CHAPTER X

RECOMMENDATIONS

AND

CONCLUSION
CHAPTER 10

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It is apparent from the research findings that culture shock is a very real and a very painful and most often distressing experience for students who go to other countries for their higher education. We have seen that there are stages of culture shock that students undergo and eventually most of them overcome culture shock or are able to deal with it efficiently. The main aim of this study was to identify the effect culture shock has on the language learning experience of international students in India, the time it takes for them to overcome it and to provide strategies by which the negative impact of culture shock could be minimized. I have given the following suggestions and strategies that could be adopted which could make the sojourn of these students in India more fruitful and pleasant. I have categorized them into five levels:

1. At the university level
2. At the college level
3. At the teachers’ level
4. At the international students’ level
5. At the Indian students’ level

1.1. UNIVERSITY LEVEL

At this level the changes required would mean some changes in policy making. They may take a long time but in the long run the advantages to international students are many. Moreover, the revenue resulting from international students studying in India will surely see a considerable increase if this aspect of the students’ experience is taken care of.

1.1.1. Admission: While admitting students to undergraduate or post-graduate courses universities could insist that they complete the procedures in advance and report three months prior to the commencement of the program. The rationale behind this is that it
takes at least three months for students to get used to living in India, getting around, settling into a new home and overcoming the effects of culture shock

1.1.2. Culture orientation: in the three months that students will spend before their course starts universities can make it compulsory for international students to attend a cultural orientation program. It should be designed in such a way that students would be:

a) Able to recognize that any important life transition is likely to result in stress and discomfort as a usual and normal consequence. The pain caused by the change might be less if recognized as a normal response.

b) Reassured and shown support maintain a healthy self-image and to restore their sense of self-efficacy

c) Given time to adjust without pressure or urgency

d) Shown the patterns of the adjustment they have to go through. In that way the process may become more concrete and less ambiguous

e) Prepared to cope with the culture shock. That preparation might include language study, learning about the host culture, simulating situations to be encountered and spending time with nationals from the host culture.

(Li et al, 2007)

1.1.3. Teacher training: Apart from the mandatory qualification required for college lecturers, a training course should be made compulsory for anyone aspiring to teach undergraduate and post-graduate students. As seen in chapter 1 (1.4) under teachers’ profiles, most of them are only post-graduate with a very small percentage having an M.Phil and even smaller percentage with doctoral degrees. Even those with doctoral degrees have not had any formal training in English Language Teaching. Expertise in teaching comes with number of years of experience. But that means that in the early years of teaching there could be some irreparable damage done to students due to lack of knowledge and skills in the field. A special training course for teachers at the
tertiary level should be designed which would cover the following aspects English Language Teaching:

a) Theories and trends in English Language Teaching (discussed in detail in literature review)

b) Theories in second language acquisition (discussed in detail in literature review) with special emphasis on learning styles, personality traits, language anxiety and cultural differences.

c) Classroom management strategies

d) Innovative and interactive lesson plans (see 1.3.2- Activities in the English Language Classroom)

1.2. AT THE COLLEGE LEVEL

1.2.1. Credit courses:

Bangalore has several autonomous colleges and a large percentage of international student study in these colleges. These colleges follow the credit system i.e. every student must get 200 credits by the end of their three years of under-graduation for them to obtain their degree. Credits are given for attendance, participation in sports or cultural activities at state or national levels, participating in groups like NCC, NSS, or clubs like Drama Club, Literature Club and so on. Students are also required to attend credit courses offered by different departments which could range from soft skills to cooking to self-defense.

Courses could be offered specifically for international students on Indian culture, English skills and personality development. The course on Indian culture could cover the following aspects:

4 Brief history of India

5 Festivals and celebrations

6 Food and customs

7 Games and sports
The main aim of this course is to create an awareness among the international students about India- that it is not just a country where the streets are inhabited by ‘cows and dogs’ as one student succinctly put it (in the questionnaire), but that it is filled with a rich culture and heritage. On the other hand this course should also help students get in touch with the reality that is India- that it is not everything that the tourist agent told them it would be- that there will be people who will cheat them, people who will stare at them when they go out- that they shouldn’t trust and take people at face value. By doing this credit course, not only will students get their credits, they should also be able to cope with culture shock that they are bound to face. It also helps in that it brings together international students from different streams and different semesters. It provides students with the opportunity to interact with other international students whom they might not have met otherwise. In colleges where the credit system does not exist- an International Students Club can be formed wherein students can meet every week or every fortnight to share their experiences.

1.2.2. Celebrations

An International Students’ Day or Week could be arranged at the college level to make these students feel special and welcome. It not only reaffirms their cultural identity but also assures them that their culture and customs are appreciated and accepted. Students can showcase their national costume, their songs and dances, national flag and so on. They could also prepare a delicacy from their country and set up a stall. They could also bring small trinkets or articles from their country (like key chains, junk jewelry etc.,) and sell it to the other students. This creates a great amount of interaction between Indian and international students outside the classroom. It could lead to several opportunities for informal conversation whereby the English skills of these students could be enhanced.

1.2.3. Cells
When students come to India they are completely on their own. They are about 17 years of age and may not have had much experience dealing with legal aspects of travelling, negotiating with house owners and so on. They may not have had any exposure to the ways of people (policemen who bribe them) and may be too trusting. They literally grope in the dark when it comes to getting their RP (residential permission), obtaining visas, buying their tickets, renting a house, using public transportation and so on. The college could create an International Students Cell which could address the problems that these students face. Even if these problems cannot be solved these students could at least be counseled on the way they can handle them.

1.3. AT THE TEACHERS’ LEVEL

1.3.1. The teacher’s role

Teachers are the most important agents of change in students’ lives where culture shock is concerned. They need to create a conducive learning environment where students are made to feel comfortable and less anxious. Their final goal is to make students independent thinkers and users of the English language. In order to do this they must identify four loads that form barriers to their language learning. The first load is the cognitive load— the number of concepts embedded in every lesson may seem overwhelming. Teachers need to have a finger on the pulse of the students’ level of language learning and adapt lessons accordingly. The second load is the culture load. Students may be unaware of what is expected of them in the classroom and outside the classroom as well. Teachers can save a lot of embarrassment and humiliation for international students by explaining to them what to expect from the environment around them and what is expected of them. They can be guided about social norms and etiquette when they are in India. It is extremely important for teachers to treat international students with regard and concern because this sets the trend for the rest of the student community to follow. Thirdly students face the language load. They are bombarded with all forms of language around them. They see hoardings in English, people around them speak in English, they have to read a lot of information in English and they are expected to write cohesive and coherent pieces of writing when they are just grappling with the basics. Teachers can help here by introducing vocabulary at the beginning of the lesson so that they are familiar with the words and are able to engage with it when they come across it in the lesson. The teacher should also model and scaffold vocabulary so that it does not become a
formidable task for the students. Complex sentences could be broken down to simple ones to encourage better understanding. Another way that teachers can help is by dedicating some classroom time to impart cultural education for English language learners- lessons about body language, eye contact, academic language and conversational language. Classroom activities should be made interactive and learning should be fun. This motivates students to learn in a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere. The activities are discussed in the next section.

1.3.2. Classroom activities:

There is a plethora of activities that English language teachers can employ to make their classes more interesting and motivating. They are as follows:

1.3.2.1. Speaking: this section has the maximum number of activities since it is important to get students to overcome their fear of using the language in the classroom. Speaking activities can begin in pairs or in groups in order to avoid anxiety in the students. Grade topics for discussion can be given with a time limit and one of the group members can present the points discussed in the group to the rest of the class. Culture circles should be encouraged where students can share their cultural experiences in their groups. The next step would be to encourage them to participate in role-plays where they are still in a group and at the same time they perform as individuals. An interesting activity for them to do is to plan a cooking show (on radio or television) and present a dish that is popular in their country. In order to address their problems with the auto rickshaw drivers, a press conference can be arranged where some of the students are auto drivers and the others journalists. This serves several purposes- one is that students get to air their grievances about this mode of transport, another is that they get to understand and empathise with the lot of auto drivers, the third is they understand how press conferences are conducted. Students could be given the task of interviewing local with some simple questions. The interviewees could be their house owners, grocers, travelers in public transport and so on. The list of activities for speaking is endless.
1.3.2.2.Listening: Guest speakers who have been to foreign countries could be invited to speak about their experiences to the class. This again serves a dual purpose. Students sharpen their listening skills and at the same time realize that everyone who goes to a different country to study undergo culture shock. They also can pick up hints of coping with stressful situations. An enjoyable activity is to play an English song. Then a worksheet can be given where a gap-filling activity is printed based on the lyrics of the song.

1.3.2.3.Reading: Radio shows are popular with students as they can read out scripts without having to learn them by heart. Moreover, there is no anxiety of performing in front of their classmates. Reading programs should be encouraged where students report on what they have been reading over the week. Reading comprehension passages must be a regular weekly feature in the classroom.

1.3.2.4.Writing: Interesting topics related to the students’ lives, their state of mind, the situations they face, their opinion on a subject could be given as weekend projects. Field trip reports would encourage their power of recall as well as help students practice their writing skills. Providing visual stimuli and asking them to respond with writing would be an engaging activity. Film and book reviews can be a part of the curriculum. Narrative writing always has appealed to students as it gives vent to their creative side. Imaginative topics motivate students to bring out the best in them.

1.3.2.5.Grammar games: There are endless number of websites that provide games that students can play in the class and learning concepts of grammar. They also provide them with sufficient practice without students feeling the strain of trying to remember grammar rules. This method is more effective in teaching and learning grammar.

1.3.2.6.Power point presentation: Some students whose language skills may not be very high, they could be talented in other fields, such as using the computer. When activities requiring the use of technology are given they are extremely happy to contribute to the class with their skills. These presentations also help students to organize and present their ideas in a coherent and attractive manner.
1.3.2.7. **Accent:** many students who come from Middle East countries are fascinated by the American accent and would love to emulate it. Very often they are disappointed that Indian teachers are not able to teach them to speak with an American or British accent. These students can be encouraged to watch movies and programs on television which would help them develop this accent. The teacher could also conduct a singing competition and adjudge the one with the best American accent.

1.4. AT THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS’ LEVEL

Teachers can advise students to do the following which would be greatly helpful them.

1.4.1. **Practice:** Students should grab every chance to use English wherever they are. They must seek out every opportunity to engage in formal and informal language use without the fear of making mistakes.

1.4.2. **Seek support:** Whenever students feel that they are not able to cope with situations they should be encouraged to seek support from various agents such as teachers themselves, the college counselor, friends, compatriots, other international students.

1.4.3. **Family:** International students must maintain a close relationship with their families as it provides emotional support when they most need it.

1.4.4. **Indian friend:** Students who come from outside India should find an Indian ‘buddy’ someone who will help them around and show them the ropes. This is also helpful when it comes to speaking in the local language. An Indian friend can also assist with the cultural aspects that the student is not aware of – such as removing footwear before entering an Indian household, etiquette during meals, prayer time etc.

1.5. AT THE INDIAN STUDENTS’ LEVEL

1.5.1. **Accept:** Indian students must be able to accept their international counterparts unconditionally, accept their differences, especially when it comes to accent. They should also be able to invest international students with roles and responsibilities in and around the classroom which would make them feel that they really belong. One student who responded to my questionnaire felt very happy and proud that she was
elected as the class prefect by her classmates. This helps to dissipate culture shock and enhance their self-confidence.

1.5.2. Adopt: Teachers can encourage Indian students to adopt one international student at least for a while and help them around. In some instances they can even invite the international student to religious or social events at home or in the community which would help them bond better.

CONCLUSION

There can be no doubt that English has become a global language and one cannot underplay its importance. From times immemorial people have been moving from one place to another for various reasons, one of the most important being for education. But in recent times it has become more common than ever before for students to travel abroad for their higher education. Culture shock as a concept is not really a new one, but research on it has increased in the last few decades. In this research study I have attempted to discover how culture shock affects students’ English language learning since the main purpose of students coming to India is to get an education in English. I have outlined the importance of English globally, have looked at the various syllabi offered in English departments in Bangalore, statistically analyzed the results gained from questionnaires that 166 students across the city responded to, understood to some extent the problems they undergo as ‘foreigners’ in India. However, the real root of the problem lay in the fear that they all experience- fear of doing, saying, writing the wrong thing; fear of appearing that one does not have the required knowledge or is not smart enough; fear of looking, speaking, dressing and behaving differently. If this aspect of the international students is understood by all concerned it is easier to empathize and help them with the problems they face. What I have understood from this research study is that culture shock is a very real and painful problem which needs to be addressed. One cannot expect it to go away eventually. The damage that is caused in the course of the experience could be irreparable. Also we have seen that it takes about 3-6 months to overcome the effects of culture shock. During this stage learning is at a very low level. A lot of academic time is lost while students are grappling with this situation. With
this study I have come to the conclusion that of the various factors that affect English language learning, culture shock is significantly important as it affects the psychological state of mind of the student. I have also concluded that teachers have a great role to play in alleviating the stress that is caused by culture shock and creating a classroom environment that is conducive to language learning.