
MANAGING MULTICULTURAL CHALLENGES: A CASE STUDY OF MPH PROGRAM IN NORTHERN UNIVERSITY BANGLADESH

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ABSTRACT

Today's world is characterized by globalization, development of information technology and a diversity of culture, among which the field of higher education is no different. Students from diversified culture face special challenges when they are learning in an environment that is different from them. Some of the challenges are verbal communication, linguistic barriers, understanding the locals, difference in systems, religious differences, and many more. Studying abroad bears special significance in some countries, especially in the west. But not all the students had that eligibility to study there. Developing countries and underdeveloped countries thus can work together to solve their individual needs and cooperate among themselves in the field of education, administration, health etc. This paper tries to explain in an extent that how students from another country faced special challenges in coping with the existing environment. Various factors can contribute to these challenges. Then an alternative approach has been suggested to manage the situation through collaboration between educational institutions. A case study has been presented with practical example of Masters of Public Health (MPH) program in Northern University Bangladesh. Students who studied in the MPH program in recent years in the university from Thailand and Nepal were the respondents in the study. Collaboration between Northern University Bangladesh and Chiang Mai University from Thailand and Tribhuvan University from Nepal has ushered a new opportunity among the students from Nepal and Thailand to study in Bangladesh. This collaboration can be an effective way to manage the trans-cultural differences and contribute a win-win scenario for both countries.

Keywords: Multicultural challenges, Collaboration

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1.0 Introduction

Globalization has made the world a local village, a place where anyone can receive any kind of information virtually from anywhere. It has been possible through the continuous innovation of information technology. This innovation has expanded various opportunities across the globe and education is one of the sectors. People used to travel distant countries around the world for the purpose of education and knowledge. Although most of the students want to pursue their education in developed countries only, but by reality sometimes it's been difficult to do so.

A World Bank study determined that the ability to generate quality knowledge within institutions of higher education is increasingly critical to national competitiveness in the global marketplace, which poses a serious challenge to nations in the developing world (Task force, 2000). For the last quarter of a century, many governments and donor organizations have assigned a relatively low priority to developing higher education opportunities through international assistance programs, likely grounded in a “narrow” and “misleading analysis” that “public investment in universities and colleges brings meager returns compared to investment in primary and secondary schools, and that higher education magnifies income inequality” (p. 1).

As a result, developing countries' higher education systems are under great strain. They are chronically underfunded, but face escalating demand. Faculties are often under-qualified, poorly motivated, and poorly rewarded. Students are badly taught and curricula under-developed. Developed countries, meanwhile, are constantly raising the stakes. Quite simply, many developing countries will need to work much harder just to maintain their position, let alone to catch up. (Task force, 2000, p. 1) They even can work with one another to improve their situation. This research shows how international collaboration can help students to choose universities across a diverse set of cultures.

Apart from the challenges of international education the focus is also towards the students who travel to another country for the purpose of learning. They face extreme difficulties in several situations. International students come from different countries with different backgrounds and experience. They have different types of skills and level of English knowledge (Bektas, 2008; Sovic, 2009; Directgov, 2011; C. Lin, 2010). Hence, they are concerned about getting used to new ways of learning and thinking and international students face more difficulties adapting to the new situation. They face various challenges in terms of cultural and Communication

problems, loss of social support, language difficulties, academic problems, financial, Psychological, health and recreational issues (G. Lin & Yi, 1997; Yeh & Inose, 2002; Hus, 2003; Andrade, 2006; Kelly Dawn 2008; Lui, 2009 ; Sovic, 2009; Zubaidi & Rechards, 2009; Sherry, 2010; Alavi & Shafeg, 2011).

Furthermore the results of studies indicated that, the challenges faced by international students have been categorized by following four categories: (1) general living adjustment, such as adjusting to food, living/housing environment and transportation, dealing with financial problems and health care concerns; (2) academic difficulties, such as lack of proficiency in the English language Method of Teaching Problems (3) socio-cultural difficulties, for example, experiencing culture shock, Recreational Problems (4) personal psychological adjustment, such as experiencing homesickness, loneliness, depression, feeling isolation and worthlessness (Cheng, 1999; Han, 1996; Kaczmarek, Matlock, Merta, Ames, & Ross, 1994; Lin & Yi, 1997; Ying & Liese, 1994; Tseng & Newton, 2002; Norhasni Zainal, 2007; Marie Vafors & Valerie DeMarinis, 2008; Al-Zubaidi & Rechards, 2009; Mustapha, 2010; Alavi & Shafeq 2011).

Based on literature review, international students face different problems. Therefore to attract international students, universities need to understand the challenges faced by international students and to provide the right kind of support. This research follows the pattern of a research conducted by Baharak Talebloo and Roselan Bin Baki titled: “Challenges Faced by International Postgraduate Students during their First Year of Studies” published in *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Vol. 3 No. 13; July 2013*. This field of study in Bangladesh is yet to be discovered. This research identifies several problems related to international students mainly from health sciences sector.

2.0 Objective of the Report

The report focuses on two main objectives:

- a) To identify the factors contributing towards Cultural differences
- b) To provide an alternative approach of managing multi-cultural challenges through collaboration with International institutions

3.0 Research Methodology

The study was conducted at Northern University Bangladesh (NUB). The participants were ten international students, who are currently studying in Northern University Bangladesh and mainly came from Nepal. Convenience sampling was applied to select the samples. They were selected according to sampling critical cases which was a kind of purposeful sampling and also they were chosen chiefly because the researcher had an easy access to them. Patton (2002) states that qualitative inquiry typically focuses on relatively small samples selected purposefully to permit inquiry into and understanding of a phenomenon in depth. The interviewees were contacted by email. Then they were given a questionnaire. Students strongly urge that the information should be kept confidential. The main purpose of this study was to provide an in-depth description and understanding of the human life experience (Polit, 2006; Lichtman, 2006). Questionnaires are prepared in such a way that participants can write their own opinion about how they dealt with the problems.

4.0 Data Analysis & Interpretations

Respondents are asked about their duration of study and living in Bangladesh, how they learn about Northern University Bangladesh, their problem with the environment and how they managed it. They mainly heard about Northern University Bangladesh from consultancy service as 80% of the respondents mentioned it as the main source. Besides these following questions are asked to the respondents to write in their own words:

- ✓ *Share your experience of being a student of Northern University Bangladesh in your own words.*
- ✓ *What suggestions can you give to improve the situation for foreign students studying in Bangladesh?*

Besides asking the questions, international students are also asked to rank their problems in three specific categories:

Type of Problem	Factors Related to the Problem
Staying Problem	Accommodation / Housing problem, Language Problem, Visa renew / Passport office related problem, Religion Difference, Cultural barriers, Political instability
Study-related Problem	Availability of Study Materials, Cooperation from the domestic students', Understanding texts and class lectures, Cooperation from the teachers', Management system of the university, Educational fees of the university

Personal Problem	Loneliness, Lack of sharing partner, Feeling of being an alien, Inferiority complex, Missing family members
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4.1 Staying Problem

All the students in the survey commented that they faced initial problems when they first arrived in Bangladesh. 30% of the respondents surveyed emphasized most that they face visa renew problems. This problem has been supported by (Wang, 2007), that the international student services offices are needed much more especially to help students navigate the new rules and regulations relating to immigration, visas, etc. This result also closely reflects statements in the literature, (G. Lin & Yi, 1997; Lu, 2009). As Bangladesh is still building its economy, it still faces challenges in solving various passport/immigration or visa related problems. Another 30% respondents said prioritized accommodation problem. As the city of Dhaka is overcrowded, to get a suitable house to live in require special effort. Another 30% of the respondents told language was their most problematic affair when they arrived in Bangladesh. However they recovered well after living here for few years as the respondents surveyed understood clearly when they were asked questions in Bengali as well.

4.2 Study Related Problem

It is challenging to study in a foreign country as also suggested by experts and researchers in the field. Al-Zubaidi & Rechards, 2009 stated that academic difficulty categories among international students refer to the academic system, lecturers and methodology of teaching. Furthermore, Harman and Hayden (2010) find out that, regarding to teach and learning environment challenges the lack of qualifications of academic staff and the poor academic preparation of academic staff for their teacher role was the significant challenges facing higher education in Vietnam. However, in this research among the respondents surveyed 60% told that they faced regarding the management system of the University as the most problematic to deal with. Then they faced problems with the availability of study materials. Educational fees of the university also looked much heavier to many students as this was prioritized the next.

4.3 Personal Problem

Various researches suggest that foreign students specially faced difficulties in this section most, as they had to leave their families home. The alien environment sometimes looks hostile in many

cases. In the research Loneliness and Missing family members are both regarded as the most problematic by the respondents surveyed. Having sharing partners can lessen the problem but most of the participants also indicated that they face a lack of sharing partner which in turn let them think of being an alien in the host country.

4.4 Independent Comments

The respondents are also asked to give their opinion about how they faced and managed various challenges, their experiences in Northern University Bangladesh and their suggestions.

4.4.1 Adaptation to the environment

Respondents are asked the question that whether they faced problem adapting to the environment. Some of them responded 'No', as mostly Bangladesh is situated in the South Asia and most of the students are from Nepal, they cope with the environment easily. However, 70% of them responded yes and they had to manage those situations. One respondent wrote:

“Talking about problems with friends & family and adapting to the environment of Bangladesh”

Another respondent wrote:

“In first few months, language problem was the biggest issue, but later on we learned the difference in our native language, and slowly we were used to Bengali language. Then, we just made the place as our own.”

Another respondent wrote:

“At first I used to talk in English. It was much too difficult even to walk in shopping & language problem was there. Slowly we just know culture, language and managed.”

4.4.2 Experience of Life in Bangladesh

Respondents are asked to write their personal experience of studying in Northern University Bangladesh. One student wrote:

“It’s a pleasure to be a part of NUB as a student. In a new country when I first arrived, things were a bit awkward but with time everything was adjusted. I got good co-operation and help from my friends and teachers. As a whole, I am thankful to all my friends, teachers and NUB family.”

Another respondent wrote:

“I really pleased to get the chance to study in this university where there are honorable and a lot of experienced teachers of Bangladesh.”

4.4.3 Suggestions from the respondents

Respondents are asked the question that how the situation of foreign students in Bangladesh can be improved. In response to this question students suggested various issues. A list has been provided here summarizing the comments of the respondents:

Sl. No.	Suggestions
1.	Renewable Visa Opportunity, then they doesn't have to renew every year. Visa extension to be done from the university administration committee itself as it is very tedious for students
2.	Facility improvement should be emphasized
3.	English speaking should be made mandatory to teachers in class and during lectures
4.	Accommodation should be provided for the students rather than they being left alone to look for houses by themselves. Especially the unmarried ones because it is extremely difficult to find houses
5.	Cultural exposure during time of festivals and occasions would help to overcome loneliness when every domestic students rush to their hometowns
6.	Local students could be more cooperative and help each other to adjust in the new society as my friends had done

4.5 Masters in Public Health and University Collaboration

The Master of Public Health (MPH) degree is the most widely recognized professional credential for leadership of the 21st century in the field of public health. Based on the extensive experience in teaching, research and development, the Northern University Bangladesh in academic collaboration with leading reputed international universities and International organizations offers the Master of Public Health (MPH) International Program for medical and non-medical health professionals. The program emphasizes the development skills and competency in management, research and communications of health programs. Department of Public Health is providing public health education, training and research with international flavor and excellence relevant to the particular needs of the developing countries. It provides Community-oriented providing experiential learning centered around the public health problems of Bangladeshi communities; Emphasize critical, innovative thinking that is rooted in best practice and rigorous research methods; Use a multi-disciplinary, inter-sectoral approach to learning and problem-solving; Build capacity and prepare individuals to become public health practitioners, critical thinkers, researchers of public health and policy at community, district, national and international

levels. Any student with such skills & orientation will be capable to handle public health issues anywhere in the world.

The Department provides innovative and comprehensive public health education to the South East Asia region and beyond, offering a distinctive range of professionally accredited recognized courses designed to lead to successful and fulfilling careers in the fields of public health both in Bangladesh and in the global market place. The Department provides coursework and research programs at postgraduate level. Teaching and research activities in the department are formed by close links with organizations and community, giving respective courses a high degree of relevance with employers, and ensuring innovative and progressive course content.

The department has active links with universities of Malaysia, Thailand and Nepal. These provide a range of opportunities for in-country study, study abroad, and staff and student exchange, as well as academic collaboration and research. Close links with organization and community groups enable the University to offer a variety of university scholarship for talent students.

In MPH program more than 100 international students has completed their studies since its inception. For purposes of admission, all persons who are not citizens or permanent residents of Bangladesh are defined as international applicants. In most cases international applicants seeking admission into Northern University Bangladesh must meet the same academic standards for admission, as those required for native students. There are wide variations; however, between educational systems throughout the world that makes exact comparison of educational standards difficult. International applicants are selected on the basis of their prior academic work, English proficiency, probability of success in the chosen curriculum (as evidenced by prior work in the academic area involved), and certification of adequate financial resources. In some countries there are a limited number of universities such as: Nepal. Collaboration between Tribhuban University of Nepal and Northern University Bangladesh has given the students of Nepal to study in Bangladesh. As both countries are situated in South Asian region and their culture somehow matches with each other and students can easily cope with the situation which is also suggested by this study. Currently Northern University also has collaborations with BIAM Foundation, Bangladesh; TQIP (Trauma Quality Improvement Program), Bangladesh Civil Service Academy Bangladesh; Microsoft; CISCO; Nottingham University of United Kingdom;

International Islamic University Malaysia; Chiang Mai University, Thailand; Salahaddin University of Iraq; University Malaysia Perlis and Tribhuvan University of Nepal. These institutions are constantly contributing towards the development and progress of Northern University Bangladesh.

4.5.1 Vision & Mission

The vision of the program is to help the nations achieve healthful & quality life of the people especially of those from developing countries by creating skills & human resources. The overreaching mission of department of public health is to advance the people's health by giving quality learning, discovery & communication to upcoming health leaders. To peruse this mission the department generates knowledge through continuous research with quality higher education that can be communicated to the health professionals, researchers & policy makers to advance the health of the populations as well as quality of life.

4.5.2 Special Features of MPH Program

- ✓ Faculty members having PhD from reputed national/international universities or institutions having proven Research/Management expertise.
- ✓ Appreciable communication Experiences.
- ✓ Evening and Holiday/Weekend class schedule.
- ✓ Updated courses curriculum and course modules.
- ✓ NUB Financial Aids/Tuition Waiver for deserving candidates.
- ✓ Provision of internship in the relevant areas of specialization.
- ✓ Offers enrollment opportunity for medical and non-medical graduates.
- ✓ Extra-curricular activities.

4.5.3 Why MPH at NUB?

- ✓ Most of the NUB MPH graduates have already secured job at different GO/NGO like UNO, WHO, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNDP, ADB & other national organizations
- ✓ Internship opportunities in local organization for career development program
- ✓ Course waiver for deserving & experienced students
- ✓ Well established library having rich collection of books & high impact Journals with online access

- ✓ Exclusive research & computer labs having 24 hours internet facilities for students
- ✓ Provision of uploading lectures so that students can have the facilities to download & prepare before the class commence
- ✓ NUB campus is under the coverage of Wi-Fi facilities
- ✓ National study tour as a part of course curriculum

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendation

It is proven and true that whenever a student is traveling abroad for study he/she have to face some cultural difficulties to adapt. These challenges are more or less same in any country around the world. Although various measures are always being taken to improve the situation still it depends on the person. This study tried to show the problems in the context of Bangladesh. Bangladesh is a developing economy. The country is advancing. Its asset was always and will be the population. To support the population it's always emphasizing the quality of education. There are currently 34 public and 76 private universities in Bangladesh which indicates the nation is striving towards building an educated nation. The opportunity is reaching outside now as various students from outside are also coming to Bangladesh for higher study. As the situation improves Bangladesh can provide international standard quality education for all. The challenges that international students face can also be lessened to some extent due to this. Previously it was believed that government should always take all the initiatives. But things are changing as Private ownership; public-private partnership (PPP) and joint collaboration between international institutions are contributing more towards higher education. This report finds an alternative way to manage the multicultural challenges with direct involvement and collaboration between international universities. In future this kind of initiative can be fruitful to both parties.

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