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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Cultural Anchors and Student Experiences: A Cross-National Analysis of India and Belgium

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ABSTRACT

This article views culture as the invisible organizing framework for how students "make their way in life"-which frames their outlook toward their studies, their approach to building relationships with each other and with faculty, their pattern of interacting with their peers and instructors, their psychological states, and so on. In this exploratory article on this topic, an exploration is given on comparing and contrasting the cultures-based on students' attributes, learning practices, social behaviours, value systems, views on the mind, and engagement with globalization in a group of Indian versus Belgian university students. Relying on six-dimensions of Hofstede's (2010) classification, Triandis's (1995) high- and low-individualist/collectivist ways of understanding culture, Hall's (1976) high-and low-communicative style, and Bourdieu's (1986) idea of cultural capital, the most distinctive cultural differences between India and Belgium are pinpointed, and we discuss how these are "lived." furthermore, new, "hybrid" cultures resulting from digital shifts, and mobility are discussed and offered for discussion and response by policy- makers, student affairs professional and Educators. The important discoveries of this article is the culture characteristics that Indian students generally show is collectivist more often impacting on their learning style and interaction with other people, while Belgian students possess strong individualist characteristics and prefer the sense of autonomy in the university life; at the same time, the generation of hybrid cultural identity among students demonstrates the globalizing effect and the power of digitalization over the conventional cultures.

Keywords: *Cross-Cultural Comparison, Indian and Belgian University Students, Cultural Dimensions (Hofstede), Student Learning and Social Behaviour, Hybrid Culture and Globalization*

INTRODUCTION

Culture is less a background for human life and more the fabric within which experience itself takes shape. For young adults in the crucial transition years that bridge adolescence and full adulthood, culture is the architectonic of everyday existence – of education, relationships to authority, intimacies, navigations of risk, and self-construals of being and purpose. Arnett (2000) labeled this life stage of identity exploration, instability, self-orientation, and opportunity as 'emerging adulthood' and contended that although emerging adulthood is a period of transition to be found in multiple societal contexts, the particular nature and expression of the stage is the creation of cultural context.

India and Belgium are excellent choices for comparative culture study because the two societies score quite differently on numerous cultural indicators. Inhabiting and influencing one of the oldest (5,000+ years) and largest civilizations (1.4+ billion) on Earth, India embodies a hyper-collectivism,

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a pronounced social hierarchy, extensive religious heterogeneity and a high-risk high-yield learning context, heavily influenced by the intense social Darwinism that pervades the nation (Sinha, 1990). With its comparatively small (11 million), ethnically fragmented linguistic population in the heart of Western Europe, Belgium reflects an extreme individualism, a vibrant secularist ideology, a liberal approach to social relations and a rich welfare provision underpinning a relatively risk-free environment for higher learning (Hofstede et al., 2010).

Hence Students culture plays a strong practical relevance for research. Internationalization of education has boom around the world – the higher than 6.4 million worldwide college students are searching out and receiving instruction in better education institution out of their homeland (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2022) – number of students from South Asia learning at the KU Leuven, Ghent College, the VrijeUniversiteit Brussel in specific have been growing and universities in Belgium more regularly had appeared into partnerships with academic establishment in India. Understanding and discerning in the cultural codes or logic which sets of students introduced inside the shared vicinity of teaching and studying could make effective preparation of the lesson, counselling and cooperative teaching inside the mutual region.

The study methodology follows several stages: the application of a theoretical framework of propositions (Chapter 2) forms the basis for developing cultural profiles of each society studied (Chapter 3). This foundation enables a dimensional comparative analysis (Chapter 4), which precedes the thematic exploration of college students' academic lives (Chapter 5), social lives (Chapter 6), values (Chapter 7), psychological states (Chapter 8), and cross-cultural interactions (Chapter 9). The study concludes with a chapter presenting the results, implications, and general conclusions. This article focuses on Chapters 5 through 9, which detail students' academic and social lives, values, psychological states, and cross-cultural interactions.

The authors intend, throughout the analysis, to avoid cultural dichotomies and rigid cultural essentialism. Instead, they aim to identify patterns within each student population and their societies that represent the most frequently recurring configurations and widely accepted models within each social subgroup and among individuals. This approach seeks to reveal patterns in student behavior and value systems that transcend individual cultural contexts.

METHODOLOGY

The conceptual framework guiding this study relies on four mutually supportive theories that together help explore different aspects of India-Belgium comparison. A Key framework used for comparison of cultures is the work of Hofstede on national cultural dimensions (originally done on IBM employees from 40 nations (Hofstede, 1980), and thereafter extensively researched over years resulting into a framework of six dimensions: Power Distance Index (PDI), Individualism versus Collectivism (IDV), Masculinity versus Femininity (MAS), Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI), Long-term versus Short-term Orientation (LTO), and Indulgence versus Restraint (IVR) (Hofstede et al., 2010). Although Hofstede's work has attracted criticism of being too simplistic and essentialist (McSweeney, 2002), it continues to be most commonly applied methodology in cross cultural research in business and education.

Another important theoretical source is Triandis's (1995) work of individualism-collectivism. Triandis added to the original model by identifying a new dimension between collectivism/individualism, which the author calls vertical vs horizontal. This is where the author explains Indian as vertical collectivist cultures that embrace social hierarchies and make people deferring to family and social needs. Belgian people, in his terms, exhibit horizontal individualism, a culture that values self-reliance but does not necessarily involve a disregard for hierarchy. This perspective has been particularly helpful to study student's identities, decision making and relations to peer group.

There is Hall's (1976) high-context and low-context frame work: "In high-context, high-learning-cost countries such as India "virtually everything a person has to communicate to another person is already known or "in the open." All the other person needs is the ability to call that system of memories to mind and "tune in. In low-context cultures such as Belgium, on the other hand, information can be shared without prior reference to context." Students learning and interacting with instructors, peers, and university officials navigate these different cultural norms on an ongoing basis.

The Bourdieu (1986) notion of cultural capital, which he defines as socially learned tastes, preferences, the ability to interact and display social grace, and knowledge acquired from home and the environment, may be one way to account for how students from different backgrounds are differently equipped with the necessary orientational resources on arrival at higher education, or why studying

abroad can lead to experiences of profound stimulation and bewilderment. Meanwhile Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model of nested ecological systems, including Family, Peer Group, Institution and Macro Social System, acts as a salutary reminder that the influences of culture can operate concurrently.

India: Civilizational Depth, Collectivism, and Hierarchy

The country evades monistic interpretation; in essence it is a multi-billion strong democracy encompassing stunning varieties in language, religion, caste and region. Within such variations, however, cross-cultural studies have often pointed out enduring cultural trends. Sinha (1990) found Indian culture to be 'nurturant-task' in type, blending relational warmth with a quest for achievement. While family acts as the central institutional pillar of life, decision-making on education, career and marriage is generally reached after extensive collective deliberations, with decisions typically not being an individual prerogative (Saraswathi& Dutta, 2010). Hofstede et al. (2010) have situated India on the high end with PDI of 77 which suggests a culture that is receptive of status-driven hierarchy. Honouring the guru in the Indian system of education (which is as old as Vedic learning systems and subsequently the ashram approach of learning) contributes, in our universities today, to the culture of respecting and deferring to authority in academia and to elders in institutions (Kumar, 1991). Students disputing a professor openly, though prevalent now in few top metro urban colleges, has traditionally not been common in other college settings. At 48 on the IDV scale India comes across as moderately collectivist. Individual academic achievements are often subverted by the perceived demands and expectations of the family and the educational outcomes are, by and large, viewed as family achievements (Agarwal, 2009). Indian competitive examinations (e.g., forIIT-JEE, NEET etc) with extreme stakes demonstrate both competitive and collective strive. India ranks rather low on the UAI at 40, indicating a culture with tolerance for ambiguity which appears counter-intuitive given the rigorous and often ritualised education system. This tolerance is often explained by Kakar's (1978) research on India in that, due to the strong prevalence of religious thought, uncertainties associated with the world are absorbed in a cosmological and spiritual framework of karma and fate, minimizing existential uncertainty. LTO for India is 51.

Belgium: Language Complexity, Individualism and Liberal Civic Culture

The Belgian sense of nationhood is fractured into the native linguistic divides of Dutch (Flemish - ~60% of population), French (Walloon - ~32%) and a small German speaking area (eastern). Not only did they establish a functional division in administration based on language - but different, contrasting intellectual/cultural traditions (Witte et al., 2009) - including a Protestant ethic in Flanders, as compared to the more relational and intellectualist traditions found in Wallonia (Witte et al., 2009). The Belgians place a moderate level of respect for hierarchy (Hofstede et al., 2010 score a 65 on PDI), however, this was seen less pronounced on the ground in practice, particularly in Flemish higher education, where Belgian students are acculturated to expect clear rationales for policy, are comfortable in confronting professors in seminar situations and place value on participative democracy and accountability within their institutions (De Wit &Verhoeven, 2001). At 75 (IDV), the Belgians attach a significant value to individual freedom of expression, lifestyle, autonomy and decision making. Indeed, Verhoeven (2004) remarked on the high degree of agency of Belgian students in creating their academic and life paths, based on personal preference and individual competence, rather than family influence. This is supported by the existence of a substantial safety net created by a welfare state which supports unemployed, health care provision and subsidized university places enabling this free-ranging individualist pursuit. In relation to the LTO, Belgium has a long-term, and a very pragmatic outlook, focused on institutionalization and future planning, based on investment in qualifications and future social provisions (82). The extremely high UAI score of 94 is by far the highest, and demonstrates a desire for certainty, transparency and adherence to rules in all institutions, including the education system (European Students' Union, 2012). In the Belgium system, this implies that student unions would typically represent their members in challenging practices deemed unfair.

COMPARATIVE CULTURAL DIMENSIONS' ANALYSIS

On the surface, a quick look at the Hofstede scores of Indian and Belgian societies shows that there are fundamental differences that shape the academic experiences of students. As per Hofstede et al., 2010 in the power distance the score of 77 in India is compared with a 65 for Belgium (0075, 2010) that barely scratches the surface of the real disparity in the classroom, since high UAI of 94 in Belgium (0075, 2010) ensures that a rigid formal system of accountability curbs abuse of power. In India, with a low

UAI of 40, power is largely unmoderated by constraints (0075, 2010). The difference between India (48) and Belgium (75) on the IDV is perhaps the most significant difference for the day-to-day life of students. According to Triandis (1995), collectivistic students havean ego that derives its sense of self and its goals largely from a consideration of social groups that it belongs to; their feelings about themselves depend on what happens to these groups and to an important extent from their performance in groups; an academic failure not only affects the student concerned, it reflects on the entire collectivity. The failure is not considered as personal but as belonging to the student and impacting on his collective as a whole. Although a UAI score of 40 in India appears at odds with a high stakes assessment culture, Bhatt (2004) suggests this may be attributed to a culture with coping mechanisms such as reliance on religious fate and the embrace of an improvisational problem-solving culture(jugaad) that prizes creativity and adaptability over procedure. In contrast with the highly adaptable Belgian society where a score of 94 in UAI necessitates a procedural based approach to learning where they need to understand appeals processes, ways to critique results and why assessment criteria are the way they are. Students in India are typically trained to accept implicitly what the professor deems to be fair and correct. India with a Masculinity score of 56 is just above the middle, whereas Belgium with a 54 is just below it. For both countries, this means they lean neither towards extreme achievement-orientation nor to extreme quality of life preference. For India, Masculinity is expressed mostly in career aspiration, where status is defined as success based on gaining a portfolio of credentials that signifies capability (Agarwal, 2009).

In Belgian MAS, quality of life, meaning Leisure time and aesthetic and sensory gratification, is on an equal footing to that accorded to career advancement, and consequently studies are more easily compartmentalized (Verhoeven, 2004). Finally, for the two nations' Impulses vs Restraint dimension which rates India as 26 versus Belgium as 57, the implication is that Belgium encourages a more readily and uninhibited display of gratification in most its forms; that which is desirable, pleasant, fun and fulfilling while Indonesian culture encourages delayed gratification and a greater emphasis on planning for future security, promoted by a more rigorous child-rearing methodology aiming for a sense of security and control (Kakar, 1978).

Academic culture and student behavior

In Indian and Belgian, there is the difference in learning culture, pedagogical culture and students culture and this difference may impact to student and the institutions. In India, Higher education is seen as a tool for upward mobility in socio-economic and for most both of elite and non-elite group families. But the colossal expansion of higher education system (4,000 institutions in India in 1990 – 54,000 institutions in 2021: Agarwal 2009) did not diminish, and indeed intensified the problem of "credentialism bottleneck" in the most top-ranked universities, thereby creating an intensely competitive examination culture. This affects student culture on an everyday basis not just from the point of view of the admissions process, but all the way into the classroom in which education is traditionally teacher-centered (deference to teacher as authority) in India and in which structural constraints of large classes in public institutions can also lead to this situation. Kumar(1991) was highly critical of the legacy of the colonial systems of teaching, for example he stressed the importance of a school curriculum that, by providing examination-based learning and evaluation, inculcated docility and conformity rather than the ability for critical agency. For rote-learning, replicating information in examination and standardized assessments for performance in such, the students attempt to access the credentials. Forthat matter, privately established, multiple billion-dollar business centres (coaching centers) are found for the preparation which is another, commodification of education outside institution: and the preparation of those credentials for gaining more and more admission; as noted Bray (2009). Guided by a process of Bologna Process Harmonization and legislation that govern higher education within both Flemish and French Communities, Belgian Universities' learning and qualification framework follows a competence-based approach, characterized by study programme in modular sets, with student-centered forms of education (De Wit and Verhoeven, 2001). The degree programs usually involve students participating in seminars, writing essays of analytic kind, presenting papers, and collaborative work with peers for assessing learning and for acquiring abilities rather than of information recall only. There is low power distance practice (low PDI). - Collaborating among students for unofficial assignments; - An institution promotes the idea of Equality, Openness (e.g. Addressing professors using first name in Belgium). It would be expected for rates of academic offences to be differential due to cultural contexts in the two Countries. In India due to intense pressure to succeed, the quality of guidance in terms of supervision etc at varies institutions and varies in terms of country and context. Thus academic offenses are sometimes committed due to the pragmatic rational of, "anything goes to

get success and do not care for the rule." and for plagiarizing of documents it seems to be acceptable, particularly if no adverse impact/result of such deed found in any.

Belgium taking seriously of this issue, and as country scoring High on UAI, the institutional frame will hold the rule strictly to follow and may become of individual behavior against collectivism towards collaborative approach. Hence, in countries such as Belgium, it can be suspected the individual oriented approach and rules adherence make students to consider academic fraud as more harmful. Attendance: In India the higher education is generally marked by rigorous mandatory attendance in institutions especially at Private higher education institutions, most so at the institutes which provide professional education; owing to social, cultural and institutional practices. Whereas in contrast; no obligation attendance is observed among most Universities in Belgium attributed to their collectivist nature of the country and due to higher regard for individual autonomy.

The cultural field that is opened in Student Social life of the college a sphere is the key site for cultural practice, and in the Indian context defined by the intersected lines of gender, caste, class and religion as also more universal experiences of friendship, sexual involvement, and leisure. The lives of students on big cosmopolitan college campuses (Mumbai, Delhi, Bangalore, Pune, Hyderabad and Chennai) are now increasingly subject to social liberalization giving them a hybridized culture of cosmopolitanism and globality of popular culture and celebrations with a local base (Fernandes 2006). Festive holidays – Diwali, Holi, EID, Pongal, Onam, Durga Puja, Christmas - serve as cultural calendar events of the college and a temporal rhythm which induces solidarity and individualistic self-expression through collective celebration events. College festivals organised by student unions which comprise of cultural academic and sporting activities are the major events and in the college annual calendar and for most student the major memory of the campus. Romantic liaison is being increasingly openly manifested in urban context but still is within some system of surveilance in the form of family/community regulation, and that between students of different caste/religious origin is often fraught with social challenges (Saraswathi and Dutta 2010). Belgian university students' life on the contrary revolves around a completely different cultural anchors. There is a tradition of associations of students (studentenverenigingen in Flanders and cercled'etudiants in French language universities), in centres like Leuven, Ghent, Liège and Namur, which are a very well-rooted aspect of university town culture. These associations, typically associated with a specific faculty, organize the initiation ceremony (doop in Dutch, baptême in French) of students who newly join, where their members also engage in various social, sporting, art and, professional, or volunteer, works as well as other collective cultural and social actions. Initiation ceremony of student associations is among the most debated among them due to potential abuses; as a result, Belgian universities tend to have a cautious use of such traditions. The consumption of alcoholic drink.

Values, Beliefs and Worldviews

The values of college students are the philosophical springboards from which student perspectives on their studies, social relations, and individual life pathways are constructed. For college students in India, the pervasive philosophical ethos of 'dharma' (duty to perform in accordance with his/her place in family, society, and cosmos), even if they do not conceptualize their value beliefs in the language of formal religiosity continues to exert a profound influence. Kakar (1978) explained how the Hindu conceptualizations of 'karma' (action), 'moksha' (liberation), and 'seva' (service) influence their dispositional framework and mold their moral choices rather than explicit formal religious ideology. Although formal religious observation continues to be an important aspect of daily life of most Indian students and, visits to temple, saying namaz, attending gurudwara, observing fasts, participation in religious festival constitute a significant element of personal and community life that will strike the Bengali students in Belgium. Caste identity, though constitutionally denounced and rejected by majority of young people in India, still informs choices pertaining to social and marital connections, and organization of study groups in many Indian colleges and universities as reported by Jodhka and Rehman (2012). Belgian student, on the contrary, operate mostly within a framework of secular post-Christian values as may be understood from student population in the public universities in Belgium particularly in Flanders and Wallonia where the rapid secularization process is evident from decline in weekly church attendance (Dobbelaere, 2002). Typical frame of ethical discussion is thus rooted inhuman rights, democracy, gender justice, LGBTQ+rights, social justice and anti-racism as common progressive values found in most European civic cultures(Norris & Ingle).

Mental Health and Cultural Context

A student's culture of upbringing, how it frames the understanding and response to mental health problems, has a fundamental impact at all levels of assessment and intervention. How issues are expressed, the type of service which is chosen or available in the broader context and cultural framework are all shaped by context. So care should be taken in comparing such figures for mental health on a cross-country basis, as the term mental health is, not culturally neutral, and varies across cultures (Kleinman, 1988). Mental health remains a stigma in India to this day. Fewer than 20% of Indians will seek professional support for mental health, let alone one might ask how many students will avail of this services? The expression and understanding of mental health in the Indian context may be conceived as "pressure" or "adjust difficulty," in which seeking external help is stigmatized through perceptions of family honour or spiritual deficits, which could be "solved through family help" (Deacon & Loring-Clark, 2016). "Pressure to succeed," "fear of academic failure," "career uncertainty," and "disappointment in parents" and social pressure "are the major issues in the India context" (Agarwal, 2009); with more than 30% of undergraduate's experience moderate to severe symptomology for anxiety and depressive issues (Srinivasan et al. 2019) with minimal universities providing any college counseling facilities (Goa).

There exists in Belgium a general high access to Mental Health Support. For instance, the two Belgian educational authorities (the Flemish and the French) are legally obliged to have at least one school psychologist (Van Ouytsel et al., 2019). The great majority of Belgian higher education institutions (universities and "hogescholen/ HautesEcoles") also provides a general offer to students regarding access to a broad service to the student (e.g. Peer, counseling and crisis support (Van Ouytsel et al., 2019). Mental health support in Belgium generally involves some strong institutional context, mostly conceptualized around wellness and public health issues and a general inclination to some external help. However, in this specific cultural setting it could be a real problem of Mental health support, having been as it can be framed with some issues that have raised as a consequences of this high value placed upon individualism; which represents "A frame of mind, according to which, autonomous actions/behaviour receive a greater positive emphasis than dependence of other others, at the cost of social supports for effective individual coping" and also a framework that "values independence rather than interdependence" (Peeters et al. 2017, p. 245). It generates therefore "a deficiency in rich, integrated communities and networks that can provide support found among Indian student population, where social support helps to support the student under the parental stress" (Peeters et al. 2017). For a significant group of 1st-year university students the feeling of "existential isolating loneliness as the pervasive impact of being pressured to "perform" (or to be "proving oneself)" (Baert et al. 2020, p. 3). It is felt as one of the biggest challenge facing, first years' students and more specifically ones coming "from the 'first generation' and/or from the 'working class' strata of society", which lack some cultural context, for whom "academic life, more often than not provides insufficient consistent, social cultural capital to draw on" (Baert et al., 2020, p. 3), leading some students to resort to substance abuse like alcohol.

Cross-cultural transition could be particularly vulnerable for students arriving from highly individualism cultures, such as it can be inferred by the analysis of Belgian context, they may be doubly confronted to vulnerability on account of acculturative challenges, as for instance language, social support network deficiencies and cultural adaptation processes (Berry, 2005), which would make a student more likely to be on vulnerability: "The social and cultural environment of a new culture that places a considerable premium on individualism may present particular difficulties". Although some improvements have already been made worldwide concerning student services support for students coming from individualism countries, the current system of support for universities could do much to improve to facilitate students from collectivism countries.

Cross-cultural interaction and globalization

The globalization students are witnessing, and 'the internationalization of higher education institutions provides for a significant number of Indian students today more possibilities of "real" cross-cultural contact with Belgians than has been the case in the past' (Poonawalla and De Jong, 2023). This growing global mobility for Indian students toward Belgium, driven by the recruitment efforts of universities such as the KU Leuven, that "boasts about '20 percent of its students are international'" (KU Leuven, 2023), with students studying subjects such as business, economics, computer science, and engineering at Belgium's universities (KU Leuven, 2023), and through more extensive and numerous student exchange programmes, with schemes such as Erasmus+ enabling a higher number of exchanges of Belgian students to India (and Southeast Asia) than before (Erasmus+, 2023) have afforded the two cultural groups plenty of opportunities for interaction.

It follows then that according to intercultural theorist Pratt (1991), that such interactions lead to 'contact zones', the 'contact zones,' in Pratt's terms, 'are spaces of transculturation where subjugated peoples are brought in contact with oppressors... [where] settlers and colonized subjects interact, negotiate, and create hybrid meanings and cultures' (Boonzaier and Gittens, 2008, 63). That is, students learn to negotiate the differences between cultures: "to be misunderstood, resisted and ideally transformed through a dialectic of learning" (Ashcraft, et al., 2004, 277). On their arrival in Belgium, they, coming from the subcontinent, can feel a shock when confronted by the bluntness and informality with which Belgians converse; many students find their way of communicating – particularly those whose background is a high-context culture – quite rude. Belgians have been observed calling their professors by their first names, expressing themselves more assertively, and openly arguing with their university teachers regarding academic matter: "it's shock for an Indian to see the students being so forward and aggressive against their teacher and not be apologetic" (Krishnakumar and Dahanayake, 2021, 105). Belgians are likewise presented with 'social situations' that were believed to be part of everyone's lives and 'would consider themselves to understand "how a human being 'is supposed to relate' to others"' (Svensson and McEvoy, 2008, 8). Meeting with the highly organized Indian social life, which seems so ritualized, with a plethora of religions and Languages, gives rise to feelings of confusion as well as fascination on their behalf, for in it, they discover a worldview, with a "rights-based and universalistic orientation, to which we appeal [in Belgium] on many fronts" (Prakash, 2004). Belgian visitors have often reported enthusing about the generosity and the closeness and warmth of Indian hospitality and "the vastness "of relation we never have any more in our alienated individualist society"' (Appadurai, 1996: 43). Along with the forces of globalization, these phenomena have fostered the construction of a "'global youth culture identity' [this term varies across literature (Appadurai, 1996:4) where global youth identity is referred to as 'global ecumene', 'global mass society of consumers' (Ritzer, 2011) and it affects 'cultural producers and users of products and services']." The cultures of these common global consumer practices have "now become more complex... With a more multi-scalar identity negotiation between, on the one hand, local and transnational identities on the other" (Oslo and Rdde, 2011, 113) [the definition comes from, Oslo and Rdde (2011,114)].

The impact of globalization, and in particular the part that the media plays in the transnational diffusion of products, ideas and culture, to include the transmission from Belgium to India as well as between other nations, continues to influence young people, and has the effect of "crossing boundaries" through the transnational spread of 'cultural products and norms' which eventually results in hybridization. As one Indian research indicates, it is seen to be prevalent also where "'global' is assimilated within 'local': In India and the West were engaged in a form of incorporated or assimilated, hybrid identity in young people in India" (Naseer and Aslam, 2023, para.6). As Ritzer(2011,619) claims: "What the assimilation of youth into the global processes... Does not challenge that in many ways the integration process occurs via assassination whereby local cultures are assimilated into global cultures is that it would assume a process of domination on the part of global culture against local cultures (i.e., not simply the dominance of the 'West', but the dominance of 'global' against 'local')." And thus it is no surprise that students from both India and Belgium tend to both celebrate both national and western festivals, such as Holi and Valentine's Day; students in both countries attend to Yoga classes, dance to electro and Hip- Hop; Indians are learning K-pop songs while Belgians engage with American movies and music and vice versa – and it would seem that we would want to consider the conceptualization offered by Bhabha (1994) of a 'third space', a porous borderland of crossing places, where identity is reconceptualized.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Implications for Policy and Practice in Higher Education

The implication of the research is to:

1) Facilitate culturally responsive pedagogical approach, i.e., avoid a one-size-fits-all and modify our approaches in relation to students' cultural context

2) Reinforce Faculty development, i.e., provide trainings about learner-centered, collaborative and intercultural teaching methods

3) Develop student support services for international students through orientation, peer support and cultural adjustment programs

4) Build culturally responsive student mental health services (addressing the issues of stigmatization, various forms of seeking help, and the need for intercultural counseling)

5) Introduce interculturalism into curriculum through the development of intercultural case-studies, international collaborative projects and global learning experiences

6) Adapt emergency and student support systems to recognize cultural variations in help seeking behaviors and distress expression

7) Establish an India-Belgium university partnership for increased intercultural collaboration and student mobility

8) Equipping our students for a globalized society with intercultural communication, cooperation and adaptation skills.

9) Digitalization awareness among students in a positive way for their progressive growth

Conclusion

The findings demonstrate strong cultural differences between Indian and Belgian university students: Collectivism versus Individualism, hierarchy versus Egalitarianism, family oriented versus Student-oriented decision making, examination oriented versus Critical oriented learning. Social differences show that Belgian students are more likely to make an independent life. There are also strong supports for students' mental health in Belgium and there is no negative stigma of talking about psychological issues, while there is negative stigmatization regarding talking about psychological issues among Indians. The development of globalization and digitalization results in the formation of cultural hybrids in both the countries. It is important for the universities in both the countries to apply culturally sensitive teaching, intercultural competence training and inclusive students' support.

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