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Understanding Indian International Student Experiences, Expectations, Challenges, and Support Interventions in UK Higher Education

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ABSTRACT: *In recent years, the number of Indian international students studying in institutions in the United Kingdom (UK) has significantly increased. While pursuing higher education in the UK provides Indian international students with substantial benefits, adapting to a new academic and sociocultural environment presents them with significant challenges. Drawing upon the literature, this literature review provides a comprehensive summary of the specific challenges faced by Indian international students at UK universities compared with their initial expectations. The findings reveal significant challenges in both academic and non-academic domains, encompassing language barriers, unfamiliarity with academic culture and writing conventions, hurdles in securing employment, and sociocultural and psychological stressors. Furthermore, the review also identifies the existing helpful interventions provided by higher educational institutions in overcoming these challenges, which emphasizes the need for tailored support systems to address difficulties more effectively and to ensure positive experiences for Indian international students.*

Keywords: Indian students, international students, student expectations, student challenges, university interventions

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INTRODUCTION

For international students, the UK is among the most desirable locations for higher education (Abbas et al., 2021). India, a nation that was formerly a British colony, is home to a growing number of highly educated youths (UniAcco, 2024). Among international students in the UK, Indian students represent a large share, with an increasing number of Indian students surpassing that of students from many other nations. Between 2018 and 2022, there was a notable increase in foreign student enrollment from 469,160 to 679,970 at UK universities (HESA, 2023). Among these, approximately 57% of the students were from Asian nations, with India being the second highest at 32% after China (HESA, 2023). In other words, one in five foreign students attending UK universities is from India.

Studies in the UK provide Indian international students with several advantages in terms of academic development and career prospects. However, adapting to the new educational system and culture of the host country often makes students' lives challenging, as they come from various educational, geographical, socioeconomic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds (Chhetri et al., 2021; Lomer & Mittelmeier, 2023). As a result, these students might need to adapt not only to their program requirements and academic culture but also to other social and cultural conventions of the host country (Ammigan and Jones, 2018). As it is among the most significant source nations for the UK education sector, it is crucial for UK higher education providers to understand the experience of their Indian international students, both on campus and beyond. By understanding, evaluating, and pinpointing aspects that need improvement, providers can ensure that students have positive overall experience, including mental well-being, academic success, cultural integration and greater employability.

Indian international students possess a unique cultural and social identity among foreign students, distinguished by their diverse linguistic backgrounds, traditions, educational systems, and strong communal ties (Marom, 2022). Although Indian international students constitute a major student population in foreign universities, the literature concerning the specific challenges they encounter is scarce. Therefore, it is important to identify the challenges faced by the Indian international student community that can help universities develop effective strategies to deliver exceptional support to Indian international scholars, aiding their adjustment process and thereby enhancing their academic experience (Chennamsetti, 2020).

Our conceptual framework was that if Indian international students' expectations are not continuously addressed, then their challenges remain unspoken, which may negatively impact their study experience in the UK. With the increase in the number of Indian international students in the UK, can we keep

up with their expectations, determine their underexplored challenges, and discuss collective interventions to help enhance their experience studying in the UK? This literature review seeks to present a comprehensive examination of the specific expectations and challenges faced by Indian students in the UK and the interventions implemented by higher education institutions (HEIs) to support them. It aims to address the expectations of Indian international students so that educators and education providers can emphasize the challenges unbeknown to the majority and highlight the gaps or limitations of the current support interventions so that we can collectively continue supporting them.

METHOD

The articles selected for this review included expectations and challenges faced by Indian international students who have been enrolled or have been enrolled in universities and any interventions applied or recommended by the universities. They are peer-reviewed articles on the topic of interest. No restrictions were applied on the study types (which included literature reviews, critical reviews, questionnaire or survey-based studies, case studies, or conference reports) or databases (which included the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), Journal Storage (JSTOR), Education Research Complete, ScienceDirect, UK universities databases, and Google Scholar databases). Peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2013 and 2024 were considered for the review. Only articles published in the English language were included.

The search string was created using keywords such as “Indian students”, “expectations”, “challenges”, “migration”, “English language proficiency”, “academic challenges”, “employability”, “sociocultural challenges”, “UK universities” and “higher education interventions”. Since there is a dearth of literature specifically addressing Indian students in UK institutions, this review additionally draws on research conducted in other nations and evaluates its results in light of how they may be relevant to the UK setting.

After the relevant articles were selected, we utilized a thematic synthesis approach to analyze the findings. This process involved reading each article carefully and extracting key themes related to the academic, cultural, and psychological experiences of Indian students.

RESULTS

Through the searches conducted on the basis of the above terms, 29 articles met the final inclusion criteria. The content was considered and is reported below in the following themes: (1) expectations of Indian international students regarding higher education in the UK, (2) challenges encountered by Indian international students studying in the UK, and (3) interventions by higher education institutions.

Expectations of Indian International Students Regarding Higher Education in the UK

The decision of Indian international students to pursue higher education in the UK is driven by several factors, and a study conducted by King and Sondhi (2017) revealed some of the major expectations and motives behind this decision. The main factors motivating Indian international students include the aspiration to graduate from a renowned or world-class university, the potential to embark on a unique adventure and perhaps a life-changing experience, and the desire to pursue a family custom of travel and experience. According to King and Sondhi, international student migration can also be viewed as a strategic investment to enhance one's career prospects, to compete better in the native labor market upon returning to their home country, or as a stepping stone toward a rewarding international career in the global marketplace (King and Sondhi, 2017). Additionally, the prospects of living in a first-world country and the promise of a modern lifestyle might further influence student decisions. The study revealed that there are situations where pursuing an education and career in India is unable to meet the demands of students. For example, sometimes there is excessive competition for available seats and courses in desired local institutions, or the required courses are not offered, which motivates students to seek higher education in other countries (King and Sondhi, 2017). For some students, studying internationally also offers a reason to alleviate the fear that stems from the likelihood of not being able to obtain top-quality higher education in India (King and Sondhi, 2017). Moreover, they noted that students from India feel that countries such as the UK have more merit-based hiring practices. This gives Indian international graduates the expectation to land positions that match their educational qualifications, experience, and skills, in contrast to the barriers and limitations inherent in the Indian labor market, which is still perceived as highly stratified and often dependent on social status, gender, and connections (King and Sondhi, 2017). They see it as an opportunity for career advancement and expect a better working environment with improved facilities and more efficient bureaucratic processes (Hercog and Van de Laar, 2016).

King and Sondhi (2017) also suggest that Indian student migration can be seen as a component of global youth mobility culture; in particular, students from middle-class backgrounds can travel and explore many locations and cultures by studying abroad, and they view it as a desired lifestyle feature. While academic credentials are still important, some other expectations among students are to experience another country's sensory and cultural aspects, including its unique landscape, climate, historical legacy, leisure options, and customs surrounding food and music. In addition, they anticipate the opportunity to meet with individuals from countries with other cultures and the potential for forging new connections and engaging in social interactions. Studying overseas is therefore viewed as a chance for Indian international students to learn experientially (King and Sondhi, 2017). Furthermore, the study identifies the possibility of prospective Indian international students being influenced by marketing images or advertisements by universities and leading them to adopt the identity of "youthful

adventurers” (King and Sondhi, 2017). A further study by Basu (2016) revealed the crucial impact of recruitment agencies on the expectations of Indian students. As they receive commissions, they often instil exaggerated or unrealistic expectations regarding student life, thereby causing students to have significantly elevated expectations without fully comprehending the potential challenges that may arise. Basu (2016) also revealed that students often report optimistic and unrealistic expectations regarding living costs, expecting them to be manageable and within their budget. There is now the National Code of Ethical Practice for UK Education Agents by UKCISA and BUILA (2011) that sets out the best practice education agents should comply with.

Challenges Encountered by Indian International Students Studying in the UK

Navigating student life in the UK presents Indian international students with several challenges. These challenges range from limited English language proficiency and adjusting to an unfamiliar education system to sociocultural differences, finding employment, multitasking, feelings of isolation, and social integration (Chennamsetti, 2020; Nachatar Singh et al., 2023; Basu, 2016; Divan et al., 2015; Pallela and Talari, 2016).

English Language Proficiency

English language barriers are widely recognized as significant challenges that hinder overseas students from adapting to life in the UK (Chennamsetti, 2020). It has been identified in the literature as the primary obstacle that influences several aspects of Indian students' lives, encompassing both academic and nonacademic aspects (Chennamsetti, 2020; Basu, 2016).

According to Yuerong et al. (2017) and Chennamsetti (2020), the English language barrier interferes with the active involvement of a student in the classroom environment, the comprehension of lectures and assignment instructions, the ability to complete written and verbal assessments, and overall academic success. These issues have resulted in a higher degree of stress among Indian international students. For instance, a previous study conducted at an Australian university revealed that Indian international students experience challenges in using the English language for academic writing purposes, such as finishing assessments (Basu, 2016). The required level of linguistic proficiency was greater than what students had anticipated. In particular, students reported the English language as a barrier to effectively participating in group discussions and meetings (Basu, 2016). Taylor and Ali (2017) noted the importance of active engagement, suggesting that the lack of this can lead to a feeling of isolation within the group. Moreover, the study emphasizes how important it is to speak English fluently for academic support, as demonstrated by the fact that students who struggle with the language are reluctant to ask tutors and staff for help because they are worried about understanding each other.

Moreover, Chennamsetti (2020) reported that Indian scholars who have lower language proficiency tend to question their learning capabilities, which results in considerable academic stress and challenges that affect their overall achievement. In addition, a lack of confidence in English language proficiency often leads to feelings of worry and stress, hence impeding psychological and sociocultural adaptation (Chennamsetti, 2020). On the other hand, the study by Basu (2016) indicated that even though many Indian students have proficient language skills since English is the medium of instruction in their academic environment, they may still encounter challenges with culturally unique elements of communication, such as the use of jargon and differing accents. While international students may perform well in passing standardized English tests for admissions, unfamiliarity with British academic culture and real-world communications with native academic staff and students may hinder their academic achievements.

Apart from the challenges faced in academic settings, language limitations also induce anxiety as well as social alienation, as poor English proficiency prohibits foreign students from interacting socially (Yuerong et al., 2017; Chennamsetti, 2020). A study conducted by Chennamsetti revealed that self-consciousness often prevents Indian international students from expressing themselves, especially in regard to their capacity for clear communication and adherence to grammatical, pronunciation, and vocabulary criteria. According to Perry et al. (2017), this could lead to inadvertently suppressed emotions, resulting in students experiencing isolation and worry. An additional challenge encountered by Indian international students is the concern that they may unintentionally offend native English speakers in conversations, necessitating a continuous need to self-correct their language (Chennamsetti, 2020). This fear of the likelihood of being misinterpreted by professors and peers often contributes to extreme self-doubt, nervousness, and constant worrying, resulting in decreased self-confidence (Chennamsetti, 2020).

Academic Challenges

While studies tend to focus on language barriers, other academic challenges faced by Indian international students have also been reported in the literature (Basu, 2016; Divan et al., 2015; Chennamsetti, 2020; Pallela and Talari, 2016). Producing written assessments of a quality that meet the requirements of British higher education is a major challenge for Indian international students. The inexperience of Indian international students' academic writing in the UK higher education tradition is a crucial factor, as evidenced by several studies (Bailey, 2013; Divan et al., 2015; Pallela and Talari, 2016). Another study conducted by Bailey (2013) revealed that in India, despite English being a medium of instruction, pupils may still lack familiarity with writing assessments with high word count, British academic writing standards, and practices. Additionally, Bailey indicated that although English language tests such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) may offer an idea of linguistic proficiency, they do not always indicate students' proficiency in academic writing (Bailey, 2013; Read, 2022). Another study conducted with Indian international

students revealed that lecturers often have specific expectations and requirements for assignments; however, they typically offer only generic and broad feedback. The students perceived that the instruction emphasized “what to do” rather than “how to do it”, resulting in a lack of sufficient information on the methods and strategies required to complete their assessments (Basu, 2016).

Pallela and Talari (2016) reported that Indian students tend to underperform in international universities because they have limited critical thinking skills. They reported that academic misconduct due to plagiarism is particularly high among Indian international students. Many Indian international students are unaware of the term “plagiarism” and its significance, which is attributed mainly to the academic culture in India. As reported by Pallela and Talari, except for the prestigious Indian institutes such as the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Indian Institute of Management (IIM), and National Institute of Technology (NIT), only a handful of Indian institutions assess their students’ capacity for critical thinking, practical application of concepts, and ability to solve emerging difficulties using the right technologies (Pallela and Talari, 2016). Academic culture in all other HEIs primarily emphasizes classroom-based education, where students are required to provide nearly similar, predefined responses in a predetermined format during examinations. This has resulted in students focusing on attending classroom lectures, studying the recommended books, and memorizing the material to perform well in examinations. In regard to academic writing, they lack knowledge of intellectual theft and plagiarism (Pallela and Talari, 2016). Moreover, according to Divan and team, when students transition to a new academic culture, the conventional emphasis on content rather than the development of writing skills worsens this problem by encouraging the prevalent belief that students would either naturally have the required writing skills or be able to learn them with ease (Divan et al., 2015).

Additionally, research by Chennamsetti (2020) indicated that some Indian students abroad lack positive attitudes, especially because of fears of academic underperformance in assessments. Furthermore, the results of this study revealed that Indian international students often encounter difficulties in interacting with academic staff because students are unsure of what is expected of them and lack confidence in their skills and abilities. Another challenge faced by some Indian international students is overcoming their habits of passive learning with minimal participation in classroom activities. In the UK academic culture, students are expected to be active learners, ask questions, and actively participate in discussions with lecturers, whereas Asian students view such behavior as challenging the lecturers’ knowledge and authority and disrespectful (Raymond and Choon, 2017).

A further challenge reported is the significance of nonverbal communication, particularly body language, in multicultural environments. Even though body language serves to explain meaning in situations where linguistic barriers are present, variations in cultural backgrounds can occasionally result in misunderstanding or misinterpretation of nonverbal cues (Damanhour, 2018). For instance, India and the UK have different communication styles because of their cultural contexts. India is regarded as a high-context culture, which means

that many messages are conveyed through nonverbal cues and shared understanding. Not everything needs to be explicitly stated, as people are expected to read between the lines and understand the context. The UK, on the other hand, has a low-context culture in which communication tends to be more direct and explicit. People communicate their messages clearly and verbally and rely less on nonverbal cues. This difference necessitates Indian international students to adapt their communication styles when they interact with people in the UK (Thomas et al., 2019; Van de Vijver, 2017; Sadiki, 2020).

Sociocultural Challenges

Relocating to a foreign nation for education is frequently perceived as an upsetting experience for international students that inevitably results in some form of cultural shock (Unjore, 2014). Several studies provide evidence that Indian international students frequently experience societal challenges (Chennamsetti, 2020; Basu, 2016; Taylor and Ali, 2017). Research has shown that overseas students have limited social support, resulting in them feeling lonely and homesick and developing emotions of despair and stress (Chennamsetti, 2020; Heng, 2017). Chennamsetti noted that transitional difficulties are particularly relevant for Indian international students as they move from collectivistic cultures, which prioritize harmonious social groups and the wellbeing of the group over personal interests, to host countries with individualistic cultures that prioritize self-sufficiency, personal goal setting, independence, and individual achievements. Furthermore, Indian international students frequently face difficulties in forming new social support systems, which are essential for their ability to adapt to a host country environment (Chennamsetti, 2020; Basu, 2016). According to Taylor and Ali (2017), this obstacle has a significant influence on their psychological well-being and, as a result, their academic achievement.

Chennamsetti (2020) reported that even if Indian students speak English fluently and have made friends, some Indian students studying overseas find it difficult to integrate into the local culture. They frequently attribute this difficulty to disparities in their nationalities, cultural backgrounds, and eating habits. Feelings of being an outsider brought on by linguistic and cultural differences make it difficult for them to integrate into the host community (Chennamsetti, 2020). Additionally, this sense of nonbelonging had a detrimental effect on students' readiness to ask for support when required as well as their active involvement in class, as already discussed (Chennamsetti, 2020).

Other Challenges

Several additional challenges faced by Indian international students have also been reported in the literature, encompassing issues such as multitasking, emotional and psychological adjustment, financial constraints, adapting to the weather, and difficulties in finding employment (Nachatar Singh et al., 2023; Chennamsetti, 2020; Unjore, 2014; Basu, 2016).

Navigating multitasking poses considerable difficulties for Indian international students studying in the UK. Research has revealed that in India, students typically focus solely on their studies since they are not expected to work while they are pursuing education (Chennamsetti, 2020). However, these students encounter drastic changes in responsibilities upon relocating abroad. Unlike in India, where they typically rely on their parents to finance their education and to cover living costs, international students face the burdens of paying substantial tuition fees and covering living expenses, necessitating part-time employment. Financial constraints are a significant challenge for some students (Basu, 2016). Indian nationals applying for a student visa from outside the UK will need to show enough funds (tuition fees for one academic year and living expenses for up to 9 months) in their personal or parent's bank account for at least 28 consecutive days. However, the rising cost of living, currency exchange fluctuations and the pandemic have affected family income and savings, leading students to pursue part-time work. Owing to this, they are compelled to reduce their expenditure and feel a great deal of concern and anxiety, which affects their daily lives while also impacting their academic and social lives (Basu, 2016). Moreover, in India, students are predominantly less self-reliant, as they typically reside with their parents. This relieves them of household responsibilities and routine chores and offers a considerable amount of time to focus on academic commitments. However, transitioning to countries such as the UK presents challenges since students have to learn to balance their academic work with additional responsibilities such as doing household chores (cooking, cleaning, and laundry) and independent living, resulting in elevated stress levels (Chennamsetti, 2020).

Postgraduate employment is another significant challenge for Indian international students. A recent study that examined the employability barriers of Indian international students in UK universities revealed significant hurdles (Nachatar Singh et al., 2023). One contributing factor is time constraints. Since there is a need to adjust to academic and social stresses in an unfamiliar educational setting, Indian international students prioritize these aspects and, hence, have limited time to engage in employability-related pursuits. Furthermore, because South Asian HE institutions focus more on academic abilities than on extracurricular and employability-related skills, Indian students prioritize academic performance over building skills for employment. Another factor is limited internship opportunities or employability-related activities offered by UK universities. This limits Indian international students' ability to gain UK-based work experience and insight into workplace culture. It consequently impacts their chances of being recruited by UK companies that prioritize internship experience (Nachatar Singh et al., 2023). Another barrier related to employability is the lack of career assistance at universities that are culturally tailored. Students feel that the current career services generally prioritize helping domestic students secure work while offering minimal individualized guidance specifically designed for overseas students (Nachatar Singh et al., 2023). Furthermore, the findings revealed that Indian international students also have concerns regarding the perspectives of UK employers and that ethnic background and visa status could influence their hiring decisions. In

addition, Indian international students feel less benefit than home students do because of their narrower awareness of the workplace and wider cultural and language aspects (Nachatar Singh et al., 2023).

Moreover, a study conducted on Indian postgraduate students at the University of Nottingham indicated challenges associated with their emotional responses regarding their travel to the UK (Unjore, 2014). Owing to differences in environments and cultures, the experiences outlined in that study demonstrated that students' adjustment process begins even before they arrive in the UK or prearrival phase. The authors suggested that while universities provide essential prearrival resources and guidance, the significance of this support in facilitating international students' mental and psychological adjustment cannot be overlooked (Unjore, 2014). Moreover, while environmental factors such as weather in the UK may seem less significant, the findings suggest that they do indeed influence the adjustment process of Indian international students (Unjore, 2014).

Although students must endure several challenges while studying abroad, it is crucial to acknowledge the immense benefits it offers. For example, a study by Lillyman and Bennett (2014) highlighted the positive experiences of international students, such as improved confidence, enhanced intercultural comprehension, and personal growth, which can ultimately alter their outlook on careers and worldviews. Moreover, the positive learning experiences are not only for international students but also for academics, home students, and host institutions. The presence of international students enhances classroom diversity, promotes tolerance, and deepens cultural knowledge for both academics and domestic students. The host universities also gain from more international research possibilities, stronger cross-cultural exchanges, and higher academic prestige (Lillyman and Bennett, 2014).

Interventions by Higher Education Institutions for Indian International Students

Considering the increasing number of Indian international student enrollments each year, offering sufficient support that fulfills the expectations of these students and promoting a welcoming campus environment and retaining quality is critical for higher education providers (Ammigan and Jones, 2018). Universities must ensure that foreign students receive the support they require for them to have a pleasant experience, succeed academically, and become actively involved in the community (Ammigan and Jones, 2018; Taylor and Ali, 2017). Nevertheless, evidence of interventions specifically designed to support students from different countries is limited, as academic organizations and academics frequently regard overseas students as a single cultural entity (Basu, 2016).

To help overseas students adjust to their new surroundings, there is an orientation period whereby students are provided with information about their course of study, university, and life in the UK (Ecochard and Fotheringham, 2017). In accordance with the quality assurance agency's recommendations, the induction procedure should include an explanation of academic skills, the UK's academic culture, and guidance toward available academic skills assistance.

Institutions also have the obligation to provide services for nonnative speakers to meet the linguistic demands of their curriculum and to assist them in improving their linguistic competence (QAA, 2023).

Chennamsetti (2020) highlighted the importance of university counseling services and international offices in raising awareness among prospective international students regarding the difficulties that they are likely to experience to facilitate effective transition. They also suggested that students might benefit from knowing that facing difficulties of this nature is a typical occurrence and that many overseas students go through them. This knowledge will also assist them in creating ways of coping with difficulties (Chennamsetti, 2020).

International student support services provided by UK HEIs play a crucial role in supporting international students in the host country. This includes assisting them in resolving any issues that might occur throughout their stay (Basu, 2016). One effective and popular supportive intervention in UK universities is peer mentoring (Taylor and Ali, 2017). Studies indicate that support provided by mentors assisted international students in addressing issues related to orientation, course details, and coursework, which affected students' ability to overcome challenges promptly and efficiently (Collings et al., 2016; Taylor and Ali, 2017). While there is ample research on peer mentoring for university students in general, examining the impact on the adjustment process of international students would be intriguing. Mentoring primarily benefits home students during their initial weeks, but it remains beneficial for minority students who continue to face challenges (Taylor and Ali, 2017).

One common approach to addressing subpar academic writing and potential plagiarism among Indian international learners is to offer them opportunities to practice academic writing and receive feedback (Divan et al., 2015; Bailey, 2013). Divan et al. (2015) emphasized the importance of repeated practice and the execution of the obtained feedback to improve the performance of students. They also recommended that the feedback should be prompt and comprehensible and bridge the disparity between performance and expectations. The literature reports a variety of modalities for language assistance by universities, such as English for Academic Purposes (EAP) workshops, writing seminars, and casual conversation sessions (Ecochard and Fotheringham, 2017; Divan et al., 2015). These approaches help students become more proficient in English while also increasing their confidence in public expression, further promoting cultural integration in the host community (Ecochard and Fotheringham, 2017). However, while programs for improving academic writing were deemed beneficial, feedback reported by students has indicated that these programs are broad in nature and not tailored to specific disciplines (Górska, 2013). The study recommended that tailoring these programs would be more valuable, as this would allow students to receive direct supervision from the subject instructors, focusing on the writing structure and disciplinary language (Divan et al., 2015). For instance, a study conducted on writing development programs tailored to biological sciences at the master's level revealed that the program was able to improve academic writing performance and significantly reduce the plagiarism rates of international students, indicating the effectiveness of discipline-specific writing support (Divan et al., 2015). The study

recommended that it would be beneficial to offer tailored training at the beginning of the program. It is also recommended to provide clear guidelines for assignments (e.g., format and subject-specific requirements) and to provide detailed feedback on initial assignments to establish the expected level of performance (Divan et al., 2015).

Another proactive approach suggested by Taylor and Ali (2017) is that tutors may specifically assist overseas students by encouraging them to openly communicate their learning experiences. This approach helps reduce students' reluctance to seek assistance and facilitates academic improvement strategies. According to Taylor and Ali, tutors can more effectively address the expectations of overseas students and facilitate smooth academic transition and performance when they have a greater understanding of the cultural variations in learning. McDonald (2014) recommended that tutors should critically examine their own behaviors and perspectives when working with overseas learners to ensure that they do not impose culturally stereotyped behavior and learning approaches on students.

Moreover, given the varied learning methods and approaches in each country's education system, universities could introduce a social support group at the start of the program to gain a better understanding of the educational format in the UK (Taylor and Ali, 2017). Apart from that, to mitigate the challenge of social interactions, the study suggested the adoption of a Buddy System, where overseas students are paired with UK students who are familiar with the local surroundings and cultural norms. This approach provides benefits to students who may initially lack confidence or have a tendency for self-isolation, aiding them in enhancing their proficiency in English, cultural understanding, and confidence in interacting with the public. Additionally, it promotes the understanding and embrace of diversity among English students (Taylor and Ali, 2017).

Recent research has suggested that international students actively pursue job opportunities to leverage their international qualifications and skills (Campbell et al., 2020; Singh and Fan, 2021; Nachatar Singh, 2018). This helps to improve the job prospects of students and their academic achievements. Considering the challenges faced by Indian international students in finding jobs abroad, a recent study by Nachatar Singh (2023) suggested that universities need to provide culturally relevant career services that are specifically designed to meet the distinct requirements of Indian international students. This involves instructing employers on policies and entitlements regarding work prospects for Indian students and delivering specialized career guidance that addresses cultural differences, especially in work settings.

DISCUSSION

Indian international students in the UK face many unique challenges owing to their distinct academic, social, and cultural backgrounds. However, India is among the world's most diverse countries, both socially and culturally, comprising people of numerous ethnicities, races, languages, religions, and socioeconomic classes. Therefore, recognizing and meeting the diverse requirements of Indian

international students necessitates a nuanced approach that considers these distinctions (Tavares, 2024).

Although most of the research has focused mostly on the challenges encountered by Indian international students, it would be ideal to have studies that report the helpful interventions implemented at UK universities and their success rates (Campbell et al., 2022). Moreover, considering the increasing number of Indian international students within the student community, the assumption that they will easily integrate into a system mostly designed for home students and a homogeneous cohort of international students appears unrealistic (Sidhu et al., 2021). Furthermore, there is insufficient emphasis on providing support for the mental well-being of these students.

A crucial aspect that emerges from this review is the need for timely support during the initial stages of the academic journey. Owing to the standard duration of two years for master's programs in India, a one-year master's program in the UK is perceived as intensive and tightly scheduled. Often, Indian students obtain a clearer understanding of how to perform well and meet expectations of an assessment only toward the later stages of the program (Kundu & Bej, 2021). International students find it challenging when they complete their initial written assignments at UK universities (Bailey, 2013; Cao, Zhu & Meng, 2021). Offering academic support earlier in the program could lead to better results.

Students' mental health and stress levels can also be greatly improved with timely support during the early period. This could include offering exemplars or models that illustrate the expected structure and quality for different assessments, including both written and verbal tasks. As suggested by Divan and team, this could serve as valuable reference points for how to approach their tasks effectively and help students navigate their assessments more confidently (Divan et al., 2015). In addition, although several existing studies discuss supporting interventions for enhancing academic skills, there is a lack of evidence on programs that can familiarize international students with other aspects, including the social and cultural norms of British society, colloquial English usage, and nonverbal communication, which could enhance their ability to effectively interact in both educational and social settings. For effective support, it is crucial for academic staff to understand the expectations, requirements, concerns, and difficulties experienced by Indian international students both on and off campus (Pawar & Dasgupta, 2024). This will allow for an evaluation of the present level of assistance offered concerning these matters and will enable the recognition of initiatives that can be implemented to bridge the gap between the demands of Indian scholars and the support provided by the universities.

CONCLUSION

This literature review aimed to provide an understanding of the expectations of Indian international students before they pursue higher education at UK universities and the challenges they encounter while they are navigating student life. It is evident from the literature that Indian international students encounter several challenges in both academic settings and everyday life, especially in terms

of academic culture, language, and sociocultural differences. The literature has revealed that proficiency in the English language is a significant obstacle that equally impacts academic achievement and social life. Moreover, the rigorous standards and focus on self-directed learning of the UK's educational system pose challenges for Indian scholars. Major academic challenges included unfamiliarity with the academic culture in the UK, particularly difficulties in understanding academic writing expectations, limited classroom engagement, and interactions with tutors and classmates. Additional challenges included difficulty in expressing themselves, social integration, uncertain employment, esteem, and multitasking. Moreover, these challenges were reported to influence students' mental well-being, self-confidence, and academic performance. Furthermore, interventions developed by UK HEIs to support the academic requirements of these students and enhance their psychological and sociocultural adjustment were explored. Although these interventions targeting the international student community as a whole seem to be beneficial, the literature indicates a lack of supportive services and resources tailored to Indian international students. Since students from diverse ethnic backgrounds encounter distinct challenges, it is crucial for higher education institutions to develop a deep understanding of the academic, linguistic, employability, and sociocultural-specific concerns of Indian international students. Offering specific support through targeted interventions can enhance academic and social experiences and ensure the effective adaptation and success of our students.

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- None
- Some sections, with minimal or no editing
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