Z E S Z Y T Y N A U K O W E P O L I T E C H N I K I P O Z N A Ń S K I E J
Nr 81 Organizacja i Zarządzanie 2020

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STRATEGIES IN WELCOMING AND ADJUSTING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS TO THE UNIVERSITY AND LOCAL SOCIETY. APPROACH FROM POLISH AND AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES

DOI: 10.21008/j.0239-9415.2020.081.14

In the growing globalization in the sector of higher education, every school must have a clearly defined strategy on how to recruit and retain international students. Many times these strategies vary among the regions and countries where the students are from, some students need a more personal approach, whereas others prefer a less engaged process. For some students moving to another country or even continent can be a very stressful experience. International students not only have to face a new academic rigor but also many times a new society and culture. The universities that make international students feel welcome contribute greatly to their academic success. International students who have support from a dedicated service can easily immerse into the local society and adapt rapidly. The universities constantly need to work on new strategies that allow students to adapt to the academic environment and familiarize them with administrative procedures and campus life. Access to a committed service that caters to the needs of international students proves that such an engaging approach leads to satisfactory results in students' success to adapt to a new school and new community. The article analyses best practices, such as orientation specifically targeted at international students, high-quality students' services, and a successful university Buddy program. Such approaches prove to facilitate the most effective results. The analysis demonstrates that international students adapt better to academic structures and requirements as a consequence of engagement with the offered services. Such strategies allow international students to make the best of their internationalization experience.

Keywords: international students, international education, cultural adjustment, adaptability strategies

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1. INTRODUCTION

For many years, internationalization has been one of the most important factors in creating a university's strategy, building and developing educational quality as well as providing adequate branding and promotion of a university worldwide. One of the most crucial components of a university's internationalization strategy is the ability to attract, recruit and maintain international students at its premises.

However, international students who move to study in a foreign country often face adaptive problems. In order to facilitate this adaptation process, universities have to enforce welcoming and adjusting strategies that would allow international students to adapt to a new university environment. The best solution seems to be combined methods of domestication and foreignization.

The terms "domestication" and "foreignization" were used for the first time by Venuti in his book entitled "The Translator's Invisibility" in relation to the translation strategies (Venuti, 1995). The translator can make a choice between preserving the foreign character of the original text (foreignization) and intervening on the original text and adapting it to the norms of the target language (domestication). In this article these strategies were used by the authors to name the two approaches that Universities may adopt towards international students, on the one hand, to make them feel at home and, on the other hand, to adjust their way of living to the local culture and society. This area is quite new in the context of internationalization development and requires more extensive research. The article aims to analyze different approaches adopted by two institutions of higher education in Poland and one higher education institution in the United States towards adaptability strategies in welcoming and adjusting international students to the university and local community.

2. STRATEGIC ADAPTABILITY IN INTERNATIONAL RECRUITMENT

The recruitment process of an international student starts way before the recruitment process of a domestic student. An international student needs to choose not only what career to pursue but also where to study. The research shows that there are several external factors taken under consideration by an international student before making the final decision. These factors include the program's difficulty, the time required to complete the degree, the value of the degree, and influence from faculty, advisors, and family (Nguyen, Quin, Gopala, 2019, 231). Many international students strongly rely on agents who play a crucial role in the decision-making process. The agents are often the premier source of information about the school and its offerings (Pietraszek, Rodgres, 2015, 4344). Agents not only en-

courage the student to apply to a particular university but also promote the destination. There is a risk associated with the agents' involvement in students' recruitment, such as admissions process manipulation and circulation of misleading information, among others (Nikula, Kivisto, 2020, 213). According to ICEF (International Consultants for Education and Fairs) agents play a significant role in global student mobility. Other important factors in the admissions process of international students are its current and former students (alumni). Both groups can influence the decision-making process of prospective students by spreading positive word-of--mouth messages. Building a strong connection with alumni is extremely important in the context of promoting the university to its prospective students (Nguye, Quin, Gopala, 2019, 232).

International students contribute $44.7 billion to the United States economy. The USA is a top educational destination globally (*Open Door Report*, 2019). According to the Institute of International Education, foreign students in the United States have been on the decline for the last three years. There is a decrease in enrollment due to the political factors. Whereas in Poland, the number of foreign students is increasing steadily every year. The table below shows an increase on a yearly basis from the academic year 2000/2001 until 2018/2019.

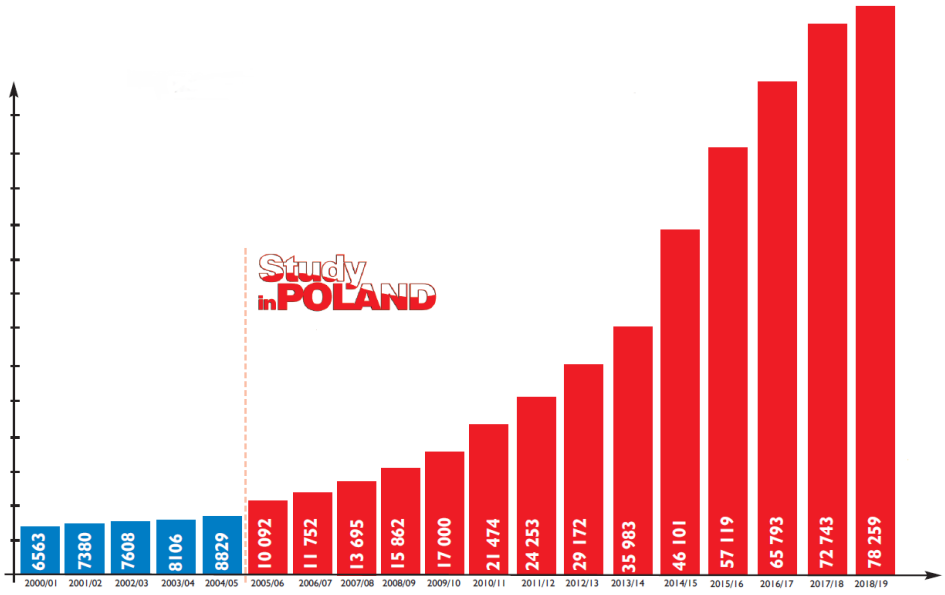


Fig. 1. Increase in the number of international students in Poland 2000-2019.
Based on: *Foreign students in Poland Report*, 2019

Covid-19 will play a significant role in the students' mobility. At the time of writing this article, there is no data available yet.

The adaptability of international students to the local culture varies by region. Research shows that the biggest gap is between western and eastern cultures. The international students from Asian countries who are in the process of adaptation in intercultural interactions pass through different states: intercultural shock state, intercultural resistance state, intercultural accommodation state, and bi-cultural competence state (Fong, 2019, 105). They are also more prone to a bigger amount of unfamiliarity of life abroad due to differences in language, culture and educational systems (Wang, Hannes, 2014, 67). Asian students constitute the biggest number of students who study abroad, and their number has been rising over the last years.



Fig. 2. Distribution of outbound mobility among students by the world regions.
Source: *Project Atlas*, 2019

In Poland international students mainly come from Ukraine, Belarus, India, Spain and Turkey (*Foreign students in Poland Report*, 2019). When it comes to the United States, international students represent the following top five countries: China, India, South Korea, Saudi Arabia and Canada (*Project Atlas*, 2019).

In general, students who decide to study in a foreign country are expected to adapt to the new culture, environment, and surroundings. Research shows that these students face several adjustments. They have to pass through academic adjustment, socio-cultural adjustment, and psychological adjustment (Wang, Hannes, 2014, 67).

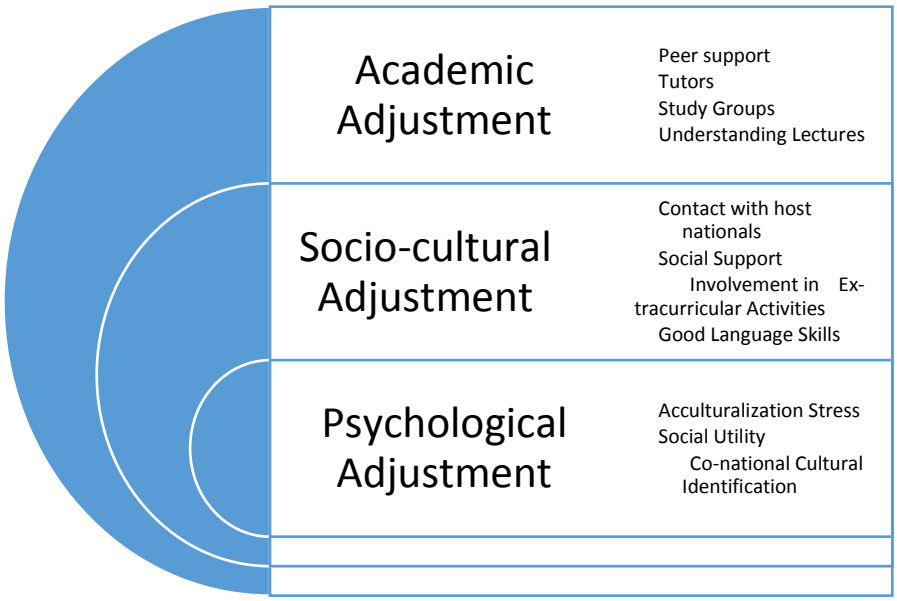


Fig. 3. Phases of Adaptability of Foreign Students.
Source: Wang, Hannes, 2014

In the adaptation process it is crucial from an international student perspective to feel safe, to have an easy access to vital information. It is also important to feel comfortable when it comes to local people, customs, and traditions. The global/international office administrators serve as the first contact for international students. They often serve as counselors, advisors, and even mentors by providing the services and support from academic to basic personal needs. International students often feel very lost and lonely at the beginning, and such support is essential in the students' success to thrive at a foreign university.

International students bring internationalization and allow cross-cultural interaction on campus. The presence of international students in the classroom delivers educational diversity and opportunity to discuss the broader affairs from domestic and global perspectives. (Bista, Foster, 2011, 9). International students bring financial and cultural benefits to the university and the community. Several studies indicated that the opportunity to interact with international students provides significantly higher level of development of several skills like for example mastery of foreign languages or understanding of the position of science and technology in the global perspective (Luo, Jamieson-Drake, 2013, 91)

Success at a foreign university is perceived as a must by many Asian cultures. The opportunity to study "non-local degree" brings higher value and is almost an obsession in Asian society (Walters, Leung, 2017, 233). The choice of school plays

an essential role for students in defining their own identity. Świątkiewicz-Mośny (2017, 277) stated that: "School is the institution which influences individual biographies in a significant way through the socialization process. Its task is to prepare students to live in a changing world, to transfer knowledge, and to teach interpersonal relationships. All these three areas are strongly connected with the value system. School and teachers attribute importance and value to the knowledge they teach". This concept can be applied not only to international students, but also to domestic ones.

3. ORIENTATION DAYS AND LANGUAGE SKILLS AS IMPORTANT FACTORS IN THE DOMESTICATION STRATEGY

Students' orientation plays a crucial role in the students' domestication process. Through orientation, students can familiarize themselves with the school and the surroundings. They can learn the school dynamics and adjust to the local academic atmosphere. This is also a great opportunity to present them the local culture and immerse them into the local society, giving them the opportunity to learn more about a new country, discover local food, local students as well as domestic customs and traditions. On the other hand, international students mean benefits for the city as they are spending money in restaurants, taxis and local attractions. They would buy apartments or make other investments in the city. In the future, they may even become business partners of locals.

It is imperative to provide an orientation that is specifically aimed at international students. Such orientation can be a leading factor in the student's success because it can shape their vision towards a positive concept of studying in a foreign country. Students perceive orientation as a benefit that provides access to the vital information that international students need to know and understand (Acar, 2016, 85). Many schools offer pre-arrival virtual orientations to prepare students to fully integrate as soon as possible into the university's academic life. Such a blended approach to orientation, including face-to-face meetings and providing online information, proves to be the most desired solution, both for students and teachers. It also helps the students to maximize their learning potential (Hodgson, So, Hung, 2008, 7). The major obstacle in the integration process is the language barrier because learning the native language of the place of study and residence is the most crucial gateway to its culture (Greenall, 2012, 80). It is more of a challenge when studying in a country where the language of instruction is not the same as the local mother tongue, as it is the case in Poland. Whereas, in the USA the language of instruction and the local language are the same, which makes the domestication process far smoother for international students. That is obviously one of the main

reasons why English-speaking countries are top choices for international students. Among top 5 countries, 4 of them are English-speaking countries including: the US, the UK, Canada and Australia, which are primary choices for students who plan to study abroad. China is the only exception among leading countries, mainly due to the rise of Chinese universities in global rankings, its economic growth and distinctiveness of the Chinese language (Bayiz, Mahsood, 2018, 325).

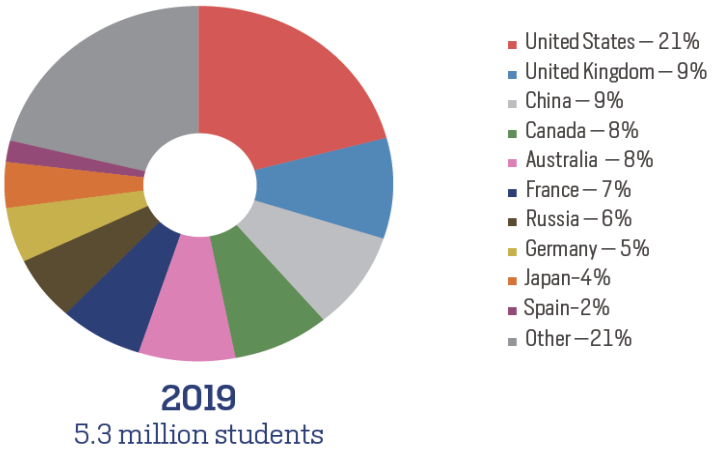


Fig. 4. Top destinations to study abroad globally.
Source: *Project Atlas*, 2019

4. STUDY OF ADAPTABILITY STRATEGIES IN POLISH AND AMERICAN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Strategy analysis has been conducted among two Polish and one American University. They were selected to represent different fields of study and different student educational profiles. Both, Poland and the USA, have currently almost the same ratio of international students compared to the total higher education population – 5,6% and 5,5%, respectively (*Project Atlas*, 2019). The study has been conducted on the basis of three basic adaptability phases: recruitment and admission phase, orientation phase, and cultural adjustment phase. Attracting international students to a university is a key element of the internationalization strategy at each university.

Poznan University of Medical Sciences (PUMS) and Poznan University of Technology (PUT) both have a history that dates back 100 years ago. PUMS is ranked within top 7 medical universities in Poland, according to Perspektywy rank-

ing 2020[1] (*Perspektywy…*, 2020). PUT has been ranked within top 6 technical universities in the country according to the same Perspektywy ranking. However, in the international ranking of the Center for World University Rankings, PUT is in 1493rd place, whereas PUMS is in 1172nd place (*Center for World University Rankings*, 2020-2021). At PUMS there are more than 7,000 students in total, out of which almost 1,000 are international students (Center for Medical Education in English, PUMS). Poznan University of Technology has over 1,300 academic staff to support its 16,000 students across 9 faculties, offering 33 fields of study (20 in the English language) and over 100 specializations. Most of the programs are technical, but PUT also offers scientific and social studies. Out of 16,000 students studying at PUT, 325 are full-degree program international students (International Relations Office, PUT). Even though PUMS has over half less students than PUT in total, it has almost three times more international students than PUT. The reasons for it being the following:

– medical studies are far more popular among international students than technical studies,
– there are fewer medical programs available for foreigners than technical studies,
– PUMS has a far longer history than PUT in recruiting international students (almost 30 years), being the first University in Poland to offer English-language medical studies for students.

In terms of agents who recruit students, PUMS largely relies on them when it comes to admissions from their top 5 countries. In the case of PUT, the admission largely concentrates on university's own efforts to recruit students via online promotion and participation in educational fairs. Current students and alumni play also an important role in the admissions process.

Florida International University (FIU) is a public research university located in Miami, Florida. It is a top tier research institution founded in 1965. FIU is part of the state university system of Florida. Currently, FIU has 55,000 students of which 4,700 are international (Office of Institutional Research, FIU). They mostly study at the College of Engineering and College of Business. FIU actively recruits international students through the Office of International Admissions via direct recruitment (online promotion and educational fairs) and agents. In the U.S. News & World Report rankings, FIU is ranked #218 in National Universities, #12 in Top Performers in Social Mobility and #63 as Most Innovative Schools.

The above table presents the top 5 countries where international students come from in each university. Obviously, these are totally different countries of origin, which makes the students' domestication process quite different. PUMS has the majority of international students from developed countries, whereas PUT's international students come largely from developing countries, one of the reasons being the amount of tuition fee that is, on average, five times higher for PUMS compared to PUT. At the same time, FIU is a natural choice for many students from Latin

[1] Perspektywy ranking is one of the most important academic rankings in Poland.

America because of its location, language (Spanish is practically a second language in Florida) and proximity. Students from Canada, China and India are also very highly represented in the students' demographics of the University.

Table 1. Top destinations for international students at PUMS, PUT and FIU respectively

	TOP 5 COUNTRIES				
UNIVERSITY	**1st**	**2nd**	**3rd**	**4th**	**5th**
PUMS	Taiwan	USA	Canada	Norway	UK
PUT	Ukraine	India	Turkey	Belarus	Bangladesh
FIU	Venezuela	Colombia	China	Brazil	Argentina

Source: Center for Medical Education in English, PUMS; International Relations Office, PUT and Office of Analysis and Information Management, FIU.

FIU offers scholarships that are mostly merit-based. Students can review the scholarship opportunities through a scholarship search engine (fiu.academicworks.com) where all available scholarships are listed. PUT and PUMS are generally not offering any special scholarship programs, as the expanded system of scholarships is not something that Polish universities would offer to international students or even domestic students. Only the best students would receive some small amount of money for obtaining a high GPA after the first year of studies and beyond. There is also a possibility for students in a difficult financial situation to receive social scholarships from a university Rector. However, international students in Poland can apply for scholarship programs at the national level (e.g. at the Ministry of Science and Higher Education or the Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange). Whereas, at FIU students have access to a variety of scholarships. Many scholarships are directly correlated to the discipline of study. International students can also find opportunities to apply for the out-of-state tuition waivers through Florida Linkage Institutes.

As far as living costs in Poland are concerned, they are still lower in comparison to other European countries (especially Western countries) and the USA. That makes studying in Poland attractive. Also, the majority of the young generation speaks English, which is also an important factor to attract international students. Additionally, the city of Poznań was recently ranked 3rd as the best city to study in Poland by ikalkulator.pl portal (ikalkulator.pl). Poznań owes its high position to the high level of teaching as well as the opportunities that the city offers to students. When it comes to the USA, the cost of living in Florida is lower than the national average. Students have many possibilities to find appropriate accommodation. Miami is a vibrant city, very popular among the younger generation. South Florida is a very cosmopolitan region and a hub for many industries, therefore, it attracts many international students.

The conducted analysis is focused on three key areas of adaptation to the local environment which are carried out in all the three Universities, such as:
– orientation days specifically targeted at international students,
– high-quality students' services,
– successful Buddy programs.

Administrators and faculty should support international students to acclimate to the school and its dynamics. **International students' orientation** is the first step that introduces students to the academic and social life of a foreign university. This event allows the students to realize that they are not alone and it presents an opportunity to meet domestic and international students from other countries.

Poznan University of Medical Sciences organizes a 4-day event for its international students normally at the end of August prior to the start of the classes. It commences with a welcome word from the University authorities and students' organization representatives. As a custom, PUMS invites, on a yearly basis, one of its successful alumnus to deliver a welcoming speech to freshmen. One of the days is dedicated to open hours organized by dormitory residential advisors, head of dormitories, psychological counselling team, representatives of the town hall as well as admissions agents who are also invited to participate in the orientation days by the University authorities. In the case of PUMS, to the majority of the freshmen, agents are probably the only familiar faces that they recognize once entering the premises of the University. Orientation is also the best time to familiarize the freshmen with administrative procedures and structures at the University. PUMS usually also invites representatives of diplomatic corps from the countries which are mostly represented among incoming students. Campus and city tours are obviously an unmissable part of every orientation, and PUMS is no exception here. Additionally, PUMS also organizes a book sale and a freshman party at one of Poznan's clubs in order to further domesticate the students and make them feel welcome.

Poznan University of Technology also organizes a 4-day event for freshmen. Due to double intake throughout the academic year, PUMS prepares its orientation for international students twice a year – in September and February. Apart from the usual welcome part from the University authorities and students' organization representatives, as well as obligatory campus and city tours, PUT stresses the importance of sports as an integration element and presenting the international students local culture and customs that are one of the most important domestication factors. Therefore, PUT organizes a sports day during which international students get the opportunity to play volleyball, basketball or go bowling. One of the orientation days is dedicated totally to Polish culture and customs. However, PUT also organizes a separate cultural week event, but this time it is not only addressed to its international students, but also to foreign teachers and international guests. It is organized on a yearly basis, from Monday to Saturday, and includes a series of lectures, presentations, movie shows, quizzes, games and other activities. It covers a variety of topics from famous Poles, through Polish holidays and traditions, to

Polish cuisine and cinema. One of the evenings is dedicated to St. Andrew's night event which is an old Polish tradition – a magic evening with candles and future telling. The international students and other participants also get an opportunity to be a part of Poznan Croissant Live show during a visit to Saint Martin Croissant Museum where they are able to bake famous croissants themselves and taste them too.

Florida International University organizes International Students Orientation that is a mandatory event for all international students entering the school. During orientation international students learn about the school and meet new peers. They familiarize themselves with what FIU offers, from academic support to personal and professional development. Students learn about their rights and duties starting from the immigration requirements to class registration and schedule. Students have access to the counseling services, various students' organizations and more. FIU organizes international week when students from all over the world showcase their heritage and culture. There are also many students' clubs. FIU has a very comprehensive emerge program for all students so the international students can acclimate together with their peers.

Table 2. Needs, activities and results of orientation days at PUMS, PUT and FIU respectively

COMMON	**Needs**	**Activities**	**Results**
	familiarize students with a university, its structure and administrative procedures as well as with the local community	welcoming events campus tours city tours open hours	students feel welcome and overcome the first adjustment phase
PUT			
	acculturalization stress-relief	Polish culture day	Domestication
	psychological stress-relief	sports day	peer support and socialization
PUMS			
	obtaining students' essentials	booksale	peer support and socialization
	having fun	freshman party	socialization
	alienation-free mindset	meetings with diplomatic corps representatives and admissions agents	foreignization
FIU			
	stress-relief	Global Peer Mentor Program	peer support and socialization
	co-national cultural identification	International Students Week	foreignization
	social support	campus events / sports activities	domestication

The authors' analysis.

It is not uncommon that international students feel stressed because the adjustment process can make them change their values, beliefs and behaviors (Johnson et al., 2018, 1866). The opportunity to start an academic career with comprehensive international students orientation is a good starting point for students to begin adjusting to the new environment. It is also imperative for a university to provide international students with **high-quality students' services** that would help them to adapt to the new environment as quickly as possible.

PUMS within its Counselling and Psychological Services (CAPS) offers counseling and psychological support to international students. They mainly deal with students' problems with cultural adaptation and learning issues, coping with stress, personal life crises and others. There is also a special advisor dedicated only to international students that is a mediator between students and the Dean regarding academic issues, social matters and general problem-solving.

At PUT the counselling is organized in a different way. The International Relations' Office staff offer help and counsel for international students in order to arrange for them an English-speaking doctor or psychologist appointment or support them in any other way needed. The office also closely cooperates with Poznań Town Hall in order to support foreigners with the help of Migrant Info Point that, among other activities, organizes consultations for foreigners, integration and multicultural events. It also offers, in cooperation with Poznan Town Hall, AIRBAG support program that helps fight discrimination based on color, ethnic origin or religious belief.

The Office of International Students and Scholar Services at FIU serves as a hub for international students' needs. FIU offers several programs that can help students to adapt to the new academic and personal life in the United States. Foreign students can access the following services: The International Peer Mentor Program, International Students Club, Department of Campus Life and FIU Counseling and Psychological Services Center (Cultural Adjustment, FIU). The Office of International Students Services offers students tips on cross-cultural adjustments and cares about the overall students' well-being while studying at FIU.

Another group that provides support for incoming international students are current, upper-class students, foreign or local, that are volunteers in **universities' Buddy programs**. For incoming students, the Buddy program is an effective step in making their transition journey from high school to university easier. Not only does it help the new students to settle down quickly into a university environment, but also it provides them with much needed academic support (Alharthi, 2020, 124). The Buddy program is a great opportunity for local students to mingle with foreign students, building future friendships. It also enables local students to go through a process of internationalization at home.

Table 3. Adaptability Phases of Foreign Students at PUMS, PUT and FIU respectively

	ACADEMIC ADJUSTMENT	SOCIO-CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT	PSYCHOLOGICAL ADJUSTMENT
PUMS	Students' advisor	National Students' organizations Buddy Program	Counselling and Psychological Services (CAPS)
PUT	Faculty involvement	Intercultural Café Culture Week Sports Day Buddy Program	Individual help in arranging psychological support in English
FIU	Faculty involvement Tutoring centers	International Peer Mentor Program Students Ambassadors	Counseling and Psychological Services Center

The authors' analysis.

Buddy programs work both at PUT and PUMS. The idea is to promote cultural exchange and international understanding and help to integrate current students and freshmen in order to make the transition for the latter ones as smooth as possible. Buddies would pick up new students from the airport/railway station, help to find their way on and around campus (downtown, shops, university life, cycling and public transportation, students' services, etc.). As for FIU, many Colleges there, also have corresponding offices that are designed to help their international students' population. The College of Business at FIU created the Office of Global Initiates that launched an Ambassador program (similar to the Buddy program) that connects current international students with the new ones. Such collaboration creates a strong bond and offers students much needed support.

5. CONCLUSIONS

All in all, the adjustment plays a vital role in the international students' adaptation process. It is to students' benefit to adapt and understand the local culture and academic dynamics of the institution where they study. It allows students to emerge into the culture without losing their own identity entirely. By offering a well-prepared orientation and a variety of supportive services to international students, it is possible to make them feel safe and protected. They adapt better to the academic structure and requirements. Students who become familiar with the culture and local society thrive in the new environment. A future study should analyze what is the success rate of the students who pass through the adaptation process in the host institution. Although all the mentioned services are offered to every international student, not all the students take full advantage of them. Many students still cannot easily adapt to the new environment and it is imperative for each higher institution to reach out to them.

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STRATEGIE ZWIĄZANE Z POWITANIEM STUDENTÓW ZAGRANICZNYCH I ICH ADAPTACJĄ NA TERENIE UNIWERSYTETU I WŚRÓD SPOŁECZNOŚCI LOKALNEJ NA PRZYKŁADZIE UCZELNI Z POLSKI I USA

Streszczenie

W obliczu postępującej globalizacji w sektorze szkolnictwa wyższego każda uczelnia musi mieć jasno określoną strategię pozyskiwania i utrzymania studentów zagranicznych. Bardzo często te strategie są różne w zależności od regionu i kraju, z którego pochodzą studenci. Niektórzy studenci potrzebują bardziej osobistego traktowania, podczas gdy inni wolą mniej zaangażowane podejście. Dla części z nich przeprowadzka do innego kraju lub

nawet na inny kontynent może być bardzo stresującym doświadczeniem. Studenci zagraniczni muszą nie tylko skonfrontować się z nowym akademickim rygorem, ale również w wielu wypadkach z nowym otoczeniem i kulturą. Uniwersytety, w których studenci zagraniczni czują się mile widziani, znacznie przyczyniają się do ich sukcesu akademickiego. Studenci zagraniczni korzystający ze wsparcia w postaci usług przeznaczonych specjalnie dla nich mogą łatwiej dostosować się do lokalnej społeczności. Uniwersytety muszą stale pracować nad strategiami ułatwiającymi studentom przystosowanie do środowiska uniwersyteckiego i zapoznanie z procedurami administracyjnymi oraz życiem studenckim. Dostęp do odpowiednich usług, które zaspokajają potrzeby zagranicznych studentów, świadczy o tym, że takie zaangażowane podejście prowadzi do zadowalających rezultatów i ułatwia adaptację do nowej uczelni i nowej społeczności. W artykule przeprowadzono analizę najlepszych praktyk, takich jak dni adaptacyjne dla studentów zagranicznych, wysokiej jakości usługi na rzecz studentów i skuteczny program wsparcia ze strony lokalnych studentów (tzw. „Buddy program"). Takie podejście zapewnia najlepsze wyniki. Analiza pokazuje, że studenci zagraniczni lepiej adaptują się do struktur i wymagań akademickich w wyniku aktywnego korzystania z oferowanych usług. Taka strategia pozwala studentom zagranicznym jak najlepiej wykorzystać doświadczenia w zakresie internacjonalizacji.

Słowa kluczowe: studenci zagraniczni, edukacja międzynarodowa, przystosowanie kulturowe, strategie przystosowawcze