CHAPTER - 5

DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

Social psychologists became interested in intergroup contact for its relevance to better understanding among people belonging to different groups. It was expected that intergroup contacts would lead to a better understanding among people who did not have much opportunity to interact among themselves. However, Amir (1969) has shown that intergroup contact may have an effect contrary to what is expected of it. Reviewing a large number of studies Amir came to the conclusion that in order to have positive effect on intergroup relations, contact should occur under certain circumstances.

While earlier studies of intergroup contacts were confined to different ethnic groups living in a country, later studies of intergroup contact became concerned with the problems of foreigners arriving in an alien culture to stay for a definite period or for settling down permanently. Many theories and concepts have been forwarded by different researchers to explain the outcome of culture contact and experiences of sojourners in an alien culture. Thus Oberg (1960) introduced the term culture shock to denote the initial confusion, disorientation and emotional disturbance subjectively reported by sojourners and objectively observed by those who have professional responsibilities to help sojourners in an unfamiliar culture. The trauma, anxiety,
depression and other psychosomatic symptoms that follow the loss of familiar cues of social interaction and support do dissipate gradually in the phased manner. Researchers such as Deutsch and Won (1963); Jacobson (1963) and Lysgaard (1955) have observed that the process of adjustment of sojourners to an alien culture follows the pattern of a U-curve. The phases are: an initial stage of pleasure and optimism which is replaced by hostility and frustration, depression and confusion. The final phase is that of confidence and satisfaction with the receiving culture as sojourners become familiar with new cues of social interaction.

According to Furnham and Bochner (1982) the clinical-adjustive orientation to the problem of living in an alien culture is not of much relevance to the amelioration of the problem and to the preparation of predeparture training for those who would be going to an alien country. They are of the view that it is more useful to identify difficulties and social skills required to deal with the difficulties. In order to identify the kinds of problems encountered by alien people, Furnham and Bochner (1982) carried out factor analytic study of social difficulties experienced by foreign students in Britain. The study led to the identification of the following factors: formal relations/focus of attention, managing intimate relationships, public rituals, initiating contact/introductions, public decision making and assertiveness.
The country which alien people arrive in may differ from the country of origin in respect to economic development, living conditions, political system, political stability, educational system, recreational facilities and many other aspects of life which may determine the nature and intensity of problems experienced by the aliens. Keeping this in mind, a factor analytic study was conducted by Odera (1992) to identify the dimensions of problems experienced by foreign students in India. The study conducted by Odera (1992) is a pilot phase of the current study. For the purpose of comparison and identification of extracted factors certain items which were found to have high situation in different factors in Furnham and Bochner's (1982) study were also included in the pool of items which were generated by interviewing foreign students in India. The following eight factors were extracted:

(a) Relations with the host stewards (RHS): This factor involves mannerism of the host stewards towards the guest students and inadequacy of the hosts to manage effectively the affairs of the guest students. In a way the hosts are short of consideration for the guest students.

(b) Stress due to habits and lifestyles of the hosts (SLH): The factor accounts for the psychological stress the students go through due to unique behavioural patterns of the host population. This leads to casual interaction between the two groups.
(c) Treatment meted out (TM): This factor accounts for conducts and habits of the hosts towards the foreign students. The students are handled rudely and treated with contempt at times.

(d) Pleasure-unpleasure of interaction (PUI): This factor shows that some of the situations in India are congruent with desires and expectations of the students while at the same time some situations are anxiety provoking.

(e) Suspiciousness of hosts-guests relations (SHG): The native people and the students are suspicious of each other's behaviours, this attitude creates mistrust between the two groups and gives rise to aggression and hostility towards each other. Subsequently, friendships or going out with the host nationals are infrequent or rare events among the guest students.

(f) Reaction to unfamiliar people and situations (RPS): This factor indicates that managing relations with unfamiliar people and coping with ambiguous situations undermine the confidence of the guest students and expose them to stress.

(g) Accommodation and crowding (AC): This factor refers to lack of easy accommodation and exposure to unruly crowds that make the students tense. The hosts when in crowd become rowdy, unco-operative, offensive, disrespectful, annoying and outrageous.

(h) Problems of interaction and freedom of choice (IFC): This
factor accounts for interactions that cause unhappiness and being helpless to attain one's desires.

None of the factors extracted in the present study is found to tally with the factors extracted by Furnham and Bochner (1982). Having confirmed that there are different dimensions of difficulties encountered by foreign students in different countries, it was to be explored whether same set of psychological variables are associated with different kinds of difficulties experienced by foreign students in India. For this reason one has to determine the unique contribution of different variables in the prediction of different kinds of difficulties.

The specific hypotheses to be tested in the present study are:

i) Male and female African students will differ in regard to each of the eight kinds of difficulties experienced by them, viz.: relations with the host stewards (RHS), stress due to habits and life styles of the hosts (SLH), treatment meted out (TM), pleasure-unpleasure of interaction (PUI), suspiciousness of hosts-guests relations (SHG), reaction to unfamiliar people and situations (RPS), accommodation and crowding (AC) and finally, problems of interaction and freedom of choice (IFC).

ii) Male and female African students will differ in respect to the following variables: reasons for preferring India for further studies (WHY), cultural similarity (CS), communi-
cation skills (CoSk), fulfilment of expectations (EF), ego-strength (E-S) and intolerance of ambiguity (IA).

iii) African and Middle East (ME) students will differ in respect to each of the eight kinds of difficulties experienced by them; African students experience more difficulties than Middle East students.

iv) African and Middle East students will differ in respect to the following variables: reasons for preferring India for further studies (WHY), cultural similarity (CS), communication skills (CoSk), fulfilment of expectations (EF), ego-strength (E-S) and intolerance of ambiguity (IA).

v) Variables, reasons for preferring India for further studies (WHY), cultural similarity (CS), communication skills (CoSk), fulfilment of expectations (EF), ego-strength (E-S) and intolerance of ambiguity (IA) shall have significant correlation with each of the eight factors [viz.: relations with the host stewards (RHS), stress due to habits and life styles of the hosts (SLH), treatment meted out (TM), pleasure-unpleasure of interaction (PUI) suspiciousness of hosts-guests relations (SHG), reaction to unfamiliar people and situations (RPS), accommodation and crowding (AC) and finally, problems of interaction and freedom of choice (IFC) of difficulties in both African and Middle East samples.

Thus the six predictor variables can be combined to form regressional equations for prediction of the eight different difficulties.
As reported in chapter 4, African male and female students were not found to differ in respect to any difficulty. This implies that the nature of interaction with the hosts is not influenced by the distinction of gender. The gender specific behaviour patterns which male and female African students might have acquired during the course of socialization at the time of their upbringing in their native countries become of little consequence in their interaction with the members of the host country. Moreover, the host nationals seem to treat male and female African students alike; they are not more favourably disposed towards African female students than they are towards African male students. In the absence of adequate number of female students from Middle East countries we cannot make a similar statement in regard to the treatment received by Middle East male and female students, but it is to be observed that the common belief that fair sex is more likely to be treated with tinge of courtesy and consideration cannot be extended to female students living among members of the receiving country.

The fact that male and female African students do not differ in respect to any of the six predictor variables indicates that neither male nor female group is better equipped with personal resources and skills to deal more effectively with demands of living in an alien culture.

African and Middle East students are found to differ in respect to five kinds of difficulties, namely: stress due
to habits and lifestyles of the hosts (SLH), reaction to unfamiliar people and situations (RPS), suspiciousness of hosts-guests relations (SHG), problems of interaction and freedom of choice (IFC) and treatment meted out (TM). The fact that Middle East students encounter less difficulties as compared to their African counterparts may be explained in terms of more cultural similarity between Middle East students and the native people.

When African and Middle East students are compared in respect to the six predictor variables, significant differences are observed in two groups in relation to their mean scores on the measures of cultural similarity (CS) and the measures of fulfilment of expectations (EF). The content of the measure of cultural similarity (CS) includes aspects such as: food habits, clothes (e.g. dresses, shirts, trousers), body language, house designs, curriculum syllabi, philosophy of life of common man, physique, hair, facial features, colour of the skin and so forth. All these aspects of similarity are more conducive to pleasant interaction between Middle East students and the native people. One of the important dissimilarities between African students and the native people is physical appearance. The criterion of physical attractiveness prevalent in India renders Middle East students to be more socially acceptable than their African counterparts.
The fulfilment of expectations (EF) is another variable in respect of which the Middle East and the African students differ, there is greater fulfilment of expectations in the case of Middle East students than in the case of African students.

In the African sample variable fulfilment of expectations (EF) makes a significant unique contribution in the prediction of seven out of eight criterion variables. The criterion related to problems of interaction and freedom of choice (IFC) is best predicted by variable fulfilment of expectations (EF). On the other side, variable cultural similarity (CS) is the best predictor which makes significant unique contribution in the prediction of six out of eight variables in the Middle East sample. The best predicted criterion in the Middle East sample is stress due to habits and lifestyles of the hosts (SLH). However, it was found that the variable fulfilment of expectations (EF) could make a significant unique contribution in the prediction of only one criterion, i.e., accommodation and crowding (AC) in the Middle East sample and variable cultural similarity (CS) could make a significant contribution in the prediction of two criterion variables namely, stress due to habits and lifestyles of the hosts (SLH) and treatment meted out (TM) in the African sample.

Intolerance of ambiguity (IA) is the only IV that does not make significant contribution in the prediction of any of the criterion variable in either African sample or Middle
East sample. Variable related to reasons for preferring India for further studies (WHY) has made negligible contribution in the prediction of only one criterion, relations with the host stewards (RHS) in the African sample but did not predict any criterion in the case of Middle East sample. Variables ego-strength (E-S) and communication skills (CoSk) made significant contribution in the prediction of stress due to habits and lifestyles of the hosts (SLH) and problems of interaction and freedom of choice (IFC); and pleasure-unpleasure of interaction (PUI), and accommodation and crowding (AC) respectively in the African sample but not in the Middle East sample.

In fact, the two personality variables, ego-strength (E-S) and intolerance of ambiguity (IA) are not found to be good predictors of the difficulties encountered by the guest students in India. The fact that the variable related to reasons for preferring India for higher studies (WHY) was not found to be a significant predictor of difficulties strengthens the point of view regarding the concomitance of fulfilment of expectations (EF) and the difficulties. It may be so due to the fact that before foreign students come to India they are not very clear about what they should expect, but as they spend some time they are exposed to different settings of life in India and related situational difficulties. Along with difficulties, they may acquire the feeling of lack of fulfilment of expectations (EF) or otherwise.

The variable communication skills (CoSk) was found to be a predictor of two kinds of difficulties in the African
sample, pleasure-unpleasure of interaction (PUI) and accommodation and crowding (AC) but it could not be a useful predictor of any difficulty in the case of Middle East students. Most of the students from African countries are capable of communicating in English but it is not the case with the Middle East students who have to acquire communication skills (CoSk) in this language which is the medium of instruction in the Indian universities where foreign students are enrolled. Communication skills (CoSk) include not only ability to converse and write English but also ability to communicate with the native people in local dialects in places such as markets, shops etc. In addition to that, understanding of native languages is likely to make the host culture easily accessible to foreign students.

However, due to the fact that foreign students are observed to interact more with fellow compatriots and foreign students from other countries than the native people, the lack of knowledge of native language cannot be a potent predictor of all the kinds of difficulties experienced by the foreign students. Nevertheless, better communication skills (CoSk) may make the interaction between the native people and foreign students a little more pleasant but at certain occasions may also create bad blood between foreign students and the native people because the derogatory remarks hurled at the international students in the native languages become meaningful to them.
The prediction of difficulty related to accommodation and crowding (AC) in the African sample with acquisition of communication skills (CoSk) becomes possible because this would enable African students to adjust better in crowded places such as hostels, colleges, departments and also inside means of public transportation such as trains, buses etc. With communication of their feelings and attitudes to the native people present in a crowded place foreign students may become less sensitized to the problems of accommodation and crowding (AC).

The reason as to why communication skills (CoSk) could not be good predictor of social difficulties in the case of Middle East students may be due to the fact that inspite of individual differences observed in their ability to communicate in English, most of them know little English when they arrive in India and gradually they are able to acquire some proficiency in the language though the proficiency may not be as higher as it is claimed to be. This observation is made in the light of the fact that during the course of data collection, Middle East students were to be explained the meaning of different items and sentences though their self appraised proficiency in English was higher. Like the African students, Middle East students have frequent interactions with fellow compatriots and other foreign students which make the learning of the native languages less relevant to the difficulties experienced by them. However, there is more similarity in
the vocabulary of Middle East languages and languages spoken in Northern India. As a consequence, Middle East students may feel more at home in India than African students for the reason of greater similarity in the languages and reasons other than disparity in language become more relevant to the experience of different kinds of difficulties experienced by Middle East students.

Let us consider the relative effectiveness of the six variables selected for prediction of the eight kinds of difficulties. Two of the six variables are personality characteristics which are assumed to be acquired by foreign students before their arrival in India. These characteristics are ego-strength (E-S) and intolerance of ambiguity (IA). The rationale of their inclusion in the set of predictors is already discussed in detail in chapter 1. In spite of the fact that these two variables appear to be relevant to an individual's social adjustment in a new cultural setting, these variables were not found to make significant contribution in the prediction of any kind of difficulties experienced by foreign students in India. This finding seems to have implication that in a setting where an individual's behaviour is determined by contemporary demands of life, personality factors are not likely to be crucial determinants of an individual's reaction to the situation.

Other four variables considered to be effective predictors of difficulties are not at as much high level of abstraction as the two personality variables, namely;
ego-strength (E-S) and intolerance of ambiguity (IA). They are more proximal antecedent of the difficulties encountered by foreign students in India. Of these four predictors one namely reasons for preferring India for further studies (WHY) has to do with the positive or negative expectations foreign students come along with at the time of their arrival in India. If not constrained by other factors a foreign student is likely to prefer to study in a country about which he has positive opinion and he is not likely to study in a country about which he has negative opinion. However, since such constraints as funds needed for continuing higher education in a country where one would like to pursue studies may not be wished away, one has to settle for an option of lesser level of preference.

The opinion prior to undergoing the experience of living in another country does not seem to be as effective predictor of difficulties as the disparity between what a person was expecting and what he found after living in an alien country. His experiences may be more positive or pleasant than what he was expecting. Conversely, positive expectations that a student brought with him at the time of arrival might be overshadowed by the negative events and experiences that he encountered after living in an alien country. The findings of the study show that variable; reasons for preferring India for further studies (WHY) is not significantly related to any of the social difficulties and as such it would not be a good predictor.
The fulfilment of expectations (EF) is the variable which was found to be correlated with all the eight dimensions of difficulties in African students and seven dimensions of difficulties in the case of Middle East students. This variable makes unique contribution in the prediction of the following dimensions of difficulties in the case of African sample: stress due to habits and lifestyles of the hosts (SLH), problems of interaction and freedom of choice (IFC), treatment meted out (TM), relations with the host stewards (RHS), pleasure-unpleasure of interaction (PUI), suspiciousness of hosts-guests relations (SHG) and accommodation and crowding (AC). In the case of Middle East students, this variable is found to be correlated with all dimensions of difficulties except with criterion; relations with the host stewards (RHS), but it could make unique contribution in the prediction of only one criterion variable namely accommodation and crowding (AC).

The difference observed in effectiveness of variable fulfilment of expectations (EF) in the prediction of criterion variable in the case of African and Middle East students implies that one has to search for different reasons for the difficulties encountered by different alien groups in the same country of their arrival. This observation is further strengthened by the fact that in the case of Middle East sample the best predictor of difficulties is variable cultural similarity (CS) which is effective in predicting the following six dimensions of difficulties:
stress due to habits and lifestyles of the hosts (SLH), treatment meted out (TM), pleasure-unpleasure of interaction (PUI), reaction to unfamiliar people and situations (RPS), suspiciousness of hosts-guests relations (SHG) and problems of interaction and freedom of choice (IFC).

The cultural similarity was expected to be a good predictor of different kinds of difficulties of foreign students because those who came from culture which is more dissimilar from the host culture are not likely to have social skills that would enable them to have smooth interaction with the members of the receiving country. The cultural similarity (CS) variable has been given more importance by culture-learning model of contact espoused by Bochner (1972, 1981, 1982). The culture learning model rejects the pseudo-medical model in which the notion of culture shock is of great importance. The notion of culture shock has implication that sojourners suffer a break down in their normal healthy psychological functioning, they are ill and need treatment or at least counselling. The culture learning model is also important from the point of view of training programmes devised for the purpose of imparting cross-cultural competence to sojourners.

The culture-learning model is further strengthened by our findings which reveal that predictor variables ego-strength (E-S) which denotes individual's personality resources to cope successfully with shocking situations and predictor variable intolerance of ambiguity (IA) which is
relevant to sensitivity of the initial shock caused by an exposure to unfamiliar situations, were not found to be effective predictors of social difficulties, have implications that the notion of culture shock is of little significance in understanding the nature of difficulties experienced by foreign students.

Considering the predictability of different criteria, we find that the best predicted criterion is stress due to habits and lifestyles of the hosts (SLH) in both African and Middle East samples. The predictor variables explain 19.4% of variance of this criterion in the African sample and 29.7% in the Middle East sample. It is to be pointed out that the factor stress due to habits and lifestyles of the hosts (SLH) is the largest factor extracted from the matrix of intercorrelation of responses given to the items of social difficulties questionnaire. This factor accounts for 23.07% of the common variance shared by the eight factors. The items which are included in the measure of this factor have the following content: Indians' habit of "polluting" the environment, violation of traffic rules by host nationals, Indians' habit of spitting in streets, overcharging of items by shopkeepers and vegetable vendors, absence of whole-hearted co-operation from Indian counterparts, belief of native people that foreign students have too much money, increment in price of daily used commodities, sound pollution (crackers, hooting etc.), eve-teasing behaviours of Indian boys/men towards
girls/women and great differences in habits and cultural approaches.

Thus the factor stress due to habits and lifestyles of the hosts (SLH) has nothing to do with direct interactions between foreign students and the Indians; it seems to involve the negative impressions of the native people created in the minds of foreign students due to unhygienic and undesirable habits of the native people.

The second best predicted variable in both African and Middle East samples is problems of interaction and freedom of choice (IFC). The predictor variables explain its 21.1% of variance in African sample and 23.8% of variance in Middle East sample. It is to be pointed out that problems of interaction and freedom of choice (IFC) is a small factor, it accounts for 6% of common variance. Thus, there seems to be no systematic relation between the amount of variance of criterion variable being explained by the predictors and the amount of common variance shared by the criterion variable, i.e., size of the factor. The items which comprise this factor have the following content: getting very intimate with a member of opposite sex, getting admission to a university one desires, quality of food in university messes, canteens and affordable restaurants, nagging boggars who go to an extent of bargaining, understanding English spoken by some Indians in public offices, getting a course one desires, being accompanied by Indian friends who do not behave in a proper manner, some teachers and students becoming serious only two months or so to exams, teaching
and examination systems and having strong feelings of homesickness. Unlike the factor stress due to habits and lifestyles of the hosts (SLH), the factor problems of interaction and freedom of choice (IFC) contains items which refer to certain kinds of difficulties experienced by foreign students rather than to the annoying habits of the native people and the environmental degradation which are perceived to be sources of difficulties by the foreign students.

In chapter 4 we compared the predictability of different criteria of African and Middle East samples. Now it is to be pointed out that the set of predictors could make relatively better prediction of most of the social difficulties in the Middle East sample than the African sample. The implication of this finding is that we have to search for different variables for the prediction of different kinds of difficulties experienced by the students who come from different parts of the world to pursue further studies in India.

The six variables that were selected for the prediction of the social difficulties of foreign students were not found to be good predictors despite of the fact that they were selected on the basis of their theoretical relevance to the criteria which they were to predict. The best predicted criterion variable is found to be stress due to habits and lifestyles of the hosts (SLH) in the case of Middle East group but not more than 29.7% of variance of this criterion could be explained by the predictors. In the
case of African sample the best predicted variable is problems of interaction and freedom of choice (IFC) but not more than 21.1% of variance of this criterion variable could be explained by the predictors.

In view of the fact that major portion of variance of criterion variables remained unexplained we have to search for a strategy that would enable us to make better prediction of difficulties of foreign students. Two alternative strategies can be suggested. First, making use of a large number of predictors which may not have high correlation with the criterion to be predicted. Second, making a search for the variables which bear high correlation with the criterion to be predicted. The first approach seems to be more appropriate because the criterion to be predicted is complex and the set of theoretically relevant variables bearing high correlation with the criterion can be specified. One can also make search of moderator variables that would be helpful in the involvement of predictability of social difficulties of the guest students coming from different countries.

However, there are certain variables which are so much relevant to the prediction of difficulties of foreign students that one cannot ignore even when one follows the first alternative, namely, increasing the collection in the basket of predictor variables. These variables are to be such as to enable us to provide specific informations about the receiving country that would help prospective foreign
students to acquire social skills for their adjustment to or acceptance in a foreign country. These variables are:

(a) Educational system: This variable is important given the fact that the main aim of the students going to a foreign country is to acquire knowledge and pursue studies, so information related to this variable are very necessary in order to relate it with the factors related to educational aspirations of the students. Besides, the variable is in juxtaposition with future placement in terms of jobs for foreign students when they return to their homelands. This variable would create anxiety and stress to the students especially when they are not certain of gaining jobs due to educational system; educational structure, teaching methods and content of syllabi.

(b) Social life: This variable is relevant because it would cover all aspects of rules, etiquette and social conventions of the receiving country that may make the students' adjustment easier.

(c) Living conditions: It cannot be ignored whether the students are contented or satisfied with day-to-day conditions in the receiving country or not. If the students are most of the time worried about deteriorating conditions in the host country, it makes their stay unbearable in a way.

(d) Attitudes of the hosts/relations with the hosts: A lot of difficulties of foreign students are created due to attitudes of the native people regarding physical appearance,
habits, lifestyles of foreign students, etc. Xenophobia, stereotypes and disparity in the evaluation of social desirability of different styles of behaviour patterns and habits of foreign students are the main components of the attitudes of the host population towards foreign students which are to be considered in the prediction of difficulties experienced by foreign students.

The importance of the variables enlisted in the foregoing paragraph was recognized by the present investigator but their contribution in the prediction of the criterion variable was camouflaged and undermined due to the fact that they were not considered separately and covered comprehensively. To illustrate this, there were certain items regarding educational system in the measure of preferences for coming to India for further studies (WHY), fulfilment of expectations (EF) and cultural similarity (CS). Although the measure of fulfilment of expectations (EF) was found to be a good predictor of difficulties encountered by foreign students, it is to be observed that the scale is not made up of highly homogeneous items. One can therefore, break this scale into different measures of fulfilment of specific kinds of expectations such as expectations regarding educational aspects and related issues, lifestyles and conditions of living, acceptance by the members of the host country, etc. and can use them in the prediction of difficulties with hope that it will lead to a better coverage of variance of different kinds of social difficulties experienced by foreign students in India.