ABSTRACT
ABSTRACT

India is a preferred destination for education, especially in the tertiary levels, as students from different parts of the world find it easy to obtain a bachelors’ or masters’ degree here. The main reasons for them to do so are that education is imparted in the English language, the cost of education is relatively low, duration for courses of study is less when compared to that of their western counterparts and most importantly, they find that the education imparted is of a high quality. It is not surprising then, that there is a large inflow of students from other Asian, Middle Eastern and African countries. These students prefer to study in the metropolises in India as there is a common notion that these cities provide the necessary ambience and atmosphere for easy adjustment into the new culture. However, international students in India encounter several situations arising from cultural differences between their home country and the host country. More often than not, these encounters give rise to mental, physical and psychological stress which together is termed as ‘Culture Shock’.

In the recent decades innumerable researches have been conducted and have proved that this phenomenon of culture shock is not ‘just a passing phase’ or a fleeting feeling of homesickness. It is a very real and painful experience which has been likened to a disease- complete with symptoms and cures. Several researchers such as Kalervo Oberg, Cora Du Bois, H.D. Brown and John Schumann have identified the various stages that individuals go through as they experience culture shock. Although the period of time taken to move from stage to stage may differ from individual to individual all of them go through these stages.

In the first stage he experiences euphoria when he steps into a new country. Every experience seems new and exciting and the individual feels like a tourist, eager to learn everything he can about his new home. As he moves to the second stage, he becomes aware of the stark differences in culture and language leading to difficult encounters with the local people. This is the stage of culture shock and can last for different periods of time for different individuals. Some never overcome this stage and may just give up on their education and go back to their own country. Thirdly, individuals begin to accept the cultural differences and make an attempt to adjust accordingly. The stage of total recovery commences when individuals truly feel that they belong to their host country and begin to function as its citizen. When it is time to
go back to their own country sometimes they face a stage called reverse culture shock where they have to again realign themselves to their original culture.

Having taught English language and literature for 15 years in three different educational institutions in Bangalore, it was apparent to the researcher that international students in these institutions faced a set of challenges that were unique and spread across various streams and levels of education. These challenges also seemed to have an effect on their English language skills and the researcher felt impelled to contribute her time and effort to alleviate the ill-effects of culture shock and thereby began this research project.

The main aim of this thesis is to study the phenomenon of culture shock and determine if it affected English language learning of international students in India. It also seeks to find out whether geographical distance from the host country to the native country had a role to play in the degree of culture shock experienced by the students. Another endeavour of this study was to check if there is a difference in the way male and female students were affected by culture shock and finally compare the factors of personality and motivation with culture shock to find out which of the factors significantly affected English language learning.

Braj Kachru, a linguist, has illustrated the use of the English language in various nations with the metaphor of concentric circles. The “inner circle” comprises those nations for whom English is their first language. The United Kingdom, the United States of America, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, Anglophone Canada and South Africa form the traditional bases of English. They are the norm creating countries as other countries depend on them for setting standards. The “outer circle” consists of those countries for which English has a historical significance especially in the context of colonization. In these nations English along with the national language is used officially in the nation’s institutions. India, Nigeria, the Phillipines, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Malaysia, Tanzania and Kenya come under the umbrella of the outer circle. These countries are norm-developing countries as they adapt the language to suit their purposes. The third circle is called the “expanding circle” and encompasses those countries where English is used only as a foreign language, not for any official or institutional purpose. It has no historical significance in these countries. Much of the rest of the world’s population come under this category. They are China, Japan, Korea, Mongolia, Russia, European countries, middle- eastern countries and countries in the west and north of Africa.
Students who come to India to study English as well as the subjects of their course come from this expanding circle and have had very little or no exposure at all to the language. They face the dual challenge of learning the language first and then mastering their subject in this newly learnt language. English in Indian universities and colleges are taught keeping in mind the fact that students have studied the language for at least 10+2 years in primary and secondary school. The level of English, therefore, is considerably high, especially for international students who are studying English as a second language or perhaps a third language.

The review of literature for this study covered these broad based categories: the relationship between culture and second language acquisition, the importance of teaching culture in the English language classroom, culture shock and English language learning, motivation and English language learning, personality and English language learning as well as an in-depth review of books on approaches and methods in English language teaching and the theories behind second language acquisition. After having done the literature search the following hypotheses were formulated:

1. Culture shock affects English Language Learning of International students in India who are studying at the tertiary level.

2. Geographical distance of the native country from the host country influences the degree of culture shock.

3. There is a difference in the way culture shock affects male and female students.

4. Culture shock reduces proportionately with number of years spent in the host country.

5. Of the three factors- personality, motivation and culture shock- the most significant in English Language Learning of international students in India is culture shock.

Since the nature of the research is quantitative, a 55 item questionnaire rated on the Likert scale of 5 was administered to students of four tertiary level educational institutions in and around Bangalore. The total number of responses received was 166, of which 107 were male and 59 were female. Data collected have been analyzed using the SPSS’ 18 and the tests employed were ANOVA, Pearson’s Chi-Square, Spearman’s Correlation and Independent sample T-Test.

The results obtained show that there is a strong statistical relationship between culture shock and English language learning experience. This is further supported by the test result of
the correlation between test score and culture shock. As far as geographical distance from the native country to the host country is concerned it is clear from the analysis that the greater the distance, the higher is the culture shock. The test results show that students from Arab countries experience a higher degree of culture shock than that of students from Asian countries. The third hypothesis stated that male and female students do not differ in their reaction to culture shock. This was proven partially in the analysis. The test results showed that there is no significant relationship between gender and culture shock. However, where test scores were concerned, female students fared better than their male counterparts in spite of experiencing culture shock.

It was hypothesized that culture shock reduces proportionately with number of years spent in the host country. It may be considered common knowledge that culture shock will abate with the passing of time. However, the test results show that whether students stayed in India for less than six months, up to one year, up to three years or even more than three years, there is no significant relationship between the two variables. This means that culture shock does not eventually or naturally go away. This is an important finding as it would help teachers address the issue of culture shock instead of hoping that time will help in dealing with it in due course.

This study is also particularly important as it clearly shows the degree of culture shock in its four stages and its impact on English language learning. When scores were compared with that of culture shock by duration of stay it was clear that language learning is at its lowest in the second stage when culture shock is at its highest. This again goes to prove that culture shock has a significant effect on English language learning.

Finally, three factors that influence language learning were compared with each other to identify which of them had a greater impact. They were personality, motivation and culture shock. It was found that culture shock had a statistically significant relationship with both English language learning experience and test scores when compared with the other two variables.

From the statistical analyses it can be understood that culture shock largely affects the way international students learn English and cope with the other aspects of their sojourn in India as students. Since culture shock is a very real and painful experience, active steps need to be taken by all those who are involved in the education ambit to deal with the issue.
The researcher has made several recommendations at the university, college, teachers’, international students’ and Indian students’ level. It is hoped that these recommendations may be helpful in aiding international students overcome this painful experience. At the university level it is suggested that the admission process for international students be done earlier so that they may have at least two months before classes begin to get adjusted to the new environment. That would also provide the time required for students to settle into their new homes, learn social norms and behavior required to survive in the host country and to get acclimatized to the food and weather. The university can make it mandatory for these students to attend cultural orientation programs during this time. Where teachers are concerned, it is imperative that they undergo training to address issues regarding culture shock and its remedies. The university can make it compulsory for teachers to undergo these training sessions.

At the college level, especially in autonomous institutions, credit courses can be conducted which would greatly benefit international students overcome the effects of culture shock. Courses on Indian culture, English language skills and personality development can go a long way in helping these students. They can also be made to feel welcome in the college by organizing a special day for them where they can showcase their country’s culture in terms of food, clothes, songs, dances and display of items of art and craft. A separate cell can be formed in the college where international students can voice their grievances.

Teachers play a tremendously important role in helping international students integrate into the Indian scenario. They are figures of authority whom these students can go to in order to seek help in dealing with their problems and challenges. A teacher ought to be approachable and sympathetic when international students seek their help. In the classroom several activities can be conducted in the four skills, namely- reading, writing, speaking and listening. Grammar games, power point presentations and accent training aid in overcoming their fear of the language and the fear of performance.

International students on their part should practice English whenever it is possible and make use of every opportunity to immerse themselves in the language. They should never hesitate to seek support from faculty members, members of the administration, peer group from their own country and from their Indian friends. Having Indian friends also helps in learning
social etiquette, being part of cultural activities and to have an insider’s view of how Indian society functions.

Indian students can also contribute greatly to the alleviation of culture shock in their international counterparts. They need to accept foreign students as they are and not to discriminate them under any circumstances. It is also suggested that each Indian student in the class or college adopt one international student to show them the way around, to help in English language learning as well as score well in exams.

It is an accepted fact that language and culture are inextricably connected and one cannot exist without the other. Language is learnt through culture and vice versa. Cultural encounters can enhance or inhibit the learning of a language by virtue of its nature. It is the responsibility of those who are the stakeholders in the education domain (university, colleges, teachers) to make sure that international students do not suffer greatly due to culture shock. This is a phenomenon that can be identified and remedied, provided that these stakeholders take the initiative to do so.

It can be concluded then, that culture shock is a very real and painful experience which requires the intervention of external factors to deal with it. It is also apparent from the statistical analyses that this painful experience inhibits the learning of English language, thereby defeating the purpose of international students’ stay in India. This research study compared the effects of the three psychological factors- culture shock, personality traits and motivation on English language learning. One of the limitations of this study is that it did not take into account linguistic and social factors. Another is that, due to paucity of time more number of colleges could not be covered. These drawbacks may be remedied by further research in this field.

This thesis has contributed to the field of ELT by bringing to light the effect of culture shock on English language learning of international students in India. It is hoped that this particular community of students benefit from the results of this research and teachers of English language recognize the gravity of the challenge presented by culture shock and take steps to remedy it.