

# International Students' Consciousness of Postgraduate Programmes of Learning in the UK

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Article information	Abstract
<p><b>Key words</b> 3-5 keywords</p> <p><i>Received 26 February 2022, Accepted 28 March 2022, Available online 26 April 2022</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Abstract</b></p> <p>Students from all parts of the world come to the UK every year to pursue courses in higher education. The purpose of this study is to investigate the impressions international students (N=80) obtained and developed after spending some time at British universities. The study was guided by two research questions: (1) What is the students' attitude of the postgraduate programme they are currently undertaking? (2) What are the problems that overseas students face while studying in the UK? Moreover, the study explored the problems that these students experienced while studying in the UK. The researchers used three tools to obtain the data needed, namely nominal group technique, interviews and questionnaires. The findings in the current study revealed that students pursue their postgraduate studies because they had limited chances in their countries of origin. Besides, students were encountered by various difficulties and problems.</p> <p><i>Keywords:</i> international students, postgraduate programme, the UK, attitude, response</p>



### **Introduction**

The history of study abroad can be traced back to colonial times. It may be recalled that in those days selected citizens of the colonies were brought to the mother country to be developed into an elite which helped in the administration of the colonial provinces. "British education has been known to be the best in the world. For many years, UK universities have obtained a high reputation and have benefited from accelerating their market penetration worldwide. Unfortunately, this superiority has begun to decline" (Binsardi et al. 2002).

Currently, however, Britain is interested in raising the number of international students. As a result, it would be of interest to know how this group of students view the prospect of higher education in the UK as a way to help increase the number of international students. Thus, a study into how the international community looks at UK education will be pertinent. A number of studies have been conducted in this area. Most of these studies however were directed to investigate the problems that overseas students face while they study in the UK. For instance, Hughes (1990) concentrated on the accommodation issue while the British Council (1997) was interested in finding out factors that could be necessary to create more comfortable life for this group of students. Barker (1997) focused at the utilization of the knowledge and skills acquired from UK universities.

The current paper aims to contribute to our understanding of the perceptions of international students in the United Kingdom and to help organizations that may need information about international students. Because the policy implications of the 1980s had shifted the trend towards postgraduate programmes, it will be important to undertake research into this area. In line with this, Drew (2001) says that, "What makes the student's' perception interesting is that they specifically relate to what help or hinder the achievement of their learning outcomes and that they indicate a totality of experience" (213).

The data collected as part of this research comes from a cross-section of international students in two universities located in the North East of England. Both qualitative and quantitative survey have been used to investigate this topic. In this, a nominal group technique, interviews and a questionnaire have been employed in collecting the relevant data. The outcome of this study is creating an overview of the attitudes of postgraduate students towards the programmes of study.

It is higher education strategy and policy which are the most significant aspects for overseas students' position in Britain higher education. This chapter also examines some problems overseas students encountered while studying in the UK.

### **Difficulties encountered by overseas students**

Overseas students come from different backgrounds. Their problems are liable to be related to their background. Those from English speaking countries may have minimal problems especially in academic communication. There are others who come from tropical countries and these may have problems with the climatic conditions. Yet other students could come from socially and culturally different places than the society in the UK. These are the areas where the problems an overseas student faces may be rooted. These problems are collectively known as 'culture shock' (UKCOSA c 2000).

### ***Culture Shock***

The concept of culture shock has been identified in (UKCOSA c 2000) and the British Council (1997) as the major problem for international students. As they identify it, the term stands for the summary effect on a student who has moved from a familiar culture to one which is unfamiliar to him/her. It includes the impact of being in

a new environment, learning to do common things in different ways and separation from family and friends. A number of elements contribute to this phenomenon. However, as Salvadori (1997) argues in his discussion on the difficulties of interculturalism, "Education will only be valid...when something changes in the culture of both".

In other words, universities should provide a climate which tends to lead to fruitful learning dialogues where overseas students can benefit from being in another culture and the opportunity of studying under professional supervisors (Cadman 2000 p. 477).

**Pre-arrival Information.** In the survey carried out for the Society for Research into Higher Education, Kinnell (1990) identified a number of problems overseas encountered in information provision. The most crucial finding was that some students were not informed about confirmatory arrangements by their institution until they arrived in the UK. Even for those who managed to get the information, it was short of some basic issues such as in the areas of diet and support for students. In the related study carried out by Moogan et al. (1999) the following was the response from such groups of students, "Difficulty in obtaining information about the content of the programmes of study from the prospectuses of the university" (p. 223).

Similarly, in a study carried out in two Australian universities by Harman (2003) he found that, "A small group of international students complained of lack of preparation by the department for their arrival, even to the extent that for the first month nobody could find the key to the postgraduate student room".

In the analysis of the overseas students' information requirements, Mortimer (1997) found that just below half of the universities were able to satisfy the general information needs of the overseas students. This group was able to send out information that was quite comprehensive and was designed in a 'user-friendly fashion'. On the other hand, the majority of the universities only touched on the issues briefly in the prospectuses. For example, there was very little practical welfare and medical advice in the guidebook. Some of the information delay prevented potential students from developing prior knowledge about the environment in which they were coming to stay (Niven 1987). Hughes (1990) found that pre-arrival information about accommodation was deficient in coverage, "There are many examples of pre-arrival information which the true accommodation situation can only be deduced by sophisticated reading between the lines" (p.38).

**Induction.** Niven (1987) suggests that some universities did not provide adequate induction to their international students when he remarks, "In some institutions of higher education in the United Kingdom it is not unusual to have two hours of orientation activity - a meeting, in other words, to welcome overseas students, and to point out a few critical facts about their days to come" (p.153).

Macrae (1997) claims that some universities concentrate on the welfare of their international students during the induction period ignoring their academic adjustment programmes. To those universities, he suggests the inclusion of programmes that can help bridge the gap between the roles of the students and their supervisors.

**Accommodation.** In a study into the accommodation requirements of international students, Sen (1970) identified some degree of dissatisfaction. A general dissatisfaction came from a group of students who were not happy to be in rented flats and lodgings. Kinnell (1990) recorded accommodation problems which were caused by seasonal migrations. For example, during vacation some students were asked to vacate their accommodation either for other activities or for maintenance. Postgraduate students had limited facilities and there were no

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married quarters in the universities. Research students expressed their petition for, "A reasonable and quiet place to relax after their several hours tiring work" (p. 23).

In related studies, other problems could be cited while a student experiences life in the accommodation provided. Bullen-McKenzie (1991) found that students were not happy about the accommodation with which they were provided. In this same work, it was reported that students had problems maintaining cleanliness in the common places and there were invasions of other people's property. In addition, Hughes (1990) found that the problem of accommodation ranged from noisy neighbourhoods to problems of safety in the street at night and dampness. The study carried out by Harman (2003) revealed that international students have problems in terms of the cost of accommodation for this problem; he says that, "the high cost of accommodation in major cities put a major strain on incomes".

Another problem associated with accommodation is inherent in the ghettoization policy (Hughes 1990). There are two types of ghettoization. The first one is where overseas students from one country are accommodated in one place with the hope that they will offer one another social and cultural support. The second type of ghettoization, (total ghettoization) is where international students from different backgrounds are accommodated together without the presence among them of British students. This policy came about to ensure that the scarce institutional accommodation was allocated to those with the greatest need. The problem of ghettoization was that some students were not happy to be in the accommodation allocated to them. Some countries have internal problems that made students from that country feel unsafe staying together. In addition, it was not giving students in such accommodation the chance to improve their English (Hughes).

**Language.** The problem of English is a general issue for international students as (UKCOSA c 2000) remarks, "Although you may have learned English thoroughly it is possible that the regional accents you discover when arrive in the UK make the language harder to understand than you thought" (UKCOSA c).

What's more, international students differ in language skills. In line with this, McNamara and Harris (1997) said that, "Commonwealth students are less likely than others to have difficulties, having been more likely to have experienced English" (pp. 174-175).

However, language problems of students who are not native may affect their academic studies. Therefore, much attention should be given to language issues in teaching such students.

**Contact with British students.** Overseas students hope to meet the home students as soon as they are in the UK. However, they were surprised by the limited opportunities to mix with British students. As a result, the hope of improving English and gaining cultural understanding through friendship with native colleagues was unfulfilled. (Kinnell 1990). "We British were seen as cold, reserved and not welcoming to outsiders" (British Council 1999, P. 2).

Other students also bear witness to the previous findings. International students do not have the opportunity to mix with their classmates which they thought would assist in the improvement of their English. This group of students resorted to forming clusters among themselves and they used participation during lectures as a mean of improving their English (Bullen-McKenzie 1991).

**Relationship with gender issues.** Some overseas students came from countries where public expression is not commonplace. They found the expression of affection in British society to be disturbing. The legitimate presence of certain societies like the gay and lesbian sgroup was a concern for some overseas students. A female

international student to whom an Englishman gave a warm welcome had the following comment to make, "When I first arrived, he tried to be friendly by hugging and kissing me. Of course, according to my custom, we never do this with a stranger" (British Council 1997, p.16).

**Problems related to the programme of study.** Many overseas students claimed that they got inadequate academic guidance and insignificant help with personal problems. Overseas research students challenge their supervisors for being away most of the time they were sought for guidance (Niven, 1987). Some of the problems related to programmes of study were associated with new teaching systems. Some students found it with the lectures' abstracts. There were some students who claimed they were given too much reference reading and were left too much to their own initiative. There were those who found they were given too much to do in too little time (Sen 1970). Though tutors had the share of the blame, some students because of their background lack the initiative to approach their tutors or had cultural difficulties in doing so (Barker 1997). He also stated that though language problems can be an issue the problem of overseas students could be rooted in the cultural differences between students and their tutors as he noted, "This view was echoed by some research students, who felt that their supervisors did not try to see situations from the students' point of view" (p. 117). Kinnell (1990) found that time constraints were again a major issue, "Many of the one-year masters' courses were extremely concentrated" (p. 22).

Doing research and writing reports were approaches which the students found strange, "Seminars can be intimidating if you are not used to this kind of teaching" (UKCOSA d 1999, p. 3). A survey carried out to see the perceptions of overseas students about higher education revealed that, these students needed to work hard right from the beginning in order to face the challenges before joining university education (Moogan et al. 1999).

Based on the purpose of the study, the present research attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What is the students' attitude of the postgraduate programme they are currently undertaking?
2. What are the problems that overseas students face while studying in the UK?

## Method

### Description of the methodological framework

In the present study, an approach was adopted as the pertinent method to investigate the perception of international students towards higher education in the United Kingdom. To understand this approach more fully, a description of the methodology and the instruments is necessary. Since the focus of the research is the individual opinion of overseas students, the most appropriate methodological tools are the nominal group technique, interviews and questionnaires (Bell, 1999 & Cohen, et al. 2011).

### The Nominal Group Technique (NGT)

The nominal group technique involves assembling a group in order to collect data in the form of views, ideas and opinions about specific issues of overseas postgraduate students. The NGT is designed to help all team members participate and express opinions while still building team consensus. The nominal group technique is a quite popular means of reaching a group decision because it avoids many of the potential problems of group decision-making (cf. McMillan et al. 2014). It is a structured meeting/process that usually identifies and ranks

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the major problems or issues facing the group. In this technique, three groups were involved. Each group consisted of 8 to 10 male and female post-graduate students. Analysis of the NGT outcomes allowed us to design the interviews and the questionnaires. This technique involves collecting information, for the purpose of improving the effectiveness of the process. A successful evaluation in this stage generates outcomes that are valid, reliable and indicate directions and action for improvement of the other two stages (interview and questionnaire). The nominal group technique is a meeting with students at which they are asked to give their views and opinions about their programmes. It must be structured with care to generate good outcomes. A nominal group is one in which the individuals constituting the group work without interactions during the first part of the process, though the idea generated by each individual will later be brought in for discussion.

### **Interview**

This is the second method used to collect the necessary information. The interview was conducted as one-to-one interaction between the researchers and the other participant for the purpose of gathering useful data. The questions used in the interview were based on the nominal group technique. Analysis of the interview data allowed us to design questionnaire items (Abawi 2017). However, interviews are useful in collecting data on the attitudes and opinions of the students (Preece 1994). Hughes (1996) identifies two types of interviews, the research interview and other interviews such as a job interview. In the research interview, which is the pertinent type here, he suggests the importance of being rigorous and methodical in conducting it in order to minimize biases in the outcome. In this study, interview bias was minimal as the interview questions were derived from the results of the NGT. Commenting on the structure of interviews, Bell (1999) considers interviews as ranging from formal to informal interviews. Informal interviews are such that the direction they take is determined by the respondent.

These unstructured interviews require expertise and skill to keep them on track and the data they generated may be difficult to analyze. On the other hand, the structured interview may be designed to have items similar to a questionnaire but could be administered by the interviewer. This is the type of interview whose outcome can most easily be analyzed. The limitation of this type of interview is that because the interviewer controls the questions, some important areas might be missed out. Finally, the third type of interviews which is a semi-structured interview. This approach has some strength as the respondent is given a considerable limit within which to respond. Here, the analysis of the result is not too great a problem as a framework is established beforehand. It was this third type of structure that was utilized in this study with the framework based on the NGT data. Similarly, the data obtained from the analysis of the interviews was utilized in designing the questionnaire. The instruments for data collection were closely related in which to a large extent they reinforced each other giving it a triangulation structure.

### **Questionnaires**

This is the final method used in collecting data. The questionnaire was designed according to the outcomes of the nominal group technique and the interview in such a way, this intended to lead to an element of triangulation. Thus, the questionnaire will be administered after the Nominal Group Technique and the interviews. This is an attempt to move from a general overview to a more specific insight. It will be distributed to approximately 150 overseas students in Newcastle and Northumbria Universities. Data collected allowed participants to be grouped according to their gender, age and nationality. The purpose of considering nationality

as a variable in the research was to find out whether the experience of being an overseas student varies in any way according to nationality. The questionnaire consisted of some dichotomous items while other items were based on the Likert scale (Allison et al. 1996). Questionnaires were preferred because they are comparatively quick and cheap (Bell 1993, 1999 and Creswell 2009).

Nevertheless, it was wise to let people check the items before they were sent out. It was realized that the difficulty of developing a questionnaire ranges from designing for clarity to that selecting items. Nevertheless, these problems were minimized since the items for inclusion were generated directly from the analysis of the NGT and the interview data. Reaching the overseas students through their respective departments and the use of the International Offices of Newcastle and Northumbria Universities reduced the problem with the distribution and return of the completed questionnaires. The effect of the NGT, the interview and piloting were believed to have led to highly refined items in the questionnaire. It was believed that, since the various parts of the methodological framework were linked together, the data collected was highly reliable and valid.

### **Validity and Reliability**

Regardless of the type of research conducted the aim is for it to be valid and reliable. Validity is distinguished in internal and external dimensions. The first is the extent to which the result can be interpreted accurately, and the second is the extent to which the results can be generalized (Wiersma 2000). Reliability, on the other hand, is the extent to which a study would produce similar results under the same conditions by different researchers (King 1994). Reliability is a necessary characteristic for validity. In order to ensure a reliable and valid study, the researchers applied as strong a methodology as possible. The triangulation of different methods was intended to increase the likelihood that the 'phenomenon of interest' was being examined from various points of view (Maykut and Morehouse 1994).

### **Participants**

Although the intention of the research was to study overseas students in all the universities in the North East of England, it was restricted by the time frame to just two universities. Therefore, the participants of this research were 80 international students at the University of Newcastle and the University of Northumbria.

### **Procedure**

Three methods were utilized in gathering the data for this study. First, the nominal group technique (NGT) was used to get the gross view of the international students on the UK educational programmes. Three groups were involved in the NGT. These groups were selected from the different schools at the University of Newcastle. The findings from the NGT gave a proper direction for the design and implementation of the interview. The interview consisted of semi-structured questions focused on the areas identified from the results of NGT. For the interview, six interviews were carried out at Newcastle University. The transcript was then analyzed. The outcome of the interview exposed some new areas which were included in the questionnaire. Then a questionnaire was prepared in a way that included all the aspects which the previous data had revealed. The questionnaire consisted of semi-structured questions and was administered to a large number from within the international student community studying at the University of Newcastle and at the University of Northumbria.

**Analytical techniques**

Bell (1993) stated that information collected from interviews, and other tools do not mean anything until it is analyzed, presented and evaluated. King (1994) supported this position and said that processed data could help our understanding of the situation better, hence a more reliable basis for planning future action. In this study, the data was collected by three instruments namely, NGT, interview and questionnaire which then analyzed separately (cf. Cohen et al. 2011). The outcome of the NGT was first analyzed. In doing this the data obtained from the volunteers were noted and then categorized on the basis of their similarities and differences. Secondly, the data obtained from the interviews were also summarized and categorized (for a sample interview transcript see Appendix B). Then the collated data were interpreted. Finally, the data obtained in the questionnaire were collated and interpreted.

**Results and Discussion**

The current study was guided by two research questions: (1) What is the students' attitude of the postgraduate programme they are currently undertaking? (2) What are the problems that overseas students face while studying in the UK? A triangulation approach was utilized to gather the data required for this study. This included the nominal group technique, interviews and questionnaires. These instruments were utilized to investigate the impressions that international students developed during their studies here in the UK. Two universities were involved (Newcastle and Northumbria) to represent the North East of England. However, the triangulation approach was used because it is believed that this structure improves the validity and reliability of the outcome of this study. In this section, the summary results obtained from this approach will be discussed. This chapter is divided into two parts as follows:

**Students' attitudes towards UK postgraduate education**

***Available awards***

As it can be seen from the interview data, sixty per cent of the students were sponsored by different bodies. Based on this response, the situation was explored by using the questionnaire results which revealed that fifty-two per cent of the sample was sponsored students. This means that the majority of the students depended on an award. Sen (1970) noted that a good number of overseas students came through sponsorship and this would appear to be true also of the Newcastle students. Harris (1997) cited a number of scholarships for the citizens of the ex-colonies of Great Britain. Williams (1981) also noted that because British qualifications were internationally recognized, governments and companies offered grants for students to study in Britain. After the introduction of all full-fee policies, sponsorships were more for postgraduate studies than doing undergraduate programmes (Commonwealth Secretariat 1992). Thus it can be seen that a substantial number of students study in Britain through scholarships.

***Easy admission to a UK university***

Based on the responses to the NGT, many students found that admission to their national universities was more difficult than what they found with the UK universities; forty per cent of the participants in the questionnaires also claimed that it was easier to get admission to the UK universities. This is against a background of thirty-two to whom admission to British universities was not easy. The development policy in the early 1980s led to institutional competition for overseas students both within the UK and with other countries (Woodhall 1987). The overriding factor turned out to be the issue of income for the recruiting institutions

(Williams 1990). Students who find difficulty in gaining admission to UK universities maybe those from countries whose qualifications have not been recognized in Britain (UKCOSA 1998). Other difficulties could arise from visa restriction policy (UKCOSA b 2000). The overall view is that because the UK has many places available, the majority of overseas students get admission for studies.

#### ***The cost of education in the UK***

Based on the outcome of the NGT, there was no evidence of a student claiming that tuition fees in the UK were lower than in their own countries apart from if they were comparing the UK with the USA. However, in the questionnaire the situation was clear. Eighty-two per cent believed that education in the UK is more expensive than in their countries. Only seven per cent of the participants thought that education in their own countries was more expensive than in the UK. The responses in this study support the general view of the international student body that after the implementation of the foreign students' fees policy British education became expensive (Williams 1990). It was only refugees with full status and the EU students who were considered to be receiving fair treatment in this regard (UKCOSA 1999). However, it appears that some affluent parents have been able to send their children to study in the UK (Commonwealth Secretariat 1992). This would tie in with the fact that forty-seven per cent of students in this sample were self-sponsored. Though there is a general complaint about the cost, British education continues to be sought by people from overseas.

#### ***Duration of programmes***

Based on the NGT responses it can be seen that the relatively shorter periods of the study were an important factor in choosing the UK for education. Similarly, half of the respondents in the interview were in favour of UK education because the duration of programmes was shorter here. In the questionnaire, fifty-two per cent of the students agreed that the duration of programmes in Britain played a role in their decision and thirty-two per cent disagreed. As we have seen in chapter two, the reduction in the duration of programmes was an adjustment made to relieve overseas students with regard to the cost of studying in the United Kingdom. At the same time, it was to give a market advantage to the British higher education sector (Williams 1990). This study can confirm that the comparatively shorter programmes offered by British institutions are perceived as a potential advantage.

#### ***The need to improve English***

Referring to the outcome of the NGT the need to improve English was an important factor. Similarly, in the interviews, half of the sample had the aim of improving their language. Finally, in the questionnaire sixty per cent of the students agreed that studying in Britain would help to improve their English against twenty-three per cent who did not think so. Sen (1970) reported that students coming to study in Britain were attracted by factors related to English. Macrae and Harris (1997) also commented that people are choosing British education because English is internationally recognized. As a result, the British Council promotes the English language overseas by running English programmes and disseminating English literature (Williams 1990). Relating to the responses recorded above most of the students in the sample had come to study in Britain so as to get the chance to improve their English.

#### ***The attraction of British culture***

Relating to the outcome of the questionnaire, seven per cent of the students responded that they were attracted to study here by the British culture. However, forty-two per cent of responses showed disagreement with the statement. The British Council (1997) revealed that certain elements in the British culture were

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incompatible with international students. The British Council (1999) noted that the British were described as cool, reserved and part of an unwelcoming society. The finding of this study can suggest that international students are not particularly attracted to British culture.

### ***Opportunity to interact with people from other countries***

In the NGT the desire to go and experience life abroad scored second position. In the questionnaire, ninety-five per cent of the participants supported the view that studying in Britain would give them the opportunity to meet people from other countries. Mortimer (1997) challenged universities that omitted the number of overseas students in their prospectuses. Including this aspect in the information pack makes an aspirant anticipate different nationalities during his/her studies in Britain. From this data, it can be seen that overseas students have valued the environment in British universities which brings together people from all over the world.

### ***Compare education in the UK with home***

The response in the questionnaire shows that fifty-seven per cent of the participants agreed that studies in the UK would give them the opportunity to develop knowledge of UK education. However, twelve per cent disagreed with the statement. British education promotional literature reaches the remotest corners of the world disseminated by the British Council and the recruiting institutions (UKCOSA b 1999). This makes some people develop an interest in following up what British education is like. As can be seen in this study, a large proportion of the students wanted to gain knowledge about British education.

### ***Working under a particular supervisor***

In the questionnaire, a ten per cent response shows that some students decided to study in the UK because of knowledge of a particular supervisor. However, thirty-five per cent of the students disagreed about having come to work under a particular supervisor. The literature some universities used for inviting overseas students and convincing their sponsors might include the freedom for a student to select a supervisor to work with (Williams 1987). Based on the outcome of the questionnaire recorded above, the effect of freedom a student has to choose a supervisor is negligible in the recruitment drive. It can also be noted that attraction due to the knowledge of a particular supervisor applies perhaps more for PhD students than students who are studying Master's programme.

### ***Programmes are of better quality***

In the NGT the quality of British education was positively highlighted. In the interviews sixty per cent of the sample had been attracted by the quality of education. Further in the questionnaires, forty-two per cent against twenty-two agreed that British education was of high quality. A general concept on British education is associated with its historical position. As Williams (1981) puts it, British education was considered highly in its colonies and this trend continued in the new independent states. Kinnell (1990) also recorded that overseas people are after the quality of education in Britain. Harris (1997) further held that students continue coming to study in UK because of the perceived prestigious position of British universities. The consistent results recorded in this section imply that the quality of British education has remained important to the international community.

### ***Programmes better organized***

The results of the questionnaire revealed that fifty-seven per cent of the sample agreed to the statement that education system in the UK is more organized than in their respective countries and a smaller proportion

disagreed with the statement. Niven (1987) noted that it was the available facilities and the reputation of the institutions in Britain that govern the decision of the international community. As a majority of participants in this sample viewed it, UK education system can be considered to be better organized than of other countries.

#### ***Programmes related to home context***

Half of the interviewees were doing programmes which were pertinent to their home context. In the questionnaire the outcome was that eighty per cent felt that they were doing programmes relevant to their home context while five per cent had programmes not related to their home situation. The situation that followed after the introduction of full-cost fees had induced higher institutions of learning to start meeting the education demand of overseas governments in a bid to design programmes to their taste (Williams 1990). As a result, most countries have programmes in the UK which match their home conditions.

#### ***Programmes not being offered at home***

In the NGT the main reason for choosing the UK for the study was the limited opportunity of doing the intended programme in the student's home country. In the questionnaire, fifty per cent of the sample agreed that the programmes they were doing were not available in the institutions in their countries.

The variety of programmes introduced in British institutions to attract clients from dependent countries ensures that such nations have programmes relevant to them in the UK. The introduction of full-cost fees in the 1980's led to the development of programmes that were designed for specific nationality groups (Harris 1997). Thus a substantial number of students come to Britain to do programmes that are not being offered in their own countries.

#### ***Programmes related to future career***

In the NGT the issue of pursuing career development featured significantly as a factor in choosing British education. In other words, the relationship between studies in the UK and getting a better job was important. In the questionnaire, sixty-two per cent against twenty per cent agreed that they were doing programmes related to their career. Here again, the same situation created by the overseas student policy led to the evolution of a myriad of programmes enough to match the career aspirations of the majority of international students (Williams 1990). It is clear in the responses recorded in this section that a lot of students are attracted because Britain provides programmes relevant to their careers. Furthermore, the marketing drive conducted by the British institutions and the related bodies may have an effect beyond the attraction for overseas students. Such an endeavour might sell British qualifications to employing agencies in other countries (Niven 1987). McNamara and Harris (1997) noted that UK qualifications are recognized in the countries that send their students and that UK education was trusted internationally. So, jobs which could not be obtained easily by holding a national qualification can be accessible to a person educated in Britain. This is the view that the majority of the students in this sample have. Not only studying in the UK would provide students with a better job but also it would provide them with promotions in their places of work. Because of the reputation of British education, international students anticipate some promotion on their return (McNamara and Harris 1997). According to the responses available, the impression most students have is that programmes undertaken in the UK would be rewarded with promotions when they get back to their countries.

***Satisfaction with programmes***

During the interview, only one student responded a dissatisfaction as the programme he was doing was decided for him by his sponsor. This respondent found the programme abstract. In the questionnaire, seventy five per cent were satisfied and twelve per cent were not satisfied with the programmes they were doing. Sen (1970) found that students who came to the UK wanted to advance their knowledge in a place of their choice. Others in this group wanted a specific qualification. This group was satisfied with what it came for. Bullen-McKenzie (1991) found that international students count themselves successful when the great effort they put in leads to the attainment of an academic qualification. Like their peers noted in Bullen-McKenzie's study, the majority of the students in this sample have registered their satisfaction.

**Problems overseas students face while studying in the UK**

***Language problem***

Based on the result of the interview, half of the sample had reported problems related to English. However, with regard to the questionnaire, only twenty-seven percent had problems in English while two per cent had no language problems. This low record of language problems could suggest that some students had a solid background in English prior to their coming to the UK. It can also be suggested that some of these students might have benefited from the language programmes available in the UK. It is generally the case that international students hope to interact with home students so as to improve their English (Kinnell 1990). After realizing that it was not easy to meet home students they started to use lectures for improving their English (Bullen-McKenzie 1991). Based on the data available in this section, English language is a problem only for a minority.

***Support from tutors***

Based on the result of the interview, half of the students reported having received minimal support from their tutors. Sen (1970) reported that some students felt their tutors left them to struggle too much on their own. Kinnell (1990) also found a significant number of students claimed they received insufficient support from their tutors. However, further investigation by the questionnaires showed that only twenty-two per cent voiced this complain while forty-five per cent got the adequate support they expected. Though the outcome of the interview and the questionnaire do not support each other, it can be concluded that a certain proportion of overseas students in Newcastle do not get the appropriate support which is due to them but that generally the support was adequate.

***Problem with academic facilities***

In the interview, complaints about facilities were nonsignificant factors. Similarly, in the questionnaire only seven per cent had been affected by shortage of facilities. The majority had no problem in this regard. This finding reveals that British institutions are of high quality and they have better facilities than in the students' own country.

***Impact of separation from family***

Based on the result of the interview the impact of separation was nonsignificant. However, in the questionnaire, the effect of separation was a major factor. It is suggested that one of the factors that causes culture shock among international students is the separation of the students from their families (UKCOSA c

2000). Based on the outcome of the questionnaire it can be suggested that most of the international students are to various degrees, affected by the physical separation from their families.

### ***Financial problem***

In this study financial problems do not appear to be a general issue as only ten per cent reported having had financial problems against fifty per cent who did not experience financial problems. Sen (1970) identified a certain level of the financial difficulty students faced and this was often due to bureaucratic delay on the part of their government. Some students were hit by this problem after they misused their money. Other students were faced with the obligation to support their families back home while some were affected by the fluctuation in foreign exchange rates (Niven 1987). Similar to findings elsewhere, the problem was experienced by few students at Newcastle University.

It is observed that many students from various parts of the world pour into the United Kingdom to pursue higher education. This may be a normal trend of an event or there could be a special meaning inherent in the flow. Objective conclusions cannot be drawn if a systematic investigation is not carried out first. Thus, the current study was designed to investigate this area. As part of this, the impressions of these students have been addressed. Finally, the problems that these students encounter during the period of study were also considered. A harmonious mixture of qualitative and quantitative approaches was utilized in this study. Pertinent data were collected through NGT, interviews and questionnaires. The three instruments were considered to have reinforced each other in a way to produce highly reliable data. As a result, conclusions can be drawn.

Students decide to study in the UK because in some countries the chances for postgraduate studies within their countries are limited. Alternatively, some of the programmes a student wants to study are not available in their own universities. There is another reason that prompts some groups to cross the sea to England that is related to either improving English or to an assured ability to study in England. In addition, the duration of programmes which are offered in British universities also proved to be another favourable factor. Universities in the UK were considered to be better in terms of the materials they discharge and the way they are organized as compared to the provision in the countries this sample is drawn from. Besides, the objective reasons outlined above that bring international students into the British higher education system, the education obtained was found to match the future aspirations of the students. Similarly, in this study, a qualification from a British institution of higher learning appeared to be more weight compared to the credentials this group would obtain in their own countries.

Moreover, in the present study, the problems students met during their studies were also considered. The main findings can also be outlined here. In this study, one of the problems that hit a large proportion of the students was the effect of having been separated from their families. Other factors that could not be generalised included problems with language and complaints about support from tutors. The issue of academic facilities and financial problems has also featured as a minor problem. Significantly, the current study has attempted to address an important gap in the literature on postgraduate learning programmes. Additionally, the present study has delivered robust inspiration to universities and educational institutions that students are certainly enthusiastic to know more about postgraduate study.

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**Appendix A**

**Interview Questions:**

What is your perception of the programme you are currently undertaking?

How would you relate your studies in the UK to your future prospects?

Have you encountered any problems with regard to your programme of study?

What is your advice to anyone in your country who is thinking about studying in the UK?

Do you have any additional thoughts that you would like to add?

## **Appendix B**

### **A sample transcript of interview response:**

#### **Background:**

Programme of study: Masters in Law.

Nationality: Malaysian.

Gender: Female.

#### **What is your perception of the programme you are currently undertaking?**

The programme I am pursuing right now is excellent. It is actually fantastic, very nice, good and of high standard. I think it is one of the top five universities in the UK. I have been interested in pursuing this programme since last three years. It is an excellent programme because it is diversified in terms of the five subjects available in my programme of study. Since I am a practitioner I could either practice in shipping law or I could move on to a consultancy firm specialist in trading or I could be a copyright lawyer. Doing my programme in the UK gives me the chance to know more about how Britain is doing in my field of study.

#### **How would you relate your studies in the UK to your future prospects?**

I have already answered that question; my study in the UK will prove to be very helpful in the future. I intend to specialise hopefully in copyright laws. This programme is generally useful for me. I may practice law specialising in the protection of intellectual property rights ranging from patents to copyright. Thus, the master in law would prove to be useful in terms of the career I intend to pursue.

#### **Have you encountered any problems with regard to your programme of study?**

I do not think that I had any problems but I realise other students had problems related to finance. The fees for international students are very high compared to home students. Most of them don't have a scholarship and their parents support them which is very expensive so, of course the finance cause them problems. Another problem that I encountered was that we hardly had lectures; all we did have was seminars. So, basically, the lecture is where you were given a reading list and you are supposed to read that area of law and go on to your seminars. So if you've been educated at a programme where predominately you were spoon-fed by your lecturer, then I think this is the problem you will face in this course of study. This programme gave me a lot of time to read other materials. I think it also gave me a lot of time to take on part time jobs. It is not just about studying; it is also to learn about culture in England. I think it is quite good overall.

#### **What is your advice to anyone in your country who is thinking about studying in the UK?**

I advise everybody to come to study in the UK not only because of the subject matter that they have chosen but also to take this programme of study because it is diversified. I'd like them to come to Newcastle up north as there is much culture. The fact that Newcastle will be the city of culture in 2008 is quite good as well there is a lot to learn from this place. You don't just meet the English but you meet people from all the borders; from Africa, America, European and Asians. I think I have picked up a lot of things as it is a melting pot. I would definitely advice anybody to come to Newcastle or UK. Also, I would advise anyone who is coming over to make proper arrangement for finance especially the tuition fees and accommodation.

#### **Do you have any additional thoughts that you would like to add?**

I think the best advice I can give to any student is not just to come to Newcastle but to the UK. They shouldn't place too much emphasis on their studies. I think what they need to do is to go out be members of clubs, pick up a language, as there are many societies. I believe getting a part-time job would also help. It is just to learn the way the locals live and not just stick to your own clan. You want to be a person of quality. Take every moment as important not just emphasising on studying. Tuition fees are too high for international students. The British Government should consider this. That does not mean that international students should pay the same as home students but, they should reduce it.

**Appendix C**

**Questionnaire for overseas students studying in the United Kingdom:**

The present study examines students' impressions about postgraduate programmes of study. Also, the problems that these students have met while studying in the UK.

**Background**

Please tick ( ) or fill in as appropriate the required information about yourself:

- 1 Nationality: [ ] [ ]
- 2 Gender: Male [ ] Female [ ]
- 3 Age: 21-30 [ ] 31-40 [ ] 41-50 [ ] 51 and above [ ]
- 4 Marital status: Single [ ] Married [ ] Single with children [ ]
- 5 Programme of study: Certificate [ ] Bachelor [ ] Master [ ] PhD [ ]
- 6 Length of programme: [ ] [ ]
- 7 How has the programme been financed?:  
Own funds [ ] Charity [ ] Company [ ] Government [ ] Other source [ ]

**B. My attitude towards UK postgraduate education**

		Agree	Strongly agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
8	The cost of education in the UK is lower than in					
9	It was easier to get admission to a UK university					
10	Programmes of studies in the UK universities are shorter than in other countries					
11	I wanted to study in the UK to improve my English					
12	Doing my postgraduate programme allows me to					
13	Studying in the UK gives me the opportunity to					
14	The postgraduate programme I am undertaking is					
15	Doing my postgraduate programme gives me the					
16	Education in the UK is of better quality than in					
17	Programmes in UK universities are better					
18	The knowledge I am getting in my programme					
19	The programme I am doing is not offered in my					
20	The programme I am doing is relevant to my					
21	Doing my studies in the UK gives me the chance					
22	Studying in the UK will improve my general					
23	I am satisfied with the programme I am currently					
24	I have had problems with the use of English in					

25	I have had much guidance from my tutors					
26	The poor library and other facilities have affected					
27	Being separated from my family has affected my					
28	Financial problems have affected my studies					

**C. My advice to anyone coming from my country to do a postgraduate programme in the UK would be:**

		Agree	Strongly agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
29	Prepare to cope with cultural difference					
30	Establish friendships with English speakers to					
31	Use the facilities in the language centre					
32	Work hard right from the beginning of the course					
33	Know that the information provided in the					
34	Consider coming to study in the UK as a last					

Thank you for completing the questionnaire

**Appendix D**

Country of origin	Frequency
Libya	8
Botswana	8
China	6
Malaysia	6
Indonesia	6
Taiwan	5
Nigeria	4
Zimbabwe	4
Singapore	4
Algeria	4
Burma	4
Pakistan	2
India	3

**STUDENTS' CONSCIOUSNESS OF POSTGRADUATE PROGRAMMES**

Iran	2
Kenya	2
Malawi	2
Greece	2
Egypt	2
Tanzania	2
Thailand	2
Argentina	1
Brunei	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>