Article

Cross-cultural examination of social support, academic support, and well-being: A comparative study of Indian and international students

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ABSTRACT

In this study, we used a comprehensive survey instrument to examine the nexus of social support, academic assistance, and well-being among 190 university students, including 64 international and 126 Indian students, with gender parity. It addresses a critical gap in the literature by exploring how emotional and educational support intertwine and elucidating their impact on students' psychological states. The findings highlighted a positive correlation between social and academic support and overall well-being for both cohorts, with minor cultural differences. The study underscores the importance of culturally sensitive interventions in fostering student well-being, calling for tailored support systems. These insights can enhance support services in academic institutions for diverse student populations with the aim of enhancing their holistic well-being.

Keywords: *Academic support, international migrants, social support, university students, well-being*

INTRODUCTION

The globe is a rich tapestry of human movement and diversity, woven through the intricate dance between native populations and global migrants. This symbiotic

relationship defines our globalized society, where natives safeguard cultural heritage, and international migrants bring fresh perspectives. Exploring this complex connection reveals its multifaceted dimensions and its impact on demographics, socioeconomics, politics, and culture worldwide. Notably, a significant number of individuals relocate within or beyond borders, with students from immigrant backgrounds facing a profound cultural shift. Adapting to new educational environments becomes a strenuous process, particularly as these institutions play a crucial role in the integration of immigrant children from within and outside the country. While existing studies explore the impact of social and academic support on student well-being, there is a research gap concerning the distinctive experiences of migrant students. This study aims to fill this void, offering insights that could guide targeted interventions and support systems for students in the city, contributing meaningfully to the field, as policymakers increasingly prioritize internationalization and the influx of foreign students in India.

The foundation of this study revolves around the pivotal roles played by these three variables in the lives of both native and migrant students. Given the profound influence of social support on academic and personal success, this study employs House's (1981) social support theory, categorizing support into emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal dimensions. In general, social support from teachers and academic support are positively associated with better mental health outcomes in migrant students. Moreover, it is believed that migrant students who reported higher levels of social support and academic support experienced less stress and anxiety related to academic performance. This investigation specifically evaluated family, friends, and significant others' support via the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support by Zimet et al. (1988).

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are proposed:

H_1 = There is no significant difference in the social support, academic support, or well-being of native and migrant students across nationalities.

H_2 = There is no significant difference in the social support, academic support, or well-being of native and migrant students across nationalities

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social support has emerged as a crucial factor in bolstering the psychological well-being of native individuals, especially amidst challenges such as academic stress and mental health issues prevalent in India's competitive educational landscape. Research by Zhai (2004) focused on the adjustment challenges faced by international students in U.S. higher education. The findings revealed how students primarily seek support from friends and family for personal issues,

academic stress, cultural disparities, and language barriers that pose significant hurdles.

Pawar and Dasgupta (2024) seek to examine the experiences of international students at Indian higher education institutions and gather their insights into how the university's International Student Office (ISO) can better assist them. The findings reveal that students view institutional support as a multifaceted concept encompassing desired outcomes, experiences, and interactions. On this basis, the study suggests a consumer-centric framework aimed at enhancing the effectiveness and value of international student support services at the university.

Academic support, including tutoring, mentoring, and guidance, is indispensable for academic enhancement. Native students contribute to refining their study skills and navigating educational systems, whereas migrant students facilitate adaptation to new academic environments and bridge cultural gaps. Kelley Hall (2010) discussed the influence of student support services and engagement, which affect students' confidence, direct their attention toward achieving their goals and careers, foster a willingness to remain in school, and enhance their overall academic experience. The subjects expressed high levels of satisfaction with grade point averages, advisory services, enhanced test scores, cultural enrichment, transferability, self-assurance, and overall program engagement, which justifies the crucial impact of academic support for students. The present study delves into four distinct types of academic support, namely, informational, motivational, esteem, and venting support, as per the Student Academic Support Scale by Thompson & Mazer (2011). Both social and academic support collectively influence the overall well-being of individuals, a multifaceted concept that includes emotional, social, psychological, spiritual, self-awareness, and physical well-being, as per the well-being index by Chauhan & Sharma (2016).

Nair et al. (2024) investigated the complex concept of perceived social support, which refers to individuals' subjective assessments of the assistance and companionship they receive from their social networks, including friends, family, and the wider university community. In conclusion, this study reveals the intricate network of interpersonal relationships that significantly impacts academic success, psychological well-being, and overall satisfaction with the college experience. A thorough understanding of perceived social support is crucial for higher education institutions aiming to promote holistic student development. By fostering collaboration among educators, policymakers, and mental health professionals, universities can create an environment that empowers students to thrive both academically and psychologically, acknowledging the various sources and forms of social support available to them.

In the realm of native individuals, social support systems foster a profound sense of belonging, emotional solace, and encouragement. This support extends across familial, cultural, economic, and educational domains, emphasizing the need for cultural sensitivity in support programs. Academic support contributes to continuity within educational systems, nurturing a holistic sense of well-being by intertwining academic achievement and self-esteem. This study probes the well-being of natives and explores the elements of happiness, contentment, and

satisfaction derived from positive social relationships, academic accomplishments, and robust physical health. Well-being is a multifaceted concept encompassing physical, mental, and social aspects (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

Conversely, international migration, a global phenomenon with far-reaching implications, shapes the lives of migrants and influences their social, academic, and overall well-being. The migration experience, often driven by economic prospects, educational pursuits, or escape from conflict, exposes migrants to unfamiliar environments, underscoring the critical importance of social and academic support. In a study by Gabrielli et al. (2021) on the academic resilience of both natives and migrants, empirical evidence indicated that immigrant-origin students achieve favorable academic adjustments when they possess strong self-efficacy beliefs, experience positive home environments, and hold positive language attitudes within their households. Furthermore, social support proves instrumental for migrants in building connections, navigating relocation stress, and mitigating feelings of isolation, acculturation stress, and discrimination, as per a study by Singh et al. (2015).

For migrant students, academic support emerges as a linchpin for academic success, assisting in overcoming obstacles such as language barriers and adaptation to novel educational systems. The well-being of migrants encompasses physical, mental, and emotional health, along with overall life satisfaction.

According to a study by Hingle (2023) conducted to gain deeper insights into the support requirements of international students and their effects on their well-being and to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how they exhibit resilience in the face of adversity, the findings indicate that international students experienced an overall sense of well-being and thriving when they met their fundamental psychological needs. This study highlights the profound impact of migration, adaptation, and potential stressors on migrant well-being, underscoring the significance of social support, access to resources, and academic support in enhancing the overall well-being of international migrants.

Hyseni et al. (2023) studied the global issue of poor mental health among youths, focusing on countries with medium-to-low development levels, particularly southern Europe, and uncovered insights for developing interventions by assessing mental health, study skills, barriers to seeking psychological help, and perceived social support among Kosovar university students. The findings revealed prevalent anxiety and depression, stressing the importance of university support services to enhance mental wellbeing, study skills, and overall student experiences.

Through a global perspective, this exploration aspires to contribute to a more inclusive and equitable understanding of the diverse experiences and challenges faced by both natives and migrants. As Joseph & Sudesh (2023) discussed how better adjustment and quality social support systems lead to decreased academic stress in international migrant students, their multiple regression analysis results revealed that academic lifestyle was a significant predictor of perceived academic stress.

A study by Sharma (2023) examined the associations among social support, academic achievement, and well-being in adolescents. The research relies on

secondary data sources, including research papers, articles, manuscripts, and government/nongovernment reports. The literature review revealed that social support is a substantial predictor of academic success among students, demonstrating a positive and significant impact.

Matschke (2022) studied the impact of social support on social identity development and well-being and discovered that people feel more connected to the social groups around them and more integrated with their own identities over time. Their overall well-being remained consistently high throughout the entire period, while feeling socially connected positively influenced well-being. Additionally, receiving emotional support from others was linked to better well-being, whereas receiving information that aligns with one's own values was connected to a stronger sense of identity integration. The study also noted that practical support (such as assistance with tasks) initially helped with identity integration but had a diminishing impact over time.

Barbayannis et al. (2022) examined the impact of academic stress on the mental well-being of college students, particularly considering their diverse experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. A survey of 843 students revealed a significant correlation between academic stress and poor mental well-being across all participants, with heightened stress due to the pandemic. Nonbinary individuals present a low level of mental health and the highest level of academic stress, whereas women report higher stress levels than men do. Academic stress affects mental well-being universally, emphasizing the need for targeted support, especially for vulnerable groups.

Brandt and Hagge (2020), while studying access to education and social support in natives and students migrating to Germany, reported that higher educational levels increase the probability of accessing social support as well as sources of support. Additionally, migrant descendants are more likely to achieve upward educational mobility than their native peers are, with parental education level being the main factor contributing to these patterns.

Singh and Sharma (2018) reported that academic support was positively related to well-being in both native and migrant Indian students. The study surveyed 300 native students and 300 migrant students and reported that students who received more academic support reported higher levels of well-being. Researchers have suggested that academic support could be an effective way to improve the well-being of students, particularly those who are struggling with academic stress or other challenges.

Auerbach et al. (2016) examined the prevalence of mental disorders among college students globally while offering a comprehensive perspective on the mental health challenges faced by students. Approximately 20.3% of the college students reported experiencing disorders within the past 12 months, 83.1% of whom experienced onsets before matriculation. Merely 16.4% of the students who experienced long mental disorders underwent any healthcare treatment for their mental health conditions during the same 12-month period. While the family is crucial, social support networks outside the family also exist. Friendships, community networks, and religious institutions can serve as sources of support, as per Shankar and Partha (2014).Hefner & Eisenberg (2009) explored the

prevalence of mental health issues among college students and their help-seeking behaviors, shedding light on the challenges that students face and the importance of support services. Storrie et al. (2010) discussed the notable increase in the prevalence of serious mental illness among university students in recent years. The topics covered mentioned the nature of challenges encountered by students, faculty approaches to handling such situations, obstacles hindering help-seeking behaviors, supportive tools, and epidemiological patterns within the university student demographic.

The function of social support in reducing the detrimental impacts of acculturative stress on the psychological wellbeing of migrant Indian students has also been studied by many researchers. Acculturation at the individual level refers to the simultaneous sociocultural and psychological changes that occur concerning both the host and heritage cultures due to interactions with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds (Berry, 2005).

A multinational study by Ward and Rana (1999) discussed the acculturation and adaptation processes of international students, shedding light on the importance of social support in facilitating successful cross-cultural adjustment. The analysis indicated that having strong identification with one's own nationality was linked to improved psychological well-being, whereas strong identification with the host nationality was connected to enhanced sociocultural adaptation. A longitudinal study by Uchino (2004) revealed that social support can reduce the risk of cardiovascular diseases by moderating the physiological response to stress. This explains the ultimate effects, thereby affecting psychological health due to stress.

METHOD

This descriptive study involved quantitative methods such as the use of questionnaires to collect numerical data from the sample population. The sampling techniques that were employed included judgmental and purposive sampling, with a focus on specific traits such as gender, nationality, and year of study. The resulting sample size consists of 126 native Indian students and 64 international migrants, ensuring representation from both genders across different courses at Lovely Professional University. The questionnaire was designed to measure variables related to social support, academic support, and well-being. Data collection involved administering the questionnaire to participants and then analyzing the responses via statistical methods such as descriptive analysis and independent sample t tests.

Participants

The study involved quantitative methods such as the use of questionnaires to collect numerical data from a sample population of 190 students at Lovely Professional University (LPU), Phagwara. The sample included both native Indians and international students from various schools within the LPU, such as business/management, education, pharmacy, and engineering. The objective of

this research is to investigate the differences in the social and academic support and well-being of students based on nationality and provide insights into their dynamics.

Measures

The following tools were used to collect the data from the subjects:

The first tool, administered for social support, was the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support *(MSPSS; Zimet* et al*., 1988)*. It is a seven-point Likert scale (from 1 = very strongly disagree to 7 = very strongly agree). It has three subscales: family, friends, and significant others. The value of Cronbach's alpha is .914, which is clearly greater than the benchmark value of alpha = 0.7, which makes it apparent that the scale has good internal reliability.

The second tool, administered for academic support, was the Student Academic Support Scale (*SASS; Thompson & Mazer, 2009*). This scale is a method of assessing the frequency, importance, and mode of communicating academic support among students. The SASS is a 15-item scale that uses a 5-point Likert scale for each item. The value of Cronbach's alpha of 0.914 is clearly greater than the benchmark value of alpha = 0.7, which makes it apparent that the scale has good internal reliability.

The third tool, administered for well-being, was the Well-being Index by Chauhan and Sharma (*WBI; Chauhan & Sharma, 2016*). This test consists of 50 statements with 32 positive and 18 negative statements. All these statements are related to emotional well-being, social wellbeing, psychological well-being, spiritual well-being, self-awareness, and physical well-being. This is a five-point scale with scores ranging from 5 = always to 1=never for positive statements and 1 always to 5 never for negative statements. The value of Cronbach's alpha is .890, which is clearly greater than the benchmark value of alpha = 0.7, which makes it apparent that the scale has good internal reliability.

RESULTS

An independent sample t test was performed to compare social support and its relative dimensions, namely, family support, friend support, and support from significant others across nationalities, i.e., between Indians and Internationals. The analysis indicates various levels of significance in their mean scores. For family support, the calculated t value (0.549) with a p value of 0.249 suggests nonsignificant differences, indicating that any observed variations in mean scores (22.55 for Indians and 22.03 for Internationals) are likely due to chance rather than a meaningful disparity between nationalities. Similarly, for friends' support, the calculated t value (1.956), with a p value of 0.339, suggests insignificant differences between the mean scores (20.94 for Indians and 19.42 for Internationals), again indicating that the observed variations are more likely due to random results. Concerning support from significant others, the calculated t value (0.637), with a p value of 0.040, also shows insignificant differences

between mean scores (21.40 for Indians and 20.81 for Internationals), suggesting no significant disparity in perceived support. However, in terms of overall social support, a significant difference is observed, with a calculated t value of 1.181 and a p value of 0.016. The mean score for Indians (64.89) is slightly lower than that for Internationals (62.27), indicating a significant nationality wise gap in perceived overall social support. Therefore, while no significant disparities are found in family, friends, or significant others' support, there is a notable difference in overall social support between Indian and international participants.

Table 1: Nationality differences in the social support of natives and migrants

Dimension	Nationality	N	M	SD	df	t	P
Family Support	Indian	126	22.55	5.718	188	.549	.249
	International	64	22.03	5.859			
Friends Support	Indian	126	20.94	4.867	188	1.96	.339
	International	64	19.42	5.380			
Sig. Other Support	Indian	126	21.40	5.582	188	.637	.040
	International	64	20.81	6.916			
SOCIAL SUPPORT	Indian	126	64.89	12.671	188	1.181	.016
	International	64	62.27	17.500			

P<0.05 ≠ Ho P ≥ 0.05 = Ho

Note. N= number, *M* = mean, *SD* = standard deviation, df=degree of freedom.

The differences in academic support and its associated dimensions, namely, informational support, esteem support, motivational support, and venting, revealed mixed findings between Indians and Internationals. For informational support, no significant differences are observed, with a calculated t value of 0.243 and a p value of 0.809, indicating that the mean scores (20.48 for Indians and 20.23 for Internationals) do not reflect meaningful disparities in perceived informational support from academic circles. Similarly, for estimation support, the calculated t value of 0.565, with a p value of 0.573, suggests nonsignificant differences between mean scores (8.79 for Indians and 8.47 for Internationals), implying that any observed variations are likely due to random fluctuations. In terms of motivational support, insignificant differences are found, with a calculated t value of 1.526 and a p value of 0.129, suggesting that the mean scores (9.34 for Indians and 9.47 for Internationals) do not signify a meaningful discrepancy. However, for venting support, significant differences are noted, with

a calculated t value of 2.174 and a p value of 0.031, indicating a meaningful gender disparity in venting support, with Indians exhibiting slightly lower mean scores (5.75) than Internationals (4.94). Regarding overall academic support, no significant differences are observed, as reflected in a computed t value of 1.065 with a p value of 0.288, suggesting that any observed differences in mean scores among nationalities (44.37 for Indians and 42.11 for Internationals) are likely due to random variation.

Table 2: Nationality differences in the academic support of natives and migrants

Dimensions	Nationality	N	M	SD	df	t	p
Informational Support	Indian	126	20.48	6.141	188	.243	.809
	International	64	20.23	7.140			
Esteem Support	Indian	126	8.79	3.605	188	.565	.573
	International	64	8.47	4.012			
Motivational Support	Indian	126	9.34	3.585	188	1.526	.129
	International	64	9.47	3.988			
Venting Support	Indian	126	5.75	2.406 2.525	188	2.174	.031
	International	64	4.94				
ACADEMIC SUPPORT	Indian	126	44.37	12.97	188	1.065	.288
	International	64	42.11	15.29			

P<0.05 ≠ Ho P ≥ 0.05 = Ho

Note. N= number, *M* = mean, *SD* = standard deviation, df=degree of freedom.

The examination of emotional well-being revealed a significant difference, with a calculated t value of 2.260 and a p value of 0.004, indicating that while Indians scored lower (20.64) than did Internationals (22.00), this disparity does not suggest meaningful nationality wise differences in emotional well-being. Conversely, in terms of psychological well-being, despite Internationals scoring higher (37.25) than Indians (34.94), the insignificant differences indicated by a calculated t value of 2.864 and a p value of 0.311 suggest no meaningful disparities between nationalities. Similarly, the analysis of social well-being illustrates no substantial disparity, with Indians scoring slightly higher (55.08) than Internationals (56.00), supported by a calculated t value of 0.911 and a p value of 0.140. Furthermore, no significant differences are found in spiritual well-

being, where international students score slightly higher (21.67) than Indians do (21.25), as reflected by a calculated t value of 0.866 and a p value of 0.172. The examination of self-awareness reveals no noteworthy distinctions despite Internationals scoring higher (34.66) than Indians (32.88), with a calculated t value of 2.495 and a p value of 0.296. However, a highly significant distinction emerges in physical well-being, with Indians scoring lower (22.58) than Internationals (23.38), supported by a calculated t value of 1.299 and a p value of 0.006. With respect to overall well-being, although Indians present a lower mean score (187.38) than do Internationals (194.95), the insignificant distinctions illustrated by a calculated t value of 2.367 and a p value of 0.072 suggest that there are no major nationality differences in overall well-being among participants.

Table 3. Nationality differences in the well-being of natives and migrants

Dimensions	Nationality	N	Mean	SD	df	t	P
Emotional Well- being	Indian	126	20.64	4.037	188	2.260	.340
	International	64	22.00	3.651			
Psychologic al Well- being	Indian	126	34.95	5.508	188	2.864	.311
	International	64	37.25	4.619			
Social Well-being	Indian	126	55.08	6.996	188	.911	.140
	International	64	56.00	5.676			
Spiritual well-being	Indian	126	21.25	3.438	188	.866	.172
	International	64	21.67	2.679			
Self-awareness	Indian	126	32.88	4.851	188	2.495	.296
	International	64	34.66	4.176			
Physical well-being	Indian	126	22.58	4.426	188	1.299	.006
	International	64	23.38	2.941			
WELL-BEING	Indian	126	187.38	19.87	188	2.367	.072
	International	64	194.95	21.68			

P<0.05 ≠ Ho P ≥ 0.05 = Ho

Note. N= number, *M* = mean, *SD* = standard deviation, df=degree of freedom

CONCLUSION

An overarching difference in overall social support was identified, with Indian students reporting significantly higher levels than their International counterparts, suggesting a substantial nationality-wise gap in the perception of social support, potentially influenced by cultural and contextual factors. Notably, in the realm of family and friends' support, no significant disparities were observed, suggesting that perceived familial support is consistent across nationalities. The academic support system does not vary significantly between Indian and International students, except for a specific aspect of venting support. Regarding well-being, Indian and International students displayed differential patterns. International students reported higher emotional well-being than their Indian counterparts. Physical well-being presented a substantial difference, suggesting that International students perceive their physical well-being more positively than their Indian counterparts.

Implications

The implications for supporting all higher education students' mental well-being are discussed in our study. The findings of the present study emphasize the need for culturally sensitive interventions and support systems to cater to the diverse needs of students from different backgrounds. As suggested by Baik et al. (2019), to enhance student mental well-being, academic instructors and their teaching methodologies, aspects of student support services; environmental, cultural, and communication; curriculum development; program management; evaluation methods; and extracurricular student activities must be mended. The study contributes valuable insights for educational institutions and policymakers aiming to increase the well-being and academic success of a culturally diverse student population.

Despite the diligent efforts and vigorous plans, several limitations of this study exist. Ethical concerns related to privacy and disclosure might have limited the participants' willingness to share personal experiences, particularly when the research involves sensitive topics and information related to personal and academic factors. Moreover, participants might struggle to recall and report social and academic support experiences accurately, introducing potential recall bias and impacting data reliability. Crucially, overrepresentation or underrepresentation of certain subgroups could impact the external validity of the findings. Thus, uncaptured cultural differences among native and migrant populations could limit the applicability of the study's conclusions across different cultural contexts. Additionally, the tools used to measure these factors may lack cultural validation for both native and migrant populations, potentially leading to a misunderstanding of the measured constructs.

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