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Journey into Higher Education: A Study of Postgraduate Indian Students' Experiences, as They Make the Journey to a New Teaching and Learning Environment in the UK

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Title: Journey into Higher Education: A Study of Postgraduate Indian Students' Experiences, as They Make the Journey to a New Teaching and Learning Environment in the UK

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Abstract:

In recent years the number of postgraduate students from India studying in the United Kingdom (UK) has significantly increased, bringing substantial economic benefits to the higher education sector and the wider economy. In particular, Indian students studying on postgraduate programmes in the UK form the largest group of postgraduate students (58%), which is forecast to grow annually, by 3.1%, until 2024 (British Council, 2014; HESA, 2018). However, increasing international competition along with evolving government restrictions on student immigration and the decision to leave the European Union (EU), has put the sector in a very vulnerable position. Currently, there are various groups of international students who have come from different academic backgrounds and encountered various challenges moving to an unfamiliar Teaching and Learning Environment (TLE). Hence it is crucial that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) understand from a student perspective, the issues and challenges that students experience, so that they can design and implement appropriate support strategies that facilitate the needs of different cohorts of students.

The search for specific studies carried out on Indian postgraduate students' educational experience into (HEIs) in the UK has generated few results. Indeed much of the research that currently exists about international students' educational experience has centred on specific aspects of transition such as: widening participation, social and academic integration, retention, and the social and academic institutional systems that support students Harvey, Drew and Smith, 2006; Johnson, 2010; Roberts, 2003; Trotter and Roberts, 2006; Yorke and Longden, 2008). However, this study makes an attempt to move the discussion forward by viewing transition as an educational process rather than as an outcome. By viewing transition as an educational process, it allows the researcher to capture student's experiences as they make their journey from one (TLE) to another. This DBA study focusses on capturing the educational experiences of a group of Indian students who have chosen to study on various postgraduate degree programmes within a Business School at a Scottish university. The study follows the students' educational journey, as they move from their previous (TLE) to a new (TLE) in the UK. Using a purely qualitative approach to gather data, the research captures students' experiences as they journey into a new (TLE) in the UK, thus allowing the researcher to obtain a deep understanding of the issues and challenges through the voices of students.

Research data was gathered using two sets of unstructured interviews, which were conducted at two critical points in the students' journey. There were six students interviewed at two different stages and each interview lasted between one to one and half hours. Subsequently, the data was analysed using thematic analysis which identified six specific themes that were presented and discussed. The findings revealed the issues and challenges that Indian postgraduate students experienced when they made the educational journey from their home (TLE) to a new (TLE) in the UK. The findings also reveal that the support strategies implemented by the host institution were not effective in helping students to successfully adapt

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to their new (TLE). The study makes a contribution to knowledge in two ways. Firstly it moves the discussion forward by allowing the researcher to study transition from a different perspective. For example, this study views transition as an educational process that captures student's experiences, therefore it explores experiences rather than simply capturing the outcome of an educational journey. Secondly the study contributes to knowledge by providing Indian students with a voice to share their experience in the context of a postgraduate programme. Recommendations from the study are presented and based on the needs of Indian students, with some ideas being unique because they were suggested by the students themselves. These can be used to inform the host (HEI), the teachers who teach these students, as well as the wider academic community.
