



## **FROM HOMESICKNESS TO SUCCESS: ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AT VFSTR**

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### **Abstract:**

*This study investigates the unique challenges faced by international students at VFSTR, focusing on homesickness, cultural adjustment, language barriers, and academic difficulties. Exercising a mixed-methods research design, the study integrates quantitative data from surveys and qualitative insights from in-depth interviews with international students. The findings reveal that these challenges significantly impact the overall student experience and highlight the critical role of institutional support mechanisms in promoting success.*

*The study emphasizes the importance of directed interventions, such as culturally responsive pedagogy, peer mentorship programs, and enhanced language support services. By adopting a holistic approach to student support, VFSTR can better address the needs of its international student population, contributing to their academic achievements and personal growth. This research provides valuable insights for representatives of different educational authorities in general and educational institutions in particular aiming to create inclusive and supportive environments for international students.*

**Key words:** Homesickness, Cultural adjustment, Language barriers, reflective language teaching, task-based learning.

### **1. Introduction**

An increasing number of international students are looking for academic possibilities elsewhere, notably in India, as a result of the globalization of higher education. Students from many nations are now flocking to Indian universities. Vignan's foundation for Science, Technology & Research deemed to be university (VFSTR) known for its diverse academic offerings and vibrant campus life is now attracting many students from different countries. The following table shows the number of international students currently studying in VFSTR

<b>Foreign Students Currently Studying Details</b>		
<b>S.No</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>No. Of Students</b>
1	BANGLADESH	1
2	KENYA	1
3	MADAGASCAR	1
4	NEPAL	27
5	NIGERIA	2
6	SOUTH SUDAN	17
7	SUDAN	104
8	SYRIA	9
9	GHANA	1
10	TOGO	10



11	ZIMBABWE	45
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>		<b>218</b>

Nevertheless, despite the fact that international students contribute to the academic environment through their varied viewpoints and cultural backgrounds, they frequently encounter sustainable obstacles that may impede their performance both personally and academically. Home sickness, which can cause emotions of loneliness, anxiety, and sadness is one of the most common problems. The need to adapt to a new cultural setting, where strange social conventions and behaviours might engender a sensation of alienation, frequently exacerbates this emotional pain. Moreover, linguistic difficulties are a major challenge, especially for pupils who do not speak English as their first language. These obstacles may make it difficult for them to follow lecture, take part in class discussions, and finish assignments, which may have an effect on their academic achievement.

These challenges are especially significant at VFSTR because of the diverse student body and the different kinds of support that are offered to international students. Resolving these issues is important for the student's overall experience at the university as well as for their academic success. This study aims to investigate the issues that international students at VFSTR face, specifically homesickness, cultural adjustment, language proficiency, and academic integration. By identifying these issues and suggesting specific solutions, the study hopes to contribute to the creation of efficient support system that can assist international students in moving from homesickness to success.

## **2. Literature Review**

International students have a well- documented problem with homesickness, which frequently presents as feelings of loneliness, unease, and detachment from familiar surroundings. "Homesickness can significantly impact students' mental health, leading to decreased academic performance and social withdrawal" as noted correctly by Stroebe, Schut, and Nauta (2015). The difficulty of adjusting to a new cultural setting, where strange customs and social conventions can intensify feelings of alienation, frequently make this problem worse. Cultural adjustment involves adapting to new social norms, behaviours, and expectations, which can be challenging for students from different cultural backgrounds (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). One important way to lessen homesickness is through cultural adjustment or acculturation. According to Berry's (1997) acculturation concept, people can adapt to a new culture in four different ways: assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalisation. Smith & Khawaja stated that "Integration, where individuals maintain their cultural identity while engaging with the new culture, is associated with better psychological outcomes and reduced homesickness". It has been demonstrated that intercultural activities, peer mentorship, and orientation sessions are among the programs that help international students acclimatise to their new culture more easily (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). The majority of international students experience homesickness as a result of their language competency issues. They discover that the language they speak and the setting of India are not the same. English is the



only language they can speak with each other in order to express themselves. The language proficiency of international students is one of the key elements influencing their academic success. According to Andrade (2006), students who struggle with the language of instruction often find it difficult to follow lectures, participate in class discussions, and finish homework. These difficulties can exacerbate emotions of loneliness and homesickness as well as poor intellectual self-esteem.

### **3. Research Questions:**

The research questions are designed to understand the problem and to establish the scope of the problem.

1. What are the primary causes of homesickness among international students at VFSTR?
2. What are the coping mechanisms and strategies that help international students at VFSTR manage homesickness and achieve success?

### **4. Research Methodology:**

The study was conducted at VFSTR Deemed to be University, Guntur Andhra Pradesh, India. The University is one of the reputed and ranked all India 72 in university category in 2023 accredited by National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) which is an initiative by Ministry of Education. The university is one of the front runners in engineering education in this region. For the data collection, the researchers selected 100 international students who are studying in various branches in VFSTR. These 100 students have been selected from the different courses which are offered at the university and volunteered to participate in the research. Before, initiating the study, the researcher observed the student's academic progress, hostel life and their social integration. Later, semi structured interviews were conducted with the international students to know their perceptions of the homesickness. Part, one questions are designed to know the primary causes of homesickness among international students. Part two questions are designed to address the second research question how do international students at VFSTR develop coping mechanisms to manage homesickness, and what are the most common strategies they use. The collected data was quantified in terms of the students' opinion on Likert scale 5 points i.e.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Disagree
3. Neither Agree nor Disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

### **Questionnaire Analysis:**

In order to collect the primary data and to understand the causes of homesickness and its impacts: initially, the researcher had interaction with students of different countries who

are staying in Vignan's hostel and even with the students residing outside. The researcher also interacted with some teachers, caretakers and wardens who look after these students. It was learned that majority of the students are struggling with homesickness which resulted in

1. Decrease in academic performance.
2. Social withdrawal.
3. Mental health issues.
4. Physical health decline.
5. Higher attrition rates.

However, the teachers, caretakers and hostel wardens reported that students struggle to overcome the homesickness during their stay and studies at VFSTR is a major stumbling block. As a result, they are not enthusiastic to attend the classes, focus on the lectures and mingling with others. During the student's night stay at hostel, it was observed that most of them are spending sleepless nights and they worry a lot after talking to their parents through phone. Some students from the country Sudan are very much worried about their families as the war is prevalent in that country and many of these students' family members are losing their lives and livelihood. With all these kinds of things and having a homesickness student face lot of difficulties and sometimes he forgets the purpose what he came for.

Keeping the need of addressing the challenges of international students caused by homesickness in mind, questionnaire was administered to 100 international students, 5 teachers, 4 caretakers and 2 wardens. The tabular representation of the Primary causes of homesickness among international students at VFSTR is mentioned below.

**5. Part one questions:**

Part, one questions are designed to know the primary causes of homesickness among international students at VFSTR and were personally interviewed to understand the problem qualitatively.

S.No	Primary causes of homesickness among international students at VFSTR?	Students' responses in % on Likert Scale				
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Cultural adjustment	05	05	00	85	05
2	Language barriers	10	10	05	25	50
3	Separation from family and friends	05	05	00	10	80
4	Academic Pressure	05	05	00	15	75

5	Social Isolation	05	5	05	25	60
6	Living conditions	25	30	10	10	25
7	Financial stress	05	05	00	05	85
8	Unfamiliar Environment	20	05	15	55	05
9	Uncertainty and instability family conditions at home.	20	05	15	55	05
10	Food	05	05	00	10	80

**Table-1 Primary causes of homesickness among international students at VFSTR**

Through a Likert scale analysis, the data collected from international students at VFSTR offers a thorough understanding of the main reasons why they get homesick. The answers have been grouped according to a number of criteria, such as social isolation, language hurdles, and cultural adjustment. Here is a thorough analysis of every component: Remarkably, 90% of students strongly said that being apart from family and friends is a significant cause of homesickness. This emphasises the psychological effects of being separated from accustomed support networks, which play a significant role in the experience of home sickness. According to attachment theory, emotional stability depends on having close relationships with friends and family (Bowlby, 1982). Numerous research on overseas students have shown that being cut off from these support systems frequently results in emotions of homesickness and loneliness (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). A resounding of 85% students concurred that cultural adjustment is also one of the major contributors to homesickness. Students frequently struggle with cultural differences which can cause feelings of alienation and anxiety (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham, 2001). Due to its impact on social integration and academic achievement, this adjustment is crucial (Brown & Holloway, 2008). Another important element that adds to students' homesickness is language obstacles, as indicated by 75% of students. Students' capacity to integrate socially and academically is directly impacted by their language skills (Zhang & Goodson, 2011). Homesickness can be made worse by poor communication, trouble comprehending lectures and social cues, and frustration (Sawir et al., 2008). 90% of the students attribute their homesickness to academic pressure. The emotional toll is increased by the pressure of meeting academic standards in a foreign setting. One well-established factor contributing to psychological suffering in international students is academic stress. (Andrade, 2006). Increased anxiety and homesickness can result from the pressure to perform in a demanding academic setting, which is frequently exacerbated by language limitations (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Another important element is social isolation, with 85% of students agreeing. Feelings of loneliness may worsen if it's tough to make friends. Integrating socially is essential to lessening homesickness. Students who find it difficult to make acquaintances are more prone to feel homesick, claim Ryan and Twibell (2000). Depression and feelings of loneliness can result from not having a social support system (Sümer, Poyrazli, & Grahame, 2008). It appears that for many students, living conditions is not a big problem. However, living situations play a significant role in homesickness, but their effects can differ based on personal expectations and cultural background. 90% of students said that financial hardship significantly contributes to homesickness. International students encounter additional emotional hurdles

when they are burdened with financial worries. For these students, financial hardships are a major source of stress, which frequently results in homesickness and anxiety (Chen, 1999). Academic performance and mental health might be negatively impacted by the strain to manage finances, which frequently comes with little assistance (Lee & Rice, 2007). An unfamiliar environment is seen as one of the issues of homesickness. With about 60% students felt that the environment which they survive also create lot of impact on them. Over 60% Of the students agreed that uncertainty and instability of family members conditions affect them a lot. There is a war going on in Sudan. Students from Sudan are much worried about their family member's condition. Sometimes these students have no communication with family for months, it causes a lot of pain and homesickness to the students an it effects on them a lot. A significant 90% of the students agreed that food leads to homesickness, making it a big worry. Emotional comfort and cultural identity are strongly influenced by food. Feelings of homesickness and cultural dislocation may be intensified by the absence of familiar foods (Brown et al., 2010). A student's ability to adapt to a new situation is frequently influenced by their availability to familiar food (Brown & Edwards, 2011).

**Part two questions:**

These questions are designed to know suggest the coping mechanisms and strategies that are helpful for international students at VFSTR to manage homesickness, and to be successful.

S.No	Coping mechanisms and strategies which help international students at VFSTR to manage homesickness in order to get success.	Students' responses in % on Likert Scale				
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Cultural immersion	5	5	10	65	15
2	Language learning resources and practicing with peers	10	5	5	50	30
3	Regular communication with family.	5	5	0	20	70
4	Time management and seeking academic support.	5	5	5	40	45
5	Engaging in group projects.	5	10	10	50	45
6	Mingling with roommates and friends.	5	5	10	45	35
7	Seeking scholarship and part-time work.	10	5	10	40	35
8	Engaging with local students.	15	10	10	45	20



9	Counselling support.	20	15	15	30	20
10	Cooking familiar Food and exploring local cuisine.	5	5	5	30	55

**Table- 2 coping mechanisms and strategies which help international students at VFSTR to manage homesickness in order to get success.**

80% of students found cultural immersion to be an effective strategy for managing homesickness. This suggest that actively engaging with the local culture helps students feel more integrated and less isolated. Only 10% of students did not find this strategy effective, indicating that the majority benefit for cultural immersion. In table-2, .S.NO.2, around 80% of students believe that using peer practice along with language learning material is effective. This illustrates how crucial it is to increase language competency in order to lower communication barriers, which are major source of sickness. A small portion of students (15%) did not think this technique worked, which could be related to individual variances in language learning aptitude or exposure to other languages. A significant 90% of students found that maintaining regular communication with family back home is a crucial strategy for coping with homesickness. This highlights the emotional support that staying connected to loved ones provides. However, 10% disagreed, suggesting that some of them seek independence, but the majority remain significantly depend on families. Eighty five percent (85%) of students reported that homesickness and academic pressure could be handled successfully with time management and academic support. Students who practice effective time management are better able to balance their academic obligations, which lowers stress and lessens homesickness. A tiny minority (10%) disagreed with this mechanism, which may suggest that efficacy varies based on unique academic challenges. 75% of students said that working on group projects was advantageous. This tactic probably supports in building social ties and lowering feelings of loneliness. But 15% of students did not think this method was beneficial, which could be related to bad group dynamics or personality differences. Another 80% of students thought that interacting socially with friends and roommates is a useful tactic. Creating a close-knit social group on campus seems to be a crucial element in getting over homesickness. However, 10% of students did not find this strategy effective, which could be due to personality clashes or difficulty in forming meaningful connections. Over 75% of students agreed that looking for scholarships and taking part-time work helps relieve financial stress, which is a major cause of homesickness. But a few number (15%) of students disagreed, possibly because of the additional workload or inability to find opportunities that fit. Engaging with local students helped 65% of students adjust to their new environment and lessen their feeling of homesickness. Socializing with residents promotes a feeling of belonging and offers cultural insights. This method was deemed ineffective by 25% of respondents, which could be attributed to challenges in overcoming linguistic or cultural divides. Counselling support was deemed effective by 50% of students in controlling their homesickness. This suggests that while not everyone will use it, professional assistance is a useful resource. A sizable 35% disagreed, presumably as a result of stigma, accessibility issues, or a preference for alternative coping strategies. One of the best ways to deal with homesickness is to cook familiar foods and

try local cuisine, as reported by 85% of students. Food is a resource of comfort and a powerful cultural bond. Surprisingly 10% students disagreed to this. With the majority of the students respond positively to this approach demonstrate that they gain lot from it.

## 6. Conclusion:

The study on homesickness among international students at VFSTR reveals that several factors significantly contribute to their feelings of homesickness. Among these, the most prominent causes identified were separation from family and friends, academic pressure, and financial stress, with a high percentage of students either agreeing or strongly agreeing that these factors contribute to their homesickness. To manage these challenges, international students have developed a range of coping mechanisms and strategies that help them not only overcome homesickness but also achieve academic and personal success. The most effective strategies identified include regular communication with family, cultural immersion, language learning, and time management and coupled with seeking academic support. These strategies have shown to be highly effective, with a significant majority of students agreeing or strongly agreeing on their usefulness. Moreover, engaging in group projects, mingling with roommates and friends, and exploring local cuisine were also found to be valuable in managing homesickness. These activities help students build social networks and feel more integrated into the local community, thereby reducing feelings of isolation and cultural alienation. Conversely, less successful tactics like talking to nearby students and getting counselling suggest that although these methods work for certain people, they might not be as popular or efficient as they could be. This implies that in order to effectively meet the many demands of international students, there is a need for increased awareness of and access to these tools. In order to promote the success and well-being of international students at VFSTR, it is imperative that a diverse strategy to treating homesickness be used, including emotional, social, and practical techniques. By using, these findings, educational institutions can create focused support systems that can cater to the unique needs of international students improving their academic performance and overall satisfaction while studying abroad.

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