

PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES FACED BY FOREIGN NATIONALS PURSUING HIGHER EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MYSORE, INDIA

Dr. Vasanthi Reena Williams
HOD, Vidya Vikas Post Graduate Department of Commerce
Mysuru, India
Email: rina.sony@gmail.com
&
Mr. Ramadhan Muhaiyya
Student of M.Com
Vidya Vikas Post Graduate Department of Commerce
Mysuru, India

***Abstract:** Education is never restricted by boundaries. Knowledge is infinite and unbounded and needs to be shared. From time immemorial, people have been peripatetic and have been crossing borders in search of knowledge and enhancing their skill. Like many other countries, India too has been a preferred destination for education by many across the world. Of the several destinations for education in India, the University of Mysore, which is more than a decade old, has been a preferred choice for many. The University boasts of students not only from other States in India, but from all over the world. This study tries to examine the rationale behind foreign students opting to study at the University of Mysore and the challenges they face with regard to education, imbibing knowledge and congenial atmosphere during their period of study.*

***Keywords:** Foreign Nationals, Higher Education, University of Mysore*

1. INTRODUCTION

Education has been defined as a form of learning in which knowledge, skills, values, beliefs and habits of a group of people are transferred from one generation to the next through storytelling, discussion, teaching, training or research. It makes an individual civilized, refined, cultured and educated.

The University of Mysore being one of the oldest in India is also the first University to be established by an Indian. It was Sri Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV, the then Maharaja of Mysuru, who was the brain behind its establishment. The University has completed one hundred years of glorious service to education and is one of the most sought after University by students not only from other part of India but also from around the world. In fact, Mysore has been listed as amongst the top five cities that attract international students who take up various courses provided by the University of Mysore. The University presently has forty two Postgraduate Departments at the Main Campus named Manasagangotri with two Postgraduate Centers situated at Mandya and Hassan; and one Satellite Centre at Chamarajanagar. The University is presently providing higher education to more than 85000 students, of which over 10,000 are Postgraduates¹. As many as 1400 students from 50 countries are pursuing higher studies in this University. Countries include Afghanistan, China, Iran, Jordan, Thailand, Indonesia, Egypt,

¹ Source: University of Mysore website. www.uni-mysore.ac.in

Syria, Tanzania, Uzbekistan, Kajiakhan, Kirghizia, Mongolia, Uganda, Yemen, Kenya, Palestine, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal. To ensure knowledge updating among students, the University has introduced several courses that are in tune with global requirements².

1.1. Significance of the study

This study tries to analyze the criteria that make foreign nationals choose this University for pursuing their higher education. This study focuses only on foreign nationals who are pursuing their Post graduate studies at the University of Mysore and aims at identifying their prospects of securing education qualification and also the challenges faced by the foreign nationals while pursuing their education , in Mysuru. The outcome of this study would help the University and the affiliated institutions to effectively cater to the needs of these students and ensure better service and goodwill amongst them.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Blass, E, Jasman, A & Shelley, S (2010), in their study on international student community at UK, mention that most of the previous experience of foreign students will have been of other educational systems, in cultural contexts and sometimes in a language that is different from the one in which they will now study. Similarly, Kapur, D & Crowley M (2008) Hakmann, H & St. Clair, A L (2012) identify international / intercultural dimension into the teaching , research and service of an institution. They mention that International students can be grouped into two main categories and not as a homogeneous group . Global South, which is commonly labeled as the Third World or developing countries and Global North, consisting of students enrolled in institutions on an exchange or internationalization programme.

Barber, M, Donnelly, K & Rizvi.S (2013) mention through their study that the foreign national students face social environmental challenges with reference to difficulties in adapting to a new culture, difficulties with English language and communication problems. These elucidations can also be observed by various other authors who have highlighted challenges faced by foreign national students with regard to Cultural differences and communication barriers due to language spoken in the host country. (Al-Zubaidi & Rechards 2009: Alavi & Shafeq 2011, Mustapha 2010). In addition, Kharas, H (2010) and Lin & Yi (1997) mention that English accent is another major problem faced by foreign national students. This has been supported by Bharak Talebloo and Roselan Bin Baki (2013), who also mention that the foreign national students find it difficult to cope sometimes with the teaching methodology adopted in the host country and therefore face academic difficulties. Chun-Mei Zhao, George D . Kuh and Robert M Carini. The study highlights that the international students were more engaged in educationally purposeful activities than American students, especially during the first year of college, which converged considerably during the second year of their study. According to Furnham & Alibhai, 1985; Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998 students who had good network were able to deal with culture shock and stress. Similarly those who had a strong social support system were able to adjust effectively to college life in their host country. The study also identify that foreign national students tend to make friends from the same country and those who cultivated friendship with American students were found to adapt and adjust more easily to new environments.

² Source: University of Mysore website. www.uni-mysore.ac.in

2.1. Objective of the study

- To study the perspective of foreign national students on the academic progress at the University of Mysore.
- To analyze the major challenges faced by foreign national students at the University of Mysore in their academic progress perspectives.
- To examine the challenge facing the foreign students on adaption to foreign environment.

3. METHODOLOGY

Table-1: Showing the Summary of Research Methodology adopted

Research design	Exploratory and Descriptive Research
Sampling Technique	Judgmental and Convenience sampling
Sampling Unit	Foreign national students pursuing education in University of Mysore.
Sample Size	150 foreign students presently pursuing their post graduate studies at the University of Mysore.
Research Instrument	Questionnaire
Data Collection	Direct interviews
Analysis	Charts , Graphs and statistical analysis

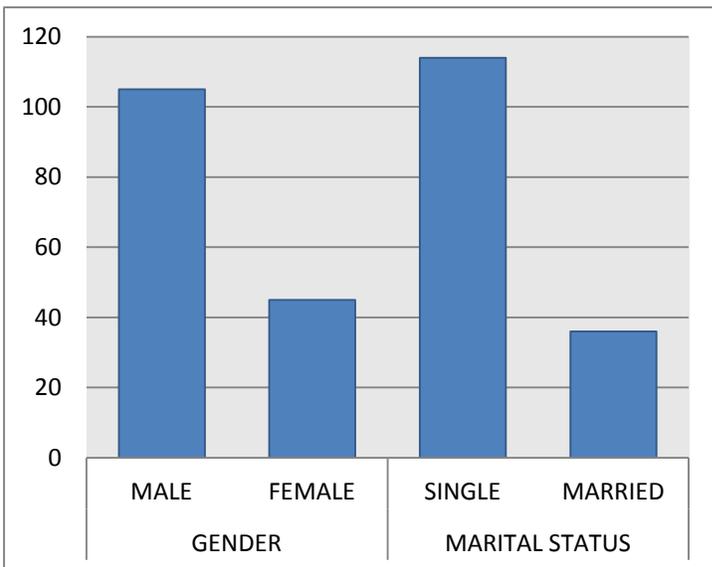
Source: Survey data

The suggestions from the study are based on the responses received from the respondents who were selected based on their nationality (other than Indians), pursuing their higher education at the University of Mysore, data which was collected thorough the responses received from the focus group through direct interviews and questionnaire, and secondary data from relevant journals and periodicals with published articles on the topic. Sampling used in this study is judgmental and convenience sampling as only students with foreign nationality, studying at the University of Mysore were chosen as respondents. The study includes both male and female students from different age groups as respondents, to ensure that the responses and opinion collected were not biased. The authors were able to collect responses from 150 foreign national students who are presently pursuing their higher education at the University of Mysore and constitute the sample size for this study.

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study attempts to analyze the prospects for foreign nationals choosing the University of Mysore for pursuing higher education and also identify challenges faced by these students living at Mysuru City, in a foreign and dissimilar cultural environment , away from their home country. The University of Mysore is one of the oldest Universities set up by the erstwhile Maharaja of Mysuru and is a very popular destination for many students pursuing higher education from all over the world.

CHART-1 SHOWING DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BASED ON GENDER AND MARITAL STATUS OF THE RESPONDENTS INCLUDED IN THE STUDY



Gender	Frequency	%P
Male	105	70
Female	45	30
Total	150	100

Marital Status	Frequency	%P
Single	114	76
Married	36	24
Total	150	100

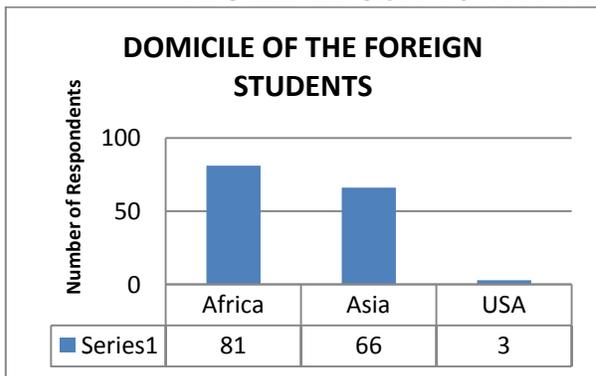
Source: Survey data.

4.1 Interpretation-1

To ensure that the analysis give a fair picture to the study, both male and female students were selected for the study. Out of the total 150 respondents 45 (30%) were female students and the rest 70% were male students. In totality, however the number of foreign male students far exceeded the number of foreign female students taking up higher education at the University of Mysore.

From the study it was observed that majority of the foreign national students, were unmarried (76%). Further, it was also observed that those of the respondents who were married were above 30 years of age. It was also observed that those who were married also had their spouse enroll together for education at the University, though, for different courses. Out of the 150 respondents to the study, 54% (81 students) were in the age group 21 to 25 while the rest 46% of the respondents were 26 years of age and above.

CHART-2 SHOWING THE DOMICILE OF THE FOREIGN STUDENTS PURSUING HIGHER EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MYSORE



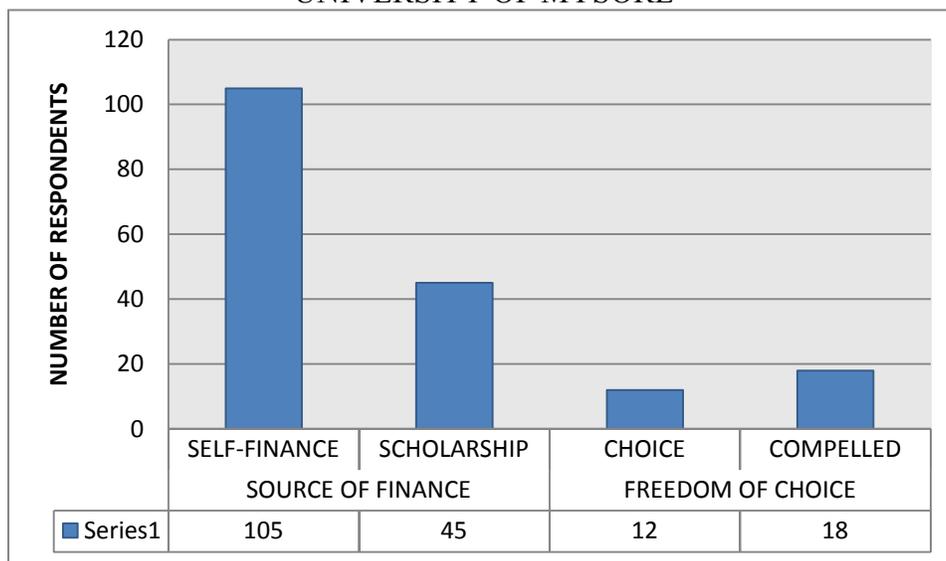
Continent	Frequency	%P
Africa	81	54
Asia	66	44
USA	3	2
Total	150	100

Source: Survey data.

4.2 Interpretation-2

The study reveals that majority of the students taking up higher education at the University of Mysore, pursuing their post graduate degree, are nationals from African countries (54%), followed by neighboring countries of India, namely, Srilanka, Maldives, Afghanistan, China and few from other countries in the Asian continent (44%). Numbers of students pursuing higher education from the United States of America were very less (2%). The study therefore reveals that the University of Mysore was much favored by the students from Africa and other countries in the Asian Continent than students from other Continents.

CHART-3 SHOWING SOURCE OF FINANCE AND FREEDOM OF CHOICE OF UNIVERSITY FOR FOREIGN STUDENTS PURSUING HIGHER EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MYSORE



Source: Survey data.

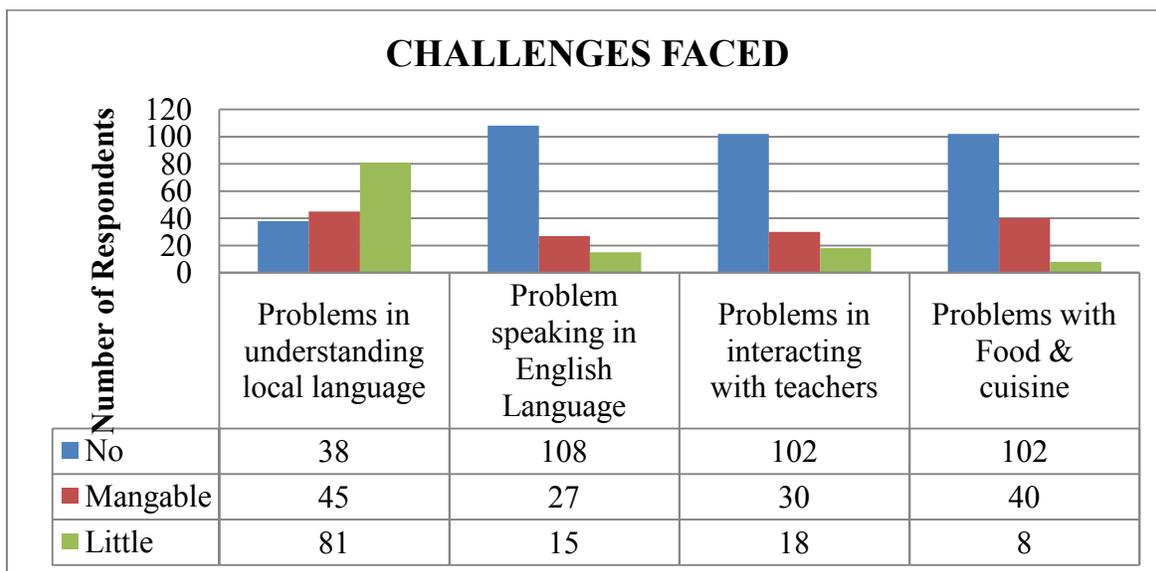
4.3 Interpretation-3

The study further reveals that majority of the foreign nationals (70%) pursuing higher education at the University of Mysore were not deputed under scholarship and were self-financing their stay and study. Further, the study reveals that these students found that the cost involved for their stay and study at Mysore was much economical along with securing a degree from the University of Mysore which was well recognized in their respective countries and elsewhere.

The study observed that 60% of the students did not have the choice of selecting the university where they preferred to pursue their higher education. The reasons cited were, cost of living in a particular city, cost of education and fee structure, affable and sociable environment, adjustment with food and culture barriers. These factors made the foreign students opt for Universities other than those that they actually preferred. Secondly, they were guided by their peers from their respective country who had earlier qualified from this University or from India, at some point in time. Some of the respondents also mentioned that the amount they received as scholarship was a deciding factor for choosing University for pursuing higher education. Mysore city is preferred as it has pleasant weather and does not have extreme climate changes. The cost of living is proportionately much less when compared to other cities in India and most importantly, a degree secured from the University of Mysore is acknowledged and approved, all over the world.

Discussions with the foreign national students who responded to the study show that 60% among them were aware of the city and this University much earlier to them joining for courses. Further discussions revealed that they had friends or relatives who were or had already completed their study at the University of Mysore. However, 40% mentioned that they were very new to the environment and had collected information that was available through the internet. Some of them had enrolled for the courses based on the advice they received from representative mediators from their country, who had facilitated their enrolment for courses in India, while some had directly approached the University seeking admission and hence were new to the environment.

CHART-4
CHALLENGES FACED BY THE FOREIGN NATIONAL STUDENTS



Source: Survey data

Descriptive Statistics			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Problems in understanding local language	3	54.67	23.072
Problem speaking in English language	3	50.00	50.587
Problem interacting with teachers / following lecture sessions	3	50.00	45.431
Problems with food & cuisine	3	50.00	47.791

Source: Survey data

4.4 Interpretation-4

The statistical analysis also show that the foreign national students seem to have problems in understanding the local language but that does not in any way interfere in their pursuit of higher education. The descriptive statistics show that the challenges faced by the foreign national students are not very grave in nature given the fact that they are able to converse in English language. The statistical analysis shows that there is positive correlation between speaking English language and interacting with the respective teachers. Therefore, we may mention that

foreign national students having command over English language (which is a universal language), faceless problems when compared to those who are not very conversant in the language.

Table-2 Correlation

Correlations					
		Problems understanding local language	Problem speaking in English language	Problem interacting with teachers / following lecture sessions	Problems with food & cuisine
Problems in understanding local language	Pearson Correlation	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)				
	N	3			
Problem speaking in English language	Pearson Correlation	-.714	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.494			
	N	3	3		
Problem interacting with teachers / following lectures sessions	Pearson Correlation	-.723	1.000**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.485	.009		
	N	3	3	3	
Problems with food & cuisine	Pearson Correlation	-.851	.975	.978	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.352	.142	.133	
	N	3	3	3	3

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The study observed that though majority of the foreign national students could speak and understand English, not all of them were comfortable in the language and depended on their friends or class-fellows to help them for their learning and living requirements as well. Some of the respondents in fact had learned a little of the local language (kannada) and were able to manage their activities involving local day-to-day transactions. However, the medium of instruction at the University Level is English and hence those who could converse /understand the language were comfortable in understanding the lessons taught and had good interaction with their faculty members as well as their class-fellows.

When we observe the chart (Chart-4), we could interpret that those of the foreign nationals who could not communicate or understand English language were dependent on their fellow mates to help them for their daily requirements and also did not interact with their faculty members as well as their other counterparts. It was also observed that the respondents who were good at speaking English language had better rapport with their class fellows and teachers and involved

themselves with lots of activity like participating in cultural events, sporting events etc., when compared to those who could not speak the language.

Similarly, when it came to understanding the local language, majority of the respondents were able to converse in English and since the localities are also forthcoming and accommodating, they were able to manage. It is important to mention here that some of the respondents had learned a few important words in the local language to help them during emergencies, like when they are amidst rural folk who could not understand the English language. Another interesting fact was that the respondents were very fond of Indian cuisine and the local food. Masala Dosa and Idli being their favorites followed by snacks like gobimanchurian, masala puri and pani puri. The students seem to be fascinated by the Indian customs and traditions and never miss an opportunity when invited for local festival and functions. They also liked to wear Indian costumes like the salwar kameez (both men and women), churidhar, Punjabi suits and sari.

5. CONCLUSION

This study, though very brief in nature, has helped in highlighting important facts and specifics concerning the challenges faced by foreign nationals who are pursuing their higher education at the University of Mysore. With the world becoming a global village, influence of various cultures has made it comfortable for people from other culture to mingle and adjust in a new environment. The importance of enhancing knowledge through education has been acknowledged the world over and hence people travel to various places seeking higher knowledge.

The study identifies that the University of Mysore is one of the preferred destinations by foreign students for higher education. The University of Mysore has made several provisions for ensuring that the students coming for overseas are well looked after, in terms of their educational needs. The environment in Mysuru is also very pleasant and very conducive for education and, the cost of living too is economical when compared to other cities in India. Therefore, in this context, it is important for the University of Mysore to ensure that; keeping these perspectives in view, it becomes imperative for the University authorities to keep reviewing activities concerning provisions for foreign national students to ensure updating and enhancement of services being provided to them. This will assist in further popularizing Mysuru as a preferred destination for higher education.

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