

BARRIERS FACED BY SOUTH ASIAN INTERNATIONAL UNDERGRADUATE
STUDENTS PURSUING HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE USA

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HONORS THESIS

Presented to the Honors Committee of
Texas State University-San Marcos
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements

for Graduation in the Honors College

by

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San Marcos, Texas
August 2012

Abstract

Even if academically prepared and financially strong, international students face difficulties while completing their education in a new country away from friends and family. These difficulties could be due to the socioeconomic status of the international student's family, legal status during their stay here, or being in a new culture and context. The purpose of this study was to analyze these difficulties, or barriers faced by South Asian International undergraduate students at Texas State University. This study will also identify the strength of each barrier, its possible reasons, and students' opinion on how to reduce it during their stay at Texas State University. Barriers of international students were divided into five categories: social, cultural, financial, academic, and legal barriers. Financial barriers were found to be the strongest barriers identified by the participants. Academic barriers, on the other hand, were the weakest barriers. Students also experienced many difficulties coming from different cultural backgrounds and expressed difficulties dealing with cultural, social, and legal challenges in addition to other challenges they faced.

Introduction

According to the Institute of International Education (IIE), the United States is a leading destination for international students from different parts of the world. IIE's data show that the US welcomed 20% of all international students in 2010 (Institute for International Education, 2011). The United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) handles all the immigration and related legal issues of international students in the United States. USCIS assigns international students an F-1 immigration status. The F-1 status is a non-immigrant lawful status designated by the US Government for international students (USCIS, 2011).

It is common to assume that international students are better prepared for academic success and have financial support (Andrade, 2009); however, international students face many challenges besides academics and finances. They face unique challenges during their temporary stay in the United States. Even academically prepared and financially strong students face difficult environments to complete their education in a new country away from friends and family (Mamiseishvili, 2012). Many researchers and theorists agree that international students experience many difficulties in new environments (Charles & Stewart, 1991). Transitional difficulties in international students' behaviors and psychological well-being impact their learning ability (Yuchun, 2011). Such transitional difficulties include language problems, differences in educational system, differences in food, and different living circumstances (Constantine, Okazaki, Gainor, & Baden 2005; Hayes & Lin, 1994).

Anything that inhibits success in college is a barrier, and the barriers are found at all stages of the college experience, from entering college until graduation (Merriam,

Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). The range of barriers faced by international students is broad and wide. They face financial, academic, cultural, legal, and other barriers (Aubrey, 1991; Kuo, 2011). There are many possible reasons for barriers.

Visa costs and renewal hassles are some legal barriers. Some of these barriers are related to national security issues. Visa policies to balance security interests with the students' needs are a possible barrier. After 9/11, the United States government made extensive changes to correct their mistakes, which ultimately increased restrictions on international students (Urias & Yeakey, 2009). International students were not tracked very well and not enough precaution was taken while issuing visas and allowing entrance and reentrance to students to the United States. Some of the terrorists responsible for the attacks had student visas (Entry of 9/11 Hijackers, 2004). Restrictions in work authorization and limited H-1B visas (H-1B is the immigration status issued to international students after they are hired by employers to work) are some other barriers international students may face (International Students and Visiting Scholar, 2007).

The socioeconomic status of the family, such as low parental income, may also cause a barrier to international students (Eggens & Kauchak, 2007). Other reasons for barriers are the cost of higher education for international students since international students pay non-resident tuition. The lack of strategies of universities to recruit international students is also a barrier. In my own experience, recruited students enjoy more support and help from international offices and other organizations.

Many universities focus on international students to increase diversity and enhance multicultural perspectives on campus (Higher Education, 2007). American students' global understanding and cultural sensitivity can be enhanced by exposure to

international education and interaction with international students (Carnevale, 1999). Such experiences can also help them interact with people from diverse backgrounds and meet the demands of today's global workplace (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004). Yet many universities view international students as tuition revenue. Especially for small universities, international students not only increase enrollment but also generate huge tuition revenue (Paige, 1990; Jacobs, 2005).

Almost every university that accepts international students has an international office that handles students' data and documentation. In my experience, some of these offices for some of these universities go beyond documentation and data to make international students' experience better. They play a great role to ease the transition from the students' home countries and educational system to the United States and its educational system. Other universities provide nothing more than just documentation services.

Students also face social and cultural barriers. People practicing local cultures have limited understanding of other cultures and limited recognition of cultural differences (Rizvi & Walsh, 1998). Therefore, being in a new culture and context may be challenging to international students. They also face social barriers in the new community they live in and the new school they attend (Stevenson, 2010). Social and cultural differences may limit students' participation in classrooms and in other activities.

This study is designed to analyze information from international undergraduate students from South Asian countries attending Texas State University. This study will explore the barriers faced by international students pursuing undergraduate degrees at Texas State University. It will also identify the strength of each barrier and its possible

reasons and the students' opinions on how to reduce these barriers during their stay at Texas State University.

Materials and Methods

This study was conducted at Texas State University, San Marcos, Texas. It was focused on South Asian international undergraduate students currently attending the university. This study was conducted from April 6, 2012 to April 27, 2012. To conduct this study an exemption from the Institutional Review Board was requested on April 6, 2012. This request was approved on April 24, 2012. In this study, participants were interviewed over the phone or in person; four participants were interviewed in person, and three were interviewed over the phone. No identifying information was collected from the participants.

Barriers of international students were divided into five types: social, cultural, financial, academic, and legal barriers. Each barrier was divided into five categories. The categories of the social barriers were low or no faculty of same origin, no role models, no community support, low achievement of parents, and age of entry. The categories of the cultural barriers were lack of diversity of state or town, lack of appreciation of diversity, feeling unaccepted, difference in religion, and other cultural differences. The categories of the financial barriers were lack of financial aid, low parental income, inability to find on-campus jobs, inability to find jobs after they graduate, and out-of-state or country tuition. The categories of the academic barriers were language difficulties, low high school GPA, low quality of previous schools, low score on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or International English Language Testing System (IELTS), and different academic system. The categories of the legal barriers were legal status, fear

of losing status, inability to work, driver's license problems, or extra requirements for finding jobs, applying for visas, transferring and in many other areas.

Participants rated the strength of the barriers from 1-10. While interviewing, participants were asked to identify any other barriers that they might have faced that were not asked. Participants were asked not to answer questions if they felt uncomfortable in any way. During this study none of the participants actually mentioned being uncomfortable. Participants were also asked if they received any help from professors, the International Office, ethnic or other organizations, local communities, and or friends. Participants were also asked for the possible reasons for barriers and any suggestions they may have to reduce them.

Demographic Information

Participants in this study were from South Asian countries. Since this study focused on international South Asian undergraduate (ISAU) populations, participants from Nepal, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bhutan Bangladesh and Maldives were eligible. There were 15 international undergraduate students from South Asia enrolled in fall 2011. Eight out of 15 students were interviewed, but one female was dropped because of her experiences, which will be discussed later. There were no students from Bhutan, Maldives or Bangladesh. Four of the participants were Hindu, two were Muslim and one was Christian. The following chart shows the international student distribution at Texas State University from 2002 to 2011 based on country of origin.

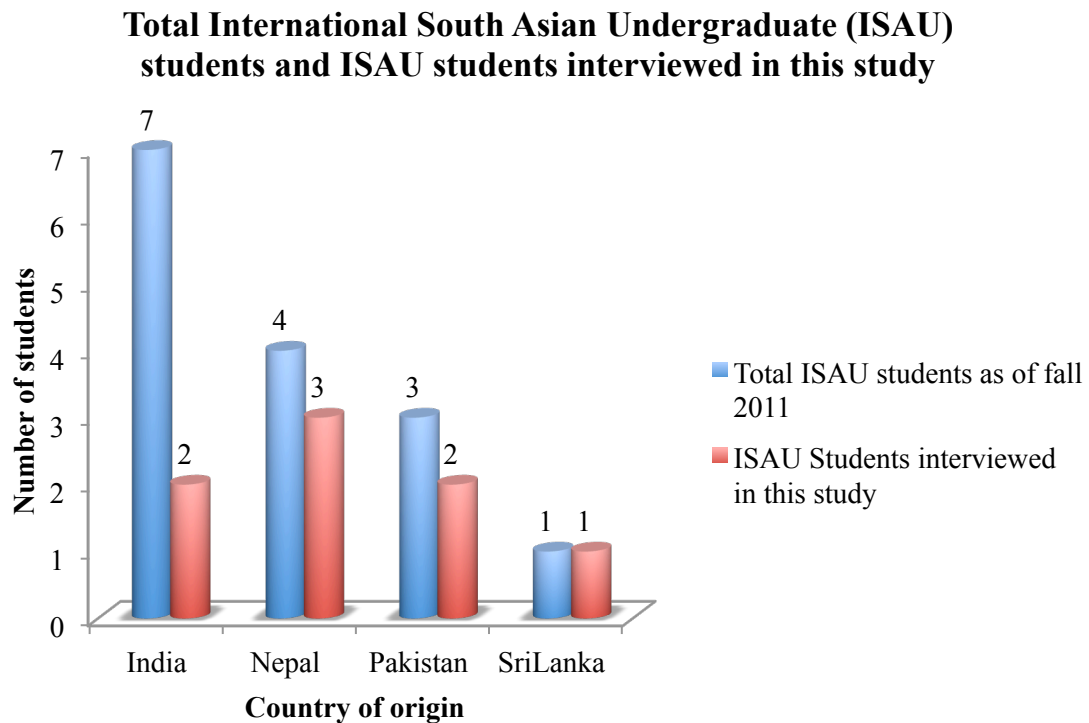


Figure 1: Total international South Asian undergraduate students and students interviewed in this study

Figure 1 shows the number of ISAU and how many participated in this study. Out of a total of 15 ISAU, 13 were male and 2 were female. In this study, 7 males and 1 female were interviewed. There were two males, each from India, Pakistan and Nepal; one male from Sri Lanka; and one female from Nepal. The female participant from Nepal was not comfortable sharing how her case F-1 status was exceptional, but she did mention enjoying many benefits similar to residents, including in-state tuition fees with scholarships and grants and fewer legal barriers compared to other students. She was excluded from this study since her case was different. So, only seven out of 15 students' experience were included in this study. The participants' ages of entry to the United States ranged from 15 to 21.

Number of international undergraduate students from South Asia from 2002 to 2011

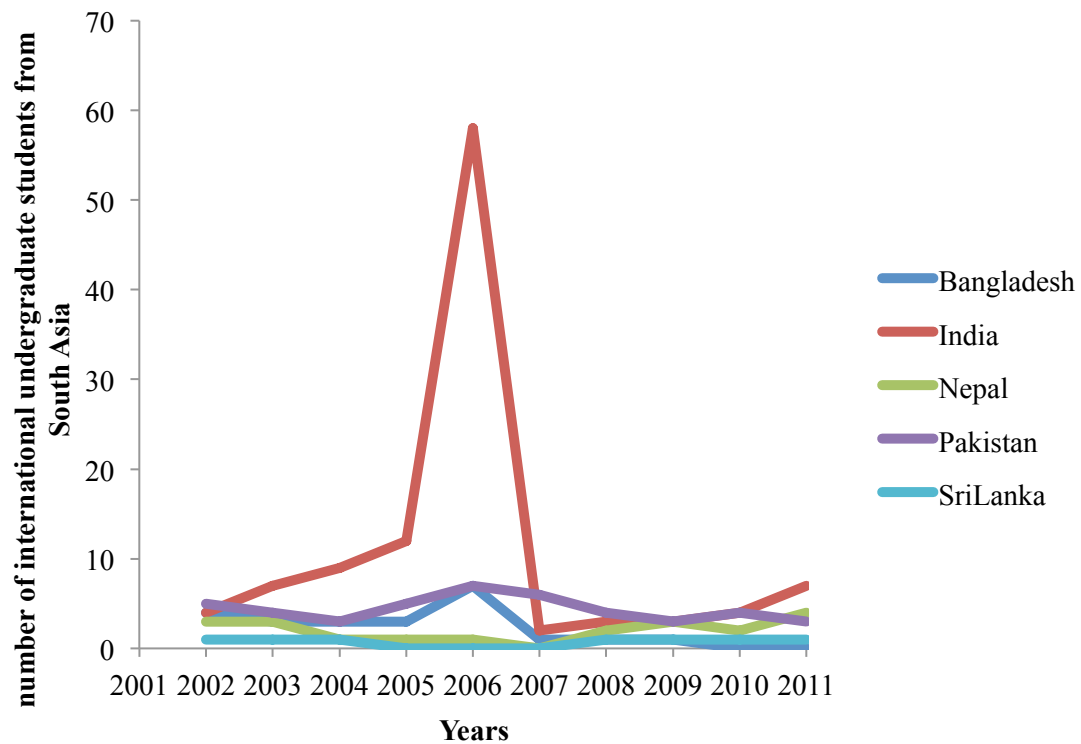


Figure 2: Number of ISAU students from 2002 to 2011 at Texas State University
(International Office Academic Affairs, 2002-2010)

Figure 2 shows the distribution of ISAU students from 2002 to 2011 at Texas State University. From the figure we see that the number of South Asian international undergraduate students did not change much from 2002 to 2011 with an exception in 2006. According to the data provided by the International Office, there were 56 Indian international undergraduate students in 2006. The number of Indian students dropped to average levels in 2007. The number of students from other countries has only changed slightly over the years.

Statistical Design and Analysis Method

Each participant rated the strength of the categories from 1 to 10, with 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest. There were five types of barriers and each type had five categories making 25 categories total. The average strength of each categories was calculated, which ran from 1 to 10. The average strength of each type of barrier (social, cultural, financial, academic and legal) ranged from 0-10, which was calculated after adding the strength of the individual categories in that barrier and taking an average. For example, the strength of legal barriers was calculated after adding the strength totals from its categories; legal status, fear of losing status, inability to work, driver's license problems, or extra requirements and taking an average. If any barrier did not apply to the participants, then the strength of that barrier was assumed to be zero.

Results

The results from this study are summarized below:

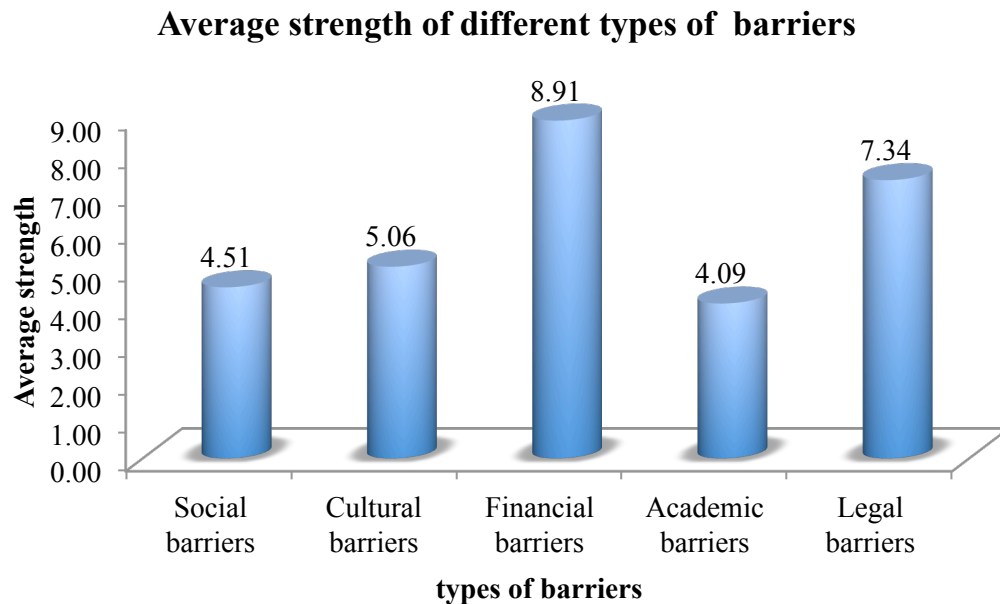


Figure 3: Average strength of types of barriers

Figure 3 shows the strength of major barrier categories. These barriers are social, cultural, financial, academic and legal barriers. The average strength of the financial barriers was the highest, and academic barriers were the lowest. Since all of the South Asian countries are developing countries with much lower GDPs, financial barriers being the strongest barrier is not surprising (Singh, 2008). According to the Google converter, the exchange rate of dollars to respective currency of South Asian countries is very high (Google Converter, 2012).

Social Barriers

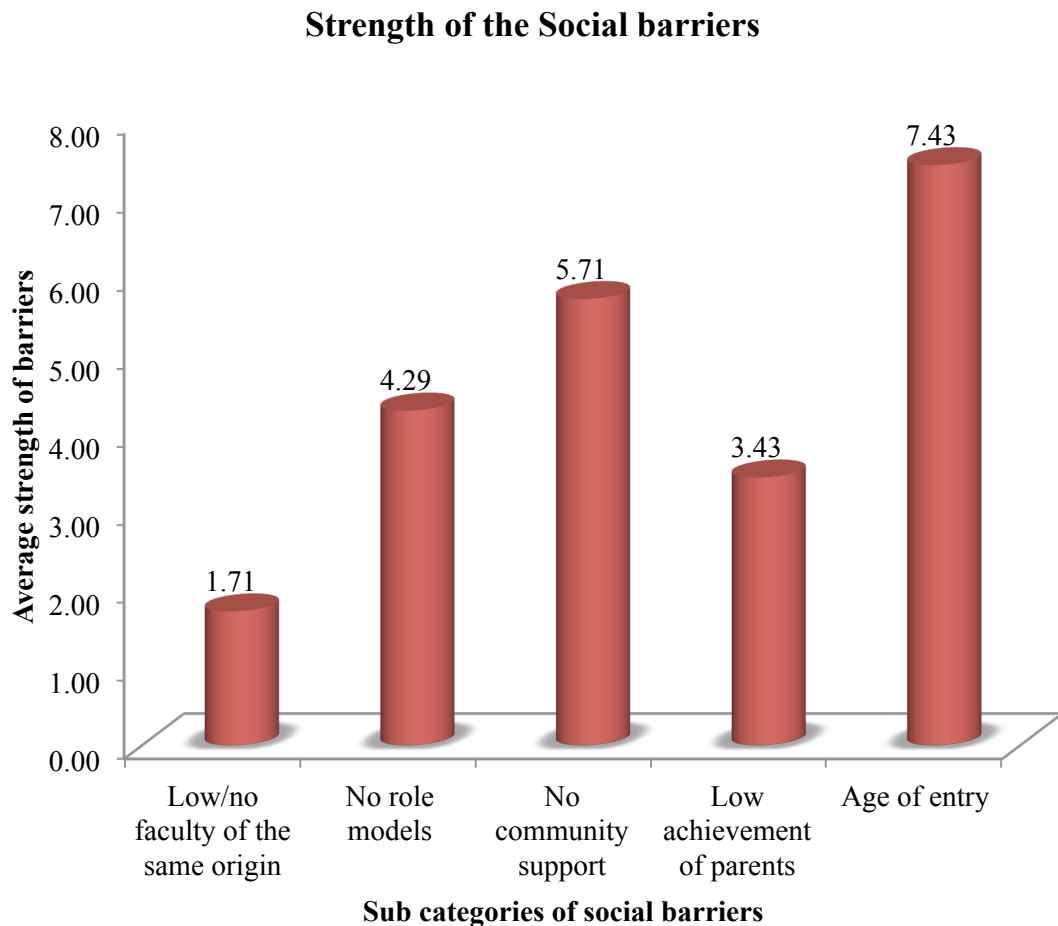


Figure 4: Average strength of social barriers

Figure 4 shows the average strength of social barriers. Within the social barriers, age of entry was the highest barrier and low or no faculty of the same origin was the smallest barrier. Many students found age of entry was very important. The participants' age of entry ranged from 15-21. The student who entered at the age of 15 went to high school in the US and was familiar with the academic system before entering college. Many of the participants felt that entering early in their lives would have given them better insights into the academic workings of the US education system and could have potentially reduced their language and cultural barriers as well.

The participants said that lack of community support was also a strong barrier for them. They did not get involved in community events. Students in this study did not identify the lack of role models as a very strong barrier on average, although some of them thought it as a strong barrier. Low achievement of parents was also considered a low barrier because it did not apply to many of the participants. Many participants' parents were actually high achievers and were able to send them to the USA for higher studies.

Students also identified low or no faculty of the same origin as a weak barrier. Many of them said they would actually learn more from faculty from other origins than theirs. The participants mentioned that they learned the same style they were familiar with from the faculty of the same origin whereas they learned the same information in different styles from the faculty from other origins.

Cultural Barriers

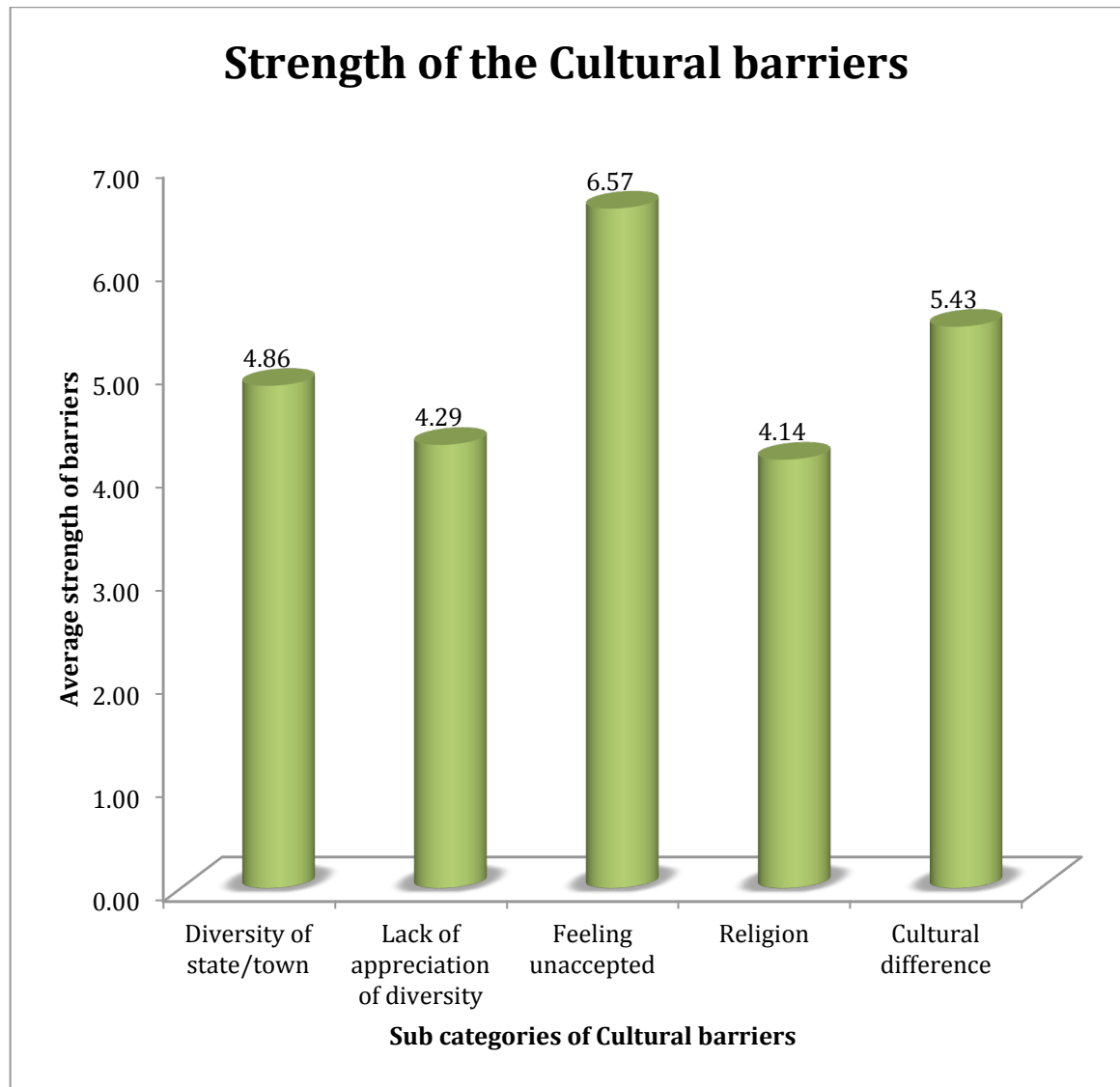


Figure 5: Strength of cultural barriers

Figure 5 shows the average strength of cultural barriers. Feeling unaccepted was the largest cultural barrier the participants faced. They felt isolated and left out in academic and non-academic situations and viewed that as a strong barrier. For example they mentioned that there were times when professors or fellow classmates would crack American jokes or use American sayings, and they felt like they were left behind. Another participant mentioned having the same feelings while professors or fellow

classmates talked about high school and college rituals. He also mentioned that he neither would have anything to say during these conversations nor would they understand why he was quiet.

The participants also identified the difference in culture as a strong barrier. Coming from different cultural backgrounds, they experienced many difficulties. Some of them were not able to convey exactly what they meant, and their friends were not able to understand them since they talked from a different cultural frame of reference. One of the participants provided an excellent example when he mentioned a project in which he had to work with an American student. He mentioned that the American student did not want to go in depth on the project since he only needed to pass the class. For the participant, on the other hand, passing was not relevant. Culturally, South Asian students are pressured by parents to perform extraordinarily well in college. One of the participants said that in the beginning years he used to think everything in his native cultural frame of reference, and many times he experienced frustration and difficulties.

The participants identified lack of diversity of state or town, lack of appreciation of diversity and difference in religion as mild, but almost equal, barriers. They thought diversity was very important, and their presence was a strong contributor to this diversity. Hindu and Muslim students mentioned their difficulty during their religious festivals since these festivals normally fell during academic sessions. The major Hindu festivals, Nawaratri and Dashain, fall in mid October when the midterms for fall are taking place. The participants had to wait to celebrate these festivals because of academic demands. These participants also felt less supported in celebrating these festivals because of the lack of diversity of the area.

Financial Barriers

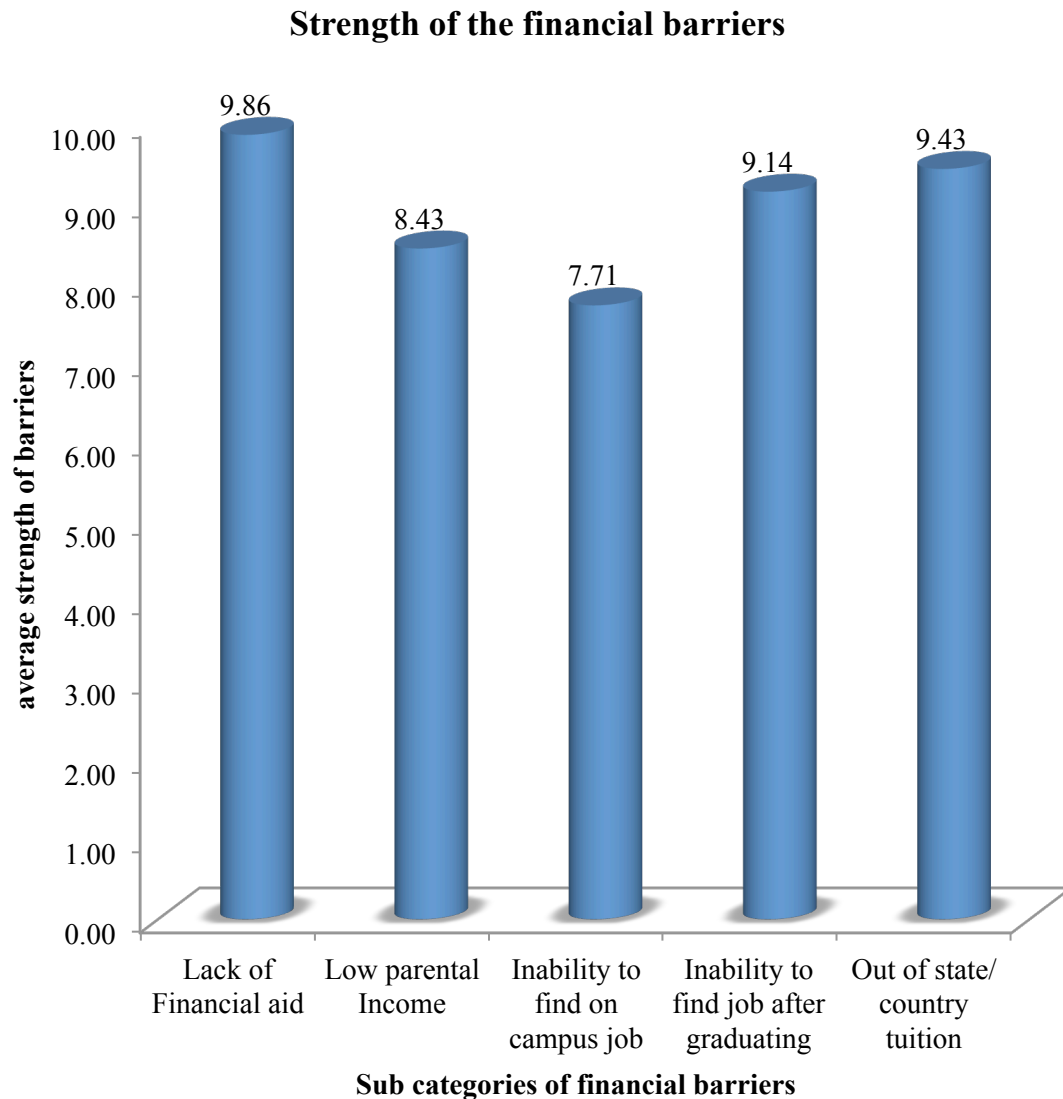


Figure 6: Strength of financial barriers

Figure 6 represents the average strength of financial barriers. Within the financial barriers, a lack of financial aid was the strongest barrier, and the inability to find a campus job was the weakest barrier. Financial barriers were high in all categories compared to the other types of barriers. Financial barriers were the strongest barriers identified by the participants. As mentioned earlier, the low GDPs of South Asian

countries and the high exchange rates might be significant contributors. Many students felt that the lack of financial aid to international students was the biggest barrier they faced. Even when their parents could afford it, many felt that having to pay more in tuition because they had to pay non-resident tuition and had no or very few opportunities for scholarships and financial aid was very stressful for them. They were very disappointed by the fact that they could not help their parents at all, despite having good grades and being more than qualified for scholarships. Additional financial barriers they identified were the inability to find jobs after they graduate. Employers must sponsor H1-B visa to international students for them to be able to work, and often employers are reluctant to hire international students because of the additional paperwork and additional costs incurred with sponsorship. With a fragile economy in recent years, many international students are not hired for the jobs for which they are qualified.

Some students mentioned that their parental income has changed during recent years due to changing economic and political conditions in their home country. This change had created difficulties for their studies here since it had become increasingly hard for their parents to afford higher education. A few students have searched for “alternative sources of income” (not clearly identified by the participants) to be able to study here. Since international students are only able to work on campus legally, not being able to find an on-campus job is a huge problem. Some shared bitter experiences of not finding a job on campus. One participant shared his own story where he could not obtain a social security number because he could not find a campus job. Since he did not have a social security number, he was unable to rent an apartment as well and had to find a co-signer every time he needed an apartment.

Academic Barriers

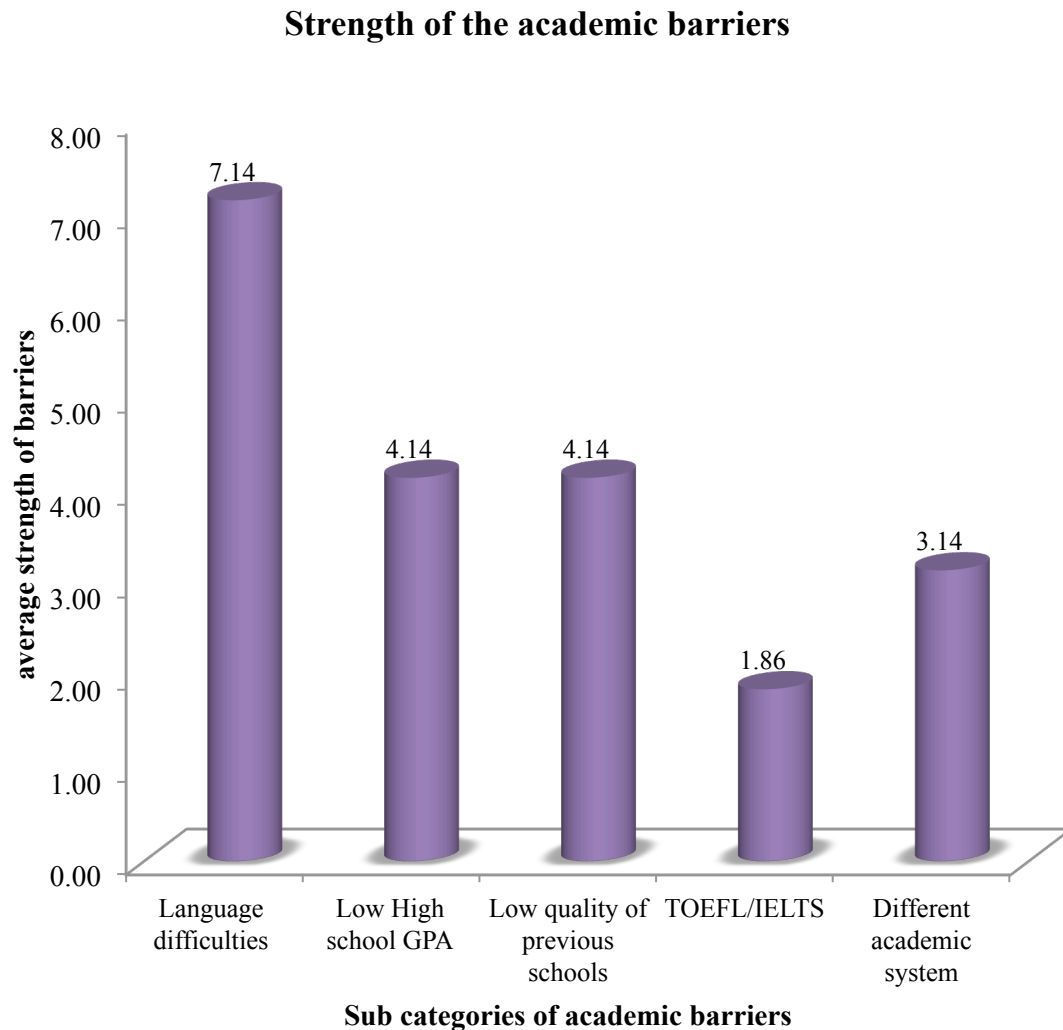


Figure 7: Average strength of academic barriers

Figure 7 shows the academic barriers faced by ISAU at Texas State University. Within academic barriers, language difficulties were the strongest barrier while TOEFL or IELTS scores were the weakest barriers.

The academic barrier was the weakest barrier of all the types of barriers. Many of the participants said that they felt academic settings were less challenging compared to their home countries. They felt it was easier here. Based on what participants said, I can

easily conclude that academic settings in these South Asian countries are not much different from each other. Many of the students expressed that it was very difficult to answer subjective questions in their home countries' academic courses compared to objective questions in the US academic courses. Subjective questions are essay-based questions that are graded harshly. Many participants recalled that even after addressing all the elements in an essay for South Asian assignments, they would never get a great score. One of the participants mentioned that scoring 100% was never possible. He mentioned that only a few students would score 80%. On the other hand, objective or multiple-choice questions are very common in the US academic system, and it is possible to score 100%. Many students score above 90% as well. The depth of the content they studied in high school was as much as the first two years of the US college curriculum as well. One student from Nepal mentioned that he had completed General Chemistry I and II, Organic Chemistry I and II, Physics I and II, Biology I and II, Algebra and Calculus I and II in high school. The participants said that going to school 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. for 6 days a week was very challenging compared to going school here for 2 or 3 days a week.

The most major barrier within the academic barriers was language difficulties. Many participants felt they had serious problems understanding and communicating with friends and professors, especially during their first couple of years. They mentioned it got better as they became familiar with the language and communication styles. Participants in this study mentioned that low high school grade point average (GPA) or low quality of previous school was a mild barrier. They mentioned that GPA calculation in their home country was very tough. They got their grades in percentages, and in many cases their final exam was the only test that counted. Almost all of them mentioned that it would be

one question for the entire country or region. Professors other than the professor who taught them would grade the tests. Therefore, GPA was not a good predictor of how they would perform in the US. They also mentioned that the different academic system was not a significant barrier. As discussed before many felt that they were in a less challenging academic system. The weakest barrier within academic barriers was TOEFL/IELTS score. A couple of the participants had high scores in these tests but still had language problems in their first years.

Legal Barriers

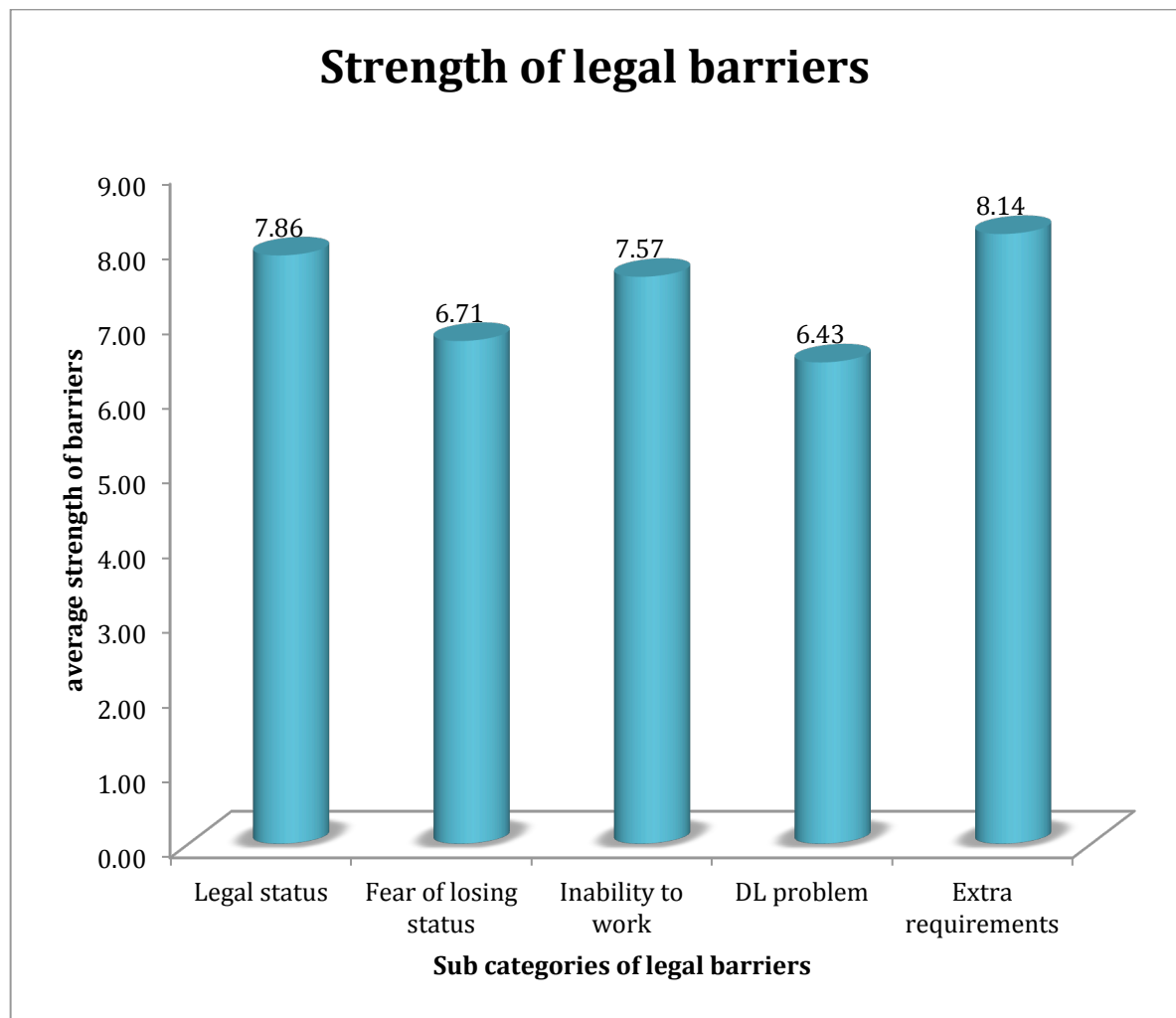


Figure 8: Average strength of legal barriers

Figure 8 shows the average strength of legal barriers. Within legal barriers, extra requirements were the strongest barrier, and the driver's license problems were the weakest. Legal status was the second strongest barrier faced by international students while pursuing their education in the USA. Like financial barriers, the sub categories of legal barriers were high in all sub-categories compared to other barriers. The participants said extra requirements for everything– from finding a job to adjusting legal status, from travelling to transferring colleges– was the biggest barrier within the legal barriers. Legal status and inability to work were also very strong barriers.

Maintaining F-1 status is very challenging. Undergraduate students in F-1 status must take 12 hours minimum in fall and spring terms. They are only allowed to drop the class if they will not fall below the 12-hour limit. The participants mentioned they normally took 12-14 hours per semester. This left them no opportunity to drop the class if they were performing poorly. Fear of losing status was also very problematic. If they had to drop a class and their credit hours fell below 12, then they would lose their status. If they engaged in any employment opportunities outside the campus setting, due to poor finances and other circumstances, they would lose their status as well. They also mentioned driver's license problems as a barrier. International students get a driver's license for one year that must be renewed yearly. They not only have to go to the Department of Motor Vehicles yearly but also have to obtain proper documentation from United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and the school they are attending every year. They are also not eligible to renew their driver's license online.

Help Received

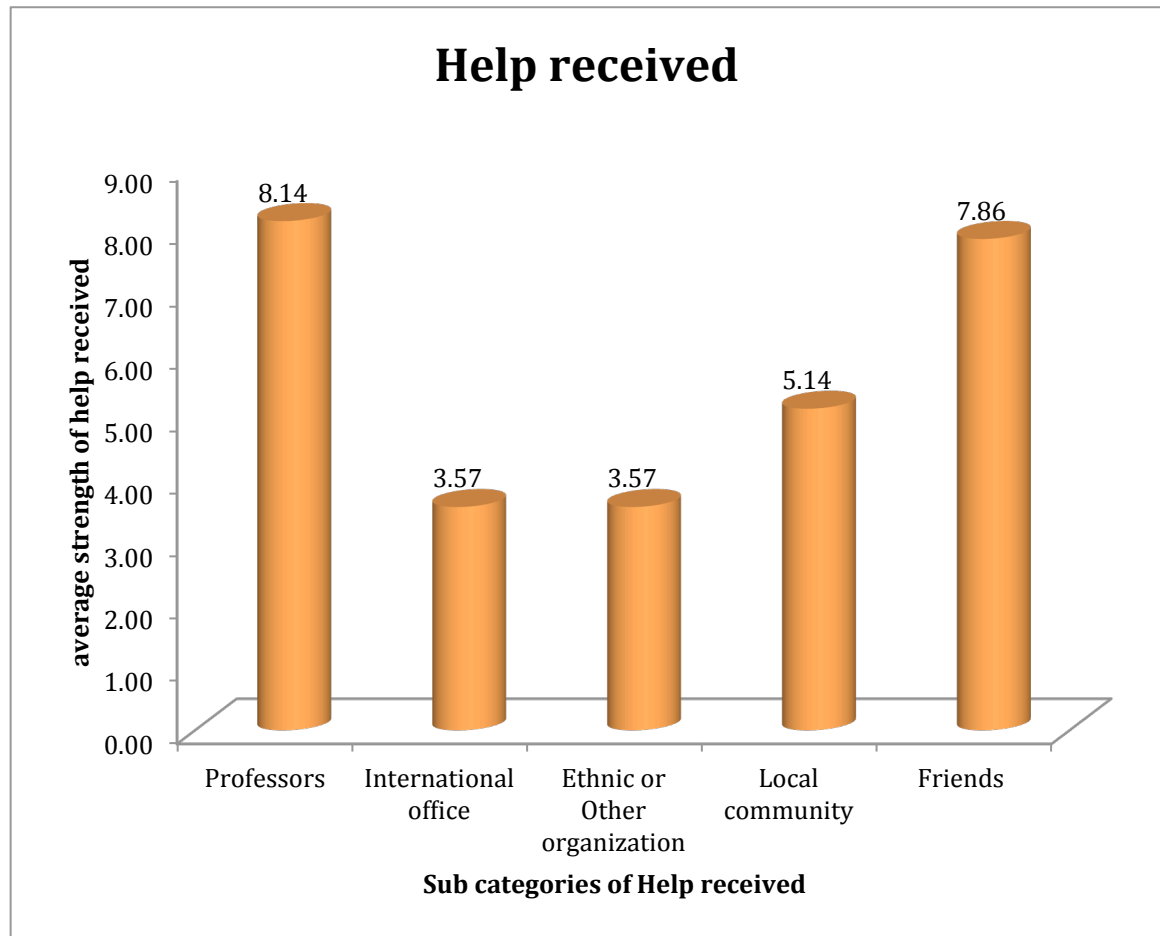


Figure 9: Average strength of help received

Figure 9 shows the average strength of help received by ISAU at Texas State University. Participants received the most help from professors and the least help from the International Office and ethnic or other organizations during their studies at Texas State University. Almost all participants said their professors were very supportive. All participants said they have received help from their friends, both American and other international students. They mentioned friends were key when it comes to learning about the culture and systems. They recognized the help received from roommates and classmates. They received a medium amount of help from the local community.

The least effective help they have received was from ethnic or other organizations and the International Office. They all uniformly said that the International Office was not helping them as they had wished. They mentioned that International Office only handled their documentation. They also said that the advisor and officers in International Office were not very helpful or knowledgeable although they did not elaborate on what kind of help for which they were specifically looking.

Discussion

Several key issues were identified after analyzing the results section. I asked the participants what they thought was causing these barriers, and they pointed out three important things. The first one is the university policy regarding financial aid. As mentioned above, there is little or no financial aid to international students at Texas State University. Although, generally international students' tuition will be adjusted to resident tuition if they obtain a scholarship with amount more than a thousand dollars, there are limited scholarships where they could apply. None of my participants had any scholarships although they applied and mentioned that they were qualified and fulfilled the requirements. They mentioned that there are universities that will provide international scholarships to international students. These scholarships are exclusive to international students only. Having scholarships like this will turn their international tuition fees to residential, making it affordable to them and their sponsors. But Texas State does not have aid of this kind.

They also think that there is not enough support from the International Office. In their opinion, having an International Office that will go beyond documentation and help them in other legal issues and advise them appropriately will reduce a great deal of

barriers. They think organizing seminars and workshops on different aspects of international students' steps will help them a lot. One student who transferred from community college pointed out that his previous college would have workshops on how to qualify for optional practice training and curriculum based training, when to apply for work permits, what to do and what not to do while travelling abroad or to their home countries. He said the community college would also have workshops where they could meet with an immigration attorney and ask any questions they had directly to the attorney. The participants mentioned that they would benefit from workshops like this.

The third factor causing these barriers is the ineffectiveness of organization that motivates international students. The participants mentioned that organizations like the South Asian Students Association (SASA), could play a better role in motivating students to get involved in different activities. Some of my participants did not know that SASA existed on-campus. The participants also mentioned that other organizations were also necessary to get them involved. In my own experience, when I was at Dallas Baptist University in Dallas, Texas as an international student, I was involved in many organizations affiliated with the International Office to motivate international students. Some of those organizations designed programs that included meeting one American student once a week and sending a summary to the advisor, and meeting American families, where the family would take a group of international students to their home and talk about cultures and food. These are a few examples, but there were many other organizations that could involve international students. The participants thought that these types of organizations would help them enhance their ability to communicate and understand local cultures and reduce their barriers.

In this study, international students felt they faced more challenges than American students as pointed out by Andrade (2009). They expressed difficulties dealing with cultural, social, and legal challenges in addition to other challenges that all students face. Although, Andrade also pointed out that international students are better prepared academically and financially, international students in this study were only better prepared academically. Despite being financially able to afford tuition, almost all the participants were worried because their parents had to pay a significant amount for their tuition. Although, many participants' parents were able to afford their education financially, they felt that having to pay extra and having only limited opportunities for scholarships was not fair. As discussed in the results section, some of the participants also mentioned financial problems due to changed circumstances in their home countries. In contrast to Andrade's study, the participants identified financial barriers as the strongest barrier they faced.

Andrade also pointed out that international students faced unique challenges, besides academic and financial. In this study, the unique challenge, based on the participants' interviews, was the legal barriers. In addition to the cultural and social barriers the participants faced, legal barriers brought more challenges to the participants. The participants were more worried about maintaining a legal status than any other thing. They mentioned everything was connected to the legal status. For example, if they failed a class, they would fall below 12-hour limit and their legal status would be in danger.

The participants agreed that even though they were academically prepared, they faced difficulties in a new country. As mentioned by Mamiseishvili (2012), the participants felt that staying away from home, friends and family was not only difficult

emotionally, but also challenging to them. The participants expressed the pain they felt going through the transition in a new country with a new academic system and new challenges. They said the difficult part was not being able to lean on friends and families since they were so far away. The findings from this study support Mamiseishvili's (2012) ideas. Even very well prepared participants in this study expressed challenges found by Mamiseishvili (2012). The other unique challenge the participants faced was language difficulties. Even though they were well prepared academically, they felt that language problems did inhibit their performance in their classrooms. Almost all the participants strongly felt that the transition was very difficult. Although academics themselves were not much of a problem, they thought that their transitions and adapting to a new environment made it more challenging. Like Yuchun (2012) pointed out, participants agreed that the transition and adaptation to a new environment did affect their learning ability. Hays and Lin (1994) pointed out similar ideas about transition, which was reflected in the participants' experiences.

A study conducted by Charles and Stewart (1991) further supports that international students, although their stay is temporary, face challenges that no other students face. They pointed out that the new environment itself is a challenge before they encounter other challenges. They have to interact with new people, in a new language, in a new country, and in a new culture. Stevenson (2010) also presented the challenges international students face in new schools, with different academic systems, away from their home school. Like Stevenson's (2010) findings, the participants in this study did mention feeling loneliness and isolation. Some of the participants mentioned it decreased gradually, but others said they still felt this way. Most of the participants did not feel

homesickness as much as they did when they first came here.

Merriam and colleagues (2007) advocated that barriers exist from the first day of college until graduation, but the participants felt barriers even before college started and until after graduation. Dealing with legal issues, like applying for a visa, obtaining an I-20 (I-20 is the official admission acceptance document provided by the International Office of the university) start before college. Language difficulties start upon arrival to the United States. The participants also mentioned anticipating challenges after graduation. They mentioned that finding an employer who would sponsor international students for H-1B was very difficult. USCIS requires international students to find a job within three months. If they are unable to find jobs within three months, then they must either enroll back to school for another degree or return to their home countries (USCIS, 2011). As pointed out in International Students and Visiting Scholar (2007), restrictions on work authorization and quota systems on H-1B approval are the reasons the participants anticipate challenges after graduation.

Despite legal barriers, Aubrey (1991) and Kuo (2011) discussed other types of barriers international students face. These barriers are very similar to this study. The participants expressed similar social, cultural, financial, and academic barriers. Eggen and Kauchak (2007) pointed out the socioeconomic conditions of the family as a possible barrier. In this study, I found socioeconomic status of international students' families very relevant. The participants were from completely different social and cultural backgrounds. As discussed earlier, South Asian countries have low GDPs. The participants identified many social, cultural and especially financial barriers even though the financial barriers were largely participants' perception about their family's finances.

Grey (2002) mentioned that international students are overlooked, and they are not given a chance for their voices to be heard while making policies in many universities. In this study, I found the participants expressing similar concerns. As discussed above, many felt isolated in the classrooms or during conversations. A few participants mentioned that they were expected to talk and act like Americans in classrooms and outside. In other words, people assume that international students understood American sayings, styles, jokes, and other things and expect international students to react appropriately. The participants felt overlooked and felt that people lacked the understanding that they were from different cultures and backgrounds. Rizvi and Walsh (1998) pointed out that there is limited understanding and limited recognition of other cultures among Americans. Almost all the participants agreed to this fact. There were numerous times they felt like the person they were talking to had limited recognition of cultural difference. They mentioned that while talking with somebody, many times the person they were talking to, assumed that they, the international student, knew the context. They suggested the university take initiatives to foster mutual understanding between international and American students. Selvadurai (1991) made this suggestion in her study as well.

The participants felt that they were contributing to the diversity as addressed by Carnevale in his study (1999). They felt that they had enhanced the understanding of locals on global understandings. They appreciated the fact that they had learned a lot themselves as well interacting with locals here. The participants called for the need of cultural sensitivity, but they did agree that people were getting better at it. The participants felt proud to come from diverse backgrounds. They also felt they were

contributing to globalization as advocated by Chapdelaine and Alexitch (2004). Unlike participants from Gomez (2011), my participants were not worried to represent them as international students, and share their experience with local people. The participants felt that local people had benefitted from interacting with them. They felt that they had enhanced the ability of their American friends to understand global perspectives.

In this study, participants mentioned multiple times that they were very unsatisfied with the financial policies of the university. They were unhappy with the fact that they had to pay international tuition. On one hand, they had to pay two to three times more than American students, and on the other hand, they were not allowed to work off-campus due to restrictions set by Department of Homeland Security. They strongly felt that the university saw them as tuition revenue as argued by Paige (1990). She also argued that international students contribute largely to total enrollment in small universities, but since Texas State University is relatively big university, international students contribute only to a very small percentage of total students. Despite this, the participants strongly felt they were a revenue-generating source for the university.

Limitations of the Study

This study had a few limitations. The sample size for this study was very small. As mentioned earlier the total sample size was 15 and 8 of them were interviewed and 7 of them were included in the study. Since there were about 30,000 undergraduate students at Texas State University, finding 15 international South Asian undergraduates by snowball sampling was very difficult. I was able to find 8 students. This small sample size also limits the generalizability. A few questions were interpreted differently to participants interviewed in the beginning. If the item was not a barrier for that particular

participant due to a specific condition, the participant was still asked the question with modification. They were asked with condition “what if” the scenario was absent (present the condition as a barrier). So the rating of the barrier was hypothetical than the actual barrier they were facing. There were 3 sub categories of barriers, which were modified as mentioned above to the first and second participants. One example of such interpretation includes my first and second participants mentioning having an on campus job, so not having an on campus job would not be a barrier to them. I asked them to rate the barrier assuming that they did not have the job.

Implications of this Study

I think this study has opened doors to several possibilities. This study may help the university acknowledge the challenges associated with international students and enhance recruitment and allocate funds for international students’ financial aid and scholarships packages. This study may also help the International Office to better understand and assist international students’ need in the future if they take international students’ opinion presented in this study as a feedback.

Suggested Further Studies

This study could open the door for future studies dealing with international students at Texas State University. One suggested study is to identify the discrepancies in the number of students from different countries. From the data provided by the International Office website, from 2002 to 2011 40-50% of international undergraduate students are from Japan. The reason for having so many students from one country and only a few students from other countries could be addressed in future studies. A further study is suggested to explore innovative ideas, like sending recruiters abroad to promote

Texas State University to international students. Another future study could identify the obstacles international students face from other regions of the world. A study on how the International office could improve to meet the expectations of the international students is also a possibility.

Conclusion

This study clearly established that international students face significant barriers. They have faced an array of difficulties from different areas. To reduce their barriers and to enhance the recruitment of international students at Texas State University, many departments have to work hand in hand. The International Office must not be assumed to be the only office combating the issue faced by international students. Student affairs and faculty from various other departments must work together with the International Office to help foreign students succeed at Texas State University. Simple contributions from many departments and organizations will not only reduce many of the barriers faced by international students, but also enhance their ability to deal with other fewer and legitimate barriers.

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