



SOCIAL ADAPTATION STRATEGIES AND INCLUSION INITIATIVES FOR FOREIGN STUDENTS OF BATANGAS STATE UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Socio-cultural immersion is an integral part of every student's learning. Integration to unfamiliar community is crucial particularly for students who choose to study overseas. The researchers employed a qualitative research approach. Descriptive and phenomenological research designs were used to observe the behavior of participants and semi-structured interview to narrate the respondents' lived-experiences. Findings revealed that the foreign students of Batangas State University experience socialization positively and negatively. The social challenges encountered by foreign students in terms of academic performance are language barriers, medium of instructions, and communication and collaboration towards academic inclination. There is also a rising problem in terms of socialization in relation to language preferences, common norms, and values attributed to foreign and local students. In terms of adaptation to Filipino culture, foreign students are challenged in understanding cultural diversities, hence, adapting to cultural preferences. Hence, the implementation of inclusion initiatives and adaptation strategies for foreign students was recommended including Include Me Now Project, Foreign Students Caravan, Universal Language for students of Batangas State University, #WeAcceptasOne – Project, and the WeSite website portal platform

Keywords: Foreign students, social adaptation, inclusion initiatives, and Filipino Culture

INTRODUCTION

Social adaptation is the adjustment of individual and group behavior to conform to the prevailing systems of norms and values in a given society, class or social group. It is also occurring in the process of socialization and also with the aid of mechanisms of social control, including social pressure and state regulation. It becomes increasingly significant when social change affects important aspects of life over a comparatively short period of time. Social adaptation strategies arise from social experiences of foreign students who tends to adapt with the occurring experiences in daily lives. According to the reports of international

organizations such as the World Bank, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation (OECD) as cited by Snoubar (2015), while the number of students studying in the world was around 20 million in 1985, 26 million in 1990, increased to 38 million and has increased rapidly since 1995, exceeding 85 million in 2001. This figure is estimated to exceed 100 million today, and in 2020 it is expected to reach 200 million.

Batangas State University (BatStateU) is a state university found in Southern Luzon under the Province of Batangas in the Philippines. It has ten campuses in Batangas -two main, two satellites

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Social Adaptation Strategies and Inclusion Indicatives for Foreign Students of Batangas State University, pp.75 -83



and six extension campuses. According to Dimaano et al. (2017), Batangas State University is recognized as one of the country's best performing schools in the Philippines most especially in the field of Mechanical and Electrical Engineering. This fact creates more opportunities for foreign students to enroll and nurture globally competitive skills.

Foreign students in both Main Campus I and II have been prevalent in the recent years. Given the fact that these foreign students came from different countries and with different nationalities, languages, and cultural background, they are obligated to adapt in the present living conditions, culture, academic system and values relevant to the place they belong to. From these adaptation process, they tend to experience different social experiences in the community and encounter a lot of challenges both in school and outside the school environment. According to Kornienko et al. (2016), when international students travel from their home country, they can face several problems with adjusting and adapting to the new culture. adaptation and adjustment problems may take several forms including physical, psychological and sociocultural issues. Moreover, Deem et al. (2008), as cited by Lumby J. and Foskett (2015) argued that the notion that it is common values that unite the global academic community implies that there is a universal set of perspectives that a university must possess.

Wu et. al. (2015) proved in their study that many foreign students face difficulties when pursuing higher education in countries other than their own. They face challenges such as unfamiliar food, unfamiliar living conditions, financial issues, juggling work, researching schedules, learning styles, and any difficulties related to language, culture, and personal barriers. A series of transitional difficulties from everyday life to cultural adaptation may occur. In addition, Baklashova and Kazakov (2016) shared those foreign students often face a series of transitional difficulties shortly after arriving in their foreign country and university to study. The concerns are categorized into academic, social, and cultural categories. In addition, students use tools offered primarily by the university to address these issues. Thus, adaptation strategies for culture and

communication is often given as support and aid by universities to help foreign students to overcome the challenges they face during they stay at the country and university they choose to study.

And this is where the real problem rises, knowing the fact that foreign students have social experiences like this, it must be the host institution's responsibility to come up with social adaptation strategies in order to assess certain challenges that every foreign student encounter. Also, these social challenges faced by foreign students revolve in academic performance, socialization and adaptation to Filipino culture. Furthermore, it can be a suggested course of action by providing inclusion initiatives and adaptation strategies for foreign students to strategize, familiarize and adapt with the new environment. This can be a big help for foreign students to determine and assess the social challenges to be properly addressed in the best manner possible.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study generally aimed to determine the social experiences and challenges faced by the foreign students in Batangas State University and proposed social adaptation strategies and inclusion initiatives for foreign students. Specifically, this sought to achieve the following objectives:

1. Describe the social experiences of foreign students.
2. Determine the social challenges of foreign students in terms of
 - 2.1 Academic performance;
 - 2.2 Socialization; and
 - 2.3 Adaptation to Filipino culture.
3. Propose inclusion initiatives and social adaptation strategies for foreign students of Batangas State University.

METHODOLOGY

The researchers used Descriptive and Phenomenological Research Design. Descriptive



research design seeks to describe the characteristics or behavior of an audience; it is not usually grounded on statistics but leans towards more qualitative methods. On the other hand, Phenomenological Research Design enables to explore experience and sensory perceptions of research phenomenon, and the formation of understanding and analyzations based on these experiences and perceptions. Participants of this study were fifteen (15) foreign students of Batangas State University, Main Campus I and II. Since the researchers needed to study a phenomenon; a timely event; shared characteristics; and perceptions, Purposive Sampling was used to select the participants. A semi-structured interview with guide questions was the main data gathering instrument in this study.

The research presented in this paper was carried out according to the following steps:

The researchers first sent written proposals and necessary documents to the Dean, Adviser, and other Offices of the University who are professionals in the field. After having the approval, the researchers started gathering their 15 participants using the Purposive Sampling Technique. Chosen participants were informed about the topic of the study and were given a consent letter to be signed by them as a certification to participate in the study. Then the researchers started arranging the schedules for the questioning and interviews according to the schedules of their participants. The researchers adjusted conditional on the time wanted by their participants. The day before the Interview, the researchers notified the interviewee about the topic and the objective of the study but not the exact questions on the interview guide for the researchers to obtain more natural and intuitive answers. The interview was also recorded. The researchers transcribed all recorded interviews verbatim. They collected all significant variables mentioned by the participants and used this to construct analysis and interpretations which helped them identify the social adaptation, experiences, and inclusion initiatives of foreign students in Batangas State University.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on the data obtained, the following are the findings of this study.

1. Social Experience of Foreign Students

The researchers observed the presence of foreign students studying in the university and the researchers explored and determined the social experience of foreign students, how they adapt to daily living given the fact that they are away from home and family. As described by the participants, the stay in Batangas State University is "Nice". With regard to the general facilities of the university, though they admit that they have seen improvements, the university should be open to more technological advancement. On the other hand, the people of the university - the teaching and non-teaching staff, are dedicated to making the stay of the foreign students remarkable. The over-all stay of the respondents in the country and the university gave the best experiences, both positive and negative.

It was found out that the foreign students have positive and negative experiences in the country and in the university and that they face challenges related to academics, socialization, and cultural adaptation. This supports the article of Teasley (2011), which stated that living in a new culture can be jarring and very difficult to process, especially if it is drastically different from one's own perspective.

The research participants also shared that Filipinos have good attitude towards foreign students. In the study of Dr. Prem (2015), it stressed that a positive attitude helps someone cope more easily with the daily affairs of life. It brings optimism into one's life and makes it easier to avoid worries and negative thinking. Hence, foreign students at Batangas State University engage in school activities whenever they feel welcome. One of the participants said "*I engage in school activities whenever I feel encouraged and welcomed by my peers and classmates.*" In a positive outlook, socialization and adaptation may progress if situations like this will continue to establish the idea that trust may open new opportunities in building new relationships with



Batangas State University's community and in enhancing academic and life skills as well. This result is related to the study of Snoubar (2015), which found out that international students have used other ways at lower rates such as participating in activities, going to artistic places, making friends of the opposite sex, and reading books relating to the host country's culture. These findings are connected with the findings of Tinto (1998) as cited by Almurideef (2016). The central idea of "integration" is strongly predicted by international students' degree of academic integration, and social integration to institutions. This integration requires participating in the student culture, both within and outside the immediate context of the learning environment or inside or outside the classroom. This proves that social adaptation and integration are results of an open and engaged relationship of foreign students and local students in the university.

Stress and pressure were revealed as another theme revealed in this study regarding the social experience of foreign students. The participants emphasized that stress and pressure are factors for becoming uncomfortable, not just emotionally but also physically. This relates to the study of Robinson M.D. (2017), which stated that stress is any change in the environment that requires one's body to react and adjust in response. The body reacts to these changes with physical, mental, and emotional responses. With that being said, foreign students' stress and pressure can greatly affect both social adaptation and academic performance. Given the psychological problems evident in facing challenges brought in by studying overseas, the foreign students' psychological stress strongly linked to socio-cultural distance. This implies that positive approaches are needed to promote psychological and social-cultural change in the academic setting (Bastien, 2011).

Likewise, it was found out that foreign students were having difficulty in cultural adaptation due to language barriers which also appeared as an emerging theme of the study. The foreign students of BatStateU seemed to be experiencing challenges in communicating due to language barriers. With this challenge, foreign students' communication is limited which resulted to miscommunication or even lessened

communication interaction. Okusolubo (2018) asserted that when students from different diverse cultures are grouped together in a foreign country like America with cultural customs and traditions different from their own, communication challenges are bound to emerge. Communication challenges, if not well addressed, may result to lack of stable social relationships, communal withdrawal, and poor academic performance, as the case of overseas education is highly important.

2. Social Challenges of Foreign Students

The presence of foreign students in Batangas State University sparked the curiosity of the researchers to identify social experiences of the foreign students in the university. Digging deeper to its context, social challenges of foreign students were also explored. Moreover, the study aimed to identify and describe and social challenges faced by foreign students and propose in the latter inclusion initiatives and adaptation strategies that would help foreign students to adapt, solve, strategize or at least ease the effects of the described and identified challenges.

2.1 Academic Performance. Academic performance is one of the social challenges being faced by foreign students in a way that they continuously adapt to new academic styles and strategies in the Philippines and in Batangas State University in particular.

Based on the interview conducted, foreign students often encountered challenges in academic performance composed of language barriers, classroom collaboration, and difficulty in catching up with lessons. Foreign students were able to follow and understand lessons in classes. With regard to academic participation in different classes, collaboration is at hand and communication with classmates in the class is evident. According to one of the participants, his classmates are very nice saying "They are nice. I'll call them nice... very, very nice!" This affirms that students and classmates of foreign students in the university are cooperative and kind towards them. On a contrary, another participant said that "Sometimes, Filipinos are not friendly." This was a personal connotation of his experience from his



classmates when he was not able to acquire an important information regarding the examination. Communication has been a major challenge to foreign students because some Filipino students are not initiating and do not want to talk with them.

The teaching in the university is described as “*remarkable*” according to another respondent. Though, he admitted saying that “*Sometimes, I need to do some extra works in my dorm so I will be able to catch up with my Filipino classmates because they understand the subject better. Most of the time, the subjects will cover 60% English language and 40% Filipino language, which I cannot understand.*” While the university implemented an English-speaking campaign across the university, foreign students were still experiencing language barriers that limit them in participating and understanding respective lessons. By this given situation, foreign students are exerting more effort to understand the lessons and even sacrificing time just to learn and adapt the Filipino language for the sake of academic performance and compliance. This supports the study of Sicat (2011), which asserted that medium of instructions really affect the foreign students’ academic performance.

All the respondents agreed that they also experience stress and pressure regarding academic performance. At some point, they all have the realization that these stress and pressure are vital for them to become better version of themselves as a preparation for the future and professional career.

2.2 Socialization. Socialization had always been a part of adaptation. With the present socialization challenges encountered by foreign students, the interview conducted by the researchers found out that language, culture, values, and attitudes are the commonly encountered challenges in terms of socialization of foreign students in Batangas State University.

Based on the interview conducted, one participant shared that “*Sometimes, Filipinos are not so friendly and they’re not so easy to be with.*” This happened when one of his classmates did not inform him regarding the change of classroom assignment for examination. “*There was no one who informed me about such change.*” In his

experience, he admitted that it is not the only time that he experienced such thing. Giving him his generalization that “*Filipinos are not so easy to be with*”.

With regard to daily communication, foreign students have already learned some of the basic Filipino language of which are “*maganda (beautiful), guwapo (handsome), masarap (delicious) and kauntilang (just a few)*”. They also found it hard to understand to a great extent simple Filipino sentence. In talking to other people in the community, foreign students found it bearable because many Filipinos can talk in English and they can understand each other even in simple form. In support to language comprehension the study supports the study of Gapsalamov et.al. (2016), that mastering such, a technology and successful teaching and intercultural communication, especially at the initial stage of training foreign students, is very necessary to perform psycho-pedagogical training of teachers to develop foreign students’ skills of intercultural communication. Personal qualities of a teacher dealing with a foreign audience play a certain role including communication skills, ability to cope with stress, overcome psychological barriers in communication, etc.

Correspondingly, it revealed that foreign students of Batangas State University are enjoying the stay in the Philippines and in the university, exclaiming “*It’s okay! It’s encouraging. It’s worthwhile, nice and good.*” When asked about the attitudes of Filipinos towards them, a respondent answered, “*Based on my personality, I don’t really bother observing the attitudes of my classmates and I’m just being me.*” The participant here showcased that the attitudes of Filipinos are not always affecting the foreign students. It depends on the personality of the foreign student whether he/she will be affected by the attitudes of the people around him/her. Academic isolation is evident to the occurrence of continuous language barrier, separating foreign students from Filipino students. In relation to Andrade (2006), as cited by Joseph-Collins (2013), posits that English Language skills are an important factor for both academic and social adjustment issues for international students. According to Pappas (2016), friendships might help keep your mind



sharp because having friends who you feel like you belong may be a key for better physical health.

2.3 Adaptation to Filipino Culture. The challenges faced by foreign students in Batangas State University with respect to adaptation to Filipino culture was exposed through the interview conducted by the researchers. Among these are food preferences, language, traditions, and values as prominent challenges encountered.

Foreign students in Batangas State University professed having simple problems with regard to food preferences. A respondent said that "*Filipino food is all about rice, all rice.*" And he has not accustomed to it yet. In the respondent's own country, they are not used to eat rice all the time, so it has become a challenge to stay where rice is the staple food, finding it hard to adapt into eating rice. Other participants agreed that some Filipino dishes are good and delicious namely; "*balut (fertilized duck egg), sisig (pig's head and liver usually seasoned with calamansi and chilli peppers), chicken adobo (marinated meat in a mixture of vinegar, soy sauce and garlic), and caldereta (meat stewed with liver paste)*". Though there are some who were still adapting to Filipino delicacies, some of foreign students found it appetizing otherwise.

Foreign students of Batangas State University enjoyed, celebrated and gazed the wonders of Filipino traditions and culture with a lot of respect. They enjoyed some of the traditions and culture in the Philippines particularly, fiesta and the Philippine's long celebration of Christmas as well as the Filipino games. On the other hand, foreign students were troubled with the local accent in the province of Batangas called "*puntong batangan*". Language surfaced as a problem because foreign students haven't mastered Filipino language yet and at the same time, not all Filipinos can speak English language in a way that they can understand.

In terms of Filipino values and attitudes, the Foreign students are still sticking to what and who they really are, saying, "*I'm just being me*". According to one of the respondents, values and attitudes do not affect the personality of the foreign student itself. It still depends on the personality of the foreign student if he/she will be affected by the

people around him/her. Thus, this supports the study of Gapsalamov et al. (2016) that foreign students do not possess common cultural and professional competences and that indicates a low level of adaptation of students in social and educational environment. Foreign students tend to not care in situation and instances that they won't get any benefits.

In general, the foreign students in Batangas State University are not looking deep in the attitudes of the people around them. They have not adapted the Filipino value of shared responsibility for the community and others. A respondent's notable remark towards the people in the community was "*I have no problem with them*", showing best respect to the entirety of the Filipino culture.

3. Proposed inclusion initiative and social adaptation strategies for foreign students of Batangas State University

This study found out that foreign students were facing challenges particularly language barrier which resulted to academic isolation. They opted to double the efforts to understand some discussions and lessons in the class. Foreign students recognize some Filipino as nice and good towards them but also revealed that there are some Filipinos who are not easy to be with, according to the respondents. It was also exposed by the study that foreign students rarely experienced challenges with regard to adaptation to Filipino culture. Hence, the researchers suggested the following social adaptation and inclusion initiatives for foreign students in Batangas State University:

Include Me Now Project. This project will be focused on the benefits of all foreign students in Batangas State University Main Campus I and II to be able to adapt social differences by including them in social activities inside and outside the campus, such as teambuilding activity. The project will work by means of encouraging and including all foreign students in the activities (both curricular and co-curricular) of the university.



Foreign Students Caravan. In honoring foreign students' sacrifices, efforts and dedication for the university, this project will showcase the talents and skills of the university's foreign students. The researchers will work in partnership with International Affairs Office of the university to help the foreign students towards the involvement in such activities. The researchers initiate this project due to socio-emotional issues of foreign students in the university. This project will help them adapt to Filipino's social norms as well as to gather new friends that will make them feel comfortable in staying inside the university. Lastly, the researchers' main goal is to make them feel that foreign students are included in the whole university not just socially but emotionally wise.

Universal language for students of Batangas State University. This third suggested project will help foreign student assess the language barrier issues to communicate towards Filipino students comfortably. The researchers found out that language barrier is the vital problem of foreign students in adapting to the filipino social norms, culture and tradition. Besides, this project will help foreign students in terms of academic performance in which they can explain thoughts and insights easily. It is suggested under this project that all professors will strictly observe the full implementation of English-speaking policy inside the campus to eradicate language barrier. This also aims to promote awareness in all students that speaking English language is important to communicate with foreign students. With that being said, the researchers will seek the help of the Office of the Vice President of Academic Affairs and different college organizations in the university, including the university's Supreme Student Council.

We Accept as One – Project. This project is also suggested in promoting the Filipino culture and tradition to foreign students by organizing exhibit about Philippine culture. #WeAcceptasOne-Project is a university-wide movement that will make use of different sets of activities like exhibits, art trainings, documentaries, seminars, productions and other events that will

promote not only the culture of the Philippines alone but of other nations' as well.

WeSite Software. The last suggested project by the researchers is the creation of software web page for all the students at the university. This is an open platform for comments sharing, suggestions and giving thoughts about students' experiences in the university. The WeSite will work as an interactive site which will accept concerns from students and eventually relayed to the responsible offices and authorities for immediate response and solutions. The researchers believe that organization of exhibit, production shows, documentaries, organized events are just some of the ways in gaining the three (3) types of learning style in which foreign students will help understand our culture and traditions. With that, the assistance from the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, College Deans, and other school organizations, are important in engaging the students to become proactive in bridging gaps and breaking barriers for connectivity and understanding. The researchers believe that this will help foreign students understand, appreciate and adapt with the Filipino culture during the meaningful stay in the university.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. The social experience of foreign students at Batangas State University is both negative and positive in nature, and it varies on how the people interact with them with regards to socialization, academic performance, and adaptation to Filipino culture.
2. The foreign students of Batangas State University do encounter multiple social challenges with regards to socialization, academic performance and adaptation to Filipino culture.
3. There is a need of inclusion initiatives and social adaptation strategies for foreign students to be use in micro and or macro scale to address the social challenges they face throughout their stay in the



university/country and is a vital part for social development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the findings and conclusions from the study, the following recommendations are hereby endorsed:

1. Similar studies may be conducted to validate the findings of this study or parallel studies with new set of respondents that deals with the specific and deeper analysis of adaption of foreign students.
2. Cultural education can be thoroughly provided by the University to the foreign students and non-foreign students so that, they would become aware of the cultural differences and find strategic way to cope with it.
3. The proposed inclusion initiatives and adaptation strategies may be presented to school administrators and other concerned offices for evaluation. And if find feasible, full implementation of the proposed inclusion initiatives should work with evaluation and assessment.

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