



Challenges Faced by International Students in Arab Universities: A Cross-Sectional Analysis

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Abstract

This study examines the challenges faced by international students in Arab universities, focusing on language barriers, cultural adaptation, academic integration, and administrative issues. Data were collected through a structured survey administered to 400 international students across five prominent Arab universities in Saudi Arabia, UAE, Egypt, Lebanon, and Jordan. The findings reveal that 70% of the participants identified language barriers as a significant hurdle, particularly with Arabic, impacting their academic and social integration. Approximately 65% of students reported difficulties with cultural adaptation, influencing their ability to adjust to local norms and academic expectations. Administrative challenges were also prominent, with 55% of students facing issues related to visa procedures, university registration, and housing. The study also highlighted the impact of these challenges on students' mental health, with 40% reporting stress and anxiety. These findings suggest a need for Arab universities to enhance support systems, including comprehensive language support, orientation programs, and streamlined administrative processes to improve the overall experience for international students.

Keywords: International students; Arab universities; Language barriers; Cultural adaptation; Academic integration; Administrative challenges; Mental health

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Introduction

The global landscape of higher education has witnessed a significant transformation over the past few decades, characterized by an increased movement of students across borders. International students now represent a critical segment of many university populations worldwide, bringing a rich diversity of perspectives, experiences, and cultural nuances that enrich the academic and social environment of their institutions. In the Arab world, universities have increasingly become destinations for students from Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas, drawn by the unique blend of modern education and rich cultural heritage (Altbach & Knight, 2007). However, the integration of international students into Arab universities is accompanied by a variety of challenges that can impact their academic success and overall well-being.

Understanding the complexities that international students face is crucial for developing effective support systems that enhance their educational experiences and outcomes. Challenges such as language barriers, cultural adaptation, and administrative hurdles are not unique to the Arab region but are often magnified

here due to the distinct social, educational, and linguistic context (Lee & Rice, 2007). Language, being the most immediate barrier, poses significant challenges, not only in academic settings where instruction might be in Arabic or a mixture of Arabic and English but also in everyday interactions and administrative transactions within and outside the university campus.

Cultural adaptation is another significant hurdle. International students must navigate a social environment that is often drastically different from their own, adhering to cultural norms and social expectations that

may affect their social interactions and even their academic engagement and integrity (Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland, & Ramia, 2008). This cultural transition demands a complex re-adjustment process, where students often struggle with issues of identity, belonging, and understanding, potentially leading to social isolation or conflict.

Academic integration extends beyond language proficiency, encompassing the ability to adapt to different educational philosophies and practices. Arab universities may employ pedagogical approaches that differ markedly from those in Western, African, or Asian educational systems, potentially leading to academic challenges for students unfamiliar with such styles (Khattab & Fenton, 2016). Furthermore, the assessment methods, classroom dynamics, and student-teacher relationships can also vary significantly, impacting the academic performance and engagement of international students.

Administrative challenges also play a critical role. Navigating visa requirements, registration processes, accommodation arrangements, and other bureaucratic procedures can be daunting for international students. These administrative tasks, if not managed efficiently by the universities, can become significant stressors, detracting from the educational experience and consuming time and energy that could be better spent on academic and social engagement (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007).

The mental health and well-being of international students are profoundly affected by these challenges. Studies have shown that international students are often at a higher risk of experiencing psychological distress than their domestic counterparts, primarily due to isolation, cultural stress, academic pressures, and administrative burdens (Hyun, Quinn, Madon, & Lustig, 2007). Therefore, understanding the source and impact of these stressors is crucial for creating interventions that promote mental health and academic success.

Despite these challenges, the potential for personal and academic growth for international students in Arab universities is immense. The opportunity to immerse themselves in a new cultural setting, learn a new language, and develop a global network of peers is invaluable and can lead to significant personal development and cross-cultural competencies that are highly prized in the global job market (Andrade, 2006).

The narrative of international students in Arab universities is thus one of challenge and opportunity. By dissecting the nature of these challenges and understanding their implications, stakeholders can develop targeted strategies to mitigate these issues. Providing comprehensive orientation programs, robust language support services, effective academic advising, streamlined administrative processes, and mental health services can significantly enhance the experiences of international students. Moreover, fostering an inclusive campus culture that celebrates diversity and promotes intercultural dialogue can transform these challenges into a powerful impetus for growth and learning.

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to investigate the challenges faced by international students in Arab universities, with a focus on understanding the barriers to language proficiency, cultural adaptation, academic integration, and administrative processes. The study seeks to explore how these challenges impact students' mental health, well-being, and academic success, providing evidence-based recommendations to improve institutional support systems and enhance the overall experience of international students in the Arab world.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. **Language Barriers**
 - What are the primary language-related challenges faced by international students in Arab universities?
 - How do language barriers affect their academic and social integration?

2. **Cultural Adaptation**

- What are the key cultural adaptation issues experienced by international students in Arab universities?
- How does cultural adaptation influence their social relationships and academic engagement?

3. **Academic Integration**

- What academic challenges do international students encounter in terms of teaching methodologies, assessment systems, and faculty interactions?
- How do these challenges impact their academic performance and satisfaction?

4. **Administrative Challenges**

- What administrative hurdles do international students face, including visa processes, registration, and accommodation?
- How do these challenges contribute to stress and detract from their overall educational experience?

5. **Mental Health and Well-being**

- What is the relationship between the challenges faced by international students and their mental health outcomes (e.g., stress, anxiety)?
- What institutional measures can mitigate the negative impact of these challenges on students' well-being?

6. **Support Systems**

- What types of institutional support systems are currently in place to assist international students in Arab universities?
- How can these systems be enhanced to address the specific needs of international students effectively?

Operational Definitions of Key Concepts

To ensure clarity and consistency, the following operational definitions are provided for the core concepts explored in this study:

1. **International Students:** Individuals enrolled in higher education institutions outside their country of origin, pursuing undergraduate or postgraduate programs. In this study, this includes students attending Arab universities in Saudi Arabia, UAE, Egypt, Lebanon, and Jordan.
2. **Language Barriers:** Challenges faced by students in understanding and effectively communicating in the primary language(s) of instruction and daily interactions within the host country. This encompasses difficulties with academic terminology, social communication, and language-related administrative tasks.
3. **Cultural Adaptation:** The process by which international students adjust to the cultural norms, social practices, and academic expectations of the host country. This includes overcoming cultural shock, understanding local customs, and achieving a sense of belonging.
4. **Academic Integration:** The degree to which students successfully adapt to the educational system, pedagogical styles, classroom dynamics, and assessment methods of the host university. This also includes engagement with academic resources and faculty interactions.
5. **Administrative Challenges:** Difficulties encountered by students in navigating institutional and governmental processes, such as visa applications, university registration, housing arrangements, and accessing support services.
6. **Mental Health and Well-being:** The psychological and emotional state of students, measured in terms of stress, anxiety, and overall life satisfaction during their academic tenure in the host country.

Methods

Study Design

This study employed a **cross-sectional design** to investigate the challenges faced by international students enrolled in Arab universities. A cross-sectional design involves collecting data from participants at a single point in time, enabling researchers to capture a comprehensive overview of their experiences and the factors influencing their academic and social integration. This approach is particularly well-suited for examining multiple interrelated variables within a diverse population, providing both descriptive and relational insights.

Rationale for Cross-Sectional Design

The cross-sectional design was chosen for several reasons:

1. **Efficiency:** The ability to collect data simultaneously from a large and diverse sample of international students across multiple universities allowed for a comprehensive analysis of challenges within a limited timeframe.
2. **Breadth of Analysis:** This design facilitated the examination of a wide range of factors, including language barriers, cultural adaptation, academic integration, and administrative hurdles. Additionally, it enabled the study to explore the associations between these challenges and their impact on students' mental health and academic success.
3. **Exploration of Relationships:** While the study was not longitudinal in nature, the cross-sectional approach allowed for the exploration of correlations between variables such as language proficiency and mental well-being or cultural adaptation and academic performance.

Key Variables and Constructs

The study examined the following primary variables:

- **Independent Variables:** Language proficiency, cultural adaptation, academic integration, and administrative challenges.
- **Dependent Variables:** Mental health outcomes (stress, anxiety, and overall well-being) and academic success (measured through self-reported performance and satisfaction).

Setting

The study was conducted across five prominent Arab universities located in Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Lebanon, and Jordan. These institutions were chosen based on their high international student enrollment and their reputation for academic excellence in the region. Each university is known for different strengths in various academic disciplines, providing a diverse range of experiences and environments for international students.

Sample

Sample Size

The study included a total of 400 international students. The sample size was determined using **Cochran's formula** for sample size calculation, which ensures statistical representativeness and reliability. This sample size was chosen to provide sufficient power to detect meaningful patterns and relationships among the variables being studied, while also reflecting the diversity of the target population.

Sampling Technique

The study employed a **stratified random sampling** approach to ensure representation of key demographic and academic characteristics of the international student population. This technique divides the population into distinct subgroups (strata) based on specific characteristics, followed by random selection within each stratum.

1. **Stratification Variables:**

- **Nationality:** Students were grouped based on their region of origin, including Asia, Africa, and other regions, to capture the influence of cultural and linguistic diversity.
- **Gender:** The sample included proportional representation of male and female students to examine potential gender-based differences in challenges faced.
- **Academic Level:** Students were stratified into undergraduate and postgraduate levels to account for variations in academic expectations and experiences.
- **Field of Study:** Participants were selected from diverse academic disciplines, including engineering, business, humanities, and others, to reflect the breadth of the international student body.

2. Sample Selection:

- Within each stratum, random sampling was used to select participants, ensuring that every individual within a subgroup had an equal chance of being included.
- Efforts were made to balance the representation of students from different universities, academic levels, and fields of study to avoid overrepresentation of any specific subgroup.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

1. Inclusion Criteria:

- Students currently enrolled as full-time international students in one of the selected universities.
- Students who had completed at least one semester of study to ensure they had sufficient exposure to the academic and social environment.
- Willingness to participate and provide informed consent.

2. Exclusion Criteria:

- Domestic students or students with dual citizenship in the host country.
- Students who were enrolled in short-term exchange programs or language-only courses, as their experiences might differ significantly from those in degree programs.
- Participants who declined to provide informed consent.

Demographic and Academic Characteristics of the Sample

The final sample of 400 students included:

- **Gender:** 60% male (240 students) and 40% female (160 students).
- **Academic Levels:** 80% undergraduates (320 students) and 20% postgraduates (80 students).
- **Fields of Study:** 30% in engineering (120 students), 25% in business (100 students), 20% in humanities (80 students), and 25% in other disciplines (100 students).
- **Regions of Origin:** 40% from Asia (160 students), 30% from Africa (120 students), and 30% from other regions (120 students).

Recruitment Process

1. Coordination with Universities:

- Collaborations were established with the international student offices of the selected universities to identify and invite eligible participants.
- Ethical approvals and permissions were obtained to access student databases and distribute surveys.

2. Participant Outreach:

- Invitations were sent via university email systems, with follow-ups through social media platforms commonly used by students (e.g., WhatsApp groups, Facebook groups).
- Clear instructions about the purpose of the study, voluntary participation, and confidentiality were provided.

3. **Ensuring Representation:**

- Efforts were made to recruit participants from various nationalities, academic levels, and fields of study to ensure the diversity and representativeness of the sample.
- An equal opportunity to participate was provided to all eligible students within each stratum.

By employing this detailed and systematic sampling process, the study ensured that the sample accurately reflected the diversity of international students in Arab universities. This approach also enabled the researchers to capture a wide range of perspectives and experiences, providing a robust foundation for the analysis and interpretation of the challenges faced by this population.

Data Collection Tools

The survey instrument used was a detailed questionnaire developed through an iterative process that involved literature review, expert consultation, and preliminary qualitative interviews with a subset of international students. The final questionnaire consisted of:

1. **Demographic and Background Information:** This section collected basic information such as age, gender, country of origin, and academic details.
2. **Language Proficiency and Communication Challenges:** Students rated their fluency in Arabic and the primary language of instruction and detailed specific communication barriers they faced.
3. **Cultural Adaptation:** Questions here assessed the degree of cultural shock, experiences with local customs, and efforts to integrate socially.
4. **Academic Integration:** This section focused on academic experiences, including satisfaction with academic resources, interactions with faculty, and academic performance.
5. **Administrative and Logistic Concerns:** It covered administrative support related to visas, registration processes, accommodation, and other logistical aspects.
6. **Mental Health and Well-being:** A series of questions evaluated levels of stress, anxiety, and depression, along with overall satisfaction with life as a student in the host country.

The questionnaire was available in both English and Arabic to accommodate the language preferences of the diverse student body. It was distributed electronically via university email systems and social media platforms, ensuring easy accessibility and increased participation.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the survey were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics provided an overview of the data distribution and central tendencies. Chi-square tests were utilized to examine the relationships between categorical variables, and Pearson's correlation coefficients were calculated to assess the strength and direction of associations between language proficiency, cultural adaptation, and academic success. Open-ended responses were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify prevalent themes related to the challenges faced by international students. This qualitative data provided depth and context to the quantitative findings, offering a richer understanding of the students' experiences.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the institutional review boards of each participating university, ensuring that the research adhered to international standards of ethical conduct in research

involving human subjects. Informed consent was a prerequisite for participation, with participants informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their involvement, and the confidentiality of their responses. Data were anonymized and securely stored with access restricted to the research team only. Special care was taken to maintain the confidentiality of the participants' responses and to ensure that participation or non-participation in the study did not affect their academic standing or university services.

By meticulously addressing each of these methodological areas, the study aimed to provide comprehensive insights into the challenges international students face in Arab universities, paving the way for more effective support strategies and policies to enhance their educational experiences and outcomes.

Results

A total of 400 international students participated in the study, achieving a response rate of 100% due to the targeted recruitment efforts. The demographic and academic characteristics of the participants are summarized in Table 1. The average age of the students was 23.5 ± 4.1 years. The cohort included 240 males (60%) and 160 females (40%), reflecting the gender distribution in the participating universities. Most of the students were undergraduates (320, 80%), with the remaining 80 (20%) enrolled in postgraduate programs. The students represented a broad range of academic disciplines, with the largest groups in engineering (120, 30%), business (100, 25%), and humanities (80, 20%).

Demographic and Academic Characteristics

Table 1 presents the demographic and academic characteristics of the international student participants. The diversity in nationalities included significant numbers from Asia (160, 40%), Africa (120, 30%), and other regions (120, 30%). Many students were from English-speaking countries (200, 50%), with others coming from non-English-speaking backgrounds (200, 50%), which influenced their experiences with language barriers.

Table 1. Demographic and Academic Characteristics of International Students (N = 400)

Characteristic	Frequency (%)
Gender	
- Male	240 (60%)
- Female	160 (40%)
Age (years)	
- Mean $\pm$ SD	23.5 ± 4.1
Academic Level	
- Undergraduate	320 (80%)
- Postgraduate	80 (20%)
Field of Study	
- Engineering	120 (30%)
- Business	100 (25%)
- Humanities	80 (20%)
- Other	100 (25%)
Region of Origin	
- Asia	160 (40%)

- Africa	120 (30%)
- Other Regions	120 (30%)

Language Proficiency and Communication Challenges

Table 2 highlights the significant language and communication challenges faced by international students in Arab universities, emphasizing the critical role of language proficiency in their academic and social integration. A majority of students (60%) reported difficulties with Arabic, reflecting the challenges of adapting to a predominantly Arabic-speaking environment. These challenges extend beyond academic settings to social interactions, affecting their ability to engage both formally and informally. A smaller but noteworthy percentage (10%) faced challenges with English, likely representing students from non-English-speaking backgrounds who struggle with technical vocabulary or academic writing, particularly in disciplines where English is the primary medium of instruction. Furthermore, over half of the students (55%) indicated struggles with social communication, hindering their ability to build relationships with peers and faculty, which are essential for cultural adaptation and emotional well-being. Academic communication was identified as a significant barrier by 65% of students, impacting their understanding of lectures, ability to interact with faculty, and participation in group discussions. Notably, 45% of students reported inadequate access to language support services, such as tutoring or bilingual resources, exacerbating their difficulties. Additionally, 37.5% of students acknowledged that language barriers negatively affected their confidence, limiting their willingness to participate in academic and social activities. These findings underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions, including comprehensive Arabic and English language programs, bilingual academic materials, peer mentorship schemes, and cultural sensitivity training for faculty and local students. Addressing these challenges holistically can significantly enhance the academic performance, social integration, and overall satisfaction of international students.

Table 2: Language Proficiency and Communication Challenges

Language Challenge	Frequency (%)	Details
Difficulty with Arabic	240 (60%)	- Limited proficiency in understanding lectures delivered in Arabic.
		- Struggles with reading and comprehending academic materials in Arabic.
		- Difficulty engaging in informal conversations with peers and staff.
Difficulty with English	40 (10%)	- Challenges in understanding academic terms and technical vocabulary in English.
		- Limited ability to express complex ideas in academic writing.
Social Communication	220 (55%)	- Difficulty initiating and maintaining conversations with local students.
		- Misinterpretation of cultural cues in informal interactions.
		- Hesitation to participate in group discussions or extracurricular activities.
Academic Communication	260 (65%)	- Challenges in following lectures and classroom discussions due to language barriers.

		- Difficulty communicating with faculty members for academic advice or clarifications.
		- Struggles in presenting ideas during oral presentations and group projects.
Access to Language Support Services	180 (45%)	- Lack of access to adequate language support programs (e.g., Arabic or English tutoring).
		- Limited availability of bilingual materials for non-native speakers.
Impact on Confidence	150 (37.5%)	- Students reported reduced self-confidence in academic and social settings due to language.

Cultural Adaptation

Table 3 provides a comprehensive overview of the cultural adaptation challenges faced by international students in Arab universities, highlighting the multifaceted nature of their experiences. Half of the students (50%) reported difficulty adjusting to local customs, including challenges in understanding traditions, adhering to cultural norms, and participating in community events. Academic expectations also posed significant difficulties for 45% of the students, particularly with adapting to new pedagogical approaches, classroom dynamics, and grading systems. Social isolation emerged as a prominent issue for half of the respondents (50%), driven by limited opportunities to form meaningful connections with local peers, compounded by language barriers and cultural misunderstandings. Gender-specific cultural norms affected 40% of students, with female students encountering challenges in navigating gender-segregated environments and male students adjusting to expectations in mixed settings. Religious practices and sensitivities were an additional source of difficulty for 35%, including challenges aligning personal practices with local norms and feelings of isolation during religious holidays not observed in the host country. Perceived discrimination was reported by 25%, reflecting experiences of bias or stereotyping based on nationality, ethnicity, or religion, which further exacerbated feelings of marginalization. Moreover, 30% highlighted the inadequacy of cultural orientation programs, which limited their ability to understand and navigate local practices effectively. Lastly, 22.5% of students experienced cultural fatigue, characterized by emotional exhaustion from constant adjustments and frustrations arising from repeated misunderstandings.

Table 3: Cultural Adaptation Challenges

Cultural Issue	Frequency (%)	Details
Adjusting to Local Customs	200 (50%)	- Difficulty understanding and following local traditions and cultural norms.
		- Struggles with adhering to dress codes, dietary restrictions, or other cultural practices.
		- Limited participation in local festivals or community events due to unfamiliarity.
Academic Expectations	180 (45%)	- Lack of familiarity with the pedagogical approaches used in Arab universities (e.g., lecture-heavy formats).
		- Difficulty adapting to stricter classroom dynamics and attendance policies.

		- Challenges with understanding grading systems and feedback mechanisms.
Social Isolation	200 (50%)	- Limited opportunities to form friendships with local students due to cultural and language barriers.
		- Feelings of exclusion in group activities or extracurricular programs.
		- Reluctance to seek social connections due to fear of miscommunication or cultural misunderstandings.
Gender-Specific Cultural Norms	160 (40%)	- Challenges faced by female students in adapting to gender-segregated environments or societal roles.
		- Male students reported difficulties understanding expectations for respectful behavior in mixed settings.
Religious Practices and Sensitivities	140 (35%)	- Difficulty aligning personal religious practices with local norms or expectations.
		- Feeling isolated during religious holidays not observed in the host country.
		- Limited understanding of the religious values influencing the cultural environment.
Perceived Discrimination	100 (25%)	- Experiences of bias or stereotyping based on nationality, ethnicity, or religion.
		- Feeling marginalized in academic and social spaces.
Availability of Cultural Orientation Programs	120 (30%)	- Limited access to programs that explain local cultural practices and expectations.
		- Inadequate university-led initiatives for fostering cross-cultural dialogue.
Cultural Fatigue	90 (22.5%)	- Mental and emotional exhaustion from constant cultural adjustments.
		- Feelings of frustration or withdrawal due to repeated misunderstandings.

Table 4 provides a comprehensive overview of the administrative and logistic challenges faced by international students in Arab universities, highlighting the multifaceted nature of these obstacles. Visa issues were the most frequently reported challenge, affecting 45% of students, with delays in processing, unclear guidance, and difficulties in renewal being the primary concerns. Registration problems, encountered by 40% of students, included confusion over procedures, limited course availability, and errors in academic records, which compounded their stress during enrollment periods. Housing difficulties were reported by 35% of students, emphasizing insufficient on-campus housing, high off-campus housing costs, and poor living conditions. Financial challenges also emerged as significant, with 32.5% of students struggling with delayed scholarship disbursements and the high cost of living in host countries. Furthermore, 30% of students noted limited access to administrative support, citing the unavailability of multilingual services and unresponsive staff as key barriers. Navigating bureaucracy was a challenge for 25% of students, who experienced complex paperwork requirements and inconsistent communication from university offices. Finally, 22.5% of students reported difficulties with health insurance and accessing

medical facilities, further complicating their adjustment to a new environment. These findings underscore the need for universities to streamline administrative processes, enhance housing and financial support, provide multilingual services, and improve access to health and medical resources. Addressing these challenges comprehensively can significantly reduce the stress faced by international students, enabling them to focus more effectively on their academic and personal growth.

Table 4: Administrative and Logistic Challenges

Administrative Issue	Frequency (%)	Details
Visa Issues	180 (45%)	- Delayed visa processing (120 students, 30%).
		- Lack of clear guidance on visa requirements (100 students, 25%).
		- Issues with renewing or extending visas (80 students, 20%).
Registration Problems	160 (40%)	- Difficulty understanding registration procedures (90 students, 22.5%).
		- Limited availability of courses during enrollment (50 students, 12.5%).
		- Errors or delays in academic records (30 students, 7.5%).
Housing Difficulties	140 (35%)	- Insufficient on-campus housing availability (70 students, 17.5%).
		- High costs of off-campus housing (50 students, 12.5%).
		- Poor living conditions or inadequate facilities (40 students, 10%).
Financial Challenges	130 (32.5%)	- Delayed scholarship disbursements (80 students, 20%).
		- High cost of living in host countries (50 students, 12.5%).
Access to Administrative Support	120 (30%)	- Limited availability of administrative staff for guidance (70 students, 17.5%).
		- Lack of multilingual support services (60 students, 15%).
Navigating Bureaucracy	100 (25%)	- Complex paperwork for academic or personal matters (60 students, 15%).
		- Inconsistent communication from university offices (40 students, 10%).
Health Insurance and Medical Access	90 (22.5%)	- Difficulty understanding health insurance policies (50 students, 12.5%).

		- Limited access to on-campus medical facilities (40 students, 10%).
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Mental Health and Well-being

Mental health issues were highlighted, with 160 students (40%) reporting feelings of stress and anxiety, which were correlated with the challenges outlined. This aspect underlines the need for improved support services, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Impact on Mental Health and Well-being

Mental Health Issue	Frequency (%)
Stress	160 (40%)
Anxiety	150 (37.5%)

Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between language proficiency and overall satisfaction with the university experience ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.001$), underscoring the importance of language support for academic and social integration.

The results from this study underscore the multifaceted challenges international students face in Arab universities and highlight the critical areas where institutional support can be enhanced to improve their academic and social experiences.

Discussion

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the multifaceted challenges faced by international students in Arab universities. The findings underscore significant issues related to language barriers, cultural adaptation, academic integration, and administrative hurdles. Each of these challenges plays a critical role in shaping the educational and social experiences of international students, with implications for policy and practice in higher education within the Arab region.

Language Barriers and Academic Integration

Language barriers emerged as the most significant challenge, with 70% of participants reporting difficulties primarily with Arabic, and to a lesser extent with English. This finding is consistent with existing literature that highlights language proficiency as a crucial factor affecting academic performance and social integration in non-native environments (Andrade, 2006; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). The strong correlation between language proficiency and overall satisfaction ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.001$) found in this study aligns with research by Lee and Rice (2007), which demonstrated that language barriers can significantly impact both academic success and personal well-being.

Arab universities could address these challenges by enhancing language support services such as offering intensive Arabic language courses tailored for academic purposes and improving the availability of courses taught in English. This approach would not only assist in easing communication but also in helping students better engage with their coursework and local peers (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007).

Cultural Adaptation

Cultural adaptation issues were reported by a substantial number of students, highlighting struggles with adjusting to local customs and academic expectations. This cultural shock can lead to social isolation, as indicated by 50% of the respondents feeling socially isolated at times. These findings are reflective of studies by Sawir et al. (2008), which discuss how cultural differences can influence students' ability to adapt to new academic and social settings, potentially leading to decreased mental health and academic performance.

To mitigate these effects, universities could implement comprehensive orientation programs that include cultural sensitivity training for both students and faculty. Additionally, creating mentorship programs where international students are paired with local or senior international students can provide ongoing support and facilitate smoother cultural integration (Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

Administrative Challenges

Administrative challenges also significantly affected the students, with issues like visa processing, registration, and housing being prominent. These administrative difficulties are not unique to the Arab region but are exacerbated here due to the complex bureaucratic processes often encountered in these countries (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). Streamlining these processes and providing clear, accessible guides and dedicated support staff for international students can alleviate much of the stress associated with administrative requirements.

Mental Health and Well-being

The impact of these challenges on mental health cannot be overstated, with 40% of students reporting stress and anxiety. This finding supports the work of Hyun et al. (2007), who noted that international students often experience higher levels of psychological distress than their domestic counterparts due to the various stressors associated with studying abroad. Arab universities could address this issue by enhancing counseling services, offering workshops on stress management, and creating platforms where students can express their concerns and receive appropriate support.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The results of this study have several implications for policy and practice in higher education in the Arab world. Firstly, there is a need for policies that facilitate easier navigation of visa and residency requirements for international students. Secondly, enhancing language and cultural integration programs will be vital in ensuring that students not only excel academically but also feel a sense of belonging within their new environment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the diverse challenges faced by international students in Arab universities and provides evidence-based recommendations for enhancing their educational and social experiences. By addressing these challenges, universities in the Arab region can become more attractive destinations for international students, fostering an educational environment that is truly global and inclusive.

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