

Impact of Cultural Adaptation on the Academic and Behavioural Outcomes of Overseas Students from Kanniyakumari District of Tamil Nadu

Sreeshna V. S ^{1*}, Dr. D.G.M. Victoria ²

^{1*} Research Scholar (Reg.No. 23113151032003), P.G. Department of Economics and Research centre, S.T. Hindu College, Nagercoil, Kanniyakumari-629002 - Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu, India.

² Assistant Professor, P.G. Department of Economics and Research centre, S.T. Hindu College, Nagercoil, Kanniyakumari-629002 - Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu, India.

^{1*} Corresponding author: sreeshnavs1999@gmail.com

Abstract

The increasing mobility of students across international borders has drawn attention to the challenges associated with cultural adjustment in host academic environments. Cultural adaptation is considered a critical factor influencing students' academic performance and behavioural engagement. This study examines the impact of cultural adaptation on academic outcomes and behavioural adjustment among overseas students. A survey was conducted among 75 international students using a structured questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, correlation, and regression techniques. The findings reveal a significant positive relationship between cultural adaptation and both academic outcomes and behavioural adjustment. Students who demonstrated higher levels of cultural adaptation reported better academic performance and more constructive behavioural engagement within their institutions. The study underscores the importance of institutional initiatives, such as orientation programs and intercultural support systems, in facilitating effective student adjustment. The findings contribute to the literature on international student mobility and provide practical implications for higher education institutions seeking to enhance student integration and academic success.

Keywords: Cultural Adaptation, Academic Outcomes, Behavioural Adjustment, Overseas Students, International Education, Higher Education.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of international student mobility has transformed the landscape of higher education worldwide. Universities across developed and emerging economies are witnessing a steady rise in the enrolment of overseas students seeking academic advancement, global exposure, and improved career opportunities. While cross-border education offers substantial academic and professional benefits, it also presents significant challenges related to adjustment within unfamiliar cultural and institutional environments. Among these challenges, cultural adaptation has emerged as a central factor influencing students' overall educational experience. Cultural adaptation refers to the process through which individuals adjust to new

social norms, communication patterns, academic expectations, and institutional structures in a host country. For overseas students, adaptation extends beyond linguistic competence and involves navigating different teaching methodologies, classroom participation norms, assessment systems, and peer interactions. Successful adaptation enables students to engage effectively in academic activities, whereas difficulties in adaptation may hinder performance and participation within the educational setting.

Higher education institutions often assume that academic preparedness alone determines student success. However, research increasingly suggests that adaptation to the host culture and institutional environment plays a critical role in shaping academic outcomes. Students who adapt effectively are more likely to participate actively in class discussions, collaborate with peers, understand instructional styles, and meet academic expectations. Conversely, inadequate cultural adjustment may result in disengagement, limited classroom interaction, and reduced academic performance. The theoretical grounding for understanding this relationship can be traced to Student Integration Theory, which emphasizes that academic success depends not only on cognitive ability but also on students' integration into the social and academic systems of the institution. According to this perspective, integration into academic norms and social networks enhances commitment, engagement, and persistence. Cultural adaptation functions as a foundational mechanism that facilitates such integration, particularly for students navigating a foreign educational context.

In addition to academic performance, behavioural adjustment within the classroom and institutional environment is equally important. Behavioural adjustment includes participation in academic discussions, adherence to institutional norms, collaboration with peers, and engagement in campus activities. Overseas students who experience cultural difficulties may hesitate to interact, avoid participation, or struggle with institutional expectations. Therefore, examining behavioural outcomes alongside academic performance provides a more comprehensive understanding of student adjustment. Despite the growing body of literature on international student mobility, empirical research examining the direct relationship between cultural adaptation and both academic and behavioural outcomes remains limited, particularly in small-sample institutional contexts. Many studies focus either on psychological well-being or on general adjustment, while fewer studies quantitatively assess how adaptation translates into measurable academic and behavioural indicators. This gap underscores the need for focused empirical analysis within specific educational settings.

The present study seeks to address this gap by examining the impact of cultural adaptation on academic outcomes and behavioural adjustment among overseas students. By employing a structured survey and quantitative analysis, the study evaluates whether higher levels of cultural adaptation significantly predict improved academic performance and positive behavioural engagement within higher education institutions. The findings aim to contribute to the literature on international student adjustment while offering practical implications for institutional support mechanisms designed to enhance student integration. Understanding this relationship is particularly relevant for universities that increasingly depend on international enrollment for academic diversity and financial sustainability. Effective institutional strategies,

such as orientation programs, intercultural training, mentoring systems, and academic support services can strengthen adaptation processes and improve student outcomes. Therefore, identifying the extent to which cultural adaptation influences academic and behavioural performance holds both theoretical and policy relevance. Hence, this study positions cultural adaptation as a key determinant of student success within cross-border higher education. By analysing its impact on academic and behavioural outcomes, the research provides empirical insight into the mechanisms that facilitate effective integration and performance among overseas students.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To assess the level of cultural adaptation among overseas students and its effect on their academic performance.
2. To investigate the relationship between cultural adaptation and behavioural adjustment within higher education institutions.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The growing mobility of international students has attracted considerable academic attention over the past three decades. Early theoretical contributions by *Berry (1997)* introduced the concept of acculturation, explaining how individuals adjust to new cultural environments through processes such as integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalisation. Berry's framework laid the foundation for understanding how adaptation influences individuals' functioning within host societies, including educational settings.

In the context of higher education, *Tinto (1993)* proposed the Student Integration Theory, which emphasised that academic success is strongly influenced by students' integration into both academic and social systems of institutions. Tinto argued that students who actively engage in academic activities and social networks are more likely to persist and perform well. This theoretical perspective has been widely applied in studies examining international students' adjustment experiences.

Empirical research has further explored the relationship between cultural adjustment and academic performance. *Ward and Kennedy (1999)* distinguished between psychological adjustment and sociocultural adaptation, highlighting that sociocultural competence significantly predicts successful functioning in academic and social domains. Their findings suggested that students who adapt effectively to social norms and communication patterns demonstrate better academic engagement.

Similarly, *Andrade (2006)* examined international students in the United States and reported that language proficiency and familiarity with academic expectations were key determinants of academic success. The study emphasised that institutional support mechanisms, such as orientation programmes and mentoring, facilitate smoother adaptation and improved performance outcomes.

Smith and Khawaja (2011) conducted a comprehensive review of international student adjustment and identified language barriers, academic differences, and social integration as major challenges affecting academic achievement. Their findings reinforced the importance of structured institutional support in enhancing adaptation and academic engagement.

Further research by *Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping, and Todman (2008)* analysed cross-cultural adjustment among international students and found that social interaction and cultural learning significantly influenced students' academic and behavioural outcomes. The study highlighted that adaptation is not limited to psychological comfort but extends to active participation within academic environments.

More recent studies have quantitatively assessed the impact of adaptation on measurable educational outcomes. For instance, *Glass and Westmont (2014)* found that international students who reported stronger cultural engagement and campus involvement demonstrated higher academic satisfaction and improved classroom participation. Their findings suggest that adaptation enhances both cognitive and behavioural dimensions of student success.

Despite the substantial literature on international student adjustment, many studies have either focused predominantly on psychological well-being or provided qualitative insights into student experiences. There remains limited quantitative research examining cultural adaptation as a direct predictor of both academic outcomes and behavioural adjustment within a unified analytical framework, particularly in smaller institutional samples.

The present study builds upon the theoretical foundations of *Berry (1997)* and *Tinto (1993)* while extending empirical work by examining how cultural adaptation quantitatively influences academic performance and behavioural engagement among overseas students. By integrating adaptation with measurable academic and behavioural indicators, the study contributes to the ongoing discourse on international student integration within higher education institutions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a quantitative research design to examine the impact of cultural adaptation on academic outcomes and behavioural adjustment among overseas students. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 75 respondents enrolled in higher education institutions abroad from Kanniyakumari District of Tamil Nadu. The instrument comprised 20 items measuring cultural adaptation (10 items), academic outcomes (5 items), and behavioural adjustment (5 items), using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Convenience sampling was employed due to accessibility considerations, and participation was voluntary and confidential.

Data were analysed using SPSS. Composite scores for each construct were computed by taking the mean of respective items. Reliability of the scales was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha to ensure internal consistency. Descriptive statistics were used to examine central

tendencies and variability, followed by Pearson correlation and linear regression analysis to determine the extent to which cultural adaptation predicts academic and behavioural outcomes. The statistical techniques were selected to quantitatively assess the strength and significance of relationships among the study variables.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The rapid growth of international student mobility has created diverse academic environments within higher education institutions across the world. While studying abroad offers significant academic and professional opportunities, overseas students often face challenges in adjusting to unfamiliar cultural, academic, and institutional contexts. Differences in language, teaching methods, classroom participation norms, and social interaction patterns can affect students' ability to integrate effectively into the host academic environment. Inadequate cultural adaptation may influence students' academic performance as well as their behavioural engagement within institutions. Although previous studies have examined international student adjustment, many have focused primarily on psychological well-being or general cultural experiences rather than quantitatively analysing how cultural adaptation directly affects academic outcomes and behavioural adjustment. Therefore, there is a need to empirically examine the extent to which cultural adaptation influences students' academic performance and behavioural engagement in the context of overseas higher education. Addressing this issue can provide valuable insights for educational institutions seeking to improve support systems and promote effective integration of international students.

TESTING OF HYPOTHESES

To examine the impact of cultural adaptation on academic outcomes and behavioural adjustment, the following hypotheses were tested using linear regression analysis.

H1: Cultural adaptation significantly influences academic outcomes among overseas students.

H2: Cultural adaptation significantly influences behavioural adjustment among overseas students.

The results of regression analysis are presented below.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Gender</i>	Male	40	53.3
	Female	35	46.7

10.48047/jocaaa.2024.33.08.447

Level of study	UG	25	33.3
	PG	43	57.3
	Ph. D	7	9.4
Duration of stay	< 1 Year	6	8
	1 – 3 Year	57	76
	> 3 Year	12	16

Source: Primary Data

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The sample consists of 75 overseas students, with a slightly higher proportion of males, say, 53.3 percent compared to females, that is, 46.7 percent. In terms of level of study, most respondents are postgraduate students which is about 57.3 percent, followed by undergraduate students, say, 33.3 percent, while doctoral students constitute a smaller share which is 9.4 percent. Regarding duration of stay in the host country, a substantial count of 76 percent has been residing abroad for one to three years, indicating moderate exposure to the host academic and cultural environment. A smaller proportion of respondents have stayed for less than one year which is about 8 percent and 16 percent of respondents resided for more than three years. The distribution suggests that most students have had adequate time to experience and adapt to the host educational setting, which is relevant for examining the relationship between cultural adaptation and academic as well as behavioural outcomes.

Table 2 Reliability Statistics

Variable	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Cultural Adaptation	10	0.82
Academic Outcomes	5	0.79
Behavioural Adjustment	5	0.76

Source: Computed SPSS output

Table 2 presents the reliability analysis of the study variables using Cronbach's Alpha. The results indicate that the Cultural Adaptation scale, consisting of 10 items, demonstrates good internal consistency with an alpha value of 0.82. The Academic Outcomes construct, measured using 5 items, records a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.79, indicating satisfactory reliability. Similarly, Behavioural Adjustment, also measured through 5 items, shows an alpha value of 0.76, reflecting acceptable internal consistency. Since all Cronbach's Alpha values exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, the measurement scales are considered reliable and suitable for further statistical analysis, including correlation and regression testing. The results confirm that the items within each construct consistently measure the intended underlying concept.

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>
Cultural Adaptation	3.82	0.64	2.10	4.90
Academic Outcomes	3.70	0.58	2.20	4.80
Behavioural Adjustment	3.65	0.61	2.00	4.75

Source: Computed SPSS Data

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics of the study variables. The mean score for Cultural Adaptation is 3.82 with a standard deviation of 0.64, indicating that, on average, respondents demonstrate a relatively high level of adaptation to the host academic and cultural environment. The minimum and maximum values suggest a reasonable spread of responses, reflecting variation in adaptation levels among students. Academic Outcomes record a mean value of 3.70 and a standard deviation of 0.58, indicating a moderate to high level of perceived academic performance and satisfaction among respondents. The observed range from 2.20 to 4.80 shows that while most students report positive academic experiences, some variability exists across the sample.

Similarly, Behavioural Adjustment shows a mean score of 3.65 with a standard deviation of 0.61, suggesting that students generally exhibit constructive behavioural engagement within the academic setting. The range of scores (2.00 to 4.75) further indicates diversity in behavioural responses, supporting the suitability of the data for further inferential analysis. Overall, the descriptive statistics reveal adequate variability across all variables, justifying subsequent correlation and regression analysis.

Table 4 Correlation Analysis

Variables	1	2	3
Cultural Adaptation	1		
Academic Outcomes	0.62	1	
Behavioural Adjustment	0.55	0.60	1

Source: Computed SPSS Data

The correlation matrix presents the relationships among Cultural Adaptation, Academic Outcomes, and Behavioural Adjustment. The results indicate a strong positive relationship between Cultural Adaptation and Academic Outcomes ($r = 0.62$), suggesting that students who exhibit higher levels of cultural adaptation tend to report better academic performance and satisfaction. Similarly, Cultural Adaptation shows a moderate positive relationship with Behavioural Adjustment ($r = 0.55$), indicating that students who adapt effectively to the host academic and cultural environment are more likely to demonstrate positive behavioural engagement within the institution. Furthermore, Academic Outcomes and Behavioural Adjustment are also positively correlated ($r = 0.60$), implying that students who perform well academically tend to display constructive behavioural participation in academic settings.

Overall, the correlation results suggest that cultural adaptation is positively associated with both academic and behavioural outcomes. The moderate to strong correlation values indicate meaningful relationships among the variables, thereby justifying further regression analysis to examine predictive effects.

Table 5 Regression Analysis on Academic Outcome

Predictor	Beta	t-value	Sig. (p)
Cultural Adaptation	0.62	6.45	0.000

Model Summary

R	R²	Adjusted R²	F	Sig.
0.62	0.38	0.37	41.60	0.000

Source: Computed SPSS Data

Table 5 presents the results of the linear regression analysis examining the effect of Cultural Adaptation on Academic Outcomes. The findings indicate that Cultural Adaptation has a positive and statistically significant impact on Academic Outcomes ($\beta = 0.62$, $p < 0.001$). The positive beta coefficient suggests that higher levels of cultural adaptation are associated with higher academic performance and satisfaction among overseas students. The t-value of 6.45 further confirms that the predictor is statistically significant.

The model summary shows a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.62, indicating a strong positive relationship between the predictor and the dependent variable. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.38$) reveals that Cultural Adaptation explains 38 percent of the variation in Academic Outcomes. The adjusted R^2 value of 0.37 indicates that the model maintains strong explanatory power even after adjusting for sample size. The F-statistic ($F = 41.60$, $p < 0.001$) confirms that the overall regression model is statistically significant. Thus, these *results support the hypothesis that cultural adaptation significantly influences academic outcomes among overseas students.*

Table 6 Regression Analysis on Behavioural Adjustment

Predictor	Beta	t-value	Sig. (p)
Cultural Adaptation	0.55	5.30	0.000

Model Summary

R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	F	Sig.
0.55	0.30	0.29	28.10	0.000

Source: Computed SPSS Data

Table 6 presents the results of the regression analysis examining the effect of Cultural Adaptation on Behavioural Adjustment. The findings reveal that Cultural Adaptation has a positive and statistically significant impact on Behavioural Adjustment ($\beta = 0.55$, $p < 0.001$). The positive beta coefficient indicates that higher levels of cultural adaptation are associated with improved behavioural engagement among overseas students. The t-value of 5.30 further confirms that the predictor is statistically significant.

The model summary shows a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.55, indicating a moderate positive relationship between Cultural Adaptation and Behavioural Adjustment. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.30$) suggests that Cultural Adaptation explains 30 percent of the variance in Behavioural Adjustment. The adjusted R^2 value of 0.29 indicates that the

explanatory power of the model remains stable after adjusting for sample size. The F-statistic ($F = 28.10$, $p < 0.001$) confirms that the overall regression model is statistically significant. Therefore, the *results support the hypothesis that cultural adaptation significantly influences behavioural adjustment among overseas students.*

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The present study examined the impact of cultural adaptation on academic outcomes and behavioural adjustment among overseas students. The findings provide empirical evidence that cultural adaptation plays a significant role in shaping students' academic performance and behavioural engagement within host institutions. The demographic profile indicates that the majority of respondents were postgraduate students who had stayed in the host country for one to three years. This duration suggests that most participants had sufficient exposure to the academic and cultural environment, allowing for meaningful assessment of adaptation levels. The relatively balanced gender distribution further supports the representativeness of the sample.

The reliability analysis confirmed that the measurement scales used in the study demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency. All constructs recorded Cronbach's Alpha values above the acceptable threshold, indicating that the items consistently measured their respective underlying concepts. This strengthens the validity of the subsequent inferential analysis. Descriptive statistics revealed that respondents reported moderately high levels of cultural adaptation, academic outcomes, and behavioural adjustment. The observed variation in responses suggests that although most students experience positive adjustment, differences exist in the degree of adaptation and engagement. This variability justified further correlation and regression analysis.

The correlation analysis demonstrated positive associations among all three variables. Cultural adaptation was strongly related to academic outcomes and moderately related to behavioural adjustment. Additionally, academic outcomes and behavioural adjustment were positively interrelated, suggesting that academic success and constructive behavioural participation reinforce one another within the higher education context. The regression results provide stronger evidence of the predictive role of cultural adaptation. Cultural adaptation significantly influenced academic outcomes, explaining a substantial proportion of the variance. This finding implies that students who effectively adapt to the host academic system, communication patterns, and institutional norms are more likely to achieve better academic performance and satisfaction. Furthermore, cultural adaptation was found to significantly predict behavioural adjustment, indicating that adapted students tend to participate more actively in classroom activities and engage constructively within the institutional environment.

Overall, the findings highlight cultural adaptation as a critical determinant of both academic success and behavioural engagement among overseas students. The results align with integration-based perspectives in higher education, which emphasise the importance of institutional and social adjustment in promoting student achievement. The study underscores

the need for higher education institutions to implement structured support mechanisms, such as orientation programmes and intercultural engagement initiatives, to facilitate smoother adaptation and enhance overall student outcomes.

SUGGESTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Based on the findings that cultural adaptation significantly influences both academic outcomes and behavioural adjustment among overseas students, the following suggestions are proposed:

➤ *Strengthening Orientation Programmes*

Higher education institutions should implement comprehensive orientation programmes for overseas students upon arrival. These programmes should focus on academic expectations, assessment patterns, classroom participation norms, and institutional policies. Early exposure to academic culture can facilitate smoother adaptation and improve academic performance.

➤ *Language and Communication Support*

Institutions should provide structured language assistance and communication workshops to enhance students' academic interaction skills. Since adaptation is closely linked to engagement and participation, improving language competence can significantly contribute to both academic and behavioural outcomes.

➤ *Mentorship and Peer Support Systems*

Universities may establish mentoring systems where senior students or faculty members guide newly enrolled overseas students. Peer support networks can help students navigate academic challenges and social integration more effectively.

➤ *Intercultural Engagement Activities*

Organising intercultural events, academic discussion forums, and collaborative group activities can enhance students' exposure to diverse cultural perspectives. Such initiatives promote social integration, which in turn strengthens behavioural engagement within academic settings.

➤ *Continuous Academic Monitoring*

Institutions should periodically assess the adaptation levels of overseas students through feedback mechanisms and counselling support. Early identification of adjustment difficulties can prevent academic underperformance and disengagement.

➤ *Policy-Level Interventions*

At the policy level, educational authorities should encourage universities to develop structured international student support frameworks that integrate academic guidance, cultural orientation, and behavioural engagement strategies.

CONCLUSION

The present study examined the impact of cultural adaptation on academic outcomes and behavioural adjustment among overseas students. The findings provide clear empirical evidence that cultural adaptation plays a significant role in shaping students' academic performance and behavioural engagement within host institutions. Students who demonstrated higher levels of adaptation to academic norms, communication patterns, and institutional expectations reported better academic outcomes and more constructive behavioural participation. The results highlight that adaptation is not merely a social adjustment process but a critical determinant of educational success. The positive and significant relationships identified through correlation and regression analysis confirm that cultural adaptation meaningfully contributes to both academic achievement and behavioural engagement. These findings reinforce the importance of institutional integration in promoting student success within international higher education contexts. Overall, the study underscores the need for higher education institutions to prioritise structured support systems that facilitate cultural and academic adjustment among overseas students. By strengthening adaptation mechanisms, institutions can enhance not only students' academic performance but also their overall engagement and participation within the educational environment. The study contributes to the growing discourse on international student mobility by providing quantitative evidence on the role of cultural adaptation in influencing key educational outcomes.

References

- Glass, C. R., Gómez, E., & Urzua, A. (2021). Recreation, intercultural friendship, and international students' adaptation to college by region of origin. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 82, 136–148.
- Marginson, S. (2014). Student self-formation in international education. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 18(1), 6–22.
- Glass, C. R., & Westmont, C. M. (2014). Comparative effects of belonging and engagement on academic outcomes of international students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 55(4), 391–406.
- Smith, R. A., & Khawaja, N. G. (2011). A review of the acculturation experiences of international students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35(6), 699–713.
- Yeh, C. J., & Inose, M. (2003). International students' reported English fluency, social support satisfaction, and social connectedness as predictors of acculturative stress. *Counseling Psychology Quarterly*, 16(1), 15–28.
- Zhou, Y., Jindal-Snape, D., Topping, K., & Todman, J. (2008). Theoretical models of culture shock and adaptation in international students in higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 33(1), 63–75.
- Andrade, M. S. (2006). International students in English-speaking universities: Adjustment factors. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 5(2), 131–154.

Ward, C., & Kennedy, A. (1999). The measurement of sociocultural adaptation. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 23(4), 659–677.

Berry, J. W. (1997). Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 46(1), 5–34.

Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition* (2nd ed.). University of Chicago Press.