Identification and analysis of risks faced by Indian student community in Australia

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

Master of Science

Royal Institute of Technology, Sweden

2017

Program authorized to offer degree:

ITM TMT
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Abstract

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Qualitative research method, in the form of individual surveys, was used to understand the issues and problems faced by students when studying abroad in Australia. For the research purposes, students from India, who went for studies in Australia after ‘A’ levels, were surveyed. By doing so, it was possible to identify the pressing issues faced by students when going overseas for their higher education. Some of the major issues were experiencing homesickness, cultural shock, financial worries, difficulty with part time jobs, language and employment after graduation. Among some seemingly minor, but major personal issues that diminished the experience of students abroad are difficulties faced in adapting to a different climate, food issues, a feeling of separation from family and friends and a general sense of loneliness. A huge issue that requires a separate section in itself is challenge faced by students in fully integrating with the local environment and getting to grips with the cultural norms, which can be very different from what the students are used to in their home country. Most of the students surveyed have expressed a feeling they had of never fully belonging in Australia. This results in the students usually forming cliques with their fellow countrymen, which can usually limit the extent to which the students explore their host country or mingle with the local people. In fact, it takes away the whole point of leaving the comforts of home to live in a new country. However, the students were also quick to point out that with time, this feeling diminished and while they never
walked away feeling that they eventually became 'one of them', the problems this feeling created in their lives decreased and they truly enjoyed their overseas student experience.
Introduction

Every student, at one stage of his life or the other, has toyed with the idea of studying abroad. The idea of leaving one's comfort zone and flying out to a completely new country, in search of better education and better career prospects, is no doubt interesting. The hidden thrill in exploring the 'unknown', as well as the idea of living independently, studying, working and earning on one's own, living a life where the terms and conditions are set by one self, instead of parents or relatives, as is the case in most student lives, can be particularly appealing for the young generation. Not only that, as globalization sweeps across the globe, the students have found that a 'foreign' experience, where some time is spent studying and working abroad, gives them a definite edge over other candidates, when it comes to job market and the like. Also, the quality of education in developed countries like the US, the UK, Australia etc. also attract many students. Usually, pursuing studies in these countries present the student with a wider range of course choices, streams, campus facilities and chances for extra-curricular activities, not to mention the exposure to many different nationalities and cultures, in form of fellow students or teachers or the destination in itself. This is also a major deciding force.

For the purpose of writing this research paper, we will specifically look at the study abroad behavior of Indian students. We will look at the factors that motivate them to pursue their education abroad and the impact of these factors on their final decision. In most cases, Indian students think about studying abroad after finishing their Bachelor’s degree in their home country. That is, most of the students go abroad for their post-graduation studies including Masters, PhD and Post Doc. This age is usually considered the right age by most Indian families, to leave their homes behind and venture beyond their comfort zones. As the students leave their nests and venture into pastures unknown, they come face to face with challenges of many
different forms. In almost all cases, these challenges are very different from the types of challenges they faced in their home country. There is an additional factor also. When one is in their own land, among their family, surrounded by their friends and loved ones, they have an inbuilt support system, to whom they can turn for any kind of help. Whatever be the problems they face, be it academic or financial or of more personal nature, there is always someone who they can turn to for help. However, in a foreign country, where the student usually does not find an automatic support system, other than friends from his college or university, these problems can seem insurmountable. This is one of the major reasons why Indian parents prefer to wait until they consider their children mature and wise enough to deal with their problems on their own. There is also the financial aspect. Generally, a degree can range anywhere from three to four years and the expenses associated with completing a Bachelor’s degree abroad is vastly higher than completing a Master’s degree abroad, the time duration of which can be anything from one to two years. Also, it is through the exposure they receive during their college years, that most students become aware of the globalized world out there. By the time students complete their Bachelor’s degree, they walk away with a vague feeling that they should study further, pursue a higher degree and this is usually the time when the hunt begins for a reputed institution that can offer them the degree of their choice.

The Indian education snapshot
In a recent study conducted by Guardian Professional Networks, it was found that most of the Indian students aimed for a qualification that would be recognized on a global level. It was further revealed that for most of the participants, around 60%, to be more precise, the way in which they wanted to achieve global recognition was through pursuing their studies abroad, from a globally ranked institution. Keeping this in mind, the Indian students used the following
parameters to narrow down an institution for their higher studies. The factors that influenced their decision include the reputation of the educational institution, the content of the program and the lecturers teaching the program and finally, the value it would add to their portfolio. Another important factor to be considered here is that India lacks quality institutions that can offer a program and course choice that is at par with global institutions. In fields such as social sciences and humanities, however, there are a few reputable institution in the country itself. However, even these institutions that are held in reverence within the country fail to match up to international standards and rarely come up among the global top class. In fields such as business or STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), the situation is slightly more favorable. For example, institutions such as Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIMS), the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research etc are capable of being considered as internationally competitive, even if the acknowledgement from abroad for these is limited. Even then, there is a problem regarding the number of students that these institutions can take in ever year. (Vijeyavelan, 2015). In fact, as the recent statistics show, the competition can be extremely frightening. For example, take the case of Shri Ram College of Commerce in Delhi. In the year 2011, it was decided by the authorities to announce a first cut-off of 100 per cent for non-commerce (science) students who were opting for a Bachelor's degree in commerce (Honors). In another example, which occurred in the following year - 2012 - it was found that more than 500,000 students were in competition with each other in order to secure around 10,000 total seats available across 15 IITs in India. The competing students faced a staggering odds of getting into any of the best engineering schools in India. Business studies fare no better with The Indian Institute of Management in Ahmedabad (IIM-A) offered spots to only
0.25% of applicants for the 2012-14 academic years, in contrast to acceptance rates 7% at Stanford University and 13% at Harvard University for MBA programs (Zlomek, 2013).

Therefore, many students are in a position where they have no choice, but to settle for less, when they are unable to get into the best schools in India. And, it is a fact that there is a huge gulf between the standards of the 'best' schools and the rest of the schools, so much so that students did not consider them options at all. Or the students are faced with an option of continuing their education at 'private' institutions across the country. While the number of private institutions in India are many, there are many factors that dissuade the students or their parents from studying in these institutions. Firstly, the cost of studying in a public organization is way less compared to the cost of studying in a private organization. In addition to the cost, there is a general wariness among the candidates and their parents regarding the quality of education offered in these institutions and many do not find the quality worth the huge amount of money that need to be invested in these. There are, however, a handful of new credible private institutions of study in the country. But, when compared to the huge demand, their capacity is less and usually, Indian students find themselves with no place to go. (Asianscientist.com)

Throw into this already dismal picture the issue of reservation, which is prevalent in India and the picture just becomes grimmer. Since the reservation policy reduces the number of seats that are available to students in the 'general' category, reserving them for students from special categories, it further weakens the prospects of majority of students, in getting into a good institution. (Monitor.icef.com)

Therefore, a bright Indian student, who wants to study further in his field, up to Masters level or even Doctorate level, finds that the options in his country are quite limited. This usually forces students to look at options abroad. Also, it is a fact that foreign degrees are usually more valued
in the Indian market, than a local degree, when it comes to looking for employment too. While the overseas programs are usually considered more prestigious, the reasons to study abroad goes much beyond the prestige issue. The facilities, especially laboratories and research facilities, are usually better abroad, than in India and a culture of research tends to be valued highly in foreign countries such as the UK, US and Australia too. Also, the faculty members tend to be of more quality and also, more accessible and therefore, the students may find it comparatively easier to associate themselves with a laboratory or research institute abroad. (Altbach, 2014)

Also, getting out of the country will help students gain a different perspective of the world around them and also of life itself. By mingling with the native students of their destination country, and also their class mates from all over the world, the students are able to walk away with exposure to different cultures, backgrounds, languages and traditions. In a globalized world, the importance of gaining this exposure cannot be emphasized enough. Also, by studying with a globally diverse range of class mates, the student has a readymade network of global contacts, which will come in handy while working as a professional.

Yet another factor that makes studying abroad lucrative for Indian students is the employment-readiness factor of the courses they undertake overseas. Most of the institutions in countries like the US, the UK, Canada and Australia offer courses that are research informed and also with a practical touch, as opposed to purely theoretical lectures. This means that the courses are highly relevant and in tune with the latest industry trends, expectations and standards and as a result, the students are employment-ready by the time they graduate. Also, most the institutions overseas provide their students with an extensive career support, which means the students get help for anything from writing their resume to tips and tricks for attending interviews. There will also be several career fairs that will be held, in order to facilitate the job hunting process for the students.
Also, most of the universities usually have a tie-up with the key industry players and these connections can usually be leveraged for helping the students find employment after graduation, or even during their studies in form of internship or work experience program, in order to ensure that the student is fully prepared to take on the challenges of handling a full-time job. This makes the students much more employable to potential employers. Also, a student's study abroad factor will weigh as heavily as the student's academics and other qualifications, as, through right positioning, the skills and knowledge that a student acquired during their study overseas can be translated into real-world skills, which will come in handy once the student starts his life as a full-time employee. (Vijeyavelan, 2015)

Another factor, which is on many student's minds, but rarely spoke out aloud, is the easiness in emigrating to a foreign country, once the student has pursued his or her higher studies in that country. While only a few students will openly acknowledge or admit this factor, statistics have shown that a majority of students from India, chose to stay back in the foreign country after the completion of their studies. There are many reasons why a student will decide not to return to his native country. As far as India is concerned, some of the reasons are obvious. In some cases, especially if the student comes from a poor financial background, or has taken out loans to fund his studies, it is more appealing to work in the host country and earn in a foreign currency, which has more mileage than the Indian Rupee. Converting foreign currency to rupee will help the student pay back his loans easier and in short, help secure his future. Also, there are better facilities abroad, a topic we touched upon previously, while discussing the factors that influence a student to study abroad. From an employment perspective, this usually means that a student working overseas can work on cutting-edge topics of research, when compared to his counterparts in India. Also, the financial gain for the work they do is many times different.
Therefore, most of the students chose to remain in their host countries, in order to avail the permanent residency (PR) benefits, which will allow them to stay back in the host country and look for jobs, while giving those rights and privileges on a par with the citizens of that country. (Thehindu.com)

For the reasons outlined as above, studies have shown that the number of Indian students going abroad for their higher studies have increased dramatically over the past few decades. Translated into numbers, it was revealed that in just nine years, during the time period from 2000 - 2009, the number of Indian students who chose to pursue their studies abroad have increased by a staggering 256%. The numbers rose from 53,266 to 189,629, according to a study conducted by one of India's leading B-schools the Indian Institute of Management - Bangalore, which was titled 'Indian student mobility to selected European countries: an overview'. Another study conducted by UNESCO Institute of Statistics and the Institute of International Education, which studied the number of Indian students going abroad during the year 2010 - 2011, estimated that the number stood in the range of 200,000. (Monitor.icef.com) A more recent study conducted by Associated Chamber of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM) estimated that nearly 680,000 Indian students were forced to move abroad for their studies, due to the lack of quality education in their country. Furthermore, only a minute portion of these students are choosing to return to India, ASSOCHAM study titled 'Skilling India: Empowering Indian Youth through World Class Education' found out. Highest number of Indian students choose USA as their destination followed by UK and Australia.
While the news may be welcomed by institutions in USA, Europe and Australia, where the students are moving to, it is not so good news for Indian institutions and Indian education sector in general, for whom, the increase in number of students going abroad translates into lost revenue. This translates into a loss of nearly US $6-7 billion annually for higher institutions in the country, including the prestigious IITs. (Basu, 2015) Now that we have ascertained the reasons why Indian students chose to go abroad for their higher studies, we will now look into their destinations and trends in migration. After choosing different possible options, we will narrow down the study into one particular country, in order to understand in depth the challenges and problems faced by the Indian students while studying in that country.

**Australia as a study abroad destination**

In the recent years, Australia has become a favorite destination of choice for students seeking to pursue their studies abroad. It's not just this country that has changed in the past years. It's also
India that has changed, and this change also affects the demographics of the country, with the change mostly visible among the country's vast middle class population. More and more middle class people are finding themselves with the means to pursue higher education abroad and the focus is not just on studying somewhere, but on getting value for their money, through quality education. When considering the state and quality of the educational institutions in the country, it comes as no wonder. For example, around half a million students graduate with engineering degree every year in the country. However, it has been found that amongst these large number of students, only 20% have the necessary skills to be gainfully employed in the sector. Taking this into consideration, it can be said that a main criteria of students pursuing their studies abroad is to gain skills that will help them stand out in the competitive job market and make them more appealing to the employers. (March, 2014)

Some of the major factors that make Australia a country of choice for students are outlined as below.

- First is the fact that Australia boasts the largest number of international students in the world, positioned only behind the UK and the US in this area, despite having a population of only 23 million people.
- Also, the country boasts the presence of eight out of top 100 universities in the world, providing potential students with plenty of institutions to choose from.
- As far as the courses are concerned, the country boasts a variety of courses, with ample breadth and width of subjects. When we translate these into numbers, there are 22,000 courses on offer in 1,100 institutions across the country. In other words, whatever the student is looking for, it is possible that Australia has it.
For students looking for an overall study abroad experience, Australia, again, comes across as the country of choice, with the country housing five out of top global 30 student cities. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that the country is ranked ninth in the world, easily surpassing the likes of countries such as Japan and New Zealand. In certain study areas, such as arts and humanities, clinical and pre-clinical health, engineering and technology, life sciences, physical sciences and social sciences, the country's universities feature in the top 50 universities of the world. Australia, the country that produced 15 Nobel prize laureates, has 2,500,000 alumni, from its various institutions, who are making their mark in the world. Moreover, more than 1,000,000,000 people across the world are found to rely on Australian discoveries and innovations on a daily basis. Some examples of these include Penicillin, IVF, ultrasound, WiFi and Black Box, among others. With AU $200,000,000 being invested by the government on international scholarships, it is no wonder then that Australia has rapidly risen to become the study destination of choice. (Studyinaustralia.gov.au, N/A)

We have detailed above some of the major academic-pertained reasons why Australia is now the students' study abroad destination of choice. There are also some important non-academic reasons that lure students to the country. We will have a quick look at these reasons now. Most of the students choose their course with a view to directly and immediately gain gainful employment upon graduation. Therefore, they are likely to choose courses that are most in demand and which would almost guarantee them a steady income after finishing their studies. In this aspect, the students may be particularly attracted by the Permanent Residency (PR) option offered by Australia. Once a person is granted his or her PR, it is possible for him or her to remain in the country for an indefinite period of time. In other words, he or she has a full right to live in Australia. The appeal of PR becomes considerably enhanced when we look at the other
ways in which a person can remain in the country post studies. For example, in the US, the government uses a system where the employer sponsors the person and allows him the right to remain in the country. Term as a H1B visa, the work visa would allow the person to work in the country only as long as the organization retains him as an employee. Therefore, if the person loses his job, the person is only left with two options, to either find a new job or to leave the country. In situations of unexpected job loss, both these options can prove to be difficult for the person and this is where a PR appears to be a safety net to fall back on. Also, most of the employers give preference to those with an Australian PR or citizenship, making the PR system an additional bonus for job seekers. This is in contrast to the US, which, being a free economy, allows easier movement of people from all different ethnicities, backgrounds and countries. In Australia, however, there are strict rules that around 90% of the companies would not consider you for employment, unless you have either a PR or citizenship of the country.

Currently, the Australian government issues PR based on several factors. In a nutshell, these are dependent on his individual profile, such as English proficiency, educational background and qualifications and how much productivity he can bring to and contribute to the country. Therefore, factors such as the person's age, skills, degree, experience, academic credentials, language expertise, professional background etc are the deciding factors. There is currently a point system in existence called the Skilled Occupation List (SOL), based upon all these factors and higher the point you score, the higher your chances are, of getting the PR. For example, if you belong to the target age group, have an advanced degree in an area that is facing skill shortage, it can up your chances of being granted the PR.
Also, the economy of the country is doing better than some of its competing counterparts and for the students, this means better chances of employment after graduation and better paying jobs too. This can prove to be a great incentive for students. Also, since the government lists on its immigration website, the skills that are in high demand, the students will have a better idea of what to choose for their studies, in order to ensure employment.

**Indian students' enrolment in Australian institutions**

In previous sections, we have identified the reasons why more and more Indian students are choosing to study abroad and how Australia has risen as the country of choice for those seeking educational opportunities abroad. We will now look at the presence of Indian students in Australia and map the trends.

In early 2014, it was reported that the number of Indian students applying to Australian educational institutions had almost doubled in the past year. Translating this to numbers, it was
estimated that the number of visa applications lodged by Indian students for their higher education increased to 25,655 in 2014 from 12,897 in the year to September 2013, next only to China. The rapid increase comes after a steep fall in the numbers in 2009-10, when several factors - such as closing of fake colleges in the country, tightening of visa procedures and a series of racial attacks on Indian students in the Australian city of Melbourne - had come into play. Since then, the Australian Government had been taking efforts to rebuild their image, which was severely dented due to the factors stated before. Some of the steps taken by the government was to streamline the visa procedure for those students who wished to study in Australia, to offer more international scholarships etc. According to Rhian Thomas, group vice president, The Chopras education services company, New Delhi, the Australian Government was indeed successful in rebuilding their image (March,2014).

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China, Peoples Republic of (excl SARs)</td>
<td>34,224</td>
<td>25,912</td>
<td>24,534</td>
<td>29,989</td>
<td>37,863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>18,454</td>
<td>6,872</td>
<td>10,889</td>
<td>12,897</td>
<td>25,655</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>5,922</td>
<td>5,378</td>
<td>5,627</td>
<td>6,958</td>
<td>7,888</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>6,479</td>
<td>5,044</td>
<td>4,880</td>
<td>5,601</td>
<td>7,556</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>2,002</td>
<td>1,237</td>
<td>3,176</td>
<td>4,425</td>
<td>8,291</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig: Visa application lodged by country from outside of Australia

According to 'International Migration Outlook - 2015', which is a study that was released by The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the total number of visas granted by Australia to international students has grown over the past three years. This figure reached 292,000 in the time period 2013 - 2014, from 259,278 in 2012-13 implying an increase of 13%. In other words, one student out of six students studying at a university level in the country is from abroad, according to the Migration Outlook study. In terms of Indian students in Australia, India was the number one source country under Australia's regulated migration program. There were 39,000 visas that was granted to Indian nationals during the time period.
2013 - 14. In numbers, this constituted about 20% of visas granted under the migration program (Kably, 2015)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Citizenship</th>
<th>Migration Programme visa places 2013-14</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>39,026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People’s Republic of China</td>
<td>26,776</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>23,220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>10,379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>6275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other countries</td>
<td>84,324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>190,000</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, the rise in the number of Indian students enrolled in Australian universities was not just down to the efforts taken by the Australian Government in rebuilding their dented image. Another important factor that contributed to the rise in the numbers was the changes in Indian economy. Growth in India's economy meant that more and more people were positioned in the middle class sector and with the rise in their position, they were also able to get the means and drive to pursue their higher education. We already looked at the reasons why India's education scenario, despite the long way it has come, still has a very long way to go. There is too much demand for too little courses and therefore, students have no option, but to pursue their higher studies abroad. And they do not want just a degree from a foreign country, instead, they place emphasis on getting quality education. This makes much sense, when we look at the fact that only 20% of the students who graduate with an engineering degree in India have the necessary skills to be employed. This makes it all the more important for students to stress that they get return on the money invested, in terms of the quality of education (March, 2014).
Survey

Objective

The aim of this research is to conduct a qualitative study using survey method in order to identify the challenges faced by Indian students, while pursuing their studies in Australia. The findings of this research will help not only future students planning to move to Australia for their higher studies, but also the Australia's higher education council, in addressing these issues and helping smooth the overall student experience for international students in the country. Some of the specific objectives of the study are to:-

1. Identify the challenges faced by Indian students in Australia
2. Identify why the students face these challenges
3. Identify how the students managed to overcome these challenges
4. Identify the different factors - such as language, academic culture etc, that play a role in creating the challenges for Indian students

Background of the study

The number of Indian students choosing Australia as a destination for their higher studies are increasing. We have already looked at the reasons why Indian students chose to study abroad, why they prefer to choose Australia over other countries such as the US, UK etc. and the factors affecting their decision. However, since at the core of this thesis is identifying the challenges faced by Indian students while studying abroad, we will now look at the issues faced by students who chose Australia as their study destination. In order to do this, we decided to use survey as a research methodology and Indian students, who pursued their studies at various levels in Australia were chosen as the target group for this study. The duration of the survey lasted for
three months and during this time, efforts were taken to reach out to current and former Indian students in Australia and to document their experience through a survey. We looked at various factors such as the level of study undertaken, the number of years spent in the country, reasons for choosing Australia as their study destination, reasons why they chose the institution where they studies, the overall student experience, the challenges they faced while studying and how they managed to face these challenges. All these different questions were asked in order to get a comprehensive view of the education scenario in Australia and to ensure that the findings of the survey, the consequent conclusion drawn and the recommendations given based on the conclusion are genuine and based on real life experience of students in Australia.

**Statement of problem**

More and more Indian students are choosing Australia as their preferred destination for higher studies. However, it is not a smooth sail for students while they are actually in Australia and they face a host of problems. The research looks at the major issues faced by the students during their studies, which influence their overall student experience in the country and the factors that helped them overcome these issues. The support lent by government and their host institution were particularly looked upon in this study.

**Significance and need of/for the study**

The importance of higher studies cannot be underestimated in the globalized world, when competition is getting tougher day by day. In fact, getting the right education can be seen as investing in one's future. As the awareness about the importance of education has grown, people are trying to incorporate a culture of education into their daily lives. Even mature students, who are often employed, try to juggle their jobs with part time or distance or online education, as they
realize that in order to succeed in their chosen profession, they need a solid education too. (Beitler, 1997)

A foreign degree certainly goes a long way in India, where the higher education scenario leaves a lot to be desired. There is too much competition for too little seats and even then, the quality is not at par with that of world class institutes. The younger generation, not wanting to be left behind in the race, is seeking to pursue their higher studies from foreign countries, to ensure they have the right edge in the job market. However, they are also stressing on quality education and just getting a degree from a foreign institution is not enough anymore. In the past few years, Australia has risen as the country of choice for Indian students who wish to get a quality education from abroad. If the statistics are anything to go by, this trend will only continue and Australia will see a further increase in the number of Indian students seeking to get their degree from the country. However, it cannot be denied that Indian students, during their studies in Australia, are facing a host of issues. This can range from anything as simple and obvious as home sickness to more complex issues like difficulty in adapting to a foreign culture, which can diminish their overall student experience. There are some issues that the government or the university can solve and some that the students need to sort out for themselves. The need for such a study arises to not only help future students identify the issues they might face in Australia, but also to equip the authorities to make necessary adjustments to ensure that a student coming to their country has the best possible experience, which in turn might motivate other students to follow their footsteps too. In other words, addressing properly the issues identified in this research could potentially benefit Australia's higher education sector, of which foreign students are a sizeable source of revenue. This is particularly significant, considering that the world-wide competition, to attract as many international students as possible, to the countries all...
over, are on an increase. (McCormack, 2007; Hall & Zuhair, 2005) The student, on the other hand, walks away with a fantastic student experience that stays with him or her for life and moulds his or her future for the better. In short, a win-win solution for all involved.

**Hypotheses**

Primary hypotheses of the project has been formed and these are given below:-

1. Indian students face several challenges during the course of their studies in Australia
2. These challenges can both be personal and professional in nature
3. Their overall student experience can be affected by these challenges
4. Many look to their host institution as the first point of support
5. Others may also lean upon their friends and family for support

**Limitations**

Even though the study has been undertaken with utmost care, with consideration to ensure that an all-inclusive sample was surveyed, there are many limitations to this study. Study participants were based on the criteria that they were Indian students who travelled to Australia to pursue their studies - Diploma, Bachelors or Masters. Some of the limitations identified during the research are given as follows:-

1. Some of the subjects had completed their studies a few years ago. This meant that they were unable to identify all the challenges they faced.
2. Students who had scholarships or a sponsor to help them finance their studies in Australia could not comment about the financial challenges
3. Students who were living with their friends or family were unable to comment about feelings of isolation, which their counterparts faced
4. Some of the students who responded had left their homes for the first time ever, when they moved to Australia, while some others had lived away from home for quite some time when they moved to Australia. This affected their overall student experience and uniformity couldn't be achieved in this factor.

5. Respondents had lived in different parts of Australia during their stay and this too affected their overall student experience.

**Literature review**

Robertson, Line, Jones and Thomas (2000) has identified some challenges that are faced by students pursuing their education in foreign countries. It includes difficulty in understanding the colloquial language, higher tuition fees as compared to their home country and a sense of isolation and feeling of not belonging. Language issues can include lectures in different English accents, that the student may not be familiar with and therefore, a difficulty in understanding what is being said and also what needs to be spoken. Therefore, even if the student and lecturer are both communicating in English, they are unable to understand each other and this can be highly frustrating for the student. As far as the finances are concerned, it can be difficult for the student to live comfortably, if he is constantly converting the foreign currency to his home currency. For example, one Australian dollar is equivalent to almost fifty Indian rupee (in 2015) and this can be a source of continuous botheration for the student as he may need to live on a shoestring budget depriving of any entertainment. The feeling of isolation is another major factor as it is natural that the student may not easily integrate into the foreign culture. This feeling of isolation, coupled with homesickness, can also adversely affect the student.

The research findings of Robertson et al (2000) has been echoed in a study that was conducted among first-year foreign students at five Australian universities. In this study, some of the
challenges were identified as a feeling of loneliness, issues with the language, a lack of familiarity with the academic climate with the host country (Leder and Forgasz, 2004) Some of the challenges mentioned here, such as the feeling of loneliness and language issue, have already been explored earlier. Regarding the academic climate, it is indeed a tough adjustment for the student to make. In India, a student completes 12 years of schooling, before he moves on to his Bachelors level. Reaching a Masters level will take another three to four years. Therefore, the student needs to unlearn these 12+ years of learning, in order to acclimatize with to the new learning environment and this can be a major challenge, if proper guidance and support is not received from the host institution. Yet another issue has been identified by Biggs (1999, p. 23) as culture. To elaborate, the cultural background of the student, especially in terms of the educational background they have, can make it challenging for them to adapt to their host country. This can take many forms, such as being too dependent on the teacher or being taught to memorize things from an early age or not taught how to critique their learning or if they are not too familiar with the different genres of academic writing. All this can make it difficult for them to study effectively and this in turn, can add on to their list of challenges. All the challenges mentioned above appear even more complex and large in magnitude to those students who had to leave their home country to pursue their studies in a foreign country.

**Research Methodology**

The research methodology adopted for this survey was qualitative research methodology. Qualitative methodology was used as its characteristics fit perfectly the aim and purpose of this study. To elaborate, qualitative methodology is used when the researcher is seeking an answer to a question. In this case, we are trying to find answers to the core question - ‘What are the challenges faced by Indian students while pursuing their studies in Australia?’. Secondly, the
methodology uses a predefined set of procedures in order to arrive at a conclusion, by collecting evidence from a cross section of population. In this study, we are aiming to arrive at a conclusion, by collecting inputs from a cross section of Indian students who are either studying or studied in Australia. The third characteristic of qualitative methodology that made it an apt fit for this study was the fact that the findings of the study are not predetermined. That is, instead of collecting evidence to support a conclusion that has already been made, in this type of study, conclusion is only drawn after collecting the responses and analyzing them. In this study too, there is no preset conclusion and it is only after conducting the research survey and analyzing the findings that we will arrive at a conclusion. However, the strength of qualitative methodology lies in the fact that it helps to gather information about the 'human' side of any issue it deals with, namely, the beliefs and opinions of the individuals involved. Therefore, when used alongside quantitative methods of research, qualitative methodology can be really helpful in understanding the complexity and factors involved in a situation.

For the purpose of this study, an in-depth survey questionnaire was drafted and sent to subjects chosen as the sample population. Care was taken to ensure that the questions were kept as 'open-ended', in order to ensure that the respondents had the opportunity to answer the questions using their own language and by using their own words. This is as opposed to asking them to choose from fixed responses, as is the case with quantitative research methods. By doing this, it was possible to understand the 'what', 'why', 'how' etc.

**Qualitative data collection**
For the purpose of the study, Indian international students, who are either studying in Australian institutions or those who completed their studies from Australian institutions were chosen. Since the purpose of this study is to identify the challenges faced by these students, during their student life, semi-structured questionnaire with open ended questions were used and posted in international student groups with Google forms along with face to face interviews. The primary research question was: 'What are the challenges faced by Indian students in Australia and how did they overcome these challenges'. The responses of the sample population was collected and analyzed.

Analysis of the student experience

The literature review conducted earlier on revealed that the overall student experience is influenced by several factors. These factors can be either internal or external or both. Internal factors can be anything such as feeling of homesickness, a sense of isolation etc. On the other hand, the external factors can be an inability to adapt to the new culture, cultural shock etc. The different factors and the influence they exert on the student experience, as revealed by the survey, has been given below:-

- **Internal challenges**

There were several internal challenges that were identified from the research study. Major of these challenges are:-

1. **Financial worries** - With 65 % of the respondents mentioning it, money issues topped the list of challenges faced by the Indian students in Australia. It does not really come as a surprise, as the current exchange rate is around fifty Indian rupees to one Australian dollar. So, this can prove to be a burden to those who need to get money from India. A
few respondents chose to work on a part time basis to supplement their income and even with them, finances were a huge challenge, because they had to learn how to balance work with studies, without compromising either. And because most of the respondents were only used to studying on a full time basis, and not managing a part time work alongside their studies, this proved to be a major challenge.

2. **Culture** - As identified by Biggs (1999, p. 23), culture is one of the major issues faced by students who pursue their studies abroad. This has been proven through the qualitative study carried out for the purpose of this research, as 50% of the respondents reported to having faced challenges because of the new culture. Naturally, Indian and Australia culture are different and for those students for whom studies in Australia was their first ever venture away from India, it must have come as a real shock, especially if they had no friends or family to support the transition.

3. **Home sickness** - Closely related to cultural shock is home sickness, with 40% of the respondents reporting a feeling of homesickness to be one of their major challenges. As mentioned before, this was more evident in those student who did not have friends or family in Australia. This is in line with the report by Leder and Forgasz (2004) that identified a sense of loneliness among students moving abroad for their higher studies.

- **External factors**

The external factors, as identified from the research, are:-

1. **Challenges getting a work after graduation** - Difficulty in finding a job after graduation was reported by 85% of the respondents, as one of the major challenges facing them. The difficulty ranged from very difficult, with 60% experiencing this to moderately difficult, with 25% of the respondents finding it so, with one respondent unable to find a
job at all. There was only one respondent who indicated that it was fairly easy for them to find a job and describing the whole process as 'easy'. However, the conditions that made job hunting favorable for this person has not been identified and is beyond the scope of this research. This is significant as most of the Indian students arriving to Australia intends to work in the country for at least few years before returning back to India.

2. **Language** - As identified by Robertson, Line, Jones and Thomas (2000), the language proved to be a major challenge for the students, with 60% of the respondents mentioning a difficulty either understanding the Australian accent, not only in their university and during the lectures, but also while going on about their daily lives and interacting with the locals. Initially, the inability to communicate well in English led to a sense of isolation and a tendency to only get together with their country-men. However, with passing time, after taking language classes and adapting generally to the country, the students reported a better scenario, with six months being the time it took for them to adjust with the new accent. While the Australian accent in itself was a major issue, another issue is the fact that English is not very widely spoken in India, except in cities and metropolitan areas.

The importance of language has also been identified by Leder and Forgasz (2004).

In order to help the student identify these challenges and help overcome them, help is needed. This is where the student services of the host institution comes into play. Majority of the respondents mentioned that they approached the host institution for support which is an obvious place for students to turn for help, as the very purpose of their being in Australia is their studies.
Summary of findings

The study has revealed the internal and external challenges that the Indian students face during their studies in Australia. The first two challenges namely home sickness and culture shock can be alleviated by the host institution by adequate steps which are included in recommendation. The survey also brought to light a major worry for most students about finding work after graduation. Due to the structure of survey it isn’t clear if it was due to lack of experience in this space or because of their visa limitations. In line with country profile, 18 out of 20 mentioned that they are interested to work in Australia after studies.

From the comments it is inferred that the first six months after reaching Australia is the toughest time. This is when they have to get used to living alone, adapt to the Australian culture and way of living, adjust to the new cultural environment in their study institution, learn how to manage their finances, find a part time job to support their finances and also learn how to balance part time work with their studies. After these challenging six months were over, they found themselves better equipped and confident. The initial six months, therefore, is when the host institution should step up their efforts to make the student feel at home in Australia and extend as
much support as possible. With proper care and support, it can very well be said that the student will find his footing and the remainder of his course will go on without major issues. As for the issues the student face after graduation, such as finding a suitable job and getting a work visa, the Australian higher education council could look into the issues faced by international students and ease the job hunting process to attract more skilled workers. Recommendations based on the conclusions drawn from this survey will be given in a separate section afterwards.

**Future directions**

In future, further research could be undertaken to understand the challenges faced by student community in Australia better. This could be done by examining a wider range of international students, from different countries all over the world too, to find out if the challenges faced by the students were general in nature or dependent on the country they are from. This would prove to be very helpful in cross checking the findings of this research study and also for the verification of the conclusion drawn. Such studies will, no doubt, come up with themes and sub-themes that will be beneficial for the host institution and also for the higher education council in Australia, to create programs to help ease the student experience better. This could result in steadying the flow of international students to Australia and seal its position as the country of choice for students looking to pursue their higher studies abroad.

**Conclusion**

Based on the research study, where qualitative methodology of using survey questionnaire was used, it was found out that Indian students faced a host of challenges, while pursuing their education from Australia. These challenges were both internal and external in nature and exerted almost same influence in determining the quality of student experience. Most of these challenges were occurring as the student pursed their studies, such as cultural shock and difficulty adapting
to the Australian education system, which is very different from the Indian education system, while some others were faced post studies. Examples of this include difficulties finding a suitable job after graduation and issues with the visa etc. The students also identified that the initial six months after landing in Australia were the toughest, as they had lots of changes to be made then, such as adapting to the Australian way of living, finding a part time job, juggling work with studies etc, which for many, are first time experiences in life. At this time, issues such as adapting to academic culture will be magnified and can even affect the student's confidence and ability to continue with his or her studies. Therefore, this can be considered as 'critical time period', where lack of support and understanding from the host institution and authorities can lead to the student even discontinuing his or her studies. However, if appropriate help and guidance is given during this critical time, the student may be able to finish the studies in a better manner. Based on this research study, some recommendations are given below, as to how the host institutions and authorities could help the students face these challenges.

**Recommendations**

During the research, majority of the sample student population, around 75%, said the student services in their host institution was where they first turned for help, while going through a challenging time. They also touched upon their friends and family as a source of support, however, for those without any friends or relatives in the country, naturally, their first thought was to approach their host institution itself. This means that Australian institutions have a responsibility to ensure that the students in their organization have a good experience and some of the ways in which they could contribute to this are given below:-

1. Educational institutions should have a dedicated 24/7 support cell for new students. This can be in form of a hotline for students to call in emergencies or a call-centre type setting
where they can call for general help. It is recommended that the facility is available round the clock as one cannot fully say when the need would arise. For example, the student may find himself locked out of the apartment, with nowhere to go or no one to call.

2. Colleges and universities can adopt a mentor system, where a senior student is allocated for mentoring a new comer. This will help in manifold ways, as the new students will have a new friend automatically and it will also be easier for him or her to interact with someone in his peer level. As the mentors themselves were new students at first, they would be able to give first-hand information about the challenges faced by the new students.

3. Academically, extra classes could be given for those students who come from a different educational system, in order the bridge the gap between both academic cultures especially after induction. This will also save the lecturers time and energy, as the student will have a better idea of what is expected of them and will behave accordingly.

4. For those not familiar with different styles of writing, especially academic essay or thesis writing, writing workshops could be provided.

5. Accent training classes could also be provided as many students identified that it was not their mastery of English language that was a problem as they had the necessary IELTS score, but the fact that Australian accent was very different from Indian accent.

Students also highlighted challenges faced after their studies, in finding suitable jobs and also getting a visa appropriate for their stay in Australia. The Australian higher education council could look into these issues and address them in such a way that job hunting process is facilitated. Some of the ways in which this could be done, based on student feedback, are as follows:-
1. Immigration rules could be revised to facilitate the job hunting process for international students matching Australian needs.

2. Applying for post-study work visa could also be made easier and if possible, a separate department could be set up each university to assist the students in this.

3. Immigration could hold awareness classes in the study institutions in order to ensure that the students' knowledge of immigration rules and regulations are up to date.

4. Internships could be made part of the study curriculum so that students already have some work experience, by the time they graduate. This would be beneficial even for students who intend to go back to home country after studies.

5. Entrepreneurship by international students should be nurtured.

**Appendix**

Questionnaire - Australian education experience for Indian students –
Questionnaire for Indian students who completed their studies in Australia

Please state your name (Optional)

Highest educational qualification

Sex

Age group:

Please state why you chose Australia for your studies:

- [ ] Quality of Australia’s education system
- [ ] Availability of preferred course
- [ ] Affordable fees
- [ ] Life style offered
- [ ] Stay back options
- [ ] Other: __________

What was your overall student experience? (On a scale of 1-10, with 1 being very bad and 10 being very good, please rate your experience)


What are the challenges you faced during your studies?
- A different educational system
- Homesickness
- Culture shock
- Adapting to a new country
- Financial
- Juggling work and studies
- Other: [ ]

How did you face the challenges mentioned above?
- Support from friends and family
- Student Services in University
- Other: [ ]

Did you decide to stay back in Australia after your studies?
- [ ]

How did you apply for post-study work visa?
- [ ] Self
- [ ] Through an agent

How was your experience of visa application? (On a scale of 1-10, with 1 being very bad and 10 being very good, please rate your experience)
[ ]
Did you actively look for a job after your studies?

What was your experience looking for a job? (On a scale of 1-10, with 1 being very bad and 10 being very good, please rate your experience)

Based on your experience, do you have any recommendations to improve the overall student experience in Australia? (Any recommendation in particular to the university, government etc.)
References


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