

Navigating Cross-Cultural Challenges: Adaptation Experiences of International Students at a Small Northeast Liberal Arts College



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Globalization in higher education has led to more international students enrolling in institutions worldwide, with small liberal arts colleges seeing a notable increase. This trend has sparked interest in understanding the experiences of these students as they adapt to new cultural and educational environments. This qualitative study explores the cross-cultural adaptations of international undergraduate students at a small liberal arts college in the Northeast USA. We collected data from 17 international undergraduate students by applying semi-structured interviews and grounded theory for data analysis.

The study identifies significant challenges faced by these students. Language barriers, including difficulties with slang, informal language, and accents, impact classroom participation and comprehension. The speed of speech and differences between 'textbook' language and casual conversation further complicate their experience. Social interactions are hindered by pronunciation issues and a fear of making mistakes, leading to reduced engagement and feelings of awkwardness when misunderstandings occur.

Furthermore, international students experience discrimination and stereotypes, such as microaggressions and social exclusion. They report being treated differently due to their international status and cultural stereotypes, feeling ostracized from social groups, and encountering prejudiced comments.

The findings highlight the need for supportive measures in small liberal arts colleges to enhance the cross-cultural adaptation and overall experience of international students. Practical implications include fostering an inclusive environment and providing resources to address language barriers and social integration challenges.

Biography:

Dr. Inan, originally from Turkey, is passionate about learning, teaching, and the transformative potential of higher education. She teaches psychology and mentors both domestic and international undergraduates, preparing them for graduate studies. Her research focuses on parent-child relationships, academic achievement, and acculturative stress within a cognitive-developmental framework, with specific emphasis on math achievement in minority mother-daughter dyads and the effects of acculturative stress in bilingual families. Dr. Inan values building trustworthy relationships with students from diverse backgrounds and promotes inclusivity and diversity at Mercyhurst University through her teaching and service.