

Culture shock in students studying abroad report sample

[Technology](#), [Development](#)



Students studying abroad are bound to undergo an adjustment period as they attempt to adjust to their new surroundings. When a student goes abroad to study, there are many changes they will encounter in their new country that were not accustomed previously. This change of lifestyle is known as culture shock, as students can experience different challenges while trying to adapt to their new countries and schools. The following paper is designed to discuss a survey of the impacts of culture shock on students when studying abroad, and their coping strategies. The survey was conducted using SurveyMonkey and consisted of 10 questions and 50 different responses from students studying abroad (See Appendix). From the survey analysis, this paper will discuss the causes, stages, effects, and coping strategies of culture shock. These factors are relevant in understanding the impacts of culture shock in students learning behavior and they strategies they can use to cope. Moreover, from the survey analysis, most students studying abroad do not understand culture shock before going abroad, and find it highly challenging to adjust and cope.

Defining Culture Shock

In the survey, participants were asked if they understood the definition of culture shock. From the survey analysis, over 50 percent of the 50 responses had no idea what culture shock was. According to Oberg (1960), culture shock can be defined as the anxiety one experiences after losing all familiar symbols and signs of social communication. Oberg made culture shock a concept used in numerous studies that concentrate on several issues ranging from its development, effects, and coping strategies. Many researchers have simply improved Oberg's description in most culture shock

studies. As explained by Martin and Nakayama (2001), culture shock is a moderately short-lived feeling of bewilderment or confusion caused by the unfamiliarity or unusualness of environs and the lack of adapted indications in the environment.

In Kohls (2001) definition, culture shock is specific about sickness triggered by the emotional disorientation many people undergo when they are in new environments that they are not familiar. Most of the disorientation results in different symptoms that include depression, anger, nostalgia, boredom, irritability, withdrawal, anxiety, and frustration. Culture shock simply means the individual disorientation one may experience due to the unfamiliar lifestyle they experience in a new country or different social environment.

Most of the disorientation feelings can be caused by numerous circumstances and instances, such as climate differences, language issues, different teaching programs, and different school facilities, among others.

For instance, a student who migrates to the United States from China to study may experience culture shock due to language difference and other aspects he/she is not familiar with back in China. Most students studying abroad encounter culture shock impacts them in different ways including change in learning behavior. From the survey analysis, most students do not know that they will experience a disorienting feeling after they go to study abroad. It is extremely pertinent to understand and get prepared for a culture shock as a foreign student, as it helps one to adjust quickly and settle in the new school and environment enabling his/her educational goal achievement.

Stages in Culture Shock on Students Studying Abroad

Culture shock is a process that involves several stages that an individual goes through before accepting and adapting to the new country or social environment. Students studying abroad also experience several stages of culture shock. The survey analysis concluded that all students studying abroad experience mixed feeling at different stages during the culture shock experience. According to Bashraheel, (2009), there is a model that can clarify the process of global adjustment or culture shock. They developed a U-curve model that identifies cross-cultural changes in a multi-dimensional hypothesis, which is customarily defined as the degree of emotional comfort individual experiences when facing a new culture. In the U-curve theory, the extent of psychological adjustment starts at the honeymoon stage that is the high point, and then continues to an almost instant drop due to culture shock, trailed by a mounting adjustment and lastly the mastery stage (Black & Mendenhall 1991). The adjustment is not based on the conformity to a certain culture, but based on the growing contentment in being able to manage as the individual adapts to the new environment. In brief, the objective for adjustment is only acculturation and not assimilation. The extent of adjustments is determined by several aspects that include the specific individual, country, or school. However, this hypothesis does not define timelines for adjustments and concentrates much on the learning curves of adjustments. Scholars have revised the U-curve model that has traditionally included 3 stages to include five. Kohls (2001) states that the U-curve model consists of 4 stages namely; initial joy, hostility and irritability, steady adjustment, and the acceptance or biculturalism.

However, based on the survey, I have developed my own stages that the students experienced while studying abroad. The first stage is the excitement or honeymoon stage where the student is happy and excited about the whole idea of studying abroad. Most students who get a chance to study abroad are anxious and eager to go to the new country (Chapdelaine & Alexitch 2004). They only have a positive impression of the other culture and are not aware of any negative aspects of what they are to experience. Even after arrival, students are overwhelmed with their new surroundings and find the lifestyle fascinating and exotic. In brief, during this stage, students are passive and have little experience of the new culture and environment. In the survey, all students were asked how they felt about studying abroad and their first experience and 97% of all participants gave a positive response characterized by excitement and enthusiasm. The second stage is known as the withdrawal that almost instantly occurs after the excitement stage. During the withdrawal period, the student realizes that his new culture is different, weird, and unfamiliar from their host culture. It becomes difficult for students to understand other people's behavior.

They increasingly feel anxious and find the culture or lifestyle unpredictable and unusual. Withdrawal automatically starts followed by a strong mocking and criticism of the people and culture. According to Pantelidou and Craig (2006), students studying abroad are likely to develop physiological and psychological distress due to the sudden change and unfamiliarity of the new culture. The third stage is adjustment where the student develops a more confident and has adapted a routine making her more stable in the new

culture. The stage occurs gradually as the individual understands and accepts the new culture. Moreover, students feel less isolated and slowly start regaining their sense of humor and getting familiar with the new surroundings. Miller (1993) explains it blends into the last stage of adaptation. The last stage is the adaptation period that comes as a relief to many individuals experiencing culture shock. Here, students feel at home and fully adapted in their new country and school. They are able to function properly with confidence and even find some traits of the new culture than their own. Though it might be challenging for most students, it is the best experience as they are able to have an identity familiar to their previous countries (Black & Mendenhall 1991).

Effects of Culture Shock on Students Studying Abroad

Culture shock is accompanied by numerous effects that are mostly psychological and sometimes physiological. Students studying abroad experience different effects depending on the extent of their adjustment experience. According to the survey analysis, all participants experienced psychological effects while 23% experienced physiological effects. Moreover, culture shock has different effects on students learning behaviors and performance. Over 60% of the surveyed participants experienced different challenges in their learning behaviors. Firstly, culture shock makes one feel disoriented and does not understand what is happening in the new country or school. Most of the attitudes and behaviors developed before an individual migrates to his/her new country become un-applicable once one reaches the new destination (Holoviak et al. 2011). For instance, a foreign student in a

host country like South Korea may have to change his attitude and perception in education from one that is exam oriented to one that is practical. This is because the culture in South Korea makes one shun passing exams and focus on application of knowledge. Moreover, students are likely to get stressed and frustrated as some familiar actions described as normal in one's own culture are observed as bad or shocking manners in the new culture (Chapdelaine & Alexitch 2004). The most and significant effect evident in numerous studies and even the survey is the effect in learning behaviors. Language is the common trigger of culture shock that acts as a barrier in most foreign student's learning behaviors. In some cases, schools may not have any, or have few programs that make it easier for students to adapt and learn easily. Additionally, there can be a technology gap and differences in learning facilities that may encourage or discourage a student to learn.

Coping Strategies

Culture shock may look like a challenging and overwhelming phenomenon for most individuals especially students studying abroad. However, there are numerous coping strategies that one can use to ease the adjustment.

According to Miller (1993), during the culture shock experience, an individual has to find numerous ways like seeking help from back home as a way of handling the adjustment. Students find themselves even going back to their country if they are not able to deal with the disorientation. Most people find it hard to cope with the change because of the reactions they have to the culture shock. One, people assume the other people in the new culture are

and they are right; second people find their culture more valuable; third, people define their culture in moral standings like civilized, rational, and natural. When one understands that this, it is clear that culture shock is a normal phenomenon and not a disease as perceived by many (Oberg 1960). According to the survey, over 97% of students used family and friends as the best and effective coping strategy. Keeping in touch with family and friends can ease the pressure from culture shock. Additionally, seeking assistance from local or international offices that can help in adapting to the new environment can also be a coping strategy. One can also learn the new culture other lifestyle basic and join students and community unions as a way of learning and adapting to the new culture (Bashraheel 2009).

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be deliberated that culture shock is a natural occurrence bound to happen when an individual is in a new country or surrounding (Bashraheel 2009). It simply refers to the psychological effect caused by the new lifestyle that one has not adapted. Most students or individuals travelling abroad to study or live do not understand culture shock. Even most students studying abroad have no idea what culture shock is and some of the coping strategies they can use. The following paper has been designed to discuss the relevant issues that emerged from the survey analysis that concluded there are numerous effects of culture shock, and students use different coping strategies.

Culture shock is categorized in 4 groups that can also be used in assessing the culture shock in students studying abroad. It begins with a high point

that is full of excitement, followed by an instant back draw from the first stage full of withdrawal, then the slow adaptation, and finally the adapting stage where one feels familiar to the new culture. Culture shock has different effects on individuals and to most students studying abroad, learning behaviors are sometimes affected (Hess 1997). Therefore, to deal with the adjustment process, students develop some coping strategies such as talking to friends and family back home to manage the disorienting feeling and situation. Therefore, it can be concluded that culture shock is a normal occurrence and people should learn how best to manage it especially those wishing to work or study abroad.

Appendixes

List of survey questions

Why did you go to study abroad?

What was your experience while studying abroad?

Did you know what culture shock was before travelling abroad?

How has the culture shock affected you?

In terms of learning behavior, how is the culture shock impacting you?

How did you deal and manage with the culture shock occurrence?

Were there any difficulties you came across?

Did you finally manage to adapt to the new culture?

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