

# Cultural differences between countries



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## **Abstract**

### **Objectives**

To explore to what extent the cultural differences between countries affect the education of emigrant children and also address the issues related to it.

### **Background**

The importance of cultural differences is getting more and more in the present age. There exist a number of multi-cultural societies and a lot of people have to work or collaborate across geographical or cultural borders. This phenomenon is also affecting the educational system of countries around the world. The children from a different cultural background have to face a number of issues while studying in a foreign school.

Nevertheless, emigrant children have equal rights to study in a school. Education is a fundamental right for children regardless of their cultural background.

### **Methods**

Literature search was done on Pub Med, Google books, Google Scholar, Science Direct, Questia. com and ZETOC. The key words that were used for searching were emigrant, education, cultural differences, and cultural issues.

### **Selection Criteria**

Several studies were selected for critical appraisal which has different methodological approaches. The study made use of qualitative, quantitative as well as mixed approaches. A scale was used in the quantitative research study which displayed the critical analysis done by the author.

## **Introduction**

The world has now turned into a global village. The advances in information technology have made it easier to travel across geographical borders and communicate across time and space. But unfortunately the technological revolution hasn't done anything to facilitate better communication inter-culturally. In order to have an effective collaboration between cultures, efforts must be made to develop common shared meanings. For that purpose, we have to understand the cultural differences among us and share cultural information.

## **Background**

Globalization has lessened the importance of boundaries between countries. People now travel across borders for job, education, trade, and leisure. The past decade has witnessed an immense increase in the number of emigrants in almost all developed countries. Countries like USA and UK are flooded with emigrants. Majority of them reach here for job assignments and business purposes. The new environment may not be quite welcoming to these people. They may find a number of factors there that hurt their cultural values and beliefs. For this purpose, most of the companies provide cross-cultural training for their expatriate employees. But the effect of these cultural differences on their family members is often neglected. The most affected group among the emigrant population is the children. They often have to face a variety of issues while studying in a new educational system. And they are the most affected by these cultural differences.

Adler (1997) proposed that culture, values, attitude and behaviors are interconnected and influence each other in a society. Values are aspects that

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have a direct or indirect impact on our decisions. Values can be both conscious and unconscious. Values of an individual are affected by his culture. It is through attitudes that a person expresses his values and makes us react in a particular manner. Thus a person's attitude is being revealed indirectly through his actions. Any form of human action can be considered as behavior. Thus the overall culture of a society is affected by the behavior of its people. Hence culture cannot exist without people's behavior.

The education system of each country is different and is influenced by the native culture and norms. Hence the emigrant children will be encountered with certain issues that could happen due to these cultural disparities. The situation of emigrant children into schools and other educational institutions will be depend upon the type of school, duration of attending, evidences for achievement etc. In some countries like Germany, migrant children enroll at a late age and at a lower rate compared to their peers. Another aspect that invites criticism regarding enrolment is the placement of emigrant children in lower than their age-appropriate schools. This situation cannot be avoided in schools where they are no transitory classes. But with this the emigrant kids remain in this situation due to lack of motivation and support for catching up with native kids of same age. Hence these kids end up as low performers with less academic qualifications. They are considered as secondary citizens.

Even when this is an issue that needs immediate concern, there is a dearth of research being done in this area.

## Critical Appraisal

There has been many studies done on the cultural issues of emigrants but research on the specific cultural problems affecting the education of emigrant children is limited. Culture itself is very sensitive area. Huijser (2006) defined culture as a group's set of shared norms and values, expressed in the behavior of its group members. According to Schein (1991), culture is the shared norms, values and modes of behavior that characterize a group of individuals. His model views culture at three levels-the visible artifact level, values, and basic underlying assumptions. The first level focuses on the visible aspects of culture like food and clothing. The second level is mainly concerned with the beliefs about what is right and wrong. The third level reflects on the basic beliefs about human nature and its relationship with others. The emigrant life as well as that of expatriates can be related more to the artifact or value levels.

A number of writers have applied the culture concept to national cultures and have developed dimensions on which national cultures differ (Trompenaars, 1993)

There are six dimensions on the basis of which cultural differences can be analyzed (Adler 1997). These dimensions are:

Understanding the nature of people

The person's relationship to the external environment

The person's relationship to other people

The primary mode of activity.

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People's orientation to space

The person's temporal orientation.

Apart from the above, language and communication skills can also be considered as dimensions to cultural differences (Gudykunst, 1986; Tannen, 1990).

An emigrant can be defined as a national who is living in a foreign land on a temporary basis for work reasons (Sayad 2004). The extent to which the cultural beliefs are different from one country to another is known as cultural distance (Kogut & Singh, 1988). Thus cultures vary from country to country based upon the dimensions (Brouthers & Brouthers 2001). The cultural distance can be challenging for emigrants since they have to adapt to a new different culture (Black & Mendenhall, 1992). The work performance, ability to accomplish tasks as well as socialization is being affected by this cultural distance (Stahl & Caliguri, 2005). It is always useful to identify and understand the personal characteristics of individuals who could reduce the distance between the emigrant and the natives since the emigrants would get into close ties with these people (Harrison, Shaffer & Bhaskar-Shrinivas, 2004).

If there is high cultural distance, that means there exists customs and values which are unfamiliar to the emigrant. Gaining experience in different cultural context would help the emigrant to develop a global mindset and can cause an overall transformation of identity (Kohonen 2005; Sanchez, Spector & Cooper, 2000). Adapting to a different environment demands the emigrant for self-examining one's own behavior and as the disparity between home

and host culture increases, greater the need for self-examination. A sense making process is considered to be behind this event and there also exists a sense of coherence which integrates the personal characteristics with one's own previous experiences (Glanz, William & Hoeksema, 2001; Stahl, Miller & Tung, 2002). Those individuals who are capable of adapting effectively are considered to be social brokers who could integrate the opinions and suggestions obtained from people with local interpretation schemes or cultural expectations.

Those who have migrated to a destination country at a younger age and completed primary and high school are mostly economically powerful as they know the language and are culturally inclined (Chiswick and Miller, 1996). In US studies related to the immigrant children have shown that blacks and Latino's have lesser grades than natives, while a child of second generation born to a native mother also has a higher chance of attaining graduation (Bankston and Zhou, 2002). Educational and societal systems in a country affect the immigrant children in a wide variety of ways (Dronkers and de Heus, (2010)).

Educational systems in different countries are organized in different ways. The performance and achievement of emigrant children with respect to education is measured based on standardization, differentiation and the availability of resources in the destination and origin countries (Shavit and Müller, 1998; Wössmann, 2003; Buchmann and Hannum, 2001). If a country's educational system is more differentiated taking into account the social characteristics, it is seen that the native students outperform immigrant students in the country (OECD 2007). A study by Ammermüller

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(2005) showed that those students who have options to choose different school types have a better chance of performing well.

In order to study the effect of characteristics of both origin and destination countries and the educational system in these countries, Levels et al. (2008) took into consideration the political, cultural and economic macro-characteristics. Educational performance of immigrant children is affected by the countries educational system only if the child has received a part of the education in origin country. According to Rumbaut (2004) there is difference in the academic performance of immigrant children who migrated at an early age to the destination country and those who have migrated at a later age. The choice of schools and educational institutions and their differentiation is largely influenced by the choices of parents in case of younger children (Pfeffer 2008). Thus the knowledge of parents in this respect is an important resource. It is also observed that those immigrants who have are of a lower class in the society in terms of education, economy and knowledge of educational institutions etc. will choose a lower stream of educational institution for their children. The lack knowledge of the language and culture acts as a base for this to happen. (van de Werfhorst and van Tubergen, 2007). Dronkers, (2010), revealed that the individual cultural and family background of the students influenced the way they performed in the academically.

In case of education system migrant students are always at a disadvantage. The scientific performance of students in politically unstable countries is poor. The scientific literacy of immigrants are influenced or in one way affected by the cultural, social and economic characteristics of the origin and

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destination countries. There exist a large difference in the culture of one country and other, these results in less understanding among the different groups in the country and the immigrant population (Owen, Eisner and McFaul, 1981).

## **Conclusion**

There are various issues that affect the emigrant children, one of the most important issues concerning them is their education. Numerous studies and researches have been conducted in this regard. Cultural variations in a country affect the educational performance of emigrant children. Religion is an important aspect of culture in an origin and destination country also affects the emigrant education (Dronkers & Fleishmann (2010).

Researches done in Europe to a large extent cover the countries both in Europe as well as outside Europe. Important countries where researches were done are Canada, England, France and the USA. Various scientific studies have been carried out in this aspect based on these countries in Europe. One of the main drawbacks in this kind of a study is that not many countries are included in the study and not all groups of emigrants are taken into consideration.

## **APPENDIX**

### **Policy Framework**

There are many frameworks of policies in the western countries including UK regarding protecting the rights of immigrant population. Discrimination of immigrant people especially children are addressed through various laws formulated in the country. Government has certain policies and rules that

help the immigrant population to blend with the culture of the host country; this is to prevent the immigrant children from feeling the discrimination that can affect their educational performance (Portes and Zhou, 1993). Migrant Integration Policy Index(MIPEX), this helps the national governing bodies measure the access the migrants have in politics, labour market and other spheres (Niessen, Huddleston and Citron, 2007). Thus it is noted that the immigrant children perform well academically in a country where the immigrant policies are well established. British Race Relation Act and European Union Council Directives help provide equal treatment for all in the country.