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# Possible solutions to problems faced by Indian students in Western countries

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## Introduction

Over the years, there has been a discernible trend of Indian students choosing to pursue higher education abroad. Several factors can be attributed to this shift in preference (Shah et al., 2022). First off, more people are becoming conscious of and appreciative of the outstanding level of education provided by universities across the globe, including those in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and others (Perez-Encinas and Rodriguez-Pomeda, 2021). These establishments frequently showcase cutting-edge amenities, esteemed instructors, and varied educational offerings, drawing learners looking to gain a competitive advantage in their professions (Kaur et al., 2023). Indian students are further encouraged to look into studying overseas by the growing demand for people with international exposure and qualifications brought about by the growing globalization of industries (Hercog and van de Laar, 2017). More students are also being encouraged to explore this option as the idea that studying abroad can lead to better job opportunities, improved personal development, and cultural enrichment has gained traction in Indian society (Allam and Riner, 2015). From the Indian perspective, the most popular courses chosen by Indian students are from the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics or STEM fields (Pawar and Chanda, 2024). Despite this diversity in the courses chosen, there are certain common problems faced by Indian students studying in the West. These problems are wide-ranging, and there isn't sufficient literature in terms of existing evidence-based articles that have explored these issues in recent years. There are two possible reasons for this- firstly, the broad-ranging nature of the problems themselves that span across different domains of expertise. Secondly, there is a need for more opinion articles, such as the present one, to first lay out the problems and the possible solutions clearly, so that researchers in the future can gain some idea of designing the possible solutions. In order to help fill this gap, the present article has been written.

## Broad challenges faced by international students

Before we examine the challenges faced by Indian students in particular, it is also important to list out some of the key challenges faced by international students migrating from one country to the other. These include problems such as a lack of intercultural engagement due to a non-diverse environment (Yu and Moskal, 2019). This is apart from academic challenges, such as problems with communication with professors and fellow classmates. Migration itself involves moving away from a familiar place to a less familiar

atmosphere marked by differences in social traditions and facing new and unique economic problems in the host country, such as workplace exploitation (Krishnan et al., 2025). For international students, the process of adjusting begins with addressing housing problems that have become a major concern in recent times, especially in countries such as Canada (Pottie-Sherman et al., 2024). It is important to remember that these challenges constantly evolve. For example, during the pandemic, there was a major concern about the health and safety of international students (Koo and Nyunt, 2023). Let us now examine some of the major challenges that Indian students face in particular.

## Culture shock

The term culture shock is used to refer to a phenomenon in which an individual enters a situation where it becomes necessary for them to develop a new perspective of themselves, others, and the new environment around them (Cupsa, 2018). Although globalization has helped improve our understanding of cultures that are different from ours, there is certainly a possibility of experiencing culture shock when one moves to a different country with an entirely different set of values and culture, often resulting in a negative reaction to the new environment (Furnham, 2019). For Indian students who are used to the Indian/Asian education system that supports a hierarchical relationship between the teacher and the student (Tai and Wei, 2021), it is mildly shocking for them to note that the student-teacher relationship in the West is a bit less hierarchical. For example, in India, students are required to use terms such as mam/sir while referring to a teacher and are not encouraged to call their teacher by name while addressing them. However, in the West, it is perfectly fine for students to call their teachers by name (Ms. xyz or Dr. xyz) while addressing them. Apart from this, the students are also likely to experience culture shock in the context of clothing, food, and even dating. In India, for example, dating is not encouraged in some places, and there has been a rise in dating violence against teenagers (Chokhani et al., 2025). On the other hand, there are no major restrictions imposed on youngsters in the context of dating in the West. In fact, dating is considered a part of growing up and eventually choosing a life partner. In India, however, most marriages are arranged and are witnessing the rise of matrimonial sites to facilitate this form of marriage (Krishnan et al., 2024). Apart from culture shock, there are some other technical problems faced by Indian students that require urgent attention. One such problem is the problem of plagiarism.

## The problem of plagiarism

One of the less-discussed challenges in the higher education system in India is the issue of plagiarism. It is an issue about which there is a poor level of awareness among the students themselves (Raj et al., 2022). This results in tremendous pressure for Indian students who immigrate to a Western country where plagiarism is taken seriously but where there isn't enough information provided to students on how to properly cite sources, along with the necessity of attribution (Fatemi and Saito, 2020). It is quite possible that in

most cases, plagiarism by Indian students isn't done purposefully but is rather a case of unintended plagiarism, wherein the student is unaware of the unethical nature of copying or borrowing information from other sources without properly citing the authors (Prashar et al., 2023). Such cases have been reported in the media and are becoming a matter of national and even global concern (Pallela and Talari, 2016). For most Indian students studying in the West, graduating from university is only half of the challenge. The other half is securing suitable employment.

## Securing employment immediately after graduating for loan repayment

The dream of settling abroad in a Western country is one that is shared by many Indian youth. For most middle-class youth, it begins with their parents taking out an education loan for their children, and although securing an education loan has become a bit easier than it used to be (Thomas, 2017), the burden of repayment often falls on the students themselves, who are expected to secure employment as soon as they graduate and help their parents repay the loan along with the due interest (Thomas, 2017). Although education loans and student debt are common and on the rise among Western students as well (Webber and Burns, 2021). The additional challenge faced by international students, and Indian students in particular, is the limited time available for them to secure gainful employment before their student visa expires and they are sent back to India. This is particularly detrimental to Indian students because they make up the largest group of students among the international student community in certain countries, such as the US, where such laws exist.

## Barriers to securing permanent residence

Although for some, securing a job after completing their degree in the West is the end goal, there are many who view the opportunity to study and work in the West as a gateway to build a network and secure a permanent residence in the West that can help transform their economic condition and standard of living for the rest of their lives (Joseph, 2016). Once again, the major barrier for such students is securing full-time employment within the limited time available before their student visa expires (Jacobs, 2025). Apart from this, countries such as Australia have continued to tighten rules as a means to break this trend and make it harder for international students, including those from India, to secure permanent residency (Tran et al., 2020).

## A theoretical explanation

Although not all of the problems faced by Indian students migrating to the West can be explained using a single theory, the authors feel that the Acculturative Stress Theory is the best fit in

this case (Berry, 2006). The theory states that individuals undergo forms of stress when they are forced to adapt to a new environment. Many of the problems faced by Indian students in the West can be attributed to this. Apart from the radical difference in the education system between India and the West, students also need to adapt to the vast cultural differences between the two. It is therefore important to explore possible solutions for this in order to ensure that the future batch of Indian students who choose to study in the West experience fewer problems than the current one.

## Exploring possible solutions

The authors of the present article propose that social workers could play a key role in addressing many of the problems. This is because of two major reasons: firstly, the social work profession has strong roots in the West (Payne, 2020) and is systematized as well. Therefore, social workers in the West can play a major role in helping address some of the major concerns of Indian students currently studying in countries such as the UK, USA, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Secondly, existing literature indicates that social workers could play an important role in helping international students adjust to local conditions in host nations (Park et al., 2017). In order to find suitable solutions for problems experienced by Indian students in the West, there is a need for greater emphasis on the need for the latest research in this area, especially in the qualitative realm. This has been noted by other researchers as well (Slaten et al., 2016; Lau et al., 2019). A large-scale analysis of the trends in international student counseling clearly suggests that most studies concerning this issue are quantitative and based on convenience sampling (Pendse and Inman, 2017). More information from the qualitative standpoint could help policymakers design better solutions to the problems faced by the Indian student community in the West. Indian students from different parts of India could be invited on stage, and an “ask me anything about my culture” session could be organized, whereby local students can gain a greater understanding of the diversity of Indian culture through the experiences of the Indian students. The goal must be to encourage members of both groups to understand one another’s culture, belief systems, and practices so that the level of misconceptions about one another is reduced to a certain degree. Moreover, the government could consider establishing a buddy system in universities using social workers to reach out to such Indian students who might feel alienated or might be experiencing culture shock. Such a system has been suggested in the past by other researchers for international students in general (Nilsson, 2019). The buddy system would involve social workers recruiting Western volunteer students who have a positive disposition toward Indian students to form a friendship with the newly immigrated Indian students. This way, every Indian student would feel a bit more connected to the Western world and also gain a quick understanding of the system in place. This approach must be particularly implemented among younger Indian students who have migrated to the US, as research suggests that it is the younger international students who are more likely to feel more homesick when compared to other students (Poyrazli and Lopez, 2007). There is also a need for an attitudinal shift in some of the

leaders in the West in order to improve the lives of Indian students there (Song and Li, 2022). It is hoped that social workers can bring about these positive changes and make Indian students feel welcome in the West. In one major study conducted in America, the researchers noted that the international student community in the university was a vulnerable population that deserved improved financial assistance and scholarships, apart from providing them with opportunities to improve their spoken English skills (Sherry et al., 2010). While some researchers are interested in identifying small solutions to address the problem, others disagree and believe that there is a need to address a larger problem which are systems of oppression that are responsible for creating negative student experiences (Yao et al., 2019) and such large-scale issues, such as culture shock must be openly discussed in social work classrooms by Social Work faculty members. Furthermore, the students themselves must learn and discuss such issues more frequently. Although there is evidence to suggest that international students are, in fact, learning about it through media, formal education, relationships, and lived experiences (Mitchell et al., 2017), there is a need to increase its frequency, especially inside university campuses and in the media through the efforts of social workers. As far as the problem of plagiarism is concerned, like most other issues, it requires measures that need to be taken by both sides to be resolved. On the Indian side, there is a need to sensitize children about the importance of originality in academic work and also the need for citation and referencing when information is borrowed from external sources. This must begin at the school level for maximum effectiveness because it is in schools that children first begin borrowing information from external sources for their assignments and projects. Secondly, these efforts cannot lead to immediate results. It is therefore important for Western institutions to first understand the cultural context of the Indian students who have been accused of plagiarism and conduct awareness sessions for international students on this matter, instead of rushing toward the decision of punishing them. If the goal is to improve the wellbeing of Indian students in the West, there is a need to focus on their identity and the manner in which it is being negatively portrayed to the rest of society. This is important because there is a close link between identity and mental wellbeing (Nyunt and Seifert, 2023), which needs to be acknowledged by the West. Future research could focus on testing out the suggestions laid out in the present article. For example, a qualitative study could be conducted to examine the feasibility of implementing the buddy system for Indian students in Western countries. Researchers could also conduct experimental studies to examine the possible impact of the proposed sensitization programmes in Western universities to help reduce instances of plagiarism among Indian students. More such research is warranted for developing effective solutions to the problems faced by Indian students in the West.

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AP: Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization, Writing – original draft, Investigation. SK: Writing – original draft, Supervision, Writing – review & editing.

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The author(s) declared that generative AI was not used in the creation of this manuscript.

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