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A study of the factors of loneliness among students studying abroad: An insight

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Abstract:

Studying abroad offers students opportunities for academic growth, cultural exposure, and personal development. However, international students often face emotional and psychological challenges, among which loneliness is one of the most common issues. Loneliness among students studying abroad may arise due to cultural differences, language barriers, homesickness, social isolation, academic pressure, and lack of emotional support. This study aims to examine the major factors contributing to loneliness among international students and its impact on their mental well-being and academic performance. The study also suggests measures to reduce loneliness and improve adjustment among students studying abroad.

Keywords: Loneliness, International Students, Studying Abroad, Mental Health, Homesickness, Social Isolation, Cultural Adjustment

Introduction:

Globalization and internationalization of higher education have increased the number of students pursuing education abroad. Students move to foreign countries for better academic opportunities, career advancement, and international exposure. While studying abroad provides numerous benefits, it also brings emotional and psychological challenges.

One of the major psychological concerns faced by international students is loneliness. Loneliness refers to a distressing emotional state arising from a perceived lack of meaningful social relationships or companionship. Students studying abroad often leave behind family, friends, familiar cultural environments, and support systems, making them vulnerable to feelings of isolation and emotional distress.

Factors such as language difficulties, cultural shock, discrimination, financial stress, academic pressure, and limited social interaction may intensify loneliness among students abroad. Prolonged

loneliness can negatively affect mental health, self-esteem, academic performance, and overall quality of life.

This study focuses on identifying the major factors contributing to loneliness among students studying abroad and understanding its impact on their personal and academic lives.

Review of Literature:

Several researchers have studied loneliness and adjustment issues among international students.

Weiss (1973):

Weiss explained loneliness as a social and emotional deficiency resulting from inadequate interpersonal relationships. According to him, absence of emotional attachment and social integration contributes significantly to loneliness.

Peplau and Perlman (1982):

Peplau and Perlman described loneliness as a subjective psychological experience caused by a discrepancy between desired and actual social relationships. Their study emphasized emotional isolation among students living away from home.

Sawir et al. (2008):

Sawir and colleagues found that international students frequently experience loneliness due to cultural differences, language barriers, and lack of social support. Homesickness was identified as one of the strongest predictors of loneliness.

Andrade (2006):

Andrade highlighted that international students often face adjustment difficulties related to academics, communication, and social integration. These adjustment problems contribute to stress and emotional isolation.

Ward, Bochner, and Furnham (2001):

The researchers discussed the concept of culture shock and noted that adaptation to a new cultural environment significantly influences psychological well-being among international students.

Russell, Peplau, and Cutrona (1980):

Their research introduced the UCLA Loneliness Scale, widely used to measure loneliness levels among individuals, including college students and international students.

The literature indicates that loneliness among students abroad is influenced by social, cultural, emotional, academic, and environmental factors.

Objectives of the Study:

- To identify the major factors causing loneliness among students studying abroad.
- To examine the relationship between homesickness and loneliness.
- To study the impact of language and cultural barriers on emotional well-being.

- To analyse the effects of loneliness on academic performance and mental health.
- To suggest strategies for reducing loneliness among international students.

Research Methodology:

Research Design:

The study is descriptive and analytical in nature.

Sample Size:

A sample of 100 international students studying in different universities abroad was considered for the study.

Sampling Technique:

Convenience sampling method was used.

Data Collection:

Data were collected through:

Structured questionnaire

Online survey

Personal interaction with students

Tools Used

Percentage analysis

Mean score analysis

Likert scale responses

Graphical interpretation

Data Analysis and Interpretation:

Table 1: Major Factors Contributing to Loneliness

Factors	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Homesickness	30	30%
Language Barrier	20	20%
Cultural Differences	18	18%
Lack of Social Support	15	15%
Academic Pressure	10	10%
Financial Stress	7	7%

Interpretation:

The data indicate that homesickness is the most significant factor contributing to loneliness among students studying abroad, followed by language barriers and cultural differences.

Table 2: Impact of Loneliness on Students

Impact	Respondents Percentage	
Stress and Anxiety	35	35%
Depression	20	20%
Low Academic Performance	18	18%
Sleep Problems	15	15%
Social Withdrawal	12	12%

Interpretation:

The findings show that loneliness significantly affects students' mental health, leading to stress, anxiety, depression, and reduced academic performance.

Table 3: Preferred Coping Mechanisms

Coping Mechanism	Respondents Percentage	
Talking to Family/Friends	40	40%
Social Networking	20	20%
Participating in Activities	18	18%
Counseling Services	12	12%
Meditation/Exercise	10	10%

Interpretation:

Most students cope with loneliness by maintaining communication with family and friends, while some participate in social activities or seek counselling support.

Findings of the Study:

- Homesickness is the leading factor contributing to loneliness among international students.
- Language barriers and cultural differences create communication difficulties and social isolation.
- Lack of emotional and social support increases feelings of loneliness.
- Loneliness negatively affects mental health, causing stress, anxiety, and depression.
- Academic performance is adversely affected due to emotional instability and lack of concentration.
- Students who actively engage in social activities experience lower levels of loneliness.
- Regular communication with family members helps students manage emotional stress.

Discussion:

The study highlights that loneliness is a common psychological issue among students studying abroad. Separation from family, unfamiliar cultural environments and difficulties in social integration

contribute significantly to emotional distress.

The findings support earlier studies indicating that homesickness and cultural adjustment are major challenges for international students. Students with limited communication skills and weak social networks often struggle to build meaningful relationships in foreign countries.

Loneliness not only affects emotional well-being but also influences academic performance and social functioning. Institutions hosting international students should provide orientation programs, peer support groups, counselling services, and cultural integration activities to help students adjust effectively.

Parents and educational institutions also play an important role in providing emotional support and maintaining regular communication with students abroad.

Conclusion:

Loneliness among students studying abroad is a significant psychological and social issue that requires attention from educational institutions, families, and policymakers. Factors such as homesickness, language barriers, cultural differences, and lack of social support contribute substantially to emotional isolation.

The study concludes that loneliness negatively affects mental health, social adjustment, and academic performance. However, proper support systems, counseling services, cultural integration programs, and social engagement activities can help reduce loneliness and improve students' overall well-being.

Creating a supportive and inclusive environment for international students is essential for their academic success and emotional stability.

Suggestions and Recommendations:

- Universities should organize orientation and cultural adaptation programs.
- Counselling and mental health support services should be easily accessible.
- Peer mentoring programs should be introduced for new international students.
- Students should be encouraged to participate in extracurricular and social activities.
- Parents should maintain regular emotional communication with students.
- Universities should create multicultural interaction opportunities.

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