perception of what 'others' think of 'me' has a powerful resonance in shaping the 'persona' of international academics in their workplace. They are

always conscious of their background and often work diligently to avoid potential communication lapses in drafting emails or writing feedback on students' work. Those international academics who have to operate in a second language are often more diligent and often put extra effort into completing their assignments. One of the participants reported the stress caused by potential communication errors:

I am concerned about the tone, language, and accuracy of what I write. I am always careful about not getting things wrong. I think when we operate in a second language in a different cultural context; we end up working much harder than the native users of the language. It is, I think, about the fear of making mistakes, and then the concerns about how people might perceive that mistake. (Computer Science Lecturer)

...language barriers, as far as I am concerned, make people from different [cultural] backgrounds more diligent and more focused. They work twice or three times harder to make [up] for the deficit. (Social Work Lecturer)

Some participants indicated that effective use of English language was one of the challenges of working as an international member of staff. One participant who had lived in the UK for over a decade and worked as an academic member of staff for nine years explicitly mentioned about this difficulty as -

I find it hard at times to express exactly what I want to say, struggling to find the right word. Also, there are [reference to their native language] expressions that you can use and everybody understands exactly what you mean. I do not have this capacity in English. There are pronunciation/accent issues as well. People may not understand what I say or I may not understand them, which make things a bit difficult when you have a conversation. (Teaching Assistant)

Unlike the participant above, most participants exhibit inconsistencies in relation to their ability to operate in English as a second language. At one level, there is an assertion that linguistic limitations are well managed but there also exists a pattern of implicit revelations that language *is* an issue. One of the participants exhibits this fluctuation as:

Communicating with senior people in the organisation, mainly in management level meetings, requires significant preparation. English speakers possibly spend lesser time for such meetings. However, I have not faced any major linguistic issue although understanding the accents and dialects are difficult while communicating with people from different regions of the country. When I am unable to understand I ask again or request for explanation. People generally understand and cooperate as English is not my first language. (Business Studies Lecturer)

The cultural nuances associated with the language were not the only barriers to emerge under the theme of social and cultural experiences. Most participants indicated that the initial period of settlement was generally full of anxiety particularly due to extensive security surveillance, frequent incidents of violence and noticeable drinking problems in England.

People are very nice. I think it is much of class-based society. There is a lot of violence. ...there is so much police and security. So many laws, CCTV. Completely different from [country name]. (Psychology Lecturer)

But here, the amount of alcohol people drink is unbelievable. I often drive early in the morning to go to the east coast to observe the birds around three and four in the morning. People, men and women both are kind of crawling on the road totally drunk. (Biology Lecturer)

When I moved to England from Japan, I felt very nervous at the beginning due to the everyday news of shooting, murder and police siren around the place I lived in. A young boy was shot dead near my suburb. I kind of felt that it [moving to England] was not the right decision I had made. (Physics Lecturer)

The respondents mentioned that the logistical problems such as finding accommodation, school for children, transportation system, fear of committing cultural *faux pas*, settling in a new home and so forth became stressful due to the simultaneous pressures at work such as preparing for lectures, student supervision, and attending meetings. Whereas in the educational setting, they noted that the lack of schooling experience in Britain and limited knowledge of the UK school system made them immensely under-prepared in terms of their

capacity to understand and conceptualise the prior curricular knowledge of their students. This paucity of understanding, which may equally be the case with their native counterparts, could be viewed as inhibition in catering for the learning needs of students. With international staff, it was more likely to occur as a cultural impediment in spite of their genuine intention to support the students. For example, the role of a 'personal tutor' required them to advise students on personal problems that might impact on students' academic life. Dealing with students' extra-academic issues also required some understanding of young people's life styles, culture of families and relationships. These were sociologically complex issues for immigrant academics to grasp. This could be argued as an area, which could not possibly be compensated for by the individual's academic calibre and would rather demand a greater level of social and cultural appreciation. However, regular meetings with students to discuss their problems and the experience of assessing their work were reported to have offered valuable learning opportunities for grasping both students' academic levels and their personal lifestyles.

Most participants found that the UK working culture was very 'isolating' [independent (?)] and individualistic with the expectation that academics worked independently of each other. This may be interpreted as the perception of the respondents with cultural dissimilarities and their subsequent difficulty in integrating into the local groups of academics, or it could represent an aspect of UK professional culture. Similarly, the teacher-student relationship was another experience that was generally different from what they were accustomed to. The highly regarded status of a lecturer, which is the case in Asian universities, was found to be contradicted in British HEIs where the relationship with students was rather professional and non-hierarchical. This raised an issue of what was permissible and what was forbidden in the academic culture. The notions of politeness, formality and identity were often encountered distinctly by the respondents. This required them to swiftly familiarise with and adapt to these nuances of the academic culture. However, they consistently referred to their prior transnational experiences as a template with which to manage such differences.

Some distinctive patterns of social and cultural experiences were also observed between the category of participants who came from the European Union (EU) and the other category that came from Asian backgrounds.

International Academics with EU Backgrounds	International Academics from Non-EU Backgrounds
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More relaxed about social and cultural differences • Seemed to have coped well with cultural differences without much difficulty • Generally confident and high self-esteem even if lacked English competently • The ‘night out’ and ‘drinking culture’ in England perceived to be much more lavish than in their home countries • No concerns about their legal status of residency in the UK and managed to visit their home frequently. • The sense of the Diaspora community was much weaker among EU academics. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally displayed anxieties about challenges of social and cultural integration in UK society • Perceived barriers of language and cultural differences (irrespective of their acquired strengths in both). • Not attracted at all to the ‘night out’ culture or drinking outside. ‘Drinking’ limited within homes and among friends and families • Insecurity about being a non-EU immigrant and unpredictability of permanent residency in the UK • The Diaspora community meant a lot and preferred to remain connected • Regular discussions about the events taking place in their home country

Table 2: Difference between – EU and Non-EU members of staff

Academics from non-European countries face additional pressures created by the fast changing immigration laws that complicate their stay in Britain and subsequently impact on their career. This has broader implications for their families especially their children who adapt quickly to the school culture and young community. The data also indicate that there is a possibility of cultural conflict between children who adapt to local lifestyles and parents who normally prefer to maintain their native culture at home and among their native Diaspora. For example, young children tend to lose their mother tongue and develop local preferences such as food, music, relationship patterns and etiquettes. More importantly, the partners of these academics, who did not necessarily make the choice of immigration, though they might have consented, can struggle to find a suitable job and adjust in a new environment without their families and native friends. These unique experiences at home, which often go unacknowledged in the formal academic setting, are embedded inherently in the transnational experiences of international academics and impact on how they manage their professional life.

University Support Mechanism and Potential Tensions

One of the highly regarded supports for academics who move to Britain from a foreign country is the settlement fund, an additional lump sum payment by the institution that helps cover the costs of the move and initial adjustment. However, this is clearly limited to those academics appointed directly from abroad allowing them to effectively manage their 'stressful move' to 'an expensive country', Britain. Recalling her decision to move to a British HEI, one of the respondents mentioned:

It is a stressful move. You come to a new environment where you know nobody. You do not know who to ask for any support. It is a quite a lot of time to find out [where the support is available] and on top you have to teach. (Biology Lecturer)

The respondents shared the view that they were unaware of any kind of support available to them apart from the initial financial support for settlement. Some also referred to a staff

mentoring system but this was not available to everyone. There was also the induction that every new member of staff receives but this did not include any particular component to cater for the needs of new international staff. One of the respondents comments that people do not realise that the 'problem exists'. He mentions:

I get induction. But I do not have the impression that anything extra is available there. I got a mentor who did not have so much time. I can ask people all the time. But as an international [member of] staff, no. There was no induction about how the system works- the university system- education and so forth. The bureaucracy is very different. There was no induction as such. I had to ask. (Psychology Lecturer)

Even though there is a lack of an established institutional mechanism to provide necessary support for new international staff in these universities, all respondents mentioned that they experienced friendliness of and felt welcomed by their local counterparts. The personal relationship with a colleague at work is felt to be highly beneficial in enabling a smooth adjustment to a new work environment. However, this falls outside the university support system and would depend considerably on the individual's personality and ability to make friends.

Interestingly, the analysis of the data reveals that the perception of 'support' for international academics is a sensitive issue and might raise concerns about exclusion, mistrust and professional incompetence. The question of the need for extra or specialised support was either repudiated by a defensive reaction or encountered as a strange object that was hard to conceptualise. The notion of 'support' linked with someone's background might potentially be viewed as 'patronising' rather than an integral part of the institutional support mechanism.

Exploring this from an equal opportunity perspective, international academics are also appointed through a competitive selection procedure, and therefore are expected to demonstrate the essential academic competence and professional standards for the relevant

job. The analysis of interviews as well as my own professional experience suggests that the notion of providing international academics with additional support may be viewed discriminatorily by both international staff as well as their local counterparts. It is, therefore, paradoxically undermining to establish the idea that international academics need support. Furthermore, the identification of the nature of necessary support is compounded by the potential resistance from the international staff themselves who may be ambivalent or even reject the particular type of support on offer. What is implied by offering or demanding support is crucial for them.

The cultural disconnections of international academics are very subtle and revealed cautiously perhaps, to reassure themselves that this contained difference is due to natural preferences rather than any deeper incompatibility. The following interview excerpt reveals a series of oppositions or polarities indicating serious cultural disconnections that are characterised by language (German vs English), preference of food (Cold vs hot) and perceived difficulty of communication (exhausting vs easy):

Interviewer: Do you find it difficult to mix up with the people here?

Participant D: Normally, yes. I do not like the food you get here. That's why I go to the fast food shop across the street. I like warm food.

Interviewer: So, do you find anything difficult while socialising with them, talking to and making friends?

Participant D: Of course, Yes. The obstacle is of language because you cannot talk with the foreigner as you can with the native speakers.

Interviewer: Does that make any difference?

Participant D: Yes, it makes a big difference. It is exhausting for these people. For me it is the same to talk to German or native English speakers. I meet up with some students here who are learning German. They do not understand what I say. I have to speak very very slowly. Normally, English is very easy for us to understand. I have friends little bit more friends from [native] Germany or foreigners. Little bit of English

people but more non-native speakers of English. We meet up in the pub at weekend.

(Psychology Lecturer)

There is a deflection of the underlying issue that seems to be about language onto diet and later an implicit revelation of linguistic deficit as a natural effect of communication in a second language. As indicated earlier, most participants display some degree of discomfort when it comes to the issue of needing support. The notion of 'needing support' somehow appears as a therapy to one's perceived professional deficiency. Therefore, the tensions around the conceptualisation of support involve notions of sensitivity, hesitance, discrimination and rejection. Responding to a question whether international staff would need extra support, one of the participants mentioned –

I do not think there is a need for any special/extra help/support just because you are not from here [UK]. The help given should be based on your individual needs as a professional, not based on where you come from. (Teaching Assistant)

One of the respondents believes that social and cultural incompatibility affects to the sparsity of professional and communal integration. He believes that this difference may preclude in developing personal and informal relationships with local counterparts, which may disadvantage international staff in achieving professional success they seek. He further elaborates the tensions created by the cultural difference:

Not having an understanding of basic cultural things would sometimes limit your capacity to deal with academic activities. When you cannot grasp the cultural nuances, it may affect you professionally as well. (Computer Science Lecturer)

Identification of the need itself is a difficult process. Furthermore, international academics are apprehensive about university's stereotyping that they may lack in necessary aptitudes in order to perform their job effectively. So, they would rather prefer needs-based support to a standard support mechanism aimed at international staff.

Conclusions

Academic mobility may be viewed as one of the manifestations of educational globalisation, which, from the perspective of lived experiences of individual academics, requires a better theoretical understanding. Some of the themes, which emerged from this explorative study elucidated by the researcher's own experiences as an international academic reveal that transnational work entails tensions along the lines of linguistic, social and cultural adaptation. While this research explored experiences of UK based international academics, it is likely to be similar for local staff who are assigned academic work overseas as well as those working elsewhere as transnational academics.

The academic work, particularly teaching of international academics, requires 'transferability' of their academic capital (Anderson, Reder & Simon, 1996) and also needs them to acquire culturally sensitive teaching skills as an effort to integrate into the new academic 'community of practice' (Lave & Wenger, 1991). It is also useful to look at transnational process of international academics in terms of cultural metaphors suggested by Bourdieu (1984). Academic capital is something that international scholars already possess or can readily acquire with little risk. However, the findings from this exploratory study suggest that the lack of cultural capital creates a gap of vernacular knowledge, which is difficult to get hold of or trained in. Elements of broader cultural capital in terms of informal, casual, pastoral and relational understanding of the 'community of practice' create a sensitive fence that is difficult to cross and therefore often go unacknowledged. The lack of fundamental understanding of UK culture must be understood as inevitable, yet it can be remedied over a period of time rather than perceived as a professional deficiency. As this study reveals that the notion of 'needing support' is perceived as a professional threat, this issue needs to be dealt sensitively. This somewhat conjures up a catch-twenty-two situation that support is lacking but its provision may be resented.

It is important to recognise that the problems of cultural disconnection are difficult to identify and therefore, may not have an easy solution despite genuine intentions of institutions to help their international staff. However, institutions could deal with these problems

strategically in a number of ways. A mandatory induction programme focused on UK education system and tailored to cater for the needs of immigrant academics can be an effective point of departure. Secondly, the HE teaching qualification (e.g. Post Graduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education), which is increasingly becoming a requirement for HE teachers can embed some of the components that deal with social and cultural aspects of the UK HE system. Most importantly, the provision of standard support system may stereotype the problem with international academics and is likely to dissuade them from utilising the service. Therefore, support should be seen as training or a career development issue and should therefore be a part of annual appraisal sessions. Staff conducting appraisals should be familiar with the academic, social and cultural issues identified in this paper. Training for staff appraisers should allow them to raise the kinds of issues that transnational staff might experience in a sensitive manner and as part of career development in appraisal sessions. In the present climate of financial austerity and changing HE policy in Britain, the quality of teaching is undoubtedly an important element of student experience (as measured in the National Student Survey), which is likely to determine the future most UK universities. It is therefore the employing institution's responsibility to ensure that high standards of teaching and learning are maintained and therefore have a duty to pay attention to these critical issues.

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ⁱ The Open Doors report published by the Institute of International Education shows that the number of international students at colleges and universities in the United States increased by 8 percent to an all-time high of 671,616 in the 2008/09 academic year. The eighth report on the Patterns of Higher Education Institutions in the UK as indicated that the number of international students in the UK has increased by 48 percent between the years 2000 and 2006 (See <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk>). In 2009, the Australian institutions recruited 16.8 percent more international students than the previous year (See <http://aei.gov.au/AEI/Statistics/Default.htm>). In 2008/09, the world saw a 60 percent increase in the number of students studying abroad since the year 2000. (See <http://opendoors.iienetwork.org>).

ⁱⁱ The UK government has a point-based eligibility scheme known as Skilled Migrant Workers, USA has a work permit on the basis of sponsorship and green card policy and Australia has point-based work permit and permanent residency scheme for skilled immigrants.