



## From Culture Shock to Cross-cultural Adaptation: Narrative inquiry of a Kenyan student's journey in Pakistan

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### ABSTRACT

Travelling to a foreign country for higher education has its own challenges, as apart from dealing with academic stress, international students have to overcome various obstacles mainly because of linguistic and cultural differences between their native and the host country. The study explores a series of narratives shared by a Kenyan male student who had been in Karachi for the last five and a half years for earning a Pharm-D degree from a public sector university in Karachi. The aim of this qualitative narrative inquiry was to conduct an in-depth study of the challenges the Kenyan student faced during his five and a half years in Pakistan along with exploring how he succeeded in dealing with culture shock and adapting to the new academic, linguistic, and sociocultural environment in the host country. The data for this study were collected through a series of conversations with the participant collected in the form of stories, spanning over a period of 16 months. The collected data were analyzed through 'a critical events approach' based on highlighting critical events contained in the stories of experience. Although the findings of the study provide insights into the life experiences of only one international student, many international students, particularly the Kenyans can relate to it, as they pass through somewhat similar experiences during their academic journey in Pakistan. The findings of this study call for the need to facilitate international students irrespective of their race, religion, and nationality so that they do not feel marginalized in the host country.

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## 1. Introduction

The presence of international students in any higher education institution not only adds to its prestige but also strengthens the institution financially as international students' fee in almost all the degree awarding institutions is higher than the local students. Besides the material benefits associated with the admission of international students, there are other benefits as well, which are reciprocal. One major benefit, for instance, is connected with strengthening of the diplomatic ties between the guest and the host country. Besides this, both the foreign and local students' exposure to each other's culture help them acknowledge cultural diversity which not only leads to tolerance but also appreciation of the uniqueness of one's own as well as others' cultures. Since the international students get an opportunity to engage in cross-cultural communication with the locals, it also helps improve cross-cultural competence on the part of both the locals and the foreigners.

Despite being a third world country itself, Pakistan attracts many international students from the relatively poor third world countries. One major reason is the affordable fee structure of public sector Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Pakistan. Another reason on the part of the international students seeking admission in Pakistani universities is the degree of prestige associated with the degree programmes of some of the universities of Pakistan. For instance, many foreign students from African and Middle-East countries apply for admission in the

Pharm-D programme offered by the Faculty of Pharmacy, University of Karachi every year. The students claim that a Pharm-D degree from the University of Karachi can help them secure a lucrative job not only in their own country but also in the international market, especially in the Gulf countries. Hence, with the desire for better job prospects, many students from the third world countries, particularly from African countries, travel to Pakistan for higher education. Nevertheless, irrespective of the advantages associated with earning a foreign degree, international students have to face many challenges in the host country which either lead to the complete transformation of their identity or to different degrees of cross-cultural adaptation to overcome culture shock that they experience because of inter-cultural encounter.

Both 'culture shock' and 'cross-cultural adaptation' are the key concepts that have been explored with reference to the journey of one international student selected for this study. The term 'culture shock' was coined by Oberg (1954) who, being an anthropologist, used this term to describe the anxiety an individual feels as an outsider in another culture because of the sharp contrast between his/her own and others' cultural beliefs and practices. If culture shock leads to depression and disorientation, through cross-cultural adaptation an individual learns to adjust in the host culture. The greater the cultural distance between the host culture and the culture of an individual, the greater is the degree of culture shock, as a result of which it becomes more challenging to make cross-cultural adaptation. Although 'culture shock' is not a permanent state, how long an individual takes to culturally adapt to the host community depends on a host of external and internal factors including one's personality.

This study is an attempt to trace the journey of one international student, a Kenyan national, who has graduated from the University of Karachi, which is one of the largest public sector universities in Pakistan. It aims to probe into the details related to the nature of challenges he faced including different phases of culture shock, and how he struggled to overcome all the challenges. The study is also an endeavour to learn about the nature of cross-cultural adaptation he had to make during his academic journey in Pakistan by addresses the following research questions:

- What cultural differences does the Kenyan student find between his native country and Pakistan?
- What did the student find culturally shocking on his arrival in the host country?
- What kind of challenges did he face in order to survive in the host country?
- How did he culturally adapt himself to fit in the host community?

## **2. Literature Review**

Because of an increase in the number of scholarships offered to foreign students to capture international market and to further promote globalization, one can witness a growing trend among students travelling to foreign countries for higher studies. However, an increase in the number of foreign/international students does not only indicate an increase in the prestige of a university or improve the job prospects of the students when they return to their native country, it also leads to an increase in the number of challenges that both the international students and the host university employees (both teaching and non-teaching faculty) have to face. Considering the magnitude of problems, a respectable body of research literature is available focusing on the experiences of foreign students studying in the host university from a multitude of perspectives. International students and their experiences particularly attract scholars interested in exploring cross-cultural communication.

Quite a few research studies have been undertaken with a specific focus on exploring the problems faced by international students (Akbar, Nazir, Tayyab, & Shehzadi, 2021; Hwang, Martirosyan, & Moore, 2015; Montgomery, 2010; Newsome & Cooper, 2016; Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2010; Sumer, Poyrazli, & Grahame, 2008; Zhang & Brunton, 2007). With the aim to examine the nature of problems faced by international students studying in a Malaysian university, Alavi and Mansor (2011), administered a questionnaire on 135 international students followed by in-depth interviews of some key-informants. The researchers utilized Mooney Problem Check List (MPCL) to categorize the problems of international students. Based on the findings of the study, the most disturbing categories included problems associated with socialization and recreation followed by the curriculum and teaching methodology.

Utilizing the concept of identity negotiation proposed by Giddens (2020), a narrative inquiry was conducted by Ye and Edwards (2015) to explore the negotiation of identity on the part of 11 Chinese doctoral students studying in the UK. The findings based on the analysis of the participants' narratives indicate that autonomy, creativity, independence, positivity, openness, and self-reflection help international students overcome most of the challenges they face in the host environment. Moreover, the findings also reveal that despite sharing the same nationality, each participant being a unique individual with specific traits had a different way of engaging in the negotiation of identity. The study calls for the need to hear individual instead of collective voices. Besides the study by Ye and Edwards (2015), there are a couple of other studies as well that utilize narrative inquiry to trace Chinese students' struggles in foreign universities (C. C. Wang, 2017; Xing, Bolden, & Hogenkamp, 2020).

A substantial body of published research literature within the field of cross-cultural linguistics also explores the notion of culture shock and cross-cultural adaptation experienced by international students in the host country environment (Ahmad, Hashmi, Shehzadi, & Nawaz, 2021; Brown & Brown, 2013; Gill, 2007; James, 2018; Lewthwaite, 1996; C.-C. D. Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006; Yuefang Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping, & Todman, 2008; Yilun Zhou, Zhang, & Stodolska, 2018). Utilizing culture shock framework to explore international students' life experiences, Eze (2014) conducted a qualitative narrative inquiry of ten Nigerian students studying in different universities in the UK. The study provides insights into how the Nigerian students' experiences have an impact on their physical, psychological, emotional, social and spiritual health, as the findings indicated that all ten Nigerian students suffered from sleeplessness, helplessness, disorientation, and depression, during their stay in the UK because of cultural differences. The study ends with the recommendations to not only provide support to the international students during their stay in the host country but also to familiarize them with the culture of the host country before their arrival.

With a focus on investigating the nature of culture shock experienced by international students, Belford (2017) conducted an in-depth narrative inquiry of eight international students (5 male and three female students) who were studying in different universities in Melbourne, Australia and had lived in the host country for at least two years. The data for the study were based on semi-structured interviews which were thematically analyzed. The findings of the study revealed that the students' experience of living and studying in Melbourne differed from each other because of their country of origin and the degree of familiarity or unfamiliarity with the host context. Despite the distinct interpretation of the term 'culture shock' on the students' part, all of them claimed to have experienced some sort of disorientation in their initial contact with the host community and its culture. The findings based on this study emphasize the significance of cross-cultural competence and intercultural as well as intracultural friendship to avoid disorientation and alienation on the part of international students.

Although narrative inquiry has been utilized as the major research design in quite a few studies conducted to explore international students' experiences in the host country (Byrne, 2017; Chik & Benson, 2008; James, 2018; Yamamoto, 2019), a study by Wilson (2014) utilized narrative inquiry to trace the journey of four graduate student study abroad alumni including herself, who were selected for this study through convenience sampling. The major aim of this study was to investigate how the participants' study abroad experiences have affected their lives, including their personal and career growth. For collecting the data for this study, a three-phase inquiry model was employed in which the first phase consists of orientation and overview through unstructured interviews, the second phase is based on exploration through semi-structured or structured interviews, while the third phase focuses on member checking through restorying. The findings of the study reveal four major themes: self-confidence, an appreciation for diversity, self-reflection, and career and learning development. The study is unique in the sense that it is not only based on others' narrative but also includes 'self-narrative' of the researcher herself, which adds to the richness of the study.

Despite the presence of international students in both public and private sector universities in Pakistan, there is scarcity of research on the experiences of international students in Pakistani context. One study conducted in the local context is by Husain (2017) that focuses on exploring the nature and causes of culture shock on the part of international

students studying at the University of Karachi, while the other is by Zafar, Kousar, Rehman, and Rehman (2018), who conducted a collaborative study to explore international students' experience of studying in higher education institutions in Lahore, Pakistan. Using convenience sampling technique, the data for the study by Zafar et al. (2018) were gathered through semi-structured interviews of seven international students studying in undergraduate and graduate programmes, whereas Husain (2017) collected the data through conducting semi-structured interviews of 25 foreign students. The findings of both the studies revealed that international students not only face academic challenges because of the differences in the education system of their own country and the host country but they also have to face socio-cultural challenges that often lead to culture shock resulting in depression. Both the studies have important implications for research on cross-cultural encounters. However, if narrative inquiry had been utilized in both these studies, it would have led to greater insights into the lived experiences of international students.

Considering the significance of using narrative inquiry to provide thick-description of the international students' lived experiences in the host country and the scarcity of research on international students' experiences through narrative inquiry in Pakistani universities, the current study was undertaken to fill in the existing gap. The study based on the narrative inquiry of a Kenyan student who had spent 5.6 years at the time of the completion of this study, is an attempt to trace his journey through his life experiences and struggles in one of the largest public sector universities of Pakistan.

### **3. Methodology**

Being the Foreign Students' Advisor at the University of Karachi, I get to interact with the international students on regular basis as they consult me to discuss their academic and sometimes accommodation issues. With the background of Linguistics, interacting with the international students made me think of having detailed conversations with some of them in order to explore their journey further. I thought of approaching a few of them to record their experiences. Because of my curiosity to learn about the life stories and experiences of the international students, I chose narrative inquiry as my research design. The major reason for preferring narrative inquiry over any other research design for this study was to get an insight into my research participants' life in the host country from their own perspectives. Commenting on the significance of this research design, Barkhuizen, Benson, and Chik (2014) claim that narrative inquiry helps "capture the nature and meaning of experiences that are difficult to observe directly and are best understood from the perspective of those who experience them" (p.8). Drawing a comparison between narrative inquiry and other research designs, Webster and Mertova (2007) believe that narrative inquiry has an edge over other qualitative research designs as it "attempts to capture the 'whole story', whereas other methods tend to communicate understandings of studied subjects or phenomena at certain points, but frequently omit the important 'intervening' stages." (pp. 3-4). Initially when I decided to undertake this study, I thought of engaging a couple of international students in detailed conversations, but after reading the available studies on narrative inquiry and the detailed analysis in the form of storying and restorying the design requires, I narrowed down the number of my participants to one in order to provide thick description of the data and present a holistic picture.

For the selection of my research participant, I employed purposive sampling technique, a type of non-probability sampling based on the selection of only those participants who fulfill the criteria set by the researcher(s). Although currently there are 85 students from different African and Middle-East countries studying at the University of Karachi, I selected a Kenyan national for three major reasons. Firstly, unlike students of other nationalities studying in the university, who are all Muslims, most of the Kenyan students currently studying in the university are Christians. Out of total 18 Kenyan students studying in the university at the time of this research, only 3 were Muslims. The rest of the Kenyans were Christians. I decided to approach a Christian Kenyan to know if the non-Muslims face additional challenges in a Muslim dominated country. Secondly, Kenyan students are less in number as compared to the students of other African countries, like Sudan and Somalia, who are currently studying in the university. In fact, out of 85 international students, only 18 are from Kenya. Thirdly, majority of the Kenyan students are able to complete their degree programmes within the required time as compared to the international students from other African and Middle-East countries who usually take several years to complete their qualification. In contrast to Kenyans who are

exposed to English in their schools from grade 1, students coming from Middle-East and other African countries like Somalia and Sudan, are denied early exposure to English in their country. Therefore, they have to struggle learning not only Urdu but also English, which is not the case with the Kenyan nationals. The Kenyan student I selected was also able to complete his Pharm-D within the specified time (i.e., five years).

The data for this study were based on a series of informal conversations through narrative interviewing with my research participant whose stories were helpful in tracing his academic and socio-cultural journey in shaping his identity in the host context. The series of narratives in the form of 'small stories' (Bamberg, 2011, 2012) collected and recorded for the present study, project the Kenyan student's struggles in making sense of himself in connection with the sociocultural, religious as well as spatiotemporal contexts in the host environment. The data span over a period of 16 months including both brief and detailed conversations that I had with my research participant during the course of this research and have been analyzed through 'critical events approach' which implies foregrounding critical events projected through stories of experience.

Since the research participant lived in the Boys' hostel on the university campus, it was easier to coordinate with him after the classes. In fact, I was able to collect the data even during the lockdown that was imposed to control the spread of Covid-19 across the country in March 2020, as my research participant, unlike many other students who went back to their country during the lockdown, stayed back in Pakistan. As per the research ethics, the real name of the participant is not disclosed anywhere in the study. In order to conceal his actual identity, a pseudonym 'Kim' is used for referring to him throughout the study. Since adherence to research ethics also requires empowering one's research participants, I shared the study with Kim while restorying and also shared the findings with him. Besides this, I helped him in his official correspondence with the university administration for his enrolment, marks sheet, and degree.

### **3.1 Profile of the research participant**

As stated earlier, the research participant of this study was a Kenyan student, Kim (a pseudonym), who was in the fourth year of Pharm-D programme, in the Faculty of Pharmacy, University of Karachi, when I met him for the first time after joining the Office of the Foreign Students' Advisor in June 2019. When I actually conceptualized this research, he was in the fifth year which is the final year of Pharm-D programme. Kim travelled from Kenya to Pakistan for higher education in 2016. He arrived in Karachi for the first time in January 2016 when he was granted admission on PTAP (Pakistan Technical Assistance Programme) scholarship in the Pharm-D programme at the University of Karachi. Unlike many other international students who travel back to their country either during semester break or at least once every year or so, Kim did not visit his home town even once during his five-year study period at the University of Karachi. In fact, at the time of the completion of this research when he had already graduated, he was still in Karachi. Since he had applied for his degree, he decided not to leave before getting the degree.

Kim comes from a middle-class Kenyan family. Since his parents supported him financially, he did not have to do any part-time job to complete his university education in Pakistan. Although Kim is a native speaker of Kalenjin, an indigenous language from the Nilotic language family spoken by the Southern Nilotic people in Eastern Africa, particularly in Kenya, he can also speak Kiswahili, which is the official language of Kenya and is spoken as a lingua franca in the country. Besides these two African languages, Kim is proficient in both spoken and written English. However, his proficiency in Urdu is extremely limited. Despite spending more than five years in Karachi, where Urdu is used as a lingua franca both within and outside the university premises, Kim can barely communicate in Urdu. As per his information, he can understand Urdu but finds it extremely difficult to communicate in it. This is the reason that whenever he has to interact with the locals who cannot communicate in English, he seeks the help of his Pakistani friends.

## **4. Data Analysis**

The data for this study based on the participant's narration of the 'critical events' of his life are analyzed in this section. The analysis revolves around critical events to provide a

holistic picture. Webster and Mertova (2007) succinctly claim: "Because events are critical parts of people's lives, using them as a main focus for research provides a valuable and insightful tool for getting at the core of what is important in that research." (p. 71). While defining a critical event, Webster and Mertova (2007) state "A critical event as told in a story reveals a change of understanding or worldview by the storyteller." (p. 73). It would not be wrong to state that any event can be considered critical if it has an impact on the story-teller's personality and perception of the world and my research participant reported quite a few such critical events that resulted in shaping his personality and his way of perceiving the world.

The very first shock Kim received was after landing at Karachi airport. When he tried to interact with some locals in English, he was shocked to discover that majority of them cannot communicate in English. He had assumed that like urban Kenyans, almost all Pakistanis living in major cities like Karachi can communicate in English. So, one of the major challenges he had to overcome had to do with learning Urdu, which is used as a lingua franca in Pakistan, particularly in Karachi.

Other than difference in language, Kim had to deal with difference of food and weather as well. Since Kenyans are not used to eating spices, spicy food was another major culture shock Kim received in Karachi where people love to eat spicy food. The intensity of his culture shock intensified because of the change of weather in summers. When he arrived in January 2016 because of winter season he did not have any idea about the hot weather that he was likely to experience after a few months in Karachi. While narrating his experience regarding the unexpected change in weather and other shocks he received, Kim recalled:

*You know where I come from! I come from the Western part of Kenya. Ok! So, it is a very cold place. So, I had never gone to places with very high temperature... er... So when I came here...When I arrived in the hostel, welcomed by my seniors, I asked what the purpose of this is by pointing towards the fan. My seniors told me just relax, relax! You will know the purpose of this. So three weeks after, I realized the main purpose of the fan in my room.....It was a kind of a big shock.... In fact, during the first year, it was really stressful. Because of many things, the weather, the language, er... the food, and the academic stress.*

It was not only the food and weather that shocked Kim, he was equally shocked by his classmates' response on the first day of the semester when he went to the Faculty of Pharmacy to attend the first session.

*When we entered the class, the first bench was full. The second bench was occupied by three ladies but two seats were empty so when we went and sit there er... surprisingly the female students moved...just get away from there. I was with Chris and we looked at each other and asked what's wrong? Why people are moving? We sit in the corner but even then they moved. So, that thing shocked us...We became now curious and we felt bad but we went to some boys and told them what happened. We felt inferior. We talked to some students but they could not understand our accent. Then there was one guy who told us not to sit where ladies are sitting. After this incident, we not only wanted to learn about the difference in culture but also difference in religion.*

The social mistake that Kim and his other Kenyan friend committed on the very first day of their semester, made them realize that they not only need to know about Pakistani culture but also about the Muslim culture. Since in Kenya, Christians are in majority and Kim himself is a Christian, he had no background information about Muslim culture. Kim reported to have studied in a Christian school. Although, as per his information, there were a few Muslims as well in his school, he never thought of learning about the Muslim culture while living in Kenya. After analyzing the incident Kim has reported, one cannot deny that the need to learn about the culture of a community arises only when it ceases to be seen as a minority. Since Muslims are in minority in Kenya, Kim and his friend did not think of learning about them. It was only when they landed in a country where the situation is just the opposite of what is found in their own country that they realized the importance of learning about the Muslim culture. Had they not travelled to a Muslim dominated country, they would not have got the opportunity to learn about any religion other than their own. Although it proved to be a critical event in Kim's journey, it was not the only critical event that contributed in

transforming Kim's personality. There were several other differences that proved to be culturally shocking for Kim.

Besides religious, cultural, linguistic and climatic differences that resulted in culture shock, another major shock for Kim was the timings of the opening of all the shops and markets in Pakistan. According to Kim, all the markets open early morning in Kenya. While sharing the story of his initial days when he was excited to go to the market to buy a few essentials, he claimed to have been shocked to discover that most of the shops and malls open at around 12 pm in Karachi. When he woke up early morning on the first day, he was shocked to find his hostel mates sleeping. He had to change his previous routine of waking up very early, especially on weekends. While drawing a comparison between Kenyans and Pakistanis, Kim stated:

*In Kenya almost everyone is awake by 6 am. Here I have learned, if it's holiday, it's holiday. .... In Kenya, all the businesses open at 6 in the morning. In Pakistan it will start opening at 12 or 1. So, it was also challenging.*

Other than narrating his story of a series of culture shocks accompanied by homesickness he suffered from in the first year of his exposure in Karachi, in general, and the University of Karachi in particular, Kim also narrated his experience of the phases of culture shock he passed through. Despite the fact that he was able to overcome depression to a great extent through cultural adaptation in second year, both anxiety and depression relapsed due to homesickness in the fourth year with greater intensity. This means that instead of moving from the gradual adjustment stage to the adaptation stage, Kim experienced a second wave of culture shock marked by debilitating anxiety and depression. The second wave of culture shock is not unusual and is often reported by those trying to adjust in the new culture. However, the strange thing in Kim's case is that it took him almost one year to overcome the second wave. When asked about the cause of that second wave of culture shock accompanied by homesickness, he reported:

*I was totally depressed. Even I didn't read. I didn't study. It paralyzed both my semesters. I don't know but at that time it was very dangerous because I didn't want to do anything. I didn't want to see any books. I wanted to go home. Up till now I don't know but I was feeling just tired of studies.....Even I was not going to class. You know...I used to sleep. My friend sometimes come to my room in the morning, woke me up but I didn't go. I woke up in the afternoon. I was not even ashamed waking up in the afternoon and people coming from the class.....and er...When I used to go to class I used to sit behind and do my own things.*

Because of his loss of interest in studies due to depression he scored low marks, which in Kim's words was 'another stress'. He reported to have felt ashamed of himself. So, in order to compensate for this academic loss and fight against depression, Kim engaged himself in some outdoor sports, like football, running. He would also consult his friend, a fellow-Kenyan living in the hostel. It was his Kenyan friend who provided Kim the much needed moral and emotional support whenever he felt low due to homesickness, which eventually helped Kim come out of the depressive state of mind and he succeeded in improving his scores in the final year. The significance of intracultural friendship cannot be underestimated. Kim managed to overcome his depression not only by interacting with his Kenyan friends but also through his interaction with his hostel mates from other nationalities, which proves the pivotal role that both intercultural and intracultural friendship can play in battling against stress and depression in a new culture. The same point is reinforced by Belford (2017) in the narrative inquiry of eight international students studying in Australia.

Although Kim has successfully graduated and has a sense of achievement, he, like many other international students, had to pass through a difficult journey resulting in different forms of loss, like loss of the comfort of one's home, loss of native environment, as well as loss of proficiency in one's native language. With reference to his native language proficiency, Kim admitted to have experienced a significant decline in his proficiency in the mother tongue which, according to him, is the result of the limited use of his mother tongue in the host context. He reports: "*Sometimes when I talk with my parents, I find sometimes difficult when*

*they are using some words er... I am asking them what is that? Then they have to tell me in Swahili ...So there is a negative impact."*

Despite the fact that there are 18 Kenyan students in Karachi University, there are only 05 Kelinjin speakers. So, when the Kenyan students from different linguistic backgrounds interact with each other, they use Kiswahili, which is used as a lingua franca among the Kenyans. Kim gets to interact in his native language only when he is in the exclusive company of other four Kelinjin speakers, which according to him, does not happen very frequently.

Some of the culture shocks Kim received also had a positive impact on his personality. He believes that living in the hostel has developed in him a sense of group solidarity. For instance, he reported that he likes the way people here in Pakistan in general and Muslims in particular eat their meals together and socialize while eating, which creates a friendly bonding among people. This, according to Kim, is in contrast to Kenya where everyone has his/her meal alone. Kim feels that he would miss this sense of togetherness that he has experienced in the hostel. Apart from this positive impact, Kim feels that there is a positive change in his personality as a result of his experience in Pakistan. He believes that he has transformed from an aggressive and dependent person to a highly patient and independent person. In Kim's words:

*I think my character has changed. I used to be so much aggressive but now I have learned to wait...er...This is one of the biggest things I have learned due to my experience in Pakistan. Also sometimes I used to tell my friends I want to go somewhere they will tell me they will come and I had to wait, but they won't. Then they would come when I am almost losing hope. You know from these experiences I have become more cool-minded. Like, I don't expect anything now. When you expect a lot you become aggressive. Nowadays even if things are delayed, I am ok with that. There is another change that I had to make. I had to do my own things. I think every parents want to run their children's affairs....but I had to here do everything for myself. I had to be bold enough and self-reliant. I had to manage myself.*

Kim's self-consciousness with regard to his metamorphosis is evident from his narration. Not only has his experience in Pakistan made him acquire patience but also self-reliance and both are positive traits. While sharing more details he added:

*I had to change the mentality because I had a belief that this is not the right place...I had to struggle. You are feeling the stress of the weather, the food. The stress of doing everything alone! Before coming here I did not know how to cook. I had to learn to cook. So, I had to change the mentality and er... the most important thing is when I met my seniors they guided me very well. I realized it's tough but I had to do it. Another thing was to make Pakistani friends and er... I got some good friends and they they helped me a lot. One guy helped me a lot. When I went to buy something, he would bargain on my behalf...I have learned to bargain and I do it now. After having purchased a number of things here, I know how to do bargaining successfully. If you don't do bargaining, you end up by paying double the price.*

Kim's experience in Pakistan not only made him patient and self-reliant, it also taught him to survive within limited budget. He claimed to have learned to manage his budget by cutting down his expenses and in order to do that he started cooking his own food instead of buying meals from restaurants which he used to do in the first few months after his arrival in Karachi. The change in Kim's personality and his overall approach to life cannot solely be attributed to the socio-cultural context in the host community. It has a lot more to do with his perseverance to achieve his goal. It is this very desire to achieve one's goal that motivates foreign nationals for cultural adaptation in the host country. Besides this, personality traits also play a pivotal role in cross-cultural adjustment. The point is supported by the findings of a study on international students by Shu, McAbee, and Ayman (2017). Their research supports the idea that individuals with personality traits such as extroversion and conscientiousness are likely to adjust more easily to new cultures as compared to introverts who are more likely to suffer from an acute sense of loneliness and depression in an alien culture. Although Kim also confessed to have suffered from depression, his extrovert personality helped him during his journey to a great extent.



Despite all the loss Kim had to bear and the obstacles he had to overcome, Kim's journey is the journey of success as he managed to make cross-cultural adaptation to survive in the host country and emerged as a winner, which is evident from the successful completion of his degree programme in the due time. His journey is the journey of transformation not only in terms of his personality but also in terms of his perception of Pakistan. According to Kim: *Pakistan has not only helped me to acquire my degree in Pharmacy. No, no, no! There is a big thing I have learned in Pakistan and that is how to just survive independently. It has taught me how to survive and how to be happy even without money. Earlier when I used to have Rs. 3000 left in my pocket, I used to get stressed and ask my parents to send money but now even if I have 5 Rs. in my pocket, I am not worried...I think now I can easily adjust anywhere in the world. I have realized, I was in the process.....but I feel now I have got the fruits of my er... patience. The challenges I faced earlier made me feel I was not in the right place but I can tell anybody now that I am in the right place.*

Kim's satisfaction with the outcome of his journey can motivate many international students who in the very beginning of their journey become so disillusioned that they do not make any efforts to culturally adapt themselves in the host community. Not only has Kim succeeded in culturally adapting himself in the host community but has also expressed his fondness for certain aspects of Pakistani culture.

Since during his conversations Kim reported to have culturally adapted in the local community, I considered it important to ask him if he is likely to face any problem in readjusting himself in his native town when he returns to his home country after so many years. Not to my surprise, his answer was in the affirmative and on asking about the nature of problems he could anticipate, this is how he responded:

*er... You know one is er... I know I would face problem even in terms of food because I would not get necessary ingredients to even make Pakistani food. So it would be another shock for me (Laughs) after five years as I will have to get back to my normal food. I'll have to make efforts to culturally adapt to my own culture. er... number two is er... you know I told you before that I learned a very good side of humility. Eating together in the same plate! That is strange in my country, especially in my culture let me say. Eating in the same plate again would be a problem. I will not get that chance to continue practicing it. In my culture everyone would serve his food, sit in a corner and eat, but in Pakistan eating together is a very good social activity, having a chat with friends is good.*

Kim's narration of his experiences in Pakistan particularly with reference to certain positive aspects of Pakistani culture, which include eating together and sharing one's meal with friends, indicate that his journey is not just based on negative episodes but is also filled with a great deal of positivity which he has imbibed through his interaction with his hostel mates as well as his Pakistani friends in his department. Irrespective of all the challenges he faced and the difficulties he encountered during his journey, Kim is going back to Kenya with a positive image of Pakistan in general and Karachi in particular, as he admits: *"This city is fantastic. I will miss the city."*

## **5. Findings**

The findings of the study reveal different forms of culture shock on the part of the research participant, which included shock related to language, food, weather and the business timings. It is pertinent to mention that the things Kim initially found shocking because of cultural differences ceased to be shocking to him after spending a considerable period of time in Pakistan, as revealed through the stories of a series of culture shocks he received on his arrival, which are reported in this study. A similar point has been made in a study by Belford (2017), as according to the findings of this study, with the passage of time international students "become more at ease and familiar with cultural traits of the host culture and they build understanding and re-adjustment to social expectations." (p.511). It was exactly the same that happened with Kim after spending more than five years in Pakistan, as he claimed to have become habitual of things that were culturally shocking to him when he arrived in the host country.

After listening to Kim's narratives and analyzing the data based on the narration of his lived experiences with a focus on the critical events in his life in the host country, one learns about the strategies that Kim employed to overcome culture shock and culturally adapt himself to adjust in the host context. As revealed through Kim's stories, he befriended his classmates as well as his hostel mates irrespective of their nationality in order to avoid the sense of loneliness. Instead of waiting for others to approach him, he approached them with the desire to expand his social network, as he realized that withdrawing into a shell can throw him into the pits of depression. Apart from making efforts to mingle with the students from other nationalities including the local students, he also tried to integrate with the host community culture by developing the taste for local food and even learned to cook Pakistani cuisine. Moreover, Kim also adopted the local style of eating with hands which he was not accustomed to earlier. All such efforts on his part helped him not only adjust in the host country but also brought some positive changes in Kim's personality and his approach to life as he claimed to have been transformed from an aggressive and impatient person to a calm and patient individual.

## **6. Conclusion and Recommendations**

The study indicates that the outcome of international students' journey in the host country may not always be counter-productive. As obvious from the findings of this narrative inquiry, it depends on the students' willingness to bring transformation in their lifestyle to fit in the host context. However, this does not rule out the efforts required on the part of the host community to help foreigners integrate in the new culture. The study calls for the need to provide counseling to the international students on their arrival in the host university. The university administration should arrange a few workshops to familiarize students with the local culture and these workshops can be followed by a one-day city tour or an official two-week guided study tour of Pakistan during the semester break to provide international students exposure to the cultural diversity within the country. Besides this, the teaching faculty of all those departments where international students are admitted need to have some interaction with the students both inside and outside the classroom so that the students do not feel excluded and marginalized.

Because of the absence of a proper communication channel, international students' voice remains unheard which often leads to depression and anxiety on the part of these students. There is a dire need to provide international students a proper platform where their voice can be heard and they can project their distinct cultural identity, as denying them the opportunity to project their voice can result in "intense loss of self-esteem and identity" (Ryan & Viète, 2009). Last but not the least, if any international student suffers from psychological disorientation due to culture shock, instead of neglecting that student, he/she should be provided psychiatric treatment. All the higher education institutions in the city where foreign students are enrolled should collaborate with each other to organize biannual meetings, if feasible, to discuss and resolve the issues of international students and design a uniform policy to facilitate them and make their experience of living in the host country enriching rather than frustrating.

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