

## **Coping Mechanisms of Foreign Students in Baguio City: An Ethnographic Approach**

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### **Abstract**

*Abstract: Background: Different situations call for different ways of coping and adjustment. This research aims to explore on the different coping mechanisms utilized by foreign students studying in Baguio city. With over 61,000 foreign students flocking the country and over 5000 living in Baguio City, stress and coping mechanism can be defined by a myriad of factors. Methodology: Ethnographic qualitative research design. Participants included foreign students studying in Baguio city. Data gathering tools used included focused group discussions, semi structured interviews and participant observation which were collated through field notes and transcript files. Focused group discussion, semi structured interviews and participant observation were done in participating schools and academies. Results: the themes communication, learning the English Language, environment, homesickness and discrimination emerged as the sources of stress while the themes, getting enough rest and sleep, leisure activities, Active participation in sports and exercise, communicating with significant others, drinking and traveling. Conclusions: Stress is greatly influenced by the host country's culture which includes the physical environment, people, communication patterns and ways of living and by internal factors and issues from their own culture. Coping mechanisms employed by most foreign students include social activities and interactions within their conational or with other international students. Maladaptive coping mechanisms are viewed as temporarily relief to the stresses experienced.*

**Keywords: Coping mechanism, ethnography, foreign students, coping style, Baguio.**

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### **I. Background**

Often times during stressful situations individuals employ coping strategies when they feel threatened, and the purpose is to ease one's anxiety. There are many different types of coping strategies that are often used by people. The use of a strategy is often dependent upon on the situation surrounding the person, their personality and one's own personal preference of how they may be able to decrease their own anxiety (Burger, 2000). We sometimes refer to a person's general approach to handle stress as their "Coping style". There are many complex challenges facing students travelling to other countries to undertake university or other educational courses, particularly if their home country culture is strikingly different from the host country culture. It is not surprising that the physical and psychological well-being of students, as well as their academic performance, can be affected by these adjustment challenges (Ward, Bochner&Furnham, 2001). These relatively short-term visitors to a new culture (or sojourners), who come for purposes other than permanent settlement, are likely to experience 'culture shock' (Oberg, 1960) resulting from the sudden loss of all familiar signs and symbols of everyday life.

Factors that influence sojourners' adjustment to the host culture include background variables such as the difference between the culture of origin and host culture, language proficiency, gender, age, education level, status, self-esteem, and prior cross-cultural experience. In addition, there are situational variables such as length of stay, the information and support provided, social interaction with host nationals, networking with co-culturals, academic or professional performance and physical health. Length of stay is an important dimension in the process of adjustment for sojourners such as international students, with discomfort usually reduces as the new culture becomes more familiar (Adler, 1975; Ward, Okura, Kennedy & Kojima, 1998; Ward &Rana-Dueba, 1999).

Another variable held to be of particular importance to the process of adjustment is the cultural distance between the sojourner's culture of origin and the host culture (Ward *et al.*, 2001), with greater distance implying more difficulty in adjustment. This is affirmed by a study conducted among japanese foreign students, wherein the greater the cultural distance resulted to a greater psychological distress (Fukurawa, T, 2004). The degree of social interaction that the sojourner establishes within the host country is also considered an important variable in adjustment, with stronger social interaction being seen as conducive to a more positive process of adaptation

(Church, 1982). While achieving a satisfying level of social interaction with host nationals is undoubtedly a challenging process, it does provide international students with the opportunity for developing an understanding of and adaptation to the new culture (Li & Gasser, 2005). The level of social interaction between sojourners and host nationals has generally been found to be low, with sojourners wanting to have more interaction with locals than they experience (Church, 1982; James & Devlin, 2001; Daroesman, Looi, & Butler, 2005; Rosenthal, Russell, & Thomson, 2006). Berry (1997) argues that sojourners who adopt an integrative acculturation strategy, valuing both the original and the new cultures and maintaining relations with both groups, will experience a low level of adjustment stress. On the other hand, those who maintain a relationship with their own culture only - who do not value or relate to the new, keeping themselves separate from it - will experience high levels of acculturation stress.

The above study is supported by this local research which states that, existing difference in culture makes it difficult for foreign students to mingle with the Filipinos. Newly arrived international students suddenly find themselves in “relational deficit,” if not social isolation, at a time when they need more than the usual support (Sawir, Marginson, et. al., 2007). Language barrier is one factor that hinders them from conversation with Filipinos due to differences in accent and vocabularies. On the other hand, one of the most common difficulty of foreign students is hygiene practices among Filipinos. International students find it hard to cope with the Filipino health habits hence they feel inadequate and insecure leading them to isolate themselves. If the need to belong is not satisfied, negative feelings are generated, including loneliness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Osterman (2001, p. 327), remarks that “being accepted, included or welcomed leads to positive emotions such as happiness, elation, commitment and calm.” On the other hand, “being rejected excluded or ignored leads to often intense negative feelings of anxiety, depression, grief, jealousy and loneliness.”

The medium of instruction, pedagogical techniques, instructional focus and classroom interaction are school related factors which greatly affect the students’ academic and social performance (Sicat, 2011). Moreover, foreign student failure to achieve their goals like any other students creates a large amount of stress. These international students experience pressure to succeed from their families, sponsoring agencies, or even the communities from their home country (Alazzi et. al., 2006). These factors are known to be conflicts or stressors in which the level of resilience present in each person determines the capability to absorb and deal with it.

Despite volumes of reading material; self help guide; Talk shows; lectures; on line programs and literatures on how to positively cope with stresses in life to maintain mental health, there are still a lot of people who do not cope well with life stressors. While there are different contributory factors which leads to a poor coping of an individual, this behavior may lead to heavy repercussion in life.

## **II. Methods**

### **Research Design**

The researchers utilized a qualitative type of study to determine the common experiences of foreign students here in Baguio City that resulted to be a stressor in their everyday life, and to identify the common strategies they use to deal with it. A qualitative research has been described according to disciplinary traditions such as anthropology, psychology and sociology. However, it should be noted that not all qualitative research has link to any of the research tradition but simply refer to the study as a descriptive qualitative study. This is the concern of the study, to simply focus on investigating a phenomenon in an in-depth and holistic fashion. (Polit and Beck, 2006).

### **Participants**

A quota sampling of 12 participants were gathered through random-convenience sampling. The following criteria should be met for a participant to be included in the study: a minimum age of 18, currently a student, mentally capable to answer the questions and is able to understand and speak in English. The researchers limit the age to a minimum of 18 because this is the legal age to give consent and they can express more their feelings because this is the common stage where stressful events in life are occurring, particularly in school, families and peers. The foreign students were from diverse groups of Korea, Africa, and America. The researchers invited participants of various cultures to be able to explore the differences in their responses, since each has different personalities and ways on dealing with stressors. Some of the foreign students have been staying in Baguio City for more than a year, while some of them have been for weeks or months. The participants of the study were foreign students from Saint Louis University and HELP English Language Academy.

### **Questionnaire**

The researchers relied on one-on-one semi-structured interview, mini focus group discussions consist of a minimum of 3-8 participants per session and observation.

#### *Semi-structured interviews*

One-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted by the researchers. The semi-structured questions follow an open-ended approach based on the use of an interview guide. In the semi-structured interviewing, the researchers elicit answers fully from the perspective of the study participant, and attempt to gain a greater understanding of the context and meaning of the responses through various forms of probing.

#### *Focus group discussions*

Focus group discussions were also conducted wherein a purposively selected set of participants gather to discuss issues and concerns based on a list of key themes drawn up by the researchers. It was made in an informal discussion with open-ended guided questions to keep track of the discussion. We conducted four focus group discussions composed of students with attributes distinct from each other to detect patterns and trends across groups. Each session has a range of 3 – 8 participants, small enough for everyone to have opportunity to share insights and yet large enough to provide diversity of perceptions. Focus group discussions were held at accessible places where participants are comfortable, free of distractions, and which privacy concerns were assured.

#### *Observation*

Observations were done under natural settings and done unobtrusively to prevent reactivity of participants being observed. The foreign students in Baguio city were observed during free time at the University and outside the school premises like in the establishments. The researchers also visited an institution from which all students were foreigners and a careful, objective note was also recorded in a field notebook after informal conversations.

Through observation, data obtained served as a check against participants' subjective reporting (from interviews and focus group discussions) of what they believe and do. This also helped us, not only to understand data collected through other methods, but also in designing questions for those methods that will give us the best understanding of the event being studied.

A semi-structured questionnaire was used in the interview or focus group discussions. The following questions were as follows:

- a) What is the common source of your stress?
- b) How do you cope up with your stress?

### **III. Data Collection & Analysis**

The researchers conducted a self-awareness to identify personal biases regarding the research problem and set aside these biases before conducting the study. Before gathering data, a verbal consent was obtained from the foreign students included in the study. The content of the verbal consent includes the purpose of the study, expectation to a participant, duration of the interview; the confidentiality issues, the fact that participation is voluntary and that one can withdraw at any time with no negative consequences. The confidentiality was made assured by protecting their identities, ensuring them that the data they have provided will never be linked to them. The researchers used the last names of theorists for the pseudonyms of the participants. All interviews and focus group discussions were facilitated in a place where participants are comfortable, free of distractions and privacy was assured.

In analyzing the data, we read through the field notes, interview and focus group transcripts that were collected during the interview, focus group discussions and observations. We describe, interpret and understand in considerable depth to be able to sort out the data. During the sorting out of data we have gathered, we were able to identify patterns, connections, similarities, or contrastive points in the data. Through this, we were able to formulate themes and sub-categorize each theme. The identified themes and sub-themes were repeatedly analyzed and re-evaluated between and among our group. The final themes that were identified for the study were as follows: communication, environment, food, homesickness, discrimination.

### **IV. Results**

Data collection was done through semi-structured focused group interviews coupled with field notes. After extensive analysis of the data, the following themes were observed:

- 1. Communication**
- 2. Learning the English Language**
- 3. Environment**
- 4. Homesickness**
- 5. Discrimination**

The stated themes emerged when the participants are asked about the events, issues or things that they viewed stressful during their stay as a sojourner in the country. Following this inquiry by the researchers was the

question on how they (participants) cope with the said sources of stress. This then opened the topic on the different coping mechanisms they utilize to deal with or relieve their stress. From this inquiry the following themes then emerged:

1. **Getting enough rest and sleep**
2. **Leisure activities**
3. **Active participation in sports and exercise**
4. **Communicating with significant others**
5. **Drinking**
6. **Traveling**

Under each of these themes are also subthemes.

12 respondents participated in this research. To protect their identity and also to ensure confidentiality, the researchers assigned codenames to the participants. The codenames were derived from behavioral theorists, and only their family names were used. The male respondents were named after the following male behavioral theorists: Anderson, Freire, Frankl, Ilych, Fromm, Bandura while the female respondents were named after female behavioral theorists: Horney, Ainsworth, Kubler Ross, Roy. All of the respondents are currently studying in Baguio City; the respondents are composed of Koreans, Africans, and Fil-Americans. Their ages range from 20 as the youngest and 30 years of age as the oldest. To protect their identities the researchers, opt not to divulge their current location and the length of time they had been studying

### **Communication**

Communication is an essential part in our everyday life. Most of sojourners find it hard to communicate mostly if they are in a non- English-speaking country or if they are from one. It was seen that some foreign students experience hardship while trying to communicate using English and so they have to apply some sort of sign language when they want to put a point across. Communication is one of the sources of stress among foreign students. The theme communication is further regrouped into the subtheme language barrier.

#### **Subtheme: Language Barrier**

##### *During Formal Class Interactions*

Inside the class, the foreign students particularly the Filipino-Americans and Africans, they are able to speak and understand English; however, they find it difficult and become a stress to them when they cannot understand the discussion especially when professors tend to elaborate the topic using a Filipino dialect. In order for the foreign students to get track on the discussion, they try to overcome the stress by asking their seatmate to translate it or they just do a self-study pertaining to the topic they didn't understand.

*"Sometimes I'm lost in the discussion especially when the teacher already uses a Filipino dialect in expounding the topic. So, I usually ask my seatmate to translate it for me."*

- C. Roy

*"When the instructor uses Tagalog to explain further the discussed topic, I opt not to interrupt requesting the use of English but instead I do personal readings with regards to the topic."*

- E. Fromm

##### *During Casual Interactions*

During free time, foreign students seldom interact with the Filipino classmates. Especially for the Filipino-Americans, they fluently speak in English and they find it hard for the Filipinos to sustain a long conversation with them, hence the researchers had also observed that they usually isolate themselves from Filipino classmates or go with their other foreigner friends. Sometimes, the Filipino-Americans also used Filipino-English dictionaries to learn the local language. They also practice Filipino language through informal lessons from their Filipino aunt, watch Filipino movies as well as speaking in Tagalog with their siblings.

*"I use Filipino-English dictionary to learn your dialect. I also have informal lecture with my Filipino aunt during my weekends. Me and my sister practice speaking Tagalog together and also we watch Filipino movies."*

- C. Roy

For the African students, they are usually assertive in requesting to their Filipino friends to translate the terms they didn't understand. For other African students, they keep silent, ignore it and just go with the flow of conversation.

*"My problem is that when talking with my friends, they use Tagalog and so I always request them to translate what they are saying to English."*

- C. Cox

*"I usually ignore what they are saying in Tagalog."*

- A. Bandura

For the Koreans, during informal conversations with Filipinos, it was observed that they talk little and seldom initiate an interaction. For them to cope up with the stress of speaking in English, they usually interact more with their Korean friends. For some they tend to be alone and just play on their mobile phones, or stay in their room and watch movies.

### **Learning English**

The researchers found that learning English per se is a significant source of stress among foreign students, and another source of their stress are the institutional system, rules, and policies that govern their earning of the language.

As stated by Anderson,

Anderson: *"Learning English, memorizing Voca and pattern is very stressful"*.

This is then affirmed by Horney and Freire,

Horney: *"Yes English, learning English is very stressful for me"*, Freire: *"Me too."*

The researchers also found that students spend late hours of the night studying English, as Freire and Anderson stated,

Freire: *"I normally sleep at 12 o'clock"*

Anderson: *"For me I sleep around 1 a.m."*

One participant shared an implication of learning English; this implication adds pressure, which then becomes a source of stress. As Freire stated,

Freire: *"We need to learn English to get a good job. that is a pressure, to find a job is stressful for me"*

The researchers also found that the participants have to study a given number of vocabularies per day. As Ilych stated,

Ilych: *"learning new vocabulary. We have to learn less than 100 per day that is very stressful for us"*

### **Environment**

The environment is also a described source of stress among sojourners in the city. From the data obtained, the researchers further regrouped this theme into four occurring subthemes. These include institutional learning system, food, people, living conditions, and pollution.

#### **Subtheme: Institutional Learning System**

The researchers also found another source of stress, and this is the type of educational or learning system in the institution they are in. Institutional Learning System is also a source of stress among foreign students, as Horney stated,

Horney: *"Getting up early in the morning. We have to attend the curfew system at 7 a.m. It is very tiring and very stressful, since we sleep very late at night studying."*

Anderson described as a very stressful event stating:

Anderson: *"it is very stressful; we do not get enough rest and sleep for the next day"*

Aside from the curfew system, the participants also identify other policies that they deem stressful. Horney stated,

Horney: *"to me curfew and penalty system is stressful."*

Other participants, on the other hand, seemingly have an opposing view on the learning system. Freire stated.

Freire: *"Ah yes but this system is not strict or less strict than before I guess."*

#### **Subtheme: Food**

The researchers found that food is also a source of stress among foreign students. Anderson stated,

Anderson: *"I think the food is salty I miss Korean food. I tried inihawnapusit (shows notebook) in SM. It is quite salty, I can't eat much actually"*.

Other students yearn for their own native food, even if they are widely available in the city. Especially those prepared by their significant others, as Horney stated,

Horney: *"I really want to eat Korean food. The food was good but I miss my mom's food"*

#### **Subtheme: People**

Included as a subtheme under the main theme Environment, the researchers found that people also become a significant source of stress among foreign students in the city. The presence and the rampancy of thieves, who steal personal belongings, become a significant source of stress among the sojourners. They described these people as "dangerous" as in the statement of Horney,

Horney: *"I am, sorry to say but there are many thieves, they steal cellphone, wallet, money. It's too dangerous, so it is stressful."*

Certain people's attitude, action and behavior stress the sojourners are also an identified stressor. Horney stated,

Horney: *to me the problem is we are Korean, so they do the same to Americans? As in thieves? They are good and kind in the shop but in the street they change.*

### **Subtheme: Pollution**

Another subtheme identified under the main theme is the pollution. For foreign students, the city's environment (particularly the air) is polluted. As Freire stated,

Freire: *"For me bad, the air is bad"*

Erikson also affirmed the statement,

Erikson: *"pollution is very bad, I feel like dying."*

### **Homesickness**

Homesickness is also an identified source of stress among foreign students. Almost all of the research participants agreed that they experience homesickness, and it is a source of stress for them. Anderson and Freud stated,

Anderson: *"yes we feel very homesick we miss our friends and most especially our family."*

Freud: *"I always feel home sick and sometimes do not want to go out since I feel lazy. I wish I was at home."*

### **Discrimination**

Another stress that most foreigners experience here is discrimination they get from the locals. As one Freud stated,

Freud: *"my source of stress is when I walk on the streets and the locals mock me since am not of their skin colour and this prompts them to treat me who are of different origin unfairly." "But I just ignore them since I do not understand the dialect spoken here well."*

East or west home is best. Most Africans experience discrimination due to the belief that they are poor. This is a big stress to most African students who come all the way here to study. This was clearly stated by Bandura,

Bandura: *"Whenever I walk in the streets, most of the people laugh and say that a black person is walking here...then giggle". "This sometimes makes me feel bad but at the same time I feel sorry for the person laughing at me."*

After identifying the different themes that reflect the different stressors experienced by foreign students living in Baguio City, the following coping mechanisms are then identified. These coping mechanisms are once again regrouped to major themes. The researchers opted to identify the stressors first as these would help better understand the coping mechanisms they utilize. The researchers believe that in order for the whole picture to be appreciated, it is necessary to first identify what causes their stress followed by the measures they employ to deal with it.

### **Getting Enough Rest and Sleep**

For some foreign students, rest and sleep is their way of dealing and relieving stress. Anderson and Horney stated,

Anderson: *"No drinking, just sleep a lot and rest."*

Horney: *"sleeping is the best I think to release stress than drink."*

### **Doing Leisure Activities**

Leisure activities such as watching, shopping, going out to see the city, eating and drinking outside are considered coping mechanisms. Ilych stated,

Ilych: *"We usually go to Baguio city and buy clothes, have dinner."*

For other foreign students, dealing with stress employs simple activities such as watching. Horney and Erikson stated,

Horney: *"I like to watch T.V., movies"*

Erikson: *"We can't go out on weekdays. We can only go out on weekends. So we just watch movie in room"*

### **Sports and Exercise**

Sports and exercise are also identified coping mechanisms. Kubler Ross, Anderson and Frankl stated,

Kublerross: *"Play; go out, exercise, running, walk around."*

Anderson: *"Bowling play table tennis, and sometimes basketball."*

Frankl: *'sometimes go out, eat and exercise'*

### **Communicating with Significant Others**

Another coping mechanism utilized by foreign students is communication with their significant others. Ainsworth and Kubler Ross stated,

Ainsworth: *"I call my parents (shows mobile phone)."*

Kubler Ross: *"I always call parents and friends, send text message."*

### **Drinking**

Drinking alcohol is also identified by the researchers as a coping mechanism or a way to relieve stress. A participant described drinking as a stress reliever and a method that is a part of their culture. Ilych stated,

Ilych: *“Drinking is Korean culture to remove stress.”*

Other foreign students also identified drinking to cope with stress, but they also stated their own opinions on how drinking relieves stress. Some foreign students describe drinking as a temporary relief while some state that drinking leads to another stress. Kubler Ross, Erikson and Frankl stated,

Kubler Ross: *“for that moment only, it relieves stress.”*

Frankl: *“No stress is relieved but sometimes”*

Erikson: *“sometimes but not always”*

### **Traveling to other places**

Another identified coping mechanism is traveling to other places. Ilych stated,

Ilych: *“Visiting other place, hundred islands when we are stressed, it is a good way to deal with stress.”*

## **V. Discussion**

A sojourner's life in a foreign land is indeed characterized by a dynamic experience of culture and learning. These experiences can include positive responses such as learning, positive adaptation or coping, cultural acceptance, cultural negotiation, establishment of new social connections, and acquisition of new skills. Such experiences can also bring about negative responses such as maladaptation, frustration, culture shock, and finally stress.

A life in a foreign land could be a significant source of stress among people particularly students. This life requires them to step out of a zone of comfort, to a way of life that could be entirely new to them. Adjusting to beliefs, practices, way of living, environment, people, etc., can cause significant psychological and physical stress, requiring them to utilize certain coping mechanisms. Even the coping mechanisms utilized can be changed by the immersion in the unknown environment as a part of the exposure and stay in the foreign land. Such experiences are also reflected in certain studies reveal that foreign students face the same challenges such of language difficulties, isolation, acculturation and marginalization. Such challenges then cause psychological stress among them (Natsuko, K.2010).

From the data provided by the participants in the study, the researchers were able to identify and regroup the themes accordingly. The researchers first probed on the participants' source of stress. This helps the researchers further understand the coping mechanisms used, and gives an in depth and holistic understanding of the foreign students' overall situation. Five themes emerged as the sojourner's sources of stress. These are Learning English, communication, environment, homesickness, and discrimination.

### **Communication and Language Barrier**

Language barriers may generate both psychological harm and a tangible threat to international students whose first language is not English (Pedersen, 1991; Wehrly, 1988). From the data obtained, language barrier is seen to be one of the emerging issues among foreign students. Language barrier is present on both sides, on the side of the foreign student and also among the people of the host country. For some foreign students, the feeling of isolation is experienced when people of the host country speak using the vernacular. This is also an event that influences class room interaction and dynamics especially when a local professor gives lectures and at times speaks in the local language rather than in English.

International students have to adjust to a new culture and educational system which can be very different from what they were used to in their home countries. They have to learn new ways of acting according to the new cultural norms and many must communicate well in the language of the host country. These learning processes take time, and the longer these students stay in the host culture, the more acculturated they become (Flannery et al., 2001). However, they face considerable difficulty in making new adjustments initially due to lack of social support and communication problems. This may easily lead to acculturative stress (Pederson, 1991). Interviews showed that the inability to establish interpersonal relationships resulted in slow social integration. In terms of Anderson's model this is seen as coming up against certain obstacles in their cross-cultural encounters. The student response leads to either furthering their integration or stagnation.

#### *Learning the English Language*

Learning the English Language also emerged as one of the themes since a number of foreign students come to the city to study the English language; these foreign students are primarily composed of Korean nationals. Korean nationals are considered to be among the ESL (English as A Second Language) or EFL (English as a Foreign Language) speakers. EFL and ESL are terms that describe foreign nationals whose language of instruction is not English. Korean nationals choose to study in the country because 93.5% of Filipinos can speak English and it is the language widely used in teaching and business transactions (Magno, C. 2010).

From the data gathered, learning English presented as one of the causes of stress among these foreign nationals. They are required to study different vocabularies and sentence patterns daily. As described by the respondents, they study over 100 vocabularies and sentence pattern per day, and study until the wee hours of the night. This serves as their daily routine. English proficiency is an identified stressor for foreign students especially those who consider English a secondary language (Hwang, K., Wang, M. 2011)

Based on the data, studying and learning English presents as a stressor, but further data analysis show that there are certain factors that can be add to this source of stress. The researchers termed this as the “implications for learning.” As some of the respondents stated, learning English is deemed important to finding a job in their own home country. These nationals study English at the present to gain the necessary competence they need in order to secure a job in the future. For Korean nationals, premium education (Magno, C.2010), and job security are very significant life events that every national should strive for. Such factors serve as challenges of these foreign nationals and further pressing difficulty to these challenges is the economic crisis their country is facing. As the researchers analyze the data gathered, the aim to achieve a good standing in society amidst the economic difficulties adds pressure to the already difficult learning process of an ESL foreign student.

#### *The Sojourn Environment*

Living in a foreign land means a life that is entirely different from the way of life the migrant has come to know and live. The more the sojourner find the environment different, the more stress is experienced. This may be due to the gap found between the sojourner’s culture and the host country’s culture. If more differences are present as compared to similarities, a greater adjustment from the sojourner is required (Ward *et al.*, 2001). And this presents a significant source of stress. When familiar things or events are lost due to the exposure to the different environment or culture loss of a sense of “comfort” or “security” is also experienced. For this the foreign student experiences anxiety and eventually stress.

From the data obtained, certain aspects in the environment were identified as sources of stress. Among foreign students, the physical environment, the people, food and the living conditions cause them stress. The big difference in the physical environment between the host country and the sojourner’s own country was observed to be a primary issue. Most of the participants stated that pollution in the city was a problem for them. This may be due to the fact that both countries differ greatly when it comes to economic state. The sojourner’s home country is already a developed country, while the host country (the Philippines) is still struggling economically and is therefore categorized as a developing country. Developing countries are characterized by economic struggles and debt crises. These economic struggles put a significant pressure on nature and the environment (George, S. 1988). In a developing country, the struggle for development most often leads to the destruction of the environment. This struggle to development also pays little to no attention to resolving and preventing pollution and ecologic degradation. Hence, we see that pollution remains to be a major problem in developing countries, while in developed countries such as the United States, Korea, Japan, etc. such issues are resolved.

This difference or gap seen and experienced by foreign students can spark a “culture shock” response, and this difference or gap also cause them to employ adjustment measures to cope up with such difference. International students are immediately immersed into a new culture that requires adjustment to new role demands. (Arthur, N. 2004)

Another major subtheme that emerged from the environment is the people. The host country’s people, their attitude, behavior and action towards the sojourners are factors that can cause significant stress. From the data obtained, foreign students living in this city find the rampancy of unlawful people in the city as a stressor. The increasing cases of thieves stealing money and personal belongings are perceived as dangers and threats to their welfare. Foreign students also perceive that being foreigners themselves is the cause why thieves “target” them. Because they are in a foreign land, they are “unaware” of the possible dangers and are left “vulnerable”.

Security is an integral component of the relationships that shape the lives of students hosted by foreign countries (Forbes-Mewett H., *et.al.*2010). Such events cause significant stress to the sojourners because these are events that are perceived threats and dangers to their welfare.

#### *Homesickness*

Homesickness, a component of culture shock, is a major problem for college students, particularly those new to the university system (S. Fisher & Hood, 1987; Tognoli, 2003). Homesickness is defined as the reaction to the absence of significant others and familiar surroundings. This reaction can have negative effects such as loneliness, sadness and adjustment difficulties. From the focused group interviews, almost all participants agreed they experience homesickness. The data revealed that they employ certain measures in order to deal with homesickness. But the gravity, the effects and the extent of the homesickness was not further elaborated by some of the participants.

#### *Discrimination*

In most other areas, students’ perceptions are more positive, particularly in areas usually associated with discrimination and prejudice, including threats to their safety. Nevertheless, minorities of students experience distress in these areas and, as well, are concerned about their loneliness and feelings of relative



unimportance here. These perceptions are strongly related to students' feelings of lack of connectedness in Baguio, further reinforcing the value of helping to develop stronger coping strategies that result in networking, friendship and support for international students.

Internal or external demands that are appraised as exceeding the resources of the person. It is also encompassing what a person does to bring relief, reward and equilibrium.

From the data obtained, foreign students cope with the stress through employing the following coping measures: getting enough rest and sleep, leisure and sports activities, communicating with significant others, and traveling to other places. From these themes the researchers came up with the following realities or implications: the importance of social activities and interaction, and a positive cultural experience.

### ***Social activities and interaction***

Adjustment of foreign students to life outside of their comfort zones entails the utilization of important coping mechanisms. One coping mechanism the researchers observed utilized by foreign students is participation to social activities and interaction. Social activities are events that provide opportunities to learn about the dynamics of people within the society meet with other people and interact with them. Social activities can serve to provide opportunities to meet new people and to interact with people whom are they already know or familiar with.

Social activities open doors for foreign students to be culturally aware and adapt to the host countries' culture. Social activities are also seen as important factors in student development and successful adaptation. In Astin's theory of student development, social integration is seen as an important and well documented factor that contributes to a student's development and adaptation in a foreign environment. An involved foreign student participates well in academics, student organizations, cocurricular activities and interacts well with faculty members. Social integration allows the foreign student to be involved rather than isolated. It gives them a sense of belongingness even if the environment and culture is entirely foreign to them.

Social integration also allows the foreign student to have an understanding of the host countries' culture. When cultural awareness is achieved, there is better understanding of the events or things that happen around them and possibly why such events or behaviors are exhibited. This awareness equips them to gradually adapt to the culture of the host country, lessening the cultural gap that exist between them and the host country.

From the data obtained, the researchers observed that the foreign students do exercise a degree of social involvement and interaction. However, upon further probing and interview of the foreign students, these interactions are somewhat limited to people of the same nationality.

Social integration within their circle presents a positive effect. Being with people of the same nationality and culture brings a sense of "familiarity" among them. A sense or feeling that is seemingly lost or blurred while exposed in a foreign environment whose ways and culture is far from their known ways and practices. Social integration within their conational also provides a sense of safety and security. Experiencing culture in a foreign land brings about certain apprehensions and fear. Since most students do not have a family member or a trusted person to orient or assist them in the ways of life in the host country. Most of them resort to their own conational for a sense of safety and security.

For international students, access to large or clearly defined conational groups and other international students may become an important source of empathy and refuge (Andrade, M.2009).

On the other hand, when social integration is entirely limited to those belonging to their own circle, cultural awareness and cultural adaptation may not be achieved. Social integration is an opportunity that allows foreign students to meet new people, experience the culture of the host country and eventually develop cultural awareness. Cultural awareness helps the foreign students adapt successfully to the host country's culture. This is because foreign students often do not know how to respond to the events taking place around them. Provision of ample opportunities for social interaction with the members of the host culture allows the international student to learn and refine culture specific assumptions, social skills and nonverbal cues that help them function effectively in a cross-cultural setting (Furnham and Bochner, 1982).

The researchers have observed that the opportunity for ample exposure to people belonging to the host country is rarely achieved. This might explain the negative perception to the people of the host country and why they are a source of stress among foreign students. Without social interaction with these people (host country), international students may not see the other or appreciate or experience the "other side" of their culture.

### ***A Positive Cultural Experience***

Although foreign students venture into the unknown upon living in a foreign country, it doesn't mean that the experience always present a source of stress among them. Experiencing another culture in a positive way is also an effective coping mechanism. Described by some foreign students, traveling other places within the country is an effective way for them to relieve their stress. Traveling the country and experiencing the "good side of culture" is an effective and relieving experience.

Traveling and living in other countries also allow opportunities to be independent, to learn and acquire new skills, build new relationships and social networks and also to grow or change personally. The positive effects of cross-cultural experience often times is not given attention, but this experience facilitates growth and/or change, social support/building relationships, learning to navigate host culture, enjoyable activities outside of schoolwork, previous experiences and preparation, supportive faculty and staff, persevering through hard times, and a sense of belonging (Moore L. & Popadiuk, N. 2011).

From the data obtained, a positive cultural experience through traveling or social interaction presents an effective way of coping. This is also an avenue to achieve cultural awareness and eventually positive adaptive skills in a cross-cultural setting.

## **VI. Conclusions**

1. Foreign students' stress is greatly influenced by the host country's culture which includes the physical environment, people, communication patterns and ways of living.
2. Stress is also greatly influenced by internal factors and issues from their own culture.
3. Coping mechanisms employed by most foreign students include social activities and interactions within their conational or with other international students.
4. Maladaptive coping mechanisms are viewed as temporarily relief to the stresses experienced.

## **Strengths**

Foreign students who have been invited were from diverse cultures that gave the researchers the benefit to explore and compare the distinct ways of coping with the stressors among the participants. Utilizing interview and focus group discussions as a method to gather data had led the researchers to learn and validate the answers of the participants immediately.

## **Limitations**

The sample size of the study is very small because some of our participants did not want to join or did not accept our invitations for the focus group discussions and interviews for some reasons like they are busy with the school requirements. Majority of the foreign students who had participated in the study were Koreans, thus their inability to express more of their selves through English leads to inadequacy to explore more on their feelings or concerns regarding the source of their stress as well as how do they deal with it. Other identified limitations would include the disparity on the invited participants, wherein other cultures were outnumbered by Koreans, which could have caused biased in the responses.

## **VII. Recommendations**

From the results of the study it could be determined that, although there were a lot of stressors among foreign students here in Baguio City, they had positive coping strategies towards it. However, the findings in the research can be used by the administrators or councilors of the institution to promote activities or programs that may help the foreign students to be gather awareness or understanding of the host country's culture. This is derived from the researcher's observations that most of the foreign students only mingle with their conational. And through literature review and review of other studies as well, exposure to certain aspects of the host countries culture can also be beneficial.

The researchers also recommend that councilors, administrators and even school nurses within the institution participate in activities that promote student involvement. Utilizing Astin's theory of student development, it was described that involvement plays an integral role in the development of students and prevention of mental health issues such as depression, isolation, loneliness, and anxiety. Activities that strengthen or promote foreign student organizations may include:

- Orientation programs for foreign students
- Social integration of new foreign students with those staying in the country for a longer period of time.
- Introduction to support groups present in the area or community
- Orientation programs that allow the students to learn and experience the host country's culture
- A "buddy system" which may include a conational and someone from the host country.

The researchers also recommend that school nurses, or nurses who deal with foreign students directly must have also have cultural awareness to promote mental health among foreign students. This can be achieved by understanding international students' U curve hypothesis/ theory (UCT) on adjustment of foreign students in a cross-cultural setting. Most descriptions of UCT include discussions of four stages. In the initial stage ("honeymoon stage"), individuals are fascinated by the new culture and are excited about all the new and interesting "sights and sounds." This initial cultural infatuation is followed by a period of disillusionment and frustration ("disillusionment" or "culture shock stage") as the individual must seriously cope with living in the new culture on a day-to-day basis. The third stage ("adjustment stage") is characterized by gradual adaptation to

the new culture and learning how to behave appropriately according to the cultural norms of the host country. The fourth stage ("mastery stage") is characterized by small incremental increases in the individual's ability to function effectively in the new culture (Stewart, B. & Mendenhall, M. 1991).

By understanding the probable stages experienced by foreign students in a cross-cultural setting, nurses can achieve cultural awareness, and cultural sensitivity. Developing such helps the nurses deal with the students therapeutically, rid of possible cultural bias or discrimination. This would also help nurses promote mental health in a culturally congruent way. The researchers came up with this recommendation from data observation and literature review as well.

Further, if this study would be replicated, it would improve if a larger size of population would be gathered. The results might be more sufficient if the participants would be of the same number from different cultures. Further research should be done to address and explore the source of stress among foreign students here in Baguio City to determine if they are really using positive or negative coping styles.

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