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Student Exchange Programme: A Strategy for Cultural Exchange

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Abstract:

Education system has been practising student exchange programmes from secondary school levels till graduation and post-graduation programmes. In such programmes students are exchanged with other institution either within the nation or across the nations. This facilitates many factors involved in the process of education. The major beneficiaries of this programme are students who are actually involved in this process of exchange, the teaching faculty who attends the programme alongwith students, the institution involved and the nations at large. Sometimes, the families where the students are lodged get benefitted. Such student exchange programmes are primarily designed to study the culture of each other alongwith the social, political, lingual and educational differences and similarities. Education is one of the major tools to bring about change in the social, political and cultural scenario. The present paper, therefore, attempts to evaluate significance of student exchange programmes in educational institutions as political and cultural strategies of nations.

The paper will attempt to locate how cultural exchange is focused more than the academic exchange. After the World War II, almost every sensible nation is trying to understand culture of other country through variant ways; student exchange programme is one such effort.

Key Words: Student exchange, culture, cultural exchange

Generally student exchange programme is an exchange of students from an educational institution to another and vice versa. Wikipedia defines, "A student exchange program is a program in which students from a secondary school or university study abroad at one of their institution's partner institutions." In this endeavor two institution imparting education are involved in exchanging students from one another for a specific period of time.A student exchange program may involve international travel, but does not necessarily require the student to study outside of his or her home country. For example, the National Student Exchange program (NSE) offers placements throughout the United States and Canada.

Foreign exchange programs provides students with an opportunity to study in a different country and environment experiencing the history and culture of another country.[3]

The term "exchange" means that a partner institution accepts a student, but does not necessarily mean that the students have to find a counterpart from the other institution with whom to exchange. Exchange students live with a host family or in a designated place such as a hostel, an apartment, or a student lodging. Costs for the program vary by the country and institution. Participants fund their participation via scholarships, loans, or self-funding.

Student exchanges became popular after World War II, and are intended to increase the participants' understanding and tolerance of other cultures, as well as improving their language skills and broadening their social horizons. Student exchanges also increased further after the end of the Cold War. An exchange student typically stays in the host country for a period of 6 to 10 months. International students or those on study abroad programs may stay in the host country for several years. Some exchange programs also offer academic credit.[citation needed]

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Types of exchange programs[edit]

National exchange programs[edit]

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National Student Exchange (NSE) is a not-for-profit education consortium based in the United States that provides affordable and practical opportunities for students enrolled at member campuses to study and live in a new location.[2] More than 94,000 students have participated in the program since it was founded in 1968. NSE is designed for students who are looking for opportunities to study in a different state rather than a different country. NSE operates at member colleges and universities in the United States, Canada,Guam, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Nearly 200 universities and colleges are registered as NSE members. The application process, placement, and the pre-departure process are coordinated by the home NSE coordinator. The student can choose to pay the required tuition fees to their home campus or to the host campus.[2] Students may only participate in the exchange for a cumulative total of one calendar year, defined as an academic year and a summer session.

Short-term exchange[edit]

A short-term exchange program is also known as summer/intensive or cultural exchange program. These focus on homestays, language skills, community service, or cultural activities. High school and university students can apply for the programs through various government or non-governmental organizations that organize the programs. A short-term exchange lasts from one week to three months and doesn't require the student to study in any particular school or institution. The students are exposed to an intensive program that increases their understanding of other cultures, communities, and languages.

Long-term exchange[edit]

Enthusiastic welcome offered to the first Indian student to arrive to Dresden,Germany (1951)

A long-term exchange is one which lasts six to ten months or up to one full year. Participants attend high school in their host countries, through a student visa. Typically, guest students coming to the United States are issued a J-1 cultural exchange visa or an F-1 foreign student visa. Students are expected to integrate themselves into the host family, immersing themselves in the local community and surroundings. Upon their return to their home country they are expected to incorporate this knowledge into their daily lives, as well as give a presentation on their experience to their sponsors. Many exchange programs expect students to be able converse in the language of the host country, at least on a basic level. Some programs require students to pass a standardized test for English language comprehension prior to being accepted into a program taking them to the United States. Other programs do not examine language ability. Most exchange students become fluent in the language of the host country within a few months. Some exchange programs, such as theCongress-Bundestag Youth Exchange, are government-funded programs.

The Council on Standards for International Educational Travel is a not-for-profit organization committed to quality international educational travel and exchange for youth at the high school level.[4]

Application process[edit]

Long-term (10 to 12 month) exchange applications and interviews generally take place 10 months in advance of departure, but sometimes as little as four months. Students generally must be between the ages of 15 and 18.5. Some programs allow students older than 18 years of age in a specialized work-study program.

Some programs require a preliminary application form with fees, and then schedule interviews and a longer application form. Other programs request a full application from the beginning and then schedule interviews. High school scholarship programs often require a setGPA of around 3.0 or higher. Programs select the candidates most likely to complete the program and serve as the best ambassadors to the foreign nation. Students in some programs, such as Rotary, are expected to go to any location where the organization places them, and students are encouraged not to have strict expectations of their host country. Students are allowed to choose a country, but may live at any spot within that country.

The home country organization will contact a partner organization in the country of the student's choice. Students accepted for the program may or

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may not be screened by the organization in their home country. Partner organizations in the destination country each have differing levels of screening they require students to pass through before being accepted into their program. For example, students coming to the U.S. may be allowed to come on the recommendation of the organization in their home country, or the hosting partner may require the student to submit a detailed application, including previous school report cards, letters from teachers and administrators, and standardized English fluency exam papers. The U.S. agency may then accept or decline the applicant. Some organizations also have Rules of Participation. For example, almost all U.S. organizations cannot allow an exchange student to drive an automobile during their visit. Some organizations require a written contract that sets standards for personal behavior and grades, while others may be less rigorous. Lower cost programs can result in a student participating without a supervisor being available nearby to check on the student's well-being. Programs provided by agencies that provide compensation for representatives are more likely to retain local representatives to assist and guide the student and keep track of their well-being.

Australian Context[edit]

Australian High school exchange programs[edit]

Each state in Australia provides a different program of student exchange for secondary students. The programmes from each state are different for whether a student in Australia is looking to study internationally or a student from another country is looking to study in Australia. Student exchange in Australia depending on the state must be managed by registered exchange organisations or the school chosen for study must be registered.[5] The countries that are most popular for Australian students to choose to study are, Japan, France, Germany, USA, Italy, Canada, Belgium, Spain and Argentina. The main purpose of student exchange in Australia is to allow students to study, engage and experience a new culture. International students who choose to study in Australia are given different opportunities through the programmes at set schools will learn about Australian culture, but also gain English language skills at a high school level.

Australian University students exchange programs[edit]

Exchange programs for University students to study abroad varies depending on the university campus offers. International student exchange programs for university students is aimed to enhance students intercultural skills and knowledge. Student exchange programs for University students gives the opportunity to broaden their knowledge on their study of choice from a different country, this gives university students a chance to develop their work experience by seeing how the profession they are studying is practised in another country. International exchange for tertiary students allows them to gain a cultural experience on their studies, but also giving them a change to travel abroad while completing their degree.[6]

Costs[edit]

The costs of student exchange are determined by the charges from a student exchange program organisation or the university or college.[5] The costs vary depending on the country, length of study and other personal factors. Different programs through the school/university of choice may offer students scholarships that cover the expenses of travel and accommodation and the personal needs of a student.[7]

Accommodation[edit]

Host family[edit]

A host family volunteers to house a student from a different place during their exchange program visit. The family often doesn't receive any payment for hosting. Students are responsible for their own spending, including school fees, uniform, text books, internet, and phone calls. Host families could be family units with or without children or retired couples; most programs require one host to be at least 25 years of age. The host families are well prepared to experience a new culture and give a new cultural experience to the student. A student could live with more than one family in an exchange program to expand their knowledge and experience more of the new culture. Host families are responsible for providing a room, meals, and a stable family environment for the student. Most exchange programs allow for a switch of hosts if problems arise.

Housing[edit]

A university student involved in an exchange program can choose to live on campus or off campus. Living off campus is a popular choice, because students are more independent and learn more about the new culture when they are on their own. Universities that host exchange students will offer assistance in obtaining accommodation. Universities in Asia have on-campus housing for international students on exchange or studying full-time. Temporary options include hostels, hotels, or renting. Homestays, paid accommodation with a host family, are available in some countries.

Drawbacks[edit]

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Even though exchange students learn to improve themselves through the experience of studying and staying in another country, there are also many difficulties to be encountered. One of them is when conflicts between the host family and the students can not be solved by communicating with each other and that is when the student will be asked to stay with another host until they find a new match. This process, however, could take time while the students' duration of stay is limited. Even with preparation and knowledge about the new environment, they could still experience culture shock, which can affect them in different ways. Students from a completely different culture [8] can also encounter homesickness for a longer period of time. Lack of transportation can also become a major problem, because the chances students buying a car during a short period of stay is less likely to happen. Moreover, students will find it hard to find a job, even part-time since most exchange visas do not allow students to work and it is difficult to obtain one that does. Another potential drawback is health issues that can occur during the stay in a foreign country. All students are encouraged to consult a travel health expert, and be up to date with their vaccinations. Always have health insurance while traveling abroad, and carry emergency contact details of your local hosts and of multiple family members as well.[9]

Positives[edit]

Student exchange is a valuable program for students as it is intended to increase the students' knowledge and understanding of other cultures. International education helps students with their language and communicating skills, but also encourages students to improve and broaden their language skills. Students who study internationally develop a different perspective and cross cultural understanding of their studies which will further their education in which will also benefit them when they are in the workplace.[10]

The w-curve adjustment model[edit]

The w-curve model created by Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) is W shaped model that attempts to give a visual description of a travelers possible experience of culture shock when entering a new culture and the re-entry shock experienced when returning home. The model has seven stages.

A. Honeymoon Stage
B. Hostility Stage
C. Humorous/Rebounding Stage
D. In-Sync Stage
E. Ambivalence Stage
F. Re-Entry Culture Shock Stage
G. Re-Socialization Stage

Each stage of the model aims to prepare travellers for the rollercoaster of emotions that they may experience both while returning and traveling from a trip abroad. The hope in the creation of this model is to help prepare travelers for the negative feelings often associated with living in another culture. By doing so, it is the goal that these emotions will be better dealt with.[11]

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