

Social Lived Experiences and Coping Mechanisms of the Foreign Students in the Philippines: A Phenomenological Approach to Intercultural Communicative Competence

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Abstract – *Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) is a considerable tenet in the development of students. Learning institutions as an educative agency has its vital obligation to develop learners having distinct identity, encompassing diverse cultures. This study investigated the social lived experiences and coping mechanisms of foreign students in three phases – pre-sojourn, sojourn and post-sojourn. Using the qualitative method, it primarily utilized focused-group discussion (FGD), semi-formatted interview and questionnaire. Validation was made through cross-investigation in social media through questions and clarifications including informal chats. The respondents are Indians, Ghanaians, Zimbabwean, Nepalese, Nigerians and Malaysian. To facilitate the coding process, their answers were transcribed into Q and A format. Words were color-coded while respondents' responses and author's notes were uploaded to NVivo 10. To establish validity, multiple sources were used to review previous responses ensuring conformity to the ordinary expectations. Anchored by the Impact and Adjustment of Foreign Students in Comparative Aspect by Altbach (1991), development of Acculturative Stress by Sandhu, (1994) and U-curve theory by Black and Mendenhall, (1991), results reveal that the social lived expectations of foreign students were attributed to five (5) major issues: (1) Communication Barrier and Language Issues, (2) Cultural Adaptation, Adjustment and Acculturation, (3) Academic Adjustment, (4) Personal and Support Concerns and (5) Social and Non-Academic Life. With these concerns, specific interventions, functional foreign students' affairs office and factors that cater to the needs of a particular foreign student were recommended.*

Keywords – *communication, coping mechanisms, intercultural communicative competence, social lived experiences, sojourn.*

INTRODUCTION

Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) is an inevitable demand for global competitiveness especially in the field of Medical education. While there are various avenues for learning, school as an educative agency has its primordial role to mold students regardless of race, cultural beliefs and practices, size, political ideology, and development status. It recognizes the vital role of schools in societal development. It is one social agency created by the society to educate its members.

As a fulfillment of schools in societal development, Cagayan State University (CSU), Philippines as a higher education institution partakes in this noble purpose of catering to diverse people both domestically and internationally. The University openness to international students started in 2009 when it signed a memorandum

of agreement with Healthcare Management International (HCMI) Education, a global healthcare professional recruitment network which provides a world of opportunities for students who aim to pursue quality medical education.

It was to offer a special medical program to foreign students both for tertiary education (pre-Med) units to complete the requirements of the Medical School and Medicine proper. This was an overturn of the University to internationalize its educational programs and to make CSU education known globally. This step ushered the influx of international students from India, Nepal, Ghana, Nigeria, Zimbabwe and Malaysia.

Few studies have addressed the tribulations faced by the international medical students. Moreover, there is a

dearth of information recorded on the behavioural strategies these students adopt to successfully progress through their academic program. These could be some of the challenges the students' face: substantial difficulties of language barrier, curriculum overload, financial constraints and assessment tasks that require high proficiency in communication skills.

While CSU has continuously internationalizing its academic myriad of stakeholders since the program inception, however, no study in the University has focused on the sojourning experiences of these international students. Informal interviews with these foreign students reveal that just like any new student in a university, they too had a share of intercultural barriers such as communication, culture shock, and life adjustments as they hurdle in their new environment. Moreover, interviews reveal that some have graduated from their pre-medical courses and chose to continue their education at CSU-College of Medicine, while others have transferred to other Medical Universities in the country. Others may have even seized to continue their Medical Educational sojourn due to academic failure. The transfer, discontinuation, as well as persistence of some students who chose to stay at the University reveal numerous issues in sociolinguistics. These may include communicative competence, intercultural barriers, and communicative adaptability. These issues are relevant as they may influence the success of the foreign students in their academic life, personal concerns and social encounter.

To meet their academic challenges as well as their socio-cultural strife, it is necessary to understand how these students endeavor their sojourns and struggles. It is in this context where strategies are to be applied towards increasing their social marketability [1].

On the other hand, for English as a second language (ESL) and a foreign language (EFL) to others, more emphasis in teaching and learning should be placed on developing strategic competence. Without it, many learners, even some who have a fairly high linguistic proficiency, are often found incompetent in dealing with communicative problems. Especially, the problems arising in situations for which our teaching has not prepared them [2].

Understanding the impeding factors and seeking solutions to address these barriers is of prime importance. Determining the impeding and facilitating factors is a helpful tool to increase the learners Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). In second and foreign language teaching and learning, taking into consideration strategic competence is indispensable [3]

(Chen, 2010). What has been extensively taught and learned up to now is mostly grammatical competence of the learners, and occasionally sociolinguistic and discourse competencies. Strategic competence seems to have a meager space for teaching and learning. It should be recognized that without it, there can hardly be truly reliable indicators of the learners' overall competence in the target language. Including strategic competence will surely differentiate between what is evaluated and what the learner has actually acquired. This can be an area in which further research will be beneficial [4] (Xu, 2000) since the global market of society is increasingly demanding and that many people sojourn to escalate their learning capability.

A report by the Philippine Bureau of Immigration and UNESCO (2013) titled International Mobility of Foreign Students in Asia and the Pacific, indicated that in 2010, 1,791 foreign students were enrolled in the Philippines. Similarly, no studies were conducted in regards to their sojourning in the Philippines where several challenges on ICC occur. With these influences and consequences of mixed cultures, environment, and pedagogical challenges, a sojourner's existence may be twisted and consequences of these factors may be irreversible, leading to additional problems.

A study stated that in 1999, the United States Institute of International Education (IIE) reported that 514,000 foreign students were enrolled in 50 different states [5]. This figure decreased after the September 11 incident but the past five years have shown that the population increased again [6]. More than fifty percent of exchange students came to the United States using their personal funds [5] thus contributing to the local economy. Almost fifty percent of the students took either a Master's or PhD degrees thus enhancing the United States quality of education [5]. Many believe that international students will continue to be a major component of American education. Not only do they contribute economically and academically, but also diversify the culture of their host communities [7].

More than fifty percent of the international students come from Asian countries [5], [6], [8] into United States. Considering that there are cultural differences between the United States and Asian countries [8], problems could arise during their stay. A study by Scott [7] showed that some Thai students had difficulty coping with their situations due to the ethnocentrism of the people they dealt with. Lin and Yi [8], in their advice to United States universities on how to deal with their Asian student population, listed the following impeding factors to intercultural communicative competence: pressure

from academic demands, language barriers, financial concerns, performance anxiety, depression, loneliness, homesickness, relationship problems, non-assertiveness, individualism and bicultural conflicts, stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination and paranoia. Indeed, most studies have documented the phenomenon of the 'culture shock' [9], [10] and found that this interferes with the adaptation of the foreign students to their host institutions. Some studies showed, however, that the magnitude of culture shock depends on the quality of the program offered by the host institutions, the level of care provided by the education partners and the personal and social characteristic of the participants [11], [12]. The key ingredient for success is to understand the transformation process that the foreign students undergo as their sojourn progresses and the acculturation process that goes with it [13]. It is important to incorporate the roles of social and physical environments in understanding how the experiences are played out [14] and how these affect the totality of the experience. Moreover, it is reported that students actively re-conceptualize and re-interpret their experience as it comes and, in the process, re-negotiate the quality of experiences from stage to stage [13]. This is similar to the notion of a "U-curve experience" faced by Americans working abroad [15]. The U-curve suggests a three stage process: "honeymoon stage" where foreign students experience an overwhelming appreciation at the beginning, followed by the series of depressions as the "reality" sets in, and finally, a recovery stage (or failure) where the students try to make sense of their struggles [15]. These studies point out to the need of comprehending the foreign student program as a lived experience. While there had been many quantitative studies that surveyed the hardships faced by foreign students [16], very few had conducted qualitative studies that investigated how foreign students negotiate their day to day experiences. Deardorff [17] opined that expert panelists on intercultural competence comprised primarily of Western scholars in the intercultural field. What are the perspectives of other scholars, including those from non-Western perspectives and from different fields, including service fields (i.e., health care, public safety)? Philippines as an Asian country may shed light to this question of how these foreign students overcome and develop their intercultural communicative competence as they sojourn in the field of Medical education towards becoming professionals in the field of healthcare.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

In view of the foregoing, this study aimed to contribute to the understanding of the social lived experiences and coping strategies of foreign students in the Philippines and to bridge the gap of their communication with other interlocutors. It aimed to describe the meaning of foreign students ascribed to their stay in the Philippines in general and to Cagayan State University in particular. It likewise investigated whether their experiences transformed the way they view things as they sojourn.

Specifically, it attempted determine the social lived experiences and coping strategies of the foreign students; determine the facilitating and impeding factors relative to their sojourn; and provide intervention that can be proposed to improve the ICC of the foreign students.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Descriptive research design was used in this study. Methodologically, it utilized triangulation to collect information. Total enumeration of which 54 foreign students who are enrolled in the CSU, College of Medicine participated. The bulk of interviews were done face to face. Some of the participants were contacted through social networks for follow-up questions and clarifications since they are undergoing clerkship while others have different class schedules and does not conform with the author's. Information were taken and gathered through a focused group discussion (FGD) and informal chats. Moreover, a semi-formatted interview guide was also administered to the participants to elicit impeding and facilitating factors of their sojourning in the host country.

The responses were in English yet students who recently graduated answered partly in Filipino, the national language of the Philippines. Notes were taken during the interview period. In addition, semi-formatted questionnaires were distributed for proper documenting since recording through audio and video were not permitted though rejection was made in subtle way.

In order to facilitate the coding process, their answers were transcribed into a question and answer format. Key words, ideas or concepts were color-coded. After which, their responses and author's notes were uploaded to the Nvivo10 computer software. Nodes and sub-nodes were created to delineate key ideas; connections between and among the nodes were explored; and responses, like the number of times a key idea was discussed by a respondent, were graphically produced.

To establish rapport, the author profiled the foreign student respondents prior to approaching them but it was never easy. Due to diverse culture, it was found out that this strategy does not work mostly by the respondents (Cultural Difference). Likewise, business correspondence as believed official and formal in the Philippine context, doesn't work with them. (Miscommunication/ Language Barrier – Nonverbal Paralinguistics) One brave heart said that not all can be done through a letter. With this, the author tried her best to gain their trust and rapport by patiently waiting and enlightening them about the study. It was never easy but very fulfilling because she got to understand that respect and trust is difficult but rewarding to achieve. It was also realized that when you are the host, you have to open before they open. Due to the numerous visitations in the College and in the dormitory, the author became aware of the situations encountered by the participants. The interviews lasted for months, almost a year to establish trust, determined to win them though mixed with listlessness and apprehension (quite unsure if its normal), the author was able to see how the participants adjusted from the moment they formally met in campus. These pieces of information were incorporated as part of the data and included in the analysis of the facilitating and impeding tenets.

In order to establish validity, this study made use of multiple sources of information. Participants were re-contacted if some of their responses were not clear to the author, were contradictory to their previous responses, or did not conform to ordinary expectations. Official records, like attendance in their meetings, observation in the revalida, an oral/ written examination that concludes their academic completion and visits in hospitals where they are designated were also utilized to establish the truthfulness of some claims. Also, the Filipino cultural practice of *chismis*, an informal way of gathering news but proven to be a good source of data collection propelled by Mojares [18] in his study *Manuel Blanco's El Indio and the History of a Rumor in the Philippines*, was utilized to link some patterns of behavior. Finally, it helped that the author is a student herself and a faculty member of the university. The author's previous and present experiences became the anchor for which many of the responses were compared. Should the author find the responses to be unique or out of the ordinary, the author used this information for further probing. Negative cases were explicated further by going back to the participants for clarification, or looking at the literature for possible explanations.

One potential source of bias was the author's deep personal involvement in the lives of the participants but triangulating the finding by observation and interviews to secondary respondents like the administrators, office staffs, teachers, students and other members of the CSU community whom these foreign students deal with may overcome the weakness much less blunders. This personal relationship may have beclouded the analysis. Also, being a student herself, the author may have some preconceived notions of what the life of a student should be and unconsciously incorporate these notions to the analysis. Being a Filipino and a host may in one way or another impartial or prejudicial on her part. Two methods were used to overcome this bias. First was the use of a review of the scientific literature to provide the study with solid grounding on the questions to ask. The review provided this study with sensitizing concepts that guided the formulation of general and specific themes. Second was the use of feedback where the all participants were given a copy of the draft report. The participants were asked to comment and react to the points raised in the draft. Their comments and reactions were all incorporated in the final paper. This is to abide by the ethics of beneficence and non-maleficence.

Ethical standards are employed in this study. To concretize its fidelity and responsibility, all activities were officially communicated to all the respondents and administrators in the locale of the study. Proper processes were employed to overshadow respect, competence, and justice in relation to stakeholders' rights and dignity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Pre-Sojourn, Sojourn and Post-Sojourn Imprints

Prior to coming to the Philippines, the participants have various impressions on what life in the Philippines would be. It can be generally classified as optimistic and pessimistic impressions. Some students expressed both kinds of sentiments. One participant mentioned that he expected student life in the Philippines to be "cool" and easy, the same way he saw on the internet. Another thought that Philippines is a "tropical place" where everything and everywhere comes dandy and relax due to the climactic condition. Another one thought about the life in the Philippines as "easy and simple", thinking among students. Other participants mentioned the media, especially the social media are known to be the source of these optimistic impressions (OPTIMISM).

Many participants, however, were a bit cautious (APPREHENSION). One student reported that he was warned by most of his friends to be careful of "victimology." (PESSIMISM, STEREOTYPING/

LABELLING). He was warned not to be influenced by their “deceitful ways” (PREJUDICE). Another relayed that he should use his head when making a decision, especially concerning finances. Most of the students say that they got these pessimistic warnings from their fellow foreigners and some foreign students like them who had been in the Philippines and from the media as well. Accordingly, some newcomers complain of the older ones to be collecting fees from them in exchange of helping the young in working out with their papers and assisting them in the needs as they are “novice yet” in the field (FINANCIAL CONCERN, DISTRUST, PARANOIA AND PREJUDICE to the fear of the unknown). This idea resulted to ISOLATION AND INDIVIDUALISM.

In general, however, all the students characterized their initial negative impressions to be product of the FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN. Most of the participants reported that this is their first time to go outside the country. The separation from their family yield to their LONELINESS, DEPRESSION AND HOMESICKNESS which according to them resulted to NON-ASSERTIVENESS. Some students were excited upon learning that they will be coming to the Philippines to fulfill their becoming doctors someday. Some wanted to see many of the beautiful landmarks they saw only in the net, like Boracay, Palawan and Pagudpud. Others drool over the idea of independence (OPENNESS). Others say, they don’t want to go back to their countries without their diploma. It is a family responsibility (PRIDE) for them to finish their degree as they don’t want their families and loved-ones to be disappointed. Aside from the fact that it is stipulated in their Health thrust that in every family, one must have a doctor. However, this pressure of primarily why they are in the Philippines as sojourners built stress - the idea of going back to their countries means bringing with them their diplomas.

These initial impressions are congruent to the experiences of many Asian students coming to the other countries [8] (Lin and Yi, 1997). For tourists, the Philippines is viewed as place of destiny “WOW Philippines”. Anybody sojourning as students in other countries may feel lucky, one even “feel blessed”, upon learning that their visas were approved because it is indeed pretty difficult to get one.

The initial joy sustained some participants for as long as years. However, most students reported that many of their impressions changed as soon as they set foot in the airport (FAILURE TO EXPECTATION). One student reported that she was struck by the heat. He expected

Cagayan to be hot but not as hot as he expected. This is particularly true as he did his day to day activities. In his own words:

“There are some difficulties I encountered along the way. This includes the weather. At first I was very excited, yet lately, I felt the heat is draining me out. I found it difficult to walk around; waiting for a ride while on the road was daunting; it was a challenge just to go around the campus premise and to buy some stuff in the grocery store”.

This was the same student who reported that the reason she chose Philippines was because of its beautiful scenery, but that no amount of preparation can ever prepare you for this kind of weather due to the humidity of the air that it gives off.

One foreign student set foot in the Tuguegarao City Airport and was disappointed that the city they thought would be – modern and classy – was a village, as one of the students’ parents would describe when seen his picture, “I thought you are in the city? Why are there so many trees? It looks like a village.”

The INDEPENDENCE that they have acquired became a *pressing issue* on their part since all chores whether they like it or not has to be done by them (CULTURE SHOCK). Health is also one risk that they had to take. Different strains of diseases and illnesses are coming out in the Philippines. This concerns the foreign students, too (HEALTH). Chicken pox, measles and high fever were just one of the many diseases they had to overcome. These concerns formed part of their major concern, Academic Pressure, due to bulk of requirements and curriculum overload.

Most of the students also recounted problems with the FOOD. One said it was far different from their recipes in their home and he missed their cultural cuisine; another participant imparted her concern of limited food supply in her dorm which made her listless and lose weight. One student said that he was shocked to have learned that Filipinos usually serve mostly pork regardless of the variety of recipes in the canteen and restaurants. While some students are Muslim (RELIGIOUS CONCERN), others are vegetarian (FOOD PREFERENCE). This dilemma made them suffer HEALTH issues.

“...we miss our families and some favorable foods but it’s okay because we try to adjust and be contented with whichever is available in the market. (CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT).

Most students relayed that they had initial problems with their academics (PRESSURE TO ACADEMIC DEMANDS). These are usually the 1st year students and

some in the higher years. In their respective countries, schools are of quality. One claimed it is quality but expensive. Teachers discuss and explain their lessons pretty well. Moreover, most teachers in their countries don't depend solely on powerpoint presentations. Various strategies were administered to reach their goal in transferring knowledge. Some students, on the other hand, complained that the school works are not that challenging and that some CSU professors spoon-feed the students. While most of the professors require bulk of activities that resulted to stress. One student assured that a great deal of professors in the university are competitive. Most participants reported that they had problems dealing with Filipinos. A student reported that she initially had some problems with her professor due to schedule conflicts and that she did not know how to articulate the problem to the proper authority due to LANGUAGE BARRIER. Others felt the same way but they chose to keep silent anyway (SILENCE IN COMMUNICATION). Students complained of the authorities of not including them in Medical Missions. But when interviewed, the College of Medicine staff said that it could be dangerous to both the students and the patients in the Medical mission. Others wanted to donate in bloodletting but they were not allowed. They say this was their way to reach out to Filipinos.

In the Philippines, out of respect to superiors, subordinates are not supposed to say something unless they are asked (kinesics). There is a certain degree of proxemics in the way they deal with the superiors (proxemics). He had never been asked and it was his dilemma whether and how to say his problems.

Another issues is the smell (olfactics) which was one of the many issues encountered by the participants. One reported that some Filipinos cover their noses and avoid (proxemics) them. He even said that they were barred from the health and wellness centers because according to the proprietor, because of their smell she is losing clients and might be losing more clients in the future if they will continue to be at the gym. The participant said the distance (proxemics) is obvious.

"They avoid us and create a big space in between our places when we join the Zumba activity. We never go to any gym anymore."

Taking all these considerations together, students are unanimous in saying that they missed home (HOMESICKNESS AND LONELINESS). They thought that being away from home made them appreciate some things about their country which they never paid attention to before.

Some students also suffered from their social life

because of the pressure of the academic demands and financial constraints. However, the Church and Pastoral group where they belong helped them in these aspects. This somehow deviated them from their normal and usual routine – school/ dorm or apartment and vice versa.

Most of these problems are transitory. Most participants report that they were able to recover from it as soon as they realized that they will make the best out of their situations which opened their way to be open to changes (OPTIMISM AND OPENNESS). Some are still coping. Others just kept quiet (SILENCE IN COMMUNICATION). Some tried to suggest for changes in the system. This "reality bites" conforms to the U-curve notion reported by Black, Mendenhall and Oddou [15] where students, after a honeymoon stage, experience the reality of student life: that they will undergo the same day to day hardship as everyone else. Most of the struggles reported here are also the same struggles reported by Lin and Yi [8] on Asian students. The fact that the Philippines have a wide array of language variations, it was found out that one major problem they encounter is the LANGUAGE BARRIER where students reported that they had language problems. Some students claimed that they were confident in their English but not in Filipino where Filipino is the first language in the Philippines. Yet, most foreigners in the higher years are mixed in class with Filipino students. Most of the announcements are made in the local dialect or in the first language. Consequently, the foreigners have difficulty understanding and explaining their thoughts to their classmates, teachers and others. This proves the claim of one foreign student that a small problem may seem small but may lead to a big problem – that could result in toil.

"...The school should try to get a functional foreign students policy put in place. The school authority should try to let our professors know what it means for a foreigner to fail with regard to immigration extension." (DEPRESSION AND PRESSURE TO ACADEMIC DEMANDS). *"We are made to believe that English is the medium of instruction but they tend to mix other languages to fit in to the native host's understanding and comfort."*, the foreign student added.

The author had a queer experience with one of the foreign students confronting one of the evaluations she administered. While she set-up the video camera to document the activity, one of the foreign students said,

"We won't continue with the exam if you are going to video us. So much with the video, you had enough with the first year." (APPREHENSION TOWARDS DOCUMENTATION OF AN EVALUATION) This

remarks does not only entail their disapproval over documentation but also the idea that in their culture, the letter of approval in the conduct of the study even when it passed through channels does not mean they have to abide. He is trying to send a message that CSU must not only deal with papers but also the needs of the foreign students.

In this scenario it can be concluded that an individual may have its own distinct principle. Not only did the participants experience uncertainties but also the researcher herself but when he said that, she immediately disconnected the equipment to show RESPECT to the respondents' view about it.

Coping Mechanisms

Given the difficulties that they encountered, the students reported three basic mechanisms of survival. First is what one participant called being *Filipinized*. This process meant that they have to adapt to their situation and go with flow. In the words of one participant:

“Given these cultural differences, I have to adapt (COMMUNICATIVE ADAPTABILITY AND CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT) to the new condition. I must absorb the culture in order to survive. I must learn how to go along with other people. In a way, I am Filipinized:

Being *Filipinized* meant eating the Filipino food, pronouncing the Filipino style, learning the Filipino or Tagalog language.

“... As I sojourn in CSU, I learned to eat what is available and embrace Filipino cuisine. “.

One student claimed that to be able to survive, he has to eat what is available in the community.

“... otherwise, we will be spending a lot for food aside from the time consumed in food preparation.

This is similar to the notion of ACCULTURATION process described by Sandhu [13] which, when not properly done, could have disastrous results (like going home). Most participants report that they have to imbibe the Filipino culture so they can belong to the crowd. However, some participants were very conscious to guard their old self and claimed that they are still the same person they used to be (SELF-PRESERVATION).

Other forms of coping of the foreign students include sticking to the Filipino people (RELATIONSHIP CULTIVATION) concretized by Yvonne in her study of Intercultural Communicative Competence, learning about the host culture and loving them (AWARENESS TO HOST CULTURE) professed by Spitzberg and Cupach [19]. Most participants who employed this

coping strategy were in the senior years unlike in the lower years who usually hang out with their friends of the same nationality or co-foreign students in the dorm (CROSS-CULTURAL EFFECTIVENESS) shown in Deardorff's [20] study and (SOCIALIZATION) professed by Spitzberg. Likewise, this was confirmed by observations.

Another coping strategy, to stick to oneself (INDIVIDUALISM), was reported by one participant. She initially “withdrew from public life” up until the time she was able to recompose herself (PERSONAL FLEXIBILITY). Eventually, she reported that she went out and conquered the world (TOLERANCE TO AMBIGUITY AND RECOGNIZING COMPLEXITY). This was apparent by Kim and Ruben [21] and Canada's 10 Strategies to Effective Intercultural Communicative Competence.

In addition, one student claimed that to be able to survive I had to go out my way and meet Filipinos in the community. I tried to adapt to their norms and do what they do. (CULTURAL ADAPTATION) I had to eat what they eat. In fact, I eat dinuguan at puto, sisig and other Filipino delicacies. It tasted good. At first it was difficult and I have learned to adjust to the Filipino taste. It was one way for me to adjust. (CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT)

Factors That Affected Experience

Based on previous studies, it is important to understand the social and physical environment that created the experience [14]. This is crucial in determining what brought about the transformation process. In phenomenological terms, it is important to determine the key epiphany or turning points in the individual participant's lives [22]. In order to find this, the hardships and the coping mechanisms were revisited. The key themes were connected and probed for possible interactions.

By most accounts, what it meant to be a CSU student is captured by the quality of education and availability of resources is yet be unraveled.

Similar issue is situated in Michigan State University (MSU) where student is apprehended by the resources offered therein. These *resources*, in the participants' point of views during one of the interviews, are what made their experience a “unique experience.” For example, one student reported that he was completely ecstatic about the Angel program:

“I was simply amazed by the high level of technology in the MSU campus. This is especially with the online Angel program. I found it very accessible; that

everything is given to the students in a silver platter. Because, I thought—that there should be no reason for students not to study.”

To further explain the program, Angel program may seem ordinary for most MSU students and they may take it for granted. But coming from a country and a university where connecting online is still a struggle, where getting articles meant physically going to the library, locating educational materials and photocopying it manually—the swiftness and efficiency of the Angel program is a totally new experience.

CSU may have available resources like the bus service, free wifi connection, among many others but it has yet to be at par with the international claims. When properly addressed and maximized, it could make life as a sojourner easier to bear. For most foreign students, the realization of challenges in their stay in Cagayan State University is a turning point in their life as foreign student-sojourners.

“... It could have been better for the CSU to create a program or a functional office that would address all the needs of these students. I believe that if other institutions can create a functional program or office for the foreign students, CSU can, too.”

POST – SOJOURN

What Meaning Can This Bring to The Foreign Students: Lessons Learned

Given these transformation processes, what were the lessons learned by the participants? There are two general areas where their responses could be grouped. One of the lessons learned is about other cultures. This is especially true for participants who were quite pessimistic in their initial impressions. This undergraduate participant reported that:

She initially thought living in the Philippines is difficult. She also thought that Filipinos are ethnocentric. But she realized that she wants to stay in the Philippines for good. In class, she finds her classmates accommodating. The teachers are always asking her about her point of view and how it differs with Indian point of view.

This change of impressions came about because of their direct positive experiences with teachers and fellow students. This conforms to the common finding that the success of a program hinges on the involvement of educators and the support provided by the university staffs [11], [12] (Barnes, 1982; Koskinen and Tossavainen, 2003). This is also congruent to the finding that foreign students continually negotiate their experiences as it moves from one stage to another [13]

(Sandhu, 1994). Initial apprehensions could be conquered by strong support systems from different actors.

Aside from the things learned about other culture, most of the respondents reported that they learned a lot about themselves. However, this was conditioned by the social class from where the participants originate. For example, there were some students reported that this experience made them really independent. Staying in the Philippines for almost five years and doing the entire chores (laundry, cooking, washing the utensils, grocery shopping, etc.) is an experience they were never exposed in their country. Indeed, coming to the Philippines, all by their parents' expense meant that these students come from bourgeoisie groups in their respective nation.

For others, their major appreciation stemmed from the fact that they make the decisions all by themselves. Back home, their parents usually had a strong input in their decisions—what College degree to choose, where to stay, and sometimes, whom to marry. They are not so concerned with the daily chores because they had been more exposed in those types of activities.

A graduate from the CSU even said that he learned to take care of his hygiene and does not believe that the olfactics can be charged to cultural reasons but hygiene.

The differences in the response based on the social classes of the participants also conform to the notion that the success of their study in the program hinges on the individual characteristics of the participants [11], [12]. The socio-economic status, the level of preparation, and the general psychological background, all, have an impact on the quality of participant's experiences.

The honeymoon stage occurs during the first week after arrival at the host country. Individuals are fascinated by the new and different culture.

When the newcomers start to cope with real conditions on daily basis, the second stage begins culture shock stage. The stage is characterized by frustration and hostility towards the host nation and its people.

The third stage is the adjustment stage in which the individual gradually adapts to the new norms and values of the host country and can act more appropriately than they were before. Finally, in the mastery stage, the individual is able to effectively function in the new culture. The initial time in a new culture is exciting for the expatriate, plotting on a chart as a high point. However, as time progresses, they begin to feel the stress of adjusting and can begin to feel low, depressed, and even physically ill. Finally, they emerge at a higher point as they have adjusted to the new culture by learning how to cope and operate in the new environment. They

are better able to interpret new cues, have eased past the communication breakdown and resolved their identity crisis. It is not as high as the exuberance they may have felt at the start, but reflects a more moderate attitude that is healthily sustainable in the long run [23]. The degree

of adjustment is measured not by conformity to the host country culture but in terms of variables such as comfort or satisfaction with the new environment, attitudes, contact with host nationals, or difficulties with aspects of the new environment [24] [25].

Table 1. Divergence as Noises to Intercultural Communicative Competence

| <i>DIVERGENCE</i> | <i>DESCRIPTION</i> |
|---|---|
| Cultural differences | Belief and understanding towards communication |
| Miscommunication | Interlocutors think and understand differently with others |
| Language barrier in communication | How the decoder interprets the encoder's message in communication |
| Nonverbal paralinguistics | The way words are being uttered, emphasized and understood |
| Resistance to openness | Participants were careful to disclosures |
| Apprehension | Participants were careful to be close to others to refrain from being victims of bad intentions |
| The thought of "Victimology" | A term which means to caution themselves on negative effects of dealing with people |
| Pessimism | Thinking that people may do deceitful ways to them |
| Stereotyping/ labelling | The idea of status in life "CASTE System", Gender bias |
| Prejudice to the fear of the unknown/ Paranoia | The idea of something "bad" will come up. Fear and anxiety to dealings |
| Financial concern | Others felt that sojourning is for academic purpose only |
| Distrust | To suspect that other people have a selfish motive in getting close to them |
| Isolation | Secluding oneself to others |
| Individualism | Living independently and not relying to others due to negative thoughts |
| Loneliness | The feeling that nobody can support him/her except people back home |
| Depression | The feeling of being unhappy and downhearted |
| Homesickness | The feeling of being separated with loved-ones and friends. No support system |
| Non-assertiveness | No confidence to deal with others |
| Stress | Trauma to past experience |
| Failure to expectation | Disappointment for the things they expected |
| Weather disparity | New environment, different weather conditions |
| Independence as a pressing issue | Doing things for themselves |
| Culture shock | Adjustment to diverse cultures |
| Health | Diseases/ illnesses they suffered due to demands, food preference etc |
| Food | Scarcity of food preference, not used to food served |
| Religious concern | Hindrances due to religious beliefs e.g. food, clothing |
| Pressure to academic demands | Bulk of work/ requirements from school |
| Educational quality | Ways of teaching and learning |
| Language barrier to superiors | Nonverbal cues e.g. kinesics, haptics, proxemics, olfactics etc. |
| Silence in communication | Chooses to keep silent rather speak out |
| Apprehension towards documentation of an evaluation | Anxiety of documentation which might cause failure to evaluation |

Table 1 exposes the Noises called Divergence as Noises to ICC.

Notice that the impeding factors above are tenets of effects that became a cause of another effect which have caused interrelatedness if not merging of factors. However, every item has a concern of its own.

Table 2 shows how the foreign students expose convergence as social coping mechanisms and facilitating factors to ICC.

Table 2. Convergence As Social Coping Mechanisms and facilitating factors To Intercultural Communicative Competence

| <i>CONVERGENCE</i> | <i>DESCRIPTION</i> |
|--|--|
| Optimism | Positivity in sojourning and dealing with other cultures |
| Openness | Sincerity, honesty and directness in dealing w/ diverse cultures |
| Pride | Introducing ones identity belonging to a group and sticking to it |
| Silence in communication | No talk, just observe, control to disclosure |
| Filipinization | Filipinizing oneself to blend in |
| Communicative adaptability | To be gregarious and flexible |
| Cultural adjustment | Modification to ways of culture |
| Acculturation | Cultural awareness of the host culture and others' |
| Self-preservation | The idea to control disclosure of real self for protection |
| Relationship cultivation | Learning about the host culture and loving them |
| Awareness to host culture | Happens in their higher years in education first year tend to isolate themselves to host culture |
| Cross-cultural effectiveness | Competence in cross cultural aspects as a merger |
| Socialization | Joining activities with other cultures |
| Individualism leading to independence | Sticking to oneself to realize independence |
| Personal flexibility | Withdrawal from public life leading to the realization of personal flexibility in the |
| Tolerance to ambiguity | ambiguities and complexities of intermingling |
| Recognizing complexity | |
| Cultural adaptation | Adopting the norms e.g. deeds, food |
| Cultural adjustment | Adjustment to norms e.g. deeds, food |
| Change of cultural pt. of view to Filipinos being ethnocentric | Change towards Filipinos being ethnocentric – due to administrators, professors and classmates treatment due support to sojourners |
| Support system | Strengthening relationship with the same culture |
| Hygienic consciousness | Hygienic consciousness to adapt to Olfactics |

As a summary, five (5) categories were used to classify their challenges as gleaned in Table 3 Summary of the facilitating and impeding factors to ICC in the realization of the Social Lived Experiences and Coping Mechanisms to ICC of the participants. These categories were presented as to its divergence as the impeding factors and convergence as the facilitating factor to ICC.

Table 3. Summary of the facilitating and impeding factors to ICC

| COMMUNICATION BARRIER AND LANGUAGE ISSUE | |
|--|--|
| DIVERGENCE | Communication Barrier Proxemics, Olfactics, Silence in Comm., Interpersonal skills, Comm. Apprehension, Kinesics, Paralinguistics, English Language Choice and Language Use, Room for improvement in Comm. Skills, Cultural barrier, speaker-generated variables, Filipino Language, code mix and code switch among interlocutors |
| | Language issue Filipino (host) language, limited written, verbal and nonverbal comm., English acquisition, accent issues, no functional Foreign Students Affairs Office available to air proper grievance |
| CONVERGENCE | Learning the Filipino Language, adapting the English Lang. Use and Choice of Filipinos, adapting Filipino ways, Filipinization. |
| CULTURAL ADAPTATION, ADJUSTMENT AND ACCULTURATION | |
| DIVERGENCE | Different lifestyle, English as a 2 nd Lang., Comm. Probs., lack of understanding towards Medical/ Health Educational System of CSU, different foods, scarcity of food preference, adaptation to educational system, fear of the unknown, cultural barrier, no functional Foreign Students Affairs Office available to air proper grievance |

Table 3 (cont.) Summary of the facilitating and impeding factors to ICC

| | |
|--|--|
| CONVERGENCE | Filipinization, Senior Med. Students In The Same Culture, Church & Pastoral Care, Support From Some College Staff And Other Int'l Students In The Class, Independence, Self-Preservation |
| ACADEMIC ADJUSTMENT | |
| DIVERGENCE | Academic pressure due to curriculum overload, bulk requirements, assessment, objective structured clinical exams, high expectations, sufficient lecture discussion, actual lab operations and facilities, Revalida and Clerkship requirements, communication and oral presentations, fear of the unknown, code mix and code switch in class, no functional Foreign Students Affairs Office available to air proper grievance |
| CONVERGENCE | Peers, College staff, clinical staff, administrators, resilience, adjustment, exert more effort, independence, seniors in the same culture |
| PERSONAL AND SUPPORT CONCERNS | |
| DIVERGENCE | Integration of difficulty in Filipino culture and other cultures, culture shock, no functional Foreign Students Affairs Office available to air proper grievance, additional responsibilities other than academic, cultural barrier, financial problem, fear of the unknown |
| CONVERGENCE | Family, friends in the same culture, Church family, seniors, resilience, adaptation, adjustment and acculturation, social media, independence and self-preservation, government loan and scholarship |
| SOCIAL LIFE AND NON-ACADEMIC LIFE | |
| DIVERGENCE | No social life due to academic demands, meager holidays or no holidays at all, school activities not included, financial constraints, cultural barrier, fear of the unknown, no functional Foreign Students Affairs Office available to air proper grievance |
| CONVERGENCE | Friends in the same culture, internet e.g. social media, family, Church and Pastoral support, resilience, independence, self-preservation |

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Many factors such as communication barrier and language issue, cultural adaptation, adjustment and acculturation, personnel and support concerns, social and non-academic life and academic adjustment encompass the need of interculturalizing the foreign students. While research has found that academics are aware of the learning needs of their students, it may be vague about how best to address those needs "When considering internationalization of the curriculum", as academics have themselves claimed, "what is taught should not be separated from how it is taught". Innovations in classroom practices and in designing assessments are to be incorporated in the curriculum. "Strategies for engaging and extending full potential of the international students by exploring the 'fit' between educational strategies and the possibilities for maximizing their potential to succeed in this context are to be devised". Studies have shown that both academic and non-academic factors affect the progression of students through higher education. The literature on factors contributing to successful progression of students is limited. Given the high tuition fees that international medical students have to pay, do they feel they are getting their money's worth? What are their perceptions of their skills, knowledge and expectations, particularly in relation to assessment as they progress through the course? What is the extent to which they demonstrate commonalities and differences with regard to their self-

identified coping skills and progression? Answers to these pertinent research questions will provide a better knowledge base for medical educators to understand and respond to the needs of this group of students.

This study likewise revealed the difficulties and challenges faced and the factors that influenced progression through their sojourn as Medical students. It is anticipated that these outcomes would help develop better policies and practices which would positively support this group of students.

The study further found out that most participants were ecstatic upon learning that they are coming to the Philippines to study though some were quite pessimistic. Most of the participants reported initial difficulties, like problems with the weather and food, but they were able to cope to this situation by adopting the Filipino way of life or being with the company of other students. The key transformation process however, was with the resources offered by CSU and more importantly the scarcity of some resources for this taught them to be independent, resourceful and determined. Many attribute this as their epiphany, or the realization that indeed Philippines is a country where challenges are bountiful but it is in the bountiful where the strength shall bear. These transformation processes made them appreciate not only the Filipino culture and other cultures but their own culture and their own selves as well.

In general, the experiences of the foreign students follow the same trajectory as those reported in the

literature, especially among the Asians [8] (Lin and Yi, 1997). Their experience also conforms to the notion of the U-curve, where there is an initial appreciation, to be challenged by a series of distress and to be overcome by a coping strategy [15] (Black, Mendenhall and Oddou, 1991). The common strategy of adoption among foreign students is the acculturation process, which had also been well-established in most cross-cultural studies [13] (Sandhu, 1994).

Despite these similarities, this study also found some deviations. None of the Nigerians, Ghanaians and Zimbabwean participants reported to have a problem in communicating their thoughts in English but in Filipino. This could be because, these countries use English as their official language and it is used as a language of instruction in the Philippines. As such, these students may have a command of English comparatively better than their counterparts. Indians, Nepalese and others, however, reported difficulty in speaking English.

In addition, though there are some cultural differences, some participants in this study reported that they were culturally shocked upon their arrival. Some participants mentioned that they knew what to expect culturally and that they are quite prepared but others were not. Pride and prejudice made them live with the expectations of the families and loved-ones as they are determined to receive their diplomas as their ticket to come home.

The immediate significance of this study could be immediately utilized by the Cagayan State University. One is the fact that though some come as one ethnic group here in the Philippines, their backgrounds could vary. For example, most of the students come from the lower to middle income groups who, by sheer talent, made it through stiff competitions and made it in the scholarships. Others have swallowed their pride to avail of student loan to their government. As such, the difficulties they encountered and responses that came with it were different. Thus, for CSU to be successful, it must be able to delineate these differences and come up with specific strategy that addresses their unique situations.

Second, the notion of the U-curve seems to be a universal phenomenon. As such there should be specific strategies that should cater to the needs of the foreign students on a stage to stage basis. Though most participants reported receiving assistance and guidance from CSU, they thought the assistance are uniformly the same, that is, what is given in the beginning is the same thing given throughout. It might therefore be prudent for

CSU and other institutions that cater international students to come up with the following:

1. Specific intervention programs covering the pre-sojourn, sojourn and post-sojourn of the foreign students
2. Curriculum revisit to include English and Filipino crash courses
3. Policy analysis institutionalizing internationalization and intercultural communicative competence in the University.
4. Faculty development and screening retooling them on ICC and equipping them with methodological strategies in teaching and learning to include skills integration and differentiated teaching and learning to fit the learners.
5. Infrastructure development to suit to the pedagogical needs of the foreign students
6. Functional foreign students' affairs office that cater to the specific stages of a particular student where they can air their grievances and needs.
7. Strengthen Alumni homecoming of the foreign students to share their testimonies during their years in the university to bridge the gap as well as their present experience in their profession to educate the students of what awaits them in the healthcare and medical system.
8. Strong administration willpower in realization of the abovementioned recommendations with the collaboration of all the people involved.

It is also recommended that a parallel study on the extent of Accommodation of the Host Country specifically the Host Institutions which cater to internationalization be conducted. This could be an effective pursuit of investigating and unravelling the real answer to whether these international students are IC incompetent due to their lack of initiative or non-indulgence or IC incompetent due to lack of opportunity. This study could also investigate the extent of development in their intercultural communicative competence.

To end, it might be necessary to consider some factors claimed by [27] Taylor (1987) as it may shed light to the understanding of many of us concern in the wholistic and eclectic development of the student stakeholders. This may also enlighten them to the contribution of CSU in their sojourn as foreign students in the Philippines - the learning and memory they could bring home and may be pass on to their families:

- Firsthand experience is necessary to understand many subtleties of any culture.
- Feelings of apprehension, loneliness or lack of confidence are common when visiting and experiencing another culture.
- Differences between cultures are often experienced as threatening.
- What is logical and important in a particular culture may seem irrational and unimportant to an outsider.
- In describing another culture, people tend to stress the differences and overlook the similarities.
- Stereotyping due to generalizing may be inevitable among those who lack frequent contact with another culture.
- Personal observations of others about another culture should be regarded with skepticism.
- Many cultures often exist within a single race, language group, religion or nationality, differentiated by age, gender, socioeconomic status, education, and exposure to other cultures.
- All cultures have internal variations.
- Cultural awareness varies among individuals.
- One's own sense of cultural identity often is not evident until one encounters another culture.
- Cultures are continually evolving.
- Understanding another culture is a continuous process.
- One should understand the language of a culture to best understand that culture.

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