

ACADEMIC CULTURE SHOCK AND THE INTEGRATION OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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Abstract

Globalisation and international mobility have transformed the academic environment, with universities hosting an increasing number of international students. Culture shock is therefore becoming an increasingly critical issue, linked to the need for an inclusive and supportive environment for students from diverse cultural backgrounds. This research focuses on students at the University of Ljubljana and examines psychological challenges, language barriers, social interactions, and the impact of the physical environment on the individual. The aim is to identify factors for successful adjustment and to develop recommendations for improving institutional support and social integration. Qualitative analysis of surveys and interviews identified key barriers such as difficulties in making contact, often due to language differences and different communication practices. The physical environment, including accessibility, safety, and natural surroundings, has a significant impact on student well-being. Culture shock manifests itself as a complex process involving initial excitement, frustration, adjustment, and integration. Feelings of isolation and homesickness emerge, which can be mitigated by appropriate institutional measures.

Proactive support, such as mentoring programmes, Erasmus Social Network (ESN) events and language assistance, makes a significant contribution to better integration. Cultural similarities and the use of English facilitate integration, but the language gap in Slovenian remains a challenge for some. The research highlights the need for long-term strategies that address culture shock not only as a challenge but also as an opportunity for personal growth and intercultural learning. Effective institutional support is crucial for the success of international students in an unfamiliar environment.

Keywords: academic culture shock, international mobility, academic performance, social integration, University of Ljubljana.

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