

## ARTICLE

# The Journey and Experience of International Students: an Insight From a UK University

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### ABSTRACT

International students contribute circa 25.8 billion in gross output for the UK economy (Universities UK, 2017) [67]. The new UK government Strategy in March (2019) is to cement Britain's leading role in the global market by increasing the number of international students studying in the UK by more than 30% – helping boost the income generated by education exports to £35 billion (UK Government, 2019). Therefore, the main aim of this research is to explore the experience of international students during their journey at one of UK Higher Education institutions. Previous studies covered one or two factors that affect the international students to study abroad such as costs, language, culture, etc.,. However, our study suggested six themes to cover the whole journey of the international students. The themes are: selection and admission; pre-arrival; induction; orientation and settlement, engagement; and teaching and learning. Our study offers some recommendations for each theme and for the university level.

## 1. Introduction

International students in the UK generate invaluable economic, societal and cultural benefits (Foster, 2014) [28]. The United Kingdom is currently the second most popular destination for international students after the United States (Higher Education Academy, 2017) [35]. In 2017/18 the 466,715 international students (EU and non-EU) made up around 20% of all students registered at UK universities (HESA, 2019) [36]. On-and off-campus spending by international students and their visitors generated £25.8 billion in gross output for the UK economy (Universities UK, 2017) [67]. The recent published statistics showed that the percentage of UK domiciled students that are White has decreased over the last five years, as the

percentage that are Black, Asian, Mixed and from other ethnic backgrounds has increased (HESA, 2019) [36]. Additionally, the UK Education Secretary and International Trade Secretary have published a brand new International Education Strategy in March (2019) to cement Britain's leading role in the global market. This new ambition strategy is to increase the number of international students studying in the UK by more than 30% – helping boost the income generated by education exports to £35 billion (UK Government, 2019).

Based on the above discussion, it is very clear that international students are making a significant contribution to the UK higher education sector by broadening the perspectives and enhancing the experience of home students and academic staff (Bartram, 2008 [4]; Charles-Toussaint

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and Crowson, 2010<sup>[11]</sup>; Wang, 2012<sup>[64]</sup>, Foster, 2013<sup>[29]</sup>, 2014<sup>[28]</sup>). UK home students believe that studying alongside international peers gives them a better world view; prepares them for working in a global environment and makes them more aware of cultural sensitivities (Higher Education Academy, 2017)<sup>[35]</sup>. On the other hand, for the international students, the benefits of studying abroad are remarkable. Studies have reported that the opportunities for international students to mix with a wide range of nationalities (Brown and Holloway, 2008<sup>[6]</sup>, Foster, 2014)<sup>[28]</sup> increases their level of independency, confidence and competence in learning (Ippolito, 2007<sup>[40]</sup>, Kelly, 2010<sup>[42]</sup>, Warring, 2010<sup>[65]</sup>, Foster, 2014)<sup>[28]</sup>, and develops their professional and personal skills, improving their career perspectives (Campbell, 2010<sup>[8]</sup>, Kelly, 2010<sup>[42]</sup>, Foster, 2013<sup>[29]</sup>). Through all of this, international students become globally employable and, in some cases, on returning home become leaders in their chosen field, often in positions of influence (Gribble, 2008<sup>[33]</sup>, Kelly, 2010<sup>[42]</sup>, Luxon and Peelo, 2009<sup>[40]</sup>, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2008<sup>[54]</sup>, Pietro and Page, 2008<sup>[57]</sup>, HEA, 2017<sup>[35]</sup>).

To ensure that UK universities attract more international students to contribute to UK higher education institutions and to the economy, it is very important to ensure that international students have an excellent experience. We reviewed the stream of previous studies on the experience of international students and we realized that some of prior studies focused on one or more elements. (1) benefits to international students (Campbell, 2010<sup>[8]</sup>, Kettle, 2011<sup>[42]</sup>); (2) benefits to academics (Wang, 2013<sup>[64]</sup>, Lee and Rice, 2007<sup>[44]</sup>); (3) benefits to the host institutions (Andrade, 2006<sup>[3]</sup>, Higher Education Academy, 2017<sup>[35]</sup>); (4) other factors affecting the transition such as costs, language and homesickness (Foster, 2014<sup>[29]</sup>); (5) internationalisation of curriculum (Foster and Carver, 2018<sup>[27]</sup>). However, to the best of our knowledge there are few studies, if any have dealt with the whole journey of the international students. Therefore, the aim of this research is to explore the experience of international students during their journey at a UK university. We classified this journey into themes to investigate the reasons why the international students select a UK university; why they selected specific courses; their reflection on the selected university in terms of admission, pre-arrival communication, induction, orientation and settlement, engagement and the study will also touch upon teaching and learning.

The paper is structured as follows: the theoretical framework is discussed in section two. Section three covers the literature review on international students and their journey. Section four illustrates the research methods.

Section five presents the results and discussion with the last section providing a summary and the conclusions.

## 2. Theoretical Framework: a ‘Push-Pull’ Model of International Education Flows

The global pattern of international student flows may be explained by a combination of ‘push and pull’ factors that encourage students to study overseas (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002<sup>[49]</sup>, Foster, 2014<sup>[28]</sup>, Darby, 2015<sup>[15]</sup>). ‘Push’ factors operate within the home country and initiate the decision to study abroad due to number of factors. The unavailability of certain programmes (Healey, 2008<sup>[37]</sup>); the difficulty to get into some programmes due to the limited seats available (Findlay et al., 2011<sup>[25]</sup>); the grades may prevent students from continuing in higher education (Bohman, 2009<sup>[7]</sup>); employers preferences for overseas graduates (Foster, 2014<sup>[28]</sup>) and the insufficient higher education institutions in the home country to accommodate the increase in populations (Robert, 2012<sup>[59]</sup>). ‘Pull’ factors, on the other hand, operate within a host country to make that country relatively attractive to international students. Many factors influence the demand for international education. Pull factors in the host country include the quality of education, reputation of the country/institution, improved employment prospects and the opportunity to experience a different culture (Wilkins et al., 2012)<sup>[66]</sup>.

The decision to select a final study destination appears to involve at least three distinct stages (Mazzarol 1998)<sup>[50]</sup>. In stage one, the push factors play an important role in which the student must decide whether to study internationally rather than locally. In the second stage, pull factors become important, making one host country relatively more attractive than another. In stage three, the student selects an institution. A variety of additional pull factors make one institution more attractive than its competitors: institution’s reputation for quality, teaching programmes, staff expertise, degree of innovation, use of information technology, resources (Foster, 2014<sup>[28]</sup>, Darby, 2015<sup>[15]</sup>).

Our study focuses on the “Push-Pull” model when exploring the experience of international students who came to study in UK. The current study covers the whole journey of the international students who want to study abroad. This journey can be categorized into different themes: selection and admission; pre-arrival; induction; orientation and settlement, engagement; and teaching and learning. Many sources review international students’ experiences from a negative perspective, this article highlights both the positive and negative experiences of the international student and provides some recommendations in which the student, academia and universities can en-

gage with one another to provide a positive experience for all concerned. The following section will cover these themes individually.

### 3. The International Students Experience and Journey: Prior Studies

#### 3.1 University Selection and Admission

Whether international students want to study for an undergraduate or for a post-graduate degree, there are many factors likely influence their final decision. Prior studies discussed various reasons to explain why international students choose to study in the UK and how they select the university they want to study in. The suggested reasons are: to improve English (Goldbart et al., 2005<sup>[31]</sup>; Kettle, 2011<sup>[42]</sup>; OECD, 2008<sup>[54]</sup>; Pietro and Page, 2008<sup>[57]</sup>); to enhance career prospects (Teichler, 2004<sup>[63]</sup>); and to gain cultural experience (Goldbart et al., 2005<sup>[31]</sup>; Kelly, 2010<sup>[41]</sup>; Kettle, 2011<sup>[42]</sup>; OECD, 2008<sup>[54]</sup>; Foster, 2014<sup>[28]</sup>). For university selection, prior studies found that the reputation of the institution (Gray et al., 2003<sup>[32]</sup>; Maringe and Carter, 2007<sup>[48]</sup>; Pietro and Page, 2008<sup>[57]</sup>; Zhang and Hagedorn, 2011)<sup>[71]</sup>; the potential to enhance career prospects (Kelly, 2010<sup>[41]</sup>; Teichler, 2004<sup>[63]</sup>); and the most commonly factor was the cost (Doyle et al., 2010<sup>[16]</sup>; Foster, 2014<sup>[28]</sup>) for university selection. In addition to the above, we posit that there other factors that affect the university selection decision (see table 1: Selection and admission).

#### 3.2 Pre-arrival

Once international students have made the decision and completed all the paperwork to come to the UK, they report mixed emotions of excitement and anxiety (Amaechi et al., 2013<sup>[2]</sup>). Bartram (2008)<sup>[4]</sup> found that, at this stage, contact with peers prior to leaving their country can help to relieve anxiety and provide practical information in relation to food, finances and accommodation. Gray et al. (2003)<sup>[32]</sup> reported that an in-country representative or someone in the country, such as a previous international student who could talk about the course, helped to reduce the stress. Nambiar et al. (2012)<sup>[53]</sup> also noted the importance of international students understanding the literacy practices of the host country. In addition to the above, we think that there other factors that might be included in the Pre-arrival stage (see table 1: Pre-arrival).

#### 3.3 Induction

Induction programmes are used by higher education institutions to reduce the number of students that drop-out

of university and to increase pass rates enhancing their overall performance (Rachel and Sami, 2016<sup>[50]</sup>; Chan, 2017<sup>[12]</sup>). For newly-arrived international students, almost everything they encounter is new and unfamiliar. For domestic students, the transition from high school to the university can be challenging, unfamiliar and exciting. For international students it is all that and more; the culture, the environment, the climate, and usually the language can elicit strong emotions. Most universities recognise this and offer a variety of support services, the most common of which is new student induction (Evans and Morrison, 2010<sup>[22]</sup>). The better these induction programmes, the more likely that students will choose to remain on their courses until graduation and have the knowledge, skills, attitudes and support to undertake their studies successfully (Higher Education Academy, 2014<sup>[34]</sup>). Rachel and Sami, 2016<sup>[50]</sup> reinforce the importance of induction programmes for international students. It provides a high calibre learning background for them. In addition to the above, we believe that there other factors that might be included in induction programme (see table 1: induction).

#### 3.4 Orientation and Settlement

Brown and Holloway (2008)<sup>[6]</sup> note that moving to a new environment is often one of the most stressful events for international students. Therefore, the host institution should help international students to reduce their stress levels. Zhou and Todman (2009)<sup>[72]</sup> suggest that the primary emphasis should be on meeting the student's needs to reduce feelings of isolation on arrival. Brown and Holloway (2008)<sup>[6]</sup> recommend the presence of a representative from the university's international office at the airport. Concerns about new food are a key feature during this period of adjustment for the students and can increase feelings of homesickness (Edwards et al., 2010<sup>[19]</sup>; Hwang et al., 2011<sup>[39]</sup>). Additionally, providing some information on local shopping facilities for essential food and clothing is an important aspect for the student when they first arrive (Owens and Loomes, 2010<sup>[55]</sup>). Andrade (2006)<sup>[3]</sup> emphasises that students cannot be expected to adjust to a new country and educational system without appropriate support. Other scholars (Pherali, 2012<sup>[56]</sup>; Eseonu et al., 2011<sup>[20]</sup>) suggest the idea of a non-international buddy system to assist the international student to settle in. Early access to the internet helps the student contact with family, friends and peers (Bartram, 2008<sup>[4]</sup>; Lee et al., 2011<sup>[43]</sup>).

'Culture shock' is an issue highlighted by many authors and is described by Brown and Holloway (2008)<sup>[6]</sup> as anxiety from losing familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse which, according to Sobre-Denton and Hart (2008)<sup>[62]</sup>, is difficult to assess. It is a period of mourning

for one's own cultural context which is also related to the concept of 'homesickness' described by Foster, (2014)<sup>[28]</sup>. The homesickness is often related to linguistic, social and cultural adaptation, pointing out that, once they had adjusted, students reported the adaptation as a positive experience and found that they then adapted more quickly to new situations. In addition to the above we think that there are other factors that might be included in orientation and settlement (see Table 1: Orientation and Settlement).

### 3.5 Engagement

According to Stephen (2009)<sup>[61]</sup>, there are three different categories of meta-practices for international students to be involved in the pedagogical activities. These are: (1) student curriculum design, (2) students lead their peers, and (3) students assess their peers. When students are a part of the decision making process, they feel encouraged and motivated. Therefore, universities should make sure that they involve international students in order to encourage them and make them feel like they are an important part of the university. Especially as they are not in their domestic country and they want to be involved and have a say at the university. (1) For student curriculum design; international students should be involved to plan for future courses and take a dynamic role. This is a type of community-oriented learning and power sharing (Li et al., 2014<sup>[45]</sup>; Foster and Craven, 2018<sup>[27]</sup>). (2) Students lead their peers; either formally or informally. International students can be partially participated as observers in the first few weeks until they learn how to lead their peers and then they can take the lead (Sawang et al., 2017<sup>[45]</sup>). (3) Students assess their peers; this activity is very important and involving international students in assessment to make them see, understand and evaluate their own assessments (Nagro et al., 2016<sup>[52]</sup>). When international students are part of the decision making process, they feel encouraged and motivated. Therefore, universities should make sure that they engage international students in order to encourage and make them feel like they are a part of the university (Li et al., 2014<sup>[45]</sup>). In addition to the above, we suggest that there other factors that might be included in the engagement (see table 1: engagement).

### 3.6 Teaching and Learning

It has been suggested that many international students do not achieve their desired results due to a lack of understanding concerning what educators expect of them (Li et al., 2014<sup>[45]</sup>). According to Challis, (2011)<sup>[9]</sup> overseas students face a hard time while deciding to study abroad as they are moving to a completely different system; in-

cluding assessment criteria, learning facilities, learning and teaching methods, language and many other considerations. In the UK, they must learn about plagiarism and referencing; in Africa there is no turn-tin to check students' plagiarism and there are no libraries or even if there are libraries, they do not have enough resources. The learning experience is important not only for the student but also for those involved in the facilitation and teaching processes. The international students contribute to the diversity of the student population and in doing so they add an international dimension during classroom discussion by recognizing the influence of different culture on their values (Charles- Toussaint and Crowson, 2010<sup>[11]</sup>; Lee and Rice, 2007<sup>[44]</sup>; Wang, 2012<sup>[64]</sup>). Like the international students, UK domestic students can benefit from mixed cultural experiences that they might be less likely to gain from an all UK student group, and this may help prepare domestic students for future encounters with diversity (Andrade, 2006<sup>[3]</sup>). Chalungsoth and Schneller (2011)<sup>[10]</sup> argue that international students may find that they need to develop different learning strategies and study patterns from those used in their own countries. Many authors identify that some of the stress faced by international students are in relation to what Huang (2012)<sup>[38]</sup> calls 'learner shock'. Yeh and Inose (2003)<sup>[70]</sup> state that academic writing, and how language is used, can cause some difficulty and frustration. Wherever possible, diversity of ethnicity should be represented in teaching staff (Bartram, 2008<sup>[4]</sup>). Recent research in internationalisation, focused on how students can benefit from cultural diversity through mobility, and how this can raise their awareness of their own and other cultures of learning (Foster, 2017<sup>[27]</sup>), other studies focused on the internationalisation of the of the Curriculum (IoC) in universities. As programmes mature, internationalisation can have different meanings such as integrating international students, recruiting a suitable mix of students, challenging assumptions, or positioning curriculum content in an international context (Foster and Carver, 2018<sup>[27]</sup>). In addition to the above, we propose other factors that might be included in teaching and learning aspect (see table 1: Teaching and Learning)

Based on the review of the prior studies, our study is trying to cover the whole journey of the international students. We have classified this journey into 6 themes. The themes are: University selection and admission; pre-arrival, induction, orientation and settlement, engagement in the academic environment and teaching and learning.

## 4. Research Methods

An international student is defined as a student who is enrolled in a UK higher education institution undertaking an

undergraduate or postgraduate course and is neither a UK citizen, nor refugee, nor immigrant (Al-Quhen, 2012 [2]). To achieve the aim of this research, exploring the international student experience, a questionnaire was developed based on ‘Push-Pull’ model that has been used by previous studies on the experience of international students and based on consultation from current international students. The questionnaire has 7 sections in total and each question has different sub questions or items. Section 1 contained demographic questions on gender, age origin and academic qualifications of students who participated in the survey. Section 2 focused on selection and admission criteria used by international students when choosing a university. Section 3 was on the pre-arrival expectations of the international students before arriving at the university. Section 4 was on induction activities and programmes. Section 5 was on orientation and settlement. Section 6 was on engagement and section 7 was on the teaching and learning

experience in shaping some courses at. We used a scale that ranges from 1-7 in all questions, except the demographic questions. The scale is: strongly agree = 7; agree = 6; somewhat agree = 5; neither agree or disagree = 4; somewhat disagree = 3; disagree = 2; strongly disagree = 1.

The questionnaire was uploaded on “Qualtrics” in August/September 2017. Qualtrics is software that enables users to collect and analyse data online for different purposes including market research, customer satisfaction and loyalty, product and concept testing, employee evaluations and website feedback. The link to the questionnaire was posted on the university Facebook and Twitter to reach as many international students as possible. A total of 109 responses were received although only 102 responses were deemed valid. The valid results were descriptive statistics on each of the themes as this is an explanatory study and were ranked according to a structure of each item in each theme as depicted in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Survey Results

(1) Selection and admission survey results	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
The course is attracting	34.9%	23.9%	11%	6.4%	8.3%	6.4%	1.8%
Estimated cost of living, including accommodation	13.8%	25.7%	26.6%	10.1%	5.5%	5.5%	5.5%
The location of the university	22.9%	22.9%	14.7%	10.1%	9.2%	6.4%	6.4%
Affordable tuition fee	17.4%	26.6%	15.6%	8.3%	5.5%	7.3%	11.9%
Reputation of the university	15.6%	22.9%	16.5%	19.3%	6.4%	7.3%	4.6%
The fact that it is far from home	13.8%	23.9%	18.3%	11.9%	7.3%	7.3%	10.1%
Followed friends (word of mouth)	16.5%	24.8%	10.1%	11%	6.4%	11%	12.8%
Details of any scholarships and other financial assistance schemes	14.7%	23.9%	22.9%	7.3%	7.3%	8.3%	8.3%
Detailed programmes of study (course)	9.2%	24.8%	18.3%	8.3%	11.9%	3.7%	6.4%
Easy to fulfil entry requirements	15.6%	22.9%	19.3%	1.8%	7.3%	6.4%	9.2%
Easy visa requirements and procedures	18.3%	16.5%	17.4%	8.3%	3.7%	11%	7.3%
Referring students to the websites of the UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA) and the UK	11.9%	22.9%	12.8%	16.5%	4.6%	5.5%	8.3%
Application deadlines and processes, including any application fees	10.1%	22.9%	17.4%	7.3%	12.8%	4.6%	7.3%
Admissions processes, including any variation for international students and processes for entry at different points in the academic year	16.5%	15.6%	19.3%	16.5%	4.6%	4.6%	5.5%
Once completed the application online, the university contacts you immediately	12.8%	17.4%	18.3%	12.8%	6.4%	8.3%	6.4%
Communication was great	10.1%	22%	11.9%	7.3%	12.8%	8.3%	10.1%
Once accepted the offer, the university kept communicate with me on a continuous basis	12.8%	20.2%	20.2%	10.1%	11%	0.9%	7.3%
(1) Pre-arrival survey results							
Deadlines for payment of fees and information about how to make payments	17.4%	16.5%	12.8%	12.8%	9.2%	10.1%	10.1%
Details of welfare entitlements, including healthcare and childcare options	14.7%	17.4%	9.2%	9.2%	9.2%	12.8%	16.5%

Details of the registration and enrolment process and the documents that entrants will need	11%	12.8%	12.8%	14.7%	8.3%	13.8%	15.6%
What to expect, upon arrival, from immigration control, including what documents are needed, and when and where students will need them	7.3%	11.9%	15.6%	11.9%	11.9%	14.7%	15.6%
Advice on how to arrive safely at the accommodation, and any 'meet and greet' services made available by UWS	7.3%	13.8%	15.6%	8.3%	8.3%	15.6%	20.2%
Advice on where students need to go and what they need to do immediately on arrival at UWS, including information about late arrivals for those arriving during the evening/night	11%	8.3%	9.2%	8.3%	9.2%	17.4%	16.5%
Details of arrangements for Police registration and emergency and out-of-hours contact details (999)	6.4%	5.5%	7.3%	12.8%	8.3%	23.9%	15.6%
Details of how students can contact home upon arrival to confirm that they have arrived safely, including details about pre-enrolment access to email or Wi-Fi/internet	5.5%	11%	8.3%	8.3%	7.3%	24.8%	14.7%
<b>Induction survey results</b>							
Assessment methods and criteria for assessment	19.3%	15.6%	13.8%	14.7%	4.6%	8.3%	11.9%
What type of feedback on assessment is given and how to use it	13.8%	20.2%	16.5%	11%	4.6%	7.3%	14.7%
Helps the new students to meet each other before starting their course	6.4%	11.9%	17.4%	16.5%	10.1%	11.9%	13.8%
Learning facilities, including library resources, laboratories, and virtual learning environments	6.4%	14.7%	15.6%	17.4%	11%	9.2%	13.8%
Academic support including, where appropriate, the use of tutors and tutorials, the role of research supervisors and that of academic advisers	11.9%	19.3%	14.7%	12.8%	8.3%	11%	10.1%
Learning and teaching methods	7.3%	11%	11.9%	9.2%	6.4%	14.7%	18.3%
UWS's expectations from students such as use of tutors and tutorials	8.3%	5.5%	11.9%	13.8%	11%	10.1%	18.3%
Academic practice and malpractice such as plagiarism, attending lectures	12.8%	9.2%	12.8%	9.2%	8.3%	6.4%	20.2%
UWS rules and regulations governing the academic experience, including its complaints and appeals procedures	11%	11.9%	11%	15.6%	10.1%	5.5%	13.8%
Grading and classification systems	7.3%	9.2%	10.1%	13.8%	10.1%	11.9%	16.5%
<b>(2) Orientation survey results</b>							
Advice on settling in and information on living in the UK Advice on recognising and dealing with culture shock, and where to find guidance and support	13.8%	9.2%	9.2%	6.4%	6.4%	14.7%	20.2%
Details of how to open bank accounts	11.9%	10.1%	7.3%	7.3%	8.3%	13.8%	19.3%
Details on safety and personal security	7.3%	10.1%	7.3%	9.2%	8.3%	13.8%	21.1%
How disability is defined in the UK and what support is made available for disabled students	10.1%	6.4%	8.3%	12.8%	6.4%	16.5%	19.3%
Details of any 'buddying' schemes or other integration opportunities	2.8%	6.4%	6.4%	20.2%	5.5%	16.5%	18.3%
Academic support, including for language proficiency	7.3%	7.3%	4.6%	11%	11%	17.4%	20.2%
Advice on recognising and dealing with culture shock, and where to find guidance and support	10.1%	12.8%	3.7%	8.3%	6.4%	19.3%	17.4%
<b>(3) Engagement survey results</b>							

I am motivated to ask questions during the lectures	14.75%	21.1%	14.7%	16.5%	6.4%	5.5%	8.3%
I get the opportunity to exchange ideas with other students	13.8%	21.1%	14.7%	10.1%	7.3%	8.3%	11.9%
The course has challenged me to produce the best	9.2%	11%	10.1%	14.7%	11%	12.8%	18.3%
I am motivated to be involved in decisions about how my course is run	8.3%	13.8%	9.2%	20.2%	18.3%	10.1%	7.3%
Any changes in the course have been communicated effectively	2.8%	12.8%	13.8%	22%	10.1%	9.2%	16.5%
I get the right time to give the feedback of my course	5.5%	15.6%	12.8%	17.4%	13.8%	10.1%	11.9%
Making clear to international students the careers services available to them, and managing their expectations by explaining the scope and the limits of careers service provision	12.8%	12.8%	8.3%	11%	7.3%	10.1%	16.5%
My research skills and English have enhanced during my course	7.3%	9.2%	11%	12.8%	15.6%	12.8%	10.1%
PDP sessions provided were very useful (library talk, referencing, essay writing, plagiarism, employability and career developments, talk from experts, etc)	7.3%	14.7%	12.8%	11.9%	13.8%	10.1%	8.3%
(4) Teaching and Learning survey results							
Teaching staff developed inclusive teaching and learning practices that consider the needs of international students	21.1%	16.5%	12.8%	11.9%	11%	5.5%	8.3%
Lecturers are good and passionate about what they are teaching and they are good communicators	11.9%	19.3%	9.2%	12.8%	11%	8.3%	14.7%
The learning materials provided on VLE are helpful	7.3%	20.2%	12.8%	17.4%	10.1%	4.6%	14.7%
Assessment was fair and I have received constructive feedback on time	6.4%	13.8%	14.7%	17.4%	11%	7.3%	16.5%
Having in place arrangements to enable students whose first language is not English to cope with the demands of the programme and support the continuous development of their language skills	14.7%	15.6%	14.7%	11.9%	11%	8.3%	11%
Having processes in place to ensure that the needs of international students are considered when developing or reviewing the curriculum	8.3%	17.4%	12.8%	12.8%	21.1%	1.8%	12.8%
All teaching material has internationalization aspect integrated into teaching	6.4%	7.3%	11%	11%	15.6%	8.3%	19.3%
Lectures were considerate when they mark any piece of assessment that you are not a native speaker and English is not your mother language	5.5%	8.3%	7.3%	11%	16.5%	15.6%	14.7%
Ensuring that students who may not be familiar with teaching and learning practices in the UK are clear from the outset about course requirements, methods of assessment and associated deadlines, and marking criteria	10.1%	10.1%	10.1%	14.7%	11%	7.3%	15.6%
Overall, happy with the support I got	7.3%	11.9%	6.4%	17.4%	12.8%	10.1%	12.8%

Notes: 7: strongly agree=7; agree=6; somewhat agree =5; neither agree or disagree=4; somewhat disagree =3; disagree=2; strongly disagree=1.

## 5. Results and Discussion

Data was collected from 102 students studying at UWS in 2017. 58 of the respondents were Female and 44 were male. The majority of those who filled in the questionnaire (62%) were from the 18-25 age group.

### 5.1 Selection and Admission

Table 1 illustrates the results of the selection and admission theme. It shows that ‘the course is attracting’ statement has the highest percentage in students who strongly agree and agree (69.8%) than any of the other statements.

Ranking second was the '*estimated cost of living*' in students who strongly agree and agree with a percentage of (66.1%). In third place is the statement on students' choice of an institution being based on '*scholarships/financial assistance schemes*' with a percentage of (61.5%). Most international students were looking for scholarships and financial assistance schemes to help them with the tuition fees and living costs. The following statement ranked fourth, the students who strongly agree, agree and somewhat agree with the statement mentioning '*the location of the university*' got a percentage of (60.5%). Most students are mindful of where the university is located, and the minority do not mind of where the university is situated if they have their desired course. Our results are in line with the prior study of Goldbart et al. (2005) <sup>[31]</sup> who found that financial and personal reasons were important when selecting a university and in line with a stream of prior studies who argued that cost is the most commonly factor for students mobility (Foster, 2014) <sup>[28]</sup>. Our results are also consistent with the previous studies of Kelly (2010) <sup>[41]</sup> and Teichler (2004) <sup>[63]</sup> who focused on the potential to enhance career prospects as one of the main reasons international students choose a university. Although our respondents select other reasons on why they selected a UK university the reputation of the institution still came in seventh place out of the sixteen items suggested. This result concurs with the previous studies of Gray et al. (2003) <sup>[32]</sup>; Maringe and Carter (2007) <sup>[48]</sup>; and Pietro and Page (2008) <sup>[57]</sup>.

## 5.2 Pre-arrival Activities

Pre-arrival, for the purposes of this study, is when students have already been admitted to a university but have not been to the university yet. The following statements were used to find out whether UWS appropriately inform students before they arrive at the university. Table 1 illustrates that students who strongly agree, agree and somewhat agree was below 50% in all eight statements that constitute the pre-arrival theme. According to the results as shown in table 1, the statement with the highest percentage in students who strongly agree, agree and somewhat agree is '*deadlines for payment of fees and information about how to make payments*' with 46.7%. A certain number of students agreed to the statement that UWS makes them aware of the deadlines for any payment and UWS also offering to pay in installments. This is followed by '*details of welfare entitlements, including healthcare and childcare options*' with 41.3%. As for the statement of; details of welfare entitlements, including healthcare and childcare options. Although this service is already available at UWS, international students were not

aware of it before coming to the UK and the respondents suggested that UWS should announce such services as this might affect the international students' decision of selecting the university. Then '*advice on how to arrive safely at the accommodation, and any 'meet and greet' services made available by UWS*' being the third statement in students who strongly agree, agree and somewhat agree with 36.7%. Our respondents consider that statement to be essential because they are not only new to the university but most of them are also new to the country. Additionally, most respondents who participated in this survey are undergraduate students which means they came straight from high school, and the academic experience is different from that of the host institution. The fourth statement is '*details of the registration and enrolment process and the documents that entrants will need*' with 36.6%. Our respondents suggested that more information on this item should be sent to the international students before leaving their home country. The fifth statement on this question is '*what to expect, upon arrival, from immigration control, including what documents are needed, and when and where students will need them*' according to students who participated to the survey with 34.8%. Our results are in line with the prior study of Bartram (2008) <sup>[4]</sup> who suggested that practical information should be provided to international students in relation to food, finances and accommodation. Our results are also consistent with the previous studies of Gray et al. (2003) <sup>[32]</sup>; Dyson (2005) <sup>[18]</sup>; Zhou and Todman, (2009) <sup>[72]</sup>; and Nambiar et al. (2012) <sup>[50]</sup>; that host institutions should provide as much as information and support as possible to international students. For example, invite current international students who are already enrolled at the host institution to welcome the new international students and talk to them Gray et al. (2003) <sup>[32]</sup>. Provide them with information on the required documents they need for admission (Dyson, 2005) <sup>[18]</sup>.

## 5.3 Induction

The following statements were designed to find out the opinion of what students think about the UWS strategy in terms of induction. As presented in Table 1, '*what type of feedback on assessment is given and how to use it*' got the highest percentage out of all the statements in students who strongly agree, agree and somewhat agree with 50.5%. This is very important as most of the international students came from different education systems and it is better to make them aware of what feedback means and how to engage and reflect on it. The second most important statement is '*assessment methods and criteria for assessment*' in students who strongly agree, agree and somewhat agree with 48.7%. This is very important for

international students as they want to learn more about assessment and what is expected from them as they have a fear of failure. On the third position came *'academic support'* at UWS, where students who strongly agree, agree and somewhat agree have 45.9%. This means that UWS teaching team care about international students, they want to see them succeed as this affects the pass rate of any course. The fourth statement where students who strongly agree, agree and somewhat agree on *'learning facilities'* is at 36.7%. Our respondents found that learning facilities were very important for international students as they might need to spend extra time and use different learning channels to allow them to learn in a different language in a different educational system. The fifth statement as highlighted below is *'helps the new students to meet each other before starting their course'* where students who strongly agree, agree and somewhat agree are at 35.7%. Some respondents explained that social interaction in induction helped them a lot during their education journeys. Our results are in line with prior studies that focused on detailed activities such as assessment to reduce number of students that drop-out and increase their performance (Rachel and Sami, 2016<sup>[58]</sup>, Chan, 2017<sup>[12]</sup>). Our results also support the study of Dunne (2009) on the importance of the induction week, suggesting this is a critical time to develop intercultural relationships and interventions that promote interaction in events, which Pherali (2012)<sup>[56]</sup> argues should focus on the international student population.

#### 5.4 Orientation and Settlement

*'UWS advising on international students settling in and information on living in the UK'* is the statement with the highest percentage (32.2%) of students who strongly agree, agree and somewhat agree. Our respondents were suggesting that UWS should post more information on their website about this theme. The second statement students strongly agree, agree and somewhat agree (29.3%) with is *'details on how to open a bank account'*. Again, our respondents are suggesting that UWS should post more information on their website about this theme. Results in Table 1 highlight that *'advice on recognizing and dealing with culture shock, and where to find guidance and support'* is the third statement out of the seven in this question, where students strongly agree, agree and somewhat agree (26.6%). Our respondents were suggesting that UWS should post more information on their website about this theme. *'Details on safety and personal security'* is the fourth highest statement according to the results of Table 1. Out of 102 students who responded to the survey, (24.7%) strongly agree, agree and somewhat agree. The fifth statement is *'Details of any budding schemes or*

*other integration opportunities'*. Our respondents were suggesting that UWS should post more information on their website about this theme. Our results were consistent with the prior study of Brown and Holloway (2008)<sup>[6]</sup> who suggested that moving to a new environment is the greatest challenge for international students. Although it is not possible to relieve the stress completely, the host institution can put some measures in place to assist students and reduce their stress levels. Our results are in line with the previous study of Owens and Loomes (2010)<sup>[55]</sup> who suggested more information should be communicated to international students before they arrive, such as local shopping facilities for food and clothing. Andrade (2006)<sup>[3]</sup> emphasizes that students cannot be expected to adjust to a new country and educational system without appropriate support. Our results support the prior studies dealing with *'culture shock'* as an important issue that cannot be ignored (Brown and Holloway, 2008<sup>[6]</sup>; Sobre-Denton and Hart, 2008<sup>[62]</sup>).

#### 5.5 Engagement

As shown in Table 1, *'I am motivated to ask questions during the lectures'* is the most important statement in all the eight statements found in under this theme as the students who strongly agree, agree and somewhat agree are at 50.55%. Perhaps the UWS teaching team gives them room to think for themselves and motivates them to participate and acquire more knowledge from each other. The second statement, *'I get the opportunity to exchange ideas with other students'* with similar levels of 49.6% is possibly due to the tutorials or group work, which encourages knowledge exchange, social interaction and facilitates teamwork. *'I am motivated to be involved in decisions about how my course is run'*. This statement has almost the same percentage of students who agree and disagree. In students who strongly agree, agree and somewhat agree (31.3%). As highlighted in Table 1, the statement *'I get the right time to give the feedback on my course'* and *'Making clear to international students the careers services available to them, and managing their expectations by explaining the scope and the limits of careers service provision'* have the same percentage, in students who strongly agree, agree and somewhat agree (33.9%). Our respondents were happy to be involved in providing feedback on the course and found it an enjoyable experience. Our results are in line with Stephen (2009)<sup>[61]</sup> who identified three different categories of meta-practices for students to be involved in the curriculum or beneficial pedagogical organizations (students design curriculum, students lead their peers, and student assess their peers). However, our respondents were looking forward to more engagement at university.

UWS should make sure that they involve the students in every decision; it should be a two-way communication to provide a good quality service (Andrade, 2006<sup>[31]</sup>).

## 5.6 Teaching and Learning

As illustrated in Table 1, the most important statement with the highest percentage in this theme is *'teaching staff developed inclusive teaching and learning practices that consider the needs of international students'* with students who strongly agree, agree and somewhat agree at 50.4%. The second statement that students who strongly agree, agree and somewhat agree with is *'there are some arrangements made for students whose first language is not English to cope'* at 45%, which is a good indicator of reputation for UWS. Those who were already enrolled, will spread the word hence increasing the number of international students. As shown in table 1, *'lecturers are good and passionate about what they are teaching, and they are good communicators'* is the third statement in students who strongly agree, agree and somewhat agree (40.4%). UWS teaching staff are very passionate about the job and they want to help and support international students as much as they can, which results in delivering a good quality of service. According to Table 1, *'the learning materials provided on the student VLE are helpful'* is the fourth statement, with students who strongly agree, agree and somewhat agree at 40.3%. Possibly as lecturers do post all useful material to enhance their everyday academic learning. *'Having processes in place to ensure that the needs of international students are considered when developing or reviewing the curriculum'* is the fifth statement according to the results shown in Table 1. The findings highlight that, *'teaching staff developed inclusive teaching and learning practices that consider the needs of international students'* is the most important statement, as the literature confirms that international students massively contribute to the economy of the chosen country (Sife, et al., 2007). Therefore, UWS should ensure they adjust their curriculum and lecturers should include all continents within their examples whilst teaching to make every student comfortable and feel as though they are in the right place. Our results support the idea that the learning experience is important not only for the student but also for those involved in the facilitation and teaching processes. The international student contributes to the diversity of the student population and in doing so adds fresh perspectives during classroom discourse (Charles- Toussaint and Crowson, 2010<sup>[11]</sup>; Lee and Rice, 2007<sup>[44]</sup>). Wang (2012)<sup>[64]</sup> noted that the international student can help academic members of staff to recognize the influence of their own cultural background on their values and those of home stu-

dents and, as Lee and Rice (2007)<sup>[44]</sup> highlight, increase tolerance, understanding and appreciations of different countries and cultures around the world. As noted, the contribution of the international student in the classroom adds to the diversity of the student population and brings fresh perspectives during classroom discussion. Like the international students, domestic students can benefit from the mixed cultural experiences that they might be less likely to gain from an all domestic student group, and this may help prepare domestic students for future encounters with diversity (Andrade, 2006<sup>[31]</sup>).

## 6. Recommendations

Based on our results of the experience of international students' journey classified by themes, we are offering some recommendations to be considered for every theme and we are also offering some recommendation at university level.

### 6.1 Recommendations from the Themes

For university selection and admission, UK universities should provide some information on the university web page to allow international students to know more about the university and its courses. For pre-arrival, more could be done in engaging international students at this early stage in order to link them with different channels of the university life, to initiate sense of belonging and to prepare them for the realities of study in their institutions. This might be very effective if existing students/alumni are involved. For induction, extended induction for international students is recommended and this might include running some workshops for critical thinking, reflective writing, plagiarism, employ ability, etc., For orientation and settlement, student services can play a crucial role with international students to ensure that they are settled. This also might include language support and introducing the buddy/mentoring system. For engagement, international students should be part of student engagement policy and academic staff should encourage them to act as student representatives, to be involved in the decision making process such as inviting them to comment on new programme proposals, new courses, etc.. For teaching and learning, internationalisation in its broader concept should be considered. This includes, internationalisation of curriculum, developing inclusive approaches to teaching, applying interactive approach into teaching and integrate international students into this interactive discussion.

### 6.2 Recommendation at University Level

Universities should have policies on welcoming interna-

tional students using a coordinated approach by academic and professional services and supported by senior management. Universities also should use pre-arrival engagement activity both social and academic to reduce misalignment in expectations of living and studying in UK. They could set up private social media group classified by countries for incoming international students and this can be facilitated by a buddy or mentor from alumni. Universities should consider developing a peer –support system for international students. Universities should develop Personal Development Planning (PDP) sessions for international students. Student support services should actively engage with international students. In addition, staff who are working in the international office, they should attend training on how to deal with international students to be able to offer good services for them. They might ask for current international students to help in recruiting international students. Our study has several limitations that should be considered in future research. The focus on this study was on one university only. Future research should collect data from different universities to allow for comparisons. This is the first study to explore the whole experience of international students. More research is needed to develop conceptual framework on the experience of international students to develop a full understanding of the role each stage performs in the experience and journey of international students in the UK.

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