A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW ON STUDENTS' INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY AND CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT

Abstract. *This research aims to synthesize the most recent studies on international student mobility adjustment difficulties in order to come up with a set of recommendations for the institutions involved in the management of international students in European countries. Specifically, this study analyses the psychological processes that international students experience during their mobility. Furthermore, based on these findings, the authors underline the strategies that European countries, wishing to consolidate their position on the international education market, might adopt in order to attract international students and to support them during their integration processes. In terms of methodology, this paper uses the systematic literature review protocol, starting with framing review questions, identifying relevant works, establishing the criteria of selecting the studies that are analysed, summarizing the evidence and drawing relevant conclusions.. The main practical contribution of the study consists in a systematic list of good practices for institutions interested in easing the cultural adjustment process for their international students. Research limitations and practical implications are also addressed.*

Keywords: international students, international mobility, adjustment, acculturation, studying abroad.

Luminița NICOLESCU
The Bucharest University of Economic Studies
Romană Square, No. 6, Bucharest, Romania
e-mail: luminicolescu@yahoo.com

Cristina GALALAE
The Bucharest University of Economic Studies
Romană Square, No. 6, Bucharest, Romania
e-mail: cristina.galalae@comunicare.ro

1. Current statistics regarding the international mobility of students

One of the implications of globalization is that people are more mobile than ever before, especially skilled individuals (Koser, 2007). Even though highly skilled migrants represent a small proportion of the total migrants (Eurostat, 2011), their social and economic impact of their migration is very consistent. International students, often called sojourners -individuals who temporarily reside in a foreign place for activities such as work and education (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002) - represent the highly skilled population that recorded the greatest surge in the last decades (Tremblay, 2003). According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Institute of Statistics (UNESCO), the number of globally mobile students increased to 3.4 million students in 2009, up from 2.1 million students in 2002 (Altbach et al., 2009). This number represents a 65% increase since 2000 (Bhandari and Blumenthal, 2011) and some studies anticipate that this figure will rise to approximately 6 million by 2020 (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2008).

However, the rise of international students is not at all fortuitous. International students are thought to be advantaged as immigrants: they represent a high-achieving and highly motivated group (Russell et al., 2010) and they substantially contribute to the economies of the countries that host them. For example, each year, in-bound international students contribute with US$17.7 billion to the United States economy (Bhandri and Laughlin, 2009). Dynamics of international students' migration might also be an outcome of the worldwide growth in higher education (UNESCO, 2009; Agoston and Dima, 2012). However, the mix of host and sender countries might reflect economic growth in particular countries, or represent the effect of institutional programs developed in order to incentivize international students' enrolment/ migration. Table 1 synthesizes information about the main sending (home) /receiving (host) countries for international students from 1968 to 2006. Romania, for instance, used to be among the top 10 host countries in the 1980's, but it lost the place, as after 1989 in spite of the foreign students' interest to study in Romania, both authorities and universities did not keep up with the changes in the international higher education market (Nicolescu et al., 2009; Nicolescu, 2012).

Significant conclusions can be derived from the table above. First of all, it appears very clear that the United States of America has been the favourite destination for international students in the last decades, whilst occupying one of the first positions in the senders ranking, too. However, foreign enrolment in European countries also increased significantly as a result of the efforts made by the European Union in order to encourage international mobility. In addition to these efforts, countries like U.K. developed institutions specialized in recruitment practices starting with the late 1980s (Galalae and Voicu, 2011). On the other hand, China, India and Korea are the most active providers of international students. However, one can also observe that these countries are consolidating their position as receivers, these being

the effect of several governmental programs (Bhandari and Blumenthal, 2011). Even though these numerical values and reflect international dynamics, they cannot capture acountry's competitiveness over another (Johnson, 2006). For example the United States seems to enjoy a privileged position on the market of international education, but it also has the lowest overall percentage of international students enrolled in higher education, in comparison to its main competitors (Andrade and Evans, 2009). Less than 4% of the total number of students in USA is represented by international students, compared to approximately 20% in Australia, 15% in the UK, 14% in Germany and 12% in France (Bhandari and Chow, 2007). Three of these states are European countries and indeed historical members of the European Union. Nevertheless, whilst the international education market is becoming more competitive, Europe itself faces new challenges in order to maintain its position both as an attractor of overseas students and as a provider of high quality higher education.

Table 1

Senders and receivers of international students

	1968		1980		2002		2006	
	Home	Host	Home	Host	Home	Host	Home	Host
1	China	USA	Iran	USA	China	USA	China	USA
2	USA	France	Malaysia	France	USA	UK	USA	UK
3	Canada	Germany	Greece	Russia	India	Germany	India	Australia
4	Syria	Lebanon	China	Germany	Korea	Australia	Korea	France
5	UK	Canada	Nigeria	UK	Japan	France	Germany	Germany
6	Germany	UK	Morocco	Lebanon	Germany	Japan	Japan	China
7	Greece	Russia	USA	Canada	Morocco	China	France	Canada
8	Korea	Egypt	Hong Kong	Italy	Greece	Russia	Malaysia	Japan
9	Italy	Argentina	Germany	Egypt	France	Canada	Canada	Russia
0	Malaysia	Italy	Jordan	Romania	Turkey	Spain	Russia	Singapore

Source: Gürüz, 2008.

Understanding the real dynamics on the market of international education is far from being the only challenge. The social and economic impact that international students flows have, both on the national and international level, is one of the main topics researched by the scholars in the field of international education (Altbach et al., 1985; Brawner and Lucas, 2007).

Studies about international students can be divided in two categories. First, there is a significant literature investigating the trends in international migration, whilst focusing on the role that international students have in the development of higher education as well as on the national strategies aiming to encourage inbound and outbound students' mobility. Second, there are several studies analysing the psychological processes that students experience during and after their international mobility, as well as the effects that these processes have on their school performance and social integration. Even though the number of individuals studying in foreign

263

countries increases constantly, these sojourners still have to face differences between their home culture and the host culture. These cultural differences can lead to problems in adjusting to the host culture and in a low performance in their international assignment (Waxin, 2004). The main processes conceptualized and discussed by psychologists (e.g. Black and Gregersen, 1991; Sinagil and Ones, 2001) in the case of international students and their educational and social integration are: intercultural adjustment, acculturation and cultural shock.

Cultural shock is defined as the anxiety that results when people lose those familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse that they are not actually conscious of (Oberg, 1960). However, several previous studies proved a temporal relationship between cultural shock and adjustment (Gudykunst, 1998; Searle and Ward, 1990). Adjustment models, such as the U-curve model (Lysgaard, 1955) or the W-curve model (Gullahorn and Gullahorn, 1960) consider that cultural shock represent the first stage of the adaptation process that sojourners go through. Acculturation, on the other hand, was often referred to as a way to describe the process of second culture contact or as the strategy that individuals develop while coping with the second culture (e.g. Berry, 1994). All these three concepts refer to the behavioural and/or psychological effects generated by the transition from one country to another.

Whereas the emergence of studies dealing with trends in international mobility is mainly motivated by the emergence of international higher education itself, the increase and the diversity of works concerning international students' adjustment could probably be explained by the peculiarities that international students have, as a migratory subpopulation. Moreover, international students represent the fastest growing international skilled population with 4.1 million students studying abroad in 2011 (IEE, 2012).

Seeking to bridge these research directions, this study analyses international students' mobility through a systematic review of the recent corpus of literature on both the topic of international education and youth migration. The main research objectives addressed in our study are the following: (1) understanding the fundamental psychological processes and adjustment difficulties that international students have to face during their mobility; (2) identifying the best means through which organizations involved in international education can support the integration of international students. As a result of exploring these objectives, we will provide a series of conclusions, as well as recommendations for countries that wish to consolidate their position as competitive providers of international education, including the European countries. Through our research we wish to bring our contribution to the field of international migration and to offer some new perspectives to higher education institutions interested in gaining a better position on the market of international education.

2. Research methodology

The extensive number of academic papers dealing with international student mobility proves the importance given to this topic. Considering the practical nature of our research objectives and the existence of various studies that might provide some interesting answers, the literature review method was considered the most appropriate for our research. Such a method will not only enable the authors to understand the main themes recurrent in recent literature, but also facilitate the direction of research by determining what needs to be done on the practical side (De Los Reyes and Kazdin, 2008). Moreover, through the effort of integrating findings across many studies pertinent to our particular research questions, we will bring our contribution in the process of according legitimacy and scholarliness (LeCompte et al., 2003) to the field of international students' mobility. In order to overcome the problems associated with large number of published research studies and variation in quality between studies, our study will apply a pre-planned and documented systematic review protocol (Kirch, 2008). The use of this methodology implies limiting the number of subjective decisions that must be made during a literature review and increases the probability that relevant studies will be identified. This paper extends and builds on the work of Nicolescu and Galalae (2012).

2.1. Systematic review protocol

Starting from the background analysis of the international students' mobility and the statement of our research objectives, the following research questions will be addressed in this study: (1) which are the main psychological processes and adjustment difficulties that international students have to face during their mobility?; (2) which are the strategies that institutions and people involved in international education management could apply in order to help international students surpass these difficulties? A documented search strategy is used to unpack these research questions.

2.2. Search strategy and selection criteria

Migration of international students is a topic that received generous attention from scholars with different affiliations, from sociology, psychology and education. Considering the nature of this study and the variety of studies in the field of youth migration, we used a complex reference search engine and the active support of experimented librarians. The main combinations of key words considered appropriate to explore the research questions were: (1)"international students" + "institutions", (2) "international students" + "international education management", (3) "international students" + "acculturation", (4) "international students" + "acculturative stressors". Running a dry search on these words yielded over 30.000 references. Therefore, we had to limit the literature scanning process to those domains that are coherent with our

research questions, namely: European Studies, Political Science and Government, Statistics and Demographics, Sociology, Business and International Business. All of these domains, except for the last one, included Education as a separate sub-domain. After a thorough analysis of the databases indexed in each of these categories, we narrowed our selection criteria once again, by selecting only the databases that cover all the above subjects. In terms of content type, even though books, e-books, book chapters, conference proceedings, data sets, government documents were also available, we decided to limit our search to peer-reviewed journals and e-journals. These types of publications represent a field's primary source of knowledge (Scanlan, 2011) and reflect accurate findings that are specific for the time when they were published.

In terms of language, we had to limit our search for literature to those readings written in English. Even though this language restriction is a limitation of our study (White and Schmidt, 2005), we considered that using the services of a translator would involve a higher amount of risk. In regards to the time frame considered, we made several analyses in order to understand the dynamics of publications dealing with international student mobility. Considering that our research goal is to identify recent works with an impact on the current times, it is only natural for us to mainly look at publications that appeared in the last years. However, after running a search based on the criteria that we described, we determined that the number of publications indexed between 1912 and 2012 does not differ much from the number of materials published between 1990 and 2012. However, this might be explained by the fact that databases were established in the last decades and they do not necessarily include works that were produced a while ago. Moreover, as stated above, international students' migration phenomena emerged in the recent times and it is only natural for scholars to follow the trend.

After deciding upon all these criteria, we ran our first search in order to generate a list of all the themes and subjects that respect our requirements. Out of a number of 212 themes we selected 35 that were considered to best describe our research subject.

The materials that were finally considered relevant for our review were issued by six academic publications, all focusing on education, research and development. Seven of these papers were published in the International Journal of Intercultural Relations (first published in 1977) and three of them in the Journal of Studies in International Education (first published in 1997). In terms of methodology, eight of these articles used a quantitative approach, six of them included qualitative studies and one applied mixed methods, with an emphasis on the quantitative side. Table 2 synthesizes our search strategy as described up to this point.

Table 2

Literature search strategy

Main key words	"international students" + "institutions"		"international students" + "international education management"		"international students" + "acculturation"		"international students" + "acculturative stressors"	
Themes and subjects included	"education", "sociology", "political science", "international relations", "educational research", "culture", "economics", "research", "globalization", "higher education", "social sciences", "interdisciplinary linguistics", "international colleges and universities", "international migration", "social aspects", "anthropology", "students", "social sciences", "economic theory", "nationalism", "western Europe", "immigration", "economic development", "minority and ethnic groups" "psychology", "demography and learning behaviour", "economic growth", "multidisciplinary", "social conditions and trends", "social sciences", "schools and educational services", "social trends and culture", "social issues", "developing countries", "study and teaching models".							
Themes and key words excluded	"clinical conditions", "very short programs", "involuntary and illegal student migration", "second generation immigrants", "internal migration", "mental or other illnesses", "intermarriage", "obesity", "children migration", "teachers migration", "repatriation motives".							
Research domains	Business and International Business, European Studies, Political Science and Government, Sociology, Statistics and Demographics.							
Databases	Business Source Complete, Emerald Insight, Europa World of Learning, FRANCIS (International Humanities and Social Sciences), National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) Working Papers, OECD iLibrary, Social Explorer, Web of Science (Thomson Reuters Web of Knowledge), Wiley Online Library, World Development Indicators (WDI).							
Content type	Peer reviewed journal /e-journal articles							
Content language	English							
Time frame	1912-2012	1990-2012	1912-2012	1990-2012	1912-2012	1990-2012	1912-2012	1990-2012
Results	6,760	6,577	1,190	1,170	2,943	2,900	173	173

Source: Authors' findings.

2.3. Assessment process

In the following phase of our scanning process we identified the overlapping materials that appeared in our searches and concluded that the references identified under category (1) "international students" + "institutions" generally include the ones identified in the category (2) "international students" + "international education management" and that the category (3) "international students" + "acculturation" also captures the references yielded under the last category, (4), "international students" + "acculturative stressors". Therefore, we narrowed our research by including a mix of these criteria. The result consisted in 297 articles published in the last twenty-two years. All the abstract of these publications were scanned, and again we eliminated certain publications, mainly the ones that were published under the same research project, publications that did not directly address our topic of interest and works that

were dealing with other category of migrants. After this assessment, we ended up with a number of 48 papers and after a thorough analysis of their contents; we decided to include 15 in our review. The main final criterion that we considered was the relevance of the research questions addressed in these articles, in the context of our study.

Some of these studies focused on the role of social informal structures in students' adjustment whereas others place emphasis on the academic ones. For instance, Campbell (2011) analyses the positive effect of friendship through an experiment consisting in "pairing" international students with native students. Through these means, adjustment of the international students is explored at the same time with the cultural development of native students. However, the findings of the research show that if this interaction is not voluntary for both parties involved, or even if the students engaged in such a program are constrained to meet more often than they would like to, the positive effects decrease. Another study (O'Reilly et al., 2010) proves that even when students receive high levels of social support they still experience high levels of socio-cultural adjustment difficulties and psychological distress.

Other surprising findings are generated by the studies focusing on the role of academic structures in students' adjustment. Brown (2007) explores the correlation between stress/adjustment and academic requirements that international students face. According to the conclusions of these studies, stress declines during the international mobility but not as a function of time – as it could be expected – but as a function or reductions in the academic workload. There is more to be said about the relation between adjustment and academic structures. Le and Gardner (2010) proved that international students will have different experiences because of their domain of research/study. This might be explained by the availability of resources (availability of advisors, laboratories, funding) or even departmental peculiarities. Another study (Coles and Swami, 2012) uncovers some downsides of university structures aiming to improve international adjustment. According to this research, accommodation provision, clubs and societies, introductory courses etc., all provide opportunities for adjustment support in the early stage of the sojourn even though that is not the most critical interval in the adjustment curve. Many of the studies that we included in our literature review provide different recommendations for universities/institutions that would like to consolidate their positions as providers of international educations and attractors for students. Appendix 1 summarizes the main integration problems addressed by each article, along with the methodology used and the implications for the management of exchange students. Overall, considering the rigorous criteria that we used in our research review, we can definitively conclude that the main foci of interest on the topic of international students' adjustment are:

Social adjustment (friendship and interaction with natives and/or other international students);

Academic adjustment (teaching and evaluation criteria, academic requirements, studying in a different language);

Programs designed to help international students' social and academic integration (formal and informal projects, projects developed for the dependents of international students).

3. Discussion

3.1. Findings and meta-analysis

In this section we will try to identify patterns among the studies that we explored, through the use of meta-analysis. This method focuses on contrasting and combining different approaches and findings in order to identify interesting correlations that may come to light in the context of multiple studies (Rothman et al., 2008). We will focus our analysis on three main aspects, namely perspectives on psychological adjustment, perspectives on international mobility stages and methodological observations.

A. Perspectives on psychological adjustment. Since one of the major goals of this study is to uncover the nuances of psychological adjustment in the case of international students, all the papers that we included in our review directly analyse this topic. However, what is rather unexpected is the fact that adjustment/acculturation/cultural shock or other concepts that capture these integration processes experienced by students are alternatively analysed as dependent and independent variables. When scholars (e.g. Brown, 2007; Campbell, 2011) measure adjustment, acculturation and integration as dependent variables, they are mainly interested in explaining which other factors influence these processes. While analysing the independent variables that scholars relate acculturation/adjustment/integration with, we identified two main categories. One of them includes academic aspects and the other personal or cultural aspects. The main academic issues that were used in order to explain adjustment are the academic requirements, the need for a good level of English language proficiency, the differences between the academic conventions in the home/host country, the structures of the university, the degree of information about destination/host that sojourners have, the academic resources available and the availability of extracurricular activities in the academic context. The recurrent personal/cultural issues discussed are personal characteristics, personal values, types of social interaction, cultural dimensions and self-construal.

The studies that analyse the same psychological processes as independent variables (e.g. Gullekson and Vancouver, 2010; Sakurai et al., 2010) mainly try to explain which other behaviours/psychological processes are influenced by adjustment to a new culture. If we would look at the dependent variables in these studies we will observe that in several cases these are the same aspects that in the previous case were treated as independent variables. For example, some of the works that we mentioned measure the impact that adjustment has upon the efficiency of intervention projects and social interaction.

Seminal works on acculturation (e.g. Berry, 1994) acknowledge the double role that acculturation might have – both as a behavioural influencer and as a consequence of other attitudes and behaviours. However, the practical implications of these findings for the field of higher international education are rather enthralling. On the one hand, this proves that orientation programs or other methods to support international students' definitively influence their adjustment. On the other hand, adjustment itself moderates academic results, social interaction, and communication – features that are often associated with the goals of international education.

B. Perspectives on international mobility stages. The majority of the selected studies mainly focused on investigating the behaviour/attitudes of international students during their mobility. The most trivial explanation for this fact would be, indeed, convenience. It is rather difficult to collect data from returned sojourners or even from international students that are preparing to undertake their studies abroad. However, seminal studies (e.g. Lysgaard, 1955) emphasize that cultural shock becomes intense upon arrival in a new country, immediately after the stage of adaptation. The cultural shock is usually followed by a stage of leveling off in the subsequent period. According to the W-curve theory (Gullahorn and Gullahorn, 1960), the entire process will repeat once the students return to their home countries.

These theories were widely analysed and acknowledged in the studies that we investigate irrespective in which mobility stage were the data collected. Moreover, the practical recommendations that some of these articles provide, often concentrate not only on the actions that international educations providers should undertake, but also on the timing of these actions. For example, Verthelyi and Frank (1995) emphasize the utility of "on-going orientation" whilst Gaw (2000) stresses the importance of post-departure strategies.

C. Methodological observations. Other unexpected conclusions are related to the populations and samples considered in the studies analysed. Even though a significant part of these studies uses samples of international students interviewed during their mobility, there are also exceptions. For example, some of these studies approach international students after they finalize their international mobility or also include data collected from native students in order to compare two different samples. Moreover, interesting results come out of studies made on faculty members that interact with international students or with spouses of international students.

3.2. Practical implications for European countries

However, irrespective of the sample included in these studies, all of them went beyond the theoretical aspects and, starting from the adjustment problems that they identified, managed to develop a list of recommendations for those involved in international education management. Another aspect that we would like to underline consists in the underrepresentation of Europe in these studies. However, this might be driven both by our research methodology and the distribution of papers focusing on European samples. This will not impeach in any way on the final focus of our

research, which is to develop a set of recommendations useful for European international universities. Moreover, we acknowledge in our analysis studies that do investigate international education and its effects on individuals in European countries such as the insightful studies carried out by Mehdizadeh and Scott (2005) and Gu et al., (2010) in the United Kingdom. One of the limitations – probably explained by the applied focus of such studies - is the limited attention given to the peculiarities of European international education system. To this end, before proceeding to this final step, we should briefly present some insight on this specific topic.

First of all, with the exception of the Great Britain, European countries do not use English as their main or second language. However, the main international programs developed in Europe in the last decades - with the exception of the Erasmus program which still includes programs thought in other European languages - are thought in English (Altbach et al., 2009). Therefore, not only international students have to adjust to using English in all the academic/social interactions, but also the staff of the universities that offer international programs.

Secondly, the Bologna Declaration on the European Higher Education Area, signed in 1999 by representatives of 29 European countries (EACEA P9 Eurydice, 2010) established a series of reforms and a general framework for the modernisation of European higher education. These regulations confirmed Europe's intention to adopt a system of comparable degrees divided in two main cycles (undergraduate studies and graduate studies). Other accomplishments of the Bologna process are the implementation of a system of transferable credits, the establishment of several programs aiming to encourage international mobility among students, teachers, researchers, administrative stuff. However, even though these reforms prove European cooperation in quality assurance, they are not necessarily compatible with other higher education systems in the world. Moreover, as it was discussed earlier, the main sending countries, at least for international students, are located in Asia. Therefore, irrespective of the level of internal coherence that European education guarantees, the most important among all the actors involved – the international students, most of them coming from outside Europe – do not benefit from it. Moreover, international students from outside Europe will also face difficulties in obtaining a study visa and will have to support higher tuition fees than European students.

All these peculiarities show that European states have to face more difficulties than the United States or Australia, for example, when it comes to consolidating their position on the market on international education outside the European Union.

Starting from the analysis of these difficulties, the authors of this study developed the model depicted in Appendix 2, designed to capture the most important actions that universities, among which the European ones should include in their strategy when wanting to consolidate their position on the international market. In order to develop this model, the authors considered both the input given through the studies that were analysed and the peculiarities of European international education system.

3.3. Recommendations for European countries

The model that we propose separates the activities that universities should develop based on the lifetime cycle of international students. First and foremost, we posit that there are five distinct intervals that constitute the cycle of students' international mobility. Out of these five phases, the first and the last one refer to what activities that international students offices should develop before and after the factual mobilities and do not even require the presence of students in the host campuses. In order to be able to accommodate and to facilitate the integration of international students in a new cultural and academic context, universities should, on the one hand, prepare the new incoming students for what it will follow and, on the other, prepare their staff and professors for the interaction with international students. In order to address the latter, universities might organize seminars and discussions with those who will be interacting with the incoming international students and explore issues such as cultural differences or difficulties imposed by studying in a second language. In order to prepare students for their international mobility, institutions should, first of all, supply them with information about practical aspects – such as accommodation – and more abstract problems – such as social habits in their future destination.

Probably the most critical stage during the life cycle of an international student is the beginning of the mobility. As we discussed in the previous sections, the first contact with the new cultural environment and the assessment of this contact might influence the adjustment of international students on a long run. Therefore, international student offices should organize orientation trainings and introductory meetings. Moreover, engaging international students in a dialogue, instead of just sending information to them is crucial at the beginning of the process.

Moreover, international offices might want to facilitate the contact between native students and international students. Previous studies showed certain reluctance from both groups when it comes to freely interaction. Therefore, a well thought external intervention through the means of exploiting common interests, for example, might prove very useful. Even though interactions between international students usually come more naturally than the ones between natives and internationals, programs aiming to create stronger connections between the members of the latter category might also be useful. Furthermore, besides good quality academic training, international students should have the option to attend language classes focused on the academic usage of foreign languages.

It is often believed that just because students are travelling abroad for their studies, they should be aware of cultural diversity. However, this is not always the case. Therefore, both international student and native students should be made aware of cultural and social differences through formal and informal activities. Another aspect that might be factored in refers to the families of international students. Forming family support networks for the families of international students and encouraging their autonomous development even from the beginning of their

experiences might prove beneficial for all the parties involved. Indeed, the majority of the activities mentioned above are to be developed constantly throughout the duration of an international program. However, it is extremely important to engage international students in these projects from the beginning of their stay. A challenge will also constitute in keeping international students interested in these activities and receiving and interpreting their feedback.

Towards the end of their stay, students coming from abroad should be given support in the case in which they wish to extend their stay in the host country. Moreover, if there are legal aspects – such as visa requirements – international offices should address them thoroughly.

Even once a program is completed, the expectations from a responsible international university do not go away. Keeping contact with former international students, engaging them in other international programs, even with the use of an on-line channel might help their reintegration in their home culture and home countries.

3.4. Conclusions, limitations and future research

The study focuses mainly on how students' experiences abroad have been analysed in the literature, emphasizing the main strategies that institutions might apply in order to facilitate international students' adjustment process, which, on a long term, hinges into the consolidation of their position as attractors of international students. Our study has some important theoretical and practical implications. First of all, we developed a systematic and coherent approach of the literature on the topic of international students' cultural adjustment. Such a framework proves useful in the process of selecting the relevant publications to be analysed when being faced with a very rich literature. Second, this study doesn't only explore adjustment difficulties in the case of international students; it actually factors the insight given by literature into a set of recommendations for the institutions involved in the management of international students in European countries, aiming to help these institutions improve their programs. However, our study doesn't empirically test its findings and, even though that was not our purpose, this might be considered a limitation. We do consider that this will be an interesting avenue to pursue in future empirical investigations.

Moreover, future studies might also approach the same topic from the perspective of institutions that want to emphasize their status as senders of well-trained students. It is also important to notice that a big part of the studies that we reviewed were carried outside Europe, although the samples often included European students. This might be interpreted as an alarm signal both for researchers and international universities in Europe. Some of these valuable studies might be replicated in order to better underline the needs and peculiarities of international students undertaking their studies in Europe.

References

Agoston S. and Dima A.M. (2012), "Trends and strategies within the process of academic internationalization", *Management & Marketing*, Vol. 7, No. 1, pp. 43-56

Altbach, P.G., Kelly, D.H. and Lulat, Y.G.M. (1985), *Research on foreign students and international study*, University Press of America, New York

Altbach, P.G., Reisberg, L. and Rumbley, L.E. (2009), *Trends in Global Higher Education: Tracking an Academic Revolution.* A Report Prepared for the UNESCO 2008 World Conference on Higher Education. [online] at http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/ 001831/183168e.pdf (accessed on August 21, 2012)

Andrade, M.S. and Evans, N.W. (eds.) (2009), *International Students. Strengthening a Critical Resource,* American Council of Education, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Maryland

Berry, J. (1994), "Acculturation and psychological adaptation: An overview", in: Bouvy, A.-M., van de Vijver, F., Boski, P. and Schmitz, P. (eds.), *Journeys into cross-cultural psychology,* pp. 129-141,Swetsamd Zeitlinger, Lisse

Bhandari, R. and Chow P. (2007), *Open Doors: Report on international educational exchange,* Institute of International Education, New York

Bhandari, R. and Blumenthal P. (2011), *International students and global mobility in higher education: national trends and new directions,* Palgrave Macmillan, New York

Bhandri, R. and Laughlin, S. (eds.) (2009), *Higher Education on the Move: New Development in Global Mobility*, IIE, New York

Black, J.S. and Gregersen, H.B. (1991), "Antecedents to cross-cultural adjustment for expatriates in Pacific Rim assignments", *Human Relations*, Vol. 44, No. 5, pp. 497-515

Brawner Bevis, T. and Lucas, C.J. (2007), *International Students in American Colleges and universities: a History*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York

Brown, L. (2007), "The Incidence of Study-Related Stress in International Students in the Initial Stage of the International Sojourn", *Journal of Studies in International Education*, Vol. 12, No. 1, pp. 5-28

Campbell, N. (2011), "Promoting Intercultural Contact on Campus: A Project to Connect and Engage International and Host Students", *Journal of Studies in International Education,* Vol. 16, No. 3, pp. 205-227

Coles, R. and Swami, V. (2012), "The socio-cultural adjustment trajectory of international university students and the role of university structures: A qualitative investigation", *Journal of Research in International Education*, Vol. 11, No. 1, pp. 87-100

De los Reyes, A. and Kazdin, A.E. (2008), "When the evidence says "Yes, un and maybe so": Attending to and interpreting inconsistent findings among evidence-based interventions", *Current Directions in Psychological Science,* Vol. 17, No. 1, pp. 47-51

De Verthelyi, R.F. (1995), "International students' spouses: Invisible sojourners in the culture shock literature", *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, Vol. 19, No. 3, pp. 387-411

Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA P9 Eurydice) (2010), *Focus on Higher Education in Europe 2010: The Impact of the Bologna Process,* [online]

athttp://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/122EN.pdf (accessed on August 20, 2012)

Erichsen, E. and Bolliger, D. (2011), "Towards understanding international graduate student isolation in traditional and online environments", *Educational Technology Research & Development*, Vol. 59, No. 3, pp. 309-326

Eurostat (2011), *Eurostat Rapport.* [online] at http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Migration_and_migrant_population_statistics#Further_Eurostat_information (accessed on August 20, 2012)

Galalae, C. and Voicu, A. (2011), "A Factorial Model for Studying the Dynamics of International Student Mobility", *2nd International Conference on Business, Economics and Tourism Management IPEDR* vol. 24, 2011, Singapore, IACSIT Press, pp. 47-51

Gaw, K.F. (2000), "Reverse culture shock in students returning from overseas", *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, Vol. 24, No. 1, pp. 83-104

Gua, Q., Schweisfurthb, M. and Daya, C. (2010). "Learning and growing in a 'foreign' context: intercultural experiences of international students", *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education,* Vol. 40, No. 1, pp. 7-23

Gudykunst, W. (1998), *Bridging differences: Effective intergroup communication,* Sage, London

Gullahorn, J. and Gullahorn, J. (1960), "The role of the academic man as a cross-cultural Mediator", *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 25, No. 3, pp. 414-417

Gullekson, N.L. and Vancouver, J.B. (2010), "To conform or not to conform? An examination of perceived emotional display rule norms among international sojourners", *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, Vol. 34, No. 4, pp. 315-325

Gürüz, K. (2008), *Higher Education and International Student Mobility in the Global Knowledge Econom,* State University of New York Press, New York

Institute of International Education (2012), *Open Doors 2012. Report on International Educational Exchange*, IIE Publishing House

Jang, D. and Kim, D.-Y. (2010), "The influence of host cultures on the role of personality in the acculturation of exchange students", International *Journal of Intercultural Relations*, Vol. 34, No. 4, pp. 363-367

Johnson, M.M. (2006), "Toward a new foreign-student strategy", *The Chronicle of Higher Education,* Vol. 52, No. 47, pp. 167-185

Kirch, W. (ed.) (2008), *Systematic Literature Review.Encyclopedia of Public Health,* Springer, New York

Kosser, K. (2007), *International Migration. A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford Press, New York

Le, T. and Gardner, S.K. (2010), "Understanding the Doctoral Experience of Asian International Students in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Fields: An Exploration of One Institutional Context", *Journal of College Student Development*, Vol. 51, No. 3, pp. 252-264

LeCompte, M.D., Klinger, J.K., Campbell, S.A. and Menke, D.W. (2003), "Editor's Introduction", *Review of Educational Research*, Vol. 73, No. 2, pp. 123-124

Lysgaard, S. (1955), "Adjustment in a foreign society: Norwegian Fulbright grantees visiting the United States", *International Social Science Bulletin*, Vol. 7, No. 1, pp. 45-51

Mehdizadeh, N. and Scott, G. (2005), "Adjustment problems of Iranian international students in Scotland", *International Education Journal,* Vol. 6, No. 4, pp. 484-493

Mehtap-Smadi, S. and Hashemipour, M. (2010), "In Pursuit of an International Education Destination: Reflections From a University in a Small Island State", *Journal of Studies in International Education*, Vol. 15, No. 5, pp. 409-428

Murphy-Lejeune, E. (2002), *Student Mobility and Narrative in Europe: The New Strangers*, Routledge, London

Nicolescu L., Pricopie R. and Popescu A.I. (2009), "Country differences in the internationalization of higher education – how can countries lagging behind diminish the gap", *Review of International Comparative Management*, Vol. 10, No. 5, pp. 976-990

Nicolescu L. (2012), "The analysis of conceptual tools for the study of country of origin effect for hybrid offerings", *Management & Marketing*, Vol. 7, No. 1, pp. 3-14

Nicolescu L. and Galalae C. (2012), "International students' mobility and adjustment. A literature survey", International conference Future of Europe 2012 Rethinking Strategies in Emerging Economies, 9-10 November 2012, The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania

O'Reilly, A., Ryan, D. and Hickey, T. (2010), "The Psychological Well-Being and Socio-cultural Adaptation of Short-Term International Students in Ireland", *Journal of College Student Development*, Vol. 51, No. 5, pp. 584-598

Oberg, K. (1960), "Cultural shock: Adjustment to new cultural environments", *Practical Anthropology*, Vol. 7, pp. 177-182

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2008), *Education at a glance: OECD indicators 2006.* [online] at http://www.oecd.org/education/higher educationandadultlearning/41284038.pdf(accessed on September 12, 2012)

Rothman, K.J., Greenland, S.L. and Lash, T. (eds.) (2008), *Modern Epidemiology,* Lippincott Williams and Wilkins Press, Philadelphia

Russell J., Rosenthal, D. and Thomson, G. (2010), "The international student experience: three styles of adaptation", *Higher Education*, Vol. 60, No. 2, pp. 235-249

Sakurai, T., McCall-Wolf, F. and Kashima, E.S. (2010), "Building intercultural links: The impact of a multicultural intervention programme on social ties of international students in Australia", *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, Vol. 34, No. 2, pp. 176-185

Scanlan, C.L. (2011), Reviewing the literature. Graduate course, [online] at http://www.umdnj.edu/idsweb/shared/rol.htm (accessed on September 12, 2012)

Searle, W. and Ward, C. (1990), "The prediction of psychological and socio-cultural adjustment during cross-cultural transitions", *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, Vol. 14, No. 4, pp. 449-464

Sliwa, M. and Grandy, G. (2006), "Real or hyper-real?: Cultural experiences of overseas business students", *Critical Perspectives on International Business*, Vol. 2,No. 1, pp. 8-24

Toyokawa, T. and Toyokawa, N. (2002), "Extracurricular activities and the adjustment of Asian international students: A study of Japanese students", *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, Vol. 26, No. 4, pp. 363-379

Tremblay, K. (2002), "Student Mobility Between and Towards OECD Countries in 2001: A Comparative Analysis", OECD, *International Mobility of the Highly Skilled*, Paris, OECD, pp. 39-67

UNESCO (2009),*Global Education Digest 2009: Comparing Education Statistics across the World*,UNESCO Institute of Statistics, Montreal

Waxin, M.F. (2004), "Expatriates' interaction adjustment: The direct and moderator effects of culture of origin", *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, Vol. 28, No. 1, pp. 61-79

White, A. and Schmidt, K. (2005),"Systematic literature reviews", *Complementary Therapies in Medicine,* Vol. 13, No. 1, pp. 54-60

Yang, R.P.-J., Noels, K.A. and Saumure, K.D. (2006), "Multiple routes to cross-cultural adaptation for international students: Mapping the paths between self-construals, English language confidence, and adjustment", *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, Vol. 30, No. 4, pp. 487-506

Appendix 1. Literature review synthesis

Brown (2007)	The incidence of stress in international students in relation to the requirements of an international master's program (academic requirements, the need for a good level of English language, the dissonance between the academic conventions).	Qualitative study; ethnographic analysis through repetitive interviews and participant observation on a sample of international students in the United Kingdom.	Adopting a cultural-skills-learning approach in order to prepare international students for the new academic culture, focusing on developing several abilities, such as essay writing and referencing. Organizing academic orientation trainings before the commencement of each program. Providing academic support in order to alleviate the distress experienced by students.
Campbell (2011)	The positive influence of friendship with native students on international students' adjustment.	Qualitative experimental study; international students were paired with native studies for a semester. The later sample was supposed to offer support to the former; data were collected through narrative journals kept by the host students, describing the encounters.	Organizing programs aiming to connect international students and domestic students only with voluntary participation of the later; periodically assessing these projects in order to maintain their quality.
Coles and Swami (2012)	The role played by university structures in socio-cultural adjustment of international students.	Qualitative research; the study consist in small-group interviews with Malaysian students enrolled in undergraduate programs in the UK.	Designing intervention programs for international students not only at the beginning of their programs but also at different moments during their stay abroad. Creating co-cultural student networks in order to integrate internationals into the wider student body.
De Verthelyi and Frank (1995)	Characteristics and expectations of international students spouses (choice and decision making, psychological preparation, length of proposed stay, preparedness for change, family tradition of overseas study, degree of information about the USA, and formulation of a personal project).	Qualitative study; in-depth semi structured interviews with spouses of international students from various countries were conducted during their stay in America.	Sending more detailed pre-arrival information for spouses (about housing opportunities, ethnic-food stores, child care facilities, budget considerations, access to services and programs offered by the university and the community, visa work and study restrictions, etc.). Scheduling pre-arrival interviews with students who intend to bring their spouses in order to discuss the possible obstacles of the spouses. Providing on-going orientation for incoming spouses. Encouraging autonomous peer group activities between spouses, creating a spouses community.
Erichsen and Bolliger (2011)	International graduate students' perceptions	Mixed methods; data were collected through	Controlling international students emotional needs through programs

	of academic and social isolation, both in traditional and online environments.	surveys and in-depths interviews.	designed to reduce anxiety or isolation among international students, being them involved in traditional or online education.
Gaw (2000)	The effects of reverse culture shock on self-reported problem severity, willingness to see a counsellor, and student support service usage in the case of students that return to their home countries after an international experience.	Quantitative study; survey on a sample of American students that graduated from a program abroad/attended an exchange program and returned to their home country.	Developing psycho-educational outreach modules and discussion groups in the institutions that host students who undertook a program/a term abroad. Creating opportunities for returnees to become involved with international aspects on their campus.
Gullekson and Vancouver (2010)	Differences perceived by international students in emotional display norms - between home and host cultures, in the context of international adjustment.	Quantitative study; survey investigation applied on international and American students studying in America.	Developing cross-cultural programs to train sojourners and host nationals on the nature of emotional display across cultures (focusing on the notion that more display of emotion is acceptable in individualistic than in collectivist cultures).
Jang and Kim (2010)	The extent in which different cultural dimensions (individualism/ collectivism) of the host cultures produce different patterns of acculturation in the case of international students.	Quantitative study; the population of the study comprised collectivist-bound students studying in a collectivist countries and individualist-bound students studying in an individualistic countries.	Organizing courses focusing on cross cultural issues, with the teaching style focused on student discussions, with the participation of both host and exchange students. Sponsoring social events between host country students who have previously visited current exchange students' countries (applicable in the case of exchange programs) Encouraging informal interaction between exchange students and international students.
Le, Gardner (2010)	The experience international doctoral students enrolled in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields in American Universities.	Qualitative study; interviews with international Ph.D. Asian students enrolled in the United States of America.	Providing international students with the necessary tools to succeed academically and socially by offering information about the American culture, appropriate funding and guarantee of continuous funding for the duration of the study, regular meetings with graduate advisors increased availability of courses, up-to-date technology, and research equipment.
Mehtap-Smadi, and Hashemipour (2010)	International students reasoning for choosing to pursue their education in a university in a small island state.	Quantitative study; survey on a sample of international students enrolled in a university in Cyprus.	Offering quality education that is student focused, offering immigrants the possibility to stay and work after graduation, providing English-medium instruction, designing a student friendly web-site and advertising international programs at target groups.

279

O'Reilly et al (2010)	Psychosocial adaptation of international students in Ireland using measures of social support, loneliness, stress, psychological well-being, and socio-cultural adaptation.	Quantitative study; data were collected from both international students and native students in Ireland through subsequently applied surveys.	Organizing pre-arrival orientation program and offer post-arrival support to students. Encouraging international students to live in on-campus accommodations in the host universities, and providing good accommodation for them.
Sakurai et al. (2010)	The effects of multicultural intervention programs on the development of social ties, cultural orientation, and psychological adjustment among international students in Australia.	Quantitative study; survey on international students involved/ not involved in socialization programs during their stay in Australia.	Conducting intervention programs that aim to enhance social engagement among international students, while creating opportunities for international students to interact with each other and maybe even with native students. Encouraging international students' offices and associations to take an active role in developing clubs where students can interact based on their academic/nonacademic interests.
Sliwa and Grandy (2006)	The process of second culture contact in the case of international Chinese students.	Qualitative study; in-depth interviews with Chinese international students enrolled in a university in England and faculty members from the same university.	Exploring the expectations of faculty, international students, and national students in regards to course content and cultural experiences in order to align them Expectations in delivering higher education.
Toyokawa and Toyokawa (2002)	The relation between the level of engagement in extracurricular activities of Japanese students studying in the United States and the students' psychological health, academic involvement, social support from friends and active use of leisure time.	Quantitative study; surveys were used in order to explore the behaviour of Japanese students in America.	Facilitating the engagement of international students in out-of-class activities whilst supporting their successful performance in the classroom. Providing international students with information On both the academic aspects of their program and opportunities for off-campus activities. Assessing students' interests and needs before designing any kind of support program for internationals.
Yang et al. (2006)	Correlations between self-construal, communicative competence in the language of the host society and cross-cultural adaptation of international students.	Quantitative study; data were collected through surveys applied on two samples: one of international students register-red at a Canadian uni-versity and originating from societies with a collectivist cultural orientation, and a group of Canadian-born students.	Designing programs in order to help international students develop or improve linguistic and communication skills.

Appendix 2. Recommendations for organizations receiving international students in Europe

Activities

Before students arrival	At the beginning of the mobility	During the entire mobility	At the end of mobility	After the return home
15. Constant evaluation of the interaction between professors, staff and international students.				
1. Organizing seminars for professors and all the staff of the departments/institutions that will interact with international students in order to prepare them for the experience 2. Scheduling pre-arrival interviews with international students and the ones who will accompany them abroad in order to understand their expectations 3. Organizing interviews with different national students registered in an international class and with faculty members that teach in such a program in order to understand their expectations 4. Sending detailed information to the students about the host culture, university requirements, housing alternatives, life-style and social events. 5. Advertising the opportunities offered by the foreign university on the website and other similar channels	6. Organizing cultural orientation trainings 7. Organizing academic orientation trainings	8. Organizing post-arrival recurrent meetings 9. Adopting a teaching style that acknowledges cultural relativism 10. Organizing co-cultural seminars aiming to connect international students from different countries 11. Encourage the development of clubs where international and native students can share their non-academic interests 12. Forming family support networks for the families of international students and encouraging theirs autonomous development 13. Include courses focus on cross cultural issues in the curricula of international students 14. Offering language courses focused on the academic requirements		
		16. Sponsoring socialization events between international students and natives who have international experience 17. Developing non-academic programs with the voluntary participation of native students	18. Offering international students the possibility to enlarge their stay if they wish to do so	19. Creating opportunities for students who return from a mobility program to get involved in international activities / to keep in touch with the university

Time frame

About the authors

Luminița NICOLESCU is a professor at the Faculty of International Business and Economics from The Bucharest University of Economic Studies. Her research interests include: marketing and international marketing related topics, higher education management and reforms and management of small and medium sized enterprises. She is the author and co-author of around 30 books and books' contributions and she wrote over 60 papers in national and international journals. She is highly interested in the research activity, as she participated in around 30 research projects either as project director or as project member.

Cristina GALALAE is a Fulbright Visiting Scholar at the IC2 Institute, University of Texas at Austin and a PhD candidate at The Bucharest University of Economic Studies in Romania. She holds a Bachelors' degree in communication and public relations, a Master in strategic marketing and one in management and communication. Her current research lies at the intersection of the fields of international relations and marketing, with migration studies and consumer culture theory as the core of her interests. Her work was published in several international journals and presented in academic conferences all over the world.