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Cultural Challenges and Adaptations of Overseas School Teachers in a Gulf Country: A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract: Cultural differences between overseas teachers and the Arabian Gulf environment can significantly impact teaching and learning. Thus, a better understanding of the cultural differences is necessary and crucial. This study explores how overseas teachers become accustomed to one of the Arabian Gulf countries' cultures in a school. A phenomenological approach was adopted using semi-structured interviews with ten teachers to identify the cultural challenges, how teachers adjusted to them, and what role technology plays. This research suggests that professional development programmes can prepare teachers to address cultural challenges. The findings have implications for the success of international teachers who want to work in international schools in one of the Arabian Gulf countries. Furthermore, the study reveals that overseas teachers face diverse cultural challenges, including language barriers, communication differences, religious differences, racism, and climate disparities. This study can help to explore how Gulf institutions recruit, integrate, and retain international faculty through strategic talent management and employer branding practices.

Keywords: International education; Culture; Acculturation; Educational marketing; Student satisfaction; Strategic talent management

1. Introduction

Located at the northwest tip of the Arabian Gulf, the Arabian Gulf countries, including Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, are renowned for their abundant oil and gas resources. With Iraq to the north and Saudi Arabia to the south, these nations serve

as crucial trade hubs due to their strategic locations. As a result, the people residing in these Arabian Gulf countries are immersed in a diverse cultural landscape, leading to significant cultural influences (Alhassan, 2011). Globalisation and the expansion of international schools in the Arabian Gulf countries have increased the demand for overseas teachers worldwide. The



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increasing number of overseas teachers in the Arabian Gulf poses many cross-cultural challenges in schools. Foreign teachers from different cultural backgrounds and teaching practices will likely face cultural problems (Romig, 2009). Teachers considering overseas teaching are expected to prepare themselves for factors like a change of location and culture, student body and colleagues, parental expectations, the loss of familiar signs and symbols, etc. These issues significantly impact their professional satisfaction and personal happiness (Halicioglu, 2015). The degree of dissatisfaction experienced by teachers who cannot adapt to the new surroundings and culture they find themselves in has resulted in a rise in different websites and blogs advising them on how to break contracts (Halicioglu, 2015).

Fumham and Alibhai (1986), as cited in Bornau (1999), stated that cultural differences in the classroom may lead to cross-cultural communication failure. Also, during the work of the researchers at an international school in one of the Arabian Gulf countries, one of the researchers witnessed that more than 30 overseas teachers resigned, and many others decided not to continue for the following year. Spencer (2016) stated that it is difficult for international teachers in the Arabian Gulf countries to adapt to the environment and that many of her colleagues left their employment during the school year. This study aims to explore the cross-cultural challenges overseas teachers face in international schools and explore the strategies they propose to overcome them. By delving into their experiences and perspectives, valuable insights can be gained to inform teacher training programs and support systems, ultimately enhancing the experiences and effectiveness of overseas teachers in multicultural educational contexts.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study will add to the body of literature on culture and education. This study is significant in the Arabian Gulf countries because it sheds light on cultural challenges (e.g., language and religion) that international teachers face and how they adjust to them. The research focuses on the experiences of overseas teachers from a cultural and technological standpoint without explicitly focusing on how demographics and socio-economic characteristics like

gender, salary and benefits influence this experience. This was decided to provide a general overview of the challenges and the role of technology in mitigating the issues. These insights may help impact the training standards for new teachers to become culturally proficient, which is expected to reduce overseas staff attrition in schools in the Arabian Gulf countries. The findings also benefit international school organisations and higher education programmes by preparing more globalised teachers in their teacher preparation programmes.

Research Problem

The role of schools is to ensure that all learners develop positive cross-cultural attitudes and provide a good quality of education regardless of their gender, religion, culture and social class. Consequently, the attitudes and practices in the school should be aligned with the theories of multicultural education to achieve the role mentioned above. Also, teachers should be knowledgeable about the cultural issues in the environment in which they teach. This study attempts to explore the cultural challenges that overseas teachers face to help them acclimatise and explore the role of technology in this process.

Research Questions

Schools must prepare teachers for cultural issues, as what teachers think affects how they teach (Avery & Walker, 1993, as cited in Falconer, 2000). Although research in intercultural communication and culture shock has highlighted many issues that could lead to cross-cultural communication difficulty, studies have yet to be conducted on what cross-cultural situations overseas teachers perceive as most difficult in the Arabian Gulf countries. Knowing this information is essential for establishing what cultural knowledge would most significantly benefit teaching and learning.

Therefore, in this research, the following questions will be answered, specifically relating to international schools.:

- What are the cross-cultural challenges that teachers face?
- How do they address these cross-cultural challenges?
- To what extent can technology help teachers in international schools manage these challenges?

2. Literature Review

Culture provides people with an identity through acceptable language, actions, postures, gestures, tones of voice or facial expressions (Hall, 1977, as cited in Enayah, 2002). Different definitions have been developed for culture, but no single definition is acceptable to social scientists because of the nature of culture, which is a social group's way of life that differs from place to place. Hofstede (1997) defines culture as a system of values that means individuals have specific preferences.

2.1 Cultural Diversity

Many studies reveal that teachers appreciate cultural diversity and understand the fundamental diversity issues in their schools (Falconer, 2000). Also, appreciating cultural diversity is helpful for teachers to meet learners' different needs and accept other cultures. According to Delpit (2006) and Gay (2000), as cited in (Pfaller, 2010), "among many others strongly believed that teacher preparation programmes must change the fundamental myths that permeate the educational training programmes" (p. 25). Thus, the importance of teacher expectations should not be underestimated. Wise and Darling-Hammond (1995), as cited in Wonderland (2015), indicated that the teacher preparation system improves teacher capacities and ensures the success of teachers in the 21st century. Therefore, a teacher's knowledge and understanding of school diversity are vital and lead to success in teaching and learning.

2.2 Culture Shock

Culture is the aspects of life that a group of people share in common but not shared by all humanity (Hofstede, 2002). When people acculturate to another culture, they face 'a culture shock', which can be defined as the new cultural challenges while adjusting to a new environment. The phrase 'culture shock' was initially introduced into the literature by the Finnish anthropologist Kalvero Oberg in 1953 (Johnson, 2004).

Newly hired teachers can face a cultural shock when they work in a foreign country. Letven (1992) and Bunz (1997), as cited in Mann (2012), described four phases of "reality shock" for teachers: a honeymoon period, a crisis stage, a recovery stage and finally, an adjustment stage. Furthermore, Hofstede (1986) lists four differences that may cause cultural problems

in schools: differences in the social positions of the teacher and student, differences in the relevance of the curriculum, differences in the profiles of cognitive abilities, and differences in expected patterns of teacher-student and student-student interaction.

2.3 Technology and Culture

Technology can shrink the world by sharing knowledge and experiences, so it can be used to help teachers teach a multicultural curriculum. Also, it can be used as a tool to help teachers address cultural challenges. For example, it can be used to create a community with a climate of mutual respect to help students build positive relationships and respect diversity (Marri, 2005). Technology can offer many opportunities. "In particular, educational technology in schools can provide information, aid in developing knowledge and skills, and link different locations" (Knapp & Glenn, 1996, as cited in Marri, 2005, p. 8).

Building communities, activities and discussions can be used to help students see each other as individuals. Also, teachers can create content from multiple perspectives based on race/ethnicity, class and gender. Previous studies have shown that technology can provide meaningful ways for educators and students to process information and collaborate to promote critical thinking and social justice through multicultural education (Sleeter & Tettegah, 2002). Technology addresses equity and access issues for learners (Hollenbeck & Hollenbeck, 2009) and facilitates multicultural democratic education.

For the Gulf region case, artificial intelligence (AI) has the potential of assisting educators in adapting to new educational settings as well as cultural ones. With the assistance of AI-based tools, educators can take advantage of real-time translation, cultural orientation modules, as well as locally applicable teaching materials tailored to the values and expectations of Gulf-region schools. With the assistance of these technologies, educators can gain insights into the students' backgrounds, communication, and culturally responsive practices, assisting them in adapting better in culturally diverse classrooms. Through facilitating better cultural accommodation as well as personalised professional learning, AI enables the creation of inclusive, respectful learning environments right from the onset of the transition process.

2.4 Previous Studies

While the specific cultural challenges and adaptations of overseas school teachers in Gulf countries are not directly addressed in the previous studies, the themes of cultural integration, local perceptions of teaching, and the professional experiences of teachers in foreign contexts offer valuable insights into the complexities faced by educators in such environments. Overall, while the specific cultural challenges and adaptations of overseas school teachers in Gulf countries are not directly addressed in the previous studies, the themes of cultural integration, local perceptions of teaching, and the professional experiences of teachers in foreign contexts offer valuable insights into the complexities faced by educators in such environments

Overseas teachers in the regions of the Gulf typically experience several issues of culture impacting professional practice in personal readjustment. Shared in all the studies is the reality of culture shock, experienced before as well as after movement (Almutawa & Alsuwailan, 2025). Teachers indicate concern about homesickness, adjusting to new manners, as well as high regional living costs in the region (Almutawa & Alsuwailan, 2025). Culture shock is further facilitated by the requirement for accommodation to new social expectations as well as behavioural norms (Stasel, 2021; Halicioglu, 2015). Teachers in the specific case of Kuwait report transport challenges as well as social integration issues in general maintain the sense of isolation (Almutawa & Alsuwailan, 2025).

Other research has examined classroom-centered cultural barriers. Educators cite national parent involvement challenges, few innovation opportunities, as well as surviving restraints as obstacles to personal growth as well as professional growth (Almutawa & Alsuwailan, 2025). In Qatar, specific educational dynamics—the fixed staff-student relationship as well as culturally taking risk hesitance academically—the expat teacher is forced to redefine expectations in the classroom (Woolley & Yyelland, 2022). Additionally, the multicultural context of Gulf classroom contexts, in which students come with numerous cultural as well as linguistic contingencies, provides increased difficulties in the effectiveness of the management of diversity (Abu-Shawish, Ellili-Cherif, & Romanowski, 2021).

For these challenges, experts suggest the requirement

of cultural preparation. Acquiring knowledge of the new destination's culture, as well as society's expectations, before transfer can minimise the effects of culture shock and make the transition easier (Almutawa & Alsuwailan, 2025). Teachers must also take part in the community life of the new destination in terms of entering the new setting with openness and flexibility. Teacher professional learning and institutional support also appear here; well-planned induction programs, as well as frequent mentoring, can enable the teachers to develop the cultural capabilities, which can contribute to success (Romanowski, Abu-Shawish, & Merouani, 2019; Sharplin, 2009).

Third, pedagogic flexibility is at work in cultural adaptation here as well. Teachers here would mostly function as “selective cosmopolitans,” adapting in the sense of mediating the values of the home-country as much as the receiving society's expectations (Kadiwal & Rind, 2013). Leadership here as well is the key since school leaders who aim for inclusiveness as well as manage the staff members' diversity well can accommodate the foreign teachers better (Romanowski, Abu-Shawish, & Merouani, 2019). Generally, these studies highlight the intricacies of cross-culture adaptation as well as open the way towards investigating the lived experience of the realities of the Gulf international school teachers—a direction this present study further attempts to sketch out.

Although there is an increased need to hire foreign teachers in the Arabian Gulf schools (Fruit, 2004), more empirical research needs to be conducted. Still, studies have not been done on other countries such as China, Turkey, USA and Kasheztan. For example, in a survey about bilingual schools in the Netherlands, Grantham, McCarthy and Pegg (2007) concluded that Dutch schools with a bilingual stream need to offer more support to help foreign teachers adjust to the school environment. In an attempt to explore cultural challenges faced by Western-educated staff relocating to work in an Arab educational setting, Khelifa (2009), as cited in Wonderland (2015), identified the challenges of these Western teachers, which are differences in expectations about learning, differences in classroom cultures, differences in methods of teaching, and differences in attitudes towards learning and knowledge.

Academic research has duly established the fact

that expatriate teachers generally experience issues of cultural as well as ethnic differences in the classroom context. Government school studies in Qatar, for instance, identify the requirement of the teacher in adjusting the learning plan in conformity with the culturally diverse pupil clientele of Qatari citizens, along with pupils of different expatriate nationalities. Such practices necessarily inform the pedagogic choices of the professionals authoritatively, the issue of cultural adaptability becoming the cornerstone of the professional practice of these professionals (Abu-Shawish, Ellili-Cherif, & Romanowski, 2021).

Moreover, the Gulf migration of the South African teachers is normally facilitated by the absence of financial as well as professional prospects in the motherland. Upon migrating, the teachers should adjust on the spot to the new learning designs alongside societal values, which necessarily requires the adaptation of adaptive learning tactics (Mohamed, Dasoo, & Israel, 2024).

From the leadership perspective, the Qatar school leaders concurred in the reasonableness of addressing staff diversity as well as issues of culture and national differences. Their research depicts the extent of the success of the effectiveness of leadership as well as institutional facilitation in the success of the expatriate educators in integrating in multicultural learning settings (Romanowski, Abu-Shawish, & Merouani, 2019).

The cultural adaptation is at the centre of the expatriate teacher's performance within the Gulf, as proposed in several empirical studies. At the centre of the dynamics is the link between cultural intelligence (CQ) and the expatriates' performance. CQ in research is established to mediate cross-culture encounters as well as performance in the workplace, with high CQ resulting in high-performing expatriate teachers adjusting well in new cultural environments (Bovornusvakool, 2018). Additionally, openness to experience is established to positively affect CQ, which has been related to high performance outcomes (Bovornusvakool, 2018).

Furthermore, the female expatriate experience in Saudi Arabia was further discovered to exhibit the role of cultural adaptability in retention as well as in job satisfaction. Social networking, alongside the prospect of blending in society, emerged as powerful

motivators of success in the profession. Experiencing circumstances of work as well as the sense of freedom were further discovered to dictate success in the classroom (Hoke, 2020).

Another crucial function is the role of self-perception in cross-culture adaptation. Self-enhancement studies suggest that the overestimation of one's awareness of culture can deter workplace adaptation as well as peer assessment by the boss. Accurate self-assessment and identification of one's awareness of culture thus remain the keys to adapting effectively, furthering the need for modest self-perception and culture awareness for expatriate educators (Templer, 2020). In summary, the performance and success of expatriate teachers in the Gulf region are shaped by a combination of cultural intelligence, personal motivation, and self-awareness. While specific cultural adaptation strategies may not always be explicitly detailed in the literature, existing research consistently highlights adaptability as a critical factor in navigating diverse educational environments. Moreover, the presence of supportive leadership and a responsive institutional framework further enhances the ability of expatriate teachers to thrive and perform effectively in multicultural settings.

3. Theoretical Framework

In framing this study on cultural challenges, the researchers draw upon research and two models: the Harris and Moran model and Wright's model. These models help in framing the discussion of this study.

Harris and Moran's (1979) model for successful adaptation to a new culture involves the following steps:

1. Cultural preparation - what new teachers need to do to find out about the new culture;
2. Immersion - teachers need to get to know people from the host culture and make friends;
3. Creativity and experimentation - teachers need to try and learn from their mistakes to adjust to the new culture;
4. Cultural sensitivity - teachers should be aware of unique customs, traditions and beliefs;
5. Recognising the complexities of the host culture;
6. Culture bearers - bringing their cultural differences with them and using them as a lens to see and understand other cultures;
7. Patience, understanding and acceptance of oneself

and those from the host culture;

8. Realistic expectations - anxiety and disappointment are lessened if the teacher is realistic in their expectations;

9. The challenge of changing cultures - moving to a new culture can be a rewarding experience and can contribute to personal growth.

In Wright's (2005) model, the first phase of culture shock is known as the tourist stage, when teachers are worried about moving to a new culture due to the news they have collected from different resources about the host culture. The next phase of culture shock is the disintegration/difference phase, characterised by anger or withdrawal. The third stage, reintegration, involves the individual developing the ability to meld old and new experiences to interact more successfully in the new culture (Wright, 2005). In the fourth stage, gradual adjustment occurs where the individual gains a sense of cultural equilibrium within the new cultural environment (Wright, 2005). The final stage, reciprocal interdependence, involves the individual acclimatising to the new culture.

4. Ontology and Epistemology

The methodology of this study was used in alignment with the interpretivist paradigm. Researchers who believe in interpretivism assert that no single reality exists (Creswell, 2012). Therefore, the researchers used a phenomenology approach as it best reflects the purpose of this study, which is to help me collect the experiences and views of teachers. This qualitative, phenomenological study utilised an interpretive approach by using semi-structured interviews to investigate the cultural issues teachers face in an international school.

Ontology concerns the existence and reality or the philosophical assumptions about the nature of existences (Flowers, 2009), while epistemology considers the nature and scope of knowledge (Cohen et al., 2007). Ontologically, the researchers discussed the study from a strong constructivist angle, as the reality will be socially constructed by overseas colleagues who work in an international school. Based on that assumption, ontology, phenomenology studies, and other approaches study the nature of consciousness, a central issue in metaphysics or ontology. Epistemologically, this study will explore a personal

and subjective experience – “cultural challenges of overseas teachers” – so the researchers will follow the interpretivist approach. Epistemology and phenomenology help define the phenomena on which knowledge claims to rest since it aims to understand the nature of consciousness (Smith, 2003).

5. Methodology

When the purpose of a study is to examine lived experiences and the meaning constructed from those experiences, phenomenology is the most suitable approach to the study (Giorgi, 1997, as cited in Alban, 2013). Phenomenology is the study of reality as it is subjectively experienced by individuals (Gall et al., 1996, as cited in Falconer, 2000). A qualitative study allows the researcher to explore a specific phenomenon in-depth and holistically, leading to a comprehensive and multifaceted understanding of the issues involved (Patton, 2002). Using semi-structured interviews with participants helped the researchers of this study hear the teacher's perceptions and cultural challenges in their own words.

The research population consisted of ten teachers aged 25 to 55: three Canadians, five Americans and two Jamaicans. These ten teachers were selected using purposive sampling procedures because they represent the majority of nationalities of overseas teachers in the school. Both men and women were included in this study.

Data Collection and Analysis

This qualitative study used a phenomenological approach through personal observation and interviews to explore the cultural challenges of ten overseas teachers. The researchers began participant selection by emailing teachers in the school. The email introduced the researchers, stated the purpose of the study, described the research and clarified the procedures and confidentiality as well as risks and benefits. All the participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study anytime. The researchers met each participant at the agreed-upon time and location.

The researchers used three data sources to obtain evidence: (1) interviews with teachers, (2) observational notes, and (3) a literature review. Interviews can be essential to obtain meaning from participants' experiences in a specific context (Cohen et al., 2002). Generally, it was crucial to ensure that the wording of

the interview questions did not force participants to respond in particular ways (Creswell, 2012). The initial step in data collection involved receiving approval to conduct research from Lancaster University. All participants provided informed consent to take part in this study. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and national research committees and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. Ethical approval for this research was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee at Lancaster University.

The open-ended questions were used to identify the specific cross-cultural challenges and how to address them and determine the extent to which technology helps. Using a content analysis method, text portions referencing distinct ideas were tagged by code names. The code names used were pre-determined based on the questions. Each code within the names represented an idea that each participant raised. Using NVivo – a computer software program for qualitative analysis – codes and their associated text passages were linked, which built up to a set of codes and their frequency of use. Defined themes, then grouped codes.

6. Findings

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten overseas teachers in this study. Three open-ended questions were included in the interviews to capture the participants' views of the challenges and how they would address them.

6.1 Observations from Question 1

What are the cross-cultural challenges that teachers face?

Analysis of the ten participants' written responses produced 30 observations that related to the questions asked and the conceptual models. Broadly, the study of reactions from the first open-ended question identified reasons that cut across seven themes. The challenges had themes that cut across language, communication, behaviour, interest/participation, religion, racism and climate.

Three of the 30 responses indicated that language was a cross-cultural challenge teachers faced. It is noted that an international teacher who speaks

Arabic can easily navigate his/her way around the Arabian Gulf countries more easily than non-Arabic speakers. Four observations suggested that religion is a significant cultural issue overseas teachers face. Concerning interest and behaviour, the teachers perceived that not only do the parents not show interest in the kids' achievements in school when compared to how other parents are in other cultures, but many of the students also do not have a sense of responsibility, mainly because most of them have maids looking after them.

Communication challenges faced by teachers were attributed to the notion of politeness expected between student–teacher, parent–teacher and teacher–teacher. The responses suggest issues with understanding what would be considered offensive to one another, specific hand gestures or body language that could be insulting, the expected level of respect and, especially, the polite cues expected. This difference in communication styles often leads to misunderstandings between student–teacher, parent–teacher and teacher–teacher. Juffer (1993) mentioned that culture shock is caused by five distinct factors, including interpersonal or intercultural communication, which is ineffective. For instance, one of the participants mentioned that people would get annoyed if you mentioned the “Persian Gulf”, which is called the “Arabian Gulf” in the Arabian Gulf countries.

The teachers interviewed also indicated that racism was a big challenge, especially between Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti students. Kuwaiti students often bully non-Kuwaiti students, and there also seemed to be issues of inequality between Kuwaiti students and non-Kuwaiti students, as well as between overseas and local teachers. One teacher also pointed out that personal routines and rituals, such as drinking, cannot be done quickly in Kuwait.

6.2 Observations from Question 2

How do teachers address these cross-cultural challenges?

Analysis of the written responses produced a total of eighteen observations that were related to the question asked and the conceptual models. The analysis of the responses highlighted several ways the teachers could address cross-cultural challenges: learning about the culture of the society before going in, adapting to the

situations encountered, asking questions and talking to teachers who have immense experience in the same set-up, creating a buddy system between the teachers, cultural awareness training by the school and teachers' involvement in community service, and volunteer groups outside the school. Samples of the responses include:

- *"I try to learn as much about the culture that I am working in as I can. I try to remain respectful and inclusive. I think more tribes training about the cultural differences will be useful."*

- *"I find myself talking or explaining things to my students as if they were adults. In my culture, adults do not explain why they must follow rules. You just follow the rules because there are rules."*

6.3 Observations from Question 3

To what extent can technology help teachers in international schools manage these challenges?

The responses' analysis provided different ways technology could help address cross-cultural issues. Some highlights include using the internet as a means of showing students the cultural differences; creating activities accessed by students and parents that reflect different cultures; developing internet discussion platforms and email exchanges to aid community building between teachers, students and parents; and integrating some of the teachers' culture when teaching the kids. Samples of the responses include:

- *"Technology can be a bridge between cultures. From language translation, to creating activities that can be accessed by students and parents to creating activities that reflect different cultures"*

- *"Teachers can use the Internet as an information-gathering tool about these challenges. Also, internet discussion platforms and email exchanges to aid the building of community with his students and parents"*

7. Discussion

This study echoes the findings of Alban (2013), who stated that due to the diversity in schools, teachers and students need to adjust to cultural differences. Haslberger (2005) defined cross-cultural adaptation as "a complex process in which a person becomes capable of functioning effectively in a culture other than the one in which he or she was originally socialised" (p. 2). Berry et al. (1998), as cited in Johnson (2004), found that several factors modify the amount of stress

experienced by persons within a new culture, such as education, positive attitude, prior cultural experience, length of experience and available support systems. Previous experience with the culture or sharing the same language or religion as the host culture may make it easy for the teacher to adjust quickly (Hastings, (2012); this was highlighted by one of the participants, who mentioned that she has not faced any cultural issues because she is a Muslim and she can understand Arabic. This raises the question of whether or not teachers who have had experience teaching in Arabian Gulf countries may face the same issues as these teachers without previous experience.

A primary and overarching finding was related to the fact that the majority of the families have maids to take care of the house and the children. Some participants indicated that having maids created some challenges for teachers. Firstly, children became weak in their native language (Roumani, 2005). Secondly, children depend on maids to do many things, which contradicts teachers' expectations that learners should obtain increasing independence. Spencer (2016), who described her one-year experience in Arabian Gulf countries as a teacher in her book *Welcome to the State of Kuwait*, stated: "I felt that they regard me as one of their maids: someone who there to pander to their needs and clear up after them; someone who lets them do exactly what they want" (p. 34).

Seven out of ten participants have indicated that religion, language and racism are the main cultural challenges for teachers. This has been highlighted in Harris and Moran's (1979) model as "cultural sensitivity", which refers to areas teachers must avoid or be aware of. That explains why one of the participants has many Mohammeds in her classroom. Also, it describes the famous question indicated by another participant – "Who are you?" – that is used in introducing other people because a family name is fundamental to recognising your identity. During one of the researchers' works, it was mentioned that only students (citizens of the country) could participate in the robotics competition, which was considered unfair. This echoes the finding of Romig (2009), who indicated in his study that racism and language are the main cultural challenges.

There are many ways to adjust to new cultures. Harris and Moran (1979) stated in their model that

the first step in adaptation to a new culture is cultural preparation, to give teachers what they need to know about it. Falconer (1998) stated that professional development can be an aspect of support that helps teachers recognise cultural challenges. Some participants indicated the importance of professional development, such as the “tribes programme”, which allows students and teachers to respect different cultures. Another participant mentioned that tribes’ programmes and induction days helped them adjust to the new culture.

The next step for adaptation is having friends, otherwise known as “immersion”, in the Harris and Moran (1979) model. “Expatriates who can develop friendly relationships with local nationals will be more adapted than those who do not” (Haslberger, 2005, p. 7). Luring and Selmer (2009), as cited in Hastings (2012), stated that having social contact with another social group will encourage positive attitudes. “This socialisation process for teachers new to a particular school and to the education profession itself is important” (Johnson, 2004. p. 52). One participant mentioned that she tried to adjust by having friends from the local community. Another participant highlighted the importance of technology in socialising with people (Marri, 2005).

Cultural differences, such as language and religion, can confuse overseas teachers and make them wonder about their responsibility to accommodate these differences (Alban, 2013). One Participant indicated that she is not comfortable in Arabian Gulf countries and has decided to resign this year. Adler (1975) referred to that stage as the “reintegration stage”, where the individual rejects differences, while Letven (1992) and Bunz (1997) named it the “crisis stage”. Veenman (1984) described the symptoms of reality shock in teachers and how changes in their behaviour and personality can identify them. He added that teachers may leave their profession if they do not check their reality shock. White (2005) also described this stage in his model as the disintegration/difference phase when the teacher cannot adjust to the new culture and withdraw.

These results support prior studies demonstrating that foreign educators had routinely suffered from religion, linguistics, racism, and communication styles as major triggers of stress in the Gulf states (Almutawa

& Alsuwailan, 2025; Abu-Shawish, Ellili-Cherif, & Romanowski, 2021). Just as in prior studies, seven in ten took part in this research, citing the factors as major triggers of stress, in corroboration of what prior research had outlined as fundamental aspects of culture shock (Stasel, 2021; Halicioglu, 2015). Evidence that particular educators, in particular those whose linguistic or spiritual identities overlap with the receiving culture, conform relatively readily, is in agreement with Hastings' (2012) report of the buffering function of similarity in culture.

Moreover, the reliance of the participants on professional development and social action as adaptation tools is consonant with institutional strategies promoted in the research base. For instance, Romanowski et al. (2019) as well as Sharplin (2009) identify the essential function of induction programs as well as leadership support, which were equally cherished by the teachers in the present study. The notion of the teachers as “selective cosmopolitans,” pragmatically adapting to new norms while maintaining fundamental pedagogic values, as analyzed by Kadiwal and Rind (2013), was equally evident in the strategies adopted by the teachers, for instance, looking for mentorship as well as using culturally responsive content.

Aligning Findings with Harris and Moran's Model and Wright's Model

Based on the provided theoretical framework, the findings align with Harris and Moran's model and offer valuable insights into the experiences of overseas teachers. Firstly, cultural preparation emerged as significant, with teachers emphasising the importance of learning about the host culture before entering a new teaching environment. They recognised the need for immersion, building relationships, and engaging with the local community. The participants' strategies to adapt and address challenges indirectly reflected creativity and experimentation. They also emphasised cultural sensitivity, recognising the complexities of the host culture and integrating their own culture into teaching. The study highlighted the importance of patience, understanding, and acceptance, as well as the transformative potential of the experience.

In summary, the study's findings align with various steps in Harris and Moran's model. The participants

emphasised cultural preparation, immersion, creativity, cultural sensitivity, recognition of complexities, integration of their own culture, patience, and acceptance. These insights shed light on the challenges and adaptations experienced by overseas teachers and highlight the transformative potential of navigating cultural transitions.

A comprehensive understanding of the teachers' experiences and additional dimensions of their cultural transitions can be gained by integrating Wright's model. This research contributes to international education and guides educators facing similar challenges in diverse teaching environments.

Wright's model offers valuable insights into teachers' emotional and psychological experiences in a new culture, complementing the study's findings. Although the stages of culture shock proposed by Wright were not explicitly mentioned, the participants' experiences and strategies shed light on the challenges and adaptations related to cultural adaptation.

The findings align with several stages of Wright's model. The participants' cultural preparation and information gathering before arrival correspond to the tourist stage. The challenges teachers face in terms of language, communication, behaviour, racism, and unequal treatment indicate a phase of disintegration or experiencing differences. The strategies proposed by participants, such as learning from mistakes, adapting to situations, and engaging in community service, reflect the reintegration process and gradual adjustment. While not explicitly discussed, the overall study suggests the concept of reciprocal interdependence as teachers acclimatise to the new culture and find ways to manage challenges.

Considering Wright's model, a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences and the stages of cultural adaptation can be gained. This integration enhances the applicability of the study's findings and contributes to the existing literature on the challenges and strategies involved in navigating cultural transitions in an educational context.

Overall, the findings of this study align with the theoretical framework by highlighting the challenges teachers face in a new culture and proposing strategies to address them. The Harris and Moran model and Wright's model provided a valuable lens through which to interpret the findings and understand the stages

and processes of cultural adaptation in the context of overseas teaching.

8. Research Limitations

The scope of this study was confined to overseas teachers at an international school in one of the Arabian Gulf countries. Furthermore, the content of the research was limited to the cultural challenges that overseas teachers face while working in one of the Gulf countries. It is impossible to generalise the results of this study to fit every country and individual because culture affects all individuals differently. The study did not include a control group or comparison group, which would have provided a basis for comparison. Finally, this study did not consider the gender, cultural background, or any other demographic variables of the teacher participants that might have impacted the findings.

9. Conclusion and Implications

This phenomenological research investigates adaptation processes alongside the cultural issues of foreign teachers in international schools in one of Gulf countries. With the aid of interpretative phenomenological analysis, the study expresses the extent of the cultural issues of the teachers, which include issues of linguistic challenges, communication issues, norms of participation, religious as well as racial tensions, as well as climatic issues. It is revealed in the study that well-organised orientation days as well as training programs can help teachers become accustomed to the workplace. Technology was also found as central in assisting the teachers in becoming culturally accustomed as well as professionally qualified.

Overseas educators in the Gulf regions experience key cultural challenges, i.e., culture shock, difficulties in socialising, adapting to various learning settings, etc. Strategies of adaptation involving learning about the receiving nation, involvement in social relationships, participation in professional growth, as well as the optimal treatment of differences, form the overseas educators' baseline of success. Such research indicates the function of supporting measures, as well as culture awareness, in the improvement of overseas educators' adaptation in the Gulf regions.

To further equip the worldwide educators, the

following actionable suggestions can be made here. Recruitment agencies must develop extensive orientation programs for the overseas-destined teachers. Schools must promote inclusiveness in a proactive manner by offering networking, hosting social gatherings, and combining home-based with overseas workers. Sustained professional improvement mechanisms must be organised for the improvement of the cultural competency of the educators as well as long-term viability. In addition, future research can extend the findings of the current study further by studying overseas educators with broader nationalities as well as engaging in comparative adaptation tendencies.

The investigations also indicate the need for additional research in cross-cultural learning. Larger, more varied samples would enable consideration of longer-term follow-ups, the input of personality variables, as well as the differential success of various strategies of adaptation. This would move towards the achievement of more evidence-based, inclusive practice in the professional support of learning professionals in overseas settings.

Third, the present study supplies useful, new insights into the lived experiences of foreign teachers based in the Gulf. It closes the literature gap by presenting the specifics of the cultural issues felt, as well as the measures adopted for the resolution of these issues. With the conceptual lenses of Harris, as well as Moran with Wright, the present study improves our database of culture shock as well as of cultural adaptation. With the findings highlighting the need for preparation, social support, training for the teacher, as well as infusion of technology, the present study supplies useful input in cross-cultural education, with useful implications for multinational schools, pre- as well as in- service programs for training the teacher, as well as policymakers for improving the retention of as well as performance by the teacher in multicultural settings. In a nutshell, Students increasingly behave like consumers of educational services. Ultimately, the study findings benefit education are vital as from a consumer behavior perspective, students can be viewed as educational consumers whose perceptions of foreign teachers influence satisfaction, engagement, and overall evaluations of educational service quality.

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