A Multi-level Conceptual Framework to internationalize Higher Education

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Abstract

As the demand for international education continues to grow and competition between universities for international students intensifies, the effective management of international students is seen as the key to the successful internationalization of university programs. This paper identifies the challenges that international students face in a foreign tertiary environment and present a comprehensive multi-level framework to deal with these complex challenges. This conceptual framework describes effective practices at the strategic, tactical and operational levels which universities can embrace to manage international students effectively.

Keywords: International Students, Challenges, Management, higher education
INTRODUCTION

The current status of internationalization of higher education varies from institution to institution. Some institutions are faced with failure in internationalizing their campuses due to a lack of strategic planning, a lack of support for international education by university administrators, and a lack of commitment to international education in general. Many university administrators do not fully support internationalization even though there is an increased awareness of the impact of global change on the university. In many universities, it is apparent that some factors such as lack of funding, lack of faculty participation, problems with study abroad programs, problems faced by international students, a negative perspective related to international student recruitment, and hindrances faced by foreign scholars are the most common obstacles that prohibit the development of internationalization (Albach, 2004; Takeda, St John-Ives, & McPherson, 2005).

Knight and de Wit (1995) advocate that one major educational function of internationalization is to enable students “to understand, appreciate and articulate the reality of interdependence among nations (environmental, economic, cultural and social) and therefore prepare those involved to function in an international and inter-cultural context” (p. 13). The presence of international and multicultural students in universities generates ideal social debate for cultivating the development of cross-cultural awareness and communication skills as well as social unity (Cortazzi & Jin, 1997; Holmes, 2004; Knight & De Witt, 1995). Consequently it is important to all students, irrespective of their background to know that they are acknowledged, respected, encouraged and treated fairly.

Several studies have indicated that universities have a responsibility to manage and prepare students to work in the international arena (Fantini et al., 2001; Hagen, 2002; Moses, 2003). The presence of international students on a university campus provides a unique social forum for enhancing every student’s understanding and appreciation of the richness of other cultures. It is argued that well educated students are expected to be adaptable and open to new forms of learning. Ninnes (1999) reported that a university’s lack of sensitivity to the special needs of international students could hinder their adaptation
to the new environment. Although researchers have examined several aspects of international student management, no comprehensive framework exists. In this paper we develop a conceptual framework which will help higher education institutions develop strategies and policies to manage international students effectively. Our model multi-level in nature and presents organisational, individual and cross-level constructs. We use the extant literature on organisational diversity management and international education to develop a comprehensive model that provides suggestions on how, higher educational organisations, its employees and international students can benefit from holistic planning at organisational and individual levels. While there are several facets to internationalisation of higher educational institutions, of particular interest to this paper is the socio-cultural adjustment, psychological wellbeing and educational achievements of international students. We define international students as those who enter the country with a student visa and continue to hold this visa for the entire duration of degree completion. While multi-cultural domestic students and foreign students on short term exchange will benefit from our model, they are not the main focus of this paper.

A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR MANAGING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Diversity is a key attribute of all international students. International students display differences in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs and other ideologies. The concept of diversity encompasses acceptance and respect. It means understanding that each individual is unique, and recognizing individual differences. It is important to explore these differences in a safe, positive, and nurturing environment. It is also about understanding each other and moving beyond simple tolerance to embracing and celebrating the rich dimensions of diversity contained within each individual. Gurin, Dey, Hurtado and Gurin (2002) purported that students from a range of backgrounds can add to the richness of the learning experience by generating an atmosphere of speculation, experiment and creation so essential to the quality of higher education and helping to develop the human relations and analytic skills needed to thrive and lead in the work environments of the twenty-first century.
The conceptual framework developed in this paper is based on a similar comprehensive approach used to manage diversity in organizations through effective human resource management (Shen, Chanda, D’Netto & Monga, 2009). These authors argue that a multi-level approach (strategic, tactical and operational) is required to manage diversity effectively. Brews and Hunt (1999) describe decisions specific to the strategic level as those related to an organization’s strategic ends or “what” the organization hopes to achieve. These are closely tied to the mission, goals and objectives of the firm. Tactical decisions are related to an organization’s resources and focuses on “how” the firm implements achieving its ends. This level of decision making is generally described as action plans, policies and procedures. Operational decisions are those that impact on the daily operations in functional areas of the organization. Similarly, we argue that a comprehensive framework that includes organizational practices at the strategic, tactical and operational levels is necessary to manage the challenges of international students effectively and deliver positive outcomes for all stakeholders. Our conceptual framework first examines the challenges faced by international students. We discuss the educational, economic and socio-emotional challenges which international students experience. We then propose a multi-level approach to deal with these challenges. At the strategic level we examine the higher education institution’s vision and mission of internationalization, global business strategy and strategies for managing diversity. At the tactical level, we discuss academic interventions, practices for dealing with economic issues and ways of supporting international students’ transition and managing cultural diversity. At the operational level, we deal with programs to assist student learning, measures to help with the cost of higher education, and social activities which provide socio-economic support. We believe that the adoption of a comprehensive framework to manage international students will result in positive outcomes for all stakeholders. These outcomes include high international student satisfaction, a positive image for higher education institutions and sustainable competitive advantage in the global market place.

Insert Figure 1 about here
INTERNATIONAL STUDENT CHALLENGES

The international student diaspora has grown substantially in countries such as US, Canada, UK, and Australia in the last decade (Marklein, 2007). A large number of international students enroll in business schools across these countries (GMAT, 2007). Management education has become increasingly popular due to job opportunities in global businesses across all continents. While well paying jobs in multi-national corporations (MNCs) or other global businesses may await successful international business management students in home or host countries, their educational and social journey in the host country is not without challenges. International students have to learn new ways of achieving their educational goals and often unlearn older ones (Ramsay, Barker, & Jones, 1999). Economically, international students have to forgo full-time employment during the tenure of their degree as well as pay for their higher education from savings or incur hefty student loans (Forbes-Mewett & Nyland, 2008). International students usually live away from friends and family and have to create a new social network in the host country. As cross-cultural experiences are central to international sojourns, international students have to learn culturally appropriate ways of interacting with host country citizens, which often includes learning a new language (Lebcir, Wells, & Bond, 2008). Such educational, economic, and socio-emotional challenges can be stressful for international students (Andrade, 2006). In the following paragraphs, we review the extant literature on international education related to these challenges.

Educational Challenges

Studies comparing international and domestic students have reported that international students find the academic process more challenging than domestic students, leaving them less time to engage in extracurricular and social activities (Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005). International students find lecture and other classroom dynamics more difficult to understand than domestic students (Ramsay, Barker, & Jones, 1999). Students educated in different national cultures prefer divergent teaching and learning styles (Hofstede, 1986). For example, learners from some Asian cultures (e.g., China: high in power distance and uncertainty avoidance) have been found to prefer passive learning styles (lectures, textbooks, videos,
computerized learning, etc.). On the contrary, learners from western cultures (e.g., US: low in power
distance and uncertainty avoidance) have been found to prefer active learning styles (case studies,
research projects, class discussions, etc.; Rodrigues, 2005). Asian students (collectivists) have shown a
preference for cooperative peer learning strategies while western students (individualists) for
individualistic and competitive learning strategies (Niles, 1995; Ramburuth & McCormick, 2001). As a
result of such divergent learning preferences, it is appropriate to use a variety of learning styles in
curriculum development while teaching cross-cultural groups of students (Rodrigues, Bu, & Min, 2000).
International students need to adjust to assessments in the new educational context. Many students trained
in educational traditions that only assess learning in forms of examinations at the end of the course may
find it difficult to perform well in more inductive assessment methods such as essays and research
projects (Lebcir, Wells, & Bond, 2008). Oral presentations, group assessments, and classroom discussions
may also be difficult for international students that speak English as a foreign language (Ramburuth &
Tani, 2009). Having to learn about the new educational and assessment styles as well as the content of the
course has the potential to lower performance and wellbeing of international students (Burnapp, 2006).

**Economic Challenges**

Undertaking foreign degrees are expensive endeavors for international students (Bordia & Bordia,
2008). This is especially challenging for students from developing countries that choose to study in
developed countries. In addition to educational expenses, students have to consider living in a more
expensive country during the course of their studies. Many students from developing countries may have
to pay for these expenses from savings in weaker currencies (e.g., US $ 1= Indian Rupee 50
approximately). They also have to forgo full-time employment for the duration of their studies as many
countries (including US and Australia) allow individuals holding student visas to work substantially less
than full-time. Coupled with this is the fact that international students often do not get part-time
employment in their areas of expertise and need to engage in low paid shift work in retail outlets. This
may reduce their work and life satisfaction during the period of employment (Forbes-Mewett, & Nyland,
International students find such employment challenging in relation to their academic goals as well. In a new academic environment, where along with new content, they need to engage with new pedagogic styles, international students may not be able to work the number of hours they would like to, in order to sustain their monetary needs. This can result in economic challenges and insecurities which are greater than originally anticipated (Deumert, Marginson, Nyland, Ramia, & Sawir, 2005; Forbes-Mewett, & Nyland, 2008). In addition, while domestic students living away from families can go back home for short breaks, international students will find overseas travel back home very expensive. International phone calls may prove to be expensive too and international students may have to rely solely on the internet for communication with friends and family back home. Such limited contact with the existing social network may make international students emotionally vulnerable (Rajapaksha & Dundes, 2002).

**Socio-emotional Challenges**

Cultural and social adjustment in a new country can be challenging to international students. The lack of existing social networks for international students in the new environment can lead to less social support in trying times (Hechanova-Alanpay, Beehr, Christiansen, & Van Horn, 2002). This can lead to feelings of emotional insecurity (Forbes-Mewett, & Nyland, 2008). Other forms of insecurity may stem from lack of familiarity with the geographic location, urban environment, cultural context, healthcare, and transportation systems that international students have to deal with (Deumert, Marginson, Nyland, Ramia, & Sawir, 2005). International students may find it difficult to create meaningful friendships with domestic students (Crossman & Bordia, 2010; Volet & Ang, 1998). Support from local contacts is important in the initial settling-in period for international students. For example, finding suitable accommodation in a convenient and safe neighborhood may require advice from local contacts. Unfortunately, international students are not able to establish these contacts within the first few weeks of arrival in the host country. While support services are available for domestic and international students in most universities, international students, unfamiliar with the systems within foreign universities, may be less knowledgeable about these services when they first arrive.
Such socio-emotional challenges, along with educational and economic ones, have the potential to make higher education in a foreign country a very stressful time for international students. If educational institutions do not help international students address these challenges in a constructive and systemic manner, international students are unlikely to have a fulfilling and successful educational experience in the host country. This will not only affect individual students adversely but can also lead to loss of reputation for the educational institution (Bordia & Bordia, 2008).

**STRATEGIC LEVEL PRACTICES FOR MANAGING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS**

**Higher Education Institution’s Vision and Mission of Internationalization**

Most theorists describe strategic decision making as involving or impacting the long-term direction of the firm (Byers & Slack, 2001; Johnson & Scholes, 1999). In view of the worldwide trend to build multi-cultural universities, university administrators must include internationalization into the vision and mission of the university. The commitment of the Board of Governors emphasizes that internationalization is part of the overall mission of the university. This commitment reinforces the legitimacy of internationalization and allows it to be integrated and taken into consideration in the overall decision-making of the university (Knight & de Wit, 1995). Given the significant reduction in government funding over the past few years, universities have increased their reliance on international students as a significant source of revenue. Hence, the improvement of international students’ study experience is a strategic issue, given the growing competition between universities (Li, Chen & Duanmu, 2010).

**Global Business Strategy**

Most world-class universities pursue a global business strategy. For many universities, the growth in the trade of education services has presented great potential in terms of recruiting full-fee paying international students as a source of revenue, especially at a time when many of these institutions, especially the public ones, are being faced with reduced state financial support and are having to operate under an increasingly market-oriented approach (Kwiek, 2001). A global business strategy implies
recruiting students and academics from overseas as well as operating in other countries. Global business strategies including curriculum innovation, study abroad programs, faculty/student exchanges, foreign language study and joint-international initiatives can have a significant impact on student and faculty experience (Knight & De Witt, 1995). These strategies impose pressure on academic staff and university bodies to provide well structured services to assist and motivate local and international students to cross the culture barrier. In order to achieve the goal of internationalization, all members of a university have to work towards the same outcome. Universities have to build a ‘bridge’ between international students and local students to facilitate collaboration and foster a multi-cultural environment.

Strategies to Manage Diversity

At the strategic level, universities are faced with an inherent set of challenges, notably immediate revenue generation and the necessity to maintain a long-term international engagement (Nichols, 2003). Basic principles of good diversity management must be included at the strategic level to recognise and value individual differences and provide fair treatment to all. Managing diversity is premised on recognition of diversity and differences as positive attributes of an organization, rather than as problems to be solved (Thompson, 1997). Valuing diversity can become a source of competitive advantage, increase the quality of organizational life and ultimately be good for business (Cassell, 1996). Hence, strategies to enhance student diversity and to make international students feel valued and recognized in the receiving institution become paramount. These strategies should include ensuring university administrators are skilled in diversity management, academic staff have the skills to deal effectively with multicultural students and proper integration of international students into the host institution.

TACTICAL LEVEL PRACTICES FOR MANAGING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Academic Interventions

Many university academics still react to international students’ transition difficulties with an assimilation approach that encourages students, both implicitly and unequivocally, to override their past experiences of education and to discount their habitual ways of perceiving what is expected of them as
learners (Biggs, 1999; Samuelowicz, 1987). According to Andrews, Dekkers and Solas (1998), such a deficit approach implicitly equates difference with deviance; it seeks to normalise, to reduce anomalies, to coerce the international student into conformity. In the absence of positive affirmation, these students often accept and internalize misinformed negative views of themselves as lacking in initiative, linguistically impoverished, and passive or ‘rote’ learners (Biggs, 1996; Rendon, 1994). Hence, international students view these difficulties as their own imperfections rather than faults in ‘the system’ (Andrews et al., 1998).

Another academic intervention is through internationalization of the curriculum and teaching methods. Several research studies have supported a holistic and inclusive curriculum-embedded framework that fosters a critical, ethical and creative use of information and underpins knowledge construction across disciplines and across cultures; one that both addresses and draws strength from diversity (Biggs, 2003; Gurin et al., 2002). It fuses conceptions of information literacy as integral to the learning process with those of educational inclusivity (Biggs, 2003). Rather than focus on differences and deficit, this holistic approach promotes the learning of all students, including internationals. This kind of holistic approach to learning addresses the behavioural, cognitive and affective aspects of information use and harnesses the learning potential inherent in both the similarities and differences of students’ learning experience. It embraces cultural and linguistic diversity, fosters a supportive and inclusive learning environment and so promotes equitable learning outcomes for all students in this culturally diverse environment.

Other scholars emphasized a central insight of student-centred learning by advocating that students process new knowledge through reference to prior knowledge; what they already know, think, believe, and have experienced are essential elements in their process of negotiating new knowledge (Biggs, 1993; Dawson, 1998; McLean & Ransom, 2005). It is important, therefore, that in supporting international students to become confident autonomous learners, instructors capitalize on their existing knowledge and experience. Prior knowledge and experience need to be recognized as significant pre-
learning or ‘presage’ factors that have a measurable effect on the learning process and on learning
outcomes (Biggs, 1993; McLean & Ransom, 2005).

**Dealing with Economic Issues**

Finances are essential to student survival as without adequate finances necessities such as food
and shelter cannot be acquired (Khawaja & Dempsey, 2008). International students, especially from
developing countries, face huge financial challenges when studying in a foreign university. Financial
concerns are commonly identified as one of the greatest sources of stress for international students (Chen,
1999; Lin & Yi, 1997; Mori, 2000; Mullins, Quintrell, & Hancock, 1995). Increasing tuition fees and
living expenses are notable areas of concern (Chen, 1999). Many university administrators argue that
international students are aware of the financial commitment before they enter the host country and that
international students have actually demonstrated that they have the money to pay for their course.
However, the reality is that many international students are forced to rely on loans from family members
or financial institutions to cover the cost of their overseas education. Given that the currency of most
developing countries is extremely weak against major western currencies such as the US Dollar, the cost
of overseas education for international students from most developing and Asian countries is certainly
very high. In addition, the earning capacity in the home country after the student returns is extremely low
by international standards. University administrators should be aware of these issues and be sensitive to
the financial problems international students face. Allowing the students some extra-time to pay
university fees when genuine problems arise, is a good tactic that universities can use. Universities can
also provide “emergency loans” to international students to help them tide over difficult financial
situations. Scholarships can be offered to offset part of the student fees. Universities should also examine
ways of providing part-time employment to international students to help them defray the high cost of
education. Overall, international students should be treated valued customers who are making a
significant financial contribution to the university.

**Supporting International Students Transition and Managing Cultural Diversity**
Tertiary education involves adjustment to new academic and social environments. The demands of these new environments can create stressors that may strain interpersonal relationships, undermine self-esteem (Murff, 2005), and jeopardize academic performance (Clinard & Golden, 1973). Such demands are often more complex for the international students, who have to adapt to a new culture, language, academic, and social environment (Mori, 2000). Past research has indicated that international students have lower levels of social support than domestic students (Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002; Khawaja & Dempsey, 2008).

Cultural diversity on university campuses sets a platform for ideal inter-cultural learning. Yet, one of the most disturbing aspects of the internationalization of higher education is the lack of interactions between local and international students from Asian backgrounds (Gu & Brooks, 2008; McLean & Ransom, 2005) which are caused by cultural-emotional connectedness, language, pragmatism, negative stereotypes and ethnocentric views (Decker, 1993). Sadly, international students become scapegoats and this is seen through the stereotyping of their ‘problems’ and the constant use of the language of difference, not seeing international students as ‘our’ students and certainly not seeking reciprocity in international contact (Chalmers & Volet, 1997; Cross & Hitchcock, 2006). A study by Barnett et al. (1994) found that among the university staff surveyed, diversity was 'treated most usually as a problem' (p.210) rather than something positive. Archer and Hutchings (2000) reported perceptions of a 'continued domination of higher education by middle-class whites, both as staff and students' (p.563). Consequently, those from other ethnic backgrounds may feel pressured to fit with longstanding traditions which are not accommodating of diversity.

Academics are usually apprehensive about the impact of cultural diversity on their university and in turn this leads them to recognise the limits of their aptitude in dealing with the issues that would appear, such as that of cultural pedagogy and epistemology (Ryan, 2005; Sharda, 1995). The internationalization of higher education however requires academics to know students expectations and difficulties and then to explain the differences, expectations and assumptions of the host country higher
education system (Cross & Hitchcock, 2006; Tan & Goh, 2006), for example, the opportunities to
develop their independent learning and critical thinking proficiency. Above all, expecting and
encouraging international students to do well, rather than anticipating a whole range of difficulties, is
likely to help students achieve the necessary adaptation and success.

Pragmatically, student diversity is a fact of life in higher education today; one that can be
celebrated rather than decried. Student diversity can enrich the learning experience of all involved, but it
does require thoughtful management of content, teaching and assessment so that all students are
advantaged and none disadvantaged by that diversity. Universities must uncover some of the underlying
assumptions and consider how they might be addressed to make the learning environment more inclusive
of diversity.

**OPERATIONAL LEVEL PRACTICES**
**FOR MANAGING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS**

**Assisting International Student Learning**

The cultural diversity that exist in higher education today presents many implications for teaching
and it entails the implementation of teaching methods which are inclusive of students from a variety of
cultures and from non-English speaking milieu (Chang, 2006; Dawson, 1998; Ramburuth & McCormick,
2001). Rendon (1994) suggested that academics should demonstrate a genuine concern for teaching; are
personable and approachable towards students; treat students equally; structure learning experiences that
allow students to experience themselves as capable of learning; work individually with those students
needing extra help and provide meaningful feedback to students to guide and facilitate their learning
process.

Academic staff may choose to implement practices to facilitate the inclusion of student diversity
into the curriculum and the learning and assessment processes. This can be done by adopting different
approaches to promote culture mix and offering opportunities throughout a program of study for students
from different cultures to work together in small groups on both structured and unstructured tasks (Cross
Students from non-English speaking backgrounds repeatedly highlight the need for more English tutorials and for tutors to be made available after class and on weekends. Barnett et al. (1994) and Leask (2002) suggested some strategies that were used successfully to provide for diverse student groups. These included additional contact with lecturers; well structured lectures; recorded audio of lecture; peer tutoring; language and learning support; additional resources for students with a disability; redeemable assessment and adjusted examinations requirements (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991).

Helping with the Cost of Higher Education

While tuition fees form a significant cost of international education, the cost of international travel, local transportation, housing and food can be considerable. Many universities provide free airport pickup and transportation to affordable temporary accommodation, comprehensive orientation programs and campus tours for new students. In some universities, existing students from the new arrival’s home country are asked to “meet and greet” the new student at the airport. These types of services enable new international students to feel more at ease and provide an important source of extremely valuable information about the host country.

Vissing and Diament (1997) found that approximately 20% of university students are in housing arrangements that could be classified as distressing. Poor quality of accommodation has been associated with lower measures of mental health (Evans, Chan, Wells, & Saltzman, 2000). In addition, many international students are unable to find suitable housing on account of the scarcity and high cost of residential hall accommodation and lack of housing in the private sector. International students are frustrated with the difficulty of obtaining suitable accommodation near their campus as many real estate agents do not want to lease residential accommodation to international students (Forbes-Mewett & Nyland, 2008). Universities can play a significant role in alleviating these problems. Subsidized accommodation can be provided by the university either on or near the campus. Universities can also establish contacts with real estate agents and assign a housing officer to enable students to obtain suitable accommodation at a reasonable price.
One of the primary concerns of international students is procuring a part-time job to offset the high cost of education. Pro-active career management services should be provided for all international students. These services should include workshops on resume writing, interview skills, job search skills and employment regulations in the host country. In addition, the career management office should establish a strong relationship with local employers and employment agencies. This will enable international students to find suitable part-time jobs without too much difficulty.

Other services which contribute to reducing the cost of education include provision of cheap books either through a “second hand bookshop” or through “book banks” where students can loan prescribed textbooks. Universities can also provide a “food cupboard” to help struggling local and international students. Staff and students should be encouraged to donate non-perishable food items to the food cupboard and needy students can pick up these items as required (D’Netto & D’Netto, 2008).

**Social and Recreational Activities to deal with Socio-Emotional Issues**

Robertson, Line, Jones, and Thomas (2000) found that the most common challenges of international students were feelings of isolation from local classmates, homesickness, and the need for social activities. The assignment of mentors and peer support programs was seen as very important in the initial weeks and would help to deal effectively with the challenges of living in a new country (Rose, 2005). Research indicates that supportive communication practices with friends and spouses is useful in releasing stress (Misra, Crist, & Burant, 2003) and therefore facilitating cross-cultural adjustment. These findings highlight the primacy of social support as a coping strategy (Jacob & Greggo, 2001).

Social and recreational activities are considered an important means of interacting with local students and also with other international exchange students. Regular drama, theatre and other types of entertainment should be provided on campus. In addition, frequent get-togethers should be organized for local and international students so that greater networking is facilitated. Social events such as free bar-b-que, beer evenings, pub crawls, etc, help international students meet other students and develop friendships. Day trips and weekend trips would enable international students to experience the beauty of
the host country (D’Netto & D’Netto, 2008). Host Family Programs provide students with a “home away from home” and also facilitate better understanding of local customs.

Al-Sharideh and Goe (1998) found that the number of strong network bonds that international students had with other students from their culture or similar cultures was positively related to a high self-esteem. One way of promoting such networks is through “Multicultural Parties”, where students from different countries could “show-case” the dances, music and customs from their home country. These parties should include ethnic food and drinks. Another way of enabling local students to learn about other cultures, is by celebrating the “national festivals” of different countries. Many universities organize a “multicultural week” on campus. Such activities would improve cross-cultural sensitivity and improve students’ appreciation of the values and beliefs of other cultures. Dance classes could be conducted and dance competitions could be organized. Free movie nights could be also held for students. A unique “multicultural sports day” could be organized where students would participate in games from around the world (D’Netto & D’Netto, 2008). These activities help international students overcome the loneliness of being away from home and facilitate a deeper appreciation of the host country. Student counseling services can also help international students who are experiencing high levels of stress or have to deal with difficult problems. Universities must ensure that student counselors have cross-cultural skills and are able to understand students from different ethnic backgrounds.

**BENEFITS FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS**

**International Student Satisfaction**

Experience in a foreign country as a student provides significant benefits to international students. The main benefits are acquisition of world-class knowledge, ability to understand another culture and improvement of one’s cross-cultural sensitivity. This exposure to other cultures and the development of a greater appreciation of other cultures is seen as an important attribute for a global career. Most multinational corporations seek employees with the personality and characteristics that enable them to be successful in the international workforce. Thus, an overseas education enhances career opportunities and
enables international students to work effectively in different countries on a truly global basis. The ability to develop networks with students from other countries is seen as an important element of the international student experience. This network can provide greater career and business opportunities in the future. For students from non-English speaking countries, international education in a western country helps them to improve their knowledge of English and contributes substantially to their ability to speak English fluently. Local students can also benefit from the interaction with exchange students from other countries as these international students provide them with “first hand current information” about the culture and business practices of other countries. High student satisfaction with the services provided in the host institution can lead to student retention and completion rates. This, in turn, is likely to enhance recruitment of new students from the international student’s home country. Positive feedback not only assists in retaining and capturing more of the export education market but helps maintain reputation and image (Khawaja & Dempsey, 2008).

**Reputation of Higher Education Institution and Sustainable Competitive Advantage**

A university’s reputation is based not just on the quality of education programs but also on the level of service provided to students. International students are extremely important to receiving universities. In addition to financial contributions to universities’ development, international students’ distinct demand for various courses (such as mathematics and engineering) helps receiving universities maintain a diverse range of subjects (Li, Chen & Duanmu, 2010). International students usually pay a lot more than domestic students for the same education. Hence, the expectations of these students are high. Universities must strive to provide services which exceed the expectations of international students in order to achieve sustainable competitive advantage in the market place. Research indicates that international students highly value university efforts to enhance their social integration on and off campus. In particular, interpersonal interactions with staff and other students generate high levels of student satisfaction, enhance cultural transition and mitigate the negative effects of culture shock (Owens & Loomes, 2010). Further, international students who feel their needs are being acknowledged and
responded to, may convey favourable feedback to their families and friends. As many international alumni become eminent leaders in their home countries, a positive sojourn helps to develop and strengthen international ties and trade links (Khawaja & Dempsey, 2008).

CONCLUSION

The model presented in this paper outlines a multi-level approach to create a holistic understanding of international student management. Implemented at organizational, individual and across levels the strategic, tactical and operational practices will assist in creating a collaborative and inclusive environment in which international students can thrive. It will also benefit domestic students as well short term exchange students in terms of internationalizing their educational experience which will help them work for increasingly global organizations.

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FIGURE 1
A Conceptual Framework for Managing International Students in Higher Education

International Student Challenges
- Educational Challenges
- Economic Challenges
- Socio-emotional Challenges

Strategic Level Practices for Managing International Students
- Higher education institution’s vision and mission of internationalization
- Global business strategy
- Strategies to manage diversity

Tactical Level Practices for Managing International Students
- Academic interventions
- Dealing with economic issues
- Supporting international students transition and managing cultural diversity

Operational Level Practices for Managing International Students
- Assisting international students’ learning
- Helping with the cost of higher education
- Social and recreational activities to deal with socio-emotional issues

Benefits for International Students and Higher Education Institutions
- International student satisfaction
- Reputation of higher education institution and sustainable competitive advantage