Vilnius University
Faculty of Communication
Student of the International Communication study programme

Muhammad Ali Naseem

Intercultural Communication Challenges of Students from South Asia in Lithuania

Master's Thesis

Supervisor: Assist. Prof. Dr. Beata Grebliauskiene

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Užsienio studentų iš Pietų Azijos Lietuvoje patiriami tarpkultūrinės komunikacijos iššūkiai [Intercultural communication challenges of students from South Asia in Lithuania]: Masters research work / Muhammad Ali Naseem; Supervisor Assist. Prof. Dr. Beata Grebliauskiene; Vilnius University. Faculty of Communication. – Vilnius, 2025. 85 p. (20791 symbols): Table. 1, Figures. 24 - Bibliography: pp. 61-67 (73 titles).

This research study aims to find out the in-class and out-of-class intercultural communication and adaptation challenges of students from South Asia in Lithuania. A quantitative questionnaire was used to collect the data for this research. The sample size consisted of South Asian students from Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. All the respondents were regular students studying in different universities in Lithuania. After analyzing the data, we found that the international students faced communication problems with professors in English. Along with that, they reported pronunciation issues, difficulty understanding the vocabulary, and struggling to cope with the pace of the professors' English speaking during lectures. They also stated that they were not used to questioning due to their cultural backgrounds and mostly relied on classmates rather than asking professors directly.

Moreover, it was challenging for South Asian students to adapt to the new learning and teaching styles in the Lithuanian study environment, such as delivering presentations, writing assignments and reports, and group projects with students from different cultural backgrounds. Cultural integration into Lithuanian culture was also difficult for these students. For example, more than 50 percent of all South Asian countries reported that it was challenging for them to adapt to Lithuanian culture, and they faced prejudice and discrimination from locals. The situation was further complicated by the lack of host language proficiency, with around one-third of the international students explaining that it was challenging for them to use local services such as the hospital, transport, and housing due to a language barrier, and they used the Google Translate App to minimize these barriers. The main reasons for intercultural communication challenges of international students were a lack of English and local language proficiency, differences in the medium of instruction, and cultural, social, and educational changes in the study environment from their home country. To conclude, we can say that international students face educational, cultural, and communication challenges while studying in a foreign environment.

Keywords: Intercultural communication, South Asian, cultural integration, adaptation challenges

SANTRAUKA

Užsienio studentų iš Pietų Azijos Lietuvoje patiriami tarpkultūrinės komunikacijos iššūkiai

Muhammad Ali Naseem

Šiuo tyrimu siekiama išsiaiškinti mokinių iš Pietų Azijos tarpkultūrinio bendravimo ir adaptacijos iššūkius Lietuvoje klasėje ir už jos ribų. Šio tyrimo duomenims rinkti naudotas kiekybinis klausimynas. Imties dydį sudarė Pietų Azijos studentai iš Pakistano, Indijos ir Bangladešo. Visi respondentai buvo nuolatinių studijų studentai, studijuojantys skirtinguose Lietuvos universitetuose. Išanalizavę duomenis nustatėme, kad užsienio studentai susidūrė su problemomis bendraujant su dėstytojais anglų kalba. Be to, jie pranešė apie tarimo problemas, sunkumus suprasti žodyną ir sunkumus susidoroti su dėstytojų anglų kalbos tempu per paskaitas. Jie taip pat teigė, kad nebuvo įpratę klausinėti apie savo kultūrinę kilmę ir dažniausiai pasikliauja klasės draugais, o ne klausia tiesiogiai profesorių.

Be to, Pietų Azijos studentams buvo sudėtinga prisitaikyti prie naujų mokymosi ir mokymo stilių Lietuvos studijų aplinkoje, pvz., pristatymų, rašymo užduočių ir pranešimų, grupinių projektų su skirtingų kultūrų studentais. Šiems studentams sunkiai sekėsi ir kultūrinė integracija į lietuvių kultūrą. Pavyzdžiui, daugiau nei 50 procentų visų Pietų Azijos šalių nurodė, kad joms sunku prisitaikyti prie lietuviškos kultūros, jos susiduria su vietinių gyventojų išankstiniu nusistatymu ir diskriminacija. Situaciją dar labiau apsunkino priimančiosios šalies kalbos nemokėjimas, nes maždaug trečdalis tarptautinių studentų aiškino, kad dėl kalbos barjero jiems buvo sudėtinga naudotis vietinėmis paslaugomis, tokiomis kaip ligoninė, transportas ir būstas, ir jie naudojo Google vertėjo programą, kad sumažintų šias kliūtis. Pagrindinės užsienio studentų tarpkultūrinės komunikacijos iššūkių priežastys buvo anglų ir vietinių kalbų nemokėjimas, mokymo terpės skirtumai, kultūriniai, socialiniai ir edukaciniai pokyčiai studijų aplinkoje iš gimtosios šalies. Apibendrinant galima teigti, kad tarptautiniai studentai, studijuodami svetimoje aplinkoje, susiduria su švietimo, kultūros ir komunikacijos iššūkiais.

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Introduction

Intercultural communication can be defined as an interpretive and symbolic process through which individuals from different cultural backgrounds communicate and create relationships with others (Haddad, 2021). The communication processes initiated by globalization affect academic, professional, and personal lives. Thus, the significance of intercultural communication is constantly growing (Žegunienė, 2021).

In Lithuania, universities have experienced a steady increase in international students' admissions because of their improving quality of higher education, availability of English language study programs, and increased opportunities for different Erasmus scholarship programs (Lasauskiene, 2017). Nowadays, everyone is involved in international activities, projects, and educational exchange programs (Žegunienė, 2021). Since the number of international students is growing, it is also important to understand their issues (Šimienė, 2023).

This research work explains the adaptation processes and stages through which international students pass to adjust to a new culture. It describes both internal and external factors impacting the cultural adaptation of international students. Furthermore, this thesis also explains the educational systems of South Asia, the Baltic, and the Nordic regions. It also gives an overview of the educational systems of these regions.

Moreover, it also discusses the learning styles, teaching styles, and student-teacher interactions in these regions, as well as the adaptation barriers generated by differences in educational experiences. This research work also examines the medium of instruction in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India, as well as the language barrier as a challenge for international students in the educational environment.

This topic explores the intercultural communication and adaptation challenges of students from South Asia in Lithuania. Only a few studies have been done regarding this topic in Lithuania, particularly related to South Asian Students. The number of students from South Asia is increasing every year; therefore, it is also important to understand their intercultural communication and adaptation issues.

The research aim of this empirical work is to find out the in-class and out-of-class intercultural communication and adaptation challenges of students from South Asia in Lithuania. For this purpose, we have used a quantitative questionnaire that consists of 34 questions, including several sections on demographic information, language challenges in an academic setting, academic adjustment challenges due to teaching and learning styles, social and cultural integration issues, and daily life adaptation challenges. After collecting the data through a questionnaire, descriptive analysis is used

to analyze the data and explain the results. Lastly, we have provided recommendations and limitations for future research.

1. CULTURAL ADAPTATION

This chapter explains the adaptation process and its stages for international students studying in a foreign educational environment. It discusses the external and internal factors that impact the adaptation of international students. Furthermore, this chapter also discusses the obstacles international students encounter during the adaptation process and describes the importance of these factors in the academic success and integration of international students in the study environment.

1.1. Adaptation Process and Stages

When an individual moves from a familiar environment to an unfamiliar environment, their old behaviors and habits are no longer useful (Separa, 2024). Therefore, at the start of the adaptation process, when international students try to communicate with other students from different cultures, they face adaptation issues because of the cultural differences (Eginli, 2016).

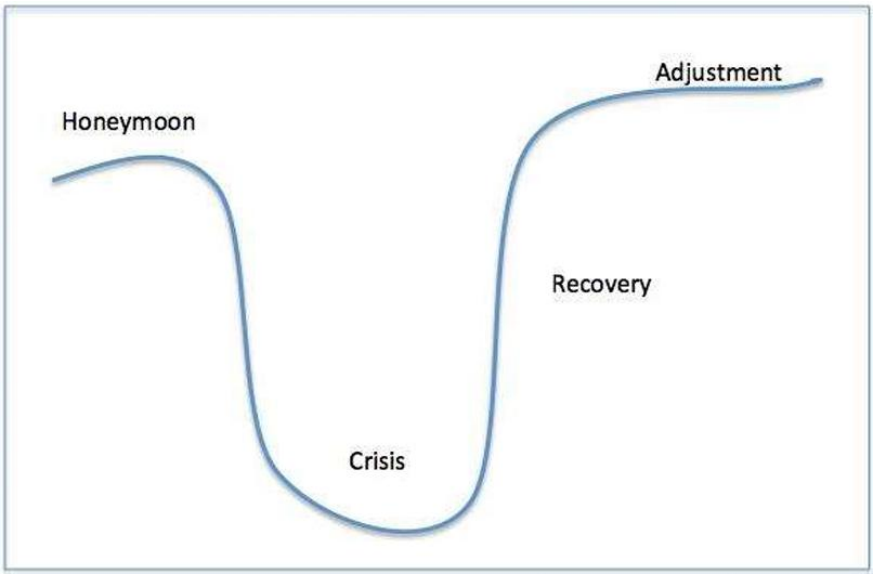
There are four stages of the adaptation process: the first phase is the honeymoon phase, then the crisis stage, the third stage is the recovery stage, and the final phase is the adaptation phase. International students have to pass through these four adaptation stages (Aisha & Mulyana, 2020).

The first phase of the adaptation process is the honeymoon phase, which contains excitement and enthusiasm for the global opportunities. The characteristics of this phase are positive feelings and curiosity towards new culture and experiences (Ward et al., 2001).

After the honeymoon phase, international students encounter a crisis phase, which comprises stress, confusion, and negative emotions. This stage begins when the expectations of students and the realities of learning in a new education system differ. Therefore, students may face communication challenges, encounter stress, anxiety, and loneliness. This is a period of cultural shock for international students (Zhang & Goodson, 2011). The adaptation process for the international students will be easier if the similarities between the host and home countries are higher (Aisha & Mulyana, 2020).

After overcoming the crisis stage, the third adaptation stage arises, known as the recovery stage (Alamri, 2018). Learning about different cultures and crisis resolution are the characteristics of this stage (Ward et al., 2001). Moreover, social support from friends, family, and institutions, such as counseling services, helps the students deal with these adaptation issues and lessens the effects of cultural shock (Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

Figure 1. The U-curve intercultural adaptation model



Source: (Alamri, 2018)

Finally, the adjustment phase is the last phase of the adaptation process. In this phase, one can function efficiently in the new culture (Alamri, 2018). Enjoyment and functional competence are the features of this stage. International students become self-sufficient, and they use their cross-cultural experience in their personal and professional lives (Ward et al., 2001).

Furthermore, universities play a critical role in helping international students to pass through these four adaptation stages effectively (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Regular support from faculty, family, peers, and different social services helps individuals cope with this stress (Lashari et al., 2018).

To summarize, international students pass through four stages of the adaptation process characterized by negative emotions, stress, anxiety, and cultural shock. These phases affect the academic performance and mental well-being of international students. Social support from university staff, family members, and friends is crucial for the cultural integration and adaptation of students and facilitates the transition through the cultural shock period.

1.2. Factors Impacting the Adaptation Process

The adaptation process is very complex, and different external factors, such as demographic traits of students, such as gender, age, education, marital status, and previous study experience, affect the adaptation of students (M. Luo & Zhang, 2021). Moreover, a research article has identified three internal factors that affect adaptation: “host receptivity, host conformity pressure, and ethnic group strength.” Host receptivity is the willingness of the host society to accept new incoming individuals. Host conformity pressure is the expectations of the society for newcomers to adapt to the host

society's culture and customs. Furthermore, ethnic group strength is the collective status and power of the ethnic group to which the individual belongs (Separa, 2024). Foreign students' ability to adapt is greatly influenced by their living environment. If the host society is more open and welcoming, students are more likely to feel supported and accepted.

Furthermore, foreign students respond differently to different host cultures. In Western countries, students from more collectivist societies may feel less integrated than those from individualistic societies. International students from Asian countries speak less English and face more issues compared to European students. (S. Luo & Liu, 2023).

The students who leave behind close-knit family systems and move abroad find it an extremely draining journey. Students from collectivist societies, where familial and social ties play a major role in day-to-day existence, may experience a sense of loneliness. There are also other issues that international students often face, such as stress, depression, headaches, and stomach pain resulting from psychological tensions (Šimienė, 2023).

Furthermore, the main reasons for intercultural communication barriers are individualistic or collectivist characteristics of culture, having low language proficiency, being unable to communicate, personality traits, and the university education system (Eginli, 2016). The other barriers to intercultural communication are stereotyping, ethnocentrism, prejudice, discrimination, and racism (Mdletye, 2022).

Some cultural traits, such as local customs, attire, weather, and food, are not common among cultures that are far apart geographically. This makes students more isolated and makes adapting to different cultures more difficult. Moreover, international students experience a greater cultural gap when they initially arrive in a foreign country, and eventually learn to comprehend the local culture, and the cultural distance gradually diminishes after building trust with people in the host culture (M. Luo & Zhang, 2021). Therefore, for international students, everything may be difficult to understand at first, but as students become used to the new culture, the cultural distance steadily decreases.

Another important factor is personality type. The five personalities are crucial to understand the adaptation process. Research studies have described that an extrovert personality can adapt easily and is positively correlated with mental well-being, while a neurotic personality is negatively correlated with psychological health (M. Luo & Zhang, 2021).

Language proficiency is another significant factor that affects adaptation. It is easier to engage socially and build relationships with local students when one is proficient in the host country's language. International students are more inclined to interact with the host population when they speak the language fluently, which promotes cultural learning and adaptation. Research has indicated a positive correlation between international students' academic, social, and cultural adaptation, as well

as their intercultural psychological adaptability, and their English language competence in the United States (Mahmood & Burke, 2018).

On the other hand, social support networks also play a key role in intercultural adaptation. A research study found that if international students have more friends in the host country, then this increases their life satisfaction and decreases their chances of homesickness. However, social support for international students mainly comes from their families and friends of other nationalities in the host population (Hendrickson et al., 2011).

The quality of these relationships is important; students who form deep connections in the host culture are more likely to adjust quickly than those who only engage with peers from their home country. However, Southeast Asian students make fewer relationships in their host country, exposing students to several psychological problems, which may ultimately affect their academic performance (Oduwaye et al., 2023).

In addition, a research study found that international students reported stress and depression while studying in a foreign study environment. Another research study conducted on 900 foreign students studying in Australia found that 41% of the participants reported higher stress levels, and culture shock and discrimination were the main causes of stress among these students (Oduwaye et al., 2023).

Additionally, foreign students can adapt quickly when they communicate and form connections with locals and become accustomed to the host culture (S. Luo & Liu, 2023). However, local students can adjust to the study environment quickly than international students because they have a social support system. International students study in a country of a different culture, have no or little knowledge of the way of life, and barely know any people in their new study destination (Oduwaye et al., 2023).

Moreover, discrimination may significantly affect international students' mental health (S. Luo & Liu, 2023). Foreign students may face these challenges of discrimination, racism, and culture shock. For example, a research study investigated that 49 respondents out of 153 reported discrimination, and they encountered verbal and physical assault (Oduwaye et al., 2023).

Likewise, another study found discrimination against Chinese students in Canada. These students reported prejudice based on their language, color, and cultural beliefs. Such labels stop students' learning and academic growth in the long run (Oduwaye et al., 2023). Lastly, it can be said that the adaptation is a cyclic and fluctuating process, instead of a linear process, and when a person experiences stress due to various reasons, this delays the adaptation process (Separa, 2024).

To conclude, we can say that when an individual moves from one country to another, students pass through four phases of the adaptation process: the honeymoon phase, the crisis phase, the gradual recovery phase, and the adaptation phase. This intercultural adaptation is greatly influenced by

external as well as internal factors. External factors include demographic traits, personality type, and language proficiency. While internal factors are openness and closeness of the host society, the belief system of the host society, and host conformity.

Moreover, people's reactions to new situations are influenced by their early ties with their home country, which also affects their capacity to build new relationships with the host country. Cultural, social, and psychological factors play a critical part in the adaptation process. Therefore, a person's capacity to adjust to different cultural contexts is influenced by a combination of personality traits, early experiences, and cultural intelligence. Lastly, the adaptation process is complex, and for international students, everything is difficult at first, but as students become used to the new culture, the cultural distance steadily decreases, and students fit into the new environment.

2. EDUCATION ENVIRONMENTS

In order to understand the adaptation of international students in a foreign study environment, it is also important to comprehend the education systems of both the host and home countries. This chapter explains the education systems of South Asia, the Nordic and the Baltic states. It also discusses the teaching and learning styles in these regions and the barriers generated due to the differences in these teaching and learning styles.

2.1. An Overview of Education Systems of Baltic, Nordic, and South Asian Regions

The educational systems of South Asia start with elementary school and continue through secondary school and higher education, and lead to bachelor's, master's, MPhil, and PhD degrees. Considering school duration, while Nepal and Bangladesh provide 12 years of formal education, India and Sri Lanka have relatively longer school years, with 13 years. In Bhutan's education system, one year of pre-primary education is followed by six years of primary school, two years of junior high, and two years of senior high school. Similarly, Sri Lanka breaks its 13-year educational program into five primary years, four junior secondary years, two senior secondary years, and two college or pre-university years (Zafar, 2016).

Furthermore, Nepal's educational system includes five years of elementary school (grades 1–5), three years of lower secondary (grades 6–8), two years of secondary school (grades 9–10), and two years of higher secondary education. After that, students can pursue bachelor's (grades 13–14) and master's (grades 15–16) degrees (Zafar, 2016).

Basic, secondary, and postsecondary education are the three stages of Bangladesh's official education system. Students move to junior secondary (three years), secondary (two years), and higher secondary (two years) after completing five years of elementary education. Students can select from the humanities, business, or science paths starting in class nine. Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) holders can enroll in three or four-year bachelor's degree programs, one or two-year master's programs, two-year MPhil programs, and three or four-year PhD programs (Zafar, 2016).

Similar to this, Pakistan divides education into three steps: elementary (grades 1–8), secondary (grades 9–12), and tertiary. Bachelor's degrees and master's programs normally last two to four years each. Options for postgraduate education include PhD and MPhil programs (Zafar, 2016).

The Maldives has a dual educational system, which blends ancient Islamic institutions with Dhivehi as the primary language of instruction, with contemporary government-run English-medium schools. Secondary education continues in grades 11 and 12; primary education lasts five years.

Notably, high-achieving students continue their education abroad, while others attend regional postsecondary institutions (Zafar, 2016).

Although state governments in India are in charge of education, a standardized national system has developed. To obtain a first degree, students typically need to finish 10 years of secondary school, two years of upper secondary education, and three years of tertiary education. The region's continuous attempts to improve educational organization and quality are shown in the increased emphasis on making education more accessible and structured to serve students from early childhood through higher education, and a focus on quality education (Zafar, 2016).

Moving towards the education systems of Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania, these three countries have many structural similarities. For instance, education is compulsory until the age of sixteen. In Lithuania, there are four years of primary schooling followed by six years of secondary education, covering the classes from one to ten (Raudienė et al., 2022). There are three study stages in Estonia: grades one to three, grades four to six, and grades seven to nine, starting from the age of 7. Similarly, nine years of education are compulsory in Latvia, starting at the age of seven, including six years of primary and three years of lower secondary education (Kools et al., 2024).

After completing compulsory education, students can pursue their education through academic or vocational pathways in a higher secondary school. In Lithuania, students can attend and continue their education in vocational schools (Raudienė et al., 2022). Similarly, in Estonia, students can pursue general education or a specific vocational education (Teichmann et al., 2014).

Moving on, national evaluations are an important part of every education system to check the academic performance of students. Lithuania conducts evaluations and tests in classes two, four, six, and eight, and a final exam in class ten to make sure that students have completed secondary school (Raudienė et al., 2022). In Estonia, students must pass three basic school exams after finishing grade 9: one in mathematics, one in an elective subject, and Estonian language and literature or Estonian as a second language (Teichmann et al., 2014). After completing grade 9, students in Latvia take a centralized exam to advance to upper secondary education (Kools et al., 2024).

Despite certain similarities, every educational system has distinctive features. The distinctive feature of Lithuania's system is the inclusion of national tests for evaluation at several early school levels, including grades 2, 4, 6, and 8 (Raudienė et al., 2022). This strategy is not common in Estonia, which emphasizes exams at the end of basic education and does not use early-stage exams or evaluations (Mare Teichmann, 2014). However, Latvia has a centralized testing system at the end of grade 9 (Kools et al., 2024).

Moreover, the admission requirements to higher education differ slightly. Lithuanian students can enroll in higher education institutions after completing their upper secondary school education (Raudienė et al., 2022). In Estonia, admission is granted after completing the upper secondary school

or vocational education equivalent to the upper secondary school education level (Teichmann et al., 2014). Similarly, Latvian students must pass a general or vocational secondary school to get admission to universities (Kools et al., 2024).

Moving towards the Nordic region, there are also some similarities in the education systems. Grades 1-6 and lower secondary grades 7-9 are included in the education system of Finland, Sweden, and Denmark. Primary education in Norway spans classes 1–7, whereas lower secondary education spans years 8–10 (Volmari, 2019).

In Nordic countries, obligatory schooling lasts for ten years. Pre-primary schooling at the age of six is compulsory. When the child turns six, compulsory education begins. Students are typically 16 years old after their mandatory education. In Finland and Sweden, pre-primary education is the first year of mandatory schooling. Students can choose to continue their education for an additional year after completing basic school. Students can review and raise their grades during this extra year, and they also have more time to consider their future goals (Volmari, 2019).

Basic education in Finland, Sweden, and Denmark consists of grades 1–6 and lower secondary 7–9, and primary education in Norway consists of grades 1–7 and lower secondary 8–10. In 2018, Sweden expanded the education system to include pre-primary education at age 6. Moreover, students can pursue vocational courses following comprehensive schooling. Denmark and Finland provide an optional extra year for students to explore professional possibilities or enhance their academic performance. Lastly, Nordic countries emphasize formative assessment techniques to promote learning rather than standardized testing during compulsory education (Volmari, 2019).

2.2. Teaching Styles, Learning Styles, and Student Teacher Interactions in South Asia

The academic success of international students depends on their relationship with their teachers. The "Student-Teacher Parampara" is a highly respected model in India, and emphasizes respect and appreciation for teachers. This relationship affects how students communicate and engage with their teachers (Yadav et al., 2022). In Bangladesh, teachers are seen as guardians, and asking questions is considered impolite. Furthermore, students act as passive recipients of knowledge in the classrooms, and books are viewed as unquestioned sources of truth (Huda, 2013).

In Pakistan, old teaching methods, traditional lecture-based approaches, provide no opportunity for students to participate in class. Despite the emphasis on new approaches, including peer tutoring and collaborative learning, evaluations continue to be theory-based and without any forward-thinking objectives. This contributes to the perception of Asian students as rote learners by encouraging rote learning and hindering their critical thinking ability (Bakar, 2015; Khan, 2020).

Similarly, Bangladesh has a strict, text-based education system, and mostly concentrates on exams. Teachers use the study material, and pupils anticipate explanations without questioning. This text-based, strict education environment discourages collaborative and interactive learning and inhibits the critical abilities of students (Huda, 2013). Therefore, Asian students are more used to rote memorization and working alone (Mesidor & Sly, 2016).

Furthermore, the education system in Pakistan is teacher-centric, and students only memorize what teachers present in lectures because they are evaluated based on the knowledge they reproduce in exams. Students use a rote learning approach from secondary school education to the tertiary education level. Old traditional methods of rote memorization are evident in the education system of Pakistan, and lack modern techniques (A. Ahmed & Ahmad, 2017). Moreover, textbooks are followed religiously, and even the examination system checks the memory of the students, and the same questions appear again and again in the papers (Bhutto, 2022).

Similarly, the educational traditions in the Indian subcontinent countries rely on teacher-focused and surface approaches to learning, and where the teacher is considered a 'guru' who provides the student with knowledge and should not be questioned. Students coming from this type of educational environment rely on memorizing and presenting information provided by the teacher and often prefer to take a passive role in the classroom. Adding to this, a passive learning style is a common approach observed in collectivist cultures like India, where students often prefer not to debate or contradict fellow students to avoid loss of face (Kansal et al., 2022). In Indian classrooms, teachers mostly rely on syllabus books and lack interaction with students. On the other hand, students focus more on memorizing the books, do not engage in class activities, and also lack feedback from teachers (Maharana & Bobby Binjha, 2025).

Lecturing is still a common approach because it uses few resources and provides effective syllabus coverage. However, project-based Learning and other more student-centered strategies are becoming increasingly popular. These approaches take students seriously as active participants to cultivate thinking, problem-solving skills, and communication-based learning (Samaddar & Sikdar, 2023).

The Sri Lankan educational system takes an innovative approach to pedagogy and teacher preparation. Through school-based trainings and field experience seminars, aspiring educators can learn new ideas and put them to practical use in educational settings. Communication-based, problem-based, and project-based methods are adapted according to the needs and learning styles of students and are becoming more and more popular (Gunaratne et al., 2021). For example, at the University of Colombo, small group exercises and problem-based learning sessions are used (Rasanga Bataduwaarachchi et al., 2013).

Furthermore, in Nepal, Brahmin and Chhetri instructors lack the language and cultural skills necessary to communicate with students from diverse cultural backgrounds. The majority of the students become passive listeners, and instructors only focus on the more engaged students (Koirala, 2021).

Moreover, education is governed by a national curriculum, and mostly focuses on textbooks in both Nepali and English. Teachers do not give much importance to local examples and facts, and discuss them outside of class. There is a huge gap between the syllabus and real-world experience. Therefore, the students do not feel motivated to learn and participate (Koirala, 2021).

2.3. Teaching Styles, Learning Styles, and Student Teacher Interactions in North West Countries

One of the most intriguing aspects of Nordic classrooms is their recent and comprehensive digitization. Students have their iPads or computers with them. Nordic classrooms provide students with lots of chances to voice their opinions and shape the conversation. Finnish classrooms are known for spending a lot of time on individual assignments and providing little opportunity for pupils to interact with one another. Although student participation and questioning are encouraged in Norwegian classrooms, student utterances are frequently employed for procedural and practical purposes. When examining Swedish math classes, a high level of student involvement is present (Klette et al., 2018).

Moreover, compared to instructors in Denmark and Norway, Finnish instructors appear to be more independent in their pedagogical decisions, but they may also be more cautious when it comes to utilizing technology in the classroom (Ottestad, 2010). According to a research study, academic staff in Latvian educational institutions use a wide range of tools, including online lesson planning and video conferencing, producing and processing audio and video, multimedia resources, gathering audience feedback, conducting surveys, creating infographics, and many more. However, the Latvian institutes are still in the development stage, and academic staff members are not familiar with these technologies (Petrovica et al., 2022).

In Lithuania, active learning approaches, including group work, class discussion, and play-based learning, are standard in Lithuanian primary education settings, and the students actively participate. Play-based education and group work methods are used at the primary education level in Lithuania. These methods are transactional in orientation, meaning that the students participate actively. The updated Lithuanian Primary Curriculum emphasizes inquiry-based education as an essential active learning method at the primary level (Miseliūnaitė & Cibulskas, 2024).

Different studies have demonstrated how classroom interaction is structured around fundamental interactional traits of student involvement during whole-class instruction in the Nordic region. Specifically, a three-move discourse format, known as IRE, is widely used in classrooms. It usually follows this pattern: the teacher poses a closed question that is information-seeking (the initiation) and calls for a pre-planned response (the response). This format is typically pitched at the recall or lower-order cognitive level. After praising the right answers and correcting the incorrect ones (evaluation), the teacher either follows up or provides feedback (feedback), which is also known as "IRF" (Klette et al., 2018).

Moving forward, teachers in Nordic classrooms give feedback by encouraging students to express their thoughts. With the widespread digitization of classrooms through computers, tablets, and cellphones, opportunities for accessing various types of content have also been introduced. Students bringing their gadgets to class have played a major role in the quick and extensive networking of classrooms. Students can also explore alternative content through digital devices, which may affect their access to shared classroom discourse and content (Klette et al., 2018).

Teachers in Lithuania rely on exchanging knowledge and experiences, looking for group solutions, and evaluating outcomes. All students can actively participate and express themselves in educational processes. Teachers' assistance for students is concentrated on learning activities without leaving out any students or overemphasizing the need for support (Lakkala et al., 2021). Moreover, Lithuanian teachers employ teacher-led approaches and establish clear objectives for their lessons. In one-on-one teaching scenarios, the instructor provides one-way instructions while focusing on the knowledge-based learning objectives (Lakkala et al., 2021).

In Estonia, negative perceptions of school experiences are linked to a lack of teacher support. Teacher-student relations are one of the educational goals in the “Estonian Basic School National Curriculum (2011).” Therefore, it is important to further understand the teacher–student relationship in Estonia (Palk et al., 2024).

We can say that there is no clear dominant teaching style. However, previous research has suggested that teachers still use old traditional, teacher-centered styles, and the learner-centered approaches are not widely practiced in higher education (Mičiulienė & Čiučiulkienė, 2021).

2.4. Adaptation Barriers Generated by Educational Experience Differences

When adjusting to new academic settings, international students encounter various challenges, such as different classroom customs, language issues, academic reading and writing, delivering presentations, and new teaching styles. They must fit into their new institution's regulations and academic environment.

When international students travel to a country for higher education, they encounter two primary challenges: a foreign academic environment and culture. In addition to the issues brought on by cultural differences, students also experience stress due to differences in teaching and learning styles (Eginli, 2016). The students need to adjust to the requirements of this new study environment and consider themselves as a part of a new society, form social relationships, and build value-based ties with the university (Lasauskiene, 2017).

Moving forward, a research study conducted on Asian students' learning experiences at a New Zealand University has explained that Asian students encountered various difficulties, especially in unfamiliar patterns of classroom interactions, difficulty in understanding academic norms, and limited support during the learning process (Eginli, 2016).

Additionally, international students faced challenges in foreign universities due to differences in pedagogical methods and unfamiliarity with the testing and grading system. They also reported difficulties in understanding the content of the lectures, understanding the classroom norms, and academic language barriers (Bastien et al., 2018).

It has been stated that there are two main reasons for students' adaptation problems in the adaptation period: Knowledge of the foreign language (English) and academic requirements and expectations (Eginli, 2016). Proficiency in the English language has been found to influence the adjustment of international students. Therefore, they have difficulty in understanding lectures, academic readings, and delivering their knowledge in academic essays and presentations (Bastien et al., 2018).

Students from South Asia face a range of educational challenges. The literature suggests that students consider language barriers to be the most critical challenge for them, which can lead to issues such as plagiarism, a lack of understanding of the teaching and learning methodologies, and poor interpretation of material. Similarly, international students also struggle with the use of local examples during lectures (Kansal et al., 2022).

Moreover, international students face more academic challenges when compared to their domestic counterparts. These challenges emanate from their academic environment and are sometimes visible in their academic performance. Teaching methods, university syllabus, and teachers' accents are examples of the academic challenges these students may experience (Oduwaye et al., 2023).

A significant challenge for students studying in other countries resides in the differences in teaching and learning styles between their home and host countries, and they are not well prepared to face the 'gap' between their expectations and reality. The educational traditions in the Indian subcontinent countries rely on teacher-focused and surface approaches to learning, and where the teacher is considered a 'guru' who provides the student with knowledge and should not be questioned.

Students coming from this type of educational environment rely on memorizing and presenting the information provided by the teacher and often prefer to take a passive role in the classroom. Adding to this, a passive learning style is a common approach observed in collectivist cultures like India, where students often prefer not to debate with or contradict fellow students to avoid loss of face (Kansal et al., 2022). Therefore, students feel the difficulty of studying in a new country with different cultural components, in a new educational system with student-teacher interaction (Eginli, 2016).

A further impact of collectivistic approaches is that international students have a strong desire to build interpersonal relationships, which they use to solve personal and academic problems. Students from the Indian subcontinent have grown up in an educational culture where it is considered respectful to the author to repeat published work verbatim or construct arguments based on existing sources without citing these (Kansal et al., 2022).

The students are generally aware of the importance of academic integrity; it is not uncommon for them to follow the learning and integrity approaches and requirements from their home culture. However, this approach is particularly evident during stressful times, when international students attempt to adapt to the new culture and learning environment, potentially alongside other factors, such as financial pressures, homesickness, and religious challenges, or challenges resulting from the students' specific motivation to seek education in the first place (Kansal et al., 2022).

Social and cultural differences also impact the communication of students with different nationalities, student and teacher communication, learning, research, and other aspects (Vveinhardt et al., 2015). In addition, they have issues with communication and interaction with local students and professors, as well as coping with the stress of schoolwork. International students also reported more advisor-related problems, and some reported discrimination between local and international students by lecturers (S. Luo & Liu, 2023).

A research study reported that Asian students experience more adaptation challenges due to language and cultural differences. These differences lead to social and emotional issues, such as isolation, communication problems, stress, and anxiety. These issues are found to be the reason behind the academic success of international students because they left behind their familiar environment and personal relationships (Lee et al., 2017).

Another study described that international students were unable to participate in class discussions. They were not used to an active role in class and were mostly accustomed to a teacher-centered environment. Secondly, fear of making grammatical mistakes was also one of the reasons behind their lack of class participation (Maeda, 2017).

Furthermore, Asian students also lack confidence in communicating, which ultimately affects their adaptation in the university learning environment. They are shy and not used to openly speaking and expressing their personal opinions in front of others (Abdulai et al., 2021; Sabariyanto, 2021).

However, learning abroad is not only a physical change of the environment for a student but also an overstepping of geographical, cultural, social, intellectual, and emotional limits (Lasauskiene, 2017).

3. MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION AS AN IMPORTANT FACTOR INFLUENCING THE ADAPTATION PROCESS

This chapter discusses the similarities and differences in the mediums of instruction of South Asian countries, including Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. This chapter also explains how language is a significant barrier for international students, impacting their university experiences, social adaptation, and academic achievements.

3.1. Medium of Instruction in Education Systems of South Asia

In South Asia, the education systems of Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh are complex, and there are multiple mediums of instruction in every country. In India, each state has its own regional language. Assamese, Bodo, Dogri, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Konkani, Maithili, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Telugu, and Urdu are among the 22 languages recognized by the Indian Constitution, with Hindi being the national language and the primary language of more than 30% of the population (Rathore & Pancholi, 2013). Not only that, but around 844 different dialects are spoken throughout the country. However, the most commonly used language for commercial, political, and national communications is English (Rathore & Pancholi, 2013).

Similarly, according to the Education Ministry of Pakistan, English is a crucial part of the educational environment in Pakistan. In public sector schools, “68.3% use Urdu as their medium of instruction (MOI), while 15.5% in Sindh use Sindhi.” In contrast, 10.4% of educational institutions use English as their medium of instruction, and the remaining 9.5% use other languages (Mukhtar et al., 2021). Teaching or instructing in English can be confusing and hinder students' comprehension. On the other hand, it also has a negative effect on teachers' performance and language proficiency, which in turn influences the quality of education (Mukhtar et al., 2021).

Moreover, Bangla is the official language of Bangladesh. Government, education, administration, everyday communication, and entertainment are all significant areas of society that use it as a functional language. The Bangla language is also used for primary, secondary, and higher secondary education at Bangla-medium schools (Sultana, 2017).

However, the English language has gained importance in universities, especially private ones. In addition to offering English lessons to weaker students, these colleges also have stringent policies about the enforcement of English in the universities. However, students find it difficult to pass all of

the required English classes. Additionally, they also perform poorly in the classes where they must read and write in English (Sultana, 2017).

Furthermore, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India have complicated bilingual educational systems. Although Indian schools teach several regional languages, English is the main language for national affairs and governance. Similar to this, Urdu and a few regional languages are the most widely spoken languages in Pakistan; nevertheless, English is equally important, despite being difficult for both teachers and students to understand. While English is frequently used in colleges, where many students struggle to speak, Bangla is the primary language in Bangladeshi schools.

Typically, India has different modes of instruction, either English or the regional language, such as Gujarati, Marathi, Tamil, Kannada, Konkani, Maithili, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, or Sanskrit, which are used as modes of instruction. At a few colleges, Hindi is also used as a teaching language. The English language has its benefits, but occasionally, learners have challenges in studying and expressing themselves in that language. In contrast, regional languages, which are mother tongues, are simpler to understand and acquire, and learners find it easy to express themselves in them (Rathore & Pancholi, 2013).

Similarly, from elementary school to university, English is taught as a crucial subject in Pakistan, and failing it means failing all other subjects. This is essential for completing degrees (Mukhtar et al., 2021). Therefore, English-medium schools in cities and rural areas are expanding to achieve this success (Abul Ala Mukhtar, 2021). However, a lot of regional languages are taught in Pakistan's far-flung educational institutions, making it difficult for students to speak fluently in the nation's lingua franca (Mukhtar et al., 2021).

According to research conducted in India, students in English-medium colleges report higher anxiety levels than those in Gujarati-medium colleges. This is because they use language inconsistently, ask teachers to restate their views, make mistakes in their classroom instruction, and struggle to discuss personal matters with peers and teachers (Rathore & Pancholi, 2013).

The student teachers at a Gujarati-medium college feel more at ease instructing in their native tongue. They efficiently run the classroom, write clearly, use a variety of teaching aids, make proper facial expressions, establish rapport with the students, set a good example, use language appropriate for the classroom, and impart knowledge in the classroom. Conversely, English-speaking college student-teachers lack these skills (Rathore & Pancholi, 2013).

While Indian schools use both English and regional languages, students often find it easier to learn and express themselves in their native tongue. In Pakistan, English is an essential subject, and failing it might affect one's overall academic performance. But because they have not been exposed to it sufficiently, many students struggle. English-medium students in India sometimes have higher

anxiety levels and communication issues than students at regional language colleges. Speaking a regional language helps student-teachers perform better on tasks and in class discussions.

The state of education in Pakistan is appalling and has three separate educational systems: Deeni Madarsas, Urdu Medium, and English Medium. The various types of educational institutions that are creating unique and disparate socioeconomic classes in Pakistani society are the source of the country's educational system's problems. According to research, these paint the worst possible picture of the entire educational system. Every socioeconomic group can find a different educational system for their kids. The middle, upper-middle, and upper classes can afford to send their kids to English-medium schools because they can afford the high tuition costs. Pakistan's lower middle classes send their kids to Urdu-medium schools because they cannot afford the fees of English-medium schools (S. I. Ahmed, 2011).

It can be understood that Multilingual education systems in South Asia are complicated and diverse. Although English is the primary language for official and national use, regional languages and English are both used in education. In general, students find it simpler to express themselves in their native tongue; however, pupils who try to learn and speak English may have communication and anxiety issues.

Moreover, Inequality based on socioeconomic class is fostered by Pakistan's three parallel educational systems: English-medium, Urdu-medium, and religious schools. Similarly, there are multiple mediums of instruction in India. Bangla is the official language of Bangladesh. Government, education, law, administration, and everyday communication use Bangla as a functional language. It is also used for primary, secondary, and upper secondary education in schools. Academic achievement highly depends on proficiency in English and has a significant impact on educational learning outcomes.

3.2. Language Barrier as a Challenge for International Students in the Educational Environment

Language barrier is one of the barriers that students encounter when they first enroll at a foreign university (Lasauskiene, 2017). According to a German study, international students pursuing higher education degrees had a greater dropout rate. According to this survey, language hurdles and the requirements of academic research were the main causes of dropouts among international students (Oduwaye et al., 2023). Therefore, language barriers are especially problematic for international students who are not native English speakers. Even if they can read and write, some of these students find it difficult to have meaningful conversations in English. Weaknesses in the student's previous English language learning experience during their native country's schooling may be the cause of this

language barrier. International students' experiences, social lives, academic achievement, and adjustment are all impacted by language barriers (Oduwaye et al., 2023).

So, it can be said that when international students first begin studying abroad, the language barrier presents a significant obstacle. Speaking and understanding English is a challenge for many students, particularly those who are not native English speakers. These issues are frequently caused by inadequate English language education in their own countries. Their social life, education, and general experience are so impacted.

Since English is the primary language of instruction in many higher education institutions, students struggle with speaking, understanding, and writing; however, in some countries, they use their native language as the language of instruction. Usually, students can communicate in English; however, they face issues regarding understanding and expressing their ideas in English (Eginli, 2016).

International students face numerous educational and cultural adaptation issues. Unfamiliarity with different accents, along with the pace of English speech, further exacerbates these challenges. Hence, students request that teachers repeat their points and speak more slowly so that they can understand the lectures. A research study has reported that it was challenging for the Chinese students to answer the teacher's questions, understand the lectures, and participate in classroom discussions. This was because of limited exposure to English and less speaking practice before studying in an English-speaking environment (Vasquez Diaz & Iqbal, 2024).

Pronunciation is also one of the challenges international students encounter during their adaptation, and local dialects from students' home countries further complicate this process. They face challenges while understanding the accents of locals and university faculty, which has been reported as an important factor for their academic and social adjustments. This unfamiliarity with various accents hinders the ability of students to understand others and ultimately causes a communication barrier (Vasquez Diaz & Iqbal, 2024).

Moreover, accent is considered one of the reasons for the communication gap, along with other factors, including a lack of familiarity with slang and colloquial language. These accent-related problems not only impact the academic success of students but also affect their social integration into the host culture. For example, Asian students in the Philippines reported difficulty in understanding the accents of professors and class fellows, highlighting the difficulty in diverse English-speaking academic environments (Park et al., 2017).

International students often prefer to study in English-speaking countries. Therefore, their favorite destinations for study are English-speaking countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. Such countries not only help the students integrate more easily, but they also improve their English proficiency. But students whose first language is not English may face greater

challenges in these countries. However, numerous sociocultural issues are connected to language barriers. For instance, research has indicated that due to different accents and pronunciations from native speakers, international students may encounter accent stereotyping and discrimination (Oduwaye et al., 2023). International students tend to receive less support and sympathy from local students due to their language problems, which leads to anxiety, stress, and isolation. The main reasons for feeling lonely are individualistic or collectivist cultural features, and not having a good understanding of the language (Eginli, 2016).

Research conducted on international students studying in Australia revealed that students experience accent-related problems when speaking in an educational setting. Therefore, they avoid class discussions so that they do not appear unintelligent to others. These language difficulties might be due to weaknesses in students' previous learning experiences, where they focus less on conversational skills and more on grammar and reading in a teacher-centered classroom (Oduwaye et al., 2023).

To conclude, we can say that for international students, language is the biggest obstacle. Despite knowing the fundamentals, many students found it challenging to communicate and comprehend in English. These issues have an impact on their social and academic adaptation. Moreover, international students also face linguistic racism. To blend in more rapidly, students choose to study in the US, UK, and Australia; however, educational and language difficulties still exist.

4. METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses the methodology used to collect data on the intercultural communication challenges faced by students from South Asia in Lithuania. It also explains the questionnaire, the major aims of each part, how the questionnaire was distributed, when it was conducted, and the sample size for this research.

4.1. Aim of Empirical Research

To find out the in-class and out-of-class intercultural communication and adaptation challenges of students from South Asia in Lithuania.

4.2. Research Design

For this empirical research, quantitative research was performed by a questionnaire, and for data analysis, descriptive analysis was used. The collected data were then analyzed and presented in a descriptive form, providing insights from the respondents' responses.

4.3. Research Sample

The research sample was decided by convenience sampling. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where participants are selected based on availability and accessibility (Al-Otaibi, 2025). All respondents were South Asian students from three countries, Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh, and studying in different universities in Lithuania. The respondents were bachelor's, master's, and PhD students. All the students were regular and studying in different universities in Lithuania, excluding Erasmus students. The questionnaire was distributed to 150 respondents, and only 115 participated in the study. The sample size was collected from 11th October 2025 to 6th November 2025, respectively.

4.4. Research Instrument

For this empirical research, a quantitative questionnaire was used. The total number of questions was 34. The questionnaire consisted of five sections, comprised of multiple-choice answers. In some questions, respondents were free to choose multiple options from the answers. The first section of the

questionnaire was “demographic information,” consisting of two questions, and provided information on the study level and country of the respondents. The second section was “language challenges due to English in an academic setting,” which aimed to provide information about the type of difficulties students faced while communicating with professors in English, misunderstandings due to students' English language pronunciation with professors, and difficulties while communicating with other students. It also included questions about the challenges students faced during classroom discussion, group projects, delivering class presentations, writing class assignments, and what strategies they used to overcome English language challenges in an academic setting. The third section comprised “academic adjustment challenges due to teaching and learning styles,” and consisted of 13 questions. It included questions such as Lithuanian teaching and learning styles challenges, uncertainty about the expectation for exams and assignments, how to address and approach professors, academic workload stress, plagiarism and academic integrity requirement challenges, types of difficulties regarding expressing personal opinion, reading and completing case studies individually, and strategies used to overcome academic adjustment challenges concerning unfamiliar teaching and learning styles. The fourth section was “social and cultural integration,” and consisted of six questions. This section included questions regarding adjustment challenges to Lithuanian culture, such as stress during interactions with locals, university support, difficulties in building intercultural relationships, frequency of participation in cultural exchange events, prejudice or stereotyping by Lithuanians towards South Asian students, and attitudes of Lithuanian students towards South Asian students. The last section consisted of three “daily life and adaptation” questions, such as challenges using health care, public transport services, types of difficulties while shopping for daily use items, and strategies used to overcome intercultural communication challenges. A questionnaire is attached in the appendices **(Appendix 1)**.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

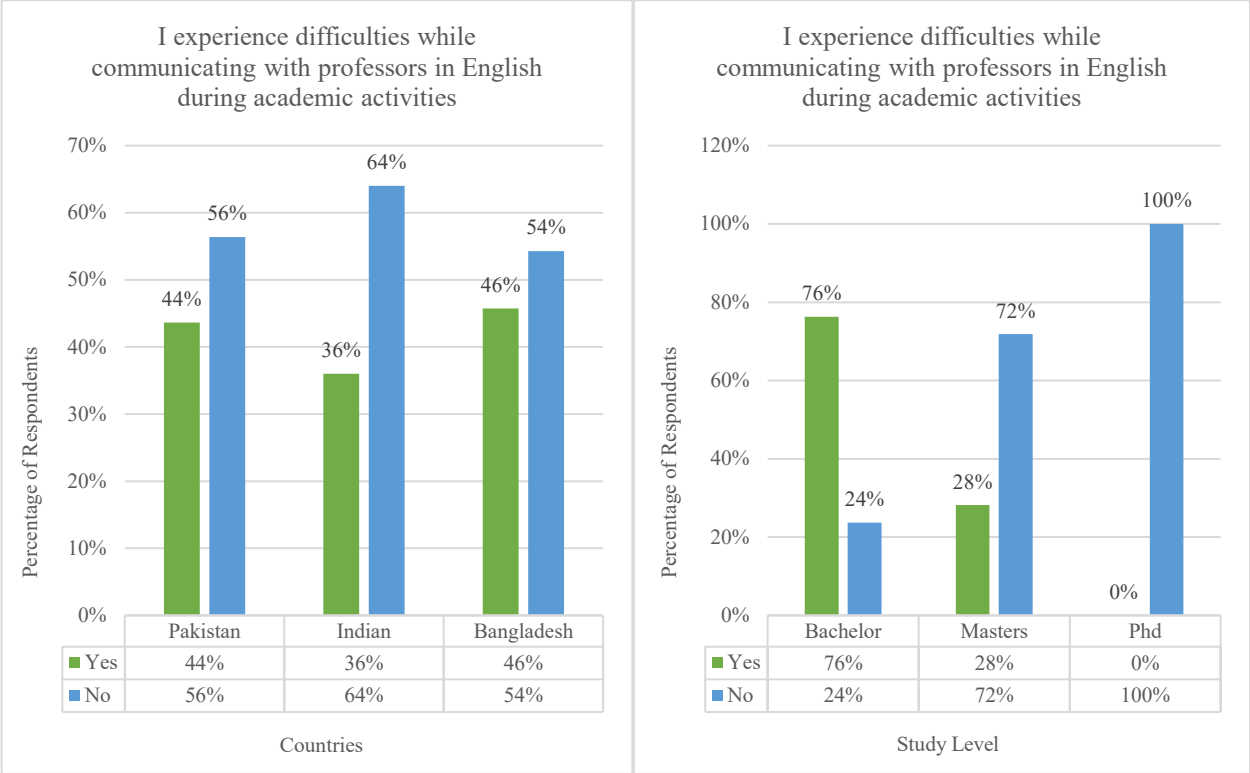
This chapter discusses the results after analyzing the data collected through a questionnaire. It also explains the key findings, using figures to illustrate the types of difficulties students faced while communicating with professors and their strategies for coping with those challenges. This chapter also gives detailed insights into the learning and teaching style challenges, adaptation challenges of South Asian students in Lithuanian culture, and their daily adaptation issues.

Table 1. Demographic information

Countries	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents	Study level	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Pakistan	55	48	Bachelor	38	33
Bangladesh	35	30	Master	71	62
India	25	22	PhD	6	5

Table 1 shows the demographic information of the respondents according to their countries and study level. Almost half of the respondents were from Pakistan, and around 30 percent were from Bangladesh. Only 22 percent of the respondents from India participated in this study. Master's students were predominantly more than bachelor's students, representing 62 percent of the respondents, and PhD students were only 5 percent.

Figure 2. Difficulties while communicating with professors in English during academic activities



Almost half of the Pakistani and Bangladeshi students faced difficulties while communicating with professors in the English language in an academic setting. Similarly, one-third of the Indian students found it challenging to communicate in English **(Figure 2)**.

In South Asia, the educational institutions of Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India exhibit a complex multilingual system. In India, each state has its own regional language, and there are 22 languages, with Hindi being the primary language of 30 percent of the population (Rathore & Pancholi, 2013).

Similarly, in public schools of Pakistan, "68.3 percent use Urdu as their medium of instruction and 15.5 percent use Sindhi language in Sindh province." However, 10.4 percent of educational institutions use English as their medium of instruction, and the remaining 9.5 percent use other languages (Mukhtar et al., 2021).

Moreover, Bangla is the official language of Bangladesh. It is used in Government, education, law, administration, everyday communication, the media, and entertainment, all of which are significant areas of society that utilize Bangla as a functional language. The Bangla language is also used for primary, secondary, and upper secondary education at Bangla-medium schools (Sultana, 2017).

The medium of instruction in the education systems of South Asia is complex, and students are mostly taught in multiple languages in their home countries. Students find it easy and comfortable to

study in their national language. Moreover, in a foreign study environment, bachelor students find it more challenging to study in an English medium of instruction, because from primary to upper secondary school level, most students study in their native language. When bachelor students come to study in an international environment, they find it challenging to communicate with professors in English.

On the other hand, master's students have some exposure to the English language as they already study in English at the bachelor's level and face fewer issues while communicating with professors. Therefore, 76 percent of the bachelor's students reported facing English language challenges while communicating with professors, which is significantly higher compared to master's students **(Figure 2).** Secondly, proficiency in the English language is considered one of the primary barriers to the success of students. The first language of Asian students is not English; hence, they encounter more challenges when they study at a university (J. Li et al., 2018).

Therefore, due to the difference in the medium of instruction in the home and host countries, South Asian students found it challenging to communicate with professors in English.

Figure 3. Types of difficulties while communicating with professors in English during academic activities

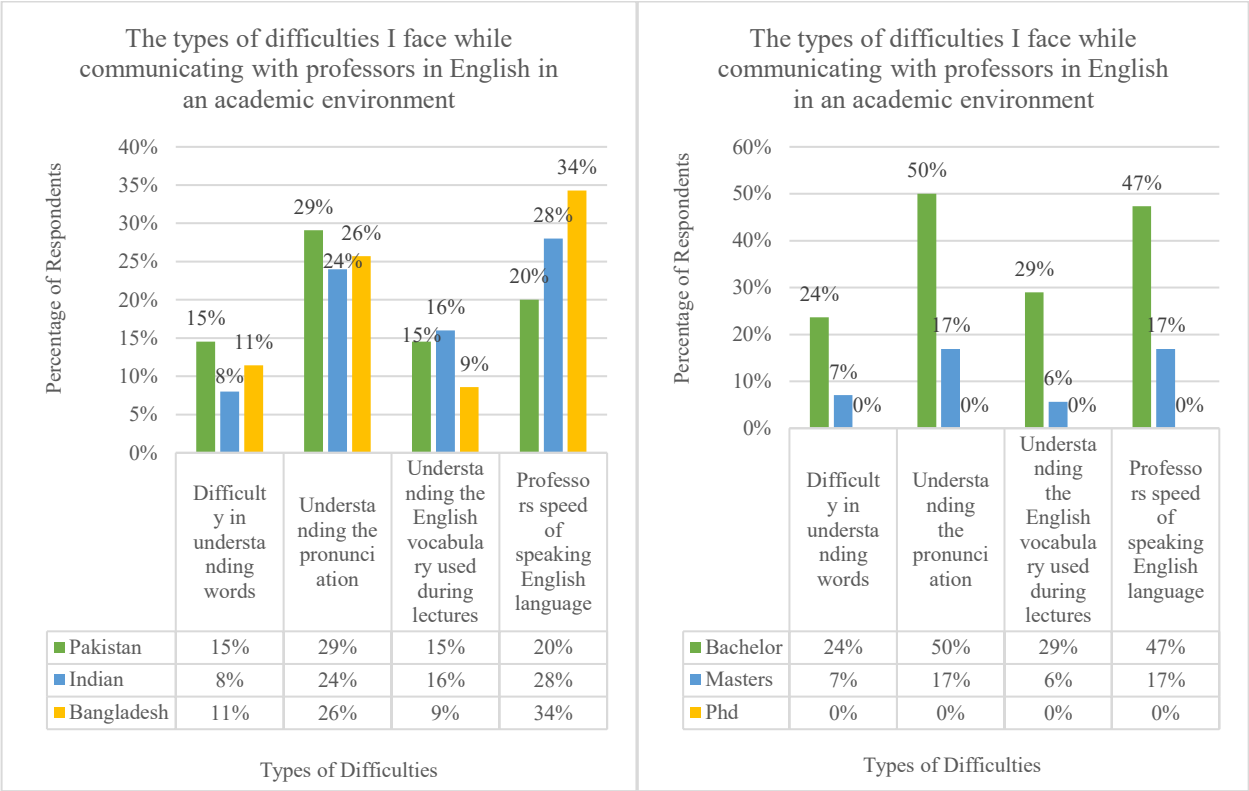


Figure 3 explains the types of difficulties students faced while communicating with professors in English in an academic setting. Almost one-fourth of all countries found it difficult to understand

the pronunciation of professors. Similarly, out of all three countries, mostly Bangladeshi students, 34 percent, faced difficulties coping with the speed at which professors speak English, along with Pakistani and Indian students, 20 percent and 28 percent, respectively. In the case of bachelor's and master's students, half of the bachelor's students mentioned that they did not understand the pronunciation of professors, with master's students with only 17 percent, and PhD students, who did not face any difficulty while communicating with professors in English in an academic setting. Moreover, almost half of the bachelor students mentioned that it was difficult for them to deal with the speed at which professors speak English, with 17 percent of master's students describing the same issue.

The language proficiency of international students may be insufficient for studying in an English-speaking environment, and a low level of language proficiency is related to the difficulty of communicating with native speakers and professors in English. This also makes it more difficult for international students to cope, especially with the pace of spoken English, the variety of accents, the unfamiliar words, idioms, and body language (Ecochard & Fotheringham, 2017).

For example, a research study conducted in India explains that students in English-medium colleges report higher anxiety levels than those in Gujarati-medium colleges. They use language inconsistently, ask teachers to restate their views, make mistakes in their classroom instruction, and struggle to discuss personal matters with peers and teachers (Rathore & Pancholi, 2013). These types of challenges affect the ability of international students to communicate with professors effectively.

Moreover, the challenges caused by accented English are twofold: students' accents impair communication, while the accents of lecturers and peers cause comprehension difficulties. This dual problem is evident among Asian international students in the Philippines, who reported struggling to understand both their lecturers' and classmates' accents, highlighting the compounded difficulty of adjusting to diverse spoken English in academic settings (Park et al., 2017). Therefore, almost half of the bachelor's students reported the same pronunciation issues.

Moreover, students and teachers feel more at ease when instructing in their native tongue. They efficiently run the classroom, write clearly, use a variety of teaching aids, make proper facial expressions, establish rapport with the students, set a good example, use language appropriate for the classroom, and impart knowledge in the classroom (Rathore & Pancholi, 2013). Another research article explained that most international students had never practiced speaking in English enough, and also faced challenges in listening comprehension (Ecochard & Fotheringham, 2017; Mesidor & Sly, 2016).

Furthermore, learning English is a complex phenomenon for students, and knowing when and how to use English correctly is not an easy task for non-native speakers. Therefore, it creates a hindrance to their speaking abilities (Sabariyanto, 2021). Therefore, academic advisors also need to

understand the differences and needs of international students to assist them in achieving their goals (G. Li & Middlemiss, 2022). Furthermore, Lithuanian teachers and South Asian students are non-native speakers of the English language. When non-native teachers and students try to interact and communicate with each other, they encounter pronunciation and speaking issues. Therefore, South Asian students reported pronunciation and vocabulary challenges while communicating with professors.

Figure 4. Challenges when asking for clarification from professors

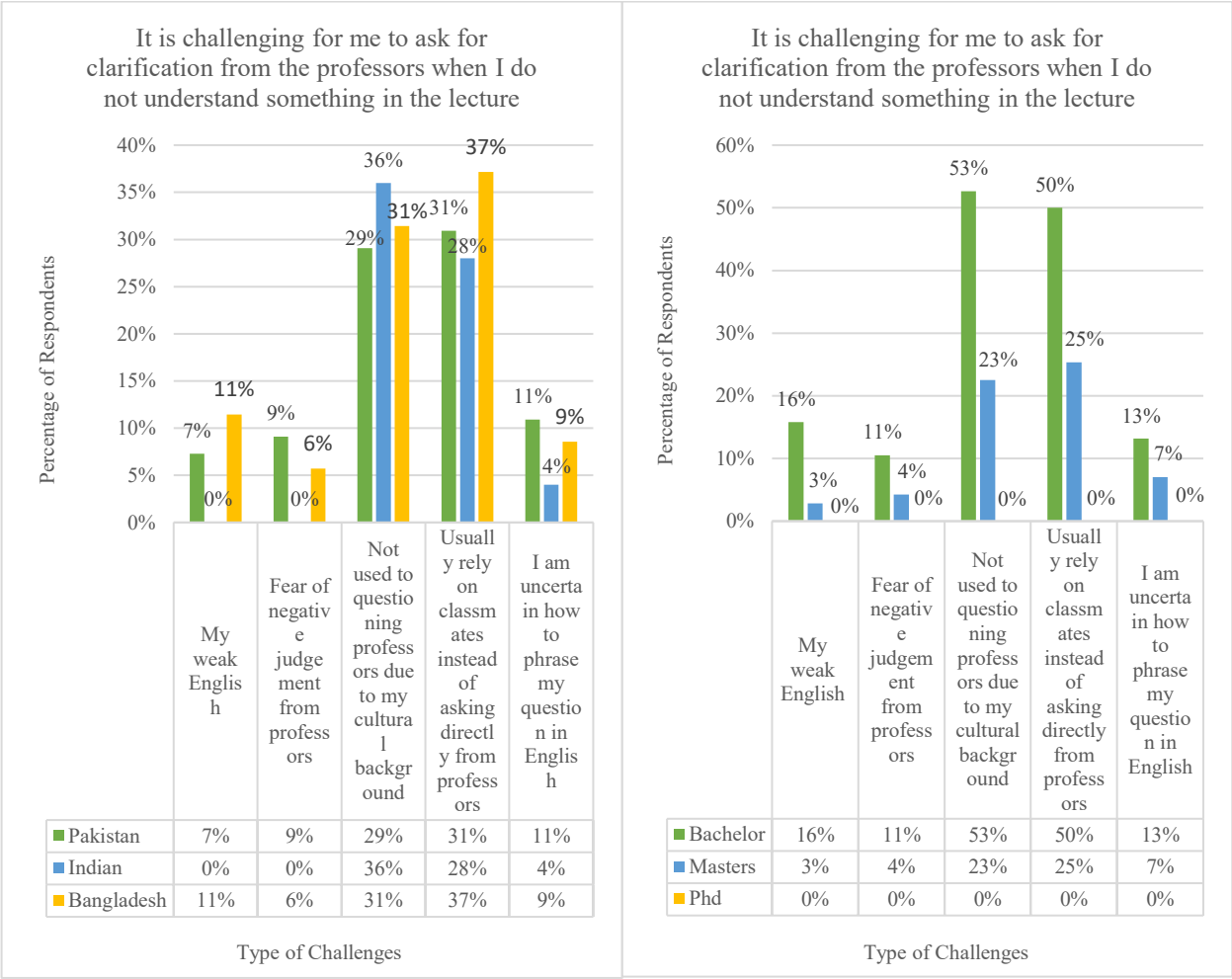


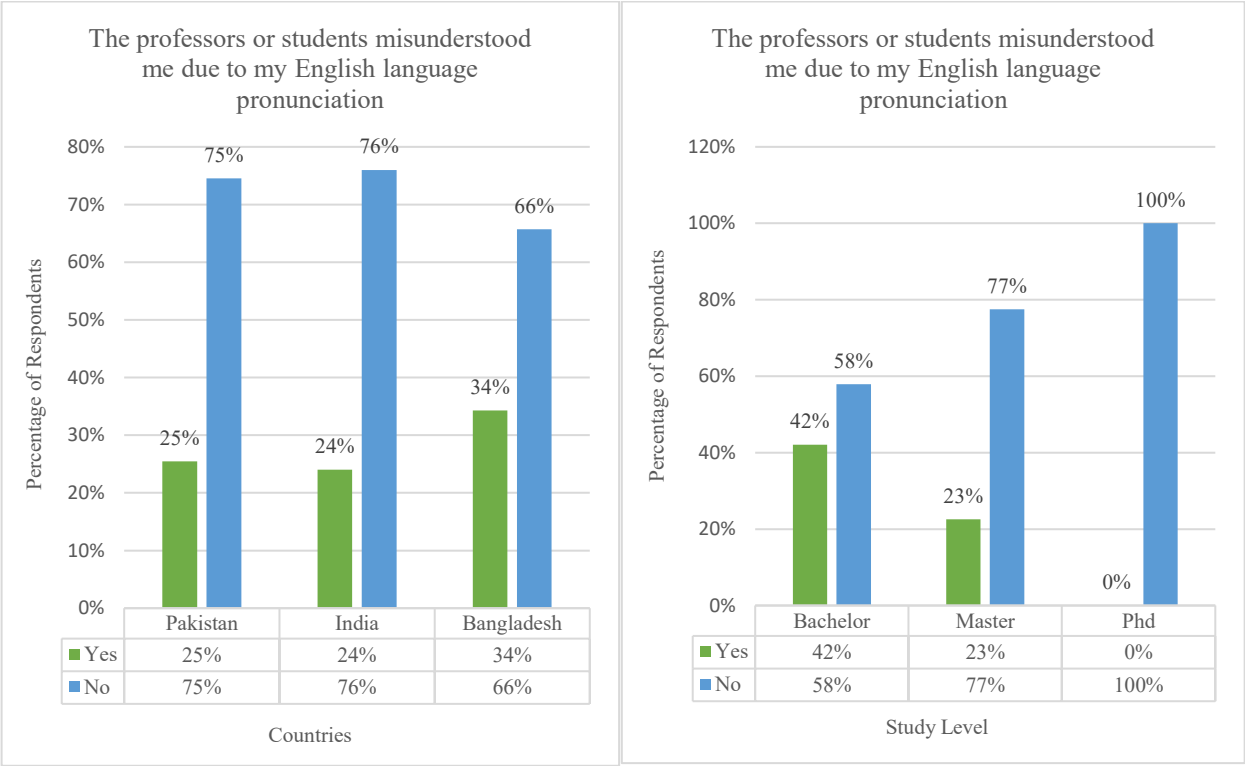
Figure 4 visualizes the results of the question asked about the challenges of the students when asking for clarification from the professors when they did not understand something in the lectures. Almost one-third of the respondents from the three countries mentioned that they were not accustomed to questioning professors due to their cultural backgrounds. Similarly, one-third of respondents also relied on classmates rather than asking something directly from the professors. Furthermore, half of the bachelor's students mentioned that they were not used to questioning professors, and they relied on classmates as well. Moreover, almost one-fourth of master's students

described that they were not used to questioning professors, and 25 percent mentioned that they relied on classmates rather than asking something from professors directly.

The academic success of international students depends on their relationship with their teachers. The "Student-Teacher Parampara" is a highly respected model in India and emphasizes respect and appreciation for teachers. This relationship affects how students communicate and engage with their teachers (Yadav et al., 2022). In Bangladesh, teachers are seen as guardians, and asking questions is considered impolite. Furthermore, students act as passive recipients of knowledge in the classrooms, and books are viewed as unquestioned sources of truth (Huda, 2013).

Therefore, South Asian students were not used to questioning professors due to their cultural backgrounds. Instead, they relied on their classmates rather than asking professors directly, as a research study has indicated that students learn from their classmates (Mesidor & Sly, 2016). Secondly, they were not active participants in the class because they were only used to listening and following the teacher's guidelines. Similarly, when South Asian students were asked about their strategies to overcome the English language challenges in an academic setting, they also reported that they asked classmates for help during academic activities **(Appendix 5)**.

Figure 5. Professors or students misunderstood me due to my English language pronunciation



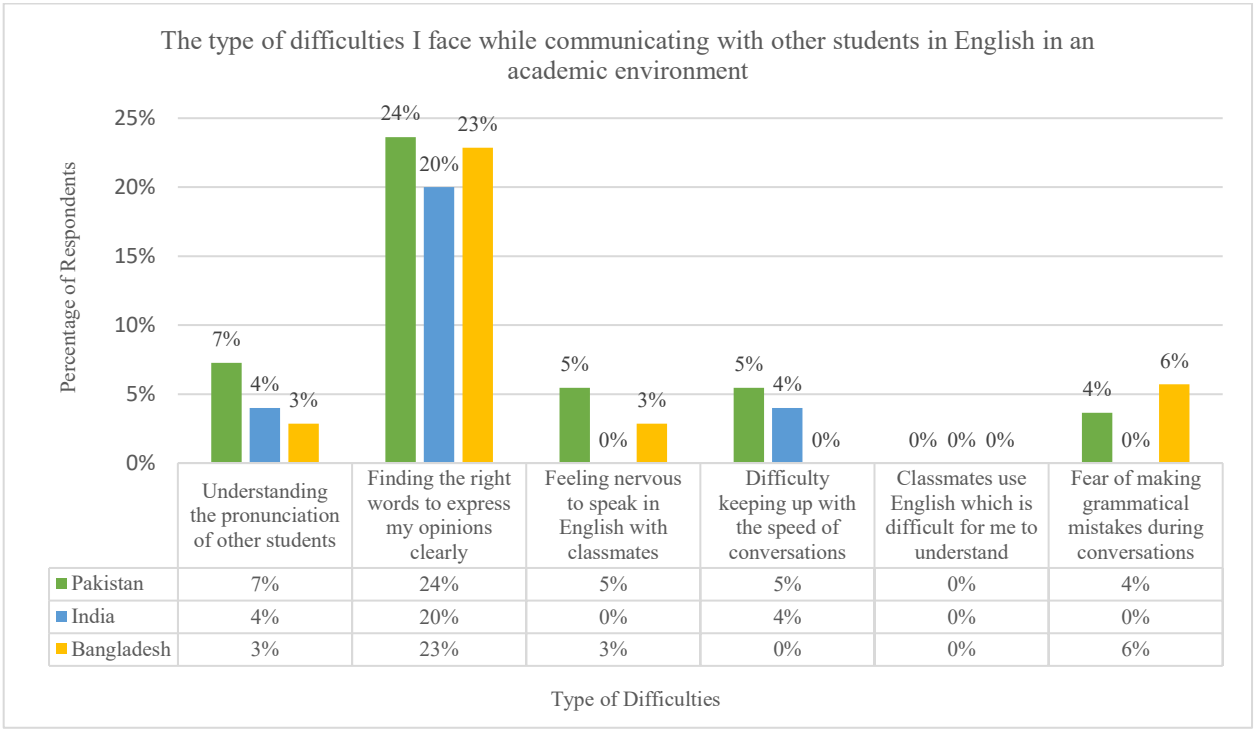
According to **Figure 5**, one-third of Bangladeshi students said that professors or students misunderstood them due to their English language pronunciation. Similarly, one-fourth of Pakistani and Indian students reported being misunderstood by professors due to their English language

pronunciation. Furthermore, almost half of the bachelor's students faced the same challenge. However, only 23 percent of master's students discussed that they were misunderstood.

Pronunciation is a huge challenge for South Asian students. For example, a research article has indicated that Urdu and Hindi-speaking people face pronunciation challenges. For example, it is difficult for them to differentiate between w and v. For example, “water, win, woman, sound like voman, vater, and vin, respectively.” In Bangali and Indian English, vowels length does not matter and is often mispronounced, causing serious problems for native English speakers. Moreover, “p, t, and k are pronounced as b, d, and g, such as bat is pronounced as pat, den as ten, and gain as cane, and vice versa, b, d, and g are pronounced as p, t, and k, respectively (Mazharul Islam, 2020).”

To explain further, pronunciation issues are complicated by the influence of local languages and dialects from students’ home countries, particularly where English is not a dominant language. Furthermore, they also face challenges with the accents of residents, foreign teaching staff, and colloquial expressions. This unfamiliarity with various English accents has been identified as a key factor in difficulties adapting both academically and socially (Vasquez Diaz & Iqbal, 2024).

Figure 6. Difficulties while communicating with other students in English in an academic environment, according to the countries

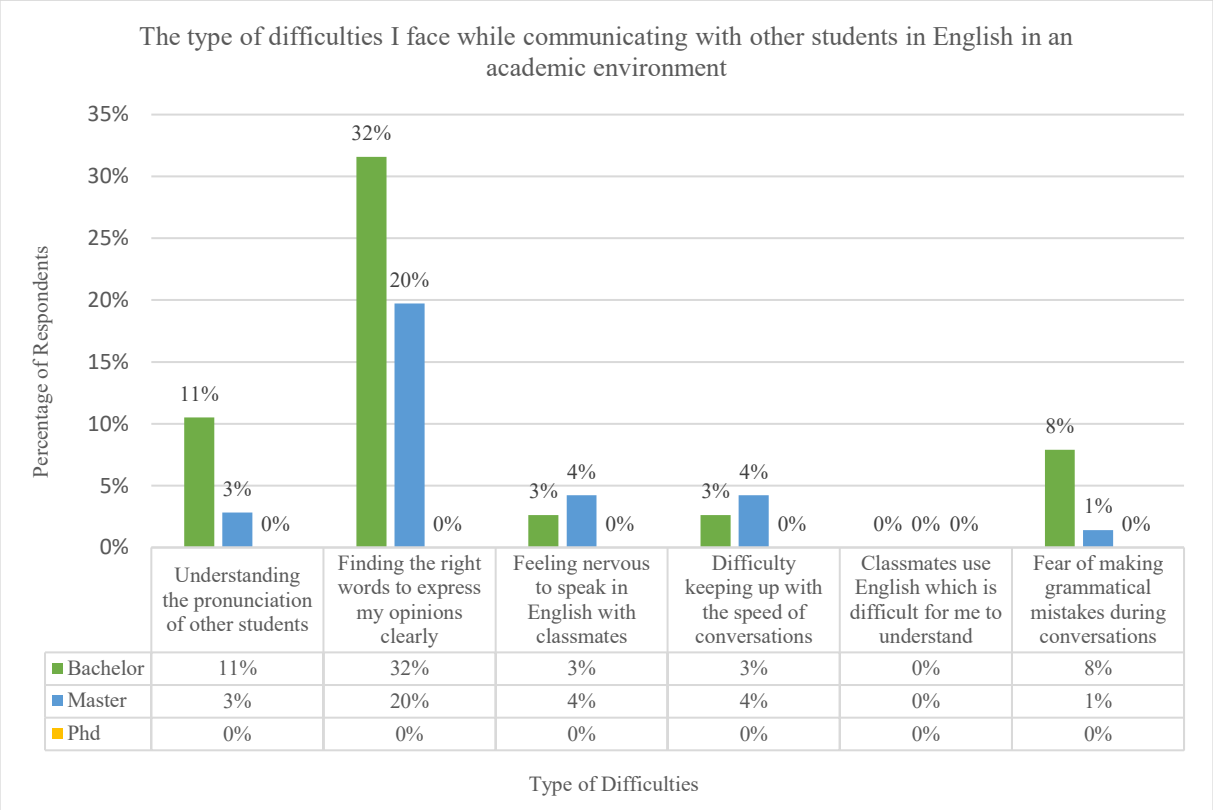


	Understanding the pronunciation of other students	Finding the right words to express my opinions clearly	Feeling nervous to speak in English with classmates	Difficulty keeping up with the speed of conversations	Classmates use English which is difficult for me to understand	Fear of making grammatical mistakes during conversations
Pakistan	7%	24%	5%	5%	0%	4%
India	4%	20%	0%	4%	0%	0%
Bangladesh	3%	23%	3%	0%	0%	6%

Almost one-fourth of the respondents of all three countries answered that it was difficult for them to find the right words to express their opinions clearly. Only a small percentage of respondents

mentioned difficulties understanding the pronunciation of other students. However, no respondents found it difficult to understand the English of other students **(Figure 6)**.

Figure 7: Difficulties while communicating with other students in English in an academic environment, according to study level



	Understanding the pronunciation of other students	Finding the right words to express my opinions clearly	Feeling nervous to speak in English with classmates	Difficulty keeping up with the speed of conversations	Classmates use English which is difficult for me to understand	Fear of making grammatical mistakes during conversations
Bachelor	11%	32%	3%	3%	0%	8%
Master	3%	20%	4%	4%	0%	1%
Phd	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Figure 7 illustrates the types of difficulties students encountered while communicating with other students in English in an academic setting, according to their qualification level. Almost one-third of the bachelor's students reported that they did not find the right words to express their opinions, compared to the master's students, with 20 percent. Only 11 percent of the bachelor's students reported that they did not understand the pronunciation of other students, and 8 percent mentioned that they had a fear of making grammatical mistakes. On the contrary, only a small percentage of master's students experienced difficulties regarding pronunciation and grammatical mistakes.

A research study has found that speaking skills are the most difficult skill to master, and some other factors exacerbate these challenges. Students are afraid of making mistakes and also fear that they might be judged by their classmates. They think that making mistakes would damage their image in the class. Secondly, students also feel shy to speak in class, and they participate less in the speaking activities. Lack of vocabulary is also one of the challenges students face when they try to speak in class, and therefore, they avoid interacting with other students and professors (Khudhur Omar, 2023).

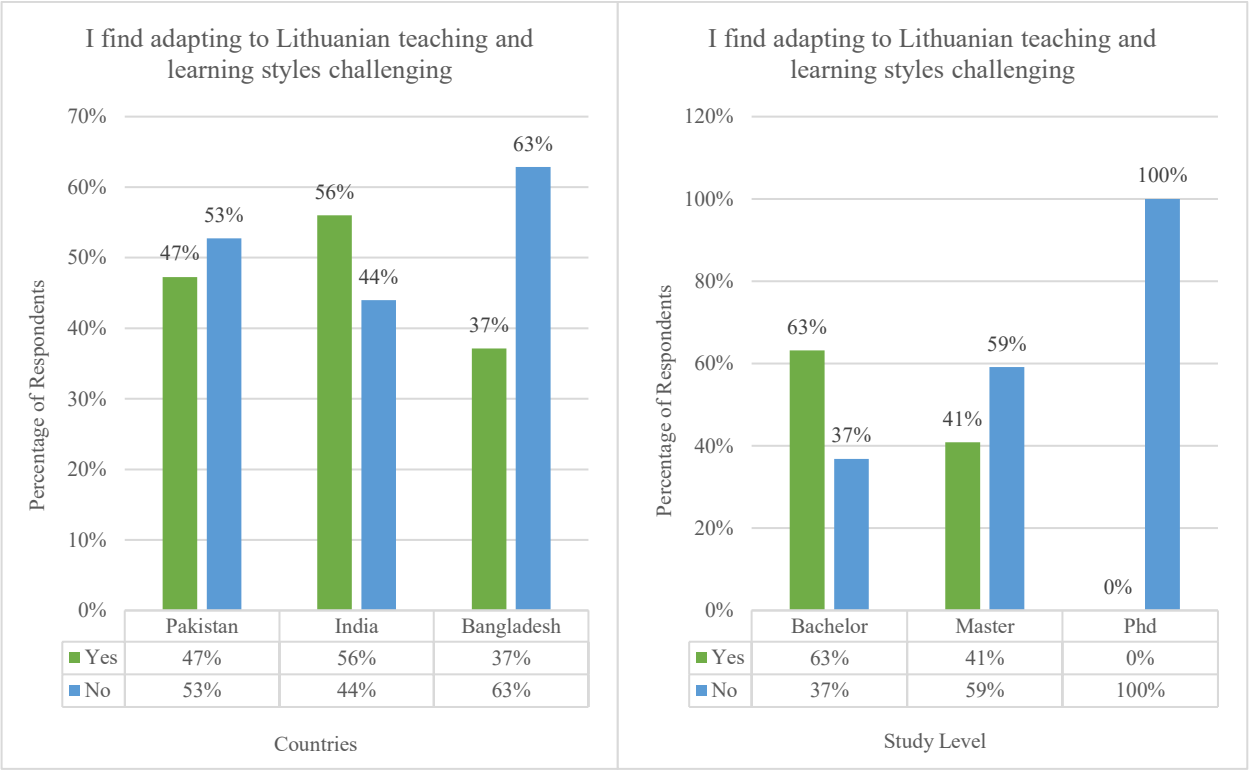
Furthermore, when students try to speak and write in English, they make mistakes and are unable to use correct English sentences and phrases (Sabariyanto, 2021).

Furthermore, international students also experience accent-related problems when speaking in an educational setting. Due to this reason, they avoid class participation so that they do not appear as unintelligent. For example, a research study has reported that pronouncing words differently from native speakers causes international students to face accent stereotyping and discrimination (Oduwaye et al., 2023).

Moreover, accent is widely recognized as a major source of miscommunication, alongside other factors such as unfamiliarity with slang and colloquial language (Park et al., 2017). The students who are not familiar with the different accents request that teachers repeat their points and speak slowly to understand the lecture content. These accent-related problems hinder the ability of international students to communicate and comprehend others (Vasquez Diaz & Iqbal, 2024).

Furthermore, students could not express their ideas clearly in English. Due to the limited lexicon range, it was difficult for students to meet the professor's expectations, lack clarity, and repeat their arguments again and again (Singh, 2019). Therefore, almost two-thirds of South Asian students reported that it was difficult for them to express their answers in English when professors asked questions during lectures **(Appendix 3)**.

Figure 8. Lithuanian teaching and learning styles challenges



Out of South Asian countries, half of the Pakistani and Indian students reported that they found it challenging to adapt to Lithuanian teaching and learning styles. On the other hand, more than one-third of the Bangladeshi students reported that they also faced the same teaching and learning styles challenges. In the case of bachelor's and master's students, almost two-thirds of the bachelor's students stated that they found it challenging to adapt to Lithuanian teaching and learning styles. Similarly, two-fifths of the master's students reported that they also found it challenging to adapt to Lithuanian teaching and learning styles **(Figure 8)**.

International students face several challenges during their academic adaptation. One of the difficulties for international students is the differences in the pedagogical methods (Bastien et al., 2018). A research study of Asian students' learning experiences at a New Zealand University has explained that Asian students faced difficulties, especially in unfamiliar patterns of classroom interactions, not knowing academic norms, and insufficient support during the learning process (Eginli, 2016). Moreover, international students also reported challenges in understanding the cultural norms in classrooms, such as direct communication with the teachers, seminars, and taking class notes (Bastien et al., 2018). Even international students struggle when teachers use local examples during lectures (Kansal et al., 2022). South Asian students reported the same issue that it was difficult for them to understand the local examples used during lectures **(Appendix 6)**.

The education system of the host country is different from that of the international students' home country. The new education system, new evaluation methods, and design of the educational system make international students vulnerable to teaching and learning styles. They also experience various challenges, including course selection, assignments, and understanding class lectures. The students who adjust to the new academic system have better academic results (Hussain & Shen, 2019).

Due to the differences in pedagogical practices in the host and home countries, such as seminars, active class participation, and writing assignments, South Asian students found it challenging to adapt to new teaching and learning styles. They were more used to rote memorization, paper exams, and just following the teacher's guidelines. Therefore, it was challenging for them to adapt to new teaching and learning practices and styles.

Figure 9. Participation in classroom discussions

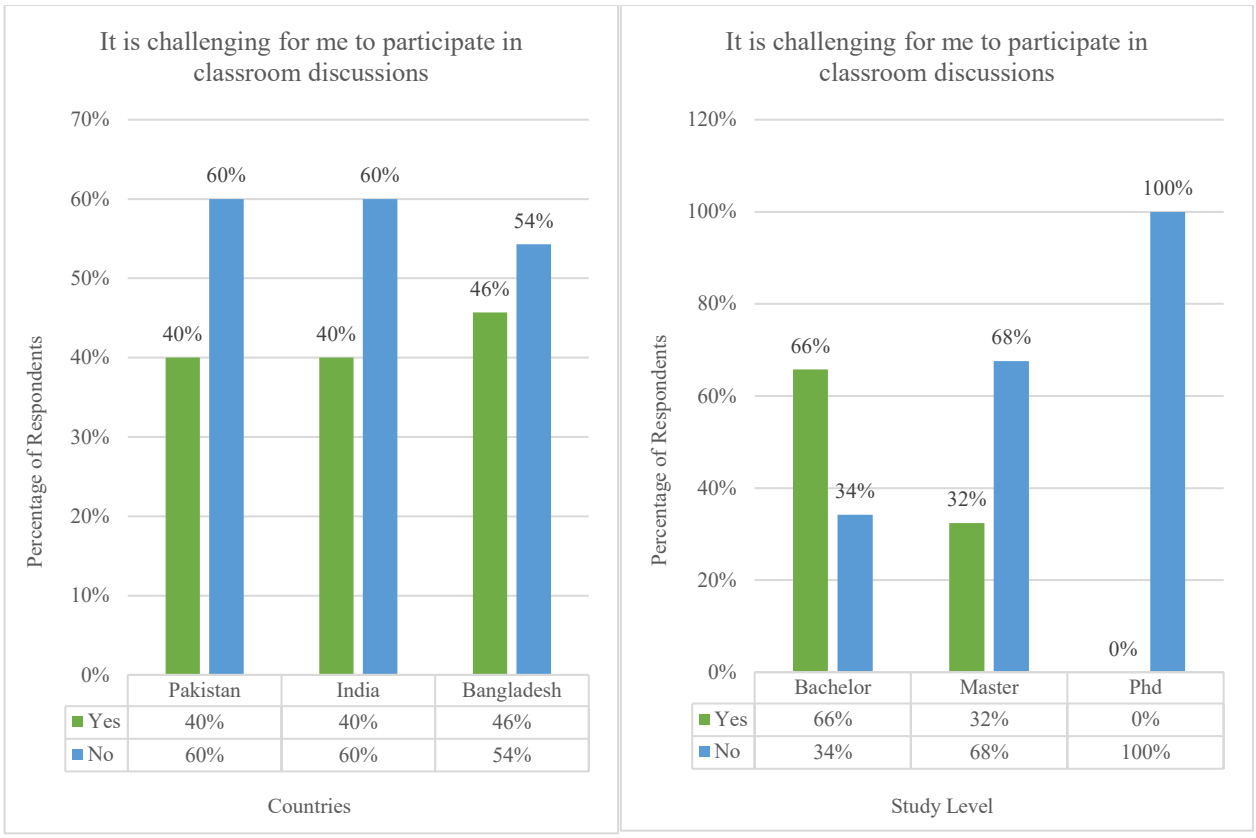
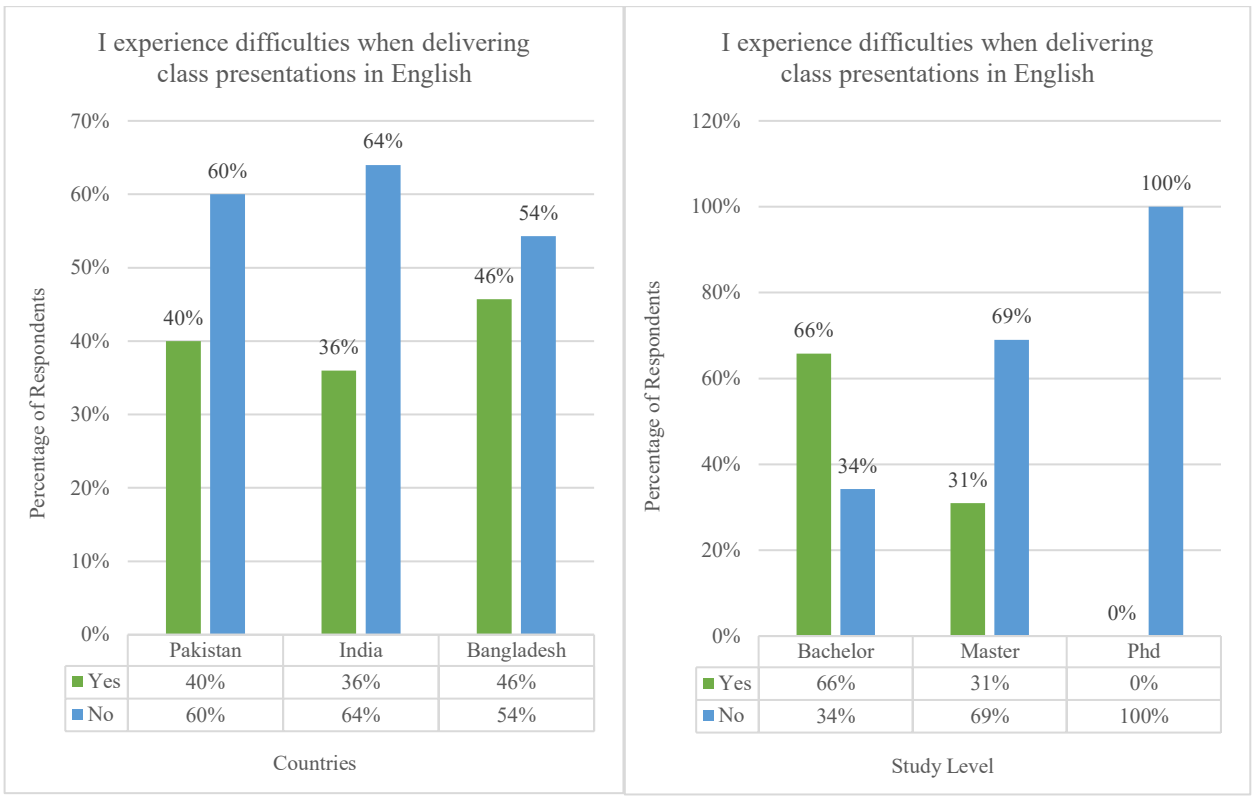


Figure 10. Difficulties in delivering class presentations



Almost two-fifths of the respondents from Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh discussed that it was challenging for them to participate in classroom discussions. For bachelor's students, two-thirds of the respondents mentioned that they faced a challenge while participating in classroom discussions. Moreover, almost one-third of the master's students reported that they also faced the same challenge regarding participation in classroom discussions **(Figure 9)**.

Mostly, Bangladeshi students reported difficulty in delivering the class presentations in English, with a count of 46 percent. Similarly, one-third of Pakistani and Indian students reported that they faced difficulty while giving presentations in English. Two-thirds of bachelor's and one-third of master's students also mentioned the difficulty during class presentation in the English language **(Figure 10)**.

A research article has reported that international students found it difficult to engage in communication-related activities and were not used to participating in class. They are accustomed to teacher-centered classrooms in their countries. The lack of communication among international students in class is because they experience cultural, academic, and social difficulties, including communication with classmates and professors, and culturally different ways of thinking and doing in host countries than in their home country (Maeda, 2017).

Moreover, fear of making language mistakes makes it more challenging for international students to participate in class discussions and is connected to the failure of students. This fear is exacerbated by the behavior of other classmates, including their smiles and laughter, and creates a feeling of embarrassment, stopping an individual's ability to think (Maeda, 2017).

Furthermore, international students are hesitant to participate in class discussions because they lack vocabulary and critical thinking ability (Singh, 2019). A low level of English proficiency makes it challenging for international students to deliver class presentations as well. These barriers affect the adjustment of international students in foreign study environments (Bastien et al., 2018). Similarly, a research article reported that language challenges make it difficult for international students to participate and communicate in the classroom (Martirosyan et al., 2019).

Furthermore, South Asian students are passive recipients of knowledge, and asking questions is considered impolite (Huda, 2013). Therefore, they are not used to questioning and participating in class. Due to the lack of critical thinking, the fear of making grammatical mistakes, and the behavior of other classmates, South Asian students found it challenging to engage in class discussions and deliver presentations.

Figure 11. Group projects with students from different cultural backgrounds

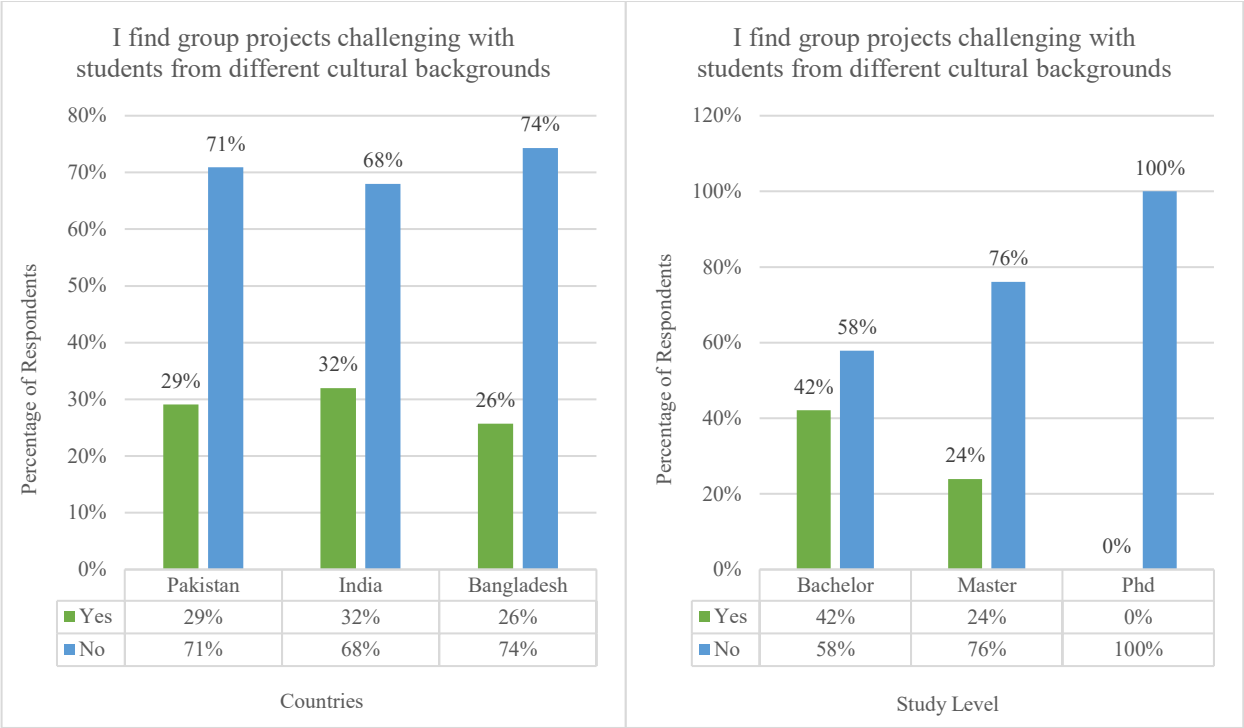
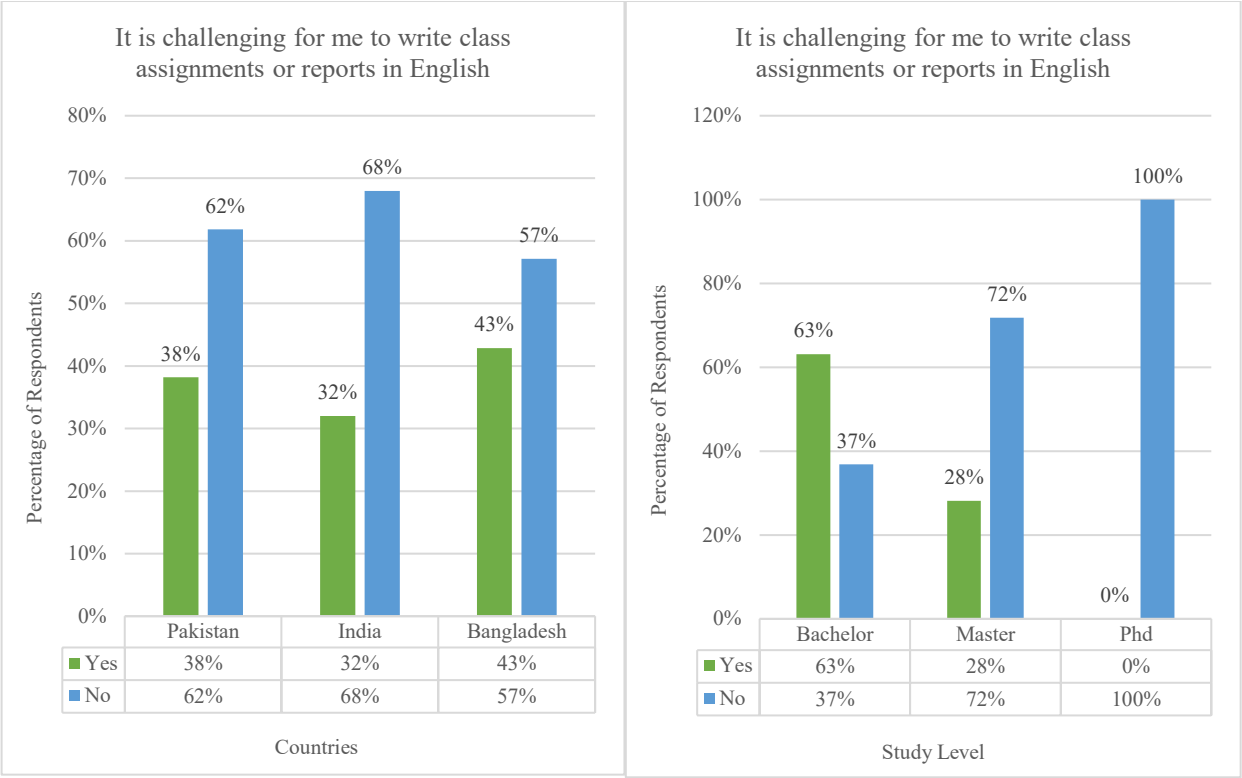


Figure 11 illustrates the challenges of South Asian students while participating in group projects with students from different cultural backgrounds. Almost one-third of the respondents from all three countries described that it was difficult for them to participate in group projects with students from different cultural backgrounds. In the case of the study level, almost half of the bachelor's students reported difficulty while participating in group projects, with 24 percent of master's students reporting the same challenge.

Collaboration and class involvement are challenging for international students due to their cultural and language differences. Academic standards are more focused on memorization and task repetition rather than group projects, and classroom engagement in their home countries (Martirosyan et al., 2019). Due to the cultural differences between the host and home countries and the low level of English language proficiency of South Asian students, they found group projects challenging. For example, a research study conducted on Vilnius University students stated that during group work, the cultural diversity was high. The international students have no experience in working with groups from different cultures because they did not know how to work in such a diverse group (Grebliauskiene, 2019).

Group projects were a completely new experience for the South Asian students, as they were more focused on memorizing the syllabus, and only paper exams were part of their evaluation methods in their home countries. Therefore, when they worked in a group, they found it challenging to communicate and share their ideas.

Figure 12. Challenges in writing class assignments and reports



Mostly Bangladeshi students reported that it was challenging for them to write class assignments and reports in English. Similarly, one third of Pakistani and Indian students mentioned that writing class assignments and reports was also challenging for them. In the case of bachelor's and master's students, almost two-thirds of bachelor's students faced challenges in writing class assignments, which is significantly higher than master's students, with 28 percent reporting difficulties in writing assignments and reports **(Figure 12)**.

Figure 13. Expectations for assignments

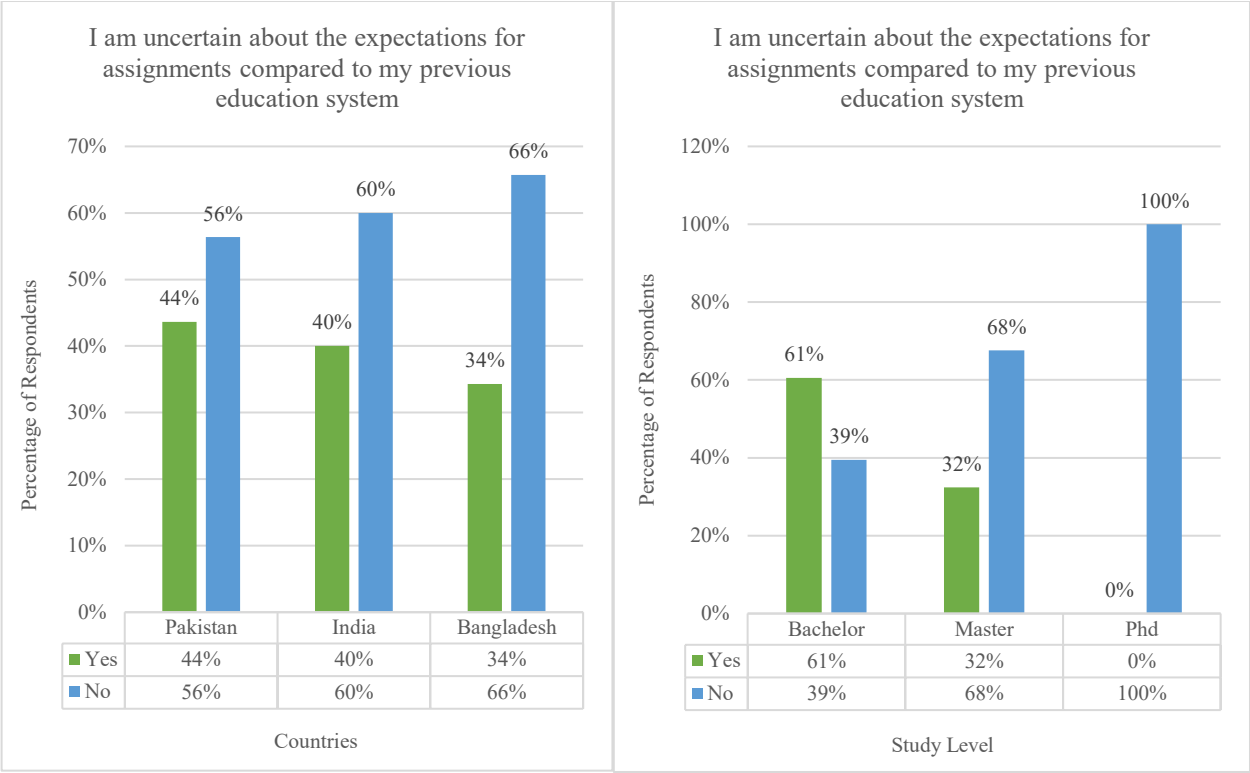


Figure 14. Plagiarism and academic integrity requirements at the country level

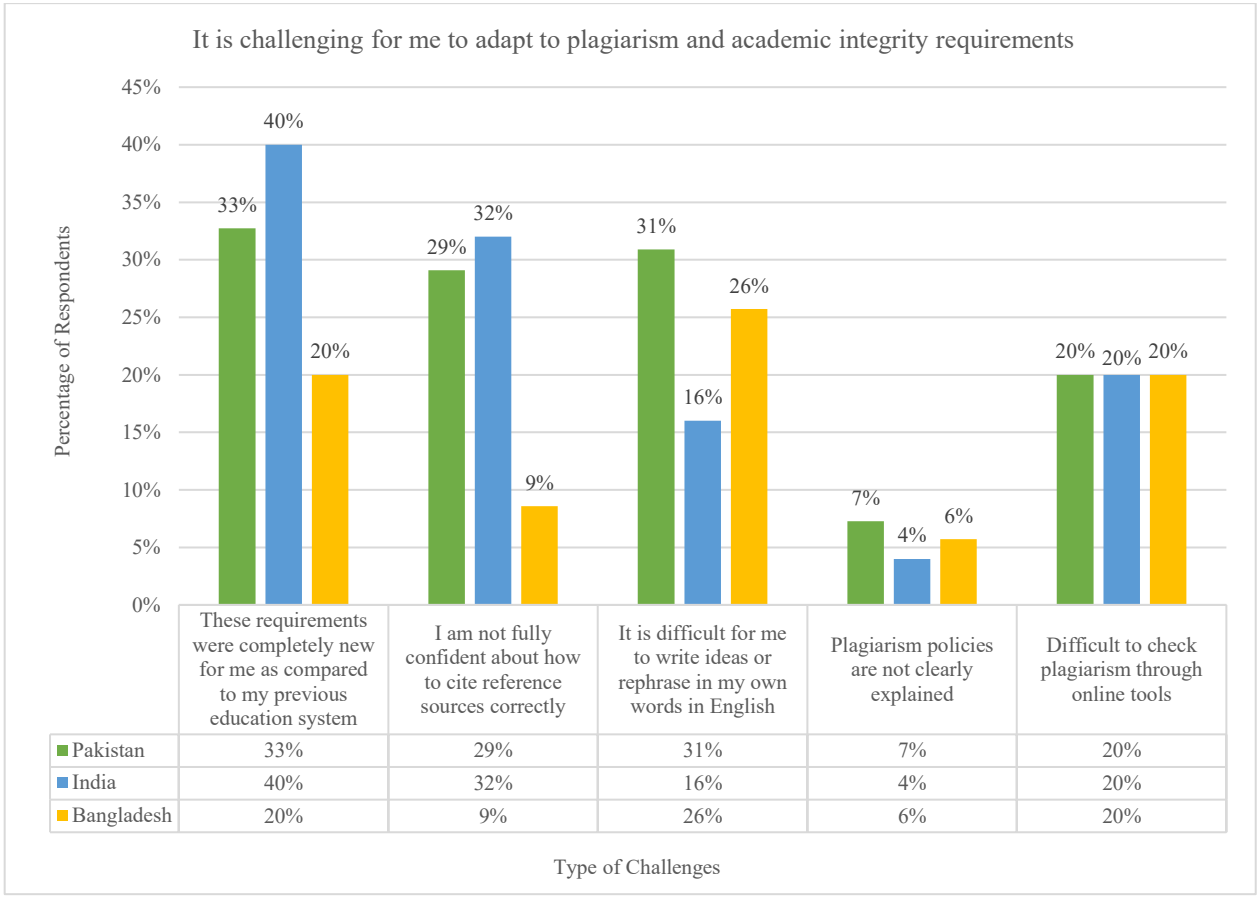


Figure 15. Plagiarism and academic integrity requirements at the study level

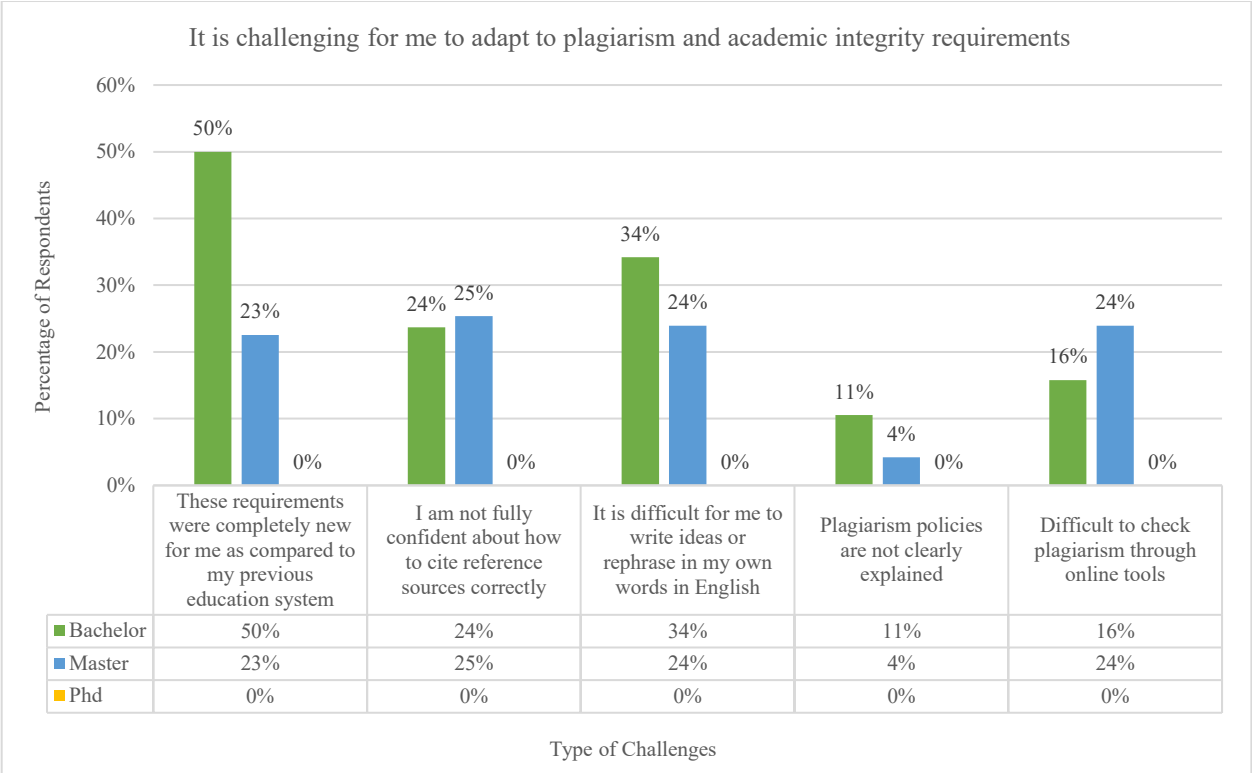


Figure 13 shows that almost two-fifths of the South Asian students stated that they were uncertain about the expectations for assignments compared to their previous education system. In the case of bachelor's and master's students, almost two-thirds of the bachelor's students mentioned uncertainty regarding the expectations for assignments, which is significantly higher compared to master's students, with one-third reporting the same challenge.

One-third of Pakistani students reported that plagiarism and academic integrity requirements were completely new for them, and it was also difficult for them to write or rephrase in English. Similarly, the most frequently reported challenge by Indians was that the requirements of plagiarism were new for them, as compared to their previous education system. However, only one-fifth of Bangladeshi reported that plagiarism requirements were new for them. Similarly, 31 percent of Pakistani students, 26 percent of Bangladeshi students stated that it was difficult for them to rephrase and write ideas in English. One-fifth of all South Asians said that it was difficult for them to check plagiarism through online tools **(Figure 14)**. Around one-third of Pakistani and Indian students reported that they were not confident about citing references. On the other hand, only 9 percent of Bangladeshi students indicated that citing references was difficult for them, which is significantly lower compared to the other two South Asian countries.

Half of the bachelor's students reported that plagiarism and academic requirements were completely new for them, which is significantly higher compared to master's students, with one-

fourth of master's students mentioning the same challenge. Almost one-fourth of bachelor's and master's students said that it was challenging for them to cite reference sources correctly. Furthermore, one-third of bachelor's students and one-fourth of master's students described that writing or rephrasing ideas in English was difficult for them **(Figure 15)**.

International students find academic writing difficult because of the differences in academic writing styles. The academic writing skills of students from their previous education are different. On the other hand, students also faced difficulty in getting feedback on their work from professors due to communication barriers. A research study has revealed that it is difficult for students to extract ideas from different sources and write in their own words, lack vocabulary, and therefore struggle to express their ideas (Singh, 2019).

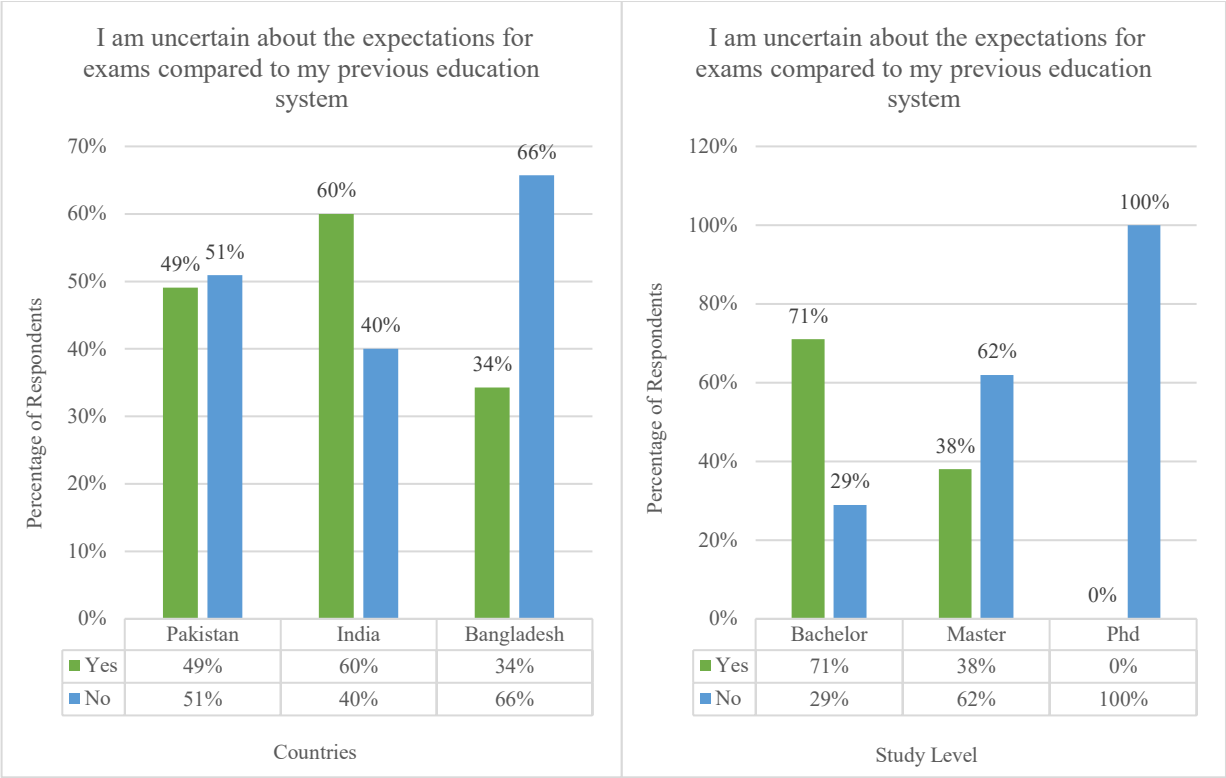
The literature suggested that students themselves consider language barriers to be their most significant challenge, which, in turn, can lead to issues such as plagiarism. Although students are generally informed of the importance of academic integrity, it is not uncommon for international students to intuitively use the learning and integrity approaches from their native culture. But this approach is particularly evident during stressful times, when international students attempt to adapt to the new culture and learning environment, and students also find it challenging to write with proper citations (Kansal et al., 2022; Soomro & Abbasi, 2025).

Similarly, a research study on “Saudi international students’ experience in New Zealand’s higher education institutions, revealed that international students lack paraphrasing and summarizing skills, identifying articles, important academic writing vocabulary, and critical thinking in their English communication.” Moreover, international students also struggle with plagiarism, and the lack of English proficiency and paraphrasing abilities leads them to plagiarize (Singh, 2019).

During writing assignments, students deviated from the actual point due to the lack of clarity in their writing skills, and therefore, they repeated their arguments and did not write concisely. This made it challenging for the professors to understand the message presented in their assignments (Singh, 2019). Academic reading and writing difficulties are also related to assignment workload, subject knowledge, and managing deadlines of assignments (Singh, 2019). The South Asian students reported the same challenges, as one-fourth of Pakistani and Indian students found the academic workload stressful due to a large number of assignments **(Appendix 9)**.

Lastly, students also have to adapt to new methods of evaluation, and those who are not familiar with the evaluation methods experience significant stress (Mesidor & Sly, 2016). Hence, South Asian students reported that it was difficult for them to fulfill the academic requirements.

Figure 16. Expectations for exams



Half of the Pakistani and Indian students mentioned that they were unaware of the exam expectations, with 49 percent and 60 percent, respectively, which is significantly higher compared to Bangladeshi students, at only 34 percent. Similarly, a significant number of bachelor's students (71 percent) reported that they were uncertain about the expectations for exams, as compared to master's students with 38 percent **(Figure 16)**.

A research article has explained that international students were unfamiliar with the evaluation method, curriculum, and credit system of the university. Some students performed well in essay writing, while others were good at multiple-choice exams. This unfamiliarity and difference in the examination systems created anxiety for students. Therefore, learning style and environment impacted the learning skills of the international students (Mesidor & Sly, 2016).

Furthermore, international students struggled with critical thinking-oriented examinations, academic writing, and group work, and the examination pattern proved to be the most challenging area. They experienced difficulty to learn and preparing themselves for the new examination pattern due to the cultural differences in the education system; they were used to selective rote learning for exams (Bashir et al., 2019). Therefore, students also faced challenges in answering final examination questions, as they were unable to elaborate and explain their arguments (Singh, 2019).

The lack of awareness of the testing and marking system of the university and the difference in the pedagogical practices are the barriers to academic adjustment of the international students

(Bastien et al., 2018). Therefore, almost half of the South Asian students reported that they were uncertain about the expectations for the exams compared to their previous education system, which consequently hindered their adjustment in the education system of the host country.

Figure 17. Prejudice by classmates

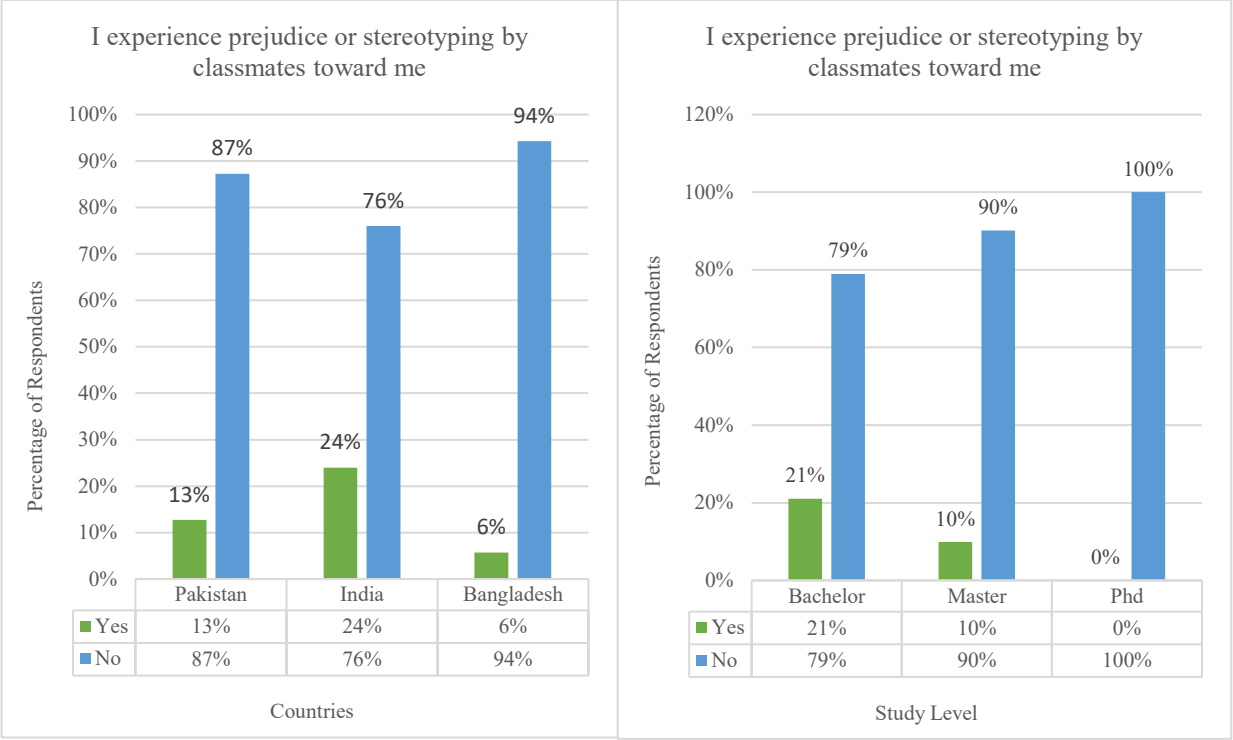


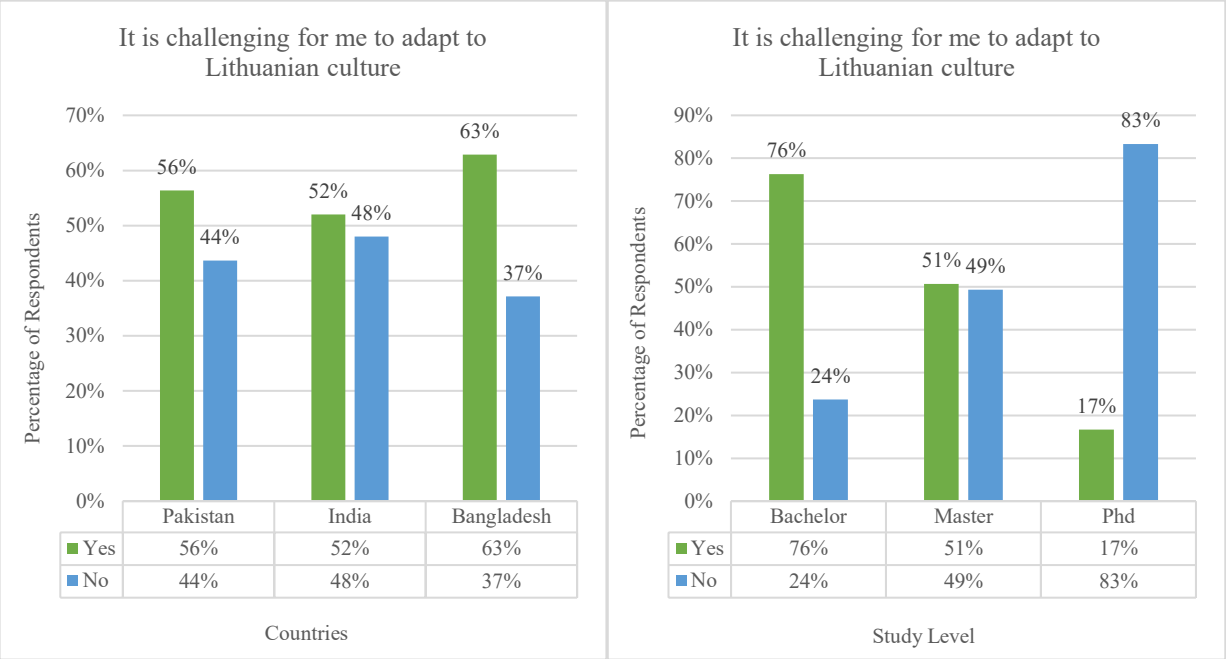
Figure 17 shows the prejudice or stereotyping faced by South Asians from their classmates. A significant number of Indians, 24 percent, responded that they faced prejudice by their classmates as compared to Pakistani and Bangladeshi students, with only 13 percent and 6 percent, respectively. Similarly, 21 percent of bachelor students reported stereotyping, and 10 percent of master students stated that they faced prejudice from their classmates.

A research study conducted on international students in the USA has explained that students commonly face discrimination. Local students often consider international students as “others” or members of an outgroup, based on their nationality, language, cultural background, and work orientation (Maeda, 2017). Students from different continents, such as Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, faced discrimination in the form of verbal abuse and felt uneasy. This racism is because of the negative perception of the country and the origin of the students (Abdulai et al., 2021).

Students discussed that other students laughed at them when they made language mistakes and shared their views. This resulted in fear and shame keeping them away from social interaction with their classmates. These students consider judgment as discrimination, especially towards their language skills (Maeda, 2017). Therefore, South Asian students also reported that they experienced

prejudice from their classmates and avoided interaction with them because local students considered South Asian students as members of another society due to their cultural differences.

Figure 18. Adaptation to Lithuanian culture



A significant number of South Asians, more than half, mentioned that it was challenging for them to adapt to Lithuanian culture, which is significantly higher. Similarly, a large number of bachelor's students with 76 percent, reported that they did not adjust to Lithuanian culture. Regarding master's students, more than half also reported facing the same challenge **(Figure 18)**.

The culture of international students, including their values, beliefs, and attitudes, is different from that of the host country, and they have to face several adjustment difficulties while integrating into a new culture. These differences affect their living environment and personal interactions due to the loss of the familiar social environment of their families, friends, and partners (G. Li & Middlemiss, 2022). Few cultural traits, such as social customs, attire, weather, and cuisine, are not common among cultures that are far apart geographically. This makes people feel alienated, which makes adjusting to different cultures even more challenging (M. Luo & Zhang, 2021).

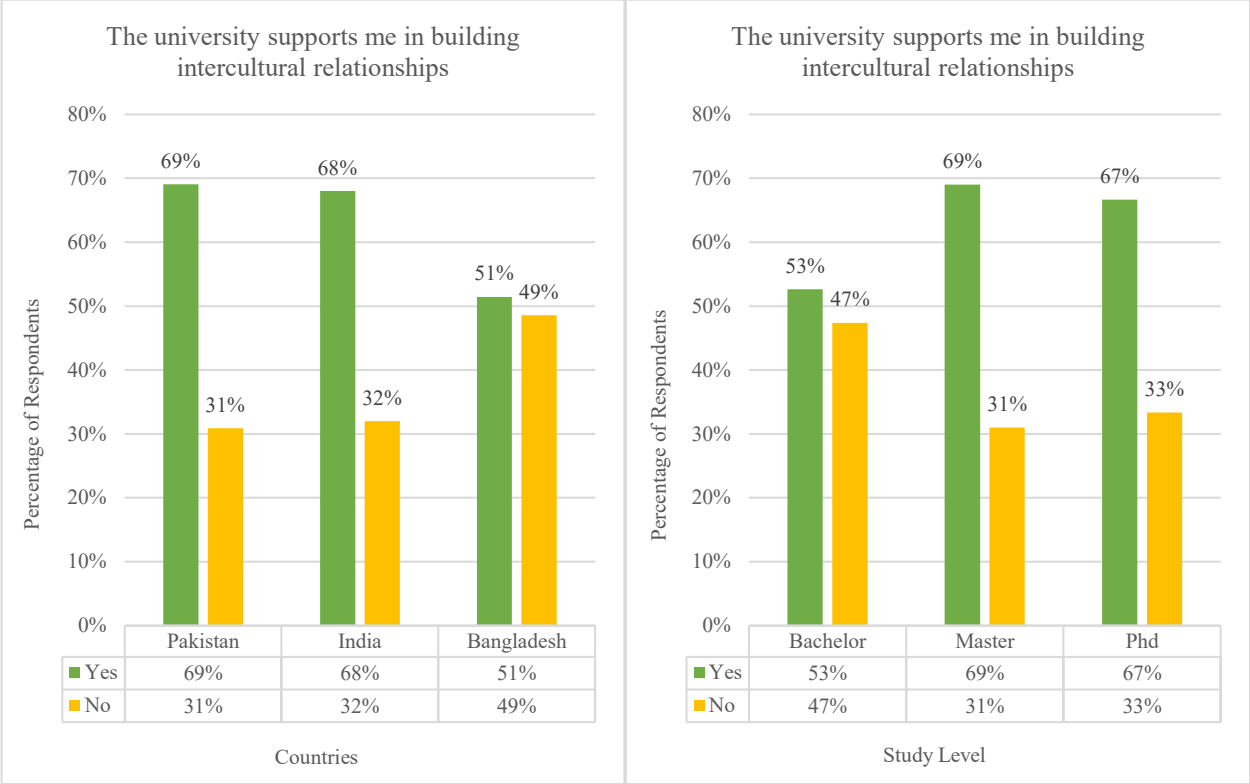
Furthermore, the Lithuanian language is the local language, and international students spend one and a half years in Lithuania. Therefore, they do not learn the local language. During their study periods, they are away from their families and friends, and only make a few friends. Therefore, they receive less support than domestic students. This situation creates difficulties for students in their social and cultural integration into Lithuanian culture (Grebliauskiene, 2019).

In addition, international students often lack effective social network support and avoid interaction with local students. If they engage with local students more, then they can understand the

culture and academic setup better and adapt more effectively to a new environment (Hussain & Shen, 2019).

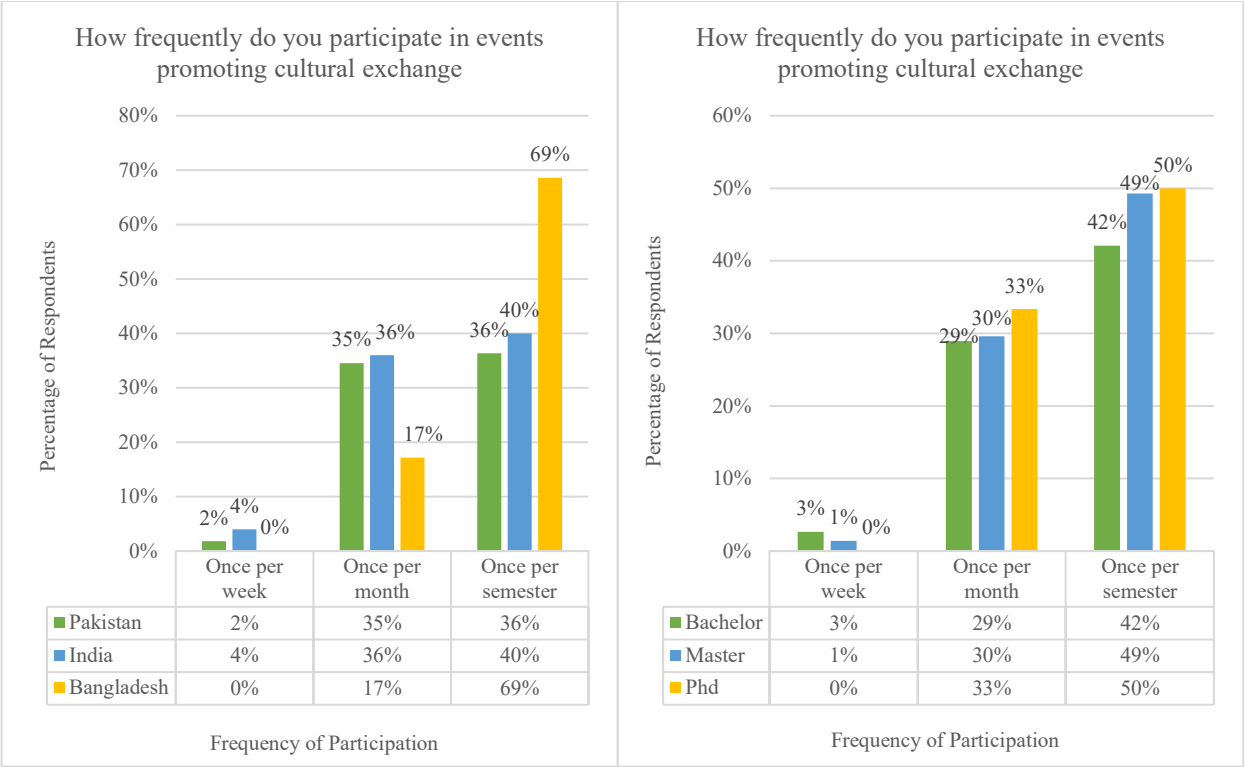
Moreover, the cultural differences, such as the values and beliefs of South Asian students, were different than those of Lithuanian culture. They lose their familiar environment in which they studied and grew. They were also not motivated to learn the local language, which made cultural adaptation more difficult. Therefore, due to these multiple factors, it was challenging for South Asian students to adapt to a new culture.

Figure 19. University support in building intercultural relationships



A significant number of South Asians stated that the university supported them in building intercultural relationships with Pakistan, 69 percent; India, 68 percent; and Bangladesh, 51 percent, respectively. Similarly, more than half of the bachelor's and master's students reported that the university supported them in building intercultural relationships, which is significantly high **(Figure 19)**.

Figure 20. Frequency of participation in cultural exchange events



As the graph illustrates, more than one-third of the Pakistani and Indian participants participated once a month in cultural exchange events. In contrast, only 17 percent of Bangladeshi students participated once a month in cultural exchange events. The frequency of once per week participation in the cultural exchange events was significantly low for Pakistanis and Indians. Not a single Bangladeshi student participated once per week in the cultural events. However, mostly South Asians participated once per semester, with Pakistanis at 36 percent and Indians at 40 percent. The highest frequency of participation, once per semester, was among Bangladeshi students with 69 percent, which is significantly higher than compared of others.

Similarly, almost half of the bachelor's, master's, and PhD students participated once per semester in cultural exchange events. Moreover, one-third of all three categories participated once per month in cultural exchange events. On the contrary, only a small percentage of students participated once per week in the event, which is significantly low **(Figure 20)**.

The research article has revealed that the participation of students in university events was zero, and they only attend lectures. They wanted to be involved in the event or activities, but the events were conducted in the Lithuanian language only. Therefore, international students found it difficult to participate in university life because of the local language barrier. They also reported that the events for international and local students were arranged separately. This situation minimizes contact with

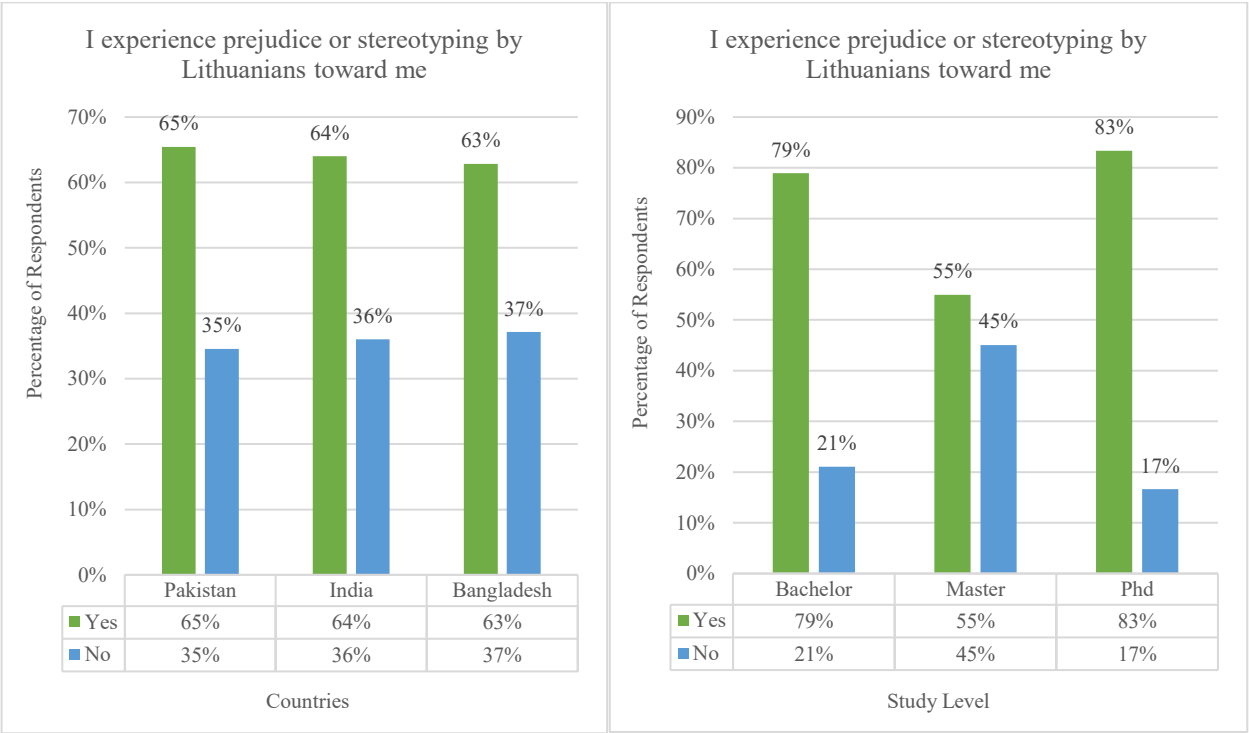
local students. In this way, international students were discouraged from forming relationships with each other and ultimately creating poor cultural adaptation (Grebliauskiene, 2019).

Different research studies have found that integration into host institutions involves friendship, doing extracurricular activities, and developing a sense of belonging. But for international students, these activities are hindered by language and cultural barriers. Furthermore, the students who are involved in extracurricular activities form stronger relationships and achieve good academic success (Enim & Rónay, 2025).

Moreover, social support from academic staff, counsellors, and local students is very effective for the adjustment of international students (Lu et al., 2024). For example, in the USA, universities arrange orientation seminars related to university facilities, classroom customs, and community programs according to the needs of international students before classes begin. Along with that, they also guide the students about local healthcare, transport, and other services. The university language centers also arrange language courses, which help the international students to improve their life experience in a foreign country (Oluwabusola Dorcas Olagunju et al., 2024).

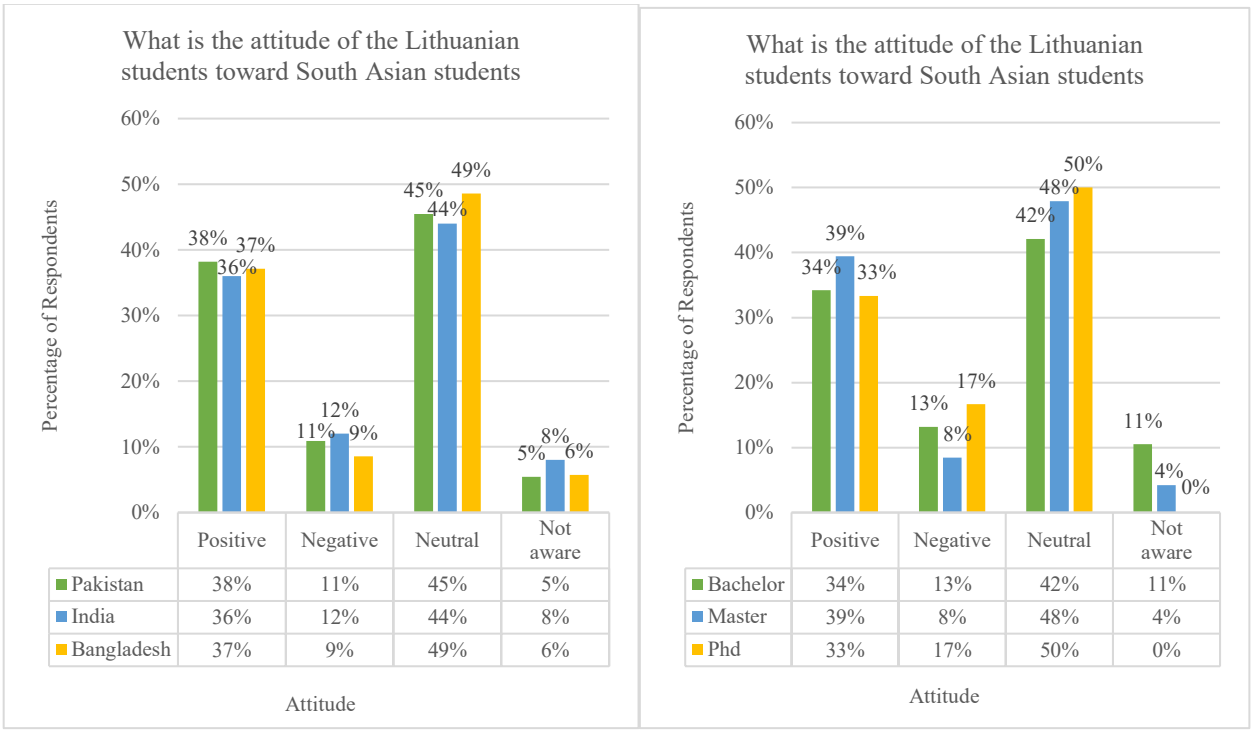
Furthermore, social support from the university plays an important role and is strongly related to the cross-cultural adaptation of students. Therefore, the university should provide different workshops, including counseling workshops and different cultural events, to help the students learn about local lectures and motivate them to participate in multicultural programs. University support has a direct impact on the students ' well-being (G. Li & Middlemiss, 2022).

Figure 21. Prejudice by Lithuanians towards South Asian students



Almost one-third of all South Asians reported that they experienced prejudice by Lithuanians towards them, which is significantly high. Similarly, 79 percent of bachelor's students and 55 percent of master's students stated the same experience of prejudice by Lithuanians **(Figure 21)**.

Figure 22. Attitude of Lithuanian students towards South Asian students



More than one-third of South Asians replied that the attitude of Lithuanian students was positive. Similarly, around half of the students reported a neutral attitude towards them from Lithuanian students. However, only a small portion stated a negative attitude. Moreover, more than one-third of bachelor's, master's, and PhD students illustrated a positive attitude, and around half stated a neutral attitude, and only a small percentage reported a negative attitude of Lithuanian students toward them **(Figure 22)**.

International students, due to their diverse cultural, language, and social backgrounds, find it challenging to integrate into the host culture. They often feel unwelcome in the host community because of their race, skin, host language proficiency, cultural beliefs, and language accent (Tekin & Trofimovich, 2024). A study found discrimination against Chinese international students in Canada. These students reported being prejudiced based on their identity, language use, skin color, and cultural practices. Similarly, a research study investigated that 49 respondents out of 153 reported discrimination, and that they had encountered racially motivated verbal and physical assault (Oduwaye et al., 2023).

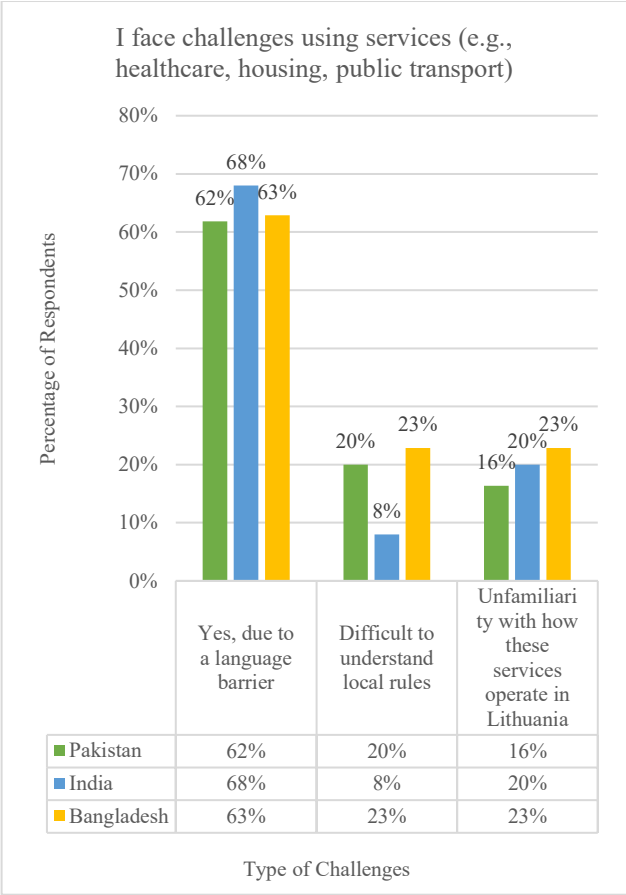
These negative attitudes arise from the differences in cultural beliefs, and local students' fear of competition over resources such as admissions, employment opportunities, study grades, and instructors' attention. Some studies have reported that negative attitudes may exist in the host countries' stereotypes about international students, locals' apprehension over being misunderstood, and bias in the host culture against international students' accents, poor language proficiency, and personal traits. For example, international students from Asia studying at a vocational school in Australia reported being labelled as PR hunters by the locals and individuals who exploit Australia for obtaining permanent residency (Tekin & Trofimovich, 2024).

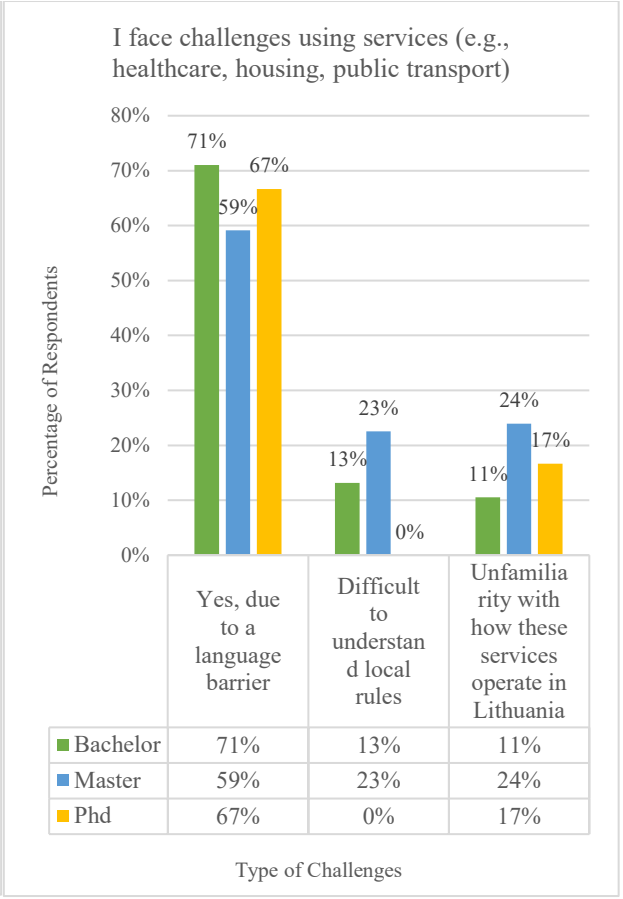
Many researchers have reported that Asian international students experience more adaptation challenges in adapting to cultural differences. These adaptation difficulties lead to several social and emotional problems, such as insomnia, loneliness, and perceived prejudice (Lee et al., 2017).

Moving forward, a research article has stated that international students received less support and sympathy from local students due to their language problems. Because of this, international students suffered from loneliness, stress, and depression (Eginli, 2016), and discrimination may significantly affect international students' mental health (S. Luo & Liu, 2023).

For instance, international students in Australia explained that pronunciation mistakes lead to bullying, which may then cause students to experience a lack of belonging and depression. Furthermore, low-level language proficiency and different accents have been shown to receive unfavorable evaluations from course instructors, trigger negative bias in employment contexts, and contribute to exclusion from group work and difficulty making friends with local students. For instance, in the United States, international students reported being ridiculed for their language errors and accents, which caused them to feel embarrassed, socially isolated, and unwilling to participate in class activities (Tekin & Trofimovich, 2024).

Figure 23. Challenges using local services





The frequently reported challenge from South Asians was the language barrier when using local services such as health care, public transport, and housing, which is significantly high, around two-thirds. It was difficult for Pakistani and Bangladeshi students to understand the local rules, with 20 percent and 23 percent, respectively. Only 8 percent of Indians reported that they did not understand local rules while using local services. A significant amount of 71 percent bachelor's, 59 percent master's, and 67 percent PhD students stated that the most challenging aspect was the language barrier **(Figure 23)**.

Figure 24. Strategies to overcome intercultural communication challenges

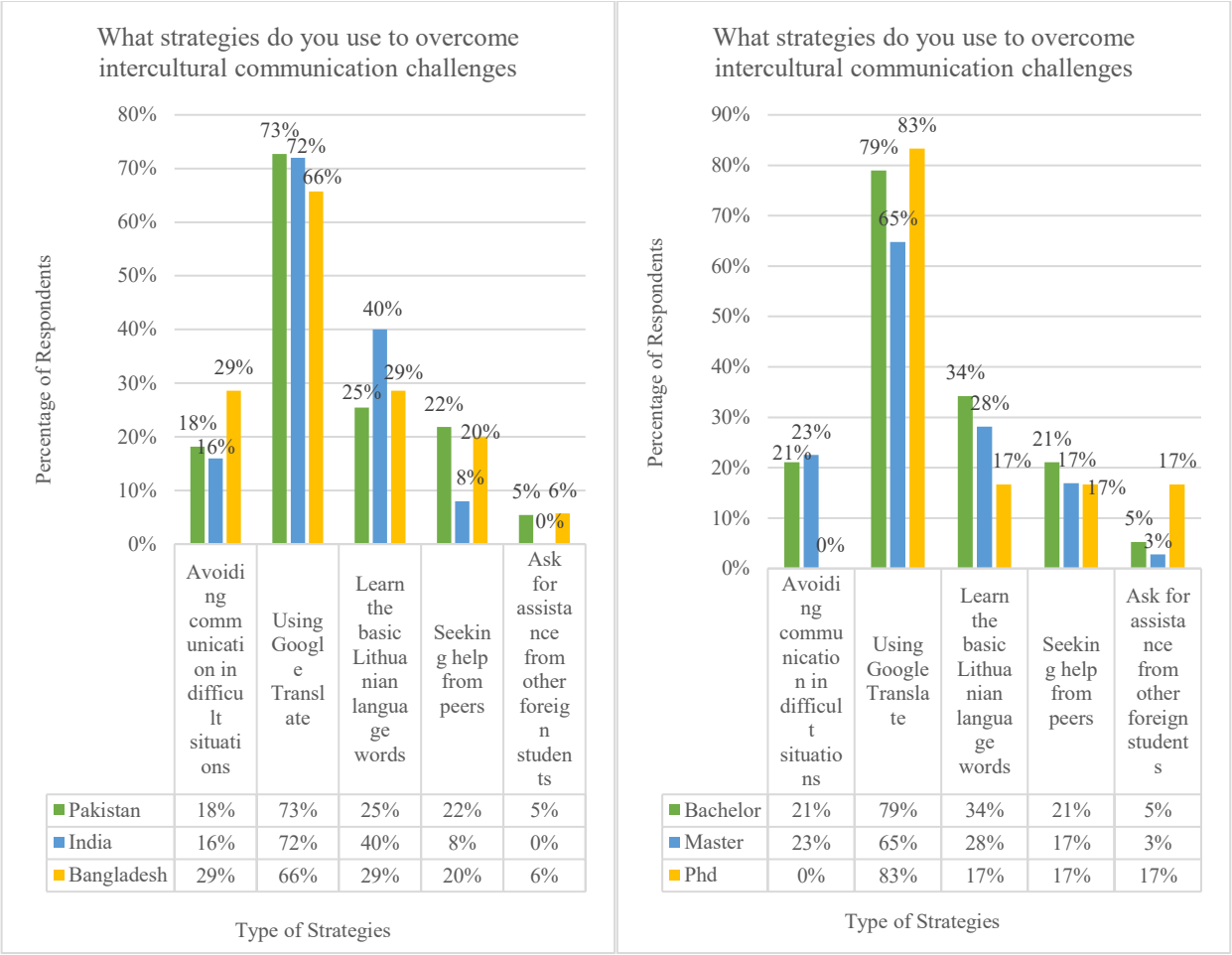


Figure 24 shows the strategies used by South Asian students to overcome intercultural communication challenges. The most widely used strategy was Google Translate. More than two-thirds of the South Asians used Google Translate to overcome intercultural communication challenges. However, some of them also learned basic Lithuanian language words, with the highest percentage of Indians, 40 percent. Even 29 percent of Bangladeshi avoided communication with Lithuanians in difficult situations. A significant percentage of bachelor's, 79 percent, master's, 65 percent, and PhD, 83 percent, students also used Google Translate to tackle the intercultural communication challenges. Also, one-third of bachelor's students tried to learn the language, and even one-fifth avoid communication in difficult situations. For master's students, one-fourth tried to avoid communication, and the same number of students tried to learn the Lithuanian language as well. Only a small percentage asked for assistance from other foreign students.

One of the most important challenges for international students is the lack of information in English. The state language of Lithuania is Lithuanian, and all the information available is in the state language. For example, instructions on how to use library services, printing, and copying are all in the Lithuanian language. Similarly, the use of various computer programs and information databases

is in the state language rather than English. The international students also face issues while dealing with bureaucratic procedures and document filing. These differences arise because of the cultural and language differences. Mostly, students use the Google Translate app, but it does not provide an accurate translation of the Lithuanian language. They did not know who could help them in this situation, and sometimes even the university mentor was not able to help them (Grebliauskiene, 2019).

Furthermore, a research article has stated that Machine Translation tools, such as Google Translate, are becoming popular because they help students to overcome barriers in translating different languages. It is used for language translation for their daily conversation, travel, education, and professional purposes (Afiliani et al., 2024). Therefore, more than two-thirds of the South Asian students were using the Google Translate app to overcome intercultural communication barriers.

Moreover, host language proficiency is necessary for cultural adaptation and social interaction with the local people. Some level of language expertise is essential for daily tasks and communication. This would positively affect the cultural adjustment of the international students. For example, a research study reported that the Korean language proficiency helped the international students to adjust to Korea (Lu et al., 2024). Hence, international students with a higher level of host language proficiency would communicate more confidently with locals (Leung & Yu, 2020). Host language proficiency is important for the adaptation of international students in Lithuanian culture. However, more than half of the South Asian students reported that they encountered difficulties while shopping for daily items, including communication with the cash-counter and sales staff, due to a lack of Lithuanian language proficiency **(Appendix 12)**.

CONCLUSION

When international students come to study in a foreign study environment, they pass through several adaptation stages to integrate into the new culture. This adaptation is not an easy task for them and takes time. However, when international students spend time in the host culture, their adaptation process in the educational and cultural environment becomes less difficult.

First of all, the education system of South Asia is very complex and multilingual. Mostly, South Asian students from Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh study in their native languages, Urdu, Hindi, and Bangla, respectively. When they come to study in an English-speaking environment, which is not their primary language and the medium of instruction in their home countries, they find it challenging to communicate with the professors. The difference in the medium of instruction in the host and home countries makes interaction and communication difficult. Therefore, a significant number of students have reported that it was difficult for them to communicate in English with professors during academic activities.

Secondly, the low level of English proficiency is considered one of the barriers South Asian students face during their academic adaptation. This also makes it difficult for them to cope with the professor's speed of speaking English, their pronunciation, and the English words used during lectures. Pronunciation issues are further complicated by the influence of local dialects from students' home countries, especially where English is not the primary language of communication. They are more comfortable when taught in their native language, and studying in English is difficult for non-native speakers. Hence, they reported the pronunciation and vocabulary challenges while communicating with professors

Furthermore, students' academic success depends on their relationship with teachers. In South Asia, a teacher is seen as a father figure, and asking questions in class is considered disrespectful.

Students are not active recipients of knowledge and mostly rely on books, focus on syllabus content, and follow the instructions of teachers. They mostly ask their fellow students if any confusion arises. Similarly, a high percentage of South Asian students reported that they were not used to questioning professors and mostly relied on their classmates.

Moreover, international students face accent-related problems due to unfamiliarity with slang, and pronouncing words differently from native speakers causes them to encounter accent stereotyping, and therefore, they participate less in class. Students also cannot express their ideas clearly in English due to limited vocabulary, shyness, and fear of making grammatical mistakes. South Asian students also reported the same challenge, that it was difficult for them to express their opinions clearly in English.

Moving forward, international students face several teaching and learning style challenges while studying in a new system. They have to adapt to new classroom customs, speaking without raising hands, direct communication with teachers, frequent seminars, course selections, assignments, and taking notes during lectures make international students more vulnerable to academic adjustment.

They are not used to all these classroom customs, and these traditions are different than their previous experiences in their home countries. Therefore, a predominantly high percentage of South Asian students faced teaching and learning style challenges.

In South Asia, the classrooms are mostly teacher-centered. They are more used to rote memorization rather than critical thinking. Academic standards are more focused on task repetition and doing the same assignments again and again, rather than group work and class engagements. They are passive recipients of knowledge and only follow the guidelines of teachers. They have no experience working in groups with students from different cultures. Furthermore, these students lack paraphrasing and summarizing skills, struggle with plagiarism, and repeat their arguments during assignments and report writing. They deviate from the actual point of discussion and lack clarity in their writing skills. Hence, it was challenging for South Asian students to write assignments and reports, and the lack of these skills leads them to plagiarize.

In addition, the culture of international students, including their values, beliefs, and attitudes, is different from that of the host country, and they have to face several adjustment difficulties while integrating into a new culture. These differences affect their living environment and personal interactions due to the loss of the familiar social environment of their families, friends, and partners. The cultural traits, such as social customs, attire, weather, and cuisine, are not common among cultures that are far apart geographically. This makes people feel alienated, which makes adjusting to different cultures even more challenging. Moreover, the lack of host language proficiency further complicates the cultural integration process. Therefore, a significant percentage of South Asian students found adapting to Lithuanian culture challenging.

Universities play a crucial role in the adaptation of students into an international environment. But the participation of students in university events is minimal, and they only attend lectures. They want to be involved in the events or activities, but the events are conducted in the local language only. There are also separate cultural events arranged for domestic and foreign students. This hinders the cultural adaptation process of international students. The frequency of participation of South Asian students once a week was very low, and most students attended cultural exchange events only once a semester.

Moreover, students face unexpected challenges such as discrimination, racism, and culture shock. They often feel unwelcome in the host community because of their race, skin, host language proficiency, cultural beliefs, and language accent. These negative attitudes arise from the differences

in cultural beliefs, and local students' fear of competition over resources such as admissions, employment opportunities, and study grades. South Asian students, due to their diverse cultural, language, and social backgrounds, found it challenging to integrate into the Lithuanian culture.

Lastly, the national language of Lithuania is Lithuanian, and all the information available is in the Lithuanian language. Even the instructions on how to use library services, printing, and copying are all in the Lithuanian language. Similarly, the use of various computer programs and information databases is in the state language rather than English. The students also face issues while dealing with bureaucratic procedures and document filing. These differences arise because of the cultural and language differences. Mostly, students use the Google Translate app to translate the Lithuanian language. Host language proficiency is important for day-to-day communication and for doing daily tasks. Therefore, a predominantly high percentage of South Asian students reported that they found it challenging to use local services due to the language barrier, and most of them used the Google Translate app to overcome these intercultural communication challenges.

To summarize, we can say that South Asian students face various intercultural communication and adaptation challenges, including communication with professors and students, teaching and learning styles, participation in class, delivering presentations, doing group projects and writing reports, fulfilling the plagiarism requirements, adaptation to Lithuanian culture, and challenges using local services. The main reasons for these challenges are the different medium of instruction from home countries, lack of language proficiency, cultural differences, differences in academic traditions and customs, experiences from home countries, and lack of proficiency in the host country’s language.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The university should introduce Lithuanian language courses for the bachelor's and master's students. Different cultural exchange events should be arranged to help students integrate into the culture.

LIMITATIONS

First of all, it was difficult to collect the sample size as the participants were not willing to cooperate and fill out the long questionnaires. Secondly, the research study focused on three South Asian countries, including Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. Therefore, future research should also involve other South Asian countries.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Questionnaire

Section 1: Demographic Information

Q 1. Which country do you come from?

a. Pakistan
b. India
c. Bangladesh
d. Sri Lanka

Q 2. What is your current level of study?

a. Bachelor
b. Master
c. PhD

Section 2: Language Challenges due to English in an Academic Setting

Q 3. I experience difficulty while communicating with professors in English during academic activities.

a. Yes
b. No

Q 4. The type of difficulties I face while communicating with professors in English in an academic environment (choose multiple options if applicable)?

a. Difficulty in understanding words
b. Understanding the pronunciation
c. Understanding the English vocabulary used during lectures
d. Difficulty in understanding the English language at the speed at which Professors speak English
e. I did not face any difficulty while communicating with professors in English

Q 5. It is challenging for me to ask for clarification from the professors when I do not understand something in the lecture because of (choose multiple options if applicable)?

a. My weak English language
b. Fear of negative judgment from professors
c. I am not used to questioning professors due to my cultural background from my previous education system

d. I usually rely on classmates instead of asking directly from the professors
e. I am uncertain about how to phrase my questions clearly in English
f. I did not experience any difficulty like that

Q 6. The professors or students misunderstood me due to my English language pronunciation?

a. Yes
b. No

Q 7. The type of difficulties I face while communicating with other students in English in an academic environment (choose multiple options if applicable)?

a. Understanding the pronunciation of other students
b. Finding the right words to express my opinions clearly
c. Feeling nervous to speak in English with classmates
d. Difficulty keeping up with the speed of conversations
e. Classmates use English, which is difficult for me to understand
f. Fear of making grammatical mistakes during conversations
g. I did not experience any difficulty like that

Q 8. It is challenging for me to participate in classroom discussions?

a. Yes
b. No

Q 9. I find group projects challenging with students from different cultural backgrounds?

a. Yes
b. No

Q 10. I experience difficulties when delivering class presentations in English?

a. Yes
b. No

Q 11. It is challenging for me to write class assignments or reports in English?

a. Yes
b. No

Q 12. What strategies do you use to overcome English language challenges in an academic setting (choose multiple options if applicable)?

a. Ask classmates for help
b. Ask professors to repeat or explain difficult points
c. Avoiding speaking in these situations due to a lack of confidence
d. Try to improve my English using online resources
e. Simple dropout from the process or stop listening
f. Concentrate on other activities

g. I did not experience any challenge like that

Section 3: Academic Adjustment Challenges due to Teaching and Learning Styles

Q 13. I find adapting to Lithuanian teaching and learning styles challenging?

a. Yes
b. No

Q 14. Teachers use local examples during lectures, which are difficult for me to understand?

a. Yes
b. No

Q 15. I am uncertain about the expectations for assignments compared to my previous education system?

a. Yes
b. No

Q 16. I am uncertain about the expectations for exams compared to my previous education system?

a. Yes
b. No

Q 17. I am unsure about how to address or approach professors appropriately?

a. Yes
b. No

Q 18. I find the academic workload stressful compared to my previous education system due to (choose multiple options if applicable)?

a. A large number of assignments and projects
b. Frequent presentations and group work
c. Tight submission deadlines
d. Difficulty managing multiple courses simultaneously
e. Lack of clear instructions from professors
f. I did not have an academic workload like this

Q 19. It is challenging for me to adapt to plagiarism and academic integrity requirements (choose multiple options if applicable)?

a. These requirements were completely new for me as compared to my previous education system
b. I am not fully confident about how to cite reference sources correctly
c. It is difficult for me to write ideas or rephrase in my own words in English
d. The university's plagiarism policies are not clearly explained
e. I find it difficult to check plagiarism through online tools

f. I did not experience any challenges like that

Q 20. It is difficult for me to respond when professors ask questions during lectures because (choose multiple options if applicable)?

a. I need more time to understand the questions in English
b. I feel nervous or afraid of giving the wrong answer
c. I am unsure about how to express my answer in English
d. I do not fully understand the lecture content
e. I am not confident speaking in front of the class
f. I feel shy to answer publicly
g. I do not know how to formulate and express my opinion
h. I did not experience any difficulty like that

Q 21. It is difficult for me to express my personal opinion during lectures because (choose multiple options if applicable)?

a. I lack confidence to speak in front of others
b. I am not used to openly expressing opinion in class discussions
c. I worry that my opinion might be judged or misunderstood
d. I find it difficult to express ideas clearly in English
e. I did not experience anything like that

Q 22. It is challenging for me to study reading materials on my own due to (choose multiple options if applicable)?

a. Difficulty in understanding academic English used in the readings
b. Having too many reading materials to study
c. Not knowing which parts of the readings are most important for exams or assignments
d. I did not have a workload like this

Q 23. It is challenging for me to complete case studies individually (choose multiple options if applicable)?

a. The language and terminologies used in case studies are difficult for me to understand
b. I am uncertain about how to complete my case study because it was a completely new experience for me
c. I received limited guidance or examples from professors on how to complete the case study
d. I did not have a workload like this

Q 24. I experience prejudice or stereotyping by classmates toward me?

a. Yes
b. No

Q 25. What strategies do you use to overcome Academic adjustment challenges concerning unfamiliar teaching and learning styles (choose multiple options if applicable)?

a. Observe how other classmates participate in class and learn from them
b. Ask professors for clarification
c. Discuss assignments and lectures with classmates
d. Spend extra time reviewing lecture notes and study materials
e. Get guidance from senior students or peers who have experience
f. Just do everything according to my understanding and do not put extra effort
g. I did not experience any challenges like that

Section 4: Social and Cultural Integration in Lithuania

Q 26. It is challenging for me to adapt to Lithuanian culture?

a. Yes
b. No

Q 27. I feel stressed and anxious during interaction with locals (choose multiple options if applicable)?

a. Difficulty in understanding the pronunciation of locals
b. The locals do not speak English
c. Lack confidence to interact with locals
d. Worry about saying something wrong or being misunderstood
e. Not knowing how to start a conversation with the locals
f. There is a lack of situations for interaction with locals
g. I avoid interaction with locals

Q 28. The university supports me in building intercultural relationships?

a. Yes
b. No

Q 29. How frequently do you participate in events promoting cultural exchange?

a. Once per week
b. Once per month
c. Once per semester
d. I did not participate in the cultural exchange events

Q 30. I experience prejudice or stereotyping by Lithuanians toward me?

a. Yes
b. No

Q 31. What is the attitude of the Lithuanian students toward South Asian students?

a. Positive attitude
b. Negative attitude
c. Neutral attitude
d. I am not aware of that

Section 5: Daily Life and Adaptation

Q 32. I face challenges using services (e.g., healthcare, housing, public transport) (choose multiple options if applicable)?

a. Yes, due to a language barrier
b. Difficult to understand local rules
c. Unfamiliarity with how these services operate in Lithuania
d. I did not experience any challenges using local services

Q 33. I face difficulty while shopping for daily-use items due to (choose multiple options if applicable)?

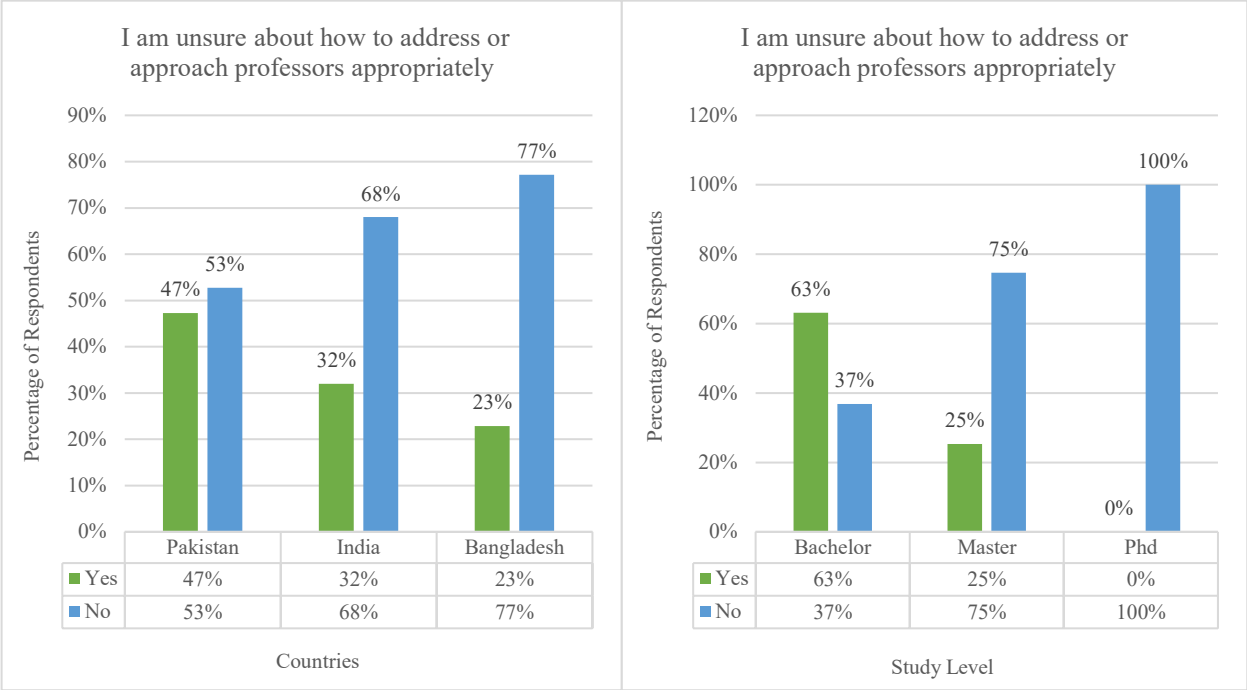
a. Communication with the cash counter staff
b. Communication with the sales staff
c. It is difficult for me to read the description of the items
d. I did not experience any difficulty while shopping

Q 34. What strategies do you use to overcome intercultural communication challenges (choose multiple options if applicable)?

a. Avoiding communication in difficult situations
b. Using Google Translate
c. Learn the basic Lithuanian language words
d. Seeking help from peers
e. Ask for assistance from other foreign students
f. I did not experience any intercultural communication challenges

Appendix 2. How to Address or Approach Professors

Figure 1. Address professors appropriately



Appendix 3. Difficult to Respond During Lectures

Figure 2. Difficulties in responding to professors' questions at the country level

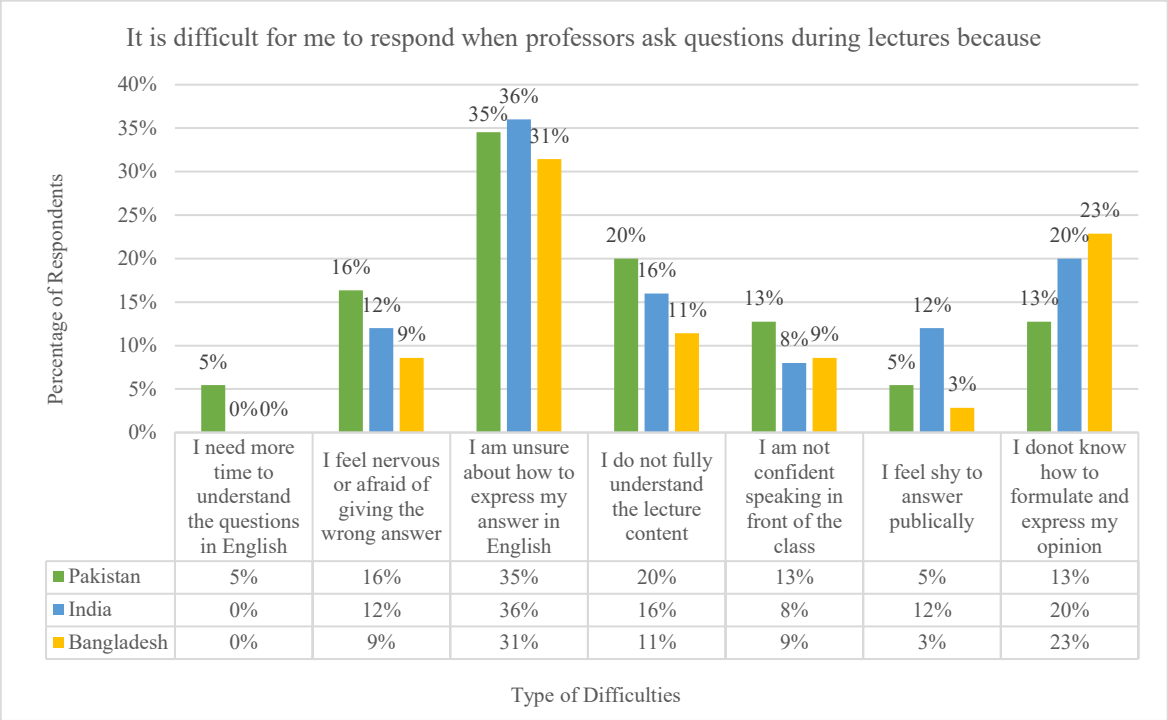
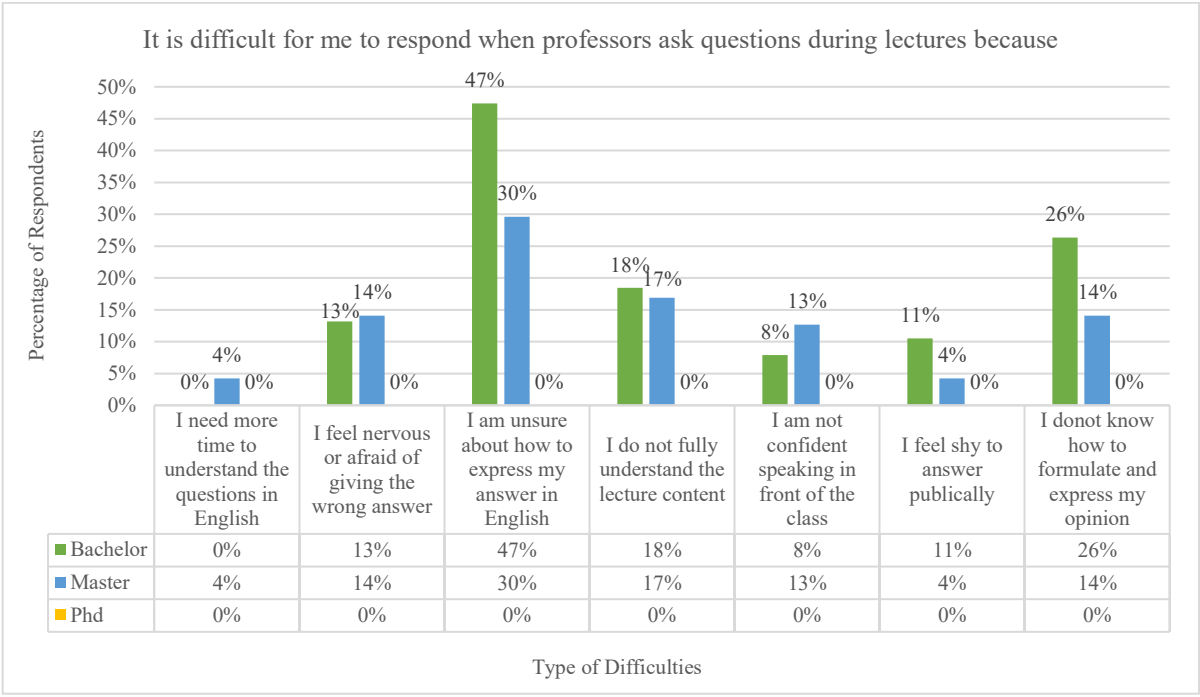


Figure 3. Difficulties in responding to professors' questions at the study level



Appendix 4. Express Personal Opinion During Lectures

Figure 4. Difficulty in expressing personal opinion during lectures at the country level

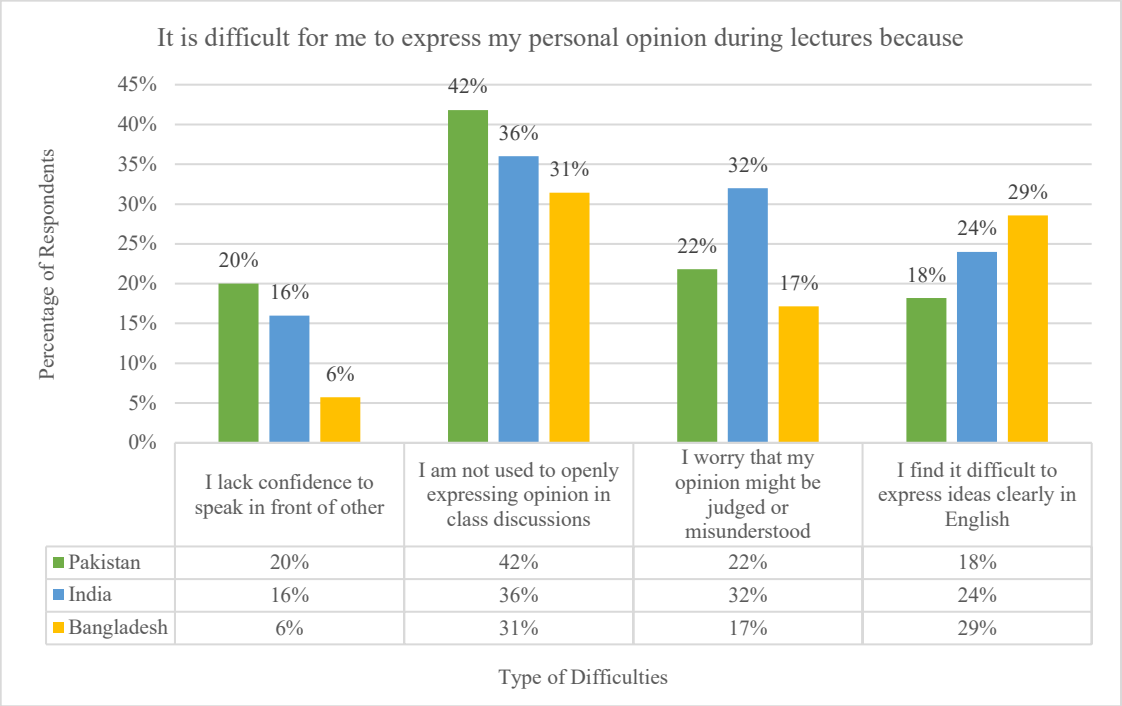
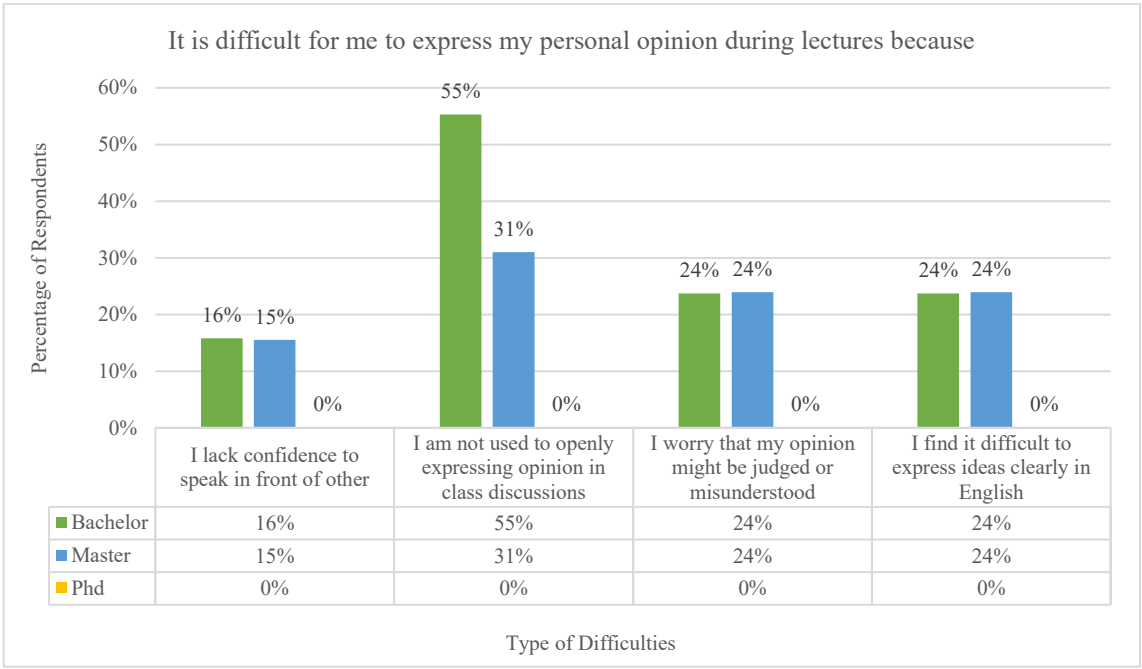


Figure 5. Difficulty in expressing personal opinion during lectures at the study level



Appendix 5. Strategies to Overcome English Language Challenges

Figure 6. Strategies to overcome English language challenges in an academic setting according to countries

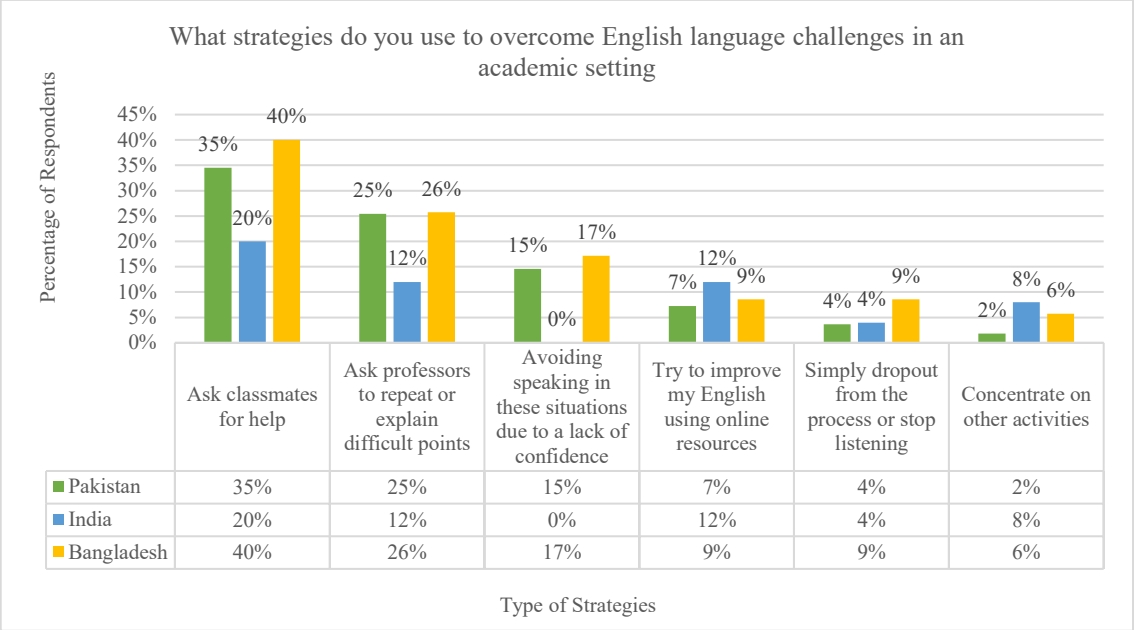
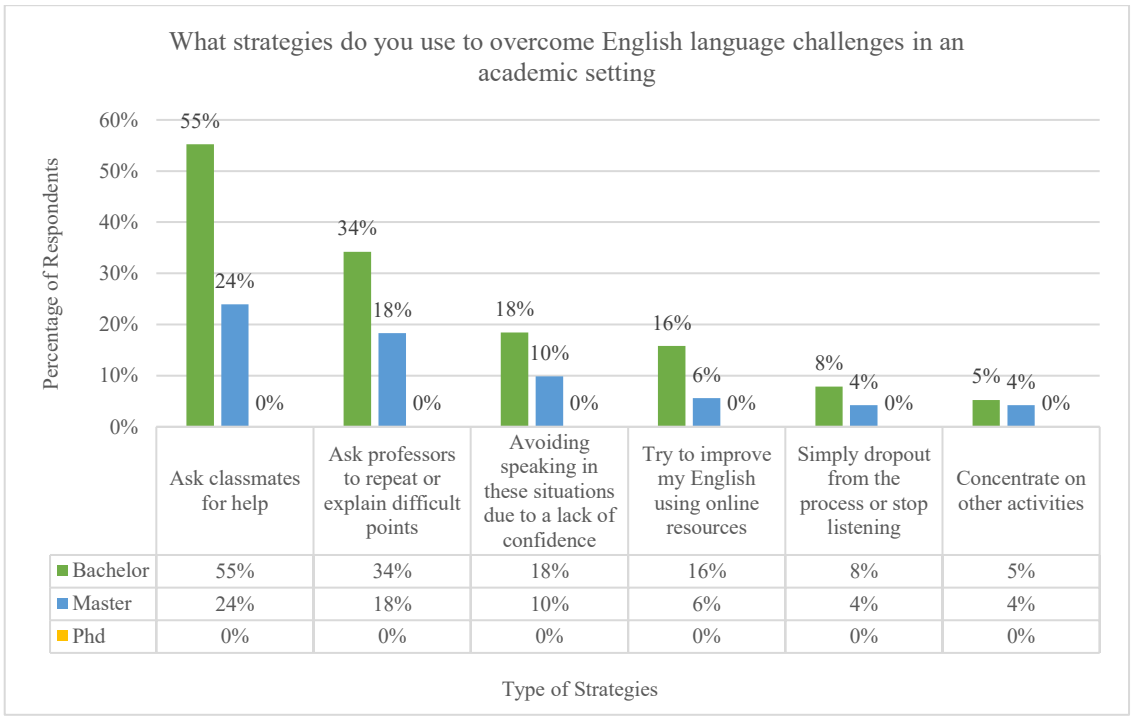
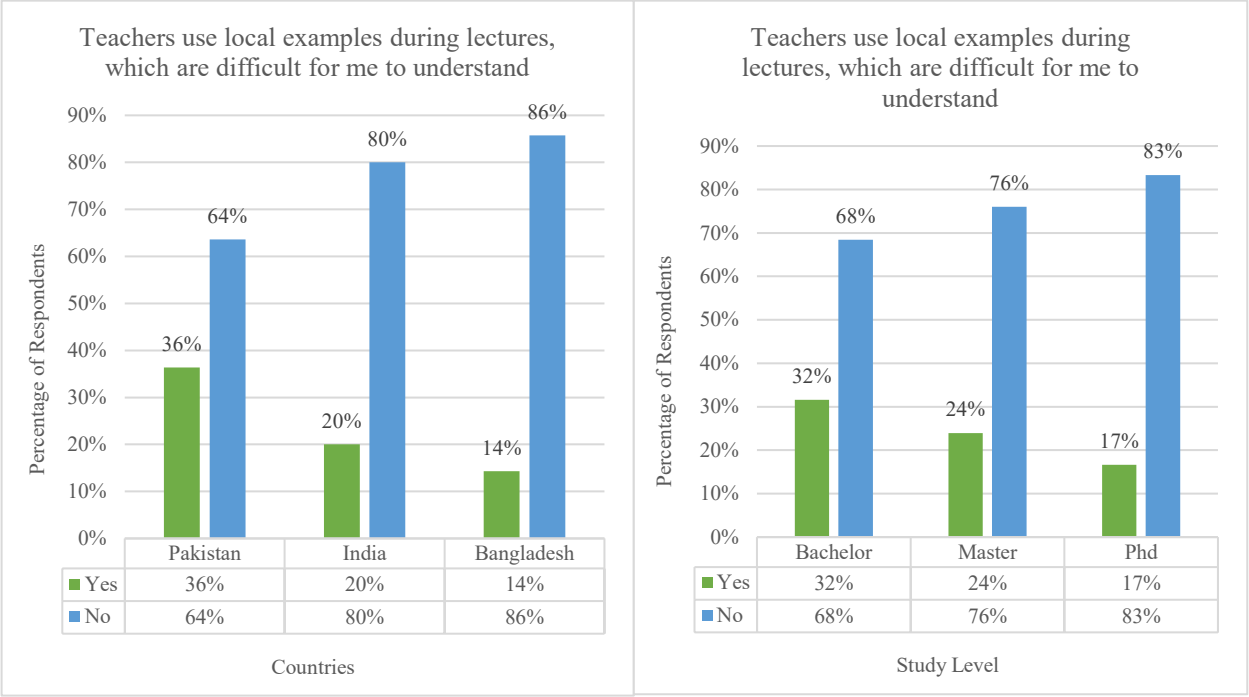


Figure 7. Strategies to overcome English language challenges in an academic setting according to the study level



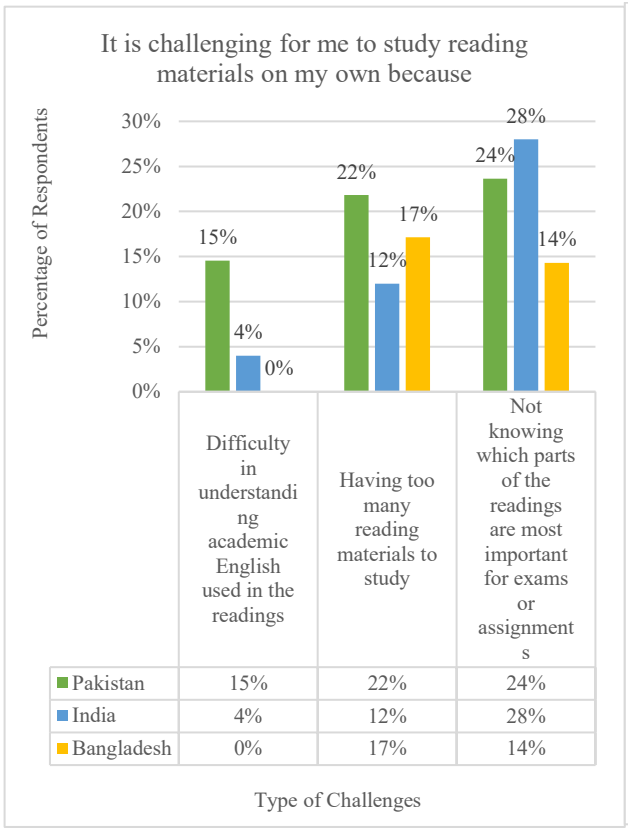
Appendix 6. Use of Local Examples

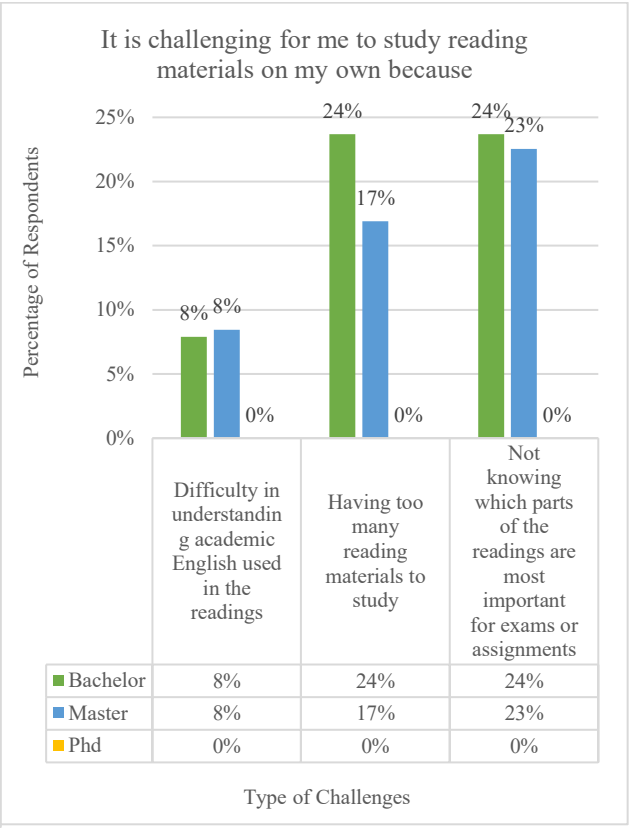
Figure 8. Use of local examples during lectures



Appendix 7. Study Reading Materials

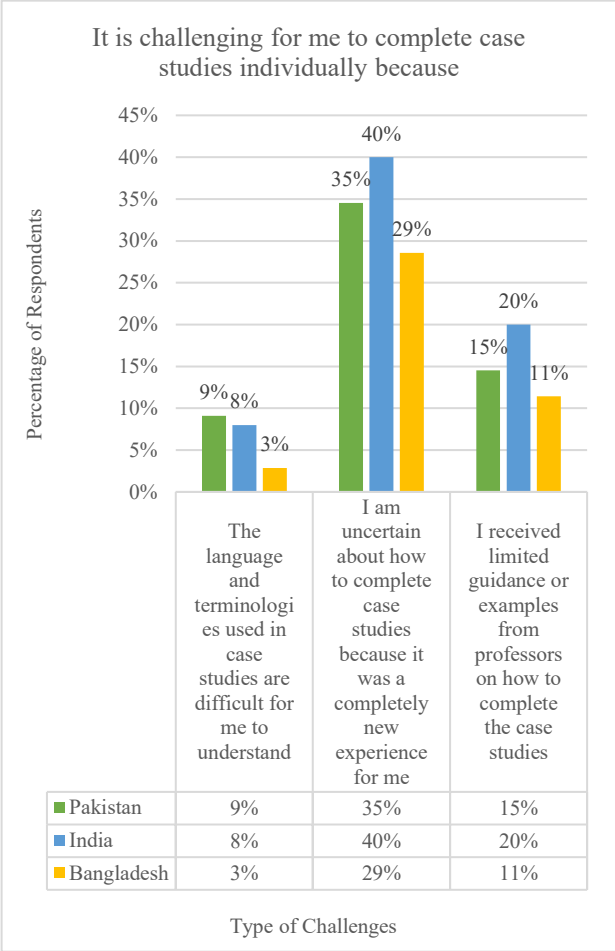
Figure 9. Study reading materials individually

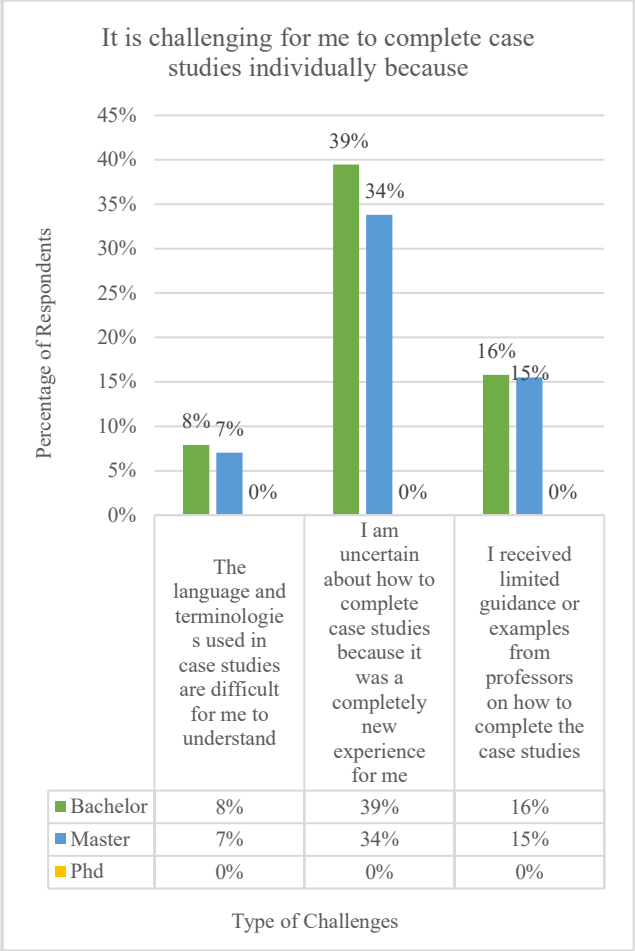




Appendix 8. Case Studies Completion

Figure 10. Case studies completion challenges





Appendix 9. Stress of Academic Workload

Figure 11. Stress of academic workload at the country level

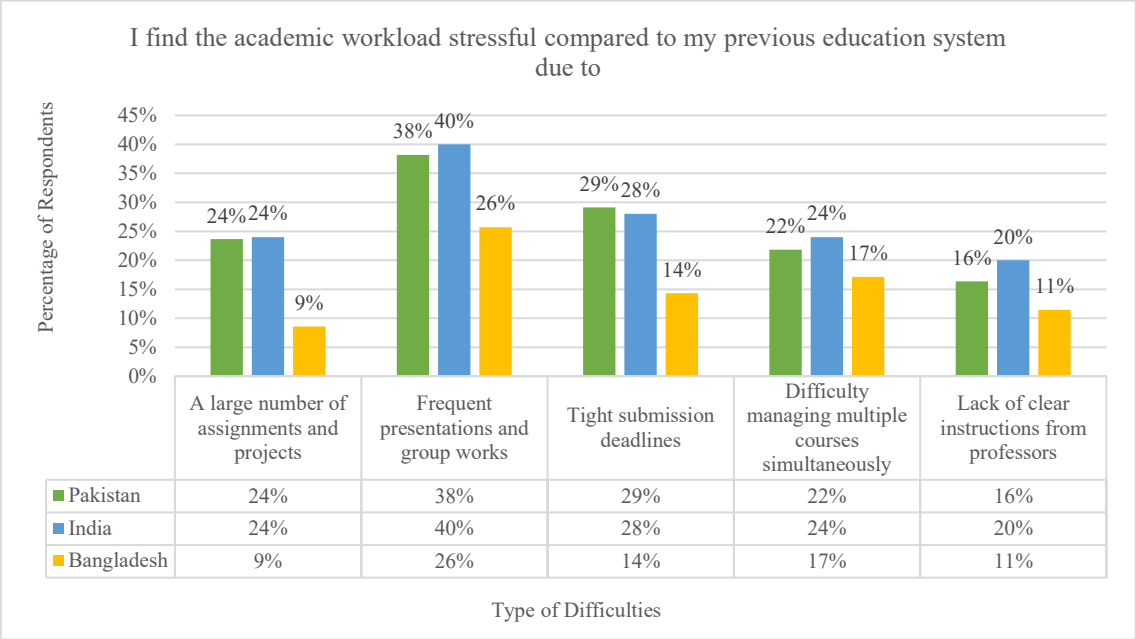
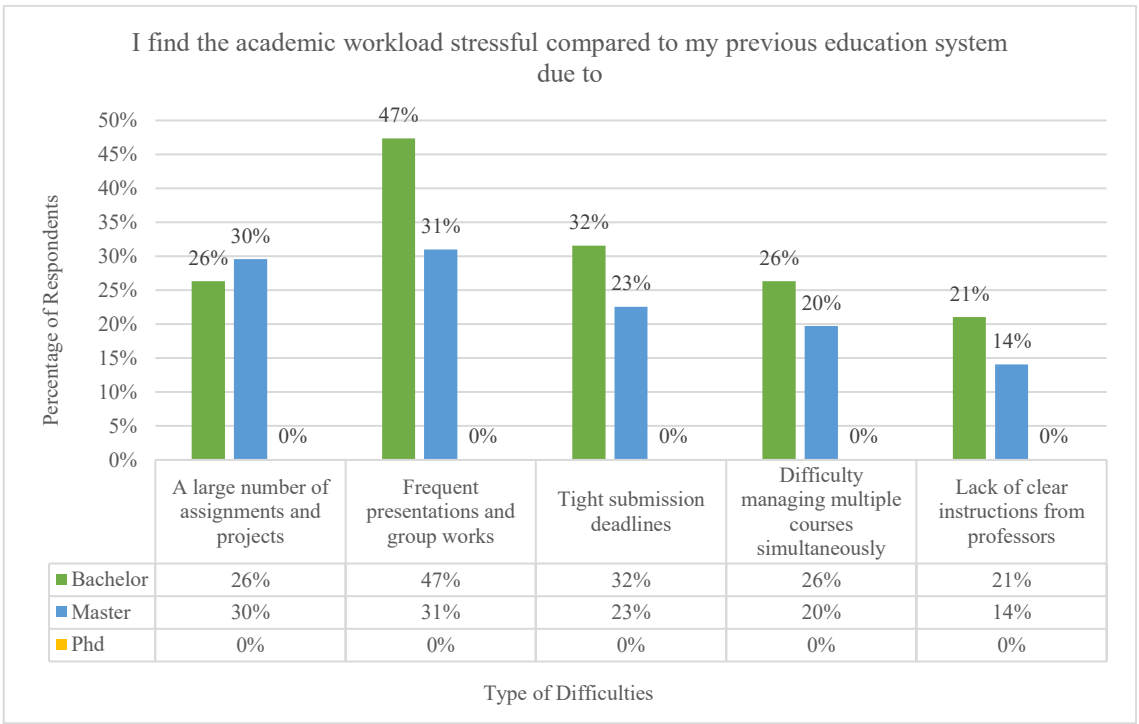


Figure 12. Stress of academic workload at the study level



Appendix 10. Strategies to Overcome Academic Adjustment Challenges

Figure 13. Strategies to overcome academic adjustment challenges at the country level

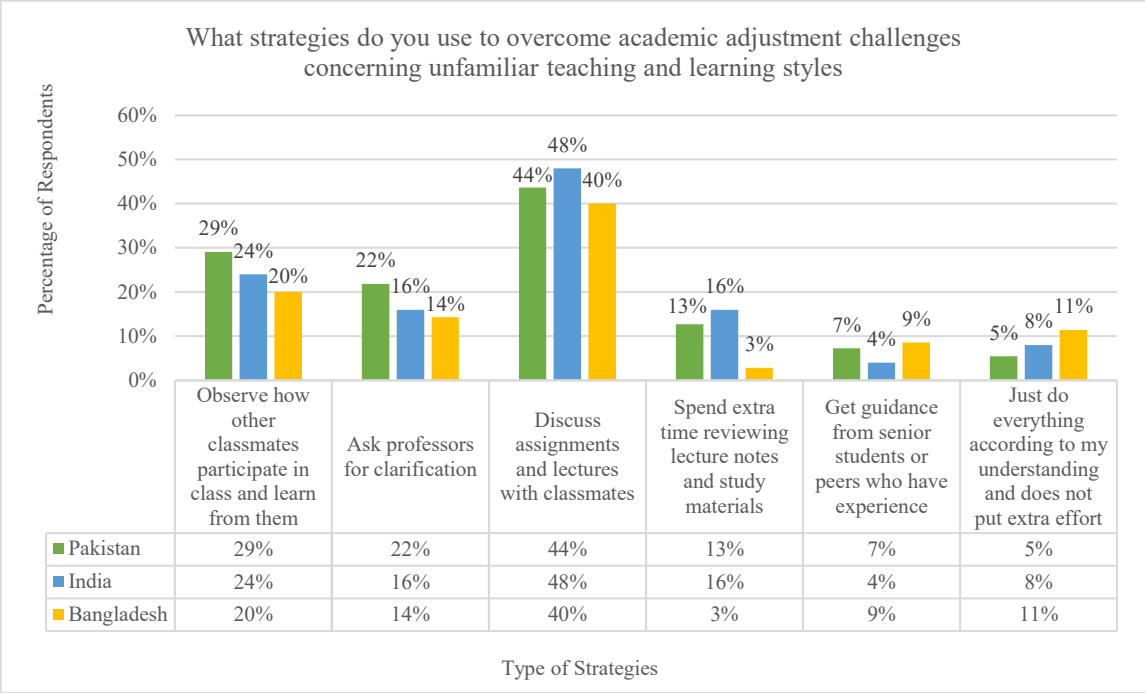
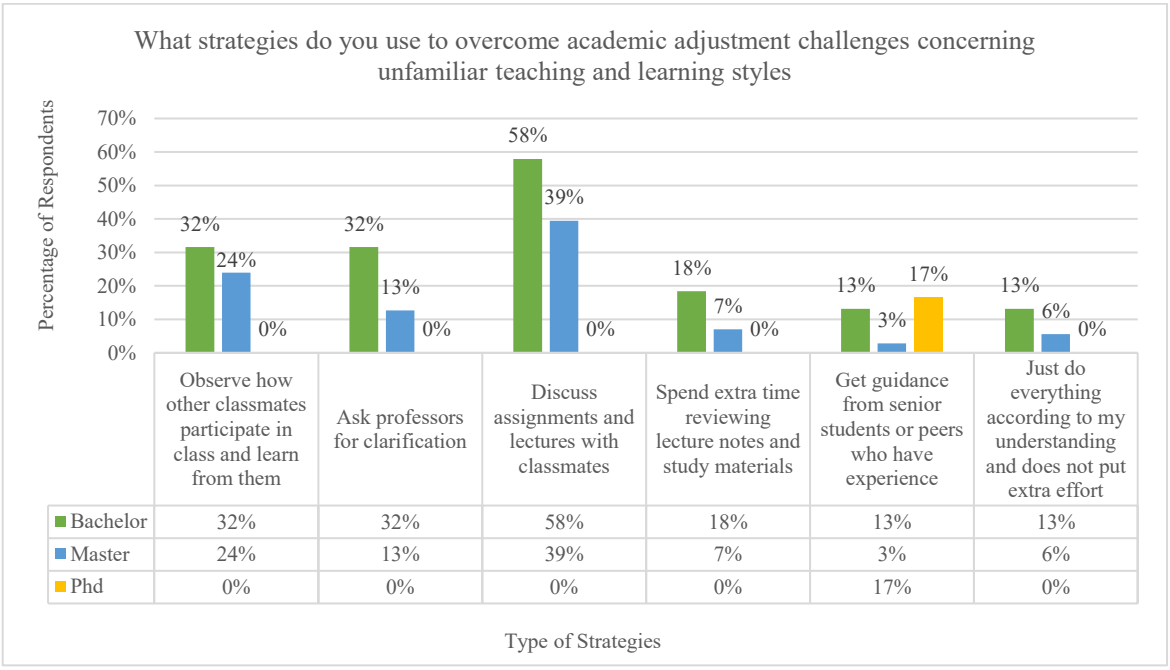
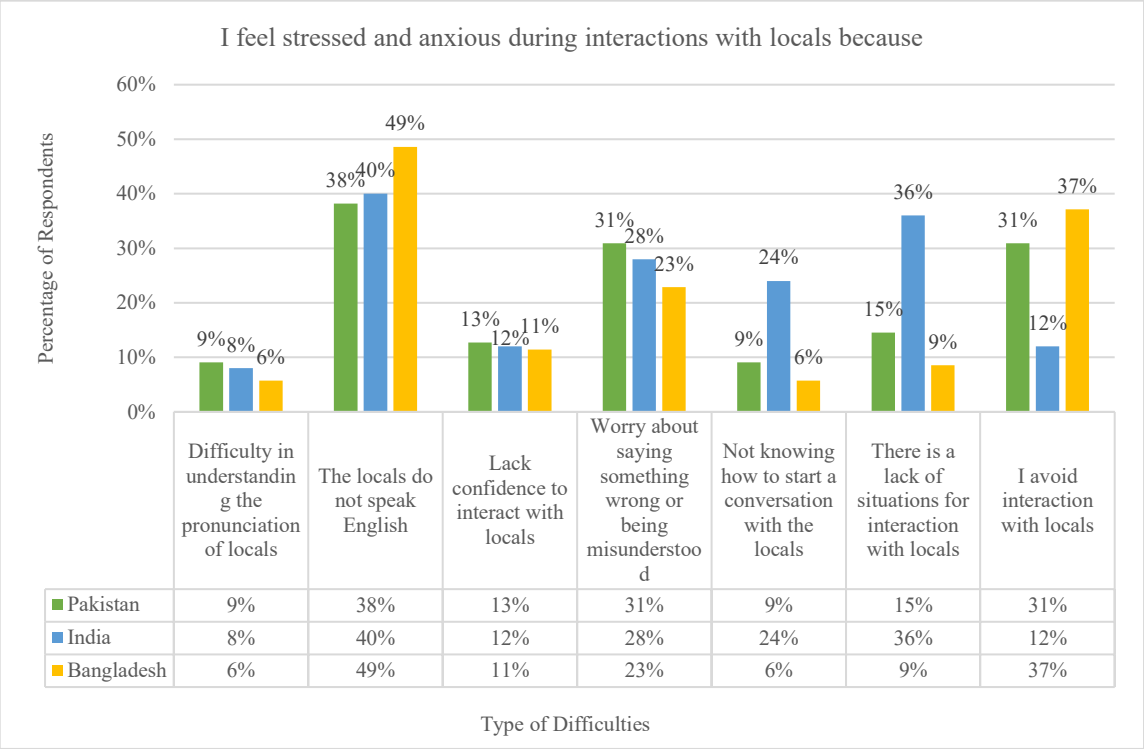


Figure 14. Strategies to overcome academic adjustment challenges at the study level



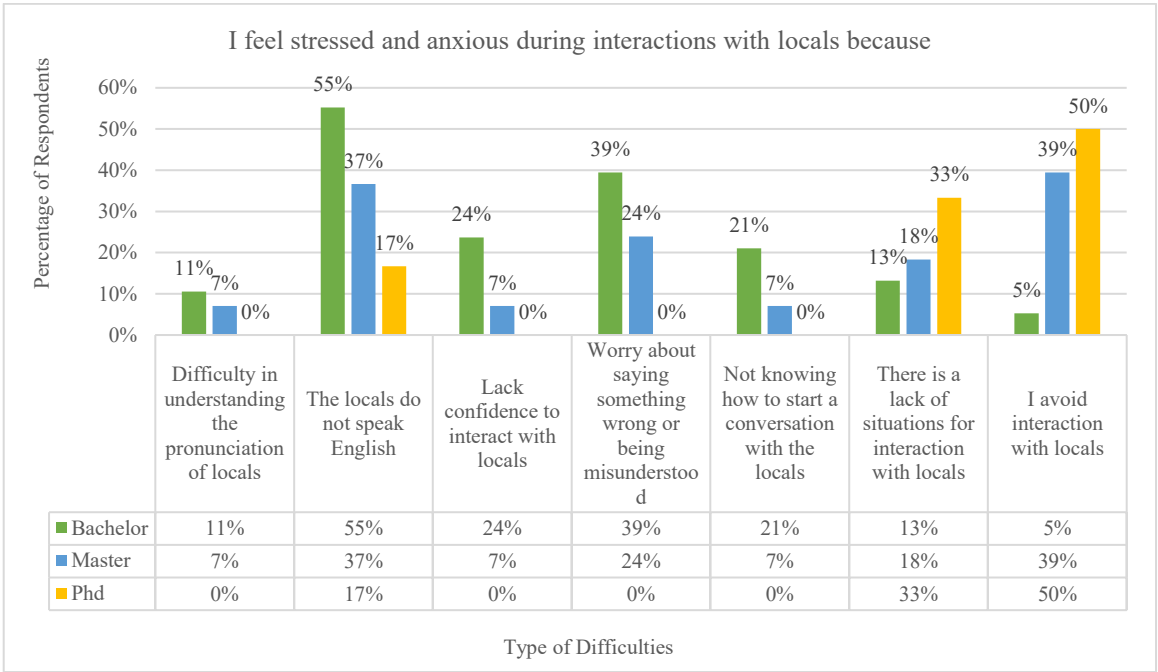
Appendix 11. Stress During Interactions with Locals

Figure 15. Stress during interactions with locals at the country level



	Difficulty in understanding the pronunciation of locals	The locals do not speak English	Lack confidence to interact with locals	Worry about saying something wrong or being misunderstood	Not knowing how to start a conversation with the locals	There is a lack of situations for interaction with locals	I avoid interaction with locals
Pakistan	9%	38%	13%	31%	9%	15%	31%
India	8%	40%	12%	28%	24%	36%	12%
Bangladesh	6%	49%	11%	23%	6%	9%	37%

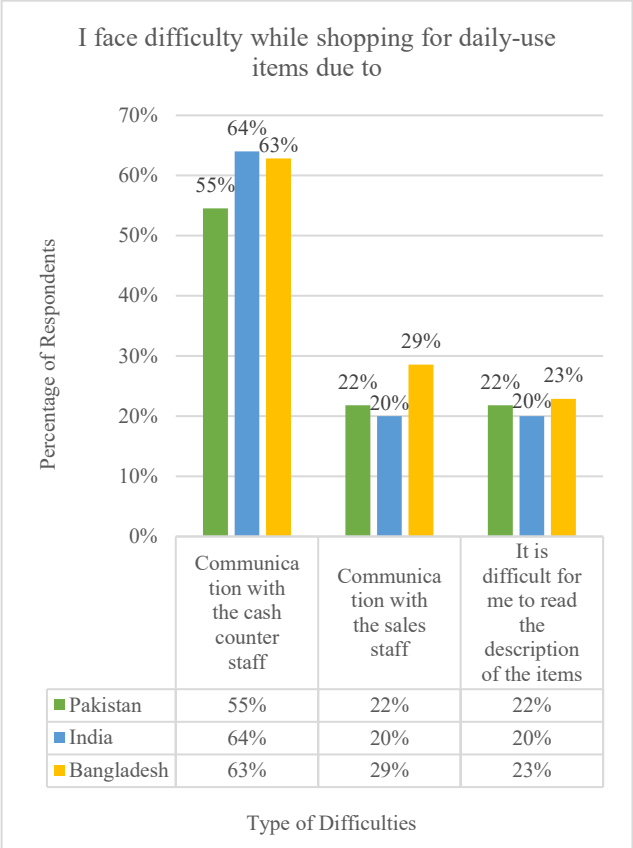
Figure 16. Stress during interactions with locals at the study level

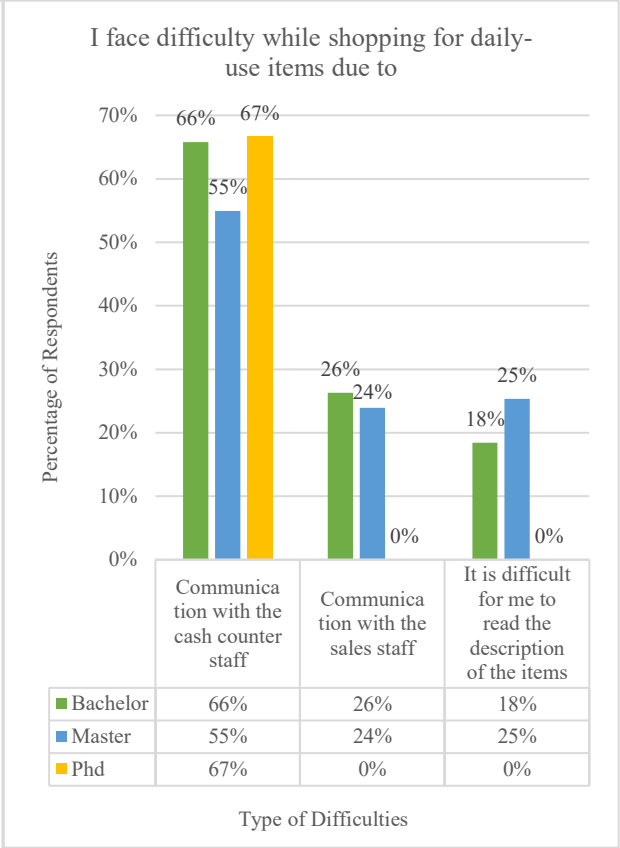


	Difficulty in understanding the pronunciation of locals	The locals do not speak English	Lack confidence to interact with locals	Worry about saying something wrong or being misunderstood	Not knowing how to start a conversation with the locals	There is a lack of situations for interaction with locals	I avoid interaction with locals
Bachelor	11%	55%	24%	39%	21%	13%	5%
Master	7%	37%	7%	24%	7%	18%	39%
Phd	0%	17%	0%	0%	0%	33%	50%

Appendix 12. Difficulty While Shopping

Figure 17. Challenges while shopping for daily items





Appendix 13. Faculty of Communication, Vilnius University Declaration on the Use of Artificial Intelligence Tools

Student's name, surname: Muhammad Ali Naseem

Study programme, year of study: Master's in International Communication, 2024-2026

Title of the written work: Intercultural Communication Challenges of Students from South Asia in Lithuania

Type of written work (e.g., essay, term paper): Master's Thesis

Course/Subject: Master's Thesis

Date of submission of the declaration: 29th December, 2025

The written work submitted for assessment has been prepared in accordance with the *Code of Academic Ethics of Vilnius University*[1], the *Methodological Guidelines for Written Works of the Faculty of Communication of Vilnius University*[2], the *Guidelines on Artificial Intelligence Usage at Vilnius University*[3], and the *Recommendations on the Use of Artificial Intelligence in Study Assignments at the Faculty of Communication, Vilnius University*[4].

☒ I confirm

☐ I do not confirm

The following artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used in preparing this written work (please mark appropriately and specify their purpose):

☐ChatGPT: _____

☐Grammarly: _____

☐Midjourney: _____

☐Gemini: _____

☐Other: _____

Additional information required:

1. Footnotes in the written work must indicate the specific parts of the text that were prepared with the assistance of artificial intelligence (AI) tools.
2. Footnotes must also specify the volume of the text that was prepared using AI tools.

[1] Code of Academic Ethics of Vilnius University: https://www.kf.vu.lt/en/studies/documents

[2] Methodological Guidelines for Written Works of the Faculty of Communication of Vilnius University: https://www.kf.vu.lt/dokumentai/VUKF_metodiniai_EN_Epdf.pdf

[3] Guidelines on Artificial Intelligence Usage at Vilnius University: https://www.vu.lt/site_files/Vertimai/EN_Translation_Dirbtinio_intelekto_naudojimo_Vilniaus_universitete_gair%C4%97s.pdf

[4] Recommendations on the Use of Artificial Intelligence in Study Assignments at the Faculty of Communication, Vilnius University: https://www.kf.vu.lt/dokumentai/documents/2024/Recommendations_on_the_use_of_AI_in_assignments.pdf