

## **Doctoral students' socio-academic interactions and integration with the scholarly communities of International Universities**

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### **Abstract**

International doctoral students now constitute a significant proportion of higher education institutes. Their socio-academic interactions lead them to a certain level of socio-academic integration with the scholarly communities within the universities. Doctoral students from different international universities in a European country were selected to explore this phenomenon qualitatively. Therefore, twelve participants were approached through purposive sampling and they were interviewed with a semi-structured guide allowing an in-depth interview for examining doctoral students' experiences of interactions with the academic and professional communities of the universities and how they are supported to integrate. The data were analyzed qualitatively through line-by-line and highlighting approaches to understand the underlying meanings of participants' experiences. It was concluded that most of the doctoral students have actively interacted with the scholarly communities and they were academically and socially integrated to a great extent that led them to academic satisfaction and progression. The study has implications for international doctoral students, higher education institutions, academic and professional communities, and student bodies working in the universities.

**Keywords:** Higher education institutes, socio-academic interaction, socio-academic integration, international universities, scientific communities

### **Introduction**

It is essential to have an understanding of how doctoral students are perceived by the academic community that exists within the institution, as well as how they communicate and form relationships with the other students which may determine the nature of integration. Host students have a beneficial impact on the learning satisfaction and academic achievement of international students (Baloch et al., 2021; Bista & Gaulee, 2017; Che, 2021; Cowly & Ssekasi, 2018; Khanal & Gaulee, 2019; Li & Zizzi, 2018). According to the findings of a study conducted in Australia by Pearson (1996), students from a variety of academic fields expressed a desire to receive support from individuals in addition to their academic advisors. In addition, Gardner (2007) discovered that students in the fields of chemistry and history highlighted the value of support from their colleagues and peers as an important factor in their academic success.

In phenomenology, the concept of relationality refers to the relationship that students have with the academic communities in which they participate. According to Van Manen (1997), "lived other" refers to the lived relation that we keep with other people in the interpersonal space that we share with them (p. 104). Merleau-Ponty (1962) proposed that humans connect to other people and are confirmed via the process of communication. He maintained that this connection occurs through discussion. Intersubjectivity refers to the way in which our understanding of both ourselves and others is shaped by the relationships we have with other people because we live in communities (Williamson, 1998). Individuals gain a better understanding of themselves and others by looking at the relationships between them. The lived experience in and by which we come also creates our basic ontological understanding

of other beings met in the world, as stated by Burch (1991). Additionally, the patterns in which we think, speak, and behave are contagious and vulnerable to change as we progress through life. During the course of the present study, the participants came to a comprehension of who they are as individuals as a result of the relationships that they forged with the academic communities housed within the university.

Because successfully adjusting to a new environment and interacting with the scholarly community within the university is associated with a student's study performance, level of satisfaction, and decreased likelihood of impulsively giving up on their studies, it is essential to understand the experiences of doctoral students on how they learn to interact with other nationals and faculty (Fenyves, 2019; Hou and Jam 2020; Mao, 2022; Rienties & Tempelaar, 2013; Rienties, Beusaert, Grohnert, Niemantsverdriet, & Kommers, 2012). Additionally, the tendency of students to form friendships with one another and learning relationships enables them to deal with the difficult demands of higher education (Baloch et al., 2021; Bista & Gaulee, 2017; Che, 2021; Cowly & Ssekasi, 2018; Khanal & Gaulee, 2019; Li & Zizzi, 2018). As a result, the purpose of this study is to investigate the experiences that doctoral students have had while studying within the institution at various universities in Austria. Additionally, the study attempts to fill a gap that has been identified in the research by documenting the perspectives of Pakistani students on how they typically interact and establish relationships with the scholarly communities that are found within universities.

The idea developed by Tinto (1993) places a significant amount of emphasis on the function that contact between students and their educational environment plays as a focal point for student involvement with the intellectual communities of the university department. According to Tinto (1993), integration is a process of interactions that enable students to actively involve themselves in the socio-academic events of the institution. These events are greatly influenced by the norms, values, and behavior of local communities of the department or program, such as students, faculty, staff, and the supervisor of a doctoral student's dissertation, particularly at the final stage of the dissertation. To put it another way, it places an emphasis on the "essential relevance of student engagement or involvement" in the educational or learning community of the institution (p.133). Tinto (1993) used the term "integration" interchangeably with "involvement in," "engagement with," "incorporation in," and "membership in" educational and learning communities, all of which center on the idea that interaction is the primary driving force behind all of these ideas.

According to Tinto (1993), academic involvement and social integration are two overarching words that refer to the process of seeking diverse memberships in distinct communities within an educational institution. These memberships are susceptible to change over the course of one's education. Moreover, "As the academic and social communities are confined within the department, contact within them becomes linked. Because "social experiences become part of one's academic experiences and vice versa" (p. 236), this causes the two notions to overlap, particularly in Ph.D. studies as opposed to undergraduate ones, which is why the overlap is more prevalent in later levels of education. Similarly, the academic and social systems may be thought of in a conceptual sense as being distinct from one another, but these do not exist in the institution in a distinct manner. However, integration or membership in one of the systems does not imply a comparable integration in the other system, despite the fact that they are interdependent, reciprocal, and interactive (Tinto, 1993). As a consequence of the fact that the two systems are intertwined, the academic and social experiences of students are also interlinked, despite the fact that these experiences have a variety of consequences on the integration. In addition, the character, range, and framework of these systems differ from one institution to the next. These systems are relatively flexible, interactive, and overlapping in universities, and at times they are difficult to differentiate from one another.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are doctoral students' experiences of interaction with their academic and professional communities in international universities?
2. How do doctoral students benefit from the interaction and relationship with the scholarly communities in the universities?

3. How do doctoral students' socio-academic interactions lead them to integrate into international universities?

## Methodology

Experience shapes who we are and how we develop, and each person has a perspective on the world in which he lives. One's experiences can shift through time, in different locations, and in the light of one's connections to those around them. Therefore, individuals learn and grow in their interpersonal relationships as a result of the significance they attribute to their interactions with others in various settings (Lincoln, 1995). This is a never-ending procedure because we learn and grow through our interactions with the world. Based on this philosophical premise, the present research examines the doctoral students' experiences of interactions and integration as they study and conduct research within the framework of their daily life at the university and their relationships with their peers, teachers, and other key people. Twelve Ph.D. students were interviewed for the study; their semesters of enrollment ranged from 2 to 7 at various international universities in a European country. They were either an independent researcher working under the supervision of their supervisor or a part of a study team that was being compensated for their job. Many of the students had already completed one or more years of studies.

Phenomenological approach of qualitative research was employed to design this study. For this purpose, individuals were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide. Interviews are a key aspect of the qualitative research process because they allow researchers to get insight into the lives of participants by hearing their stories in their own words (Kvale, 1996). Students' gender, age, marital status, current semester, research group membership, funding source, research team size, language proficiency, and international work and study experience were all collected via a brief demographic questionnaire administered before interviews. This information was used to interpret participants' experiences they shared while interview. The researcher himself transcribed the interview recordings word for word, and then those transcriptions were meticulously checked with the audiotapes to guarantee that both forms of the data were consistent with one another. By doing transcription of the interview, I was able to have a better grasp of the material (Seidman, 2013). In addition to this, it jogged my memory of the rapport I shared with the other participants as a result of my connection with them and my ability to comprehend their voices. It assisted me in concentrating on what I was listening to frequently, and it gave me the opportunity to listen to and remember the anecdotes and perceptions of each participant's life and the world they inhabit. The data were analyzed qualitatively through line-by-line and highlighting approaches to understand the underlying meanings of participants' experiences. In other words, a thematic method for analyzing the qualitative data was used for the purpose of describing the emergent results, which are presented in the following section.

## Results

Within and beyond the confines of the department, colleagues and other administrative employees provided orientation, information, and practical assistance with academic, professional, and social problems. These are the people you're most likely to talk to, while some of them have more limited relationships due to their unique personalities. Students' relationships with their peers are discussed to shed light on their significance in students' academic and social lives, as well as the ways in which students have been able to thrive both inside and outside of the university. Haris, who participated in the study as an employee of the institute, reported having various experiences with different persons. There were two categories of coworkers he mentioned:

*“One was our well-wisher and he was very interactive with us... though, he had left the institute he was still in contact with us... comparatively the other colleague is not very co-operative. He*

*tells us whatever we ask him regarding our day-to-day matters but our relations remain limited to that matter”.*

As a result of the first coworker's efforts, both their housing situation and their financial situation at the institute improved. Furthermore, Haris remarked, "He had a really excellent understanding of us."

For this reason, "they don't have much understanding about subsequent directions in the research," first-year doctoral students try to have more frequent interactions with their research groups. So, in the beginning, they shifted gears and talked about different things. Daud initiated one-on-one conversations with his coworkers, allowing them to learn from one another's expertise. Colleagues showed him the way and took him through the path. For no hindrance to interacting and everyone should be on the same level, he approved of his supervisor's recommendation that they all be addressed by their first name. Specifically, he elaborated, "My boss has never told me that I cannot do this. Not once did he inquire as to your motivations. Try it, he insisted; he never said otherwise. He made people feel safe from many different concerns, including the worry that their results might be wrong. This gave him the assurance he needed to begin playing autonomously. During weekly meetings with his coworkers and boss, he was able to get many of his questions answered and issues resolved.

On the other hand, there are some coworkers who never say hello. This kind of guy, according to Yaqoob: "He does not say hello or goodbye but instead comes and goes in silence. I suppose there may be a religious component to his refusal to accept food when offered; when I bring something to eat, I offer it to everyone else but he still refuses to eat ". Also, there's someone else who likes to psychologically tease him occasionally. "If you have 10 coworkers, three may not treat you properly, it is part of nature everywhere," he reflected.

Having a common language helps coworkers work together effectively. Since Yasmin and her coworker both used identical methods of collecting data, they were able to split the cost and divide the time. The two of them intended to combine their respective areas of expertise in information systems and intelligent transportation systems. They felt "like brothers and sisters" because of this. That's what she said:

*“I use his experience of the intelligent transport system, and he uses my experience of information science and we bring something forward which is good... The important thing is what is the approach of your colleague? Is he as energetic in working with you as you are?”*

Doctoral candidates in the field of veterinary sciences conduct experiments on animals and collaborate with laboratory technicians to analyze the results. Most of their time is devoted to them, and most of it is spent talking about relevant topics. "In my experience, I have found that the vast majority of people are good, willing to help, and have constructive dialogue.", Yousuf elaborated:

*“It may be that some of them also discriminate with respect to nationality... They behave in a way that shows they don't want to talk to us in a good way and sometimes they become hyper for no reason... They don't understand what we say and what we do... Some of them want us to talk in their [German] language”.*

The department secretary coordinates with the doctorate students and the supervisor in ways that laboratory technicians do not. He or she furnishes anything from basic office equipment to state-of-the-art laboratories and research centers. Salman's secretary is a lovely elderly lady. Because she is such a lovely lady, "As soon as you see her and engage in conversation with her, all your worries will melt away. Ethically, she is a model citizen". She is not obligated to do it, but "as a courtesy" she delivers his mail from the box.

Similarly, postdoctoral colleagues are often turned on for advice by doctorate students, especially in the sciences, where much of the work is done in laboratories and supervisors are not always on hand. In the lab, they pool their resources and talents and work together, sharing what they've learned. It's very uncommon for post-doctoral fellows to try and manage their doctoral-level coworkers "the way they want to," which can lead to strained relationships and negatively impact the quality and efficiency

of everyone's work. The situation was explained by Ibrahim, who remarked, "If you discover a colleague from your nation, he would always cause issues for you." And he went on to elaborate:

*"Due to this, my initial six to eight months were wasted. I could not work on my project in a better way and I have to restart the project right from the beginning... The objective of my colleague was that I should do all the work and he should take full credit for my work".*

Collaborating with a co-national can become "a matter of life and death" in various situations. In describing such a scenario, Ibrahim said, "They are likely to be involved in leg pulling and backbiting against each other... I would recommend that one should avoid such company and it would be better to stay at a distance." Yasmin contributed to the description in a slightly different way. She observed that this is a problem for anyone who has consistent contact with his coworkers. She noticed:

*"If we are working in a group and I want to write a paper along with my supervisor and other persons in the group, then there may be the possibility of an occurrence of clashes, not on the personal level, but clashes in the way one puts an idea, on how one is looking from a different perspective than that of one's colleagues... But there is an advantage in this only if you come across a person of your mindset".*

However, due to the frequent mobility of students, there are cases where students do not have any opportunities to communicate with their coworkers. Even though it was shocking at first, Ismaeel is now accustomed to the limited amount of people that visit his department at a very small university for only a brief time. He said, "sometimes there have been only three people, my apartment is conveniently located near both my laboratory and my car, so I never felt alone when I commuted back and forth between the two". He was cognizant of this fact and successfully struck a balance between his professional and private life.

In addition, some doctorate students do not have the chance to find someone to share or discuss their concepts, despite the fact that there exist research groups in certain universities. Researchers are typical completely alone or working together. Because they have "experts, discuss mutually, learn more, share knowledge, research together, and publish jointly," individuals who work in the partnership are "fortunate," in Younus's opinion. Unfortunately, "everyone is researching individually in his office... They barely discuss mutually," he laments of his research group. Moreover, young researchers are tied to post-doctoral researchers, who engage them in the ongoing research processes, they participate in the process, which is productive and puts them on track since they raise their experience and confidence, witness, talk, and learn the techniques of paper writing, and obtain their names in the continuing research articles. Younus doesn't have someone to help him "refine" his "crude concept" which leads to various questions, not even a post-doctoral student or someone experienced in his profession. His isolation and feelings of researching alone are a result of this.

However, in Yasmin's experience, it is common knowledge that she is a practicing Muslim and hence does not partake in the vice of alcoholic beverages. She is welcome to use her workplace space for prayer breaks. The team also includes people from Pakistan, Bosnia, and Austria, as well as a former Hungarian member who is still in touch with her. They laugh and joke as they converse in the kitchen. They eat together in the open air and talk about their various backgrounds, classes, and assignments. Her Kenyan coworker and she are good friends. "More like a family," she said. I get the impression that we're all pretty much on the same page mentally. No one assumes you are from a developing nation simply because you look poor. The place she was doing her master's degree, on the other hand, was a racist environment. She described:

*"This [racism] is from those people who are not from Austria or Europe. I mean, one lady is from Iran and she told me all the time that 'you are so talented, you should go back to Pakistan. There are some other persons as well who showed that they are superior. Perhaps they have some complexity".*

However, some of the participants' social lives on the university premises are influenced by their conditions and the language barrier. Maryam elaborated on this aspect:

*"I am hundred percent cut off from students' social events because I feel extraordinary pressure [of courses].. If I would have been unmarried, I could have participated in such activities despite the language barrier... It is not good from the learning perspective if I come here regularly and go back after sitting for the whole day in my office".*

She elaborated by saying, *"The requirements for my doctorate have left me feeling quite alone. To be completely forthright, I do not belong in such a setting. I was 'single' and active in campus life when I was a student at [another European country] "*. Also, she claimed that she *"doesn't know doctorate students of my batch; possibly I had seen them once in the last two years"* is, to put it mildly, odd. She was somewhat aback by her advisor's suggestion that social science Ph.D. candidates often complete their degrees from the comfort of their own homes. She stated, *"If I can complete work while sitting at home, then I would have done it better while being in my own country, and hence the purpose of university dies."*

As Maryam assumed she would have attended student social events if she had been single, it appears that Danyal has had less time to interact with his coworkers since the arrival of his family. He explained:

*"I don't have much social interaction here and it has decreased a lot since the arrival of my family... Also, I have seen that when we talk about something while sitting in a social gathering, usually it is somehow related to our project or a course".*

Because of the competing demands of school, home, and work, some of the study's participants may not have as much time as they'd want to spend interacting with others on campus or in the workplace. Haris stated:

*"Because I was only a 'student' in [another EU country] I used to interact more. Here, we don't go to university frequently because... we have to work regularly at our research institute and have to spend time with our family as well. So, that is why we usually don't attend events at the university".*

Student's ability to participate and adapt to their new university community may be hindered by the cultural shock they experience upon enrolling abroad. Maryam *"feels happy with her co-nationals"* while she made a contrast, *"I do not mingle much and am not very friendly with Austrian or the other nationals... I don't feel integrated into the university environment... because of the Ph.D. curriculum, my social life, and the language."*

Students at various stages of their doctoral programs reported a wide range of interactions with their fellow institute members. To that end, they assisted students in both their academic and social endeavors, thereby easing their transition to life at university. The common thread across these examples is that early on in their studies, students made an effort to spend more time communicating with their research partners and other classmates. Whether they were operating independently or in tandem, their relationships took on different forms.

## Discussion

Van Manen (1997) described that "lived other (relationality) is the lived relation we maintain with others in the interpersonal space that we share with them" (p. 104). Dialogue is also a means of affirmation and connection for its participants (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). For a long time, there has been academic and broader societal interest in studying and comprehending how students interact with one another and with influential members of the academic and scholarly community, as well as in establishing and maintaining such relationships (Baloch et al., 2021; Bista & Gaulee, 2017; Cowly & Ssekasi, 2018; Khanal & Gaulee, 2019; Li & Zizzi, 2018; Volet & Jones, 2012). This research confirms previous findings by Pyhältö, Stubb, and Lonka (2009) that Ph.D. students report wide variations in their interactions both within their cohort and with the academic community at large. The term "relationality" is used to characterize the dynamic between Ph.D. students and the many university personnel who play important roles in their research and professional development. In the course of

their interactions with the various academic groups on campus, the participants in the present study were able to gain insight into who they were as people. They learn what it's like to be a doctorate student in the context of these people at the institution.

Within and beyond the walls of the institution, peers and administrative staff offer orientation, information, and practical assistance with academic, professional, and social problems. At the beginning of their academic careers, the students tried to spend more time communicating with one another and their research teams. In the words of Lovitts (2001), students who have strong relationships with their academic communities have more meaningful interactions with their peers. They observed that the way their relationships are shaped differs depending on whether they are working alone or with others.

Some of them are more interactive than others. Haris has *"different experiences with different people"*. He describes an Austrian colleague, *"[He] was our well-wisher and he was very interactive with us... though, he has left the institute but is still in contact with us"*. Daud's colleagues not only *"showed him the way but led him to the way."* He liked his supervisor's suggestion to call all of the group members by their first names so that *"there should not be any hesitation to interact and everybody should be on the same level"*. Some of the doctoral students had informal relationships with their colleagues. Yasmin described, *"It is more like a family... It seems to me that we all have the same mentality. Nobody says that you are from a third-world country because there are others as well"*. Consistent with these findings, Baumeister (2014) discovered that African Ph.D. students at the Bayreuth International Graduate School of African Studies (BIGSAS) enjoyed a beneficial interaction with other fellows in her Master's thesis on their experiences in the academic culture of Germany. Collaboration across disciplines in the interdisciplinary groups was especially valued. People in the study group also thought the comments they received from their coworkers were instructive. In addition, some of those interviewed had secret meetings with other scientists and dissertation advisers. Students from other countries can benefit socially, psychologically, and academically by forming relationships with local students, as suggested by Zimmerman (1995). For example, a high level of interaction with students of the host culture can reduce academic problems, and decrease social problems among international students (Baloch et al., 2021; Bista, 2016; Bista & Gaulee, 2017; Che, 2021; Cowly & Ssekasi, 2018; Khanal & Gaulee, 2019; Li & Zizzi, 2018), and improve communication and adaptation.

However, there are certain colleagues who don't even say Hall or Hi. Yaqoob described such a person, *"He comes silently and goes silently without saying 'hallo' or 'hi'."* Similarly, there is another person who sometimes mentally teases him. He reflected, *"It happens even in our country, if you have 10 colleagues, then three or four of them may not treat you well, it is part of nature everywhere"*. Similarly, doctoral students working in the discipline of veterinary sciences undergo animal trials; they have to work with laboratory technicians for analyses of the samples. Yousuf stated, *"I can say that most of the people are good"*, however, *"it may be that some of them also discriminate with respect to a nationality"*. Research has shown that there is prejudice and hostility directed towards students, especially those who stand out as being obviously foreign (Bista & Gaulee, 2017; Che, 2021; Cowly & Ssekasi, 2018; Khanal & Gaulee, 2019; Lee & Rice, 2007; MacWilliams, 2004). In addition, Hercog and van de Laar (2016) looked into what influences Indian students' decisions to study abroad and discovered that students' concerns about facing racism or sexism in a foreign country's higher education system were a major deterrent. However, Uhlich (2013) conducted her Master thesis on foreign students' study experiences in Germany and found that *"only a few students had to face discrimination and they had the worst image of the German in general"* (*"Discrimination?.. NO,"* para. 6).

Few participants in the study may have less opportunity to interact with others inside the university and the workplace due to the competing demands of school, family, and the workplace.

Most modern research is conducted in a team effort between more seasoned and junior researchers, such as postdoctoral and doctoral students, under the direction of a supervisor or project leader (Baloch et al., 2021; Bista, 2016; Cowly & Ssekasi, 2018; Khanal & Gaulee, 2019; Li & Zizzi, 2018; Li & Qi, 2019; Muhar, et al., 2013). Sometimes, post-doc fellows try to *'control'* their doctoral colleagues *'the way they want to'* which results in poor relations. Ibrahim described such a situation in the life science discipline; *"It is my personal and some of the other colleagues' experience that if you work with a colleague from your own country, he would always create problems for you"* resulting in poor work relations. On the other hand, Muhar et al. (2013) propose that students should work together

in groups to drive their joint research endeavors. They should benefit from each other's ideas, skills, expertise, and areas of specialization while doing so. This contributes to the formation of a distinct dynamic of work relationships with all of the stakeholders of a research project, in particular with the doctorate research fellows who collaborate extremely closely with one another.

On the other hand, there are some circumstances in which students do not have many opportunities to engage in conversation with their classmates. Ismaeel has "*a limited number of people*" who come for a short period of time to his department in a small university. He described, "*Sometimes there have been only three persons in the department...*", but he maintained a balance between his department and personal life. Moreover, although there are research groups in certain universities, some doctoral students do not have the opportunity to find someone with whom to share or discuss their ideas. In Younus' research group, "*everybody is researching separately in his office... They hardly discuss mutually...*". Younus doesn't have even a post-doctoral student or "*someone experienced in his field...*". So, he is having feelings of isolation and fewer relationships. In line with these findings, Walsh (2010) proposed that international Ph.D. students in the field of science who battled feelings of isolation had fewer opportunities to integrate with the student community and struggled with communication issues. Also, Borg, Maunder, Jiang, Walsh, Fry, and Di Napoli (2009) argued that doctoral students with an Asian background who were studying in the UK avoided working alone and tended to receive more guidance from their advisors. They believed that this was due to the fact that doctoral students from an Asian background were more likely to perceive working alone as a threat.

The participants' personal circumstances and the difficulty they have communicating with others due to the language barrier both have an impact on the social life they lead on campus. After the arrival of his family, it appears as though Danyal is spending less time connecting with his coworkers. He explained, "*I don't have much social interaction here especially since it decreased a lot after the arrival of my family...*". Maryam, a doctoral student in social science could not establish a relationship with her colleagues due to her family life, the pressure of the courses, and the language barrier. She stated, "*I am a bit isolated due to the doctoral curriculum. I am not part of that environment to be very honest*". Bradley (2000) and Chiang (2003) argue that students in the humanities and social sciences are more prone to loneliness than those in the natural and technological sciences, where students are more likely to be immersed in formalized research settings that facilitate social interaction and the development of friendships.

Three out of eleven participants in this study reported feeling socially or academically isolated. The identities of doctoral students at the University of Helsinki, Finland, were investigated by Pyhältö et al. (2009). Nearly 30% of students said they did not feel like they belonged in the university's learning environment and scholarly community. In this regard, the students in the Education Department were found to be the most lonely individuals, which is due to the nature of the study they were involved in since "*the typical form of publishing in education is a monograph written by a single scholar*"... [while] in medicine and psychology it is more common to work in research groups" (p. 230).

However, Maryam feels happy with her co-nationals while she made a contrast, "*I don't mingle easily and am not very friendly with Austrian or the other nationals...*". This finding is consistent with the findings of Ramsay, Barker, and Jones (1999), who discovered that because international students rarely contact domestic students, they are more likely to form friendship groups with people of the same nationality. Furthermore, interacting closely with co-nationals reduces stress but enhances the degree of adjustment; hence, expanding ties with co-nationals may be a crucial aspect of cultural orientation and adjustment (Fenyves, 2019; Geeraert, Demoulin, & Demes, 2014; Mao, 2022; Mathies, 2021; Xu, 2020). However, recent studies show that both international and domestic students engage in minimal cross-cultural interaction (Bista & Gaulee, 2017; Che, 2021; Cowly & Ssekasi, 2018; Khanal & Gaulee, 2019; Li & Zizzi, 2018; Rienties, et al., 2013; Volet & Jones, 2012).

### Conclusion

The majority of doctoral students were 'active' and collaborated effectively which lead them to a supportive socio-academic integration in the international universities. While collaborating on a project, they engaged in in-depth conversation, expanded their horizons, learned from one another, and pooled their resources. There were times when students felt isolated and had to do their studies alone because



they rarely interacted with their classmates. The commitments to school, home, and employment have reduced the social opportunities available to some of them. Nevertheless, most of the doctoral students actively interacted with the scholarly communities, and they were academically and socially integrated to a great extent which led them to academic satisfaction and progression.

Because Master's and Bachelor's students engage in less intensive study courses, interact with a wider variety of faculty and peers, and participate in a wider variety of extracurricular activities at university than doctoral students, future qualitative research on this population may reveal relatively different transition experiences. It appears that early on in the Ph.D. program, an orientation designed to foster interaction and relationships is critically crucial for enhanced communication and adaptation. Orientation on the norms and values existing in the higher education system of European universities would benefit doctoral candidates' ability to communicate, collaborate, and work effectively with their university peers.

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