

COPING STRATEGIES FOR CULTURE SHOCK AND HOMESICKNESS AMONG HOSTELITES

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explores the coping strategies used by first-year hostel students experiencing cultural shock and homesickness after relocating from rural regions to urban university campuses in Pakistan. Fourteen participants (7 males, 7 females) from Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and South Punjab were purposely selected. Most were living away from home for the first time and adjusting to unfamiliar urban environments. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed thematically. Findings revealed cultural shock in the form of disorientation, communication barriers, lifestyle differences, and academic challenges. Homesickness emerged through emotional loneliness, longing for family, and loss of familiar routines. Students coped through emotional (crying, praying), behavioral (routines, group activities), cognitive (positive thinking), and social (peer and family support) strategies. Gender and regional differences influenced coping patterns. The study highlights the need for culturally sensitive university support systems to assist rural students in their transition. These insights contribute to the literature on student migration, cultural adjustment, and mental well-being.

Keywords: cultural shock, homesickness, coping strategies, hostel students, rural-urban migration, qualitative research

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1

Introduction

In contemporary society, obtaining higher education has become a crucial pathway for personal growth, societal development, and career advancement (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009). In Pakistan, a significant number of students migrate each year from remote and underdeveloped areas to major urban centers in pursuit of higher education at colleges and universities (Mahmood & Burke, 2020). Many of these students come from culturally distinct provinces such as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Balochistan, and the southern regions of Punjab, which are

characterized by unique linguistic, social, and religious practices (Zaman, 2014). While urban institutions offer improved academic opportunities, exposure to diverse peer groups, and access to better infrastructure, the emotional and psychological costs of such relocation are often overlooked (Shamim & Rashid, 2019). Transitioning to university life particularly for students residing in hostels introduces a dual burden navigating rigorous academic demands while simultaneously adapting to unfamiliar social norms, languages, food practices, interpersonal expectations, and occasionally divergent religious or political ideologies (Khan & Chaudhry, 2018). This

abrupt shift can trigger culture shock, a psychological phenomenon that occurs when individuals are immersed in an environment that contrasts sharply with their native cultural context (Oberg, 1960). At the same time, students frequently suffer from homesickness, a complex emotional response driven by the absence of familial support and cultural familiarity (Stroebe, Schut, & Nauta, 2015). These emotional struggles are often intensified for students originating from tight-knit rural or tribal communities, where regional identity and family bonds are central to personal well-being (Saeed, 2013).

Culture Shock

Culture shock is defined as a psychological and emotional state that occurs when an individual is exposed to a cultural environment significantly different from their own, often leading to confusion, stress, and identity disorientation. (Oberg 1960), who first introduced the term, described culture shock as the “anxiety resulting from the loss of familiar signs and symbols of social interaction.” In the context of hostel-residing students from culturally unique and rural regions such as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, and South Punjab, culture shock arises when these students transition into urban university settings where language, values, behavior, and expectations may starkly differ from their home environments. Several qualitative studies have explored this phenomenon through interviews, focus groups, and narrative analyses to understand the lived experiences of culturally dislocated students. These studies emphasize the deeply personal and emotional nature of culture shock, particularly how students interpret and make sense of their challenges in the new environment. For example, (Sharif 2018) conducted in-depth interviews with rural students attending urban universities in Pakistan, revealing that many experienced cultural dissonance, identity suppression, and emotional isolation. Participants reported difficulty adjusting to more liberal social norms, unfamiliar languages, and city-based academic practices. These findings reflect the narrative depth and subjectivity that qualitative methods are uniquely equipped to capture. Similarly, (Wang and Du 2018) used a qualitative

approach to examine international and minority students’ adaptation processes, finding that linguistic exclusion and the need to constantly translate cultural meanings led to frustration and social withdrawal. Participants expressed feeling emotionally alienated when they couldn’t express themselves freely or when their cultural expressions were dismissed or misunderstood. (Misirlis et al. 2020) also used semi-structured interviews to explore student adaptation and concluded that limited social support and a lack of cultural representation in university systems intensified the effects of culture shock.

Factors Contributing to Culture Shock:

Culture shock refers to the psychological and emotional disorientation that individuals experience when they are exposed to a significantly different cultural or social environment (Oberg, 1960). Students migrating from rural regions like Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), and South Punjab to urban academic hubs such as Lahore, Islamabad, and Karachi are particularly vulnerable to cultural shock. Their transition from close-knit, traditional communities to fast-paced, diverse urban settings presents multiple adjustment challenges.

Language and Communication Barriers.

Language is a central aspect of integration in any new environment. For students from rural and tribal areas where regional languages like Balochi, Pashto, or Saraiki dominate, the sudden immersion in Urdu- and English-dominant academic environments can be overwhelming. According to (Yeh and Inose 2003), lack of fluency in the institutional or dominant language is a significant predictor of acculturative stress. In Pakistani urban universities, English is used for instruction, while Urdu serves as a lingua franca, placing double linguistic pressure on rural students. Miscommunication, inability to participate in discussions, or fear of being ridiculed for their accent or vocabulary exacerbates feelings of inadequacy and exclusion (Yeh & Inose, 2003).

Social Norms and Culture Practices.

Urban culture expectations often conflict with the deeply embedded values of rural communities. For instance, the open interaction between genders, less formal clothing, and informal

communication styles common in cities may conflict with the modest, hierarchical, and conservative social practices of students' home regions. (Smith and Khawaja 2011) note that individuals who face value dissonance between their heritage culture and host culture are more prone to cultural shock (Smith, & Khawaja, 2011).

Academic System Differences. Students from rural schools often come from rote-learning environments with minimal exposure to technology, classroom interaction, or independent study. Upon entering universities in Lahore or Islamabad, they are exposed to new teaching methods, such as critical thinking exercises, open discussions, online learning platforms, and continuous assessment methods. (Andrade 2006) emphasizes that students with limited exposure to Western-style education systems face significant academic and psychological adjustment challenges in such settings. The fear of failure, unfamiliarity with digital tools, and perceived incompetence can result in academic burnout and stress (Andrade, 2006).

Lack of Social Support. Leaving behind familial and tribal support systems can leave students feeling emotionally vulnerable. Hostel life, particularly in early stages, lacks the warmth, familiarity, and safety net of home. This absence of emotional anchors makes students more susceptible to loneliness, depression, and anxiety, especially when they are slow to build trust in their new social environment. (Pedersen 1995) argues that lack of social support intensifies the psychological symptoms of cultural shock and prolongs the adaptation process (Pedersen, 1995).

Dietary and Lifestyle Changes. Dietary habits are deeply rooted in culture and identity. Students accustomed to home-cooked meals find it difficult to adjust to hostel food, which often lacks cultural familiarity, flavor, and nutrition. Poor diet, irregular meals, and changes in daily routines such as prayer times or sleep patterns disrupt the students' mental and physical well-being. (Brown and Holloway 2008) found that food-related stress significantly contributes to emotional dissatisfaction and physical discomfort during cultural transitions (Brown & Holloway, 2008).

Perceived Discrimination and Stereotyping.

Students from Balochistan or rural South Punjab often face negative stereotyping as "backward," "illiterate," or "tribal." Even subtle forms of prejudice, such as being mocked for one's accent or traditional dress, can result in withdrawal and self-doubt. (Constantine et al. 2004) emphasize that perceived discrimination strongly correlates with lower self-esteem, higher stress, and delayed cultural adjustment (Constantine et al., 2004).

Culture Identity Conflict. Culture shock is not merely about surface-level differences; it often leads to internal identity conflict.

Students must negotiate their inherited values with the dominant urban culture. Berry (1997) describes this as a conflict between heritage and host culture identities. For rural students, this may involve questioning traditional gender roles, adapting clothing styles, or modifying religious practices. Such tensions can lead to emotional exhaustion and a sense of losing one's cultural self (Berry, 1997).

Gender Role Challenges. Students, especially women from conservative backgrounds, may experience both opportunity and anxiety when confronted with urban gender norms. Urban settings often demand independence, assertiveness, and self-management qualities not traditionally encouraged in female students from tribal or rural areas.

According to (Gonzalez et al. 2014), navigating this shift in gender expectations is a significant source of psychological stress and cultural disorientation (Gonzalez et al. ,2014).

Urban Sensory Overload and Environmental Complexity. Urban centers like Karachi and Lahore are fast-paced, congested, and technologically advanced. For students from villages or small towns, the transition to crowded classrooms, public transport, noise pollution, and bureaucratic systems can be disorienting. They may find it difficult to navigate city systems, understand urban etiquette, or manage time efficiently, contributing to their stress and alienation (Ober, 1960).

Restrictions on Religious and Culture Expression. In striving to fit in, many students may suppress visible expressions of their regional, ethnic, or religious identity, fearing marginalization. The perceived pressure to

conform to urban culture can lead to guilt, shame, and a weakening connection with their roots. When cultural practices such as language, dress, or religious obligations are perceived as unwelcome, students often experience a profound sense of cultural loss.

Consequences of Culture shock

Cultural shock is not a short-lived reaction but a deeply layered experience that can profoundly affect a student's emotional, academic, and social life. For rural students who relocate to urban academic settings such as Lahore, Islamabad, or Karachi, the sudden immersion into new cultural norms, languages, academic expectations, and social environments often produces long-lasting effects. These consequences may vary in intensity but collectively shape the students' educational journey, psychological health, and sense of identity.

Psychological and Emotional Disturbance.

One of the most immediate and profound consequences of cultural shock is psychological distress. Students may experience symptoms such as anxiety, depression, homesickness, mood swings, and even feelings of helplessness or panic. The disconnection from familiar environment, cultural values, family structure, and language often leaves them feeling isolated and emotionally vulnerable. For students from tribal or close-knit communities, the absence of traditional support networks exacerbates this emotional imbalance. Over time, this psychological strain can hinder students' ability to focus, socialize, or manage stress effectively. (Pedersen 1995) outlines emotional fatigue, helplessness, and sadness as typical responses to unfamiliar cultural settings, especially when social support is lacking.

Academic Performance Decline. The inability to adapt to urban academic practices such as self-directed learning, digital literacy, English-based instruction, and open classroom discussion can lead to academic struggles. Many students from rural regions are accustomed to rote memorization and teacher-centered instruction, and therefore find critical thinking, group presentations, or online submission systems unfamiliar and intimidating. As a result, they may miss deadlines, fail to participate, or avoid engaging in classroom dialogue. Repeated

failure or underachievement leads to frustration, self-doubt, and demotivation, creating a downward academic spiral.

(Andrade 2006) states that students with limited exposure to modern academic systems often struggle with the transition, resulting in declining academic performance and increased dropout risk.

Social Withdrawal and Interpersonal Difficulties.

Cultural shock disrupts students' ability to build relationships in the new environment. Many may feel uncomfortable initiating conversations or joining social circles, particularly when they perceive linguistic or cultural differences. This fear of being misunderstood or judged contributes to social avoidance behaviors, such as spending excessive time alone, skipping social events, or avoiding interactions with hostel mates and classmates. Over time, such isolation can erode social confidence and contribute to feelings of exclusion and invisibility (Yeh and Inose 2003) emphasize that lack of social connectedness and satisfaction with peer relationships increases acculturative stress among migrant students.

Cultural Identity Crisis. Students often find themselves caught between two cultural frameworks the traditional values of their home region and the liberal norms of urban academic environments. In an attempt to "fit in," some may feel compelled to suppress their dialect, traditional dress, or religious practices, which can lead to guilt, confusion, and a fragmented sense of self. Others may resist urban norms and become defensive or resentful, further alienating themselves from the university culture. This identity dissonance can impact confidence and stability, leading to long-term self-concept confusion. (Berry 1997) explains that when individuals experience cultural incongruity, they may suffer from identity instability, especially in the absence of bicultural integration.

Development of Maladaptive Coping Mechanisms.

To manage cultural and academic pressure, some students may resort to unhealthy coping mechanisms such as avoidance, denial, aggression, or substance use. These behaviors may emerge when students lack healthy outlets such as peer support, mental health services, or cultural understanding from faculty. For

example, students may skip classes, disengage from responsibilities, or display hostility toward roommates or teachers. These maladaptive strategies worsen their adjustment and academic progress, often leading to disciplinary issues or social stigmatization. (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001) argue that maladaptive coping is a common outcome of unprocessed cultural shock, especially when individuals lack training or psychological preparation.

Reduced Motivation and Goal Uncertainty.

When the cultural and academic environment feels incompatible or overwhelming, students may lose their initial enthusiasm for higher education. The loss of motivation may stem from constant academic failures, emotional exhaustion, or the belief that success is unattainable in the new environment. This can manifest in a decline in class attendance, reduced participation, or even dropping out of programs. In some cases, students may reconsider their entire academic or career trajectory, leading to goal uncertainty and dissatisfaction.

According to (Poyrazli & Grahame 2007), chronic cultural disorientation often results in academic disengagement and disillusionment with long-term academic goals.

Difficulty in Forming Peer Relationships.

Building healthy relationships in hostels or classrooms is a major challenge for students who feel culturally different. Misinterpretation of social norms, accents, or body language often creates misunderstandings and hinders bonding.

Students may also feel looked down upon or stereotyped by urban peers, especially if they belong to an ethnic minority group. These experiences erode trust and discourage further social integration, making students vulnerable to prolonged loneliness. (Constantine et al. 2004) found that minority and marginalized students often experience interpersonal difficulties that stem from stereotype threat and peer exclusion.

Dropout or Premature Return Home. In extreme cases, students facing severe cultural shock may choose to withdraw from their university program or return to their home region prematurely. This decision is often

driven by a combination of academic failure, emotional distress, social isolation, and financial pressures. The return home is usually accompanied by feelings of failure, shame, and social stigma, especially in communities where migrating for education is considered a high honor. (Smith & Khawaja 2011) report that unresolved cultural distress is a common cause of student attrition, particularly among students from disadvantaged or rural backgrounds.

Internalization of Inferiority and Culture Shame.

Some students may internalize the negative feedback or stereotyping they receive in urban spaces. This can result in cultural shame, where they begin to view their home language, traditions, or background as inferior. Over time, this internalization can lead to low self-esteem, poor self-image, and even self-rejection. Students may actively avoid expressing their identity and experience long-term emotional harm. (Sam and Berry 2010) note that cultural marginalization can lead to long-term psychological consequences, especially when the dominant culture is perceived as superior and unwelcoming.

Long-Term Disengagement from the Academic System.

The accumulation of psychological distress, academic failure, and identity confusion may not always lead to immediate dropout but may result in long-term disengagement. Such students might complete their degrees without developing meaningful academic or professional networks, participating in extracurricular activities, or gaining the full benefits of higher education. This disengagement can lead to poor employability, lack of confidence in professional environments, and reduced civic participation.

Coping Strategies for Culture Shock

Coping strategies refer to the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral techniques that individuals use to adapt to unfamiliar environments and reduce the psychological impact of cultural disorientation. For rural-origin students transitioning into urban university life, effective coping not only reduces stress but also enhances academic performance, social integration, and psychological well-being (Ward et al., 2001). These strategies can be

categorized into personal, social, and institutional levels.

Seeking Social Support. Establishing new friendships and social connections is one of the most effective coping mechanisms against cultural shock. Students who form bonds with hostel mates, classmates, or mentors tend to adjust more quickly to new cultural norms. Emotional support from peers reduces feelings of isolation and helps students process cultural differences more constructively. (Yeh and Inose 2003) found that social connectedness is a strong predictor of successful cultural adjustment among students. Application: Students from rural areas benefit from structured peer mentoring programs or student societies where they can find culturally sensitive support.

Maintaining Contact with Family and Cultural Roots. Staying connected with family through regular phone calls or virtual communication can provide emotional grounding. This connection acts as a cultural anchor, reinforcing students' identity and values while they adjust to urban norms. Familiarity with cultural rituals, language, or religious practices also helps students maintain a sense of continuity during transition. (Constantine et al. 2004) highlight that maintaining one's cultural identity serves as a protective factor against cultural stress and identity confusion. Application: Students may continue traditions such as regional cuisine, prayers, or language use in their private time as a source of comfort and identity reinforcement.

Language Proficiency and Communication Skills. Language barriers are one of the leading causes of culture shock. Actively working on improving Urdu and English skills especially through workshops, speaking clubs, or online resources enhances students' ability to participate in academic and social settings. Improved communication reduces anxiety, increases self-confidence, and promotes classroom engagement. (Andrade 2006) emphasizes that students who invest in language development experience smoother academic and social integration. Institutions can offer remedial language support and encourage classroom participation through inclusive teaching methods.

Engaging in Cultural Learning and Adaptation. Actively learning about the new cultural environment including dress codes, academic etiquette, and social behaviors helps students interpret cultural differences rather than misjudge them. This proactive acculturation fosters open-mindedness and empathy, leading to better adjustment outcomes. (Berry 1997) proposes that integration where individuals preserve their identity while adopting host cultural traits is the most adaptive acculturation strategy. Students should be encouraged to observe, ask questions, and participate in multicultural activities on campus.

Participation in Campus and Hostel Activities. Involvement in extracurricular activities such as student societies, volunteer work, sports, or cultural events helps students build friendships, enhance self-esteem, and learn social norms organically. These platforms offer informal learning spaces where students from diverse backgrounds interact and form inclusive communities. (Smith and Khawaja 2011) suggest that active engagement in university life significantly contributes to acculturation and reduces loneliness. Students from rural backgrounds can be invited to participate in leadership roles to develop confidence and belonging.

Emotional Regulation and Stress Management. Cultural transitions naturally generate emotional stress. Learning how to manage this stress through deep breathing, journaling, exercise, prayer, or mindfulness helps students cope with overwhelming feelings. Emotional resilience allows them to bounce back from setbacks and continue their adaptation process with optimism. (Ward et al. 2001) argue that individuals who develop internal coping mechanisms show greater psychological adjustment during cultural transitions. Universities should promote wellness programs, offer counseling, and create quiet spaces for prayer or reflection.

Building a Bicultural Identity. Rather than choosing between traditional and urban cultural identities, students who integrate elements from

both cultures tend to experience greater life satisfaction and less cultural conflict. This bicultural identity allows for flexibility, confidence, and the ability to navigate multiple social contexts. (Sam and Berry 2010) emphasize that biculturalism is associated with better mental health and social competence than marginalization or assimilation. Institutions can support this process through inclusive events that celebrate regional cultures while promoting cross-cultural dialogue.

Institutional Resources and Counseling Services. Professional psychological counseling, academic advising, and career support services are underused but highly effective coping resources. Rural students who access these services can address academic stress, cultural adjustment, and emotional problems in a safe, non-judgmental space. Poyrazli and (Grahame 2007) found that lack of awareness or cultural stigma often prevents students from using institutional support, yet those who do benefit significantly. Universities must actively promote these services in orientations and ensure language/cultural accessibility for rural students.

Time Management and Routine Formation. Establishing a daily routine and time management system helps students deal with academic pressure, culture shock, and homesickness. Structured schedules provide predictability and reduce anxiety in unfamiliar settings, while balancing study, rest, prayer, and social time contributes to overall well-being. (Ward et al. 2001) note that coping effectiveness increases when individuals use behavioral strategies like planning and goal setting. First-year support programs should include workshops on time management, study skills, and life balance for incoming students.

Reframing and Positive Thinking. Cognitive reframing is the practice of interpreting challenges as opportunities for growth. When students view cultural shock as a learning experience rather than a threat, their mindset becomes more flexible and adaptive. This approach encourages resilience, persistence, and curiosity instead of fear or resistance (Lazarus and Folkman's 1984) cognitive appraisal theory supports that stress responses depend on how individuals perceive and frame the situation

Application: Educators and mentors should use affirming language and encourage students to reflect positively on their adaptation progress.

Theoretical framework for understanding Cultural shock

To understand the students' experiences of cultural shock after transitioning from rural to urban university life, this study draws upon relevant theoretical frameworks. These frameworks help explain the psychological, emotional, and behavioral responses students undergo during cultural transitions and guide the interpretation of their coping strategies.

Oberg's Four-Stage Model of Culture Shock.

Kalvero Oberg (1960) was the first to conceptualize culture shock as a psychological process, proposing a *four-stage model* of adjustment:

Honeymoon Phase. This phase is characterized by fascination and excitement about the new culture.

Crisis Phase. This phase is marked by frustration, confusion, and anxiety due to cultural differences.

Recovery Phase. It refers to the gradual adaptation and learning of local norms and behaviors.

Adjustment Phase. In this phase, the individual becomes functionally integrated into the new culture.

This model remains foundational in studies examining initial adaptation, especially among migrants, international students, and relocated individuals. (Oberg, K. 1960).

Lysgaard's U-Curve Theory of Adjustment.

Lysgaard (1955) introduced the U-Curve model, which describes emotional and psychological adjustment over time. According to this theory, individuals go through stages of initial enthusiasm, cultural frustration, gradual adjustment, and stabilization.

The "U" shape refers to the dip in emotional well-being during the frustration phase. This model is particularly useful in understanding the temporal emotional trajectory of students moving from rural to urban academic settings (Lysgaard, 1955).

Kim's Theory of Cross-Cultural Adaptation.

Young Yun Kim (2001) developed a comprehensive theory that views cultural adaptation as a dynamic, ongoing, and dialectical process. Adaptation is achieved

through repeated cycles of stress adaptation growth, wherein individuals experience cultural stress, develop coping mechanisms, and eventually grow in intercultural competence.

Kim emphasized the importance of personal communication, host environment receptivity, and the individual's preparedness for cross-cultural interaction. (Kim, Y. Y. 2001).

Berry's Acculturation Model. Berry (1997) proposed a framework based on acculturation strategies, highlighting how individuals choose to relate to both their original and host cultures. The model includes four strategies.

Assimilation. It refers to adopting the host culture while rejecting one's own.

Separation. It means preserving one's culture while avoiding the host culture.

Integration. It refers to balancing both home and host cultures.

Marginalization. It means rejection of both cultures.

This theory is highly applicable to rural students in urban universities, who may struggle between preserving their regional identity and assimilating into mainstream urban cult (Berry, J. W. 1997).

Gullahorn & Gullahorn's W-Curve Model.

The W-Curve Model builds upon Lysgaard's U-Curve, emphasizing the reentry or reverse culture shock when individuals return to their home culture after adapting to a new one. The model reflects two dips (forming a "W") one for the initial culture shock, and another for reentry.

While commonly used for international exchange students, this theory is also relevant in long academic breaks when hostel students return to their home villages and feel out of place in their native culture (Gullahorn, & Gullahorn, 1963).

Homesickness

Homesickness is defined as a psychological distress caused by separation from home and a longing for familiar environments, people, routines, or culture. It typically involves emotional discomfort, cognitive preoccupation with home, and physical symptoms such as sleep disturbances, loss of appetite, and fatigue (Thurber & Walton, 2012).

According to (Stroebe, Schut, and Nauta 2015),

homesickness is "a complex affective state characterized by feelings of longing, sadness, and anxiety that arise due to the absence of significant relationships and familiar surroundings." It is especially prevalent during transitional life phases such as starting university or moving to a new environment.

Recent international studies have further illuminated the psychological nuances of homesickness among students experiencing relocation. (Misirlis, Zwaan, and Weber 2020), through a quantitative study on international student satisfaction, found that limited access to face-to-face emotional support and an over-reliance on digital communication (such as video calls or messaging) often fails to adequately mitigate feelings of homesickness. Their findings indicate that students who lacked consistent in-person support networks reported higher emotional discomfort, social withdrawal, and lower satisfaction, especially when digital communication could not replicate cultural familiarity.

(Wang and Du 2018), in a qualitative investigation of Chinese students studying in the UK, emphasized that linguistic adaptation plays a critical role in reducing homesickness. Through in-depth interviews, they observed that students with stronger language skills reported better social integration and emotional stability, whereas those struggling with the language experienced isolation, embarrassment, and persistent emotional distress. In another mixed-method study. (Miller, Qureshi, and Park 2020) explored how digital communication affects students' emotional well-being. Although frequent virtual contact with family and friends offered momentary comfort, it often intensified emotional dependence and longing for home, ultimately reinforcing homesick feelings rather than alleviating them. Collectively, these findings suggest that homesickness is not merely the result of physical distance from home but is deeply intertwined with students' ability to maintain meaningful cultural, linguistic, and emotional connections in unfamiliar environments.

Types of Homesickness

There are various types of homesickness.

Developmental Homesickness. This form occurs during key developmental transitions,

especially when young adults leave their homes for the first time typically to attend university or move to a new city. It involves emotional distress linked to the loss of family attachment and the struggle to develop independence. Students may experience sadness, confusion, and anxiety as they begin to navigate adulthood in unfamiliar settings (Tilburg, Vingerhoets, & Heck, 1996)

Situational Homesickness. Situational homesickness is triggered by specific events or emotional moments such as birthdays, holidays, illness, academic stress, or the absence of close support. It may appear even after a student has otherwise adjusted to their new environment. This type often fluctuates and is connected to the student's emotional state and immediate circumstances (Stroebe, Schut, & Nauta, 2015).

Anticipatory Homesickness. Anticipatory homesickness occurs before the actual separation from home. It involves emotional distress, fear, or sadness in advance of moving to a new environment. This type is common among students preparing to leave for university or relocate and is often linked with anxiety and apprehension about the unknown. (Thurber & Walton 2012)

Reactive Homesickness. Reactive homesickness develops shortly after relocation and includes immediate emotional and physical symptoms such as sadness, sleeplessness, irritability, and appetite disturbances. While this type is often short-term and part of the natural adjustment process, in some cases, it may worsen into more serious emotional issues. (Fisher, S. 1989).

Factors Contributing to Homesickness

Homesickness among hostel-dwelling university students is a multifaceted phenomenon influenced by personal, social, cultural, and institutional factors. These elements interact to determine the intensity, duration, and psychological consequences of homesickness, particularly for students from culturally distinct or rural regions such as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Balochistan, and South Punjab students who come in urban areas like Islamabad Karachi and Lahore.

Cultural Distance. Cultural distance refers to the degree of difference between the student's native cultural background and the host environment. For students coming from rural or tribal areas of Pakistan such as Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Balochistan, and South Punjab the urban university setting can feel vastly unfamiliar. Differences in language, food, dress codes, gender norms, religious observance, and social customs often cause emotional dissonance. This cultural incongruity makes it difficult for students to feel "at home" in their new surroundings, leading to a persistent sense of longing and psychological discomfort. The greater the cultural distance, the more pronounced the emotional burden of homesickness. (wang & Du 2018)

Social Isolation. Relocating to a new city and living in a hostel often strips students of their traditional social support systems. Without family, lifelong friends, or familiar community members nearby, students are more vulnerable to emotional loneliness. The absence of shared routines, cultural references, or intimate conversations contributes to a feeling of disconnection. Students who struggle to form new bonds within the university environment often ruminate on memories of home, increasing their sense of homesickness and alienation. (Misirlis, Zwaan, & Weber 2020)

Separation from Family and Emotional Attachment. In collectivist societies like Pakistan, family serves not only as a social structure but as an emotional anchor. Students from tight-knit households particularly those in rural regions often rely heavily on parents and extended relatives for psychological support and identity reinforcement. Hostel life, by removing these connections, creates a void in emotional regulation and stability. The intense longing for familial warmth, shared meals, and community rituals often leads to emotional fragility and persistent homesickness. (Pedersen 2018)

Lack of Institutional Support. Despite increasing student diversity, many universities lack adequate counseling services, peer support systems, and culturally sensitive programming. Generalized orientation sessions often fail to address the specific emotional and cultural challenges faced by students from remote areas. In many cases, university staff are not trained to recognize or respond to region-based emotional needs, leaving students unsupported in their adjustment journey. This institutional neglect contributes to the prolongation and deepening of homesickness. (Sharif 2018)

Emotional Dependency on Digital Communication. To stay emotionally connected with home, students often rely heavily on digital tools such as WhatsApp, video calls, and social media. While this communication offers short-term comfort, it can also reinforce emotional dependency and prevent psychological detachment from home. Students

may find themselves more emotionally tied to what they left behind, intensifying feelings of longing when digital contact is interrupted or proves emotionally unsatisfying. Virtual connection, though helpful, can amplify the emotional contrast between home and hostel life (Miller, Qureshi, & Park, 2020).

Causes of Homesickness

Homesickness is a multifaceted emotional experience triggered by separation from familiar surroundings, routines, and social bonds. It is particularly common among university students living away from home, especially those from rural or culturally distinct regions. The causes of homesickness are both internal and external, ranging from emotional attachment to practical adjustment difficulties. The following are key contributing causes

Emotional Attachment to Family and Home Environment. One of the primary causes of homesickness is the strong emotional bond students have with their families and home communities. In collectivist societies like Pakistan, familial relationships are deeply embedded in daily life. The sudden absence of parental support, family meals, cultural rituals, and shared living environments can lead to emotional distress, anxiety, and sadness. This disconnection from emotionally significant relationships fosters a sense of emptiness and longing (Pedersen, 2018).

Sudden Environmental Change. The abrupt transition from a rural, homogenous, and familiar setting to a diverse, densely populated urban university environment often causes sensory and psychological overload. Students must quickly adjust to new languages, customs, routines, weather, noise levels, and living conditions. This sudden shift can be disorienting and emotionally unsettling, leading to homesickness as a form of psychological resistance to change (Tilburg, Vingerhoets, &

Heck, 1996).

Cultural and Linguistic Differences. Students from culturally distinct regions often face challenges in adapting to urban norms, language, and lifestyle. Differences in spoken language, food preferences, religious practices, dress codes, and gender roles may cause students to feel like outsiders. This cultural incongruence leads to alienation, making students yearn for the familiarity and comfort of homesickness (Wang & Du, 2018).

Low Coping Skills or Psychological Readiness. Homesickness is more severe among individuals who lack effective coping mechanisms, such as emotional regulation, stress management, or problem-solving skills. Many students are unprepared emotionally and mentally for the challenges of independent living, making them more prone to breakdowns in unfamiliar environments (Thurber & Walton, 2012).

Academic and Performance Stress. Students entering rigorous academic environments especially if they come from under-resourced schools may experience self-doubt, fear of failure, and academic anxiety. When struggling with difficult coursework or adjusting to new teaching methods, students may long for the simplicity and comfort of home, where expectations felt more manageable (University of Oulu, 2017).

Consequences of Homesickness

Emotional Distress and Mood Disorders. Prolonged homesickness often leads to emotional disturbances such as persistent sadness, anxiety, irritability, and mood swings. Students may experience a loss of motivation, emotional numbness, or unexplained crying episodes. If these symptoms persist, they can escalate into clinical conditions such as depression or generalized anxiety disorder (Stroebe, Schut, & Nauta, 2015).

Academic Underperformance. Homesick students frequently struggle with concentration, memory retention, and classroom participation. Emotional preoccupation with family or home life can interfere with cognitive processing, leading to poor academic performance, missed deadlines, and low exam scores. Some may even skip classes or consider dropping out due to overwhelming distress (Tilburg et al., 1996).

Physical Health Complaints. Homesickness

can manifest physically as sleep disturbances, appetite changes, fatigue, headaches, or gastrointestinal issues. These psychosomatic symptoms occur because emotional stress impacts the nervous system and overall bodily functioning. Students may neglect self-care routines, such as eating regularly or sleeping adequately, further weakening their health (Fisher, 1989).

Social Withdrawal and Isolation. Emotionally affected students may avoid social interactions, fail to build new friendships, or isolate themselves within hostel rooms. This detachment reduces their exposure to potentially supportive peer networks and worsens their emotional state. A lack of social belonging leads to a cyclical reinforcement of loneliness and homesickness (Misirlis et al., 2020).

Identity Conflict and Cultural Dissonance. Homesick students from culturally distinct areas often face internal identity conflict. In an effort to assimilate, they may suppress their cultural values, dialect, or dress, while simultaneously feeling guilt or discomfort for doing so. This results in cognitive dissonance a psychological state that leads to self-doubt, confusion, and inner conflict (Wang & Du, 2018).

Reduced Campus Engagement. Homesickness can lead to a lack of interest in extracurricular activities, student organizations, and university events. Disengagement from campus life not only affects the student's university experience but also limits opportunities for skill-building, networking, and social integration (Eisenbarth, 2012).

Coping Strategies for Homesickness

Homesickness is a distressing emotional experience, but students often engage in various adaptive strategies to regulate their emotions and adjust to their new academic and social environment. For students from culturally distinct or rural regions such as KPK, Balochistan, and South Punjab, the coping process involves both individual resilience and the use of external resources. The following are key coping strategies identified in empirical research.

Maintaining Communication with Family. For

many students, staying connected to family through phone calls, video chats, or messaging apps serves as a powerful emotional anchor. These conversations provide comfort, reassurance, and a sense of continuity with one's previous life. Daily or regular interaction with parents, siblings, or friends from home reduces feelings of abandonment and helps students feel emotionally grounded. However, researchers caution that overdependence on virtual communication can hinder full adaptation to the new environment and may prolong emotional reliance on home (Miller, Qureshi, & Park, 2020).

Peer Bonding and Social Integration.

Developing meaningful relationships within the university or hostel setting is a crucial protective factor against homesickness. Students who form friendships with roommates, classmates, or peers from similar regions often feel less alone and more socially supported. Group activities, shared meals, and emotional conversations enhance belongingness and promote psychological safety. These bonds serve as a substitute family and reduce the emotional vacuum caused by physical separation from home (Misirlis, Zwaan, & Weber, 2020).

Participation in Extracurricular Activities.

Engagement in extracurricular pursuits such as sports, drama, music, student clubs, or volunteer work provides a productive outlet for emotional energy and distracts from feelings of homesickness. Participation in campus life not only enhances students' confidence and communication skills but also accelerates their social integration into the university community. Being part of a group with shared interests fosters a sense of achievement and helps students build a new identity beyond their regional background (Stroebe, Schut, & Nauta, 2015).

Cultural Reframing and Identity Preservation.

Rather than abandoning their cultural background, many students cope with homesickness by preserving and expressing their native identity in a respectful manner. Wearing traditional attire, cooking regional food, speaking in their dialect with trusted peers, or celebrating cultural holidays enables students to feel more authentic and connected to their roots.

Simultaneously, they reframe the host culture not as a threat but as a learning opportunity, allowing for gradual integration without compromising their sense of self (Wang & Du, 2018).

Seeking Institutional Support Services. Some students utilize formal support systems such as university counseling centers, peer mentoring programs, academic advising, or wellness services. Accessing these resources helps them understand their emotions, learn coping techniques, and feel that their struggles are being acknowledged. When such services are culturally sensitive and easily accessible, they serve as vital tools in helping students manage homesickness, reduce isolation, and build emotional resilience (Sharif, 2018).

Journaling or Self-Reflection. Writing personal reflections through journaling or diary-keeping is an effective strategy for students to process their thoughts and emotions. This private form of expression allows individuals to identify patterns in their moods, recognize triggers of homesickness, and track their emotional growth over time. Journaling serves as a safe emotional outlet for students who may not feel comfortable sharing their feelings publicly (Eisenbarth, 2012).

Religious or Spiritual Practices. For many students, faith and spirituality are essential tools for coping. Engaging in prayer, reading religious texts, or participating in group religious activities (e.g., congregational prayers) offers a sense of inner peace, hope, and connection to a higher purpose. Spiritual practices help students regain a feeling of control and meaning, especially when they feel overwhelmed or disconnected from their environment (Fisher, 1989).

Time Management and Goal Setting. Establishing a structured daily routine and setting academic, social, and personal goals allows students to regain a sense of control and direction. By planning their time effectively, students can minimize idle hours that often lead to overthinking or emotional rumination. Goal setting also creates short-term rewards and motivation, which boost self-esteem and distract from feelings of loss or longing for home (University of Oulu, 2017).

Theoretical framework for homesickness

To explore how students experience and cope with homesickness after relocating from rural regions to urban universities, this study incorporates theoretical perspectives that explain emotional attachment to home and the psychological impact of separation. These frameworks provide a basis for understanding the intensity of homesickness and the strategies students use to manage it in a new environment.

Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969). Attachment theory posits that individuals form deep emotional bonds with primary caregivers and familiar environments. When students move away from home to live in hostels, this separation can trigger separation anxiety, resulting in homesickness. The strength and security of previous attachments can influence the intensity of homesickness. Students from close-knit families or collectivist cultures (like many in Pakistan) may experience stronger emotional distress due to broken attachment bonds.

Stress and Coping Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This theory views homesickness as a stressful life event that requires coping strategies. The individual's cognitive appraisal of their new environment, combined with coping resources, determines the psychological outcome. Hostilities may engage in emotion-focused (e.g., crying, praying) or problem-focused (e.g., making new friends, engaging in activities) coping. Homesickness intensity depends on perceived control and available coping strategies.

Social Support Theory (Cobbs, 1976). Social support acts as a buffer against psychological stress. The presence of peers, friends, roommates, or mentors can reduce the negative impact of homesickness. According to this theory, there are three types of support i.e. emotional, instrumental and informational support. Emotional support refers to listening and showing empathy to the other person. Instrumental support refers to lending help to the other person with the tasks or needs. Informational support refers to providing guidance and advice to the other person. This theory can be applied to the students who build strong peer networks in hostels tend to report faster adjustment and lower homesickness.

Separation Anxiety Theory (Bowlby, 1958).

This theory posits that separation from significant attachment figures (parents, caregivers) leads to emotional discomfort and anxiety, especially in unfamiliar settings. Hostilities may subconsciously relive childhood separation fears. They may experience regression, loneliness, difficulty sleeping or eating.

Transition Theory (Schlossberg, 1981). The core premise of this theory is that life transitions (e.g., moving away from home) can be destabilizing. According to this theory, adjustment depends on situation (planned/unplanned), self (resilience, background), support (resources available), and strategies (ways of coping). Homesickness severity varies depending on how well the transition is managed.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Emotional and psychological adjustment for students relocating from rural regions of Pakistan such as Balochistan, KPK, and South Punjab to urban universities is a deeply complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon. Early theoretical framing by Oberg (1960) defines culture shock as the anxiety and disorientation experienced upon entering an unfamiliar cultural environment. Pedersen's (2018) application of a five-stage cultural adaptation model spanning honeymoon, disintegration, reintegration, autonomy, and interdependence captures the acute difficulties of the disintegration stage. For rural-origin students, this stage often coincides with distress over unfamiliar teaching styles, dress codes, gender interactions, and language use in urban university settings, as highlighted in qualitative studies of Balochi students at Karachi hostels (Iqbal & Azhar, 2019). Linguistic challenges are central to cultural disorientation. Wang and Du's (2018) research on international students established a link between limited language proficiency and heightened psychological distress a phenomenon mirrored among Pakistani students who switch from regional languages such as Pashto, Balochi, or Brahui to Urdu, English, or Punjabi. In these settings, "language-induced academic stress" has emerged as a documented phenomenon where students

feel excluded from academic participation and social connection. Similar patterns of marginalization have been reported among foreign students in Saudi Arabia and Botswana, reinforcing the universal role of language barriers in exacerbating cultural and academic isolation.

Homesickness concurrently acts as a heavy psychological burden, characterized by sadness, lethargy, insomnia, appetite changes, and decreased motivation (Miller et al., 2020). Qualitative interviews with hostellers in Punjab reveal that students from strong family-centric cultures suffer intense loneliness and fatigue, though engagement in social activities and fitness routines can alleviate symptoms (Zaidi et al., 2025). Misirlis, Zwaan, and Weber (2020) report that regular digital communication with loved ones effectively reduces loneliness and homesickness, yet technological disparities such as unstable internet access and limited device ownership often restrict this form of coping for rural-origin students.

Research on psychological resilience and acculturation strategies has identified critical dimensions of adaptation. Yan and Sussman (2021) differentiate modes of acculturation, noting that integration balancing retention of one's original cultural identity with active engagement in the host culture correlates with superior mental health outcomes. This is echoed in studies from Lahore, Pakistan, where secure attachment and resilience among female hostellers were associated with lower acculturative stress Naqvi (2012–2014), and in Tabassum's (2016–2019) large-scale study where relationship quality, economic support, and longer duration in the host culture reduced stress levels.

Social support emerges as a vital protective factor, with a consistent body of evidence demonstrating its buffering effects. A meta-analysis across international student populations shows a strong negative correlation between social support and psychological distress. Within Pakistan, Dar (2013–2015) and Sarwar (2011–2013) affirm that parenting style, peer connection, and interpersonal trust significantly influence emotional and social adjustment outcomes. Peer groups, especially those formed around shared linguistic or cultural identities such as ethnolinguistic peer

circles common among Balochi students function as micro-communities that foster belonging and resilience. Further research across Asia and the Global South deepens and extends these themes. Studies from Malaysia, Korea, China, and Canada emphasize common patterns: language challenges, need for social connectedness, and importance of maintaining familiar routines. A Pakistani study on acculturation in China found that over two-thirds of participants experienced discrimination and homesickness, and recommended pre-departure orientations and campus-based cultural integration programs. Similarly, depictions of Pakistani women in the UK showed that linguistic incompetence in English perpetuated social isolation and chronic depression, suggesting language inclusion as a clinical intervention. Culturally embedded coping practices offer crucial emotional buffers. A research conducted at the University of Sussex (2023) advocates for continuity of spiritual routines, cultural music, and home-cooked meals to maintain emotional equilibrium during transitions. Analogous to findings among expatriates from the developing world (Hack-Polay & Mahmoud, 2021), digital technologies such as social media, WhatsApp, and video calls can mediate separation anxiety, although their utility is moderated by technological literacy and generational differences in usage. Contemporary sociocultural research underscores the importance of maintaining cultural identity alongside integration. Acculturation researchers such as Abouguendia and Noels (2001) show that separation strategies maintain self-esteem, although integration typically yields better academic and psychological outcomes. Nostalgia can function both as emotional retreat and support, depending on how individuals process longing. International research from China and Sabah further identifies homesickness as directly compromising academic performance, wellness, and social integration, with structured cross-cultural activities mitigating negative impacts. Adaptation for rural-origin, hostel-based students from Pakistan is shaped by intersecting psychosocial domains: linguistic competence, emotional resilience, familial ties, social integration, cultural continuity, and institutional responsiveness. Culture shock and

homesickness are not transient experiences but indicators of deeper systemic and structural conditions that require culturally informed interventions. Future qualitative research would benefit from deep narrative inquiry into lived experiences such as everyday rituals, peer-learning networks, and spiritual practices to inform culturally attuned policies for equitable higher education access and retention. Students relocating from culturally and geographically distinct regions of Pakistan such as Balochistan, KPK, and South Punjab to urban universities face dynamic psychological challenges influenced by cultural, linguistic, and institutional factors. The foundational work of Oberg (1960) and subsequent extension by Pedersen (2018) illuminate the cyclical nature of culture shock, especially the emotionally turbulent disintegration phase, during which students sharply perceive cultural incongruities in dress, interaction norms, and gender dynamics. Local qualitative studies, such as Iqbal and Azhar's (2019) exploration of Balochi hostellers in Karachi, underscore how unfamiliar educational environments and co-educational norms compound cultural disorientation. A crucial domain of stress among these students is language acquisition. Building on Wang and Du's (2018) research, which ties linguistic ability to adaptation among international students, similar "language-induced academic stress" has been observed among rural-origin Pakistani students transitioning to Urdu, English, or Punjabi as dominant languages. Studies from Malaysia confirm that lower English proficiency creates acculturative stress among international students, highlighting parallels between Pakistani internal migrants and overseas students. Homesickness compounds these challenges by creating emotional voids characterized by insomnia, appetite changes, and lethargy. Miller et al. (2020) work links homesickness to cultural disorientation among first-year students from collectivist backgrounds. Zaidi et al. (2025) add depth with phenomenological data from Punjab universities, revealing how isolation and lack of peer networks exacerbate homesickness, while engagement in social and physical activities can mitigate these effects. Digital connectivity has emerged as a critical buffer, with Misirliis, Zwaan, and Weber (2020) revealing that

structured video calls and social media contact reduce loneliness and stress. However, they caution that rural-origin students may face barriers to technology access, limiting this coping avenue. Only a minority of rural hostel students enjoy reliable internet and smartphone access. A resilience-based lens illuminates another critical dimension of adaptation. Yan and Sussman (2021) demonstrate that students using an integrationist acculturation style preserving cultural identity while engaging with the host culture enjoy better mental-health outcomes. This is reinforced by Naqvi's (2012–2014) findings linking secure attachment and resilience to lower acculturative stress among female hostellers, and Tabassum's (2016–2019) study, which found strong associations between social support, financial stability, and institutional exposure with reduced psychological distress. Social support encompassing peer, familial, and institutional networks serves as a foundational protective factor. International meta-analyses have consistently shown strong inverse correlations between perceived support and psychological distress among students. Pakistan-based research by Dar (2013–2015) and Sarwar (2011–2013) links familial parenting styles and friendship quality directly to coping efficacy, whereas ethnolinguistic peer groups among urban-looking Balochi students in Karachi create vital micro-communities supporting emotional stability (Iqbal & Azhar, 2019). Institutional support also plays a pivotal role. International models from Sussex (2023) emphasize the importance of orientation programs sensitized to cultural transition, accessible counseling, language training, and peer mentorship. In Punjab, structured wellness and social engagement initiatives have demonstrated real-time benefits in terms of student retention and mental health. Additional studies from South Asia enrich this understanding. Malaysian research confirms the universal protective value of resilience and social support while Korean studies highlight the negative impacts of cultural disorientation and the positive role of structured social integration. Ali (2022) highlight that language learning and peer networks facilitate adaptation in Pakistan's universities. Qualitative research also documents culturally embedded coping methods. The University of Sussex

(2023) emphasizes that maintaining religious practices, cultural music, and cuisine supports identity and emotional stability during periods of transition. International studies reveal that nostalgia and spiritual practices can buffer against acculturative stresses, aligning with the rejection-identification model (Abouguendia & Noels, 2001; Tummala-Narra et al., 2016). Finally, scholars highlight systemic structural factors that deepen adjustment challenges. Issues such as institutional elitism, rural urban disparity, and cultural devaluation as voiced by culturally marginalized students in LUMS and public universities (reddit testimonies) go beyond individual adaptation, indicating the need for multi-level interventions from curriculum to faculty development and socio-cultural sensitivity policies.

Rationale

The pursuit of higher education has led to a growing trend of internal migration within Pakistan, particularly among students from geographically distant and socioeconomically marginalized regions such as Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), and South Punjab. These students are increasingly enrolling in urban universities located in cities like Lahore, Islamabad, and Karachi. This movement represents a positive shift toward greater educational inclusion, offering new academic and social opportunities for students from traditionally underserved areas. However, while this transition holds promise, it also brings significant emotional and psychological challenges, particularly for first-year students who are living away from their families for the first time in university hostels.

Among the most common and impactful difficulties faced by these students are homesickness and culture shock. Homesickness, characterized by emotional distress caused by separation from home and loved ones, can lead to sadness, loneliness, and even physical symptoms such as sleep disturbances or appetite loss. Culture shock, on the other hand, refers to the anxiety, confusion, and disorientation that individuals feel when immersed in a new cultural environment that differs significantly from their own. Students from rural or conservative backgrounds may find it especially difficult to adapt to the urban university culture,

which is often more liberal, linguistically diverse, and socially open. The sudden shift in lifestyle, norms, and expectations can cause emotional discomfort and a sense of disconnection.

This study aims to fill this research gap by exploring how first-year hostel students from Balochistan, KPK, and South Punjab experience and cope with homesickness and cultural shock in the urban university context. The primary objective is to understand their lived experiences and the coping

strategies they adopt to navigate emotional, cultural, and academic challenges. The study is grounded in the belief that the voices of these students who are often left out of mainstream educational discourse must be heard and understood to create truly inclusive and supportive academic environments.

In the context of Pakistan, coping strategies among hostel students may include maintaining religious practices and cultural routines, using digital communication to stay connected with family, forming peer support groups based on regional or linguistic identity, and developing psychological resilience through optimism and adaptability. However, not all students have equal access to these coping resources. Many face intersectional disadvantages, such as limited internet access, financial hardship, language barriers, or social exclusion, which can intensify their emotional struggles and impede successful adjustment.

In sum, this study seeks to contribute both theoretical insight and actionable recommendations, addressing an urgent and under-researched issue in Pakistani higher education. By shedding light on the internal experiences of hostel students from marginalized regions, it aims to promote emotional well-being, educational equity, and institutional inclusiveness.

Objectives

This study aims to explore the cultural and emotional experiences of students who migrate from rural and culturally distinct regions of Pakistan such as Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and South Punjab to urban universities where they reside in hostels. The following objectives have been formulated to guide the investigation into various aspects of

their adjustment, challenges, and coping strategies:

To explore coping mechanisms for culture shock among hostel students. The study examines how students respond to unfamiliar cultural environments and navigate differences in norms, language, and social expectations. To understand the emotional and behavioral impact of homesickness This objective focuses on how separation from family and home affects students' mental well-being and daily functioning. To identify linguistic, cultural, and institutional stressors the study investigates specific factors within university life that contribute to feelings of exclusion and emotional strain.

To assess the role of social and peer support network the research explores how friendships, cultural groups, and mentorship influence students' ability to cope.

Research Questions

To gain a deeper understanding of the emotional and cultural transitions experienced by first-year hostel students from rural regions of Pakistan, this study is guided by the following research questions. These questions aim to explore the nature of cultural shock and homesickness, along with the coping strategies students employ during their adjustment to urban university life:

What are the coping strategies used by hostilities to deal with culture shock among hostilities?

What are the coping strategies used by hostilities to deal with homesickness among hostilities?

How do personal and cultural backgrounds influence the experience of culture shock and homesickness among hostilities?

Chapter 3

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design which explored the experiences and coping strategies for cultural shock and homesickness among hostel students. This study adopted a qualitative research design to explore the lived experiences of first-year hostel students from Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), and South Punjab as they navigate culture shock and homesickness in urban academic environments such as Lahore, Islamabad, and

Karachi. Qualitative research is particularly suitable for investigating subjective phenomena that are contextually embedded, emotionally complex, and not easily quantifiable (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The emotional challenges associated with leaving familiar sociocultural settings and adjusting to a new institutional and urban environment require a method that can capture personal meaning, interpretation, and depth of experience. The focus of this study is not to generalize findings to a larger population, but rather to understand in rich detail the emotional, psychological, and cultural adjustments these students make while living away from home for the first time. A qualitative approach enables the researcher to explore participants' perspectives through open-ended, semi-structured interviews, allowing them to express their thoughts in their own words. This is essential for understanding how students perceive and respond to challenges related to cultural displacement, linguistic adaptation, isolation, and identity conflict

Sampling Method

This study employed purposive sampling method to recruit participants who could provide deep, contextually rich insights into the experiences of culture shock and homesickness. Purposive sampling was chosen because it allows researchers to intentionally select participants who have direct, relevant experience with the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 2015). In the context of this research, participants were selected based on their first-hand experience of hostel life, cultural transition, and emotional challenges associated with relocating to an unfamiliar city for higher education. The goal was not to generalize to the entire student population, but rather to gain in-depth, meaningful understanding of how students from these culturally diverse and often marginalized regions cope with emotional displacement, cultural unfamiliarity, and psychological stress. This sampling method ensured that the data collected would be rich, relevant, and reflective of the core issues under investigation.

Sample Size The study sample consisted of total 14 participants. 7 female and 7 male participants these participants were first year university students who lived in hostels. All participants were from different provinces of

Pakistan (KPK, Balochistan, South Punjab) Pakistan who come into urban areas like Lahore Islamabad Karachi for study. Some interviews were conducted with individuals currently in university while others took place in a hostel. purposive sampling was utilized to select 14 participants seven male and seven female first-year hostel students from Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), and South Punjab, who had recently migrated to urban universities in major cities such as Lahore, Islamabad, and Karachi. These regions were intentionally targeted due to their distinct cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic characteristics, which contrast sharply with the urban academic environment's students must adapt to

Inclusion Criteria:

In alignment with the study's objectives, specific inclusion criteria were established to ensure the selection of participants who could provide meaningful, firsthand insights into the experience of culture shock and homesickness among first-year hostel students from remote regions of Pakistan. The reason for choosing this specific criterion to know how homesickness and cultural impacted the lives of students who belonged to other provinces like KPK, Balochistan south Punjab.as their travel distance is more than 5 hours and they are first year students who can effectively tell their experience in living hostels.

The following criteria were used to select participants:

Students who resided in university-managed (government) hostels.

Participants must have lived in official hostels provided by public-sector (government) universities in Pakistan. This criterion ensures a common living environment shaped by institutional policies, limited privacy, and shared facilities factors that can significantly influence the experience of homesickness and cultural shock. Private hostels or rented accommodations are excluded, as they may offer different levels of autonomy, comfort, or peer interaction. Students who lived at least three or more hours away from their home region. To ensure that the participants have undergone a meaningful geographical and cultural transition, only those students were selected who migrated from home regions located at least three hours

away by public transport. This condition reflects significant separation from family, community, and local culture, thereby increasing the likelihood of experiencing emotional distress, adjustment challenges, and identity conflict associated with cultural shock and homesickness. Students aged 18 years or older were selected. The age limit ensures that participants are legally adults and capable of providing informed consent to participate in the study. Additionally, this age group typically represents university-level students who are in the early stages of higher education especially first-year students who are most vulnerable to emotional and psychological stressors resulting from relocation and hostel life.

Exclusion criteria:

To ensure the relevance and clarity of the data, exclusion criteria were applied to eliminate participants whose backgrounds or circumstances could introduce confounding variables or fall outside the study's specific focus on first-year hostel students from remote region. Individuals were excluded from the study if they met any of the following criteria:

Seasonal hostel students who resided in hostels for a short period were excluded. Students who temporarily stayed in hostels for a limited time such as during exam seasons or practical sessions were not included in the study. Their brief stay does not allow for the deep psychological or emotional effects typically associated with long-term hostel living, including the development of culture shock or homesickness. Students previously diagnosed with mental health conditions (e.g., depression, anxiety) were excluded. Participants with a known clinical diagnosis of psychological disorders were excluded to maintain the focus on culture shock and homesickness as situational and environmental phenomena, rather than outcomes rooted in pre-existing mental health conditions. This helps ensure that emotional challenges reported by participants are primarily associated with hostel life and relocation. Students in final year or other academic years beyond the first year were excluded. The study focused solely on first-year students, as they are most vulnerable to the effects of homesickness and cultural shock due to their initial transition into a new environment. Senior students may

have already adjusted or developed coping mechanisms, which could skew the findings. Students from Punjab province or nearby regions were excluded. To focus on students who experienced a significant cultural and geographical shift, individuals from Punjab or areas near the host university were excluded. These students likely share similar language, traditions, and urban familiarity, reducing the intensity of culture shock or homesickness compared to students from more distant and culturally distinct regions like Balochistan, KPK, or South Punjab. Students living in private hostels were excluded. The study specifically targeted those living in public/government university hostels, where living conditions, rules, and peer dynamics are more uniform and institutionalized. Private hostels vary widely in terms of environment, facilities, and management, introducing inconsistencies that may affect the reliability and comparability of participants' experiences.

Data Collection Method

Data was collected primarily through semi-structured interviews, which allowed for a guided yet flexible exploration of participants' personal experiences. The study focused on first-year students residing in government hostels, with interviews conducted in both hostel and university settings. Female participants were interviewed within their hostile environments, while male participants were interviewed in university settings ensuring their comfort and confidentiality. Out of the total 14 interviews, 11 were conducted in person, while 3 were conducted online via phone calls. All interviews were conducted with informed consent, (see Appendix A) and where possible, audio recordings were made. Most of the interviews were audio recorded some of the interviews are hand written. Data collection was done by contacting people on social media who were from different provinces like kpk balochistan and south Punjab. Data is collected from first year students who are currently enrolled in universities of urban cities like Islamabad Karachi and Lahore. The data collection process ultimately yielded a rich and diverse dataset, providing deep insight into the emotional and psychological coping strategies employed by students facing culture shock and homesickness.

Semi structured interview

Semi-structured interviews were used as the primary method for data collection in this study. A total of fourteen participants were selected, all of whom were first-year university students residing in hostels and originally belonged to culturally diverse and rural regions of Pakistan. An interview schedule was developed consisting of seventeen open-ended questions. These questions were divided into three main sections. The first section focused on demographic details, such as the participant's age, region of origin, academic program, and the duration of their hostel stay. This was designed to establish the context of each participant's background. The second section explored the phenomenon of culture shock, examining the initial difficulties experienced in adjusting to urban life. Questions focused on language barriers, food and lifestyle differences, social interaction challenges, and feelings of exclusion. The third section addressed homesickness, investigating how participants coped emotionally with being away from home and the strategies they used to manage these feelings.

Participants were also asked about their perceptions of institutional support, including what types of services were available and what additional support they believed should be provided by hostel management or university administration.

All interviews were conducted in Urdu to ensure that participants could express their thoughts comfortably and authentically. Important observations and non-verbal cues were also recorded as field notes during the interviews, which later supported the depth and accuracy of the thematic analysis. Semi-structured interview was developed iteratively, focused on exploring participants' motivations, decision making processes, emotional experiences, and perceptions of their own re-offending behavior, as well as their hostel

experiences and challenges. Semi-structured interviews are often preferred in qualitative research because they allow for a balance between structure and flexibility, which is important when exploring complex and sensitive topics. Unlike structured interviews, which have a set list of questions and answer options, semi-structured interviews provide a framework for the conversation but allow for open-ended responses that can reveal unexpected insights (Barclay, 2018). Semi-structured interviews also allow for the interviewer to tailor questions to the specific context of the research and to follow up on interesting or relevant responses (Seidman, 2019). This flexibility allows for a deeper understanding of the participant's experiences, perspectives, and beliefs, which can lead to rich and nuanced data. Additionally, semi-structured interviews are often more comfortable for participants than fully unstructured interviews because they provide a clear structure and purpose for the conversation, while still allowing participants to express themselves in their own words. This can help to build rapport between the interviewer and participant, which can be especially important when discussing sensitive or personal topics like homesickness and cultural shock (Smith, 2010). Overall, the flexibility and balance of structure and openness make semi-structured interviews a preferred method for qualitative research.

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

The following table provides an overview of the demographic characteristics of the participants involved in the study. This includes details such as age, region of origin, distance and the duration of their hostel stay. These background variables helped contextualize the participants' experiences of culture shock and homesickness

Table 3.1 Demographic characteristics of the sample (N = 14)

Initials	Gender	Province	Age	Duration of stay in hostel	Distance
S	Male	Balapur , Gilgit	20	1 year	15 hours
KM	Male	sakardu	20	7 months	16 hours
AH	Male	Gilgit Baltistan	24	6 -7 months	15 hours

B	Male	Gilgit Baltistan	20	6 -7 months	15 hours
S	Male	Peshawar	20	1 year	6 hours
MA	Male	Gilgit Baltistan	20	7 months	15 hours
IK	Male	Gilgit Baltistan	21	1 year	15 hours
SZ	Female	Abbottabad kpk	20	8 -9 months	5 hours
RS	Female	Rahimyar khan	19	8 months	7 hours
RT	Female	Peshawar	19	6 months	6 hours
BA	Female	Layyah	20	1 year	6 hours
MA	Female	Peshawar	21	6 -7 months	6 hours
A	Female	Gilgit Baltistan	19	1 year	15 hours
AT	Female	Gilgit Baltistan	19	6 months	15 hours

Procedure

The research process began with the approval of the topic by the Board of Studies, Psychology Department, GCU Lahore. Following approval, first step of this study was creating an interview protocol in accordance to the purpose of the research. Then the search for participants commenced using purposive sampling, personally, who fit the study criteria. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Each potential participant was informed about the nature and purpose of the research, and their right to withdraw at any time. Informed consent (see appendix A) was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in the study. The interviews were conducted in various settings, depending on the participant's interviews took place in hostels and universities. For personally referenced individuals, Interviews were conducted in hostels of university Three interviews were conducted via phone call for participants unable to meet in person. Before beginning the formal interview, rapport was established through initial icebreaking questions. This approach helped create a comfortable environment for the participants without immediately delving into personal matters. The interviews varied in duration, Due to consent issues and restrictions on electronic devices in hostels, different methods were used to record the interviews. For the three phone interviews, audio recording was used with the participants' consent. Following each interview, participants were debriefed. They were provided with a comprehensive explanation of the research objectives and its potential implications. This debriefing process ensured that participants fully understood the purpose of their involvement and the broader

context of the study. After the interviews were completed, they were transcribed and analyzed.

Data Analysis Method:

For this study, data were analyzed using Thematic Analysis, following the six-step approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This method was chosen for its flexibility and effectiveness in identifying patterns and themes within qualitative data, especially when exploring personal experiences and coping strategies. The process began with familiarization through repeated reading of interview transcripts, followed by generating initial codes that highlighted key emotional, cultural, and behavioral responses related to homesickness and culture shock. These codes were then grouped into meaningful themes, which were reviewed, refined, and clearly defined to ensure accuracy and relevance. The final themes were supported by participants' direct quotes to illustrate how hostel students from rural regions adjusted to urban university life. Thematic Analysis provided deep insight into the lived realities of these students and helped uncover culturally embedded coping strategies within the context of internal student migration in Pakistan.

Ethical Considerations

Throughout the research process, strict ethical guidelines were adhered to, ensuring participant confidentiality, informed consent, and the right to withdraw. The study was conducted in compliance with the ethical standards set by American Psychological Association (2020). Ethical standards were followed in accordance with the American Psychological Association's

(APA, 2020) Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and they were made aware of the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty.

Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained. All identifying details were removed, and only initials or pseudonyms were used in transcripts and analysis.

Data were stored securely and were only accessible to the researcher to ensure participant privacy. Interviews were conducted in a respectful and non-threatening environment to minimize emotional discomfort or distress.

Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions and express concerns; any issues raised during the study were addressed promptly.

Where needed, participants were offered referrals or emotional support resources to promote their psychological well-being.

Operational Definitions

The following operational definitions provide precise meanings for concepts central to the study, such as homesickness, culture shock, hostilities, and coping strategies.

Culture Shock. Culture shock is operationally defined as the psychological and emotional discomfort individuals experience when they are exposed to a new cultural environment that differs significantly from their own. It involves feelings of confusion, anxiety, frustration, and disorientation resulting from unfamiliar social norms, language barriers, interpersonal dynamics, academic expectations, food, and daily routines (Pedersen, 2018; Oberg, 1960). In the context of this study, culture shock is identified through students' self-reports of cultural mismatch, discomfort in adapting to urban university life, or emotional struggles during the early phase of relocation.

Homesickness. Homesickness refers to a state of emotional distress caused by separation from home, family, and familiar surroundings. It is characterized by persistent feelings of longing, sadness, helplessness, anxiety, and a desire to return home (Thurber & Walton, 2012; University of Sussex, 2023). Homesickness may affect students' academic performance, sleep,

appetite, and emotional stability. In this study, it is operationalized through participants' verbal expressions of missing family, a sense of isolation in hostel life, and emotional withdrawal from campus activities.

Hostelite. The term hostelite is defined as an individual enrolled in higher education who reside in university-provided or affiliated hostel accommodations. These individuals live away from their home regions for an extended period, often experiencing unique psychological, cultural, and emotional transitions. In this study, the focus is specifically on first-year students from rural areas of Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and South Punjab who have relocated to major urban centers such as Lahore, Islamabad, or Karachi. Their hostel life experience is explored to understand the psychological impact of relocation.

Coping Strategies. Coping strategies are defined as the behavioral, emotional, social, and cognitive methods individuals use to manage internal and external stressors arising from challenging life circumstances (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In this research, coping strategies refer specifically to how students manage the psychological effects of culture shock and homesickness. Students used a range of coping strategies to deal with emotional challenges. Emotional coping involved managing inner distress through practices like journaling, crying, or turning to religion through prayer and Quranic recitation. These helped provide emotional relief and spiritual connection. Cognitive coping included reframing negative thoughts and engaging in positive self-talk to mentally adapt to cultural differences. Behavioral coping focused on actions such as maintaining routines, exercising, and participating in campus activities to reduce stress and create normalcy. Lastly, social coping relied on support from peers, roommates, and family communication, which helped ease isolation. As noted by (Yan & Sussman 2021), such support systems act as vital buffers during cultural adjustment.

Results and Interpretations

In this study, we adopted a qualitative research to explore the coping strategies used by hostel students experiencing cultural shock and homesickness. Since the aim was to understand

the emotional depth and personal meaning of students' experiences, a qualitative approach was most appropriate. Qualitative research is especially effective when studying subjective, emotional, and socially constructed realities. The participants in this study were first-year university students from Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), and South Punjab, who migrated to metropolitan universities in cities like Lahore, Islamabad, and Karachi. Their unique regional, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds made their experiences highly individual and nuanced something that could not be captured through numerical data alone. To analyze the interview data, thematic analysis is used, which is a flexible method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within qualitative data. followed the well-known six-phase framework proposed by (Braun and Clarke 2006). This approach allowed to explore the patterns of meaning in the participants' narratives and interpret how they adjusted to life away from home and in unfamiliar cultural environments.

Steps of Thematic Analysis

The following section outlines the six steps of thematic analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke. These steps guided the systematic process of analyzing qualitative data from familiarization with the transcripts to the generation of final themes. Suring a thorough and rigorous exploration of participants experiences.

Step 1: Data Familiarization

The first step in the analysis was the manual transcription of all interviews. Each interview was listened to multiple times, first transcribed in Urdu and then translated into English. This slow and thoughtful process allowed for a deeper understanding of each student's emotional experiences. As the transcripts were read and reread, recurring expressions began to emerge students described feelings of loneliness, missing their families, struggling with food and language, and feeling like outsiders in the hostel. These patterns served as emotional and psychological entry points for the coding process.

Step 2: Generating Initial Codes

In this phase, each transcript was carefully reviewed line by line to generate initial codes that captured meaningful elements of the data. These codes reflected the emotional experiences, behaviors, and thought patterns of the participants. Several key codes were identified from the participants' narratives regarding their experiences of homesickness and cultural shock. In the context of homesickness, many participants shared that they coped by calling their parents daily, which provided emotional relief and a sense of connection home. Feelings of sadness and emotional vulnerability were often heightened at night, a time when loneliness became more intense. Some participants mentioned writing in journals as a private way to process their emotions. Others engaged in hostel events and social activities as a means of distracting themselves from feelings of homesickness. Additionally, strong emotional bonds with roommates were frequently highlighted as a crucial support system during this transition period. With regard to cultural shock, several students struggled with the adjustment to spicy or unfamiliar food, which differed greatly from what they were accustomed to in their home regions. Language barriers also surfaced, particularly in the inability to understand local dialects or jokes, which often left participants feeling confused or excluded. Many reported a sense of being socially judged or feeling like outsiders due to their regional identity. However, finding peers from the same area or background offered comfort and a sense of belonging. Over time, most participants described gradually adapting to local customs and social norms, which led to increased confidence and improved social integration. These initial codes formed the foundation for the next stage of theme development.

Step 3: Search for Theme Based on Initial Coding

Once all the codes had been generated, they were grouped into broader categories that revealed underlying coping patterns. It became evident that the experiences of homesickness and cultural shock were distinct yet interconnected. The first set of codes formed the theme "Coping Strategies for

Homesickness”, encompassing the emotional and behavioral efforts students used to manage their longing for home and family. The second cluster of codes shaped the theme “Coping Strategies for Cultural Shock”, reflecting how students adapted to an unfamiliar social and cultural environment and reconstructed their sense of identity in a new setting. Each theme was supported by insights from multiple participants and included distinct sub-themes that added depth and nuance to the overall findings.

Step 4: Review of Themes

After the development of the two major themes, the interview transcripts were revisited to ensure that the themes accurately captured the participants’ lived experiences. This phase involved a detailed cross-checking of verbatim quotes to verify that they aligned with the emotional tone and intent of each theme. It was essential to confirm that the themes demonstrated internal consistency and that no significant data had been misclassified or forcefully fitted into unrelated categories. During this process, some themes were refined for greater clarity and precision. For example, certain narratives initially categorized under cultural confusion were re-evaluated and reclassified based on whether they represented emotional isolation more closely related to homesickness or instances of social exclusion, which aligned more appropriately with cultural shock. These adjustments were made through careful interpretive decisions aimed at preserving the authenticity and depth of each participant’s account, ensuring that the thematic structure remained true to their experiences

Step 5: Theme Definition and Labelling

At this stage, the two major themes were finalized and named in a way that clearly conveyed their core meanings. The theme “Coping Strategies for Homesickness” encompassed a range of emotional responses and personal behaviors adopted by students to manage the distress of being away from home. Participants described drawing significant emotional support from family, often through daily phone calls and emotional sharing, which provided a sense of connection and stability. Peer bonding within

hostels also emerged as a critical strategy, where friendships with roommates and hostel fellows helped reduce feelings of isolation. In addition, students engaged in social activities, such as cultural nights and games, as a means of distraction and emotional upliftment. Personal coping methods like journaling, walking, and self-reflection were also reported, offering a private outlet for emotional regulation. However, many participants noted a lack of access to professional mental health support, highlighting an institutional gap. In the absence of such resources, students often relied on practicing patience and emotional control, which they saw as essential for adapting to their new environment. The second theme, “Coping Strategies for Cultural Shock,” reflected the psychological and social adjustments made in response to the unfamiliarity of urban university life. Many participants coped by seeking comfort in peers from similar cultural or regional backgrounds, which created a shared understanding and sense of safety. Over time, students began learning local customs, languages, and communication styles, which contributed to smoother integration. Several narratives emphasized the importance of developing tolerance and emotional acceptance, allowing students to navigate new norms without judgment or resistance. Participation in shared events and group activities helped students feel included and socially visible, while the ongoing process of adjustment contributed to growing confidence and personal development. These theme names were not selected merely as descriptive labels, but as reflections of the emotional labor, adaptive strategies, and resilience embedded within students’ lived experiences. They illustrate the complex interplay between emotional needs and the sociocultural context of hostel life during a period of significant transition.

Step 6: Report Writing

In the final phase, the findings were written thematically, supported by carefully selected participant quotes translated into English. Each quote was chosen to illustrate how students coped, adapted, and at times struggled with the challenges of hostel life. Rather than presenting the data as isolated statements, each theme was constructed as a narrative arc, highlighting

students' progression from emotional disruption to gradual adjustment and personal growth. For example: Several participant narratives highlighted the dynamic and evolving nature of coping over time. For instance, students who initially described crying at night due to intense homesickness later spoke of forming deep and meaningful friendships with their roommates, which provided emotional comfort and a sense of belonging. Similarly, participants who initially felt culturally excluded because of language barriers eventually reported

processed from familiarization to theme development to understand the participants'

Results

The transition from home to university hostel life exposed students to a wide range of unfamiliar cultural environments, norms, and expectations. Particularly for those coming from rural areas or culturally distinct provinces, the first year at university posed significant cultural challenges. These included adjusting to new languages, unfamiliar food habits, differences in dressing styles, social customs, communication patterns, and overall lifestyle changes. Such exposure often resulted in feelings of confusion, discomfort, and psychological disorientation hallmarks of cultural shock. However, the students in this study demonstrated various proactive strategies to manage and reduce the impact of this cultural dissonance. This section presents how all participants used distinct coping strategies to deal with cultural shock. The findings, supported by participant narratives, illustrate how students gradually adapted through language learning, observational behavior, emotional resilience, social engagement, and lifestyle adjustment. Many participants initially struggled with local dialects, but they made intentional efforts to learn and use the local language either through formal learning or by observing how others spoke. This linguistic adjustment significantly helped reduce feelings of exclusion and improved their classroom participation and peer interactions. Students also adopted

learning local expressions and gradually gaining social confidence. These accounts offered more than just thematic support they illuminated the emotional complexity and adaptability involved in the transition to hostel life. Rather than fitting neatly into predefined categories, the narratives revealed how students actively navigated their environments, emotionally and socially, over time. This underscores the importance of viewing coping not as a static outcome but as a fluid, developmental process shaped by lived experience.

experiences and coping strategies.

observational learning by carefully watching others' behaviors, gestures, and social etiquette and then mimicking these patterns to blend into the new environment. Social integration played a critical role as well; making friends from similar cultural backgrounds and participating in hostel events helped students feel less alienated and more accepted. Emotional strength such as reminding themselves of their purpose for being at university and learning to accept cultural differences without resistance enabled students to mentally adapt and remain focused on their academic goals. Furthermore, practical adjustments such as changing one's daily routine, food habits, and clothing style allowed students to reduce unwanted attention and blend more naturally with the new culture. Enhancing communication skills, initiating conversations, and seeking guidance from seniors also helped bridge the gap between unfamiliar cultural expectations and personal comfort. These collective strategies reflect not only the challenges but also the resilience, flexibility, and adaptive capacity of students. The following table outlines how students coped with culture shock, showing their journey from initial discomfort to gradual adaptation. Many overcame language barriers, social exclusion, and unfamiliar environments by building friendships, learning local norms, and gaining confidence over time.

Table 4.1 Master Table Depicting Coping Mechanism for Culture Shock (N=14)

Major Themes	Sub-Themes	Initial Codes
Language Adjustment	Learning Local Language	Struggling with vocabulary asking meanings, watching locals talk
	Observational Learning	listening to peers, social exposure
Social Integration	Making Regional Friends	Joining friend circles, participating in room
Major Themes	Sub-Themes	Initial Codes
Emotional Strength		chats, bonding over meals
	Participating in Hostel Events	Attending events, helping organize; celebrating together making new connections
	Self-Motivation	Self-encouragement, journaling, staying emotionally stable
	Accepting Differences	respecting Values, adjusting mindset, letting go of biases understanding norms
Routine Adaptation	Adjusting Lifestyle	Changing habits, adapting routines, following hostel timings, accepting rules
	Dressing Like Locals	Adopting cultural dress, blending wardrobe, aligning with local trends

Communication Skills
 Talking Openly
 Sharing feelings, being vocal about needs, initiating dialogues

Major Themes	Sub-Themes	Initial Codes
Participation & Belonging	Seeking Advice from Seniors	Asking for help; learning tips emotional guidance; gaining hostel knowledge Joining university functions participating in programs group enjoyment; social presence
	Group-Based Collaboration	Group studies; team project planning; building community bonds

Table 4.2 Master Table Depicting Coping Mechanism for Homesickness (N=14)

Major Themes	Sub-Themes	Initial Codes
Virtual Connection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily communication • Emotional sharing 	Regular phone calls with family emotional support through conversations
Peer Bonding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making new friends • Participating in hostel life 	Initiating conversations with peers Engaging in hostel activities
Distraction Techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hobbies and journaling • Staying active in activities 	Writing journals or diaries Involvement in sports, art, and media
Spiritual Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prayers and spirituality • Crying as catharsis 	Practicing daily prayers or spiritual reading Emotional release through crying/self-talk
Adaptation Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making a daily routine • Engaging in chores 	Creating structured daily plans Keeping busy with chores and self-care tasks

Time Management

- Short visits home (if possible)
- Exploring new surroundings

Visiting family during short breaks
Discovering new places within or around campus

Attending Events
Group Based Collaborations
Talking Openly
Seeking advice from Seniors
Coping Strategies for culture shock
Self-Motivation
Accepting Differences
Participating in Hostel Events
Making Regional Friends
Learning Local Language
Observational Learning
Coping Strategies for Homesickness

Interpretation of Cultural Shock

Cultural shock has different sub themes that are described below there are the coping strategies used by students to cope with their cultural shock.

Language Adjustment

Language adjustment was one of the most significant challenges experienced by participants during their initial hostel life. Coming from diverse provinces such as Balochistan, KPK, and South Punjab, many students were unfamiliar with the dominant languages used in urban universities and hostels. particularly Punjabi and Urdu. This linguistic gap resulted in feelings of alienation, miscommunication, and academic difficulties. Participants expressed that learning and adapting to the local language was not just about communication it was essential to social survival, classroom participation, and building relationships.

Learning Local Language. Many participants deliberately engaged in efforts to learn the local language. This process was often slow and self-directed, but it proved essential in making them feel included and understood. For several students, picking up local dialects helped them understand jokes, engage in conversations, and improve their academic comprehension. It also boosted their confidence and allowed them to express themselves more clearly.

(Participant 7)

”میں نے آہستہ آہستہ پنجابی کے الفاظ سیکھنے شروع کیے“

indicating that, although the process began with small steps, it contributed to a greater sense of inclusion within surrounding social circles.

Similarly

(Participant 6)

”شروع میں مجھے لطفی سے سمجھ نہیں آتے تھے، لیکن اب میں ان کا مطلب سمجھنے کی کوشش کرتی ہوں“

demonstrating how efforts to learn the local language helped overcome a significant cultural barrier and

reduced feelings of being an outsider.

This active engagement with language served as a coping strategy against cultural shock and was often accompanied by a strong desire to belong.

Observational Learning. In addition to learning through active language acquisition, several participants relied on observational learning. Rather than formally asking questions, they learned by observing how others talked, what tones they used, how they responded in conversations, and even how they expressed emotions. This silent method of adaptation

was often more comfortable for those who were shy or hesitant to ask questions directly.

(Participant 4)

”میں نے دیکھا لوگ کیسے بات کرتے ہیں اور میں نے ویسے ہی نقل کی“

It highlights the role of social modeling in adjusting to a new environment. Similarly,

(Participant 11)

”دیکھنے سے مجھے زیادہ سمجھ آئی بجائے سوال کرنے کے“

showing how observational learning played a key role in their cultural adaptation indicating that passive observation helped them understand communication norms and feel less

culturally disoriented.

This sub-theme reveals how students relied on subtle, non-verbal cues and context-based understanding as tools to reduce cultural anxiety and fit into their new social environment

Social Integration

Social integration played a critical role in the cultural adjustment of hostel students. The ability to form social bonds with fellow students, whether from the same background or different regions, was a major factor in reducing feelings of loneliness and cultural isolation. Participants consistently reported that social engagement especially making friends and participating in group activities helped them feel accepted and emotionally grounded.

Making Regional Friends. One of the most comforting discoveries for participants was finding others who came from the same province, cultural background, or spoke the same dialect. These friendships created a “mini-home” within the hostel and gave students someone to talk to freely without the fear of being misunderstood or judged.

(Participant 10)

”جب مجھے اپنے صوبے کی لڑکیاں ملیں تو مجھے سکون محسوس ہوا“

illustrating how regional familiarity provided emotional relief.

Similarly,

(Participant 1)

”ایسا کوئی جو میری جیسی زبان بولتا ہو، اس کی موجودگی سے تنہائی کم محسوس ہوتی“

showing how shared language and cultural background helped reduce feelings of isolation.

suggesting that such friendships bridged the emotional gap created by cultural displacement. These regional bonds also made it easier to navigate new systems and cope with homesickness by providing a familiar cultural environment within the unfamiliar setting.

Participating in Hostel Events. Participation in hostel events like cultural nights, bonfires, sports, and group dinners proved to be a powerful tool for integration. Such events offered participants a non-judgmental space to express themselves, learn about other cultures, and feel part of a larger community.

(Participant 8)

”ہون فائرز اور ٹنرز نے مجھے یہاں ایڈجسٹ ہونے میں مدد دی“

It demonstrates how communal experiences fostered feelings of inclusion and belonging.

(Participant 4)

”اکیلوں کی وجہ سے مجھے لگا کہ میں بھی اس جگہ کا حصہ ہوں“

It highlights how participation in group activities contributed to a sense of acceptance.

Reflecting how shared physical activity and play created opportunities for bonding beyond cultural or language barriers. This engagement also allowed students to expand their social networks, express themselves more freely, and find moments of joy amidst transition-related stress.

Emotional Strength

Adapting to a new environment away from home required considerable emotional resilience. Many students developed inner strength to manage their feelings of anxiety, fear, and uncertainty. Emotional strength, as described by participants, involved keeping one's purpose in mind, staying patient, and learning to accept what could not be changed.

Self-Motivation. Participants often reminded themselves of the reason they had come to university: to grow, learn, and build a better future. This internal drive kept them grounded during difficult moments and gave them the strength to continue despite discomfort.

(Participant 13)

”میں نے خود کو یاد دلایا کہ میں یہاں خود کو بہتر بنانے آئی ہوں“

It points to the role of personal goals in reducing cultural shock.

(Participant 12)

”خود کو مضبوط رکھو اور آہستہ آہستہ ایڈجسٹ کرو، یہی میرا اصول ہے“

It reflects the use of self-affirmations and gradual acceptance as key strategies for coping.

Such statements reveal that motivation was not only academic but also psychological, enabling students to navigate unfamiliar territory with resilience.

Accepting Differences: Rather than resisting

the cultural differences, some participants found that acceptance brought peace. Letting go of the urge to judge or change their surroundings helped them develop tolerance and reduce internal conflict.

(Participant 14)

”لوگ مختلف ہوتے ہیں، اور میں نے یہ بات مان لی تاکہ دل کو تکلیف نہ ہو“

This comment shows emotional maturity and cultural empathy.

Similarly,

(Participant 9)

”اب میں چیزوں کو بلکے میں لیتا ہوں اور ذاتی نہیں لیتا“

It illustrates a conscious shift in mindset to prevent emotional distress.

This acceptance helped students emotionally disengage from negative encounters and build positive relationships.

Routine Adaptation

Adjusting to new routines was another key challenge, especially since the timing of meals, daily schedules, and even sleep patterns often differed greatly from those in the participants' home regions. Adapting to these routines was not only a logistical task but also a psychological adjustment that required openness and patience.

Adjusting Lifestyles. To integrate better, students altered their routines to fit in with the hostel's daily schedule. This included changing eating times, sleep patterns, and ways of interacting with others.

(Participant 4)

”میں نے اپنی کھانے کی روٹین بدل دی“

(Participant 13)

”اب میں بھی سب کی طرح دیر سے رات کا کھانا کھاتی ہوں

This shows that such changes reduced their feelings of difference and helped normalize their experience. This adaptability helped students create a smoother day-to-day rhythm and feel less isolated in group settings.

Dressing Like Locals. Several participants adopted local dressing styles to blend in and avoid drawing attention. This act was often rooted in the desire to avoid judgment or stereotyping and to feel accepted in public and social spaces.

(Participant 7)

”میں نے اپنا لباس بدل لیا تاکہ بہتر طریقے سے گھل مل سکوں“

(Participant 6)

”میں عجیب نہیں لگنا چاہتی تھی“

This shows how changing outward appearance was used as a practical tool for cultural adaptation. survival. This subtle form of conformity often helped participants escape scrutiny and reduce social anxiety.

Communication Skill

The ability to communicate effectively was a powerful coping mechanism that developed over time. Initially, many students struggled due to shyness or lack of language proficiency, but most gradually improved their interpersonal communication. This not only helped reduce cultural shock but also empowered them to build stronger peer relationships.

Talking openly. Starting conversations and engaging in daily talk with hostel mates was seen as a necessary step toward integration. For many, this required overcoming personal shyness and fear of judgment.

(Participant 8)

”میں نے ہاسٹل کی لڑکیوں سے بات چیت پر کام کیا“

(Participant 3)

”میں شرمیلی تھی لیکن آہستہ آہستہ دل کھولنا شروع کیا“



This reflects a gradual process of building social confidence. showing personal growth in communication skills. This growing confidence helped participants feel more connected and less culturally distant.

Seeking Advice from Seniors. Seniors, especially those from similar regions, played a mentorship role by guiding new students through hostel culture, rules, and emotional coping.

(Participant 5)

”میرے علاقے کی سینئر لڑکیوں نے میری رہنمائی کی“

(Participant 7)

”انہوں نے مجھے ہاسٹل کی زندگی کے بارے میں سمجھایا اور مجھے آرام دہ محسوس کروایا“

These comments highlight the supportive role of regionally familiar seniors in easing the adjustment process.

These statements show how peer support was crucial in the adjustment process. Seniors provided not only information but also a sense of safety, which helped ease cultural transitions.

Participation and Belonging

The sense of belonging grew stronger as students actively engaged in shared activities and collaborative academic tasks. Through participation, they found identity within their new environment and moved from being observers to active community members.

Attending Events. Cultural nights, sports matches, and festivals created opportunities for celebration and inclusion. These events helped students express themselves and feel acknowledged by others.

(Participant 10)

”کلچرل ناٹس اور گیمز نے مجھے جلدی اینڈجسٹ ہونے میں مدد دی“

(Participant 14)

”ہمیں نے باسٹل کے ایونٹ میں ڈانس کیا اور پہلی بار محسوس ہوا کہ میں اس جگہ کا حصہ ہوں“

It is important to see how participation in social and cultural events fostered a sense of belonging and accelerated adjustment.

These experiences helped students not just adapt but thrive. The joy and shared memories from these events contributed to building a sense of community.

Group-Based Collaboration. Group projects and academic collaborations were essential not only for learning but also for social and cultural exchange. Working in teams helped break the ice and gave participants structured opportunities to bond.

(Participant 12)

”گروپ پرو جیکٹ میں کی وجہ سے میری مقامی طلبہ سے بات چیت ہوئی“

(Participant 5)

”ہم اساتذہ نے ہم کو مل کر ایک دوسرے کے قریب آگئے“

These collaborations were instrumental in fostering mutual understanding and bridging cultural divides.

Interpretation of Coping Strategies for Homesickness

Students living away from home for the first time especially those from rural or culturally distinct regions often experienced intense emotional longing for their families, familiar routines, and the comfort of home environments. This sense of homesickness was not limited to missing people, but also extended to missing cultural familiarity, language, food, and the rhythm of life they were used to. Feelings of loneliness, sadness, and emotional discomfort were commonly reported during the initial weeks or months of hostel life. To cope with these challenges, students employed a variety of emotional, social, and behavioral strategies that helped them regain a sense of connection and control.

Emotionally, maintaining regular communication with family members through phone and video calls served as a powerful coping mechanism. These daily interactions provided comfort, reduced the psychological distance from home, and offered a channel for emotional expression. Students also used emotional sharing, such as crying or venting during calls, as a form of catharsis that helped lighten their mental burden. Socially, forming strong peer relationships with roommates and hostel mates helped alleviate feelings of isolation and replaced the lost support system from home. Participation in hostel events and daily routines with peers created a sense of belonging and normalcy, which further reduced emotional distress. Many students also engaged in creative distractions such as journaling, drawing, or participating in university societies, which allowed them to process emotions privately while staying mentally engaged. For others, religious practices such as prayer provided spiritual calmness and served as a source of hope and inner strength. Developing a personal routine and taking responsibility for daily chores like laundry or cleaning gave students a sense of purpose and structure, which helped stabilize their mental state. Additionally, time management strategies like planning short visits home or exploring new surroundings with friends offered emotional refreshment and kept their minds focused on positive experiences. Together, these strategies reflect the students' capacity for resilience and adaptation. Despite the emotional challenges of being separated from their families and home environments, students actively sought and developed coping mechanisms that helped them navigate hostel life more effectively and maintain psychological well-being. The following master table outlines the coping strategies students used to deal with homesickness. It presents the major themes, sub-themes, and supporting participant responses that reflect how students emotionally and behaviorally managed their feelings of separation from home and family.

Here are some major themes that emerged from the data.

Virtual Connection

The role of family emerged as a foundational pillar in participants' coping with homesickness. For first-year hostel students, especially those from remote or conservative backgrounds. The sudden disconnection from their familial environment created emotional turbulence. In such scenarios, maintaining consistent contact with family members served not only as a coping strategy but also as an emotional lifeline. Family connection grounded students during the transitional phase and helped maintain their sense of identity, emotional security, and continuity.

Daily Communication. Students frequently turned to phone or video calls to bridge the emotional gap caused by physical distance from home. These moments were not just habitual check-ins; they were conscious efforts to restore emotional balance and self-regulation. The act of hearing a mother's voice or discussing the day's events with a sibling re-created a semblance of home in a distant, unfamiliar place.

(Participant 10)

”روزانہ اپنی ماں سے بات کر کے مجھے سکون ملتا ہے“

indicating that these calls served as an emotional regulator that helped soothe distress and reduce internal emotional volatility. Similarly,

(Participant 1)

”میں ہر رات اپنے گھر والوں سے بات کرتی ہوں، یہی میری زندگی کا سہارا ہے“

showing how regular family communication acted as a vital source of emotional support portraying daily communication as a symbolic tether to emotional safety. The term “lifeline” metaphorically signifies how essential these conversations were to her psychological well-being.

These findings show that communication was not just a routine activity it was an emotional anchor that created consistency, especially during moments of uncertainty, fatigue, or sadness.

Emotional Sharing. More than logistical updates or routine calls, many participants described their family interactions as spaces for deep emotional sharing. These conversations provided a confidential, non-judgmental outlet for emotional catharsis allowing students to release accumulated stress, fear, and sadness. The act of crying or venting over the phone was interpreted by participants as emotionally liberating.

(Participant 13)

”فون پر روئی نہیں تو دل ہلکا ہو جاتا تھا“

a statement that reflects how emotional discharge, especially through tears, functioned.

(Participant 6)

”اپنے ماں باپ کو سب کچھ بتانے سے درد کم ہو جاتا ہے“

showing how open emotional expression with family helped ease psychological discomfort. reinforcing the role of expressive communication in mitigating emotional suffering. This sub-theme reveals that emotional expression within familial communication helped students validate their experiences and reduce feelings of abandonment or emotional overload. The comfort of being listened to by someone who truly “knows you” acted as an antidote to the impersonality of hostel life.

Peer Bonding

While familial connection helped maintain emotional ties to the past, peer bonding helped students form new emotional networks in the present. Hostel mates and roommates became key figures in participants' lives, offering companionship, shared routines, and mutual understanding. Establishing these bonds mitigated the emotional vacuum created by leaving one's home and served as a bridge to developing social belonging within the hostel culture.

Developing Friendships. Developing friendships especially with roommates played a vital role in fostering emotional security. These relationships often transitioned from surface-level interactions to deep, sister-

like or sibling-like connections. Having someone to share meals with, vent frustrations to, or walk back to the room with after classes dramatically changed the emotional experience of hostel life.

(Participant 3)

”میری روم میٹ بہن جیسی بن گئی تھی“

highlighting the depth and intimacy of these peer relationships.

(Participant 2)

”دوستوں نے ہوم سگٹس کم کرنے میں مدد کی“

showing how peer support played a significant role in easing emotional distress.

showing how even simple companionship reduced the psychological strain of solitude. These narratives reveal that friendship was not just social it was therapeutic. Peer bonds helped replace the support system participants left behind and served as the immediate emotional infrastructure within the hostel.

Participating in Hostel Life. Engagement in hostel-based activities served a dual function: distraction from emotional distress and a platform for social integration. Hostel events such as bonfires, games, and group activities were not perceived merely as entertainment; rather, they became structured opportunities for emotional redirection and positive reinforcement. Through these moments, students found themselves laughing again, becoming part of something larger, and experiencing moments of joy and normalcy.

(Participant 8)

highlighting distraction as a conscious emotional regu

”ایونٹس نے مجھے مصروف رکھا اور میرا دھیان بٹایا“

(Participant 14)

”گیمز اور ہاسٹل کی خوش مزاجی نے اداسی کم کی“

showing how recreational activities helped in managing negative emotions

showing that shared group activities helped momentarily displace homesick thoughts and foster joy. This sub-theme illustrates that structured social interaction provided cognitive relief from rumination and created micro-moments of happiness both of which were essential in managing homesickness and emotional fatigue.

Distraction Techniques

Distraction emerged as an adaptive coping strategy among participants who sought to redirect their emotional energy away from homesickness. Rather than suppressing their feelings, students used constructive engagement such as creative outlets and structured activities to temporarily detach from emotional distress. These distractions functioned as emotional “buffers,” providing relief, fostering positive mood states, and reinforcing self-worth.

Hobbies and Journaling. Engaging in hobbies like drawing, painting, or writing journals allowed students to process their inner world in a non-verbal, reflective manner. Creative expression not only gave students a voice but also became a safe space to navigate complex emotions such as loneliness, sadness, or frustration.

(Participant 5)

”ڈرائنگ اور جرنلنگ نے مجھے سنبھالنے میں مدد دی“

pointing to the therapeutic value of these expressive outlets.

(Participant 9)

”جب میں ڈائری میں لکھتی ہوں تو میرا دماغ پرسکون ہو جاتا ہے“

highlighting how personal writing served as a calming and coping mechanism. revealing how journaling served as a form of emotional regulation and self-dialogue. This sub-theme highlights the role of solitary creativity in offering psychological sanctuary a place where students could confront and soothe their emotions without social pressure.

Staying Active in Activities. For other students, remaining physically or socially active through clubs and societies was crucial to managing their homesickness. These activities offered cognitive distraction, social engagement, and a sense of structure. The more involved they became, the less time they had to dwell on sadness or longing for home.

(Participant 10)

”اثر لہ کلب نے مجھے اتنا مصروف رکھا کہ درد بھول گئی“

indicating that total immersion in group tasks or rehearsals helped.

(Participant 12)

”مصروف رہنے سے مجھے بہت مدد ملی“

showing how active involvement in extracurricular activities played a key role in coping with emotional challenges.

suggesting that structured involvement gave them purpose and normalized their hostel life.

These examples reveal that proactive involvement served as a self-driven solution to emotional emptiness. Activity-based distraction fostered a sense of competence and belonging, both of which are known protective factors against homesickness

Spiritual Support

For many participants, religion and emotional expression were not just personal experience they were structured emotional support systems. Whether through prayer, spirituality, or private moments of emotional release, these practices helped students find grounding, meaning, and resilience amid emotional dislocation.

Prayers and Spirituality. Prayer was described by several students as a deeply calming, centering ritual. Beyond religious obligation, prayer was a meditative tool that offered peace, restored emotional stability, and strengthened hope. Participants often turned to their faith in moments of despair, using it as a coping anchor to maintain spiritual and emotional balance.

(Participant 13)

”ہاسٹل کی اداسی میں نماز سکون دیتی ہے“

highlighting how spiritual practices filled the emotional vacuum left by familial absence.

(Participant 11)

”دین نے مجھے پرسکون اور ہر امید رکھا“

showing how religious faith served as a source of emotional strength and stability.

portraying faith as both a stress-buffer and a source of inner motivation. These responses point to how spiritual routines enhanced self-soothing and offered a transcendent sense of support that went beyond human connection.

Crying as catharsis. Participants also described emotionally expressive behaviors especially crying as healthy, private rituals that helped release emotional burden. Contrary to common views that discourage emotional vulnerability, students found that allowing themselves to feel and express emotions was deeply healing.

(Participant 3)

”کبھی کبھار رونا نیند میں مدد دیتا ہے“

(Participant 7)

”اب میں اپنے جذبات نہیں روکتی“

highlighting a shift toward emotional acceptance as a coping mechanism illustrating a shift toward emotional authenticity and self-acceptance. This sub-

theme emphasizes that students who allowed emotional openness rather than suppression experienced reduced emotional fatigue and improved mental clarity, enabling them to cope more sustainably.

Adaptation Strategy

Developing personal routines and participating in day-to-day responsibilities allowed students to reclaim a sense of agency in an otherwise unfamiliar and chaotic space. Rather than waiting for the environment to feel familiar, students proactively shaped it to become manageable and meaningful. These adaptation strategies gave structure to their days and turned emotional helplessness into practical action.

Making a Daily Routine. Creating structured routines like setting sleep/wake times, study hours, or meal schedules helped students establish a sense of normalcy. These routines introduced predictability into hostel life and gave students something they could control.

(Participant 7)

”ایک مقررہ روٹین نے مجھے ذہنی سکون د

(Participant 4)

”سٹیڈول سے میری الجھن کم ہوئی اور وقت کو سنبھالنا آسان ہوا“

showing how a structured routine contributed to better emotional and time management.

showing how time-based organization helped ground their mental health. These findings show that personal routine became both a psychological anchor and a practical strategy for coping with hostel life.

Engaging in Chores. Unlike routines which were self-imposed, chores like laundry, cleaning, or grocery shopping were situationally imposed but students reported these tasks as surprisingly therapeutic.

Doing small, purposeful activities helped reduce idleness and gave students a sense of control and maturity.

(Participant 5)

”کپڑے دھونا میرے لیے ایک مقصد بن گیا“

(Participant 8)

”گھر کے کاموں نے مجھے زمین سے جوڑے رکھا“

highlighting how daily responsibilities helped maintain a sense of stability and connection.

showing that performing daily responsibilities anchored them in the present. These tasks,

while often considered mundane, were framed by students as acts of independence and symbolic progress toward adulthood

Time Management

In hostel life, managing time wisely became both a necessity and a survival skill. Students found that purposeful time use not only improved their productivity but also helped prevent overthinking, rumination, and emotional collapse. Time management, for them, was not just about deadlines it was a mental health strategy.

Short Home Visits. Participants who had the logistical and financial capacity to visit home even briefly described these visits as emotionally rejuvenating. Being able to reconnect with family, culture, and comfort for even a day recharged them psychologically and helped them return to hostel life with renewed energy.

(Participant 4)

”میں ویک اینڈ پر گھر چلی جاتی ہوں اور تروتازہ ہو کر واپس آتی ہوں

(Participant 1)

”گھر میں ایک دن گزار لوں تو سب کچھ بدل جاتا ہے“

highlighting the powerful emotional impact of even brief returns home.

suggesting that homesickness could be temporarily resolved through physical reconnection. These short visits worked as powerful coping interventions that balanced long periods of separation.

Exploring New Surroundings. Those who could not visit home found alternative ways to lift their spirits, often by exploring their new environment with peers. Going to markets, cafes, or simply taking walks around campus helped shift the emotional landscape by introducing novelty, excitement, and peer bonding.

(Participant 14)

”ہم باہر کھانے یا شاپنگ کے لیے جاتے ہیں، اس سے ہوم سیکٹ میں بھول جاتی ہے“

emphasizing how exploration provided joy and distraction.

(Participant 2)

”شہر کو گھومنا مجھے مصروف اور خوش رکھتا ہے“

This highlights how engaging with the new environment helped uplift mood and reduce feelings of homesickness. showing that immersion in the outside world replaced emotional stagnation with stimulation. This sub-theme highlights how autonomy and exploration allowed students to find “home-like” pleasures even in unfamiliar places.

Summarizing Note

Hostel students from culturally diverse and often rural backgrounds employed multiple coping strategies to deal with both cultural shock and homesickness as they transitioned to urban university life. To overcome cultural shock, students actively adjusted their language, behavior, and daily routines. Learning local languages like Punjabi or Urdu through both deliberate effort and observation helped them reduce feelings of exclusion and improved communication. Observing others' gestures, tone, and social norms further eased their adjustment. Social integration was another key theme; making regional friends and participating in hostel events such as bonfires and games helped students feel emotionally secure and part of the community. Emotional strength, including self-motivation and acceptance of cultural differences, allowed them to mentally adjust to the new environment. Changes in routine, like adopting local eating and dressing styles, enabled students to blend in and avoid unwanted attention. Communication also played a vital role talking openly and

seeking advice from seniors helped reduce uncertainty and fear. To cope with homesickness, students relied heavily on emotional and practical strategies. Maintaining strong family connections through daily calls provided stability and comfort, while emotional sharing during these interactions, including crying and catharsis, helped them feel lighter and validated. Developing friendships in the hostel reduced loneliness and replaced the lost support system from home. Participating in hostel life and group activities offered emotional distraction and belonging.

Distraction techniques such as journaling, drawing, or staying involved in clubs and societies helped students manage sadness and remain mentally engaged. Religious faith and emotional expression served as inner sources of strength and calm, particularly during emotionally intense periods. Adaptation strategies like building daily routines and handling chores gave students a sense of control and responsibility. Additionally, time management strategies such as short visits home or exploring the city with friends allowed

students to reset emotionally and find joy in new surroundings. Overall, students demonstrated resilience and adaptability through a wide range of coping mechanisms that helped them navigate the dual challenges of cultural shock and homesickness.

Chapter 5

Discussion

This chapter discusses the findings of the study titled *Coping Strategies for Cultural Shock and Homesickness Among Hostilities*, aligning them with existing literature. Thematic analysis revealed two central coping domains: homesickness and cultural shock, each comprising six major themes and associated sub-themes. The study used (Braun and Clarke's 2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework to generate and define patterns across the participants' experiences. The study examined the experiences of first-year hostel students from Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), and South Punjab who relocated to urban universities in Pakistan. Thematic analysis of the interview data revealed that students encountered significant challenges related to culture shock and homesickness, particularly during the early months of hostel life. These experiences were shaped by multiple factors such as language barriers, lifestyle differences, religious-cultural norms, and emotional separation from family. The coping strategies used by participants were analyzed through theoretical frameworks including Pedersen's Culture Shock Model, Berry's Acculturation Model, Lazarus and Folkman's Stress and Coping Theory, and Kim's Intercultural Adaptation Theory.

Culture shock emerged as a prominent psychological and social challenge among participants. Many students described their initial experiences in the city as overwhelming and isolating due to unfamiliar social norms, mixed-gender environments, and an overall shift in cultural values. These responses align with (Pedersen's 2018) model of culture shock, particularly the "disintegration" phase, which is marked by anxiety, confusion, and identity conflict when individuals are separated from their familiar cultural context.

Language was one of the most frequently reported sources of discomfort. Students who

spoke Balochi, Pashto, or Seraiki often struggled to communicate fluently in Urdu or English, making classroom participation and peer interactions difficult. To cope, many began learning the local dialects or sought assistance from peers who had already adjusted. These efforts align with (Berry's 1997) integration strategy, where individuals retain their cultural identity while actively acquiring elements of the host culture to reduce dissonance and enhance social acceptance. Students also reported changing their style of dress, behavior, and communication to avoid standing out in the urban university environment. This behavioral adaptation allowed them to "blend in" and avoid social judgment, consistent with (Ward et al.'s 2001) emphasis on behavioral flexibility as an essential tool in successful intercultural adjustment. Some participants shared that over time, they began to embrace aspects of city life without compromising their core values, an evolving intercultural openness that reflects (Kim's 2001) dynamic adaptation theory, which describes cultural adjustment as a stress-adaptation-growth cycle. Social support from senior students especially those from similar regional backgrounds played a major role in easing cultural dissonance. Peer mentors provided emotional comfort, language assistance, and informal guidance on how to interpret university norms. These relationships served as a bridge between rural identity and urban expectations, helping students gradually find their place in a diverse academic environment.

In parallel with culture shock, homesickness was another deeply felt emotional challenge for participants. The shift from close-knit, family-oriented rural communities to impersonal hostile environments triggered intense feelings of loneliness, sadness, and longing. Students reported difficulty sleeping, changes in appetite, and a general sense of emotional instability, particularly during the first few weeks of hostel life. These responses correspond with (Arnett's 2002) concept of psychological withdrawal symptoms that often accompany separation from emotionally significant environments.

To manage these feelings, students relied heavily on emotion-focused coping strategies. Regular phone calls, voice messages, and video chats with family members served as emotional

lifelines that provided a sense of security and connection. Religious practices, including prayer and Quran recitation, offered spiritual grounding and emotional relief. These approaches reflect (Lazarus and Folkman's 1984) stress and coping theory, especially the use of emotional coping to reduce distress when the stressor itself (i.e., distance from home) cannot be changed.

Personal introspective strategies also emerged as key coping methods. Some students kept journals, engaged in silent reflection, or listened to traditional music from their home regions to stay emotionally anchored. These coping mechanisms resonate with (Misra and Castillo's 2004) findings on the importance of culturally embedded emotional regulation techniques among South Asian students navigating displacement.

Social coping was another crucial factor in reducing homesickness. Students formed close, sibling-like bonds with their roommates and hostel fellows, often referring to them as surrogate family members. These relationships provided a safe space to share emotional burdens, offering both companionship and empathy. This supports (Yusoff's 2012) conclusion that peer bonding significantly alleviates emotional stress during adjustment periods.

Finally, many participants shared that engaging in structured routines such as staying focused on studies, attending hostel events, or participating in group activities helped distract them from overwhelming feelings of homesickness. These behavioral strategies reflect problem-focused coping, as described by (Lazarus and Folkman 1984), where

individuals actively engage in tasks to regain control over their emotional state.

Implications of the Study

Based on the findings, several implications emerge that can inform institutional practices, student support services, and future research. This section discusses how the insights gained from students' coping strategies can be applied to improve cultural adjustment experiences and emotional well-being among hostel residents in urban universities.

Provides insight into emotional and cultural transitions faced by underrepresented hostel students from marginalized provinces.

Highlights the importance of culturally sensitive peer and institutional support in student well-being.

Demonstrates that journaling, prayer, and roommate bonding are effective, culturally relevant coping strategies.

Supports the development of orientation sessions and counseling interventions focused on cultural adaptation.

Suggests the integration of regional peer mentorship programs in hostile environments.

Limitations of the Study

While this study offers valuable insights into the coping strategies of hostel students experiencing cultural shock and homesickness, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. Recognizing these constraints

helps contextualize the findings and provides direction for future research efforts.

The sample size ($n = 14$) limits the generalizability of findings to other regions and student groups.

All interviews were conducted in Urdu, which may have limited full expression for some non-native speakers.

Time constraints restricted the depth of interviews and prevented longitudinal analysis.

Data relied on self-reporting, which is vulnerable to emotional filtering, social desirability, and memory bias.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and challenges identified in this study, several practical recommendations can be made to improve the cultural and emotional adjustment of hostel students from rural regions. These suggestions aim to guide universities, policymakers, and student support services in creating more inclusive and supportive academic environments.

Conduct longitudinal studies to examine how coping strategies evolve over semesters.

Use mixed-method designs to enhance generalizability while retaining depth.

Expand sample diversity to include students from additional ethnic, linguistic, and urban rural backgrounds.

Explore the role of gender differences in coping with homesickness and cultural shock.

Establish region-sensitive counseling services within hostel premises.

Introduce culturally inclusive orientation programs before hostel induction.

Develop structured peer mentorship programs pairing seniors with new entrants.

Include basic dialect and cultural literacy sessions to reduce regional gaps.

Advocate for inclusive hostel policies at the administrative and national levels to support underserved student populations.

Conclusion

This qualitative study explored the lived experiences of first-year hostel students from Balochistan, KPK, and South Punjab as they navigated culture shock and homesickness in urban universities. Findings revealed that students faced significant emotional and psychological challenges due to cultural differences, social isolation, and academic adjustment. Despite these stressors, participants employed various coping strategies, including peer support, religious practices, routine management, and regular family contact. The study highlights the resilience of these students while also pointing to the need for culturally responsive institutional support, such as orientation programs, peer mentoring, and mental health services. Addressing these needs is essential for fostering equity, inclusion, and well-being in Pakistan's higher education system. The data also showed that adjustment is not a one-time event but an evolving process. While many students struggled initially, over time they developed strategies to manage stress, find belonging, and regain academic focus. However, the availability and effectiveness of these coping methods varied depending on individual backgrounds and institutional support. Students from more under-resourced districts often lacked access to digital tools or experienced language barriers that made adaptation more difficult, highlighting systemic inequalities within university structures. In light of these findings, universities must adopt a more inclusive approach that acknowledges the diverse cultural, emotional, and linguistic needs of internal student migrants. By investing in student-centered policies, culturally sensitive

programming, and stronger peer networks, higher education institutions can better support rural students transitions.

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