

EXPERIENCE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS FROM THE EDUCATION SYSTEM OF INDIA: A STUDY IN GUJARAT STATE

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Abstract

Every year, many international students travel to India for the purpose of studying their undergraduate, postgraduate, and Ph.D. courses. These students are self-funded or under any of the scholarship schemes that India provides for them. One of these scholarship schemes is ICCR (Indian Council for Cultural Relation) scholarship, which offers seats to foreign students in the great universities of India. This paper focuses on the experience of international students (under ICCR scholarship) from the Indian education system in Gujarat state. In addition, the researcher has considered the social and cultural adjustment of the students in the education system of India in the region. The study is based on a mixed methodology that uses qualitative and quantitative research methods. A convenient sampling method was applied among a population of 120 students at Gujarat University and the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda. A total of 55 participants, 25 females and 30 men, contributed to the study. However, the study shows 67% of international students are happy with their study, cultural, and social experiences in Gujarat state, it is recommended to upgrade the hostel life for students and consider their language barriers in the class.

Key Words: Education, International Students, Experience, Indian Education System,

Introduction:

International student mobility and the experiences of students studying away from home have become central to higher education research and policy worldwide. India, which has historically sent large numbers of students abroad, is now also intensifying efforts to attract inbound international students (S. K. Pawar & Dasgupta, 2024). Growth in inbound mobility creates a pressing need to understand how international students perceive Indian campuses, how well they adjust academically and socially, and which systemic and contextual factors shape their experiences. For students who received much or all of their prior education in India's education system, the transition experience—the ways in which academic expectations, identity, language, and institutional practices interact—has distinctive contours that remain under-explored (S. Pawar et al., 2020). Among many outstanding academic states, Gujarat has become an appealing choice for international students. Gujarat's welcoming environment, great universities, and friendly people have been highlighted for the students and attract students from all corners of the globe (Shinde, G., & Ngan, L. T. K. (2020).

According to the statistics of the Indian government 2021, India has become an excellent academic destination for international students. Foreign students come to India from 174 countries, which displays a growth of 42% in enrollment in Indian universities. These students are mainly coming from neighboring countries like Nepal, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Tanzania, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, the Maldives, etc. India is ranked as the second-largest higher education system in the world, accommodating 45000 colleges and 950 universities that international students can join and boost their knowledge (UGC, 2021).

This study examines the experiences of international students who come from the Indian education system and study in Gujarat, with attention to pull/push factors, language and communication barriers, psychosocial adjustment, and institutional readiness. The existing merged literature provided by the user highlights three broad, interlocking themes that frame the present enquiry: (1) pull factors and perceptions that shape the decision to study in India (S. Pawar et al., 2020). (2) adaptation, academic stress, and mental-health correlates of cross-cultural study (Merlin Joseph & Sudhesh N.T., 2023) and (3) language, identity and institutional contexts that mediate daily academic and social experiences (Ennin & Manariyo, 2023).

The aim of this paper is twofold: empirically, to document and analyse the lived experience of inbound students who were educated in India prior to migration to Gujarat universities; and conceptually, to situate that experience in relation to institutional internationalization strategies, sociocultural identity processes, and structural supports identified in the literature. The study contributes to policy-relevant knowledge by combining evidence on students' perceptions and stress/adaptation profiles with contextual analyses of campus readiness and socio-economic factors affecting student well-being. Ultimately, this introduction positions the present research as responding directly to gaps identified across the provided literature: while several studies document specific barriers or pull factors, few integrate these findings at the state level (Gujarat) or explicitly link institutional internationalization strategies (e.g., the Seven "I" Framework) to students' mental-health and adjustment outcomes (Srivastava, 2022).

Literature Review

Pull factors, perceptions and institutional marketing

Several of the provided studies examine the reasons international students choose India and how they perceive Indian campuses. Qualitative interviews and larger-scale mixed-method work consistently find that perceived quality of education, cultural diversity, economic opportunity, and the experience of Indian culture operate as salient pull factors (S. K. Pawar & Dasgupta, 2024). Pawar et al. (2020) showed that students' decisions are shaped not only by formal indicators (rankings, program quality) but also by interpersonal and place-based experiences — the friendliness of people on campus and in host cities emerged as an important influence. Pawar and Dasgupta's (2024) sequential mixed-method study validated and extended these themes quantitatively, identifying four factors — internationally recognised education at affordable cost, campus readiness, employment opportunities, and cultural experience — which jointly explain student choices (S. Pawar et al., 2020).

These findings matter for Gujarat specifically because institutional marketing and policy goals often emphasize cost-competitiveness and employability as central assets. The Seven "I" Framework proposed by Srivastava (2021) offers an institutional lens for understanding how universities might operationalize internationalization across initiatives — from infrastructure and curricula to industry linkages — potentially amplifying the very pull factors identified by Pawar and colleagues (Srivastava, 2022).

Language, communication, and campus microcultures

Language and communication emerge repeatedly as proximal determinants of academic participation and social inclusion. Ennin and Manariyo's (2023) descriptive survey focused on Gujarat state universities found that differences in language competence significantly hinder foreign students' academic work, social life, and overall adjustability. Their empirical analysis underscored how even students who choose India for cultural familiarity can experience everyday communication obstacles that reduce classroom engagement and social integration (Ennin & Manariyo, 2023).

Chennamsetti's (2020) study of Indian students in the US complements this evidence by showing that language-related difficulties extend beyond classroom mechanics to affect identity, confidence, and belonging: problems expressing oneself increase stress, limit participation, and complicate social bonding (Chennamsetti, 2020). Together, these studies suggest that language support services, orientation programs, and pedagogical adaptations are critical for improving learning outcomes and psychosocial adjustment in Gujarat campuses.

Adjustment, stress and mental-health correlates

Mental health and adaptation are central cross-cutting concerns. (Merlin Joseph & Sudhesh N.T., 2023) Quantitative work by Josepha and Sudhesh (2023) finds that academic stress, academic lifestyle, and perceived social support are tightly interrelated: better social supports and smoother adjustment predict reduced academic stress, while academic motivation can paradoxically correlate with higher stress. These findings are echoed by Gebregergis and Csukonyi (2025), who show in a large cross-sectional sample that sociocultural adaptation significantly predicts psychological adaptation; that is, social integration into host communities supports mental well-being (Gebregergis & Csukonyi, 2025).

At the state level, Jaji and Mathur's (2024) analysis of international students in Gujarat highlights how demographic variables — including gender and religion — condition positive mental-health outcomes, suggesting that policy responses must be sensitive to intra-group differences. Collectively, these studies recommend multi-tiered interventions: campus-based counseling and peer-support, targeted language assistance, and policies that reduce structural barriers to integration (Ally Jaji & Mathur, 2024).

Synthesis and identified gaps

Across different researches several consistent patterns emerge that frame the research agenda for the Gujarat-focused study. First, pull factors and institutional positioning shape who comes to India and why; institutional readiness and marketing can amplify or blunt these factors (S. K. Pawar & Dasgupta, 2024). Second, language and communication limitations are a pervasive source of academic and social friction even when cultural affinity exists (Chennamsetti, 2020). Third, psychosocial adaptation and mental health are influenced by social support, sociocultural adaptation, gender and religion, implying that support systems must be both universal and tailored (Ally Jaji & Mathur, 2024). Fourth, campus cultures, administrative practices and broader socioeconomic conditions affect student experiences in ways captured by humanities and policy-focused contributions (Mustopa et al., 2024).

Despite this breadth, the merged literature also shows two notable gaps. There is scarce research that (a) integrates micro-level student experiences (language, stress, identity) with meso-level institutional strategies (internationalization frameworks, campus readiness) specifically at the state level (Gujarat), and (b) examines how provenance within the Indian education system (for example, differences in curricular design, language of instruction, and school-leaving examinations) intersects with inbound adaptation processes. Addressing these gaps is the explicit aim of the current Gujarat study.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To know about the academic experience and cultural adjustment of international students in Gujarat, India.
2. To assess the intensity of adjustment problems in academic and non-academic areas between international students studying in Gujarat.
3. To examine the respondents' opinions about their own education system and the Indian education system.

Methodology:

In this paper, a qualitative and quantitative method is used. In addition, observation was done in the hostel life of the students, and some students were interviewed by the researcher informally. The study conducted among 55 international students in Gujarat state that majority of respondents are from Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Sri-Lanka and African countries (Gambia, Malawi, Zambia, Tanzania, Uganda and Morocco).

Sampling

The researcher has used a feasible purposive convenience sampling method for this study. Among a population of 120 students, a total of 55 people contributed to the study. There were 30 male and 25 female participants from different countries in the investigation. A large number of respondents belonged to the age group of 26-30 years. Participants are pursuing their bachelor's, postgraduate, and Ph.D. courses; however, many respondents are postgraduate students.

Instrument: A structured questionnaire was developed, including 11 open-ended and 35 multiple-choice questions encompassing the students' hostel lifestyle, their institutional, curriculum of the college studies, their adjustment in the class, and the environment. Students were requested to demonstrate freely, generating strong qualitative information.

Procedure: The researcher has collected the data by sharing a questionnaire among the international students of Gujarat state. After completing the process, the collected data was analyzed by the researcher through the Microsoft Excel program and showed the results of the study by numbers, charts, and diagrams. All respondents are ICCR (Indian Council for Cultural Relations) scholarship holders..

Data Analysis and Interpretation:

This study was conducted in the Gujarat state of India among international students who are pursuing their education or have graduated recently. Data have been collected from 55 international students who are doing their Doctorate, postgraduate, or bachelor in Gujarat state.

Table 1: Qualification of Respondents

Characteristics	Frequency	Percent
Ph.D.	12	21.8
Post graduate	26	47.3
Bachelor	17	30.9
Total	55	100.00

The table demonstrates a larger number of respondents are post-graduate students, who present 47.3 % of our data. The other characteristics, Ph.D. students show 21.8 %, and bachelor students present 30.9 % of our data. We can figure out from the data that many international students are doing post-graduate degrees and some of them are doing Bachelor's degrees, and a smaller number of them are doing Ph.D.

Table 2: Satisfaction of Students from the Indian Education System

Characteristics	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	2	3.6
Disagree	4	7.3
Neutral	13	23.6
Agree	28	50.9
Strongly agree	8	14.5
Total	55	100

Table 9 presents the sum up of 36(65.4%) students who agree and strongly agree that they have experienced or are experiencing a better study period in the current degree they are studying or they have already finished. Although there are 6(10.9%) students who disagree and strongly disagree that they have experienced a better study period. Plus, there are 13(23.6%) students who are indifferent and neutral about the sentence positivity or negativity. Therefore, we can understand that most of the students have experienced a better learning process and they enjoyed their studies in India. In addition, collected data make us sure that the Indian education system can be effective for international students more than 65% which we can consider it sufficient level of satisfaction.

Table 3: well-designed Curriculum of Lessons

Characteristics	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	1	1.8
Disagree	4	7.3
Neutral	15	27.3
Agree	29	52.7
Strongly agree	6	10.9
Total	55	100.00

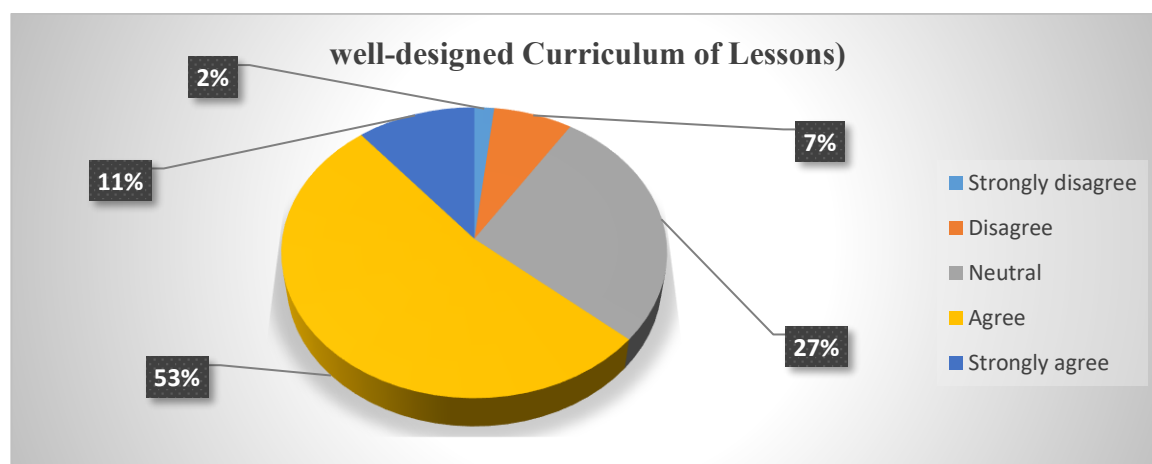


Table 3 shows that a sum of 35 (63.6 %) international students agree and strongly agree that the curriculum of the lessons is well designed, and a group of 5(9.1%) students disagree and strongly disagree with the claim. Whereas, 15(27.3) students are not sure about the curriculum being well-designed. This collected data helps us elicit a positive answer

regarding the Indian education system, that yes, the curriculum is well-designed and helps students experience a better process of learning. 63.6% of foreign students agree that India has a good curriculum of lessons, thus we claim that international students experience a better learning process from this curriculum and India's curriculum of lessons is excellent and helpful for its country.

Limitations

Like any other research, this study has certain limitations as well. First, the findings are drawn on the basis of international students' perceptions, which may not fully present the voices of local students who may play a significant role in the topic. Second, the study was narrowed to the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda and Gujarat University, which may limit the generalizability of results to other regions. Despite the present constraints, the study provides valuable insights by highlighting students' direct experiences and professional reflections on the Indian education system.

Major Findings and Recommendations

The researcher has gathered and learned many different ideas about studying in India and has gained an understanding of the quality of life for international students in Gujarat. Throughout this study and data analysis part of the paper, the researcher has identified several key points that should be considered regarding the education system in India, specifically in Gujarat, as well as some points in favor of foreign students. Although, Indian education system is good, there are positive and negative points about every system and program. Therefore, the following are the results and recommendations in case to be considered in the future.

1. Local languages which are spoken in the classroom is a barrier for international students, thus, if colleges provide at least one year of learning the local language (Hindi) for the foreign students, learning process would be more effective.
2. There are lack of internship or practical work in some colleges. Internships are important, students put class theories in action and experience the real labor market.
3. In perspectives of international students, hostels are not in good condition and do not provide a better service for students, therefore, boosting hostel quality is improving students' quality of studies.
4. Universities should have feedback form and each year share it with the students, so that students share their opinions/problems for the best.
5. There are colleges where they don't have enough facilities, especially technological tools and internet access. Thus, these facilities are must in educational institutions.

Conclusion:

International students are ambassadors of their own countries in India and they will be representative of India after their graduation too. They present what they experience, observe and study in India back to their home countries. It is a big honor for Indian that international students are happy with their educational experience in large; however, India needs to work on specific points mentioned in the recommendation section. India is a very rich country socially, economically, and educationally. In order to show the richness of India, the authorities should work more in every sector, especially, in education sector. Finally, As an International student, the researcher would like to thank government of India for providing the opportunity of education for students from all around the world, especially from his country Afghanistan. In addition, International Students are ambassadors of India after their graduation from their respected universities in India. Therefore, helping and providing better life condition for foreign students is a humanitarian work, and a great deal for India in politics region and gaining respect among beneficiaries.

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