Role of International Students' Organization in the Acculturation of International Students

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ORIGINALITY STATEMENT

I certify that the work in this thesis entitled "Role of International Students' Organization in the Acculturation of International Students" has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree to any other university or institution other than Macquarie University.

I also certify that the thesis is an original piece of research and it has been written by me. Any help and assistance that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself have been appropriately acknowledged.

In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

The research presented in this thesis was approved by Macquarie University Ethics Review Committee, reference number: 5201500594 on 26/08/2015

Signature

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ABBREVIATIONS

AUD: Australian Dollars

ADET: Australian Government Department of Education and Training

NSO: Nepalese Students' Organization

ABS: Australian Bureau of Statistics

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the role that international students' societies can play in the acculturation of international students in Higher Education. By drawing on a single case study of the relatively new Nepalese Students' Organisation (NSO), it brings into attention the impact such organizations can have on easing the transition of international students to the host country and university. In doing so, this research presents student societies as an important social support mechanism for international students, which helps them to connect to co-national students, celebrate their home culture, aid to the better understanding of new cultural context and help them respond to the various stressors they face in the new and foreign context. Interviews were conducted with members of the NSO, its President and a representative of Equity and Diversity unit at the university examined, to provide holistic insight into the research question. This research considers implications and provides practical guidelines in how universities can reconfigure their existing support programs and policies to ease the transition of international students within the new context.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores the role that international students' organizations can play in the acculturation of international students in Higher Education. By drawing on a single case study, it brings into attention the impact that such organizations can have on easing the transition of international students to the host country and university. In doing so, this research identifies international students' organizations as one of the important, social support systems existing in Australian universities.

Recognized for its quality education, higher standard of living, safe education environment and flexible job opportunities, Australia has become one of the most preferred education destinations among international students. International students contribute significantly to the socio-cultural and economic prosperity of Australia. The education sector is the fourth largest export sector for Australia, contributing around AUD $16 billion and employing around 8% of the Australian workforce during the year 2013/14 (Coelli, 2015). International students also contribute to the economic growth of society as skilled human capital after the completion of their education degrees (Moretti, 2004). The contribution of international students can be felt not only in the Australian economy, but also in the culturally rich, diversified and globalized communities, workplaces and various institutions. In the current context of internationalized education, global competition and dynamic contribution of international students, it is essential for various groups of stakeholders especially government, educational institutions, policy makers and researchers to focus their attention and activities on easing and facilitating the lived experiences of international students (Lawson, 2011).

Although every student, whether domestic or international, goes through some sort of transitional experience when entering a new education environment, the experience is considered tougher for international students (Mullins et al. 1995). International students often lack sufficient resources and skills to tackle challenges abroad. Often when they travel, they have to face a relatively new environment where the cultural values, behaviours and conventions valid at home are frequently challenged (Borland & Pearce, 2002). The situation requires them to alter their earlier conventions, beliefs and attitudes as per the new context (Borland & Pearce, 2002). This presents a unique dilemma to international students who stand between two cultures - the home culture and the host culture - with little help to guide them on this process. They suddenly find themselves in relational deficit, if not social

isolation, at a time when they need more than the usual support (Grinberg & Grinberg, 1989). The problems of foreign language, new academic settings and structures, financial agony and overall day to day living difficulties further intensify their feelings of guilt and loneliness for leaving their friends and family behind (Hamboyan & Bryan, 1995; Furukawa, 1997; Ong & Ward, 2005). Although universities provide formal social support systems like orientation programs, counselling programs, buddy programs, immigration and accommodation, these are often criticized and underutilized by international students on the grounds of being too formal, overly structured and insensitive to their specific cultural needs (Guilfoyle, 2004; Borland & Pearce, 2002; Sawir et al. 2008). Within this context this research recognizes one of the emerging and culturally sensitive support mechanisms that formally exist within universities: international students' organizations.

There has been tremendous growth on number of international students' organizations based on culture, religion, ethnicity, sports and faculty in Australian universities. The growth of these organizations can be related to the increase of the number of international students in Australia over the past few years. During the year 2015, approximately 645,000 international students from more than 191 countries were enrolled in Australian educational institutions as compared to around 587,000 during the year 2014 [Australian Government Department of Education and Training (ADET), 2015]. This research explores the role of these organizations as a medium for international students to manage stressors associated with studying in a foreign country thereby helping them to adjust and ease their transition process to the new culture. It highlights the ways in which these organizations facilitate the adaptation process by providing the means to international students to expand their social networks, celebrate their home culture and acting as a bridge between host and home culture in general.

Research has highlighted the need to focus on the role that students' organizations can play in the acculturation of international students. Specifically, this research will examine if these organizations can provide the culturally sensitive support that is missing from university led formal support programs such as counselling or orientation (Guilfoyle, 2004; Borland & Pearce, 2002; Sawir et al. 2008). They may help to fill this gap by drawing on the experience of past members, social networks and other community resources. In focusing on the role such organizations can play in the acculturation of international students, this research will provide practical guidelines in how universities can reconfigure their existing support programs and policies to ease the transition of international students within the new context.

The research uses the case study method in investigating the topic. Case studies are considered appropriate when the research at hand seeks to answer "how" and "why" questions within a context that is relevant to the current phenomenon without manipulation of participants' behaviour (Yin, 2003). The context for the current study is an Australian university, which educates more than 11,000 international students and consists of approximately 30 international students' organizations from different countries, which are formally registered, governed and operated within university premises.

This research focused on Nepalese students as an important and constantly growing segment of international students in Australia. According to ADET (2015), a total of 14,231 Nepalese students were enrolled in Australia during the year 2013 which reached to 18,056 at the end of 2014. Nepalese students were selected as they are an under-researched and underrepresented group in literature despite their growing number in Australia. Most of the studies on Asian students are concentrated on Chinese (for e.g. Zheng & Berry, 1991; Bodycott et al. 2014) and Japanese students and their adjustment process (for e.g. Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2002; Crystal et al. 1994). There is dearth of literature on South Asian students (Sheth, 1995) and particularly Nepalese students who come from different socio-cultural background as compared to students from Confucian cultures. As the topic deals with issues of acculturation in foreign context, the selection of Nepalese students makes sense as they come from a country with its own set of political, socio-cultural, economic, educational, and legal backgrounds. As such these students have unique beliefs, attitudes, needs and problems as compared to their counterparts. Furthermore, the Nepalese students' organization (NSO) was recently established at the university under examination, which offered an opportunity for the researcher to gain fresh insight into a unique juncture of this society's life. Interviews were conducted with three key stakeholders, namely Nepalese students, the President of the NSO and a representative of Equity and Diversity unit at the university in order to provide holistic insight into the research question.

This research is organized into four chapters. Chapter one presents the literature review focusing on the topics of acculturation and adaptation of migrants as well as international students. The chapter continues with an exploration of literature related to various forms of social support available to international students and the growth of international students' organizations in universities. Relevant gaps in the literature regarding the topic are identified and discussed. Chapter two discusses in detail the methodology adopted for this research. It starts by introducing the qualitative research approach adopted for conducting this research

and justifies the use of single case study method. It also details the recruitment and selection process of interviewees and presents the reasons for using semi-structured interviews for data collection. The chapter also presents how data was analysed through NVivo and ends with a critical reflection on behalf of this exercise. Chapter three presents the interview findings and analyses them in view of the existing literature. Finally, chapter four presents the conclusions of the study along with practical implications of the research for various stakeholders.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Internationalization of education has contributed to global movement of students across different nations for higher education. With the internationalization of education, increased attention has been generated on the acculturation experience of international students. As such, this chapter draws upon the existing literature on acculturation and social support of international students and migrant communities to highlight the research areas that deem further attention. This review presents and discusses the concept of acculturation and research completed in the context of acculturation of international students. It also identifies acculturation strategies adopted by migrant communities and pinpoints the need for research regarding acculturation strategies of international students. Further, the review is focused on exploring the existing support mechanisms available for international students in a foreign context and identifies the research gap regarding recognition of international students' organization as a support system. The discussion and review of existing scholarships help to set a context and theoretical base for the exploration of the topic i.e. role of international students' organizations on acculturation of international students.

2.1 Acculturation: Definitional Issues

Acculturation has been one of the most researched topics in recent times regarding international students. The initial concept of acculturation was proposed by American anthropologists to indicate the phenomenon of cultural change that occurs as a result of cultural interaction or contact between two diverse groups (Sayegh & Lasry, 1993). The most widely accepted definition of acculturation comes from the seminal work of Redfield, Linton & Herskovits (1936, p. 149) who defined it as: *"....phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups."* The American Social Research Council (1954, p. 974) also defined acculturation as:

> "….culture change that is initiated by the conjunction of two or more autonomous cultural systems. Acculturative change may be the consequence of direct cultural transmission; it may be derived from non-cultural causes, such as ecological or demographic modification induced by an impinging culture; it may be delayed, as with internal adjustments following upon the acceptance of alien traits or patterns; or it may be a reactive adaptation of traditional modes of life. Its dynamics can be seen as the selective adaptation of values systems, the processes of integration and differentiation, the

generation of developmental sequences, and the operation of role determinants and personality factors."

These early definitions of acculturation indicate it as a group level phenomenon which contributes in bringing change in the cultural patterns of two diverse groups. Later, Graves (1967) introduced the concept of psychological acculturation to highlight the role of individuals and the changes that an individual goes through during his/her contact with other cultural groups or the contact of his/her cultural group with the other groups in the whole acculturation process. The understanding that acculturation can occur on an individual level proved to be a milestone in the cross cultural psychology circles, that redefined acculturation by making clear distinction between changes on group and individual levels (Sam, 1994; Ward, 1996).

In a comprehensive literature review of acculturation, Berry (1997) argues that there is a need to understand the distinction between group and individual level as the changes and impacts of acculturation are experienced differently on these two levels. For example, individuals who bear the same original culture and live in the same new culture may not be impacted by acculturation in an equal manner, as a result of individual differences among them (Nauck, 2008). While a cultural group may experience alterations in terms of its socio-cultural, ecological, economic and political life (Navas et al. 2007), an individual may experience changes in terms of self-attitude, behaviour and cultural identity (Sabatier & Berry, 1996; Phinney, 1990). In addition, individuals are exposed to a broader range of socio-cultural and psychological issues during acculturation (Berry et al. 1987; Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward & Kennedy, 1999,). Based on this literature review, Berry (2003) later defined acculturation as a two dimensional process of cultural and psychological change that occurs as a result of cultural contact between two or more groups.

On an individual level, research on acculturation has focused on its outcomes as well as the relevant strategies one can adopt. Ward (2001) has identified three main areas of acculturation outcomes namely, Affective, Behavioural and Cognitive (ABC). She adopts three theoretical frameworks respectively to explain these: Stress and Coping Framework; Culture Learning Approach and; Social Identification Theories. The stress and coping framework highlights psychological wellbeing and life satisfaction as affective changes induced by acculturation process in individuals. Successfully managing acculturative stress is contingent on having resources such as social support in the host country. This thesis draws

attention to the stressors that Nepalese students face when they move to Australia and presents their student society as an important support mechanism. The culture learning approach focuses on the enhancement of individuals' intercultural skills through learning of communication styles, values, beliefs, rules, conventions and norms of the new culture. It emphasizes the acquisition of culture-specific behaviours, especially communication, to enhance the adaptation process (Ward & Kennedy, 1999). Finally, the cognitive approach, which is based on Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), focuses on the cultural identity of people in new culture.

With regards to the outcomes of acculturation, a significant issue to highlight is its confusion with the concept of adaptation. In the existing scholarship, adaptation is used synonymously with acculturation; however adaptation can be short term or a long term consequence of acculturation. Short term changes are often associated with negative experiences, as individuals come across a new context and have relatively less time to adapt whereas long term changes are often associated with positive experiences and adaptation to the new context as a result of acculturation (Beiser et al. 1988). Adaptation can be psychological or socio-cultural. Psychological adaptation is primarily related to an individual's mental health and is measured through psychological consequences reflected in terms of individual satisfaction, self-esteem, and physical well-being. Socio-cultural adaptation is measured in terms socio-cultural skills of individuals to deal with problems and issues such as family, community, and work in the new cultural context (Ward & Kennedy, 1993). Psychological adaptation is largely concerned with the affective aspects of individuals whereas socio-cultural adaptation is largely concerned with behavioural aspects of individual in a new cultural context (Ward et al. 2001).

Moving on to acculturation strategies, Berry (1997) has identified four that are used by individuals and groups during their process of acculturation in new context based on two specific issues. The first issue is the preference of individuals towards maintenance of heritage culture and identity and the second issue is contacts and relationships with new culture. The choices and preferences of individuals regarding these two issues results in four strategies for acculturation namely: assimilation, integration, separation and marginalization. If an individual looks to develop close contact with the new culture and create distance with the original culture, the resulting strategy is assimilation. If an individual wishes to maintain his/her own cultural identity and also looks to maintain contact with other culture in the new context, thereby maintaining a balance between original and new culture, integration is the

strategy. Similarly, when an individual maintains his own cultural identity and avoids relationship with the new society, the respective strategy is separation. Finally, if an individual wants to neither maintain his original culture identity or to build contact with the new culture, marginalization is the strategy. As the nature of individual can largely vary, the choice of strategy may also differ according to individuals and the choice of place of settlement. This research will highlight the preferred acculturation strategy i.e. integration by international students and the role played by international students' organization on facilitating them for adopting that strategy.

Berry and his colleagues carried out a series of studies among various immigrant groups in Canada and USA, particularly among Portuguese, Hungarians, Koreans and Lebanese in Canada (Berry et al. 1989; Sayegh & Lasry, 1993); and Indians in the USA (Berry & Krishnan, 1992) using a structured questionnaire to identify the preferences for acculturation strategies among them. The results showed integration as the most preferred and marginalization as the least preferred acculturation strategy among these immigrant groups. Berry and his colleagues (1989) also used a structured set of questionnaire on acculturation and were able to find a link between preference of acculturation strategy and levels of acculturative stress among immigrant groups in Canada. The study showed that immigrants opting for integration experienced minimal levels of stress, immigrants adopting assimilation strategy suffered medium levels of stress, and immigrants opting for separation and marginalization strategies suffered higher levels of acculturative stress respectively. Further research conducted among immigrants in Montreal and Paris indicated integration as the most preferred acculturation strategy and also showed positive association with psychological and socio-cultural adaptation (Liebkind, 2001; Sam et al. 2006). Research by Sam and Berry (2010) indicated a negative association between marginalization strategy and adaptation and also highlighted the significance of the characteristics of the host country on the choice of acculturation strategy and its association with adaptation. According to these scholars, settler societies like Australia and the USA welcome immigrants and non-settler societies like France and Germany do not encourage immigrants except when necessary. Integration was cited as the most preferred acculturation strategy in settler societies whereas marginalization and separation strategies were preferred in non-settler societies (Sam, 2009). The research on acculturation strategies indicates that the majority of studies are conducted on immigrants entering a new society with longer term of settlement, while there is need for research

focussing specifically on sojourners like international students who enter into a new society only for a short term. This is one of the areas this research will examine.

2.2 Acculturation Research with International Students

International students have to leave their country of origin and find themselves in a situation where they neither belong to the country they have left nor to the country they have arrived in. They lose their existing support system from home country and do not have supporting network in the host country (Grinberg & Grinberg, 1989). The situation is further complicated when they have to face a new environment with new challenges in their day to day life. They have to face new society, people, culture, language, workplace, education and so many things on their own without their usual support which is very challenging and stressful (Hamboyan & Bryan, 1995; Furukawa, 1997; Ong & Ward, 2005).

As such, the review of literature reveals that the majority of research on acculturation that examines the international student experience is centred on adaptation issues and identification of the various stressors that result in acculturative stress and poor psychological health and wellbeing of international students. Whenever international students leave their home country, they have to face a relatively new setting with unfamiliar cultural signs and symbols as opposed to home country, which causes stress and anxiety. The result is termed as cultural shock (Zhou et al. 2008). International students find it difficult to adapt to the unfamiliar changes in their socio-cultural and academic surrounding. Language barriers have been identified as one of the major stressors for international students with direct impact on their academic and socio cultural adjustment (Chen, 1999; Mori, 2000; Poyrazli, Arbona, Bullington, & Pisecco, 2001; Zhang & Brunton, 2007). The mail survey conducted among 170 international undergraduates by Barratt & Huba (1994) also indicated the role of language in enhancing the self-esteem and inters personal relationships with locals. Financial issues are another source of acculturative stress for international students, caused by work restrictions, high tuition fees, accommodation and transportation costs (Li and Kaye 1998; Mori, 2000 Poyrazli and Grahame 2007). Researchers have also examined the impact of key demographic variables on the acculturative stress experienced by international students and yielded mixed results. While Poyrazli et al. (2004) found no significant association between length of stay and acculturative stress from a survey among 141 international students; other studies have found negative association between length of stay and psychological distress and acculturative stress among international students (Zheng & Berry, 1991). In terms of gender,

the study by Mallinckrodt & Leong (1992) based on a survey among 440 graduate student have found that female students are more concerned about issues of depression, anxiety and their family relationships and more likely to receive support from fellow students, while the study by Dao et al. (2007) based on a structured questionnaire indicated that male students are more prone to health issues and more likely to receive support from faculty staff. In other studies, inadequate educational service experiences by international students at the university as compared to their expectations before arrival in host country have been linked with their poor adaptation (Khawaja & Dempsey, 2008) and enhanced depression levels (Ward et al. 2001). Misra, Crist & Burant (2003) have highlighted the impact of academic stress on students in terms of their response to other stressors and their adjustment to academic environment based on a cross sectional survey among 143 international students. International students facing academic stress reported increased stress level to other stressors during their adaptation process. The differences in cultural orientation between nations have also been highlighted in the literature as sources for acculturative stress. For example, Asian societies are characterized by their collectivist orientations which give higher priority to social values, growth and achievement while western societies are characterized by their individualist orientation which give higher priority to individual growth, achievement and respect (Hofstede, 1991; Triandis, 1995). The collective orientation of Asian students is often associated with their inability to integrate with the host society and make host national friends which results in problem of loneliness and homesickness (Mori, 2000; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Similarly, the impact of discrimination on psychological wellbeing and depression of international students (Atri, Sharma, & Cottrell, 2006) has also been discussed in literature. Mori (2000) has cited discrimination as one of the major causes preventing international students to enhance their friendship with host national students.

2.3 Social Support Research with International Students

Few other studies have focused on issues of lack of social support (Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, & Van Horn, 2002; Khawaja & Dempsey, 2008), loneliness and homesickness (Parr & Bradley, 1991; Rajapaksa & Dundes, 2002; Sawir et al. 2008) in foreign context. They have highlighted the role of family, friends and relatives as a strong support system for international students and identified the problem of homesickness and loneliness among them when they lose that support system in host country. The situation is further complicated for them through the presence of various stressors in host country.

Research has sought to examine the relationship between social support and levels of acculturative stress. Studies have indicated that international students without social support are more prone to risk of cultural adjustment and psychological stress (Hayes & Lin, 1994; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992). Similarly, other studies have indicated that international students with strong social support are better adjusted in new cultural context (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Boyer & Sedlacek, 1988). Poyrazli et al. (2004) found social support as a factor of variance in acculturative stress of international students. The study also indicated negative association between social support and acculturative stress among Asian students. The study by Yeh & Inose (2003) based on a survey among 359 international students has also identified social network and social support satisfaction as a major predictor of acculturative stress. Other studies have also identified social support as a variable aiding to reduce acculturative stress thereby enhancing better adaptation in new context (Berry, 2006; Ward et al. 2001; Safdar et al. 2003). In addition, studies have revealed the negative connection between social support and psychological distress (Dao et al. 2007; Sumer et al. 2008; J. Zhang & Goodson, 2011) and positive connection between social support and psychological wellbeing of international students (Atri, et al. 2006). Furthermore, the role of friendship with host nationals is highlighted as major factor to facilitate adjustment of international students in foreign context (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Ying & Han, 2006; Ying & Liese, 1994; Zhang & Goodson, 2011). Kashima & Loh (2006) have also highlighted the role of friendship with co-nationals to facilitate better psychological adjustment and recognition of own culture based on a survey among 100 Asian international students. Additionally, the study by Mallinckrodt & Leong (1992) also pointed the role of academic support on reduction of overall stress of students and psychological wellbeing.

To cope with these stressors, international students receive social support from various formal and informal sources during their period of transition in the foreign land. Researchers have claimed that it is essential for students to clearly distinguish between different sources as each one may provide type of support during the process of acculturation (Olson & Shultz, 1994; Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001). Support comes both in formal and informal mechanisms. Informal social support sources may include the network of families (Williams, 2007), friends and relatives (Sawir et al. 2008), co-nationals (Ward et al. 2001), host nationals (Berry, 2006; Searle & Ward, 1990), teachers along with online social network (Ye, 2006). Students may resort to these resources to obtain emotional, informational and instrumental support (Leong & Sedlacek, 1989). The expansion of one's social network and

its role in providing emotional and advisory support to international students has been well documented in literature (Ward et al. 2001; Williams, 2007). The formal social network includes the support services provided by universities in the form of orientation and counselling programs in areas of health care, study assistance, financial assistance, career counselling, immigration and accommodation including student organizations based on religion, ethnicity, sports, faculty and so on. (Galloway & Jenkins, 2005). Orientation programs in particular aim to provide valuable guidance to international students regarding the new academic and socio-cultural environment (Ward & Masgoret, 2004); however they are often criticized on being too formal, overly structured, and focused only on academic issues (Guilfoyle, 2004; Borland & Pearce, 2002). The counselling programs are also less popular among international students owing to ignorance about their existence and lack of trust regarding the expertise and cultural awareness of counsellors (Sawir et al. 2008).

Apart from these mechanisms, universities have a number of student organizations based on cultural background and/or ethnicity. As the number of international students is rising, the organisations that seek to represent them are also increasing. During the year 2015, more than 645,000 international students from more than 191 countries were studying in Australia (ADET, 2015) which indicates the probable reason behind the growth of these organizations in Australian universities. These organizations serve as a medium through which international students can expand their social network with co-national and host national friends (Zhai, 2004) with whom they can share their experiences in a mutually understandable language and cultural context. The accessibility, familiarity and proximity of international students and their shared cultural base can have significant impact on international students in the new culture (Bodycott, 2012). Moreover, international student organizations possess access to cultural resources and social networks, which can play critical role in the acculturation process. They can serve the needs and resolve problems of international students based on past experience of its members in a mutually understandable language. Furthermore, international students' organizations have the possibility of running formal support programs that can overcome the disadvantages of equivalent efforts run by central university departments, such as orientation and counselling programs.

The role of co-national groups in easing the adjustment process of international students has been highlighted in literature. Brown (2009) has highlighted the tendency of international students to form network of co-national friends which enables them to share their culture and

support in a mutually understandable language in the context of a university in England. Montgomery & McDowell (2009) have also emphasized on the role of students community in expanding social network and providing social support and knowledge for international students based on a study of a particular group of international students in a British university. The samples for both the study were drawn from the social network of international students. Al-Sharideh & Goe (1998) have also emphasized on the role of ethnic communities of international students in facilitating their adjustment process in the context of an American university based on a telephone survey of 300 international students. Maundeni (2001) highlighted the role of social network members in facilitating the adjustment process of African students in a British university based on semi-structured interview of 29 African students. The study by Roberts et al. (2015) mentioned international student societies as important support services for international students based on a case study in an Australian university; however did not provide sufficient insight on the role of these societies in acculturation of international students.

2.4 Research Question

Based on literature review, the research intends to address the following research question:

a. *What is the role of international students' organization in the acculturation of international students in the context of an Australian university?*

The review of literature reveals that the majority of study on role of co-national groups in acculturation of international students are largely based on American and British context and have provided limited information on the role of formal students' organizations existing within the university in forming such networks and its influence in the acculturation process. As such this research intends to examine the role of international students' organizations in the acculturation process of international students, especially on how students themselves perceive and utilise them in the context of an Australian university. The study of international student organizations can help clarify their role in shaping choice of the acculturation strategy of international students. It can also provide changes international students go through as part of the acculturation process. Overall, the understanding of the impact of international student's organization on the acculturation of international students can guide universities and policy makers to restructure their exiting support programs and formulate policies and implement programs to ease international students' process of acculturation into new context with greater emphasis on strength of these groups operating within the premises of university.

2.5 Conclusion

In reviewing the literature on acculturation, this chapter highlighted the research gaps that this dissertation will address. First, while the majority of research on acculturation is focused on reasons contributing to acculturative stress, there is lack of research on the strategies that lead to adaptation. By focussing on how international student organisations are utilised by their constituents, this research will contribute practical suggestions on the strategies individuals can adopt to facilitate their adaptation in the host country. Second, despite the considerable amount of research on acculturation, the samples are primarily recent migrants with intentions to permanently stay in a country and whose experience differs from international students who have a finite stay. Finally, the majority of research is done using quantitative methods which while valid; they lack qualitative interpretation of the context.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodology adopted for this study. As highlighted in the literature review, the majority of research on acculturation has utilized quantitative measures. Rather than replicating previous studies, the strategy adopted here relies on qualitative methods in order to advance existing scholarship. First, the research approach is discussed followed by data collection methods and presentation of the coding procedures adopted for analysis, The chapter concludes with the researcher's critical reflection on conducting this research, which aims at exploring the role of Nepalese students' organization on acculturation of Nepalese students, who is a Nepalese student in Australia himself.

3.1 Research Approach

Research can be broadly categorized as qualitative or quantitative. Every researcher has to choose between a qualitative or a quantitative approach (Halfpenny, 1979), a choice which could depend on the research questions posited (Petty et al. 2012). Gerring (2007) also points the need to scan existing scholarship while deciding research approach. If existing scholarship is largely quantitative, then there might be need for qualitative approach for in depth analysis of the research questions and vice versa. As the existing scholarship on acculturation is largely quantitative, this research adopts a qualitative approach. Further, as the research explores the under-researched role of international students' organization on the acculturation experience of international students, the use of qualitative approach makes sense as it is considered beneficial for understanding and documenting the impact of social events, groups, culture and development on people (Polit & Hungler, 2003). Qualitative methodologies offer flexibility in data collection by permitting simultaneous reporting of real life experiences and interactions with the participants for uncovering related facts (Kagee, 2004). Furthermore, the adoption of qualitative approach also offers avenues to collect rich, informative and intricate facts about participants' experience which helps to reveal their motivation, perception and behaviour underlying their experiences (Barbour, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

This research is exploratory in nature as it explores the dynamic role of international students' organization on acculturation of international students. Exploratory research is considered helpful in familiarizing and internalizing the context being evaluated (Neuman, 1997). This research is a single instrumental case study. An instrumental case study provides better insight into a phenomenon or process or issue of interest through in-depth analysis of

contexts, activities and issues (Stake, 1995). Case studies are often used to intensely analyse and describe issues and phenomena concerning individuals, events or groups. Case studies are widely used in educational, sociological and psychological research (Yin 1994; Stake 1995; Hewitt-Taylor 2002; Corcoran et al. 2004) as they are useful for theory and hypothesis generation (George & Bennett, 2005) and also a valuable tool for in-depth analysis and understanding of contextual situations (Greene & David, 1984; Yin, 1989). The case study method is considered appropriate for this research as: (a) it provides answers to "how" and "why" questions; b) it prevents manipulation of behaviour of those participating in the study; and c) it allows the capturing of contextual insights that are relevant to the current phenomenon (Yin, 2003). First, the basic "how" question for the research is how international students' organizations affect the acculturation experience of international students. Also, the data analysis points to some of the reasons why universities would benefit from encouraging newly arrived international students to connect with students' organization. Additionally it provides evidence regarding how these organizations can improve their services. Moreover, the case study allows the researcher to gather the opinions of two key stakeholder i.e. international students and a formal representative of the Equity and Diversity Unit, which is the unit running support service for international students. In this way, the matter is explored more holistically.

Second, as it is the purpose of this research to examine the role of international students' organization in the acculturation of international students in an Australian University, the case study is an appropriate methodology to adopt because it prevents the manipulation of participants' behaviour. A semi structured in-depth interview has been conducted with each participant uncovering various aspects related to research question. The use of face-to-face interview gives limited opportunities for participants to engage in behavioural manipulation and also provides opportunities for clarification of issues through interaction (Lakin & Chartrand, 2003).

Third, the use of case study method allows the capturing of contextual insights that are relevant to the current phenomenon. The context for the current study is an Australian university, which recruits a large number of international students. The university also hosts a number of international students' organizations, which are formally registered, governed and operated within university premises for helping international students. In such context, the study covers views of key stakeholders' i.e. international students, including the president

of a relevant student organization and a representative from the Equity and Diversity Unit of the university; all of whom exist and function within the university context and are related to each other. This allows contextual insights from these three specific sources that are relevant to the current phenomenon, i.e. role of international students' organization in international student's acculturation.

While the case study method has important advantages, it also has a few disadvantages. The case study method is often criticized on grounds of generalisability or external validity (Aaltio and Heilmann, 2009) i.e. the results from case studies are often questioned in terms of their application to broader populations. Yin (1989) has responded to such criticism by arguing that case studies are a valuable tool for analytical generalization rather than statistical generalization which means the findings should be interpreted and analysed based on contexts rather than numerical verification and validation. Additionally, Lincoln & Guba (1985) have argued that to counter such criticisms, researchers should provide sufficient contextual evidence allowing freedom for their readers to understand and interpret the results as per their need or situation. Researchers have recommended using replication logic as an important strategy for establishing external validity in case studies (Creswell, 1994; Yin, 1994). Careful selection and implementation of representative cases could aid to replication logic and overcome problem of small samples which are often the issues of criticism in case studies (Flyberg, 2004).

The case study for the current research is based on a selected cohort of international students and does not intend to represent the diverse population; however, the experiences shared by them could match with students from other countries. Further, the researcher has collected data from three particular samples particularly: international students, president of international students' organization and representative of Equity and Diversity Unit who are associated with the acculturation process in the university. The data from these three sources are matched and verified to generate themes for analysis ensuring internal validity and data triangulation.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The case study is based in the context of an Australian university where more than 11,000 international students from different countries are studying. The university has more than 30 international students' organizations from different nationalities in operation which are

increasingly being the medium of celebration of home culture and intercultural exchange. These students' organizations are affiliated with the university and guided by Campus Engagement under Equity and Diversity unit, which works on fostering principles of inclusion, equity and diversity in university practices.

This research focuses on NSO as an important segment of international students at the university. Nepalese students are one of the constantly growing segments of international students in Australia. According to ADET (2015), a total of 14,231 Nepalese students were enrolled in Australia during the year 2013, which reached to 18,056 at the end of 2014. Apart from their constantly growing numbers in Australian university and their different socio-cultural backgrounds as compared to Australians, the ease and convenience in data collection for the researcher being a Nepalese citizen also led to the selection of Nepalese students as samples for the study.

NSO was established with the objective of helping Nepalese students to make their learning experience better at the university. It was established as a medium for Nepalese students to bond together, celebrate and promote Nepalese culture at the university. It has made its presence felt at the university by organizing and participating in various events like stalls in Orientation week, Meet and Greet event, Holi celebration, End of Semester Party and Global Village. The organization has also been awarded with the Best New Student Group, 2015 by the university recently. NSO has more than 155 Nepalese students as its members currently.

The recruitment of Nepalese students for the interview was done through NSO. The president of the organization forwarded a formal invitation email to each of its members asking for their voluntary participation in the research. Ethics Approval for conducting the research was obtained prior to sending invitation email. The president of NSO also posted the invitation for research on the society's official facebook page for its members. Convenience sampling was used to select participants from the list of Nepalese students to expedite data collection process. As the research focused on the role of international students' organization in the acculturation of international students, only those Nepalese students who were currently studying at the university and were members of NSO were considered eligible as potential participants for the research. The selection of members of NSO would help to fulfil research objective as they can share how these students' organization has helped them in their acculturation process in Australia. Moreover, most of the participants (international students)

have spent a year or less than one year in Australia enabling them to recall and share their acculturation experience in detail.

A total of eight participants were selected for conducting semi structured interview which included: six Nepalese students who were members of NSO, the president of NSO and one representative from the Equity and Diversity Unit. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from the participants of the study, as they allow the opportunity for the interviewer to establish rapport, build trust and ensure commitment that encourages the interviewee to disclose their genuine experiences (Alvesson, 2003). They also provide the opportunity for the interviewee to express his/her concerns and clarify issues (Yuan, 2011).

The use of semi-structured interviews also allows the researcher to cover and discuss the issues of concern within stipulated time frame which is very important for keeping the interview focused and balanced. The questions for interview of Nepalese students were structured around reasons for them joining the organization, the support provided by the organization in connecting to home and host culture and the impact of organization on them. The questions to the president of NSO were structured around their support to international students and the support provided by Equity and Diversity Unit to them. Similarly, the questions to the representative from the Equity and Diversity Unit were structured around the importance of international students' organizations at the university and their role in supporting international students. All the interviews were conducted face to face within university premises. The duration of each interview varied from fifteen to forty-five minutes for the participants. All the participants were provided with information and consent form prior to conducting the interview, detailing the purpose of the research and assuring anonymity, confidentiality and privacy of information along with the option to withdraw from the research without cause or consequence. All the participants read the information and consent form, signed it and completed the interview. The interviews were audio recorded with consent of interviewees, and transcribed verbatim. The sample profile of participants is presented below:

Pseudonym	Sex(Male/Female)	Age	Course Enrolled	Time in Australia (Year)
A1	Female	31	Masters of Research	1
A2	Female	30	Masters of Research	1

S1	Female	24	Bachelor of Accounting	Less than 1
S2	Female	27	Master of Accounting	Less than 1
S3	Male	26	Bachelor of Accounting	Less than 1
S4	Male	24	Bachelor of Accounting	Less than 1
P1	Female	25	President: Nepalese Students' Organization	Less than 1
E1	Female	40	Representative: Equity and Diversity Unit	More than 15 years

Table 1: Sample Profile

The recruitment of each participants belonging to these three different groups were done in sequential order i.e. Nepalese students - members of NSO were contacted and interviewed first followed by the President of NSO and the representative of the Equity and Diversity Unit last. The recruitment and interview were done sequentially in order to prevent any unnecessary coercion or influence from the governing bodies on recruitment and selection of students' cohorts. Moreover, the researcher's self-involvement in recruitment and selection of potential participants without involvement of Equity and Diversity unit further helped to prevent any unnecessary coercion or influence in the process. A meeting was conducted with the Equity and Diversity unit and executive members of NSO to inform and gain their commitment prior to conducting research.

The data collected from the interviews have been transcribed and analysed using NVivo 10 software package for qualitative data analysis. The principles of grounded theory have been used for coding process.

A summary of codes from data analysis has been presented in Table 1 below.

Code Description	Examples	Interpretation & Coding
Does this section identify difficulties international students face in Australia?	i. *So it is very difficult. It's very different. Living is different, eating is different you know, studying is different, everything is different. So it makes a huge cultural shock if you*	i. International students faces cultural shock *Coding:* Cultural Shock

				are not prepared actually.
	ii.	*I felt lonely after coming here. I didn't have many friends to hang out with [...] Being new to a foreign country will definitely make you home sick.*	ii.	International students lacks friendships and feels homesick and lonely *Coding:* Friendship & Loneliness
	iii.	*You speak a different language. It's hard to understand what the locals are saying because they have an accent which we do not have. I don't understand what they say, their language, what kind of words they use. So it is very difficult. It's very different.*	iii.	International students faces problems of foreign language *Coding:* Language
	iv.	*It's more like when you are new, you don't know anything about referencing, or the fact that you have to do certain assignments in certain way or turnitin or how the similarity percentage affects your result and everything.*	iv.	International students face other problems regarding study, accommodation, finance, work etc. *Coding:* Other Issues
	v.	*Actually because many people don't even know where Nepal is and everything, I wanted to show that I am from Nepal; probably the place where the highest mountain is.*	v.	Joins international students' organization to promote heritage culture, understand host culture and increase cultural understanding *Coding:* Cultural

		Exchange and Learning
Does this section identify social support provided by international students' organization to international students?	*It is actually a very good thing because you learn about so many other things except Nepal and Nepalese things. You learn about so many other cultures there. There are so many cultures around the world which we even don't know exists, here you get the knowledge of everything.*	
	vi. *Well, I think language because whenever you meet other people in this country you have to speak what they speak. But going back to that community I can freely speak in my own language and tell whatever I want. I don't have language barrier or anything. I can express myself within that community. I guess that what makes you think like I can yell out. I can just take it all out.*	vi. Joins international students' organization to use native language *Coding*: Language
	vii. *If I have not been in that student group I would not have met so many other people. I would not have known there are so many Nepalese people studying in*	vii. Joins international students 'organization to make friends and tackle loneliness and homesickness *Coding:* Friendship and

		my university. It brings together all those people and we relive our culture.		loneliness
Does this section identify other formal support systems available at the university as compared to international students' organization	*viii.*	*Yes, of course I guess because even though our university provides lots of counselling services but they may not understand where we are coming from because of the culture. We think in different way.*	viii.	*Yes, of course I guess because even though our university provides lots of counselling services but they may not understand where we are coming from because of the culture. We think in different way.*
Does this section identify the attitude and behaviour (acculturation strategy) of international students towards their heritage and host culture?	*ix.*	*Ah, well even though we are Nepalese we go to the beach, experience the Australian culture but we don't forget our culture either. At home we still speak Nepalese. We still have our core cultural values. We are still maintaining both of them right in between may be.*	ix.	Highlights the contact and relationships maintained by international students towards heritage and host culture. *Coding:* Acculturation strategy of international students.

Table 2: Coding Summary

The following table provides a glimpse of the research plan undertaken for the research.
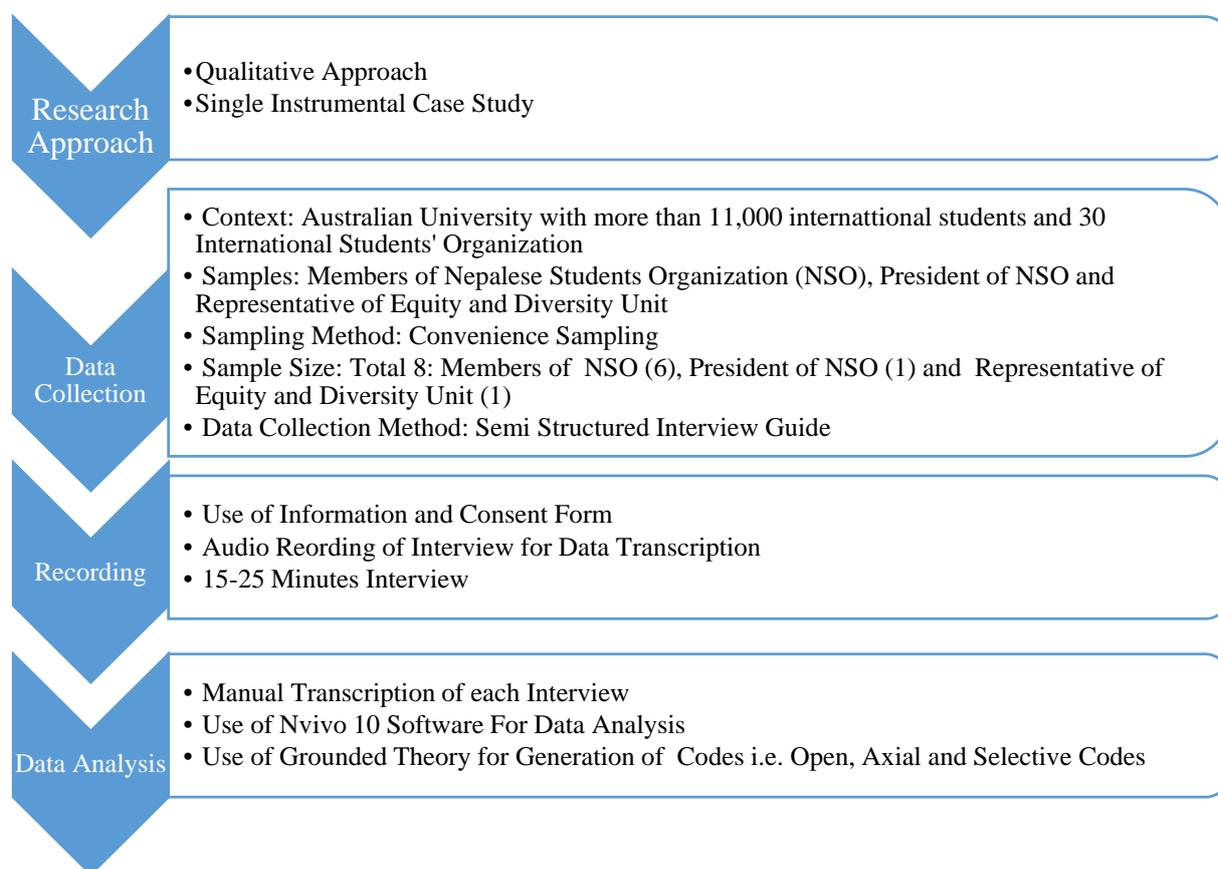
Research Approach
- Qualitative Approach
- Single Instrumental Case Study

Data Collection
- Context: Australian University with more than 11,000 internattional students and 30 International Students' Organization
- Samples: Members of Nepalese Students Organization (NSO), President of NSO and Representative of Equity and Diversity Unit
- Sampling Method: Convenience Sampling
- Sample Size: Total 8: Members of NSO (6), President of NSO (1) and Representative of Equity and Diversity Unit (1)
- Data Collection Method: Semi Structured Interview Guide

Recording
- Use of Information and Consent Form
- Audio Reording of Interview for Data Transcription
- 15-25 Minutes Interview

Data Analysis
- Manual Transcription of each Interview
- Use of Nvivo 10 Software For Data Analysis
- Use of Grounded Theory for Generation of Codes i.e. Open, Axial and Selective Codes

Table 3: Research Plan

3.3 Critical Reflection

Qualitative research is subjective in nature and may be affected by the personal judgement, prejudices and bias of the researcher during the research process (Bahn & Weatherill, 2012). Researchers are encouraged to engage in reflective practice and discuss their assumptions, preferences, experiences and actions during the research process in order to pinpoint their impact on the research process (Ortlipp, 2008). This provides a visible picture of the researcher's involvement in the research and adds transparency to the process (MacNaughton, 2001).

The research was influenced by the personal judgements and emotions of the researcher who is also an international student from Nepal in an Australian university. As discussed earlier, Nepalese students are under-researched and under-represented in literature. As such, in addition to filling a gap in the existing literature, the motivation to study Nepalese students specifically, was a matter of convenience for the researcher who also is a Nepalese student.

The researcher is an international student himself and has that acculturation experience in the context of an Australian university which made him interested in the topic of acculturation. He left his country for abroad studies and did not have that foreign exposure earlier in his life as a result he came across many issues. He did not have the support of his family and friends and had to face everything on his own. The grief of leaving home country, family and friends made the researcher alone and homesick. He attended the orientation week at the university and knew about NSO for the first time after seeing their stalls. He could see other stalls representing students from other countries as well. The acquaintance with NSO helped him in many ways. First, he came to know other Nepalese students at the university whom he never knew before. This provided him a sense of attachment and belongingness to native community and helped him overcome loneliness. Second, he had ideas and suggestions about personal problems and services available at the university. This supported him to adjust to his day to day life. Third, he came to know about various events and programs they organize and participate which could help new international students like him to socialize and adapt to the newer context. The researcher could breathe a sigh of relief in a foreign land with the support of NSO. The researcher felt that his story could be similar to other international students and could prove helpful to thousands of international students like him who are in need of social support from their own people in foreign land during their early transition phase. As such the personal experience and the support provided by NSO motivated the researcher to undertake research regarding the role of international students' organizations at the university. Gummeson (1991) has also recognized the role of an individual's earlier experience in conceptualizing and designing the research.

The experience of the researcher as an international student helped him to relate and empathize with the interviewees which were important in securing a trusting relationship with them. Moreover, all the participants selected for the research were Nepalese students and were member of NSO. The researcher and the interviewees could feel for each other as they both have been through similar journey in Australia as an international student. The researcher also shared his current position as an international student and his objectives of the research which helped him win the confidence of the interviewees. The researcher could sense the experience of interviewees as his own and supplement his own experience during the interview. For example, the researcher and interviewee S2 had bad experience with tunitin and plagiarism during the early days at the university. Both received lower marks in their early assignments due to same issues which came during the conversation. Moreover the

researcher also used his acquaintance with various events and programs organized by the organization to help interviewees recollect their memories. As a result of which they openly expressed their feelings during the interview. The mutual trust and empathy between the researcher and interviewees made the whole interview exciting and engaging. The experience of the researcher as an international student also contributed to make the interview structured by keeping it focussed on relevant issues. The researcher was also aware about the danger of using own experiences to lead interviewees' answers as such, he was particularly cognisant of the need to limit his contribution to the interview, so as to encourage participants to express themselves without researcher's influence (Tufford, 2012).

Overall, the researcher was able to conceptualize, design and execute a research based on his personal experience as an international student. His acculturation experience at a foreign university and the selection of interviewees from same nationality at the same university helped him to connect and build rapport with them which helped to make the research engaging, exciting and productive.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

In light of the scholarship presented earlier and coding process, this chapter will present and analyse the interview findings. This evidence will be presented in four key areas addressing the research question i.e. role of international students' organization in the acculturation of international students. First, this chapter will outline the reasons for international students to join the NSO which will provide details about the stressors faced by them in Australia. Second, it will provide details on how international students' organization has helped international students to cope with these stressors and emerge as a strong social support for them. Third, it will highlight the acculturation strategy preferred by international students and the contribution of international students' organization in the process. Finally, it will reflect on the preference of international students towards international students' organization as compared to other formal support services at the university. As such, this chapter will analyse data under four sections to address the research question as outlined:

4.1 Reason for joining the NSO

4.2 The emergence of the NSO as a social support for international students

4.3 The preferred acculturation strategy; and

4.4 The other formal support services at the university.

4.1 Reason for Joining the NSO

International students' organizations represent students from different nationalities and culture at the university. They are considered as an essential tool to enhance the transitional experience of international students. International students were asked for reasons for them to join the students' organization at the university. A number of stressors emerged from the inquiry which included issues on adaptation, academic skills, social network, loneliness, homesickness, cultural exchange and learning.

4.1.1 Stressors

Every country has its own set of political, socio-cultural, economic, academic and technological environment which may be similar or different from other countries. International students possess limited skills and resources compared to host nationals to deal with the new socio-cultural environment of their host country (Pedersen, 1991). As a result,

the first thing that international students face in host country is cultural shock which may increase their acculturative stress.

Cultural Shock

Similarity in environment helps international students adapt quickly to the host country's environment whereas differences may lead to various socio-cultural, economic, academic and associated problems and challenges for them during their transitional process generally termed as 'stressors'(Safdar et al. 2003). The problem may be even more complex when they are leaving their country for the first time (Zhou et al. 2008). The situation can be related to the context of the research where all the participants were international students and revealed a range of stressors that challenged them during their transitional phase in Australia.

Traditionally majority of countries in Asia have been characterized as adopting collectivist culture as opposed to Australia which falls under the individualist (Hofstede, 1998; Triandis, 1995). The participants under study are from South Asia and has been characterised as collectivist culture, whereas they are studying in Australia which represents individualist culture and highly prioritizes individual space, respect and success. The differences in cultural orientation can be cited as a source of cultural shock for international students.

The socio-cultural structure and system in Australia are different to that of Nepal. The values, systems, beliefs, attitudes and norms in Australia pose a great challenge to students from other parts of the world who are not accustomed to it. Interviewee A2 highlighted some differences that exist between Nepal and Australia which increase students' level of stress.

> In my country if I am studying, then I am not working. It's that kind of culture where you study, complete the study and then you go to work. Here you are working, studying, adjusting to new life you know. Everything from transportation, you have to adjust everything even language. You speak different language.

Another difference between the two cultures to which students had to adapt was brought forward by S1:

> Definitely when I came here I was an introvert. I kept to myself and that's how the culture in Nepal is. Over here it's so informal, so friendly that you can speak to your manager, you can speak to your senior like your friend […] It might have been a

> cultural shock [at the beginning] but when I came into university it was a way of life. I felt comfortable going to professors and speaking to them.

S4 further emphasized on the individualistic nature of Australian society which is very different from the collectivist nature of Nepalese society and cited his work experience as an example.

> What I found was different in Australia is everyone works. So starting from the age of 14 you are working and even though you are not making a lot of money you can still earn for your own pocket money. You don't have to depend on your parents but for me back at home I was 18 years old and I was still dependent on my parents for my pocket money. […] I have never worked in life before I came here. You have to be serious about work. It was actually really difficult for me to adapt because I did not know what to do.

Participants A1 and A2 also expressed their consent regarding cultural shock as one the major concern for them regarding Australia. Participant A2 said

> So it is very difficult. It's very different. Living is different, eating is different you know, studying is different, everything is different. So it makes a huge cultural shock if you are not prepared actually.

Language

The nature and method of social interaction and communication is different across various cultures. People use various forms of verbal and non verbal communication methods according to their culture which can create confusion in the eyes of international students who are new to it. This creates a communication barrier for them (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1998)**.** The problem for international students to adapt to a completely different set of language in host country who are accustomed to their home country language has also been cited in earlier literature (Lewthwaite, 1996; Wang, 2004). Lack of language competency can lead to increased level of acculturative stress and depression (Yeh & Inose, 2003; Duru & Poyrazli, 2007).

English language competence poses a serious challenge to international students. The majority of participants in the research expressed language as a serious source of stress for them. S4 expressed the ease and convenience of using native language. S4 highlighted that

naturally 'the first thing that comes to mind is Nepali, which points to the need for these students to constantly translate everything; an opinion shared by interviewee S3.

For A2, it's not only language, but also the pronunciation and slang in Australian English that is adding to the stress.

> It's hard to understand what the locals are saying because they have an accent which we do not have. I don't understand what they are saying, their language, what kind of words they use.

Friendships and Loneliness

Travelling abroad requires international students to leave their existing social network of friends, families and relatives behind in their home country (Grinberg & Grinberg, 1989). The interviews taken for this study confirm exiting literature on loneliness. For example, the loss of existing social network and lack of similar network in the host country and its contribution to problems of loneliness and homesickness among international students has also been highlighted in literature (Rajapaksa & Dundes, 2002; Hendrickson et al. 2011).

Interviewee A1 stated "I felt lonely after coming here. I didn't have many friends to hang out with [...] Being new to a foreign country will definitely make you home sick". A2 also expressed similar situation, as she migrated to Australia alone, without friends and relatives, which led to problem of loneliness and homesickness.

As a result of loss of existing social network, international students are expected to establish a new network of friends abroad so as to facilitate their need for friendships and belongingness in a foreign land. These are not easy tasks. Majority of the participants identified lack of friendship network as key challenges for them during their transition phase.

Other Issues

Apart from issues of cultural shock, language, lack of friendship network, and ensuing loneliness and homesickness, international students come across a diverse set of problems and challenges associated with their study, such as accommodation and financial conditions during their early transition phase in foreign context.

Interviewees emphasized the differences in academic system as one of the major hurdles for them. The differences in teaching style, assignments, referencing and educational services

posed challenges for them. The relative unawareness of international students regarding referencing styles and use of technological platforms like 'Turnitin' seem to create further chaos when adapting to Australian education system.

> It's more like when you are new, you don't know most of the thing about referencing, or the fact that you have to do certain assignments in certain way or [submit through] turnitin or how the similarity percentage affects your result and everything. [S2]

Interviewee P1 also pinpointed the confusion that arises among international students regarding the use of various educational services and technology available at the university.

> I think the major concern area is education; the difference in education system. The university is so big, so large that you don't know where, what kind of services the university is giving.

Confirming the fact, A2 said "So it's completely different how the study goes on here, how the life style is here."

This finding confirms existing research on how the differences in academic system between home and host country is one of the stressors for international students (Wang, 2004; Bodycott et al. 2014). The academic system in Asian countries is often criticized on adopting surface learning approach as compared to western countries which rely on creative learning approach (Leder & Forgasz, 2004). Moreover, the unfamiliarity of international students with issues of plagiarism and educational policies of Australia creates additional problems for them (Jonasson, 2004). As the research participants were Nepalese and from Asia, participants consented with the fact and agreed about the differences and their unawareness regarding education system in Australia.

Finding accommodation and a job are few other problems for international students. Interviewee S4 highlighted the cultural disparity in terms of host country's lifestyle and work culture and its impact on international students. International students may not need to worry about their finance, accommodation and job in the home country as they are supported by their family and friends. However, the stress caused by the high student fees forces most of them to find a way to financially support themselves. As such, many of them are, for the first time in their life, in a difficult position where they have to balance academic, social, personal and working lives which are running at the same time in a country where they don't have any social support. They constantly face the challenge of finding the right place and friend to live

and get a suitable job to manage their studying and living expenses in a foreign land. The problems of accommodation, finances and work restrictions faced by international students are also highlighted in scholarships (Burns, 1991; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Chen, 1999).

As interviewee S1 stated:

> I think the biggest concern for most of the international students is accommodation and finding jobs and basically something along these lines like living and working issues.

The above discussion identified a range of stressors faced by international students. The next section includes discussion on how international students' organization helped international students to cope with these stressors and emerge as a strong social support for them.

4.2 Emergence of the NSO as a Social Support for International Students

International students require social support to reduce acculturative stress and facilitate their adjustment process in foreign context (Safdar et al. 2003; Berry, 2006). Social support includes both formal and informal networks. Informal social support network consists of network of families (Williams, 2007), friends and relatives (Sawir et al. 2008), co-nationals (Ward et al. 2001), host nationals (Berry, 2006; Searle & Ward, 1990), teachers along with online social networks (Kim et al. 2009; Ye, 2006). The formal social network includes the support services provided by universities in the form of orientation and counselling programs in areas of health care, study assistance, financial assistance, career counselling, immigration and accommodation along with various student organizations based on religion, ethnicity, sports, faculty and so on (Galloway & Jenkins, 2005). Students may resort to these social support resources to obtain emotional, informational and instrumental support (Leong & Sedlacek, 1989). The expansion of one's social network and its role in providing emotional and advisory support to international students has been well documented in literature (Ward et al. 2001; Williams, 2007).

Interviewees recognized the NSO as a medium of social support during times of need.

> We don't need preparation but then we need some kind of support. It's like backbone, like someone is holding on to your shoulder. You are standing there, you are fighting but then you feel like ok they are there if I have some problems I can just go back and look into what they are doing, what kind of services are there. I can talk to them." [S2]

International students also get support from the NSO to get adapted to the new environment. Brown (2009) has identified the role of students' community in bringing people with similar culture and background together which enables them to share their past experience and learning with each other for making transition process of new entrants easier and faster.

> You come, get together and share everything about your experience. I can tell them what I am experiencing right now and any kind of situations. I can talk with them. I can share news of my country and everything. So I expected getting feedbacks, getting information, sharing information, sharing experience and learning. [A2]

Student community provides valuable practical and academic support and advice to international students who are associated with it (Montgomery &McDowell, 2009). They

help students to cope with the challenges regarding the culture, education, living, accommodation, transportation and work system in Australia which is different from the host country. Majority of participants remembered the role of the NSO in extending valuable support to them during their early transition phase. They were grateful towards organization for providing a platform for them to join the social network of co-national friends which enabled them to learn and adapt to the dynamics of new environment from their earlier experience.

> Well because I am new to Australia, I will like to know about life, culture and everything. When you come abroad first time there is always cultural shock. So it's completely different how the study goes on here, how the life style is here. Everything here is completely different from what I am used to and you need people to support through this transition process. I think that sort of experience these people have in studying or living in Australia can share to new people like me[…] that will make transition process good one and easy to understand and adjust to the life style in Australia[A2]

> They will know how to travel in the train, how you get the rent, how much the rent cost, which place is affordable, which is not, how far is the university, how to arrange everything, how to find part time job and stuffs that are really important. The experience of the students in the group is really beneficial. Even a little help can be great for them. […] So it is a bit of relief for them like I am in the new environment and I am still the part of my society. It makes them feel relaxed so that they won't get too much tensed in the starting point. [S3]

> "I have never worked in life before I came here. It was actually really difficult for me to adapt because I did not know what to do. I did not know what was expected of me. I had help from the society. They helped me a lot with the Australian work standards and everything. It was good."[S4]

The presence of formal groups at the university ensures interaction and socialization of international students with the broader community at the university which is essential to ease their transition process (Shapiro & Levinee, 1999). It helps them to address majority of stressors they face during their stay in Australia which in turn helps them to balance and sustain their life in Australia. The support extended by the NSO through its network of

international students can be compared to the process of social capital construction (Milroy & Gordon, 2003) that provides valuable impetus for fruitful growth of international students.

4.2.1 Language

The interviews of participants revealed that language serves as important barrier for international students in context of communication, expression and socialization. The availability of the NSO at the university provides a valuable medium for international students to connect and expand their network with co-national friends. Interviewee A2 cited linguistic comfort as one of the factors for joining the NSO and bonding with co-national friends. They felt a sense of relief using their mother tongue with their own people and a sigh of relief from using host country language which is consistent with the findings from Brown (2009). Brown (2009) highlighted the value of using native language among co-national students during their abroad study.

> Well, I think language because whenever you meet other people in this country you have to speak what they speak. But going back to that community I can freely speak in my own language and tell whatever I want. I don't have language barrier or anything. I can express myself within that community. I guess that what makes you think like I can yell out. I can just take it all out.

Kramsch (1993) has compared the feeling and freedom of expression of using native language with the feeling of returning to paradise. Participants also indicated the need to use host country language which helps them to carry on their daily activities. The data supports existing finding by Baron& Dapaz (2001) who cited language as a major factor for better socio-cultural adaptation and integration of international students in the host society.

Participants also emphasized on the role of these networks on fostering communication skills and making the life of international students exciting in foreign country. They also emphasized on the role of co-national friends to learn local accents and slang which enhances their interaction ability with host nationals. The finding support existing literature on the importance of language by Edwards (1994) who has also indicated language as backbone for formation and association of co-national groups.

4.2.2 Friendships and Loneliness

As discussed earlier, loss of existing friends, relatives and family network and feeling of homesick and lonely are problems that students face when they travel to foreign country. The

existence of international students' organization at the university facilitates international students to form network of co-national friends. Majority of participants recognized international students' organization as a strong medium to extend their friendship circle.

> If I have not been in that community, student group I would not have met so many other people. I would not have known there are so many Nepalese people studying in my university. It brings together all those people and we relive our culture. [A2]

> I thought after joining the group, I could connect to other Nepalese students living in Australia. [A1]

> Before this student society I hardly knew any Nepalese students. So this student society also let me expose to other students, other Nepalese students and I made very good bonding with them over time. [S1]

The tendency of international students to associate and form network of co-national friends in a foreign context has been observed in literature (Bochner et al. 1985; Ward, 2001). Hofstede (1991) has observed this trend of making co-national friends high among South East Asian students owing to the collectivist nature of society and their socialization process in an extended family.

Interviewees also cited mutual understanding and support from co-national friends with common cultural background as key reasons for joining the NSO. The characteristics of NSO can be related to some of key the characteristics of ethnic groups as outlined by Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2011) which defines ethnic group as group of people with common history, tradition, geographic origin, language, literature and religion. People feel comfortable to talk and share feeling with people from their own country (Brown, 2009) which can be observed in case of NSO.

> I am very outgoing person. I like experiencing new place and new culture. I always enjoy being in a group/team rather than being alone. I like to explore places and making friends. But when you are new, you definitely feel comfortable talking and being around people of your own cultural background and you will definitely seek advice from people who have already been there. [A1]

> So it is more about the similar thought process that your own people have in comparison to people over here. [A2]

Scholars have established the need for social supports to tackle loneliness and homesickness (Parr & Bradley, 1991; Rajapaksa & Dundes, 2002). Participants emphasized the role of NSO in expanding their friendship circle and sense of belongingness which in turn helped them to tackle their problems of homesickness and loneliness.

> I felt lonely after coming here. I didn't have many friends to hang out with. I thought maybe I can expand my social life by joining the group. I could find people with common cultural background, hobby or interest to my own and it doesn't make me home sick. [A1]

> I could find friends. I could find feelings of belongingness in here. […] it made me feel like I am not alone. I am not studying alone. There are people like me who are studying in here. Well that's one reason I guess. [A2]

However, extension of friends circle in foreign context is not easy for international students (Menzies & Baron, 2014). Everyone is shuffling across their academic, work, social and personal life. In such circumstances the social media platform adopted by this organization can provide valuable aid to extend social circle. This fact was also highlighted by one of the participants, stating that:

> Here everyone is busy obviously because they are adults and most of them live by themselves. […]They have done an excellent job because we have the facebook group through which you can connect to people and message anyone. If you want to go out for a movie, you have the social group. That's a platform for us to make friends and everything. [S4]

The findings indicate the role of NSO as a platform for extending friendship circles and also appraises social media platform adopted by these organizations in facilitating such motives. To that end, the findings support the Lim & Meier (2012) research who underlined the role of social media in extension and maintenance of social circle of international students in foreign context.

4.2.3 Cultural Exchange and Learning

The NSO has become the medium for international students to showcase their heritage culture and learn the host country culture. Students can enhance their multicultural skills and learn from experience of other students who have been through similar journey in the past. International students can share own culture, learn diverse culture, acquire multicultural skills

and develop themselves as a global citizen (Deardorff, 2006).

> If you are in Australia and you just meet Australians then that's like you just been to one country, but with so many cultural groups coming together you feel like you are in different countries at the same time. You are experiencing such a diverse and colourful cultural environment, you would never have chance to experience those things if you are sitting and studying alone by yourself. If you are part of that cultural group you get to experience other cultural groups. It just keeps on rolling, you experience one thing, that connects to another and that connects to another. [A2]

Connection to Home Country

Studying abroad brings opportunities for international students to showcase their country and its heritage culture to the world. At times, the country itself or its heritage culture may not be widely known in the host country, in which case international students have the opportunity to represent the country and its culture in front of the world; however, it also brings challenges for them to do so. Participants in this study also faced the same problem where they felt that their country and its culture were not recognized by most of the people in Australia.

> Actually because many people don't even know where Nepal is and everything, I wanted to show that I am from Nepal; the place where the highest mountain is. [S4]

This is a sentiment shared among participants in this study which led them to look for a medium to represent their heritage culture in the university. Interviewee A2 showed her joy of finding international students' organization at the university and said:

> When I saw our country's student group organization in the university, it made me feel like Wow!!! there is something which links me to my country even in here. I could find friends. I could find feelings of belongingness in here.

Migrant communities are considered crucial for socializing a new migrant. They act as a bridge between home and host country. They help them to connect and celebrate home culture in the host country, which provides a sense of pride and belongingness among new migrants (Pires et al. 2006). Ward & Searle (1991) have reported a positive association between co-national network and cultural identity. The structure and role of migrant communities largely matches the role of NSO at the university which consists of network of people from similar culture and background.

There are various facets of home country culture that international students miss in a foreign country particularly social life, language, food, costumes, festivals and various events. Migrants are particularly assumed to miss local language, food and drinks from home country (Usunier, 1998) which was confirmed in the current study.

> Well, I miss the food actually: the typical Nepalese momos [Dumpling] and the roadside momos, the pani puris [Street Food]. Those are the things I particularly miss. [S4]

> Well, they organize different cultural programs. We show what our culture is through our food and cultural dances or everything. Everyone misses home. So seeing your national food we eat at home, the dances we do, the songs we listen to in the university made me feel like my culture is right here. [S4]

The NSO organizes and participates in various events where national culture, food, dresses, events and festivals of home country are displayed, represented and celebrated. These events and programs made students nostalgic as they were able to sense local food, costume, dance, festival and language.

> This time actually they did the whole 'Newari Khaja' [Popular Nepalese Dish] set with the potato pickle, chickpeas and beaten rice - all the typical Newari set that's what we call them and that's how we set it as. And let's just say it was gone too soon. Everyone liked it. It was really so good. [S2]

> The first thing we did was the cultural night that AIESEC had organized. Actually we made 'Momos'. That was the typical Nepali thing. So actually that was quite a big hit. [S2]

International students also view NSO as a medium to connect and more importantly help out when the home country is facing difficult circumstances. The participants of this research remembered the unfortunate earthquake that shattered thousands of lives and millions worth of property during April, 2015. They emotionally remembered the pioneer role played by the NSO to gather people, fund and services to help the disaster stricken people in Nepal.

> You know the unfortunate event for us the earthquake. The thing is immediately after that we talked to campus engagement and we had a huge donation program. We started collecting tents and clothes and everything. After that campus engagement helped us put those donation boxes all around campus. And by the end we had around

$7,500 and that's what we donated to Red Cross. So it's not just culture. It's the fact that we are there for each other. [S2]

Participants expressed these events as an opportunity to build solidarity and strengthen their relationship with the home country. They reported international students' organization as a source of inspiration and motivation which allowed them to represent their culture in global context.

It's just that they being there is what motivates us, what inspire us like our culture is valued as well. I am proud of being in my culture as well and I am proud of being able to represent my culture to such an international global context as well. [A2]

Connection to Australian Culture

International students need to understand and adapt to the host culture in order to facilitate their transition process (Khawaja & Stallman, 2011). They should know about its dynamic culture, people and systems. Howells (2003) has identified the need for appropriate supporting policies and programs for international students to engage them with the newer context. The presence of various international students' organization in the university representing people from different nations and culture provides the medium for international students to associate with Australians and as such learn Australian culture. The university in coordination with these student organizations organizes various events and programs to facilitate quicker adaptation of international students. The majority of participants discussed a Meet and Greet event, an Orientation program, AIESEC week, Z (Zebra) walking, site scenery, buddy programs, airport pick up, movie shows, café crawl and festivals as programs and events that aided their acculturation process to Australia. Brown and Holloway (2008) have also underscored the importance of meet and greet events and various social gatherings organized by the university on adaptation process of international students. Their importance is also recognized by the university, which organizes a number of gatherings.

A lot of them are stereotypical Australian culture that Australia is famous for. We run a trip to Ferndale Wildlife Park where students can see kangaroos, koalas which is nice. Then we have an Australian movie or an iconic movie showing. We organize Australian Bush Dance which is held here on campus. The buddies are student's volunteers who are trained. They foster interaction and social events. They have a lot of diversity training and intercultural communication training. They help students feel

more comfortable. They have a walking tour to Manly, the Sydney sites, the city upper house and the bridge. They go to Bondi. They go to Newtown and have a café crawl. They go to the Vivid Light Festival. [E1: Representative-Equity & Diversity Unit]

The events and programs organized by the NSO aim to promote student engagement in host country socio-cultural environment which guides them towards their adjustment (Smith et al. 1999; Babacan, 2003).

We had some short trips around Sydney and explored the beauty of this place. It wouldn't have been exciting if I had done it on my own. Being in this group has made my university life exciting. I have learnt much about Australia and its culture. I have made friends with other ethnic groups. This has built confidence in me. Overall, I have learnt about the diversity in Australia. I have learnt how Australian culture is different than Nepalese culture. On top of that, I have learnt few slangs and local accent. Now I have got better ideas about places to visit in Australia, dining destinations, lovely beaches and so on. [A1]

Participants also emphasized the role of the NSO in understanding how Australians like to spend their free time.

If there is a barbeque in the courtyard they just say 'there is a barbeque there and it's free'. So you will learn about the Australian culture its barbeque. They told me surfing is the major Australian culture. You should join the surfing club. [S4]

Migrant communities play pivotal role among migrants for understanding and absorbing foreign culture (Pires et al. 2006). Similar role is played by the NSO for international students at the university. The formation of social groups and organization of social events like dances and other interaction programs are considered important for enhancing physical and psychological well being of international students as they provide an opportunity for them to interact with the broader community at the university (Lacina, 2002).

Internationalization of education has also created opportunities for students to be involved in intercultural learning and emerge as a global citizen with cross cultural knowledge and expertise (Volet & Ang, 1998). As such international students' organizations are not only the medium to showcase and celebrate home culture, they are also good platform for international students to understand and exchange other cultures represented by other

students' organization from other countries.

> So I need to get in touch with other culture. It's not about my own culture. There is English student council, there is Ukraine, there is European, there is Russian, there is Asian or other. There are so many kinds of different students groups that come together. So being part of one of those groups I can connect with everyone. I can get in touch with them. I can relive their culture, see how my culture is and then compare and experience them. [A2]

> It is actually a very good thing because you learn about so many other things except Nepal and Nepalese things. You learn about so many other cultures there. There are so many cultures around the world which we even don't know exists, here you get the knowledge of everything. [S4]

Multicultural societies are considered receptive and welcoming for people from new culture. The level of acceptance for new culture is considered critical for new entrants to socialize and adapt to the new context (Berry, 2006). Participants cited the example of earthquake appeal set up in the university by Nepalese students' organization to discuss the receptive nature of Australian community.

> Very receptive. Their reaction to our earthquake drive has been very overwhelming, very supportive and very empathetic. […]So it started off with us as a student society group but those people who followed us were our friends who were non Nepalese, some of them were Nepalese. I think they made it to go to the peak where university said we should do something on university level. [S1]

The above discussion highlights how international students' organization has provided dynamic support to international students to acculturate in a new culture. It has helped them establish co-national network of friends, cope stressors, celebrate home country culture as well as the host country culture and cross cultural learning. The next section explains the contribution of these organizations in shaping the acculturation strategy of international students.

4.3 Acculturation Strategy of International Students

As previously discussed, acculturation scholars have drawn attention to the choices individuals make regarding acculturation strategy, a choice which involves how much of each culture they want to adapt. (Burnapp, 2006; Pires, Stanton & Ostenfield, 2006). As any other migrant group, international students have to face two sets of environment during their adjustment process i.e. home country and host country environment. The confrontation with two different sets of environments demands international students to choose certain strategy to facilitate their adjustment process which exerts more pressure on them. In this case study, it is found that the NSO provides valuable impetus for international students to adapt in the Australian society. One of the participants compared the process of adaptation to the 'process of pulling threads together' and said:

> I think you just adjust to it. It's just like pulling two threads together. You hold on to the culture in here but you don't let go the other culture as well, my own culture. I think such kind of community lets us hold to our culture so that we don't forget where we come from. You definitely have to adjust here. When in Rome do as the Romans do. [A2]

According to Menzies& Baron (2014), social support plays pivotal role during adjustment process. Participants clarified the supporting role of the NSO during their adjustment process and urged students to be part of it to make their transition process easier.

> The first thing you need to do is actually be part of a group so that if you are not sure about anything you can just ask them. In the group there are experienced people who know the Australian culture. They have already lived here long so they know how things work and they can guide you. [S4]

On being asked about the preference for home and host country culture, most of the participants responded of adopting an integrative strategy where they were maintaining appropriate distance between both the cultures.

> To be honest I feel I have a hybrid kind of cultural identity because I can't say that I am fully Nepalese. I can't say I am fully Australian. I am in between. Sometimes I feel that I am more inclined into Nepalese because that is how my thought process is. Sometimes I feel like Australian because that is how I have been doing things. [S1]

Integration strategy is considered as the most preferred strategy by migrants in multicultural society (Murphy, 1965) like Australia which encourages immigration and welcomes immigrants. About 28.1% of Australia's estimated resident population were born overseas as at 30 June, 2014 (ABS, 2015).

Another participant revealed similar sort of scenario:

> Yes, it's more like adapting everything and making it your own. You take certain aspect. You don't forget where you are from. You have deep roots and that's what you have learned from your motherland. You have deep roots but then you are free to expand your branches and that's what life is for me. That's how I see it. [S2]

One of the participants emphasized on the need to balance both the cultures and said:

> Ah, well even though we are Nepalese we go to the beach, experience the Australian culture but we don't forget our culture either. At home we still speak Nepalese. We still have our cultural values. We are still maintaining both of them right in between may be. [S4]

The adoption of integration strategy requires immigrants to maintain appropriate balance and contact between their heritage culture and host culture (Berry, 2006); a point also made by Pincas (2001) international students specifically. On one hand international students are celebrating their home culture; on the other hand they are learning and enjoying elements of Australian culture like barbeque, surfing and beach. The NSO has played an intermediary link between host and home culture to facilitate easy transition of international students. The multicultural ideology of Australian society has facilitated the adoption of integration strategy.

Apart from the contribution of international students' organization in shaping acculturation strategy of international students, it is also essential to discuss how international students perceive the services provided by them in comparison to formal support services provided by the university.

4.4 Other Formal Support Services at the University

There are various formal support services available at the university for students that include orientation week, counselling services, mentor programs and buddy programs. The NSO is formally registered within the organization and provides valuable support to students.

Participants of the research distinguished between other support programs and the NSO and their faith towards it. S2 revealed her preference for the NSO and emphasized ease and convenience towards social network and resources possessed by it as a key factor that distinguishes it from university led support programs. The NSO fills the gap that university led programs do not provide as international students can freely enquire about their queries, even dumb ones, without fear with their fellow co-nationals in their native language. They can also provide valuable guidelines regarding academic and day to day life issues like referencing, plagiarism, accommodation and work which mean a lot during their transition phase.

> So it's not mentor program because university runs mentor programs but it's just asking your seniors or who has been there about how did they do it, their notes and everything. You can't exactly provide any monetary or any financial benefits they want but the voluntary help that you can provide makes it easier for someone else who could do better things than you. [S2]

Another participant highlighted that formal support services provided by the university are lacking sometimes as they are often not culturally sensitive.

> Yes, of course I guess because even though our university provides lots of counselling services but they may not understand where we are coming from because of the culture. We think in different way. [A2]

The other contestant clarified the nature of other formal support programs and its purpose and said:

> So I found out that there were sign language classes and buddy programs. So I joined the buddy programs. It was more for international students and focused on them. It was more like airport pick up. You take them to places like manly or zoos so that they could get accustomed to it but it was mainly about taking students to new lookouts or places like Sydney harbour or harbor cruise. [S2]

Participants favoured the NSO as a strong support mechanism at the university as opposed to other formal support programs based on ease, convenience and access to the resources posed by the organization. The findings are consistent with existing scholarship which also criticizes the formal support programs like orientation programs on being formal, centred and overly structured on academic issues (Guilfoyle, 2004; Borland & Pearce, 2002) despite providing valuable guidance to international students regarding the new academic and socio-cultural environment (Ward & Masgoret, 2004). The counselling programs are also criticized for being less popular among international students owing to unawareness about the existence of services and lack of trust regarding the expertise and cultural awareness of counsellors (Sawir et al. 2008).

CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This chapter presents the major findings of the study, outlines the practical implications of the findings, recommends the areas for future research and clarifies the limitations of the study with concluding remarks at the end.

5.1 Major Findings

The evidence presented in this research highlights the role of international students' organizations in universities as a strong social support mechanism facilitating the transition of international students in their host country. This research also emphasizes the stressors faced by international students and the supporting role provided to them by international students' organizations to deal with those stressors for their better adaptation. Moreover it also presents these organizations as a medium for international students to connect between home and host culture and enhance multicultural understanding. This research also provides indication on unpopularity of university led support programs like counselling and orientation among international students and recognizes their increased preference for international students' organization.

This research contributes to existing literature by recognizing international students' organization as a strong social support mechanism for international students. It also highlights the role played by these organizations in formation of co-national friends' network among international students thereby helping them to adjust in Australian culture. International students' organization has emerged as important social support for international students apart from the network of co-national friends (Ward et al. 2001; Brown, 2009), families (Williams, 2007), students community (Montgomery & McDowell, 2009), and formal support programs like counselling and orientation (Galloway & Jenkins, 2005).

While each of those has its merit, student organizations like the NSO, can act as an alternative for individuals who do not have a family in the host country. Furthermore, these societies provide much needed practical help that is often neglected by formal university programs as well as offer the platform through which individuals can meet and make co-national friends. They can act as a backbone for international students for easing their transition phase by helping them to address various stressors like cultural shock, language, friendships, loneliness, homesickness, academic problems, accommodation and finance through it social network. Further they help international students to obtain various advisory,

informational and emotional support from co-national friends which aids their adjustment process. In addition these organizations can alleviate students' feelings of homesickness by organizing festivals and events that celebrate students' national cultures. Finally, international students' organizations create a plethora of opportunities for international students to mingle with other nationalities, thus creating a more tightly-knit community.

This study has shown that an international students' organization can act as a medium to connect to home and host culture. The events and programs organized by these organizations can help international students to celebrate and relive their home culture in various ways such as celebration of home country festivals and events in a foreign country among co-national friends and also extend supporting hands in case of occurrence of misfortune events like earthquake in Nepal. It ensures a platform for them to express themselves in their mother tongue and helps them understand the Australian culture which is crucial to facilitate adjustment process. Participants showed their preference for integration strategy and showed their hybrid preference in maintaining both home and host culture. They recognized acculturation to new culture as an individual process requiring individual dedication and effort which is also confirmed in existing literature (Graves, 1967; Berry, 2006). Participants emphasized international students' organization as a medium to foster global cultural exchange and learning which helps them to develop as a global citizen. Earlier research has recognized studying in international universities as a medium to foster intercultural learning (Volet & Ang, 1998; Leask, 2009), but has not specifically mentioned the role of international students' organization in boosting such environment and learning.

5.2 Practical Implications and Recommendations

The implications for this research are important for universities. First, it points to the need to continue to fund and support such organization. As Australian Higher Education Institutions rely more and more on international students for income, it is pertinent that decision-makers provide support to these students in any way possible. Societies, like the NSO, are a cost effective yet, highly efficient way for universities to take care of an important stakeholders group.

Second, this research supports findings regarding the need to focus on social network of international students. While trips to the zoo and the beach are enjoyable cultural activities, they do not address more critical needs of international students like plagiarism, referencing, academic writing and researching materials for assignments. The NSO in this case study

proved critical to that end, not only because students could consult with peers with no fear of judgement, but also because university counsellors lack a certain cultural sensitivity. As such, it would be of benefit to Australian universities to train counsellors on how to approach students from different ethnicities. Alternatively, counsellors can trial their programs on students though these societies to gain feedback on cultural appropriateness.

Third, universities can redirect international students towards international students' organizations like the NSO through their orientation programs which are organized at the beginning of the semester. This can aware new student about the presence of these organization at the university where they can enjoy the company and guidance of co-national friends in every possible way. These two support mechanisms can generate synergy impact if they co-ordinate their activities together and help to make transition of international students easier, faster and better.

Fourth, the presence of diverse students' organizations at the university can facilitate cross cultural learning and creation of multi-cultural workforce which is very important for international students in today's world of global competition. In addition, the events and programs organized by these students' organizations are largely limited within a university and organized on a fixed schedule, as such universities can co-ordinate and pool their resources together to create a bigger platform for these organizations to facilitate and promote cross-cultural learning. This can also help to create a continuous series of events and programs for international students throughout the year where they can participate, learn host country culture, showcase their own culture and broaden their social network, thereby easing their transition process.

5.3 Limitations

This research has a number of limitations. First it is a single case, which significantly limits generalization. However, under the logic of replication, this limitation can be used as avenue for further research in the sense that different international student organizations can be examined, Second while the number of interview is indeed limited i.e. only 8 interviews were undertaken, the themes that have come across were quiet consistent, thus allowing to answer the research question. Third, the study was cross sectional in nature, as a result of which it may not have captured the acculturation experience of international students during different stages of their foreign transition which might be a subject of interest in future research. Despite the limitations, the research contributed to literature by recognizing international

students' organization as one of the important social support mechanism for international students in universities.

5.4 Directions for Future Research

This research opens new avenues for researchers to study dynamic role of international students' organization in universities. It can be made broader, integrative and representative by including more samples from diverse students' organizations across various universities. Moreover, conducting longitudinal study can provide better insights into the contribution of international students' organization on acculturation experience of international students in different transitional stages. Separate study could be conducted regarding the contribution of other support programs available at the university which will facilitate cross comparison among available support services and help to enhance existing services.

5.5 Conclusion

To conclude, this particular research has recognized the role of formal international students' organization as a medium of social support for international students. It has drawn attention to the dynamic support provided by these organizations to international students and helped recognize international students' organization as important mechanism of social support in literature. Further, this research has also highlighted the preference of international students towards these organizations as compared to university led support programs based on the advisory, informational, emotional and cultural support provided to them which proved helpful in their transitional phase. The findings could provoke future research among researchers who are concerned with the acculturation experience of international students.

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APPENDIX 1: Ethical Approval

Approved - 5201500594

Mrs Yanru Ouyang   Wed, Aug 26, 2015 at 2:13
<yanru.ouyang@mq.edu.au>   PM
To: Dr Ekaterina Todarello <ekaterina.todarello@mq.edu.au>
Cc: Mr Santosh Sharma <santosh.sharma@students.mq.edu.au>

Dear Dr Todarello,

Re: 'From Stress to success: Exploring the Role of University Ethnic
Groups in International Students' Acculturation.'

Reference No.: 5201500594

Thank you for your recent correspondence. Your response has addressed
the
issues raised by the Faculty of Business & Economics Human Research
Ethics
Sub Committee. Approval of the above application is granted, effective
"26/08/2015". This email constitutes ethical approval only.

This research meets the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical
Conduct in Human Research (2007). The National Statement is available at
the following web site:

http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/_files_nhmrc/publications/attachments/e72.pdf.

The following personnel are authorised to conduct this research:

Dr Ekaterina Todarello
Mr Santosh Sharma

NB. STUDENTS: IT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO KEEP A COPY OF THIS APPROVAL
EMAIL TO SUBMIT WITH YOUR THESIS.

Please note the following standard requirements of approval:

1.   The approval of this project is conditional upon your continuing compliance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research
(2007).

2.   Approval will be for a period of five (5) years subject to the provision of annual reports.

Progress Report 1 Due: 26th Aug 2016
Progress Report 2 Due: 26th Aug 2017
Progress Report 3 Due: 26th Aug 2018
Progress Report 4 Due: 26th Aug 2019
Final Report Due: 26th Aug 2020

NB. If you complete the work earlier than you had planned you must submit
a Final Report as soon as the work is completed. If the project has been discontinued or not commenced for any reason, you are also required to submit a Final Report for the project.

Progress reports and Final Reports are available at the following website:

http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_

ethics_approval/
human_research_ethics/forms

3.   If the project has run for more than five (5) years you cannot renew
approval for the project. You will need to complete and submit a Final
Report and submit a new application for the project. (The five year limit
on renewal of approvals allows the Committee to fully re-review research in
an environment where legislation, guidelines and requirements are
continually changing, for example, new child protection and privacy laws).

4.   All amendments to the project must be reviewed and approved by
the
Committee before implementation. Please complete and submit a Request
for
Amendment Form available at the following website:

http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_
ethics_approval/
human_research_ethics/forms

5.   Please notify the Committee immediately in the event of any
adverse
effects on participants or of any unforeseen events that affect the
continued ethical acceptability of the project.

6.   At all times you are responsible for the ethical conduct of your
research in accordance with the guidelines established by the University.

APPENDIX 2: Participant Information and Consent Form

Department of Marketing & Management

Faculty of Business & Economics

MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY   NSW 2109

Phone: +61 (0)298504756

Fax: +61 (0)298506150

Email:

Chief Investigator's / Supervisor's Name & Title: **Dr. Senia Kalfa**

Participant Information and Consent Form

Name of the Project: Role of International Students' Organization in the Acculturation of International Students

You are invited to participate in a study of the role of international students' organization in international students' acculturation. For the current study, the international student groups representing different nationality and ethnicity which are formally established within the university and help international students to celebrate their home culture will be referred as international students' organization. This research particularly seeks to understand the diverse role of international students' organization in bringing associated changes and shaping adjustment of international students in a foreign country. This might also help to understand the acculturation strategy of international students when they come across the situation where they have to adjust their preference for maintenance of heritage culture against the culture of host land.

The study is being conducted by Mr. Santosh Sharma (santosh.sharma@students.mq.edu.au) at Macquarie University, Sydney, to meet the requirements of a Masters by Research degree under the supervision of Dr. Senia Kalfa (61-2) 9850 8458 (senia.kalfa@mq.edu.au), of the Department of Marketing and Management. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to be interviewed by the researcher Mr. Santosh Sharma. With your permission the interview will be recorded through the use of a digital recorder to enable an accurate record of the interview. A face-to-face interview will be undertaken at a mutually agreed location. The interview should take approximately 30-45 minutes.

All responses are completely anonymous, and any information or personal details gathered in the course of the study are confidential. No individual will be identified in any publication of the results. Access to the data will be restricted to the researcher Mr. Santosh Sharma, who is undertaking the study. The transcripts of the interview will be emailed to you for verification/amendment and you will have the opportunity to review the audio file and transcript. If you do not agree to the recording of the interview then handwritten notes will be taken by the interviewer and you will have opportunity to review those notes.

Participation in this interview is entirely voluntary: you are not obliged to participate and you are free to terminate participation without having to give a reason and without consequence. However, you cannot be guaranteed the right to withdraw 'at any time' because the data, once submitted, cannot be identified with specific individuals.

I, …………………………………………………………………… have read and understand the information above and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research, knowing that I can withdraw from further participation in the research at any time without consequence. I have been given a copy of this form to keep.

Participant's Name:

……………………………………………………………………………………………

(Block letters)

Participant's Signature: ………………………   Date:

………………………………………

Investigator's Name:

……………………………………………………………………………………..

(Block letters)

Investigator's Signature: …………………………………………Date: ………………..

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Committee through the Director, Research Ethics (telephone (02) 9850 7854; email ethics@mq.edu.au). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

(INVESTIGATOR'S [OR PARTICIPANT'S] COPY)

APPENDIX 3: Interview Questions

<u>**Semi- Structured Interview Guide**</u>

International Students	
Q.N.1	Why did you join the Nepalese students' organization in the university?
Q.N.2	How do you connect to your home culture through participation in this organization?
Q.N.3	How do you connect to host culture through participation in this organization?
Q.N.4	In which way participation in this group has helped you?

Nepalese Students' Organization (NSO)	
Q.N.1	How do NSO support international students?
Q.N.2	What sorts of problems are faced by international students in Australia?
Q.N.3	Are there any stories/incidents that you can share in regard to the impact of NSO on international students?
Q.N.4	How is NSO supported by the university in pursuing their objectives?

Equity & Diversity Unit	
Q.N.1	From the point of view of Equity and Diversity unit of the university, why international students' organizations are important?
Q.N.2	How do international students' organizations help international students?
Q.N.3	What sorts of programs do Equity and Diversity unit prioritize regarding international students?
Q.N.4	What sort of support does Equity and Diversity unit provide to international students' organizations?