SOCIAL SUPPORT AND STUDENT ADAPTATION: ACCULTURATION EXPERIENCES OF INTERNAL MIGRANTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SARGODHA

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Abstract:

The process of migration has a long history. Migration occurs at international, national and regional levels. Previous studies have consistently demonstrated instrumental impacts of acculturation strategy of integration and the damaging impacts of the acculturation strategy. This study attempts to extend the existing literature by examining the role of social support in the acculturation process. Specially, it was hypothesized that different types of social support would enhance the positive effects of the integration strategy. Paper-based questionnaires completed a 35-items were used for data collection. The questionnaires had a Cronbach alpha of 0.929 for social support and 0.935 for cultural integration. The data was collected by survey 140 respondents (having different ethnic backgrounds). Data were analyzed descriptively using parametric inferential statistics by relying on chi-square in SPSS and to test the proposed model. The study revealed that migrated students experience very high integration process. Migrated students also reported high social support and this helps them to better integrate into the new environment. The study also revealed that there is a highly positive significant relationship between social support and acculturative process. The study recommended that migrated students participate in more social activities so that they are better integrate into the new environment. Social support systems should also be stronger in both host and home place to better assimilate into the new environment. Further research studies should investigate the issues and challenges faced by migrated students when they entering in the new environment.

Keywords: Social Support, Acculturation, Integration, Assimilation, Adaptation, Migrated Students.

Introduction:

The migration is an emerging phenomenon in an ever more global and mobile world, and it has an impact on its social, cultural, and educational environment. Although a lot of research effort was dedicated regarding international migration, internal migration particularly, among the students, is relatively understudied. Migration of students in a nation, as evident in search of higher education is an important type of social mobility and adjustment. The local migration of the student in rural or regional provinces to the university academic Centre (University of Sargodha) in Pakistan, reflects a distinctive socio-cultural process. These students usually first- generation students who attend university have to deal not only with the difficulties of higher education but also with problems of psychosocial struggles of being in the mindset of unusual societal contexts culturally. Acculturation is a multidimensional process and it refers to the manner in which persons undergo possibly psychological and sociocultural transformations in the event that they are exposed to a different cultural environment (Berry, 1997). It is not just a one way-process but a two-way exchange between the migrant and the host culture. Bidimensional acculturation model depicted by Berry (2005) identifies four possible approaches to acculturation, namely assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization, which correspond to different levels of maintaining culture and the ability to adopt the host culture. Of these, those that are linked with the most

positive results are those where integration restraints the tendency of a person to lose his or her cultural identity yet participates in the host culture in an active manner. To effectively implement such integrative strategies, migrated students, who face themselves in the complex forms of identity, social expectations and academic demands, need enough psychosocial resources to move them along.

Social support is one of such important resources. Social support refers to the perceived or real help given by interpersonal networks and is therefore a shield against acculturative stress and enables psychological well-being and sociocultural adaptation (House, 1981; Taylor, 2011). Such support can be either emotional, informational, instrumental, or appraisal-based, and it can be obtained either through the family, friends, institutions, and peer groups (Wentzel, 1998; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2009). Such support systems in the case of internal student migrants especially those adjusting to more open area of academia after growing up and living in conservative or rural setup becomes necessary. Studies confirm that provision of strong social support has the effect of boosting self-esteem of the students, creating a sense of belonging as well as reducing the related negative psychological effects of migration, such as loneliness, identity confusion, and culture conflict (Schweitzer et al., 2011; Wong et al., 2018).

In Pakistan, migration of the students of underdeveloped provinces of Balochistan, Gilgit-Baltistan, and some part of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to universities of Punjab points to strong regional, ethnic and linguistic differences. The University of Sargodha in its multicultural and multireligious setting with students representing many different regions of the country can be viewed as a smaller world in which such cultural interactions and conflicts can be observed. Most of the students with minority or marginalized backgrounds complain of being unable to fit in the social setting, facing a language gap, and a lack of access to institutional services, which all reduce academic achievements and emotional health (Ali & Bhatti, 2021; Khan et al., 2020). Nonetheless, the individuals who get regular encouragement are more probable to adjust well and rate well in their studies and social life, such as university personnel, colleagues and families.

The role of social support and the combination of social support and acculturation in case of internal migrant students in Pakistan needs to be addressed, even though this aspect is already of great importance. Existing studies on migration in South Asia largely focus on the aspect of labor migration or global educational mobility without paying specific attention to the experience of internal student migrants (Akram, 2024; Abdin, 2023). This study fills this knowledge gap by studying the influence of various types of social support in improving the acculturation process of our internal migrant students in the University of Sargodha. It will utilize a conceptual framework in which it will use cultural assimilation as a dependent variable with the independent variables namely emotional, informational, and instrumental support.

In addition, the study advances sociological knowledge on identity perception, equity in education and social unity. It acknowledges that acculturation is not a passive process but rather it is an active agency and structure. This study has some practical implications to university administrators, policymakers, and educators. Presenting the following support systems identified that assist or suppress student integration, the study provides evidence-based recommendations to plan the inclusive learning setting and supporting services, which identify the cultural and emotional needs of internal migrants.

To sum up, the literature review focusing on the roles of social support in the acculturation of internal migrants among students offers fundamental knowledge about the way young individuals may overcome the shift in cultural context in the country of origin. It insists on the importance to change the academic learning to macro-level migration patterns to micro-level experience that

reshapes the outcomes of students and their social belonging. With a more demographically varied population in the universities of Pakistan, the creation of cultures that promote both academic and socio-cultural diversity will play a crucial role in facilitating equitable access to higher education opportunities and the overall progress of all students.

Objectives of the Study:
- ➢ To see the level of social support of migrated students into the host culture.
- ➢ To know the level of cultural integration of migrated students.
- ➢ To identify the relationship between social support and cultural assimilation.

Research Questions:
- ➢ What is the level of social support of migrated students into the host culture?
- ➢ What is the level of cultural integration of migrated students?
- ➢ How social support affects cultural assimilation?

Hypothesis of the Study:

Hypothesis (Social Support & Cultural Assimilation)

Null Hypothesis (Ho): There is no significant association between social support and the cultural assimilation among students of other provinces.

Alternative Hypothesis (Ha): There is a significant association between social support and the cultural assimilation among students of other provinces.

Literature Review:

Interpersonal relationships in facilitating the process of adaptation of migrants have played an important factor with regard to the relationship between social support and acculturation that has gained a lot of fame in the migration and psychological literature. Acculturation is loosely referred to as a psychological and sociocultural absorption interaction, which occur when there is an encounter between people in the new culture setting (Berry, 2005). The process of acculturation is quite difficult yet progressive to the inner migrating students, especially those who find it difficult to live in the urban centers of learning and have moved there within rural or marginal areas. Social support is also extremely important during these types of transition and determines their experiences, academic performance, cultural adaptation and also their mental health.

The theory of acculturation has developed during decades with some of the initial contributions of Redfield, Linton, Herskovits (1936) describing it in terms of changes as the result of the supported direct contact between members of two different cultures. This was enhanced by Berry (1997, 2006) who came up with a bidimensional model and from this proposed four strategies which are assimilation, separation, marginalization and integration, depending on how much the individuals would wish to cling on to their initial culture and embrace the host culture. Of the above, the most adaptive strategy has been considered to be integration; through which migrants are able to preserve their cultural identity, and at the same time interact with the host society (Schwartz et al., 2010).

Social support, however, is usually divided into; emotional, instrumental, informational and appraisal support (House, 1981). It is conceptualized to viewed as and actual help offered by social network that effects to reduce stress; improve coping abilities and create durability in new settings (Cohen & Wills, 1985). A large body of research attest to the finding that when migrants report strong support networks in terms of family members, friends, institutions and peers, they are likely to use adaptive acculturation approach, and have less acculturative stress (Sam & Berry, 2010; Park, 2010).

Student migration, particularly internal migration education, is not only geographical but also has serious psychological, social and cultural changes. According to the studies conducted by Findlay

et al. (2012) and Ziguras & Law (2006), the mobility of students is conceived as a life-course choice that is influenced by individual ambition, family desire, as well as regional disparities. In South Asia, especially in Pakistan, internal student migration as a trend is usually dictated by the reason that good education is not available in the peripheral areas (Kayani, 2015; Javed, 2019). When these students join the urban universities, they experience diversity in culture, language barriers, and changes in social norms that may cause either development and trauma.

The studies indicate that internally migrating students are likely to experience differences in education, homesickness, discrimination and financial burdens (Shah et al., 2019; Nawaz & Amin, 2019). All this may result into acculturative stress, the defense feeling of psychological anxiety ensuing due to the development of difficulty of adaptation to a fresh culture environment (Berry, 2006). Yeh and Inose (2003) assert that these stressors can develop in form of academic difficulties, isolation, fear, and depression unless controlled by sufficient coping mechanisms like social support.

Social support can be viewed as a protective measure, as well as the enabling force under cultural transition. Ward and Kennedy (1993) conducted another research on migrant adjustments and concluded that people who had greater support available to them embodied more competence in their culture and had reduced emotional distress. To the same effect, Mallinckrodt and Leong (1992) pointed out that the international and internal students who were emotionally and academically supported by the peers, faculty, and family had better performance outcomes and cultural adaptation.

Many researchers have pointed out at the beneficial impact of the social networks to reducing out the integration process on a cultural level. As an illustration, Hendrickson et al. (2011) observed that friendship with peers in the new country enhances the language skills, cultural awareness, and self-esteem. Yoon et al. (2013) also noticed that emotional support of classmates had a large impact on the cultural acceptance and social belonging of the students. Studying the Pakistani situation, Ali and Bhatti (2021) revealed that peer mentoring, cultural clubs, and counseling services played a vital role in helping the students of internal migrants in urban universities.

Furthermore, family support, both emotionally and materialistically, is also a key pillar of most internal migrant students. Nawaz and Amin (2019) have presented that family support provides a positive impact on the capabilities of students to be strong and committed despite physical separation in families. The uncertainty and confusion, which migrants can feel in the new educational systems is also alleviated by informational support that is given by institutional means through orientation sessions, counseling units, and academic advising (SuArez-Orozco et al., 2009).

Another important and new finding that worked out in the study explained by Saxena and Shah (2012) was that individual performance and a feeling of belongingness increased as a result of study groups or collective learning situations that was encouraged due to the institution infrastructure. In the similar manner, Wong et al. (2018) concluded that institutional connection and student-centered programs contributed greatly to the academic and emotional integration of migrant students.

Even though social support is known to be beneficial, its internal migrant students are likely to encounter barriers in reaching the support. Language differences, geographical prejudices and socio-economic disparities are a disadvantage in establishing trusting relationships (Han, 2012). In the multicultural environment, the migrant students might be afraid of joining peers or engaging in social activities because of the guilt of inferiority, cultural incompatibility, or prejudice (Sun,

2018). A study by Chen (2020) established that students who were socially excluded had more stress and isolation.

Also, institutional deficiencies in meeting the special needs of the internal migrants may compound their problems. According to Suarez-Orozco et al. (2010), most universities do not have targeted support programs, and hence, have the universal solution to all that does not take cultural and linguistic diversity into account. In the case of non-existent or insufficient use of social support tools, learners can become marginalized and perform at a lower grade and worsen their mental health (Liu, 2013; Reardon, 2011).

The combination of the theory of acculturation by Berry and Bronfenbrenner ecological system of theories offers a more detailed basis of comprehending how social support influences the process of acculturation. Berry (1997) draws attention to the particular cultured approaches, whereas the Bronfenbrenner (1979) views Bronfenbrenner (1979) highlights microsystem (family and peers), mesosystem (school climate) and ecosystem (school-community services) and the macrosystem (cultural and policy norms) that individual developments are shaped by. This integrated model proposes that the policies/institution, peer culture and family support should be clear in ensuring positive acculturation.

Research Methodology:

The method and procedure that are applied for discovering answers to meaningful questions through the application of scientific method is known as methodology. The present study was followed by the quantitative research paradigm to find out the research goals. This research method also avoids biases in the study. This study employed the quantitative research paradigm; the research design used in the present study belonged to descriptive research design which is also known as the survey method. For the current study, quantitative approach of research was used, and the sampling method used in this research was proportionate stratified sampling. The advantages of this research's proportionate stratified sample technique More reliable and accurate data can be obtained than with a simple random sample. The Universe of this study was the other provinces students of University of Sargodha, Sargodha, Punjab, Pakistan. The study population comprised students from the University of Sargodha who originated from four different provinces: Particularly, Sindh, KPK, Gilgit Baltistan and Balochistan. The information about these students was collected from the Director Academic of the university of Sargodha and the data collected was made on departmental approach as well as the ethnical approach. These included 38 students belonging to Sindh, 183 students from the KPK, 130 students from GB, while 590 students were from the Balochistan province. The sampling frame in the present study was specifying that all the students enrolled at the University of Sargodha, categorized by their provinces and ethnic backgrounds. For this a sample size of 140 respondents was chosen to ensure representation from various strata based on provinces and ethnic backgrounds.

N=140

Prior to finalization of questionnaire, the pretesting was conducted on 12 respondents by the researcher and some questions that were ambiguous and unclear were reshaped. The purpose of the pre-testing was to remove errors and ambiguities from the finalized questionnaire. Paper-based questionnaires as the primary tool for data collection from students in other provinces who are attending the university. Data was analyzed through IBM SPSS Statistics 26 program.

Data Analysis:
Table 1: Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Demographic Variables

Sr.	Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	**Age**		
	15-20	33	23.6%
	21-25	105	75.0%
	26-30	2	1.4%
	Total	140	100.0%
2	**Gender**		
	Male	111	79.3%
	Female	29	20.7%
3	**Marital Status**		
	Single	130	92.9%
	Married	9	6.4%
	Divorced	1	.7%
4	**Family Status**		
	Extended	73	52.1%
	Nuclear	41	29.3%
	Others	26	18.6%
5	**Level of Education**		
	Undergraduate	132	94.3%
	Graduate	8	5.7%
6	**Ethnic Background**		
	Baloch	70	50.0%
	Pashtun	31	22.1%
	Sindhi	6	4.3%
	Gilgit	28	20.0%
	Others	5	3.6%
7	**Living Status**		
	Urban	58	41.4%
	Rural	66	47.1%
	Sub-urban	16	11.4%

The demographics table states that most of the respondents were between 21 and 25 years (75.0%), and 23.6 percent were 15 to 20 years old, with few being 26 to 30 years (1.4 %), hence tendency that the total population was youthful. There was disparity in participation in terms of gender in that males composed a high number (79.3%) as compared to females (20.7%). Nearly all the participants were single (92.9 %), only some of them married (6.4 %) or divorced (0.7 percent), which can be linked to the average age and the state of life of the university students. About the family structure, more than a half (52.1%) of the respondents lived in extended families, 29.3% of the respondents were nuclear families and 18.6% were reported being living in other structures; this shows how culturally distributed extended family system is in the community. Regarding level of education, a very high percentage of the participants (94.3%) represented undergraduates, which shows the level of participants consists of a population of students still undertaking their first degrees. In terms of ethnicity, Baloch students remained the greatest (50.0 %), then Pashtun (22.1 %), Gilgit (20.0 %), Sindhi (4.3 %) and others (3.6 percent), with an ethnically diverse internal migrant population. Lastly, a large percentage of the respondents had been located in rural regions (47.1%) and the urban centers (41.4 %), with few in the sub-urban regions (11.4), which demonstrated a diverse geographic makeup of the student community.

Table 2: Cultural Adaptation and Social Support (N=140)

Aspect	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Confident in communication	48	42	30	13	7
Enjoy cultural practices	37	42	44	12	5
Fit in with friends	42	41	37	12	8
Adopted eating habits	32	44	44	10	10
Adapted social norms	28	49	42	11	10
Comfortable with new culture	40	37	44	9	10
Enjoy social activities	47	45	29	10	9
Sense of belonging	31	41	52	7	9
Comfortable sharing problems	27	65	23	16	9
Difficulty in semester exams	17	68	36	13	6

Regularly meet peers	25	67	27	13	8
Happy in co-curricular activities	29	68	29	8	6

The Table 2 presents the data about the level of cultural adaptation and perceived social support of 140 participants. In general, there is a positive inclination of the responses in a positive experience in adjusting to a new environment. Most of the respondents described a feeling of competence during communications (48 strongly agree, 42 agree), cultural practices (37 strongly agree, 42 agree), and fitting in with friends (42 strongly agree, 41 agree), which indicates successful integration. Agreements were also very high with respect to similarity of eating habits, social norms and the level of comfort in the new culture. The feeling of social support is high with 27 participants supporting or strongly agreeing to feel comfortable with sharing problems and 92 participants stating to enjoy the social activity with the peers. Majority of the respondents also observe frequent contact with the peers and co-curriculum activity. But problems still exist namely academic and 85 students admit that they are having trouble with semester exams. Although not all the answers are positive and neutral, the general tendency is the successful cultural adaptation and high levels of support among peers.

Hypothesis Testing:
Ho: Both Social Support and Cultural Assimilation of students are not significantly associated
H1: Both Social Support and Cultural Assimilation of students are significantly associated

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1088.710a	868	.000
Likelihood Ratio	416.353	868	1.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	86.307	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	140		
Critical value (920.748), Level of Significance (0.05)			

The above table contained the results of hypothesis testing by using non parametric Chi square test. Before applying Chi square test all items related to Cultural Integration and Social Support were computed and then calculated through chi square test. From the above results we can reject our Null hypothesis on the basis of P-Value (0.000) as it is less than level of significance i.e. 0.05. Null hypothesis can also be rejected through test statistics (1088.710) because it is greater than tabulated value i.e.920.748. Therefore, we can reject the null hypothesis at the 0.05 significance level. Hence, we can conclude that both cultural integration and social support of migrated students were strongly associated.

Discussion:

An investigation on the importance of social support to acculturation experience of the internal migrant students at the University of Sargodha was explored in the current study. The results match a number of already emerging bodies of literature that emphasize the importance of social support in mediating cultural adaptation, emotional adjustment and social integration within the migrant student populations. The positive relationship between the support systems and acculturation outcomes was supported by the fact that a significant percentage of the participants stated they felt confident in achieving their goal of communicating, adapting to new cultural ways, and establishing interpersonal relationship.

This paper supports the claim of Oppedal and Ids (2015) that social support does not only reduce psychological distress conditions like depression, but it also improves cultural acceptability levels of adapting in new places. In line with Bertram et al. (2014), the evidence shows that emotional and informational support plays a crucial role when it comes to decreasing acculturative stress as well as fostering adaptation. Migrating students who perceived to have greater support received by peers, teachers or host communities had increased rate of social activities, a sense of familiarity and acceptance of local norms and practices. It confirms the findings of the previous studies (Ting Kin Ng et al., 2020), which also found that host friendships are critical to enhancing social adaptation among students.

Moreover, the present research is similar to that of Bozdağ (2020) that identified such a significant factor of cultural orientation of migrant students in Turkey as the quality of social contact and family support. Similarly, those institution and peer network-supported with both, specific and emotional support in the given study, expressed enhanced integration percentage and diminished social separation among the students that had another residential location. Additionally, the study conducted by Pinamang et al. (2021) proves the idea that the support of several sources, such as academic institutions, has a positive impact in reducing stress symptoms and enhancing psychological adjustment of foreign students, which was also the case in the present study.

Even though earlier reports like the one by Kaczmarek et al. (1994) and Lewthwaite (1997) found a need to focus on the challenges that students undergo to adapt to new academic and cultural environments, the current findings give an indication that these challenges can develop support through effective support systems. Although a certain number of participants were either neutral or faced challenges in their full adaptation especially in the dietary habits, academic pressure, and trust-building, this diversity is complementary to the complexity of the acculturation process as highlighted in the bidimensional model by Berry (2005).

In general, the study asserts that acculturation is not a one-way model. It depends largely on social and emotional support framework, which can be offered to students. In such a way, the institutions need to be particularly active to create culturally responsive support offers to lift academic performance and social integration of the students.

Conclusion:

The present study identifies the role of social support in acculturation process. The study focuses on the level of social support of migrated students into the host culture and the level of cultural integration of those students and the relationship between social support, cultural assimilation. The findings revealed that experiencing social support constitutes higher level of integration among migrated students. Social support not only affects their integration process but also have positive effects on their overall well-being. It also identifies these types of social support i.e. emotional, informational; companionship and tangible support directly affects a person integration level into the host culture. Social support from these sources positively plays a significant role in the process

of acculturation. Through these acculturations process their clothing styles change according to the host culture. Also, their eating habits change according to the environment in which they are living and they engage in social activities of the host culture. These things from the host culture enhances their overall acculturation process and it positively effects on their identity. However, if these students not receive social support from the sources they will engage in acculturative stress and it definitely affects their well-being. Overall, the study shed light on the importance of social support of other province students and their integration process into the host culture. The relationship of social support and integration process should be so encouraging that it shapes their overall identity into the host culture. The results of this study add to previous research that higher social support increases integration process of migrated students.

Recommendations:

- For a better understanding of acculturation and its relationship with the social support, there is a need for additional research work on the family involvement in the acculturation process. In this family-oriented sessions can involve to inform them about their children academic and social success.
- The future studies are required for a better understanding of the issues and challenges faced by migrated students when they entering in the new environment. Research on this topic is crucial in the 21st century as mentioned by (Berry, 1997; Cohen, 2004) because migration trends continue to rise in today global world.
- There is a need for future studies to further investigate the long-term effects of social support.

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