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Bangladeshi Students' Experiences

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This paper examines Bangladeshi students' reasons of feeling anxious when they go abroad for higher education and their perception on institutional support that helps them in managing anxiety which eventually leads to effective communication. As international student population cannot be considered as one homogeneous group, studying Bangladeshi students' perceptions and viewpoints brought out interesting insights.

Research questions were derived on the basis of Gudykunst's (2005) Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) theory. The theory suggests that managing two basic factors-anxiety and uncertainty is the key to build effective communication in intercultural settings. In this paper, only one factor-anxiety has been examined of Bangladeshi students in the Finnish universities. Qualitative thematic analysis has been used as a research method. Semi-structured interviews of 6 participants were analyzed to find the answers of the research questions.

Findings of the research supported AUM theory and revealed that linguistic, cultural/religious and academic differences gave rise to anxiety among Bangladeshi students. Supportive teachers, other staff members and the university environment helped these students in reducing anxiety and thus, effective communication was possible.

Asiasanat – Keywords
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1   INTRODUCTION

International education, especially at the university level is an age-old concept. Making the decision to study in an institution in a particular time is significant in the life of a student (Brown, 2009). With the modern age, the number of international students going abroad is increasing every year. And with that pace, the number of students going abroad for higher education has increased in the recent years. Often it is difficult for international students to cope with the host environment. The hardships students go through are mainly because of the difficulties with language, making new friends and strained finances (Jung et al.,2007). Students who are able to communicate more effectively are less likely to experience stress and uneasiness in the new culture. Sojourners, international students or exchange students are seen suffering from degrees of anxiety and uncertainty. One's social standard, educational background and ethnicity can affect uncertainty and anxiety. Often, the pressure is solely on international students to overcome anxiety and to build effective communication during the study process abroad. However, institutions can play a key role in building effective communication by providing necessary support to international students which may help them in the long run.

For this thesis, I will focus on linguistic, religious/cultural and academic background of Bangladeshi students and their struggles and adjustments in the Finnish higher educational institutions. To begin with, I am briefly describing academic, linguistic and cultural/religious overview of Bangladesh. With the implementation of Bangla as a state language in 1987, the importance of English language learning has been affected negatively in Bangladesh. With the rise of globalization, again, English has been introduced as a compulsory subject up to upper secondary school and is the second language of the country. At the initial journey, English was

taught using the Grammar Translation method (GT) which focuses on grammatically correct reading and writing skills. Later, in the 1990s, the government realized that the old traditional way of teaching English was not effective in balancing the high demand of communicative English in and outside the country. So, GT method was replaced by CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) which focuses on learner-centered activities in the classroom to promote effective language learning and achieve the desired goal.

However, Bangladeshi students going abroad for study still face the difficulty in using English for communication. They make errors while speaking English because of the lack of practice since childhood. The reasons behind CLT failure have been identified by Barman, Sultana and Basu (2007) as economic constraint, poor infrastructure, cultural conflicts, inefficient ELT (English Language Teaching) practitioners, students' sitting arrangements in classrooms, large classroom size and language teaching and learning, testing process (speaking and listening test is not required to pass the board exams), and administrative set-up. Students lack confidence, vocabulary and practice even after they complete high school.

In addition, the prevailing teacher-student relationship in the Bangladeshi culture makes it close to impossible to have effective communication. Teacher is always the central and dominating figure in classrooms. He/she is expected to be highly respected by students- which also means not to have a friendly relation, maintaining the hierarchical gap and remaining passive in the classrooms. So, it is often hard to establish necessary communication between teachers and students. Classroom environments are, therefore, mostly less communicative. In contrast to this, Andalib (2005) focused on teachers' role for communication in active second language learning where he suggested the teachers to be the facilitators in the communication process between all participants in a classroom. Rather than someone superior in authority and

knowledge, a teacher should be a facilitator, co-communicator and need analyst (Larsen & Freeman, 2004). From the Bangladeshi perspective, it is very important for the teachers to change their attitude and to cope-up with the growing needs of communication and English learning (Tarannum, 2011).

Bangladesh is a Muslim majority country with 90% of its population as Muslims and 10% of other religions -9 % Hindus, 0.6% Buddhist and 0.4% Christians ("Freedom of Religion", n.d). For Muslims, religion is a way of leading life according to the Qur'an (the holy script) and Shariah (Islamic law). Everything a Muslim does in this world has to be spiritually and morally informed for the well-being of human beings. Such is the thought and idea of the Muslims, in general. Families, mosques, religious and educational institutions, the mass media and the overall society play major roles in respecting peoples' faith in Islam. As a result, Bangladeshi society includes the wider concept of Islamism in the tradition and culture they follow. For example, the free mixing of male and female follows a limitation, halal food concern is highly prevailed and maintaining certain dress code is a must for most of the population. The predominate Islamic values in the Bangladeshi society has been confirmed by studies such as (Huque & Akhter, 1988) where they stated, "starting from the birth, the Bangladeshis receive overt and subtle guidance that inculcates the habits which are in conformity with the practices of Islam." Islam and Islam (2018) also confirmed a significant reemergence of religion in the politics, society and culture of Bangladesh. However, the practice of Islam differs from person to person.

A significant number of the studies in the field of intercultural communication have been studied in the East Asian context and Asian (Malaysia, China, Korea, Japan, Taiwan etc.) context, in general. Little has been done regarding the growing number of South Asian students

abroad, especially Bangladeshi students' psychological condition; in this context, their dealing with anxiety, during the period of their studying abroad. According to Fritz et al. (2008), it is not appropriate to classify international students as one homogeneous group. The study found significant differences between sub-cultures' adaptation process, psychological adjustments and socialization patterns. So, examining various sub-groups of international students in different contexts will help in gaining deeper knowledge of cultural differences and mental health issues of the cultural sub-groups. So, my small effort is to fill the gap in this field of research. Apart from this, the religious and linguistic backgrounds mentioned earlier in this paper make Bangladeshis different from the countries, for example neighboring country India where the dominating religion is Hinduism and Malaysia where the linguistic barrier is smaller as it is more open to welcome international students at their local universities.

Thus, the purpose of this study is manifold. Firstly, when studying Asian students, the wide range of studies covered Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese etc. population because of the number of the students going for international studies from those countries are relatively high. So, I intend to study this small international students' population (Bangladeshi students) as this population has a different socio-linguistics, cultural and educational perspectives from the East-Asian countries. Moreover, most of the related studies have been circulated in Australia, Canada, U.K or U.S. So, the present study can contribute in Bangladeshi students' experiences in the Finnish context, in terms of studying abroad. Since, the study explores Bangladeshi students' salient anxieties, their reasons, and how the institutional support helps them in building effective communication, it can help other Bangladeshi students. Furthermore, it can help the host institutions to develop the understanding of this particular culture, which in turn can help the institutions to focus on certain aspects for the future international students' support

infrastructures. Moreover, the participants of this study- some of them are at the initial stage (1 year and 1 month) of their studies- are new in Finland and still struggling with the communication development process. Others have already finished their studies and have been staying long (9 years) in Finland. So, through the study, we can see both initial and post struggling period of the Bangladeshi students which can help in finding how the change is working and how it finally worked for them. Lastly, the aim is also to bring Bangladeshi students' point of views and their experiences under the research study.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 International students for higher education

International education always existed from the early period of higher education. The history began from the University of Paris in the 13th century when it opened its doors to foreign students. International students or sojourners are the greatest highly skilled population recorded in the last decade (Tremblay, 2002). According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Institute of Statistics (UNESCO), the number of mobile students increased up to 4.8 million in 2016 which was 2.1 million in 2002 (UNESCO, 2018). Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2008) predicted this number to be 6 million by 2020. The number of students enrolled in foreign institutions is increasing 7.1% per year since 2000 to 2010 (Mak et al., 2014).

In case of Finland, until the 1990s, it had a very small number of refugees or immigrants and was little known for exchanging international students at Finnish higher education systems (Clarke, 2005). However, it has been a popular study destination not only among other Europeans but also across the world for the last 10 years (Dervin, 2013). The number of foreign students has more than doubled since the 2000s. The statistics of 2013 shows that among the foreign students, 8% were from Europe whilst 13% belonged to Asia. And among the Asian countries, China was the top one. Statistics shows that in the year 2017, there has been 20362 incoming students in Finland from Asia and the number of incoming Bangladeshi students was 617 (Statistics Finland). From the year 2011 to 2017, a total of 3996 Bangladeshi students have come to Finland for the purpose of higher education. The number is small compared to other Asian countries like China (13,619), Nepal (7925) and Vietnam (11,948). This might be one of the reasons why this small population has not been studied much before in this particular context.

Because learners are actively engaged with new people in the new environment, studying abroad is considered an enriched learning process (Yang, Webster & Prosser, 2011). Rinehart (2002) also explains that through studying abroad, students not only familiarize themselves with the academic culture of the new learning place but also come closer to the surrounding social norms and lifestyle. Being exposed to the new culture, students are challenged and exposed to their capacity of cross-cultural communication and intercultural understanding (Yang et al., 2011; Rinehart, 2002). While studying abroad, students bring in them new academic beliefs and values. Thus, their beliefs are changed and lead them to a greater learning independence (Amuzie and Winke, 2009).

Student mobility is a great source of internationalization of higher education (HE) (Kälvermark & van der Wende, 1997). Students are tending to go for study abroad to achieve an

academic and personal success as well as to flourish their career related capabilities (Krzaklewska & Krupnik, 2006; Maiworm & Teichler, 2002). It is not only beneficial for the international students but also beneficial for the host institutions and culture as it helps internationalization at home and brings harmony in the education system (in course or degree structures) (Wiers- Jenssen, 2013). Lee and Rice (2007) have considered international students in the U.S as a benefit provider. This population increases diversity, adding new perspectives in the classroom which help host institutions in increasing relative awareness and appreciation to cultures other than their own (Bevis, 2002; Harrison, 2002). Russell et al. (2010) found international students as high- achieving and highly motivated group of immigrants. A report has been found that Chinese, Korean, Japanese and South East Asian students has been migrating to countries like Australia (Soosay, 2009). In the recent decades, international students have also become a greater source of income for universities (De Vita & Case, 2003). There are factors which encourage mobility such as language improvement, cultural skills and improvement in intercultural understanding (Chetro-Szivos, 2010).

In the section below, I will describe anxiety and its association with intercultural communication in brief.

2.2 Anxiety

Anxiety is a form of human feelings which symbolizes negative affect in most cases and can affect positively as well. According to Nunn (2014), the affect and consequences of anxiety are often misunderstood as character flaw. The word "anxiety" was described by Sigmund Freud as an unpleasant emotional state associated with the feelings of nervousness, heart palpitations,

disturbance in respiration, sweating, tremor and shuddering, vertigo, and other psychological symptoms (1924). Since then to present, anxiety has been researched and described from different perspectives in different fields of studies.

From the biological point of view, anxiety is considered as a primitive level of neural organization (Wolpe & Lazarus, 1967). According to Lazarus & Averill, anxiety is an emotion based on the anticipation of threat (1972). The emotion is also thought to be an umbrella term for negative, disruptive, or disturbing affect (Izard & Tomkins, 1966). Anxiety, worry, and fear can lead to long-term mental sufferings; such as depression, exhaustion, in extreme cases- paranoia and the desire for relief from the torment of the feeling of danger (Nunn, 2014). While medical science proves particular "genes" responsible for anxiety, one's social environment also plays a key role on one's physiological sufferings of anxiety (Nunn, 2014).

In intercultural communication, anxiety is often considered as a distinguishing factor (Wilder, 1993). When one communicates with someone from a different cultural background, increased level of anxiety, stress and uncertainty can rise and affect the communication. According to Stephan, Stephan, & Gudykunst (1999), anxiety is "produced by stress combined with the perception of a situation as personally dangerous or threatening" (p. 613). Initially, every intercultural communication can be anxiety associated because of one's intention to approach appropriately and without offense, to avoid miscommunication, to recognize when the other person has negative intention, or to avoid embarrassment (Stephan & Stephan, 1985; Stephan et al., 1999). Stephan & Stephan (1985) also defined intergroup anxiety as "anxiety stemming from contact with outgroup members" (p. 158). Here, intergroup anxiety is also a form of anxiety caused in intercultural context and outgroup members are defined as people from a different cultural background. This intergroup anxiety can determine how pleasant an intergroup

contact can be perceived and whether the contact would reduce prejudice and improve intergroup relations or not (Stephan & Stephan, 1992; 1985).

Though anxiety is often conceptualized as a negative feeling, sometimes anxiety can lead to some extent of positivity in intercultural context. Rosen (2008) has explained anxiety as "a major source of energy" and considered it as a positive factor (p. 33). Gudykunst (1995) considers some degree of anxiety as positive which may encourage and motivate individuals to communicate with one another. However, there is a minimum and a maximum level of anxiety to affect communication positively or negatively in intercultural settings.

Anxiety in intercultural setting has been studied and examined previously (Hullett &Witte, 2001; Logan, Steel & Hunt, 2015, 2016 and so on). Hullett and Witte (2001) studied intercultural adaptation and isolation of international students in the U.S. The study found that students with uncertainty controlling function (allows one to be confident and comfortable to interact in an unfamiliar situation) tend to be more confident and comfortable with the host nationals. Knowledge of the host country and culture helped them during the interaction. However, students with anxiety controlling process (person in question prefers interaction with in-groups and avoids risk of stress in intercultural contacts) felt more at ease to be close to their in-group members in order to avoid risk and stress. The study suggested necessary training of the sojourners with necessary knowledge, positive stereotype and further necessary support during their journey abroad to ensure positive communication. Anxiety has also been studied in the health help seeking behavior (Logan et al., 2016). The study showed the direct effect of anxiety and predictability on willingness to interact. With high anxiety and uncertainty, people were less willing to interact with health professionals in the intercultural settings. The study also put emphasize on anxiety more than uncertainty in influencing health related intercultural

communication. In short, the study focused on managing anxiety which will lessen uncertainty and help in effective communication, especially at the initial health seeking encounters. Logan et al. (2015) also studied the effect of anxiety, uncertainty and ethnocentrism on willingness to communicate and found anxiety to be more influential than uncertainty in intercultural communication.

There have been studies associating anxiety with international students' experiences in higher education institutions (Hammer, Wiseman, Rasmussen, & Bruschke, 1998; Jaasma, 2002; Imamura & Zhang, 2014; Mak, Brown, & Wadey, 2014). According to Hammer et al. (1998), a close interpersonal relationship with the host nationals helps in understanding the host culture and can bring satisfaction of living in the foreign country. Positive attitude of the host nationals plays a major role in reducing anxiety and uncertainty. Here, the authors have brought out the importance of salient contact with the host nationals more than the knowledge of the host culture/cultural similarities in reducing discomfort and anxiety. Jaasma (2002) studied anxiety and uncertainty in an interethnic classroom setting where regular interaction with one another reduced anxiety and uncertainty and even from different cultural backgrounds, classmates were able to understand and perceive each other to an extent that effective communication was possible. Imamura and Zhang (2014) studied intergroup anxiety and willingness to communicate in both Americans as host students and Chinese as international students in the U.S. The study found integration and assimilation as shared group identities and students sharing these identities (both Americans and Chinese) were able to overcome their anxiety and established effective communication. Chinese students with assimilation and integration features enhanced their language competency and were well-received in the American host culture regardless of their strong cultural identity. Under the condition of separation and marginalization, the feelings of

anxiety and uncertainty were elevated and there was less willingness to communicate. In short, belonging to a certain culture does not affect the communication process as long as there is a shared group identity. Moreover, Mak et al. (2014) examined perceived threat related to communication between groups who do not share the same first language. The study related anxiety and negative effects associated with communication in understanding the attitude of host students towards international students. The result of this study showed that positive attitude and contact helped in removing intercultural barriers by reducing anxiety and negative emotions. Specifically, east Asian students and their association with anxiety in the educational context have also been studied (Rappleye & Komatsu, 2018). The study opens about exam and school anxiety especially in the east Asian countries (China, Korea, Japan) where the main target of attending an exam is to make a top-class result (Castle, 2016). With highly competitive exams and its pressure, students of these countries are subjected to disproportionate amount of anxiety and stress (Rappleye & Komatsu, 2018).

In this paper, anxiety is considered as a negative umbrella effect of fear, worry, depression and mental suffering. Different cultural, linguistic and educational background can give rise to miscommunication or communication avoidance which eventually leads to anxiety. The study of Hullett and Witte (2001) shows how anxiety controlling process keeps students close to their in-groups to avoid risk and stress. Necessary knowledge, training and support before and after their arrival in the host country were also suggested in the study. Apart from anxiety as a negative feeling, this paper will also take the importance of positive attitude and support of the host university staff into consideration.

2.3 Anxiety and international students

Internationalization in the process of higher education makes international students as the central players in diplomacy between nations and in the intercultural exchange (Lee and Rice, 2007). However, it is very common and usual for international students to feel anxious and uncertain in the new unfamiliar host institution. In this section, I intend to shed light on findings of other international studies in order to find similar experiences of students from across the world. Singh (2005: 10) describes in his paper about Australian academic context where international students are considered as "empty vessels" and are subject to fill them with Euro- American knowledge. Shen (2007) also observed similar kind of environment at the British universities. Moreover, Seah (2008) focused on the first-year experience of international students where they grieve for the loss of family and friends and suffer from cultural shock. This cultural shock is often manifested as stress, anxiety, rejection, helplessness and isolation (Oberg, 1960). A disorientation is also faced by them as they try to settle in a new geography, community and culture (Kell and Vogel, 2008). They might also lack knowledge about plagiarism and academic writing skills (Soosay, 2009). These students also face social, community (Lee & Rice, 2007) and institutional factors affecting their psychology.

International students going abroad already carry the cultural capital of their regular personal, social and academic lives (Sheridan, 2011). When these students move to the new host institution, they are expected to fit in and get engaged with the flow of the teaching and learning practices of the institution (Sheridan, 2011). According to Bourdieu (1989), diverse students are expected to fit into host institutions habitus; its existing practices. Similarly, this fact goes with social and integral practices, where if not helped or supported, students might feel anxious and isolated. Furnham and Alibhai (1985) reported that students' cultural and personal identity might

conflict with the adaptation of host society and campus life's customs and values. This consequently may lead to isolation and loneliness and finally to depression (Mori, 2000). Such a feeling can hinder the active participation in campus activities that plays a key role in successful learning and academic achievement (Burns, 1991; Dozier, 2001). Chalungsooth and Schneller (2011) studied international students' mental health issues and stated that international students experience more stress and psychological problems than the locals (Arthur, 2004; G. Bradley, 2000; Mori, 2000; Sandhu and Asrabadi, 1994; Tidwell and Hanassab, 2007; Yakushko, Davidson, and Sanford- Martens, 2008). In their review of literature on the acculturation of students, Charles-Toussaint and Crowson (2010) point out that international students often feel problems related to acculturation (Jung, Hecht, & Wadsworth, 2007, 2008; Rahman & Rollock, 2004), racism and discrimination (Frey & Roysircar, 2006; Hanassab, 2006; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007; Wei, Ku, Russell, Mallinctrodt, & Liao, 2008), negative stereotype (Bonazzo & Wong, 2007; Lee & Rice, 2007), "decreased access to their existing support systems" (Frey & Roysircar, 2006) and excluded in the classroom as well as in the outside context (Lee & Rice, 2007).

There are numerous studies (Byram & Feng, 2006; Wille & Jackson, 2003; Tomich et al., 2000; Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006; Senyshyn et al., 2000; Kinnell, 1990; Ladd & Ruby, 1999; McNamara & Harris, 1997) which investigate the hardship and struggle international students experience while attending foreign universities. One of the hardships is the language barrier. When international students have proficiency in language of the host institution, often English, it may lessen the anxiety level of the international students. Being proficient in a language which is not their own and which they do not have much facilities to practice is a persistent and ongoing struggle (Erichsen & Bolliger, 2011). And this struggle might lead to confusion,

misunderstanding, difficulty with course and program content and contribute to anxiety and great stress (Erichsen & Bolliger, 2011). Bangladesh is unlike Singapore or neighboring country India where English is the Lingua franca and classroom language (Evans & Morrison, 2011). Though universities in Bangladesh provide English medium education, teaching is often done in Bengali (the mother tongue). And most student's English proficiency are poor due to lack of practice which adds to the anxiety. Biggs (1997) considered language barrier not only as a lack of ability; this crisis might also occur due to one's cultural background. So, like many students who lack confidence in their English skills (Soosay, 2009), Bangladeshi students often feel the same.

Anxiety may also occur due to fear and lack of knowledge of how to behave in the new culture (Paris-Kidd & Barnett, 2011). What a domestic student knows as an adult might be completely unknown and alien to an international student. Sometimes, this lack of knowledge is enough to discourage a student to participate when he/ she does not know social taboos, expectations, learning approaches and subject matters (Huang, 2012). There are other challenges international students have to face such as transition issues, language competency, learning while developing language proficiency and learning academic discourses (Gornisiewicz & Bass, 2011). Ryan (2005) found that it is unclear to the academics of how to solve the international needs even though they are well aware of their needs.

International students are supposed to fit in the host institutional, social and integral practices which can affect their psychological health. Constant conflict between the host culture and the cultural capital they bear in mind is a basic phenomenon. This paper, therefore, intends to examine Bangladeshi students' negative feelings and as to why they suffer from anxiety. Previous studies discussed above will help this study to focus on the key factors and major issues on anxiety and international students.

2.4 Institutional support for international students

 Higher educational institutions have always been paying attention in supporting students and as a result, "student support and guidance" has now been considered as a key inspection area of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) framework (Bartram, 2009). Therefore, supporting and assisting students has become an important element in understanding common professional academic identity (Evans & Abbott, 1998; Patrick & Smart, 1998). Such an understanding in the value and belief of the students' assistance and support can help them reach their potential (Bartram, 2009).

International students are known to be struggling a great deal in the adjustment process (Brown, 2009; Gill, 2007; Hartshorne & Baucom, 2007; Senyshyne et al., 2007) and experience stress on their initial stage in the new host country (Berry & Sam, 1997; Zheng & Berry, 1991). In the students' academic needs, tutors and experts can work as "supporting agents". Such a supporting system can be provided in the majority of higher education institutions. Johnson and Inoue (2003) have stated that educators are now well aware of the support, encouragement and response of cultural needs of the students and these can help students in effective learning.

Studies often put emphasis on the necessity of international students in adjusting or coping up with the new host society; however, they fail to put up the need of host societies' role that should be considered (Perucci & Hu. 1995). The responsibility of adjusting or adopting to the host culture is often left to international students (Bevis, 2002). Li and Kaye (1998) reported the situation of international students in the U.K; students coming from Asian countries and other developing countries faced much more difficulty than their Western counterparts in terms of language, financial issues, accommodation, getting help from teachers and tutors, homesickness, making friends and so on. In case of Asian students, Lee and Rice (2007) found

that those students felt a lack of trust in the professional help services provided to them by institutions. In the U.S context, Heggins and Jackson (2003) observed the informal social network to be more important to Asian students when they feel uncomfortable to approach to university support services. Robertson et al. (2000) found that in the Australian university context, international students were criticized by their staff for not making academic progress and their critical thinking ability was not appreciated. Furthermore, the staff were unaware or unconcerned of these students' emotional psychological health. Another study on African American female scientists- all of them graduated from various Western universities, reported that white professors questioned those students' ability to do a task, criticized their accents and asked them for remedial classes (Beoku-Betts, 2004). The students expressed a lack of support and feeling of not being included.

Few studies consider host institutions who consciously or purposefully marginalize international students (Beoku-Betts, 2004; Lee, 2005). "unfamiliarity with the local conditions and norms makes international students vulnerable…" (Kell & Vogel, 2008). Such a vulnerability highlights the importance of assisting and supporting international students in establishing a sense of belonging and to reach their potential goals (Owens & Loomes, 2010). Kell & Vogel (2008) also showed a risk of failure in academic life and not being able to feel the sense of belonging which may lead to personal harm if the fundamental physiological and psychological needs of international students are not met. Lack of support may lead to confusion, depression and tension (Pederson, 1991, as cited in Scanlon, Rowling, & Weber, 2007). Institutional support in social, academic and integration acts is very important for the success, security and safety of the students (Owens & Loomes, 2010) as well as for the long-term sustainable satisfaction of the higher educational institutions. "integration with staff and

students" has been listed as an integral part for successful and engaging learning experience in Chickering and Gamson's (1987) study. The universities should actively measure and promote the interaction in and out of the classroom between teachers and students. A full beneficial enrolment process is successful when students are able to communicate with all the staff members from all the sectors of the campus. Owens and Loomes (2010) studied different university facilities and found that different orientation programs were introduced to facilitate newly arrived students in the campus- from city bus tour to luncheon with faculty, external speakers as well as representatives of security and health funds. There were also sporting activities, social and community activities, work related to welfare activities which helped students in finding an enhancing environment, a sense of belonging and empowerment of their presence in the universities. Moreover, Johnson and Inoue (2003) mentioned that higher education experience should allow students to come out of the shell of denial, defense and difference and enter to acceptance, adaptation and integration.

Therefore, Soosay (2009) acknowledged it as the duty of institutions to value cultural and linguistic diversities of minorities and to determine if the Western academic process is a match in such a setting. There is a need for international students to relieve stress and anxiety through their process of transformation in the host institution and culture. Hence, host institutions can play a major role in this case.

3   THEORETICAL FRAME

3.1 AUM (Anxiety/Uncertainty Management) Theory

Anxiety may occur while communicating with people from different cultural background. This anxiety means discomfort, fear of threat and stress during interactions and it can lead to serious negative mental and psychological outcomes (Florack et al., 2014). For international students, the psychological and socio-cultural adjustment is important in the new host environment. And for this, effective communication is a must. As the "basic causes" that influence effective communication is anxiety and uncertainty (Gudykunst, 2005), this paper considers Gudykunst's AUM theory as the theoretical frame to investigate and study Bangladeshi students' causes of anxiety, related consequences and the perceived support that helps in anxiety reduction of these students.

AUM theory is the theory that focuses on anxiety and uncertainty management during intercultural encounters. Gudykunst (1993) also incorporated the concept of effective communication to the point that interactants can reduce and manage uncertainty and anxiety. The central thrust of this theory is the interrelationship among uncertainty, anxiety, mindfulness, and communicative effectiveness and how all these influences intercultural communication (Neuliep, 2012). The theory has a central concept- strangers (Gudykunst, 1991). To define a stranger, Gudykunst presents the idea of anyone who is physically near and at the same time, mentally away. To interact with a stranger, one struggles with anxiety and uncertainty at some extent (Gudykunst, 1991, 1998, 2005). Thus, managing uncertainty and anxiety is the key concept of this theory.

AUM considers uncertainty as a cognitive phenomenon (Gudykunst, 2005). The feeling of uncertainty rises from the lack of predictability; the predictability of attitudes, feelings, beliefs, values and behavior (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Gudykunst, 2005). This feeling can make people avoid interaction at times. However, Berger (1987) argues that a certain level of uncertainty is positive when people communicate with strangers. So, uncertainty can be both positive and threatening. The opposite of uncertainty, which enhances the motivation to communicate, is attributional confidence (Duronto, Nishida, & Nakayama, 2005).

The effective phenomenon of the AUM theory is known as anxiety (Gudykunst, 2005; Plant & Devine, 2003; Stephan & Stephan, 1985; Stephan, Stephan & Gudykunst, 1999). Turner has defined anxiety as a "general or unspecified sense of disequilibrium" (1988). It is the sense of negative consequence which may result in avoiding communication. Gudykunst also indicated anxiety as the "feeling of being uneasy, tense, worried or apprehensive about what might happen". In intercultural context, it is the uncomfortable feeling one can feel in the presence of an outgroup member. It effects one's motivation to approach or to avoid communication (Gudykunst, 1993, 1995, 2005).

The goal of the AUM theory is effective communication where managing the level of uncertainty and anxiety is the basic notion. Effective communication does not refer to the closeness or relational satisfaction one might have, rather it is the process of minimizing misunderstandings. According to Gudykunst, communication is effective to the extent that the person interpreting the message attaches a meaning to the message that is relatively similar to what was intended by the person transmitting it (2005). A balance of anxiety and uncertainty is important for effective communication. The balance of anxiety and uncertainty is a complex

process which is determined by several factors, such as one's personality, attitude, motivation, background and so on.

A certain amount of anxiety and uncertainty necessarily exists between strangers especially when people work on building effective communication. However, a greater amount of uncertainty and anxiety occurs when people communicate with different cultural group members than when communicating with people of their own cultural group (Gudykunst & Shapiro, 1996). People have maximum and minimum thresholds for both uncertainty and anxiety (Gudykunst, 1993). The last axiom in AUM theory suggest that effective communication in interpersonal and intergroup encounters is influenced by uncertainty/anxiety management; one can communicate effectively at the point where they are able to manage their anxiety and ambiguity to explain other's behavior, attitudes and feelings (Gudykunst, 1995).

Gudykunst's AUM theory is a complex theory with 47 existing axioms (2005). This complex structure of the theory allows it to be more applicable in various fields and to better understand effective communication. However, in order to focus and deep analysis, this research would only examine anxiety, institutional support and how it helps in reducing anxiety and building effective communication.

3.2 Previous studies using AUM

Numerous studies have been done in the field of international education regarding the international students and sojourners mental condition, their attitude and behavior in the host culture. Students who can communicate more effectively are less likely to experience stress and uneasiness in the new culture. For example, Florack et al. (2014) argued that cross-group

friendship is ideal in creating self-confidence and decreasing anxiety. Lack of self-confidence is a kind of uncertainty which creates a barrier in cross-group friendship and eventually leads to anxiety. The personality, attitude and behavior of the foreigner influence the rate of uncertainty and anxiety. However, the environment and the quality of the host community should also be taken into consideration. Imamura and Zhang (2014) investigated Chinese and American students' willingness to communicate with each other in the U.S university setting. Communication anxiety was noticed in both Chinese and American students who were not willing to assimilate and integrate. Samochowiec and Florack (2010) explored intergroup anxiety and communication willingness. The study found that those who experienced more anxiety were less willing to communicate in the intercultural setting.

Anxiety Uncertainty Management theory argues that intercultural contact in an unfamiliar situation can produce anxiety as well as uncertainty (Gudykunst, 2005). The theory also suggests that managing anxiety and uncertainty leads to successful effective communication. In a study by Mak et al. (2014), it was found that positive intergroup attitudes towards international students helped in reducing anxiety and therefore, removed the barrier of intercultural communication by reducing negative emotional outcomes. A research showed that high anxiety and uncertainty emphasize avoidance in cross-cultural communication settings (Duronto, Nishida & Nakayama, 2005). Another study has also shown that intercultural friendship between ingroup and outgroup members can create a high-quality contact by reducing negative feelings (Davies, Tropp, Aron, Pettigrew, & Wright, 2011). Such a contact can be encouraged by higher education institutions to help international students in building a favorable contact (Mak et al., 2014) and thus, to help in reducing anxiety.

Gudykunst (1998) has developed the AUM theory for making communication more effective in a new host culture and to help people adjust and live in a different cultured country. The research of M.V. Fritz et al. (2008) applies the assumptions of AUM theory for international students who are struggling with stress as employees in a foreign country. This research showed that Asians students feel more anxious and stressed in failing as internationals because their failure is connected with their families and near ones. Their culture is more collectivist than individualistic like the North American or European cultures (Brislin, 2000). However, the anxiety level cannot be overgeneralized for Europeans or Asians as every nationality's culture is different from the others. Also, while considering AUM theory for intercultural communication, both the host culture and the guest culture should be taken into account (Firtz et al., 2008).

There have been numerous studies on East Asian students and their experiences studying abroad. However, little attention has been given to the south Asian students studying worldwide and their experiences. Therefore, my study is to examine that little number of international students coming from a small part of south Asia- Bangladesh. Moreover, In Neuliep's (2012) article, he paved a way of extending the theory by investigating communication between people of different cultures. However, he did not focus on any particular culture. He suggested that a future research should be done to examine particular cultures as well. So, my research could also be a way of examining communication between Bangladeshi students' and Finnish institutional staff.

3.3 Conclusion

Often, we generalize international students as a homogeneous group (Fritz et al.,2008). Moreover, the division appears as European or Asian / east Asian or south Asian nationals while studying international students. However, the uniqueness of each and every national makes it important to study them in different context. For example, Bangladeshi students' anxiety feeling in the international education, especially in the Finnish context has not been studied before.

In AUM theory, Gudykunst explains both central and indirect factors that affect communication effectiveness. While the theory suggests various factors such as second language competency or cultural similarities affecting intercultural communication, the two main factors which are needed to be managed for positive communication are anxiety reduction and uncertainty reduction. In short, anxiety and uncertainty are the two determinants between positive/negative communication outcomes and other variables (Gudykunst, 1995).

In the current study, anxiety as the central factor is studied in the Finnish higher educational setting. The study is focusing on one particular population- Bangladeshi international students. Here, I would examine the reason of anxiety feelings of this group when they go abroad for higher education. In the Finnish context, the institutional support these students receive which helps them in reducing anxiety and having effective communication will also be examined and discussed.

In line with previous researches, I expect to find a positive effect of anxiety reduction in building effective communication if necessary support is provided by the institutions.

Based on the literature review above, two research questions have been developed:

1. How do Bangladeshi students describe their possible feelings of anxiousness in the context of studying in a Finnish university?

2. What kind of institutional support do Bangladeshi students recognize as helping them in reducing anxiety and building effective communication within their Finnish educational context?

4 DATA COLLECTION AND METHOD ANALYSIS

4.1 Data collection and research process

The purpose of this research is to generate new knowledge on experiences and feelings of anxiety of Bangladeshi students and to understand the phenomenon of Finnish university context regarding institutional support in reducing anxiety and building effective communication. So, qualitative research seemed to be appropriate for this. According to Hartley (2004), qualitative research is flexible as well as exploratory. Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) have explained the purpose of qualitative research as to describe and interpret a phenomenon. They have also considered qualitative research as a means of understanding and generating new insights from the collected data. Moreover, this kind of research helps to understand a particular phenomenon (Ahmed, 2018). The aim is to examine human life experiences, to understand and to format a meaning from those experiences (Frey et al., 2000)

For data collection, I have selected in-depth interviews as they are widely considered to be a source of acquiring deeper knowledge about the participants' experiences on the phenomenon (Ahmed, 2018) and a powerful way to understand human beings (Fontana & Frey, 2000). Most importantly, interviewing allows the researcher to gain an understanding of the interviewees' opinions and impressions (Patton, 1987).

There are three types of interviews (structured, semi-structured and unstructured) meant for conducting qualitative studies. Structured interviews are limited to structured questions and usually limit the interpretation of the participants responses. Unstructured interviews are conducted without a list of questions or themes. Hence, the interviewer often has no control over the interviewees' responses (Hirai, 2011). Semi-structured interviews are conducted with a list of questions and themes to guide the interviewer. These help the interviewer to follow the interview and to diverge from the list if necessary. However, the flow of the conversation depends on the setting and each participant's response to the questions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). As there is always an opportunity to ask questions depending on the situation, this approach enables to better understand the participant's reported experiences. According to Bernard (1988), this is a suitable method if the researcher is to collect the data within a short period of time. To understand the complex term "anxiety" and the perceived institutional support from the perspective of Bangladeshi students, semi structured interview was selected as the interview approach in this research.

For semi-structured interviews, I set four themes; 1) participants' overall experience in Finland, 2) feeling of anxiety and reasons, 3) institutional staff and their support and 4) how the support helped in reducing anxiety. (see APPENDIX I)

4.2 Sampling

Sampling is the procedure where people are chosen from a population for data collection regarding a phenomenon (Brink, 1996). The strategy of sampling is determined by the purpose of the study and the characteristics of the studied population (Frey et al., 2000). It also depends on resources and accessibility. In the qualitative research method, a small sample size is used not to generalize the population but to understand a topic in depth (Merriam & Grenier, 2019, p. 29). Moreover, the researcher can change the sample selection if necessary information is not found from the selected sample (Mack et al, 2005). Thus, the selection remains flexible and guided at the same time.

For this research, the criteria of selecting simple were to approach international students in Finnish universities who came from Bangladesh and have been studying in Finland for more than a year. The reason for selecting students who lived in Finland more than a year was to ensure a better understanding of Finnish universities. Participants were students from University of Jyväskylä, University of Helsinki, JAMK, Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences, Arcada University and Alto University. The interviewees aged between 20 to 33. The interviewees were contacted through phone calls to introduce the research topic, ask for their consents and fixing an interview date and time. Each participant signed the consent form (see APPENDIX 2) and sent it to me via email. At the beginning, the interviews were planned to be conducted in English. This made the interviewees nervous and they asked me to send them interview questions, so that they can prepare well beforehand. I did not send them questions as to keep the interview as a conversation and to keep it as natural as possible. However, I changed my plan and the interviews were conducted in Bengali (both the interviewer and the interviewees' first language). The interview started with a brief introduction and included

questions related to their experiences in Finland, anxieties related to their academic and social

lives and the support they perceived as helpful in reducing anxiety from the institutions they

studied/ are studying.

Interviewee	Gender	Duration of living in Finland
P1	FEMALE	Born in Finland, graduated school from Bangladesh
P2	FEMALE	2 years
P3	FEMALE	9 years
P4	FEMALE	9 years
P5	FEMALE	8 years
P6	FEMALE	2 years and 2 months

Table 1: The participants

Five interviews were conducted via audio calls and one interview was conducted via

Skype. All the interviews were tape- recorded and notes were taken along the interviews. I did a

pilot testing with one of my friends before the interviews. This helped me in modifying interview

questions, strategies and helped me to be well prepared. According to Turner (2010), pilot testing

is an important part for the preparation of any interview. I have interviewed 8 participants in

total. Among them, I knew five of the participants previously and for the other three

interviewees, I have used personal network to find and contact them. The interviews took

approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour each except two interviews which ended within 15-20

minutes and thus, they cannot be included as in-depth interviews. One of them has a new born

baby, therefore, she could not concentrate. The other interview failed because the interviewee

thought he could give the required time and unfortunately, could not manage it. So, the interview

ended shortly. These two short interviews were not included in the data. So, there were 6

participants after all and it took nearly a period of over 4 weeks to conduct all the interviews.

Interviewees	Duration of interviews (in minutes)	Method of interviews
P1	44 minutes	Phone call
P2	41 minutes	Phone call
P3	52 minutes	Skype
P4	49 minutes	Phone call
P5	38 minutes	Phone call
P6	54 minutes	Phone call

Table 2: Interview details

4.3 Method and analysis procedure

 Boyatzis (1998, p. 6) stated "thematic analysis is a process for encoding qualitative

information". To encode and analyze, thematic analysis method was used in this research.

According to Aronson (1994), this method is useful in identifying and categorizing essential

themes of a data and helps in having a deeper look at the data. Themes that emerge from the

transcribed interviews serve as codes. After the completion of all the interviews, the recordings

were transcribed in their entirety. The transcriptions were read multiple times for meaning, sense

and main themes. In the notes taken while conducting the interviews and the transcriptions,

themes related to the research topic were highlighted with code words for further categorization. Two main categories were found. The main categories were then divided into themes for clarification and scrutiny. Under the themes, sub- categories were placed for clear understanding of the research findings. Data related to topics that are irrelevant to the research study were excluded after check and double-check. In the section below, I will introduce the themes that are derived from the interviews. In other words, the themes and sub-themes have been found from the perception of the interviewees; what they considered as reasons of anxiety, what helped them in reducing anxiety for building effective communication.

Two separate categories were found based on the research questions and these categories also reflected the main concepts of this study: 1) experiencing and coping with anxiety, and 2) experiences of institutional support. Under the categories, themes and sub-themes occurred based on the collected data. The themes emerged from the two main categories are listed below:

Category I: Experiencing and coping with anxiety

Theme 1: Language related anxiety

> → Anxiety while giving presentations

> → Language as a challenge

> → Lack of speaking skill; fluency, lack of vocabulary (finding the right word), other people's perceptions ("what will others think")

Theme 2: Cultural/ Religious sensitivity

> → Religious restrictions

> → Looking for people of one's home country

→ Issues related to practicing religion (i.e. prayer room facilities, halal food

concerns)

Theme 3: Exam anxiety

→ Different exam patterns

→ Quality issues

Category II: experiences of Institutional support

Theme 1: teachers' support (in and outside the classroom)

→ Mental support

→ Availability

→ Helpfulness (cooperative)

→ Low hierarchy

→ Attentive (every individual is important)

Theme 2: Other staff members' support

→ Professional

→ Helpfulness

Theme 3: Supportive university /classroom environment

→ Orientation courses

→ Supervising system

→ Helpful environment

The development of the coding schemes above helped me in individually coding the interviews under these schemes. Under the two main categories, three themes occurred in each category and the themes covered the sub themes that emerged through coding the transcriptions. A total of 8 sub themes in category I and 10 sub themes in category II were utilized to analyze the findings. The interviewees also showed concerns on tuition fees (directly related to one interviewee only), age-limits for low cost transportation cost (related to one interviewee) and harsh winter which made their struggle worse sometimes. However, they did not consider these issues as reasons for their anxiety and only mentioned them when they were asked about any negative feelings and when giving suggestions to universities. Therefore, these issues have been kept as a side track. Through the data findings and analysis, each participant has been indicated with a number and in addressing their quotes, the number of the participant alongside the letter P has been used in the bracket as an identity. For example, participant number 1 (from the demography table) will be addressed as (P1) throughout the research to ensure anonymity.

5   Findings

5.1 Experiencing and Coping with Anxiety

The first category addressed all the reported reasons of feeling anxious in case of the Bangladeshi students. This category considered all the salient anxiety of the students in their host institutions. The reported reasons of their anxiety have been put under three themes which are language-related anxiety, exam anxiety and anxiety related to cultural /religious issues. Travelling abroad, any student might feel relative anxiety especially if the country is vastly different in culture, religion and education. As there are major differences in the two countries in question, Bangladesh and Finland, the students are expected to face those reasons of anxiety.

Below I will discuss the findings for the three different themes and sub-themes from the interviews.

1) Language-related anxiety

The first theme, language related anxiety has been divided into three sub themes. The sub themes helped in describing the participants' different anxieties related to language. It is important to mention that the interviewees talked about both English (as their second language) and Finnish (host country's first language) while talking about language difficulties. However, not knowing Finnish did not affect their academic progress and only annoyed them when they went to super stores or visited/called government offices. Moreover, only one interviewee was fluent in both English and Finnish as she was in born in Finland and spent her early ages here. After completing her primary education in Finland, she moved back to Bangladesh along her family. The participant fluent in both Finnish and English only returned to Finland for higher education in one of the Finnish universities. The others were fluent in Bengali (their first language) and considered English as a complicated language.

Anxiety while giving presentations

The most common cause of anxiety for international students is probably the thought of giving presentation in front of the whole classroom. This reason also prevailed in my interviewees. The participants mentioned face shame, performance consciousness, difficulty in finding the right words and completing full sentences, worry about their appearances and embarrassment when they were asked about their presentation experiences. Two of the interviewees also felt anxious

because they were pregnant and felt nervous about their appearance. This fact affected their mental health greatly.

> the first two semesters, it (anxiety) was too much. If the teacher asked to stand up and talk, I would say, "I am not feeling well" …I used to feel very uneasy and shy. As a pregnant woman, this affected me mentally very much. (P3)

An interviewee also shared her thought on avoiding presentations as much as possible. She would rather get bad grades than give presentation. And this is because the interviewee cannot talk loud because she is not confident about her English speaking skill, is afraid that others will make fun of her and feels anxious about it.

One participant mentioned her feeling of getting embarrassed for not being able to perform on stage while giving presentations:

> When I go there to give a presentation, I always think of the embarrassment I might face. So, anxiety is there for sure. (P4)

The thought of embarrassment also comes with the performance consciousness. Another participant mentioned:

> I remember in the first semester, during a presentation, I was shaking so much that I could not stand. My friends had to help me to go to the stage. That much performance conscious I was then. (P3)

And thus, the performance consciousness gave rise to anxiousness of these students.

Language as a challenge

When I asked the interviewees if they would like to give the interview in English, most of them agreed. However, a little discomfort was noticed in their way of speaking. So, I asked them to talk in Bengali.

Some of the interviewees still felt that language anxiety was very high in them even after several years of studying in Finland:

> (language anxiety) it is still in me. I can understand more but can speak less…My language anxiety is very high. (P5)

One of the interviewees stated that the biggest challenge for her was to make her teachers understand her English as she would use long sentences and short pauses every now and then to tell people what she has in mind:

> (the challenge is) if I am able to make my teachers understand what I am trying to say through the way I speak English. (P2)

Another challenge noticed was their difficulties in understanding different accents. A participant mentioned that she had students from different countries and everybody spoke English in different accents:

> For example, he (an Australian classmate) once said "what are you doing today?". And I heard "today" as "to die". I was like, this is not making sense. (P3)

Language remained as a challenge for them not only while giving presentations. It was also there when they were having normal conversation with their classmates or teachers. The thought of being criticized or laughed at always made them more anxious and afraid.

Another participant stated,

> I feel so anxious. It's painful because I know the topic but don't know how to say it. So, it's very painful…. I feel like everyone will laugh at me if I say something wrong. I am afraid, less confident and always in fear; did I make a mistake, will the teacher criticize me, or people would say, "from where this peculiar Bengali came from?". (P2)

The feeling only remained in them because of the educational background they came from where students get criticized sometimes and the practice of speaking in English is very rare. Participant were never criticized or insulted for their weak English. However, the fear of being criticized or face shame tend to be present there.

One participant (P1) was fluent in both Finnish and English. However, she had little schooling in an international school in Finland, moved to Bangladesh and graduated from there and never studied in Finnish. The subject she was studying would teach in Finnish in the classroom. So, it was difficult for her to understand the subject related terminological words. Participant (P6) also mentioned language as a struggle. She then spoke of her struggle both in Finnish and English. She also mentioned her struggle in grocery stores where everything is written in Finnish and she constantly had to use Google translator for help.

Lack of speaking skill: fluency, lack of vocabulary (finding the right word), other people's perceptions ("what will others think?")

While talking about language related anxiety, participants were mentioning their lack of fluency, lack of vocabulary and the thought of other people's perceptions always working at the back of

their mind. The hardship of making long sentences to express themselves was mentioned by one of the interviewees:

> we have to speak in English. I sometimes cannot find the right word to say. To express my feelings, I make long sentences to make them understand without using the exact word….It is because we lack the speaking skill. (P6)

The strong emphasis on grammatically correct English makes it even harder to speak, stated one of the participants:

> In our country, still now, we give more emphasis on correct written English. We lack practice in speaking English. So, we become very aware of keeping our grammar correct when we try to speak. And, a sense of shyness works back of our mind when we speak. (P4)

Lack of fluency also made them anxious. When they are nervous, the right word doesn't come to their mind or even if it is in mind, they fail to utter it. As one the participants said,

> I am not fluent… when you feel nervous, the right word doesn't come to your mind. Or sometimes, the word is there but I am unable to speak it out. (P4)

Another participant expressed her painful feeling of not being able to say the right word even when she knew the topic. Lack of confidence and lack of vocabulary made her anxious:

> I would feel very uneasy that I am not able to make them understand… Sometimes, the words are in my brain, but I fail to express it. (P2)

2) Cultural/ religious factors

Cultural and religious awareness were found as a cause of anxiety among the participants. Being in a completely different cultural environment where the practice of religion is also different, participants found themselves in an odd position. They were homesick and always felt a lack of people of their own culture or religion. Moreover, practicing religion were found as an issue that concerned the participants to a great extent. Note that, all the participants of this study were Muslims. So, the related sensitivities were common among all the participants.

Religious restrictions

Shaking hand with the opposite gender and going to the bar where alcohol is served are considered haram (not allowed) in Islam, whereas, these practices are very common in the Finnish culture. About the restrictions, one participant said,

> I have certain religious restriction where I cannot consider anything above that.
> For example, people in our class would go to bars or hang out. But I can't do
> that… Also, there comes situation to shake hand with a male which I cannot do.
> (P4)

The struggle was also mentioned by another participant:

> Sometimes it's hard to make them understand that why wouldn't I shake hand
> with a man because it's so normal for them. Then, I won't stay anywhere at night
> even I have the freedom. So, it's a bit hard to make them understand those things.
> (P1)

Again, the participant mentioned her odd feeling of being in the new culture:

> suddenly coming from Bangladesh where everyone is Muslim, everyone is
>
> Bengali, where you feel instantly connected; here, I felt a bit odd. They have a
>
> different culture. alcohol is very integrated. So that was a problem. But now I
>
> have few Muslim friends and now I understand there are different type of friends.
>
> (P1)

Looking for people of one's own country

Participants felt lonely in the university environment where it was hard to find any other

Bangladeshi. The urge of finding the people of the same culture and religion brought a sense of

anxiousness in them. About the fact, one participant said,

> I wanted classmates from my own culture but there is no Bangladeshi in my class.
>
> (P2)

> in my department, I am the only Bangladeshi and foreign student. And Muslims
>
> are more uncommon. (P1)

There were other Asian students. However, participants did not feel to be intrigued with them.

Participants (P2, P5) shared the same feeling mentioned below:

> We have a very different culture from Chinese and Vietnamese. We are also
>
> culturally and religiously very different. (P5)

Practical issues related to practicing religion (i.e. prayer room facility, halal food concern and wearing headscarf)

The issues of practicing religion were not the same for all the participants. Some of them were affected by them and others were not. The issues are discussed below.

Prayer room facility were found in some of the participants' institutions which were very helpful for them as they mentioned. There were also students who mentioned that the prayer room facility was missing in their institutions. One said,

> As a muslim, I wanted a prayer room. But there was no prayer facility there. We would go to the meeting room or office room and ask them to let me pray, they are helpful and would allow us to do so. But that is not always an option. (P5)

> we did not have a prayer room in the university. A small prayer room for Muslim students would have helped because we stay long time in the university (and cannot come home to pray). (P6)

Concerning halal food, participants were quite upset that they always have to go for vegetarian options. Seafood item can be substituted for halal meat options. But it was not always available, mentioned one participant (P5).

About covering hair or wearing headscarf, some of the participants did not face any difficulty. Some found it hard to explain when they were asked about it. Participant (P2) said,

> I wear hijab. And so they would ask me to show them my hair. Now, I could not explain them why I cannot do so or could not explain why I wear it.

A participant shared her negative feeling about her classmates not wanting to sit beside her:

> The teacher never showed any negativity but sometimes students did not sit
>
> beside me or if I sat beside them, they changed their seat. (P5)

The participant (P5) shared the fact that such incident happened because other students did not understand the religious fact of wearing a veil and that made them feel uneasy to sit beside her. And because of the language barrier, she (P5) failed to explain the religion or break the stereotype.

3) Exam anxiety

Exam anxiety was not the same for all the participants. All of the participants were from different universities and different departments, some had mostly reflective report system as an evaluation, some had assignment system, and some had to sit for exams. So, their experiences in this regard also differed. However, the common thing found in this matter was that none of them were familiar with such evaluation systems back in Bangladesh. Another major difference highlighted was the quality issue.

Different exam pattern

About completely different exam pattern and comparatively upgraded pattern in the Finnish universities, one participant said,

> The exam question pattern is very creative. You cannot answer them unless you
>
> have understood the topic very well. Secondly, the academic level is very
>
> upgraded compared to our study pattern in Bangladesh. That is why, I faced many
>
> problems concerning my basics. (P6)

The participant also mentioned her struggle of trying to figure out how to do well in the exams.

In Bangladesh, sitting for exams starts from grade 1 and ranking is very important as it defines the quality of the student there. Two of the participants (P5, P4) mentioned their high concern when it comes to giving exam and how much tension they feel about getting the best grade.

However, this anxiety was not the same for all of my participants. The flexibility of giving exams helped the students a great deal. One participant expressed her relief in the fact that students can give one exam multiple times and the one with better grade will be added in the transcript of record. Necessary guidance was also given by this participant's teachers and so it was easier for her:

> for the university exams, its more flexible. You know you can give exams multiple times. (P2)

> I did not feel any problem rather I felt exams here are much easier than from our country. You do not feel any pressure. (P7)

Another participant (P3) gave credit to the orientation week where everything about exams and credits were made clear and that she did not had any confusion about it. The participant (P3) would go to her advisor if she faced any problem. But no anxiety related to exam was visible in the conversation (interview with P3):

> (exam anxiety) not at all. We had orientation week where teachers made everything clear about courses, credits and exams. At least, I did not have any confusion about this. (P3)

Quality issues

For the participants, it seemed that Finnish university context highlights quality over quantity. This made students nervous when they come from a different educational background. The participant (P6) mentioned her struggle of trying to figure out how to do well in the exams. In Bangladesh, the practice of writing nothing other than what is asked in the question is not a very popular practice. Students tend to think that writing more than what is asked is a key to good marks in the exams. According to one participant,

> because the study pattern is different. So, the question pattern was also different. Before entering the exam hall, I would be very nervous. Here, teachers don't go for long answers but for precise answers. Here, quality matters, creativity matters. But in our country, it's not like that except for very few subjects. (P6)

Another participant mentioned the overall study pattern as a challenge:

> it took me sometime to cope up with the study, content or how the study should be conducted here as it is different from Bangladesh. (P8)

5.2 Experiences of Institutional Support

This category addresses all the academic supports that helped Bangladeshi students overcome their anxieties and in building effective communication with the host institutions. Effective communication does not refer to the closeness or relational satisfaction one might have, rather it is the process of minimizing misunderstandings. According to Gudykunst, communication is

effective to the extent that the person interpreting the message attaches a meaning to the message that is relatively similar to what was intended by the person transmitting it (2005). The category has three main themes, namely, 1) teachers' support, 2) other staff members' support, and 3) university/classroom environmental support. Each theme has related sub-themes explaining the themes in detail. The concept of support has been solely taken from the students' point of view and brings out their perception on what support means to them and how it helped/helps them throughout their successful communication in the host academic environment.

1) Teachers' support (in and outside the classroom)

The theme brings out the perception of support for Bangladeshi students from their teachers. The teachers' support in and outside the classroom helped the students to overcome their anxieties. Also, the different teacher-student relationship in the Finnish context helped these students feel at ease. Effective communication became easier for the participants when necessary support was provided to them. Sub-themes (mental support, availability, helpfulness, low hierarchy, attentive) are discussed below.

Mental support

Mental support received from the host institution seems to be playing a major role in reducing tension, nervousness and fear, in a word, anxiety of the Bangladeshi students. Considering this support, one participant stated,

> initially they treated us as small children and helped us get our things out and
> expressed. (P3)

Being pregnant and being in a completely new environment affected 4 of my participants' mental health. They were suffering from low self-esteem and less confident due to their body shape. However, the behavior and attitude of the teachers helped them overcome the feeling and feel good about the overall situation. Participant (P2) shared her experience of meeting with teachers or supervisor during her pregnancy:

> Whenever I went to my supervisor or teachers to talk about my courses or any problem, they would start the conversation by saying, "first of all, congratulation on your new life". So, I would not feel uneasy anymore. (P2)

It is hard to make academic progress while having a new born baby. One participant would feel tensed and would worry about this. Meeting with her teachers helped her a great deal in this matter. The participant said,

> They would always console me by saying that they know how hard it is to study with a baby. So, I was getting so much mental support from them. (P4)

Availability

The availability of the teachers; regular meetings, online communication system, quick responses of email is something Bangladeshi students appreciated very much. This availability helped the students come out their nervous zone and have effective communication with the teachers. It became easier for them to discuss their problems with their teachers, have meetings and plan studies when necessary which is not common in the Bangladeshi higher education system. One participant mentioned about the online communication system:

> we have an app called "its learning". We communicate with our teachers through that. We can find their email addresses there, we can also text them through that.

> If we want to have a face-to-face meeting, we can go to the university, call them
>
> and they would come out of their room to talk. Its not like Bangladesh. (P2)

Talking about availability, one participant mentioned the weekly meeting system they had. The meeting used to be an open meeting system where students would go to the teacher's room and discuss the weekly progresses and problems if they have any. She (P3) considers the meetings to be very beneficial.

Helpfulness (cooperative)

Helpfulness or cooperation from teachers is the quality all of my participants mentioned during the interview. The helpful attitude of the teachers in and outside the classroom made it easier for the students to overcome their struggles in the unfamiliar host institutions. The flexibility students receive concerning their language problem, understanding academic differences, teachers' concern on solving any student's query, their caring attitude and the encouragement they provide to their students all these have been mentioned by my participants when they were asked about teachers' help in reducing anxiety. About the flexibility and supportive attitude, one said,

> the teachers of the universities are very flexible because they know that students
>
> who come from other countries suffer from this language problem, they will have
>
> problems in giving presentations or pronunciations. So, teachers are very
>
> supportive. (P3)

This kind of attitude and behavior can also help a student to carry on their academic progress and can also help them to get them out their anxieties:

the helping attitude of teachers, their behavior in the classroom, their concern

about solving students' query, I think all these can encourage any student to carry

on their studies…And teachers also helped to get me out of the anxiety. (P6)

From the quotes above, it is apparent that coming from a country where teachers are not able to

help the students in various ways for different reasons, Bangladeshi students felt the need of a

helpful environment. Even having some shortcomings, these students were able to cope up with

the overall unfamiliarity if necessary help was provided to them. Therefore, effective

communication was possible to build.

Low hierarchy (it is okay not to know something)

Bangladesh is a country where hierarchy is highly maintained and expected, especially in the

educational institutions. Classrooms are teacher-centered where teachers are dominating figures

rather than facilitators. This academic cultural aspect creates a gap between teachers and

students. So, when Bangladeshi students move abroad to study, they expect the same kind of

relationship between teachers and students:

the teachers are always helpful. In Bangladesh, the teachers are in a superior

position. But here, they are ready to help you throughout your study. Not just

giving advice or teaching in the class. (P5)

The interviewees of this study were not any different. However, the low hierarchy between

teachers and students surprised them and even the small aspects like calling teachers by their first

names, sitting into teacher's chair for giving presentation was a relief to them. For example,

> We address our teachers with their first names and if we call them "sir/madam",
> they feel guilty. There is a huge difference in the behavior of the teachers here
> than what we see in Bangladesh. (P3)

Not to see teachers as a fearful figure and the ability to talk with them openly to share one's problem was considered very helpful by one of the participants:

> In our country, we are afraid of our teachers or we won't talk to them openly. So,
> initially I thought the teachers here as the same. I was not sharing my problems
> with them. But after sometimes, I realized that its okay here to share your
> problems with them if you have any. They would consider your problems. (P4)

It is noteworthy to mention that teacher as a fearful figure is common but not always the same in the Bangladeshi academic context. As one participant shared her experience that because she was a student of "Educational Leadership" in Bangladesh, she found a low hierarchy and friendly behavior among students and teachers during her study there. As the teachers were always teaching and working with the issues related to classroom behavior, it helped them break the stereotype. So, exceptions can be seen sometimes.

Another point is important to mention here that students saw their teachers admitting their mistakes in the Finnish universities. This was also pointed out by the interviewees as a low hierarchy attitude. Asking something to the teachers does not make it compulsory to answer if they do not know it. So, if the teacher does not know the answer to the question asked to him /her, he /she would help by saying that he/she would search the answer and send it to the student by email or will answer it later. The attitude is rare to be seen in the Bangladeshi context where the teacher is supposed to know anything and everything. Not knowing something relevant to the

topic and admitting it or students' daring to let the teacher know his/her mistake is culturally

negative. Feeling free to talk about mistakes with the teachers made the students realize that

humans are limited to knowledge and it is okay for the teachers to not know sometimes (P2, P6).

Attentive (every individual is important)

Attention, in this study is referred to the attentive response students received when they went to

the teachers for any help or suggestion. Again, it refers to individual importance students noticed

that was provided to each and every student of the class by the teachers even if there were a large

number of students in a class. Listening to a student with utmost care and attention during

presentations, group meetings or one-on-one meetings also proved to be a source of support for

these international students during their study period.

> in a word, I would say they are attentive. When I say something to them, they do
>
> actually listen to me and would give answers according to their opinion or point
>
> of view. Not criticizing or insulting. (P1)

The time and chance students were given during a presentation also made them feel that they are

supported by the teachers. Students mentioned that they were not criticized, insulted if they were

wrong or if their English was not correct. Saying something wrong during presentations did not

make the teachers correct them instantly; it was taken as a discussion where the students came to

know about their mistakes. This attitude of listening to them with much attention helped the

students to overcome their anxieties. And the students considered their teachers as responsible

towards their duties (P6):

> if I said something wrong during the presentation, the teacher won't correct it
>
> instantly. They would give the chance to talk and listen to me. This supported me

a lot and would not insult or criticize me in front of anyone. I feel very good about

this. (P2)

This quality was noticed and appreciated by my participants. The attention made them feel

important about themselves and they felt ease in sharing their problems with the teachers when

needed which helped them in building effective communication with the teachers:

Every individual is important to them (teachers). So then, you feel good to share

the problem with them. (P6)

2) Other staff members' support

When talking about institutional support in reducing anxiety, other staff members' support has

been considered in the study along with the teachers' supportive quality. 'Other staff members'

refers to all the other staffs of the institution; psychiatrists, librarians, nurses, international office

members, academic advisors, lab facilitator and every other person related to the university the

international students came in contact with. Interview with the Bangladeshi students brought

three main themes addressing the qualities of the staff members of Finnish universities-

professional, helpful, problem-solving attitude. Participants shared no negative experiences about

Finnish university staff members. The themes (professional, helpful) are discussed below.

Professional

The students shared their several experiences where they had to go to the staffs for help or query.

They found the staff members to be positive, professional in attitude and behavior and

responsible toward their duties.

One participant (P3) shared her experience when she was suffering from depression and

anxiety and how going to the psychiatrist of the university helped her overcome her struggling

period. Availability and professionalism of the psychiatrist was something the student appreciated very much. Though she (the psychiatrist) did not understand her (the student) cultural differences, the student at least could go to someone who would listen to her and support her in need:

> my psychiatrists helped me a lot (during my pregnancy). I found someone whom I can share my sufferings with. Maybe she did not understand the cultural fact I was bringing to her, but she listened and supported me. (P3)

One participant (P6) also shared her experience in the library. The student failed to figure out the functions of the printing machine. Her library card was not working as well. So, when she went for help, one staff came and helped her (the student) by giving her (the staff) own library card.

Helpfulness (Problem-solving attitude)

Staff members were seen to be helpful, friendly and solving problems anyhow. The friendly and helpful behavior made the students feel more comfortable and they were able to come out of their uneasiness. Such an attitude also made it easy for them to reach for help whenever they felt the necessity. And the cooperation along with friendliness was addressed by the students when they were asked about the kind of relationship they have with the staff members of their respective universities in Finland and how it helped them in having effective communication:

> They are there to solve any problems, friendly and helpful. (P2)

Students felt the urge to go the staff members for any help whenever they needed. Such services are also open for students in the Bangladeshi university context. However, getting the right help at the right time from the right place is still a subject of question there. So, students felt grateful and appreciated those services in Finland.

Even if any staff failed to help, he/she would send the student or take him/her to the right place instantly. This meant a lot for the students because they knew that any valid problem has a solution and it gave them relief, said another participant (P7).

3) Supportive university/classroom environment

This third theme brings the overall supportive environment my participants had in the Finnish universities. The theme includes the points where orientation weeks, supervising system, mandatory English courses, multiple counselor option, supportive classroom environment and respect for other cultures helped Bangladeshi students in reducing their anxiety. Here, both the university system and the positive classroom environment have been discussed.

Orientation courses

In the Finnish universities, students are invited to attend the orientation week or courses which are held for three days to one week depending on the departments or the university systems. The orientation is supposed to introduce the new students (both national and international) with all the courses, credit system, examinations. It is also to let the students know whereabouts of the university campus, international office services, medical services, library options and so on. This week or course were of great benefit for my participants. It helped them to clarify their confusions and worked for them as a support:

> We had orientation week where teachers made everything clear about courses, credits and exams. At least, I did not have any confusion about this being a Bangladeshi. (P3)

> The orientation courses would offer mandatory English courses to students depending on their level of English skills. That way, it helped the students in bringing out their potential and made them confident about their language skills (P3, P5).

Participant (P3) also mentioned how the courses helped them in being confident while talking in English. Students were asked to give 5 minutes long presentations and eventually, they were giving 30 minutes long group presentations without any discomfort or nervousness. The orientation week or courses does not seem to directly relate to anxiety or effective communication. However, it is apparent from the interviews that students were considering it as a supportive agent while speaking about their improvement in having effective communication in the university environment.

Supervising system

In the higher education level, supervising or counselor options seemed to be very important and effective in this study for students to progress in their studies. Moreover, having a supervisor gave them a space to share their academic problems and solve it with the help of the supervisor. Universities also had multiple counselor options so that students could choose their counselor/advisor. That made the system more flexible and easier, especially for international students who struggle with anxiety:

> My supervisor would arrange meetings, guide me throughout my journey. She
>
> was there every time. (P4)

> if we had any confusion, our advisor, a very nice lady, would solve it instantly.
>
> So, no confusion about this being a Bangladeshi. (P3)

In building effective communication, one participant (P3) gave the whole credit to the supervisor because they tried to understand each student and helped them throughout the way. So, discomfort of the students in communicating with them was reduced. Sharing problems with respective supervisors also meant to be mentally supporting the students of this study. Their positivity helped the students to overcome their tension:

> I can remember my supervisor. I was talking to her about my study and how I am
>
> not progressing as others. So, my supervisor said positively that I have two
>
> babies. And so its normal. That inspired me that "yes, I am doing it with my
>
> babies". (P5)

Helpful environment

This sub-theme considered the helpful environment students found in and outside the classroom within their university boundaries. When asked about the university environment, students found a peaceful environment where no one disturbs others' personal space and there is no bullying or insulting which they thought would be common inside the university campuses. Students mentioned not only their teachers, staffs and supervisors but also their university environment to be positive and helpful in reducing their anxiety in the Finnish universities. Not finding someone of their own culture/religion and not knowing English very well did not exceed them in feeling

connected to the university life. Participants found their fellow classmates and people in the university to be helpful and peace loving:

> I am pleasantly surprised with my university life…though it is hard to find someone of my religion. It is easy to feel connected which is very important. (P1)

> Obviously, university played a major role in building me up and I also tried my best to overcome it (anxiety). (P3)

Participants also mentioned how the university environment encouraged in coming out of their (students) self-created boundaries. Participants did not necessarily become excellent in English after some period, however, they felt easy in giving presentations or to talk in the class. Upon asking on why this happened, students shared their confidence on the feeling that no one would insult or criticize them for their bad English. Rather, such an environment inspired them to practice and improve their English language skills:

> Especially in my department, my teachers, other staff and classmates were very very helpful…My department can be an example, the way they help you. I am very lucky that I had such an environment in the university. (P4)

So, apparently the participants found a helpful environment in the Finnish university setting. Such an environment helped them to be comfortable, reduce their anxiousness and feel accepted by their surroundings.

6   Discussion

The findings described in the previous chapter illustrate Bangladeshi students' (as international students) feelings associated with anxiety and the institutional support that helped them to overcome those feelings. According to the findings, students reported feeling anxious related to language, different academic patterns and different culture (national) and religion. In the data, language and cultural/religious anxiety tended to be stronger than academic issues which participants felt could be easily solved with the help of others- subject supervisors, advisors, teachers and classmates. Participants also reported overcoming the anxieties gradually with the support they received in the university surroundings. However, its existence was more or less present among the participants. Findings of this paper support the previous studies done on international students in various countries. Moreover, in purpose to better understand Gudykunst's anxiety uncertainty management (AUM) theory and its application, the current study aimed at investigating Bangladeshi students' reasons of feeling anxious in intercultural setting and their perceived support that helped them in having effective communication in the Finnish university context.

Anxiety

The findings illustrate three main reasons associated with anxiety. Language related anxiety was the most important among those, as every student mentioned it at first when they were asked about anxieties they faced in the universities. Participants in this study showed lack of confidence and proficiency in their second language and the lacking brought in them the tendency of avoiding oral presentations, the thought of embarrassment they might face and thus, anxiety occurred. Alsahafi and Shin (2017) addressed the target language proficiency as the fundamental factor which would contribute in the international students' cultural and academic

developments. According to the study of Lewthwaite (1996), lack of confidence in the medium language of instruction is the cause of anxiety which may hinder students' contribution in the classroom. Anxiety related to language has also been studied by Wu (2011) where he studied Taiwanese students in an American university. The study found struggles like oral presentation, contribution in the classroom, note-taking, written assignments, exams and the use of language as a reason of stress among the international students. My results mirror this study where students saw language as a challenge, struggled with presentation and discussions in the classroom and stressed about exams. However, participants did not mention any difficulty in writing assignments or note-taking. The reason could be that participants suffered from language anxiety (speaking, understanding and making others understand) and writing or note-taking was not a big issue for them in comparison. Bangladeshi education system still gives more emphasis on grammatically correct written English and practice of speaking discourse is limited (Shurovi, 2014). And so, participants faced less difficulty in writing assignments and taking notes.

Participants considered language as a challenge and faced difficulties regarding language such as- understanding different accents, speaking fluently, making the teachers understand English as they used short pauses and long sentences and problems in understanding subject related terminologies. Robertson et al. (2000) reported international students' difficulty in understanding different accents, idioms, slangs and colloquial languages. Anxiety in understanding different accents was found among my participants. One participant (P3) shared her experience of hearing "today" as "to die" and how she thought that was not making sense. Participants also said that it took them more than a year to overcome their difficulty in understanding different accents. This has been evident in Bamford's (2008) study where international students were found surrounded by challenges of understanding different accents of

their peers and lecturers. Thereby, difficulty in communication using English and fear of being criticized gave rise to anxiety and stress. This has also been confirmed in the study of Lui et al. (2016) where international students' difficulties in communicating in English and their anxiety has been discussed. Moreover, participants discussed their lack of speaking skill. Five of the participants struggled in finding the right word, spoke very slowly with pauses, lacked vocabulary and stressed about shame. The same fear and shyness of international students has been found by Hellsten and Prescott (2004) in the Australian university context where students spoke slowly and in a low voice being self-conscious of their spoken English and afraid of being evaluated by the native speakers. Thus, language barriers affected participants effective communication (Campbell & Li, 2008).

Religion

Sheridan (2011) stated that international students bring within them their own cultural capitals-personal, social and academic elements. This statement has been echoed in the accounts of my participants. All the participants were Bangladeshi Muslims and described those cultural values deeply rooted in them. So, when they entered their respective host institutions, they got concerned about their religious restrictions, dietic constraints and felt lonely without people of their own religion and culture.

Religious issues consisted of wearing headscarf (for female), not shaking hand with the opposite gender, avoiding alcohol and pork consumption, only eating meat which is halal

(processed under Islamic regulations) and the facility to pray five times a day and so on. When asked by fellow classmates about these issues, participants said that they failed to make them understand because 1) there was language barrier and 2) they never faced such a question before and did not know how to explain. The same problem has been faced by other Muslim students in different countries. Novera (2004) studied Muslim Indonesian students in Australia and found that Islamic day-to-day practices were not understood or appreciated in the host country. However, participants in this study did not face any discrimination or negativity from the host institutions regarding their religious values and practices. Prayer room facility was provided in most of the universities. In universities where there was no prayer room, students looked for an empty classroom, a quiet corner in the library or requested any office room staff to let them pray there. Students who did not have prayer room facility said that it was not always possible to find a place, thus, it disturbed them a lot at instances. Such incident has also been studied by Mukimin, Yanto and Yanto (2013) and Mubarak (2007) which showed struggles of Muslim students concerning halal food and prayer facilities.

Another main issue for the participants was the halal food concern. They were unable to join get-togethers or parties because alcohol is an intrigued part in most of the European cultures and is prohibited in Islam. Prohibition of alcohol and its connection with their religion made it a greater spiritual concern. Therefore, participants avoided such occasions and stayed home. One participant (P4) shared her experience where she was asked to join a group of friends in a bar and she avoided because she wanted to avoid alcohol. Because of these reasons, students could not fit in the local students' culture and it left them isolated and tensed. University canteens and cafeterias do not provide halal food for Muslims students and so, students always had to go for vegetarian items or seafoods. So, all these prove the fact that religion plays the central role in

decision making for Muslim students (BIS, 2011). The overall cultural and religious struggles were stronger among the participants probably because 1) students did not receive necessary trainings related to cultural adaptation and diversity management before leaving their home country (they did not mention any), 2) Bangladesh having the dominating Muslim and native culture, students were not open to cultural and religious differences and did not have psychological strength to adapt and adopt, 3) participants' reasons of coming to Finland were not solely academic; only two participants (P1, P6) voluntarily had a plan to study in Finland. Others came to Finland as a spouse and later got admission or planned to study in the university. So, I think their motivation and inspiration to get adapted somehow differ from those who plan and go abroad to study in the higher education level and lastly, 4) all the participants were female Bangladeshi Muslims. Collecting data from male students could have derived different viewpoints and struggle or adaptation stories as they differ in social roles and responsibilities in most cases in the Bangladeshi Muslim culture.

Cultural factors

Cultural consciousness was present among the participants of this study. Though participants found friendly classmates, they also wanted people of their own country and culture around them. Participants mentioned the fact that there was no other Bangladeshi student in their respective classes and Muslim student was also rare. This made them feel lonely in the university setting. Studies show that people usually feel more motivated to communicate among their cultural peers and less motivated in communication with culturally different individuals (Nesdale & Mak, 2003; Kassing, 1997). Though participants had other Asian students in their classroom, the cultural and religious differences made them feel less connected coming from Bangladesh

where "everyone is Muslim, everyone is Bengali, where you feel instantly connected" (P1). In a study of Arab students in the U.S, Mostafa (2006) showed that Arab students did not or seldom contacted with American students because of the perceived cultural and religious differences. Participants mentioned all these cultural and religious awareness and how it made them feel anxious at the host environment. The reasons resulted in culture shock which is often manifested as stress, anxiety, rejection, helplessness and isolation (Oberg, 1960).

When students from Asian countries go in the Western or European countries for higher education, they often struggle with the different teaching and assessment system. Participants in this study faced challenges regarding different exam pattern and it took a long time for them to understand the questions of the exam and what was expected from them. When they failed to get the expected mark/grade, they became anxious as one participant stated, "We study a lot for that (exam) and ranking is very important in our country. Grade defines us there. So, anxiety exists for me." (P4). So, students felt anxious about their exams because of the education system they had experienced in their country. The same experience has been found in Rappleye and Komatsu's (2018) study. Though the study was about East Asian students' high exam anxiety under the pressure of ranking top in exams, Bangladeshi students in this study can be seen to have similar experiences in their home country. So, the same fear and tension about exams remain with them.

Although participants struggled with the quality issues and creative exam pattern, they were found satisfied with "the upgraded academic level" compared to Bangladesh (P6). The fact that Finnish exams are more about precise rather than long answers seemed to satisfy the participants. Another point found in the result is that the system of re-exam was considered as a second chance to do better by the participants. Hence, all these issues made them struggle but did

not raise anxiety among them. Such an education system encouraged them to be responsible and creative thinker in their respective fields when they received support, clarity and assessment guidelines.

Institutional members' support

Finnish institutional support from the Bangladeshi students' point of view has been found from the interviews. Collected data showed that teachers, other staff members and the university as a whole supported the participants in bringing them out of their anxiety zone. A central theme of AUM theory is that reducing and managing anxiety is necessary for intercultural communication effectiveness. Thus, receiving support from the institutions helped them in managing anxiety and in building effective communication within the university environment. In this case, teachers supported them with mental support, availability, attention, friendliness, low hierarchical attitude, and helpfulness. Bangladesh universities is known to have teachers as the central and dominating figure. Asking questions or discussion with teachers are not always encouraged and the concept of effective communication is often ignored. So, Bangladeshi students expected similar kind of attitude and behavior from the teachers. However, they admitted that the different and supportive attitude of the teachers helped them mentally, emotionally and in their academic progresses. This section supports AUM theory where reduction of anxiety/uncertainty is possible in an intercultural setting if there is informal interaction, participants share one common goal, and have strong normative and institutional support (Gudykunst, 1995).

Sibii (2010) compared teacher as a companion who is "friendly individual but not a friend". Though the study is about teacher's pedagogy for college-age students to make them feel connected and improve the learning expectations, the same quality has been mentioned by my participants about their teachers. Participants preferred friendly relation as opposed to fearful

relation with teachers they had back in their home country. And the relationship certainly helped them in overcoming their anxiety as well as feeling more connected and belonged in and outside the classroom as have been mentioned by all the participants. Another factor that the students highly valued and appreciated is the supervising or advisement they received from their teachers, thesis supervisors and subject coordinators. Being in a new university, new academic life and new learning and teaching process; the students constantly felt the need of a guide. Though students at their higher educational level are expected to be independent and skillful.

Participants, here, constantly needed the time and effort of faculty because of the perceived cultural and academic differences. According to Light (2001), such a mentoring or advisement is highly valued by students which emerges through inevitable interaction and connection between students and faculty members. The interaction not only benefitted the students in their academic life but also encouraged them in communication by making them less afraid and more confident. The communication helped them in learning academic as well as surrounding social and cultural norms. These learnings and the idea of familiarization through studying abroad has been mentioned in the study of Rinehart (2002). Low hierarchy attitude of the teachers and faculty members is not the criteria Bangladeshi students are used to. It took them sometime to get used to the attitude; for example, calling the teachers by their first names, sitting in the teachers' chair for giving presentations, not just expect teachers to give advice or teach but the ability to share one's problems with them and knowing that they would consider the problems seriously; all these made the students comfortable in the new environment. According to McDowell and Westman (2005), calling the faculty members by their first name is a sign of warmth, approachability and respect. Such an attitude helped the students to overcome their anxiety and they felt "utmost comfort" (P6). Informal and personal level interaction with the

teachers and faculty members outside the formal setting helped the participants of this study a

great deal in reducing their anxiety and building effective communication. One student (P3)

mentioned the weekly meeting system she had in her university and how it helped her to get out

of her nervous zone. The student felt much at ease to share her problems then and understood the

Finnish teacher-student communication culture appropriately. The ability to contact teachers via

email, online apps and text messages in need was not taken for granted. Also, congratulating and

sending good wishes for any student's new born baby or encouraging and helping them during

the time provided mental support for those students, hence, anxiety was managed, and

communication was improved. Gudykunst's (2005) AUM theory postulates similarity with this

finding that managing anxiety (and uncertainty) is the central thrust to effective communication

and intercultural adjustment (Gao & Gudykunst, 1990). The kind of interaction has been stated in

Cox and Orehovec (2007) as functional interaction that takes place outside the classroom and is

the "most important" to support the students.

The understanding, encouraging, accessible and approachable quality of faculty

members have also been studied before (Komarraju et al., 2010; Hammer, 2005; Keeley, Smith

and Buskist, 2006). The features are seen helping students in both their academic and

psychosocial adjustments. All in all, students found the staff members to be friendly,

approachable, attentive, helpful and supportive. They understood the students' different cases,

respected their cultural values and appeared to be professional in understanding and trying to

solve students' problems. The qualities of staff members have also been found in the Australian

university setting by Indonesian students. However, the study has found a mixed experience

where some students felt supported while others noted that staff members had no prior

experience with international students and suggested that the university should develop the

professionalism of these staffs (Novera, 2004). Another important factor to mention is that students shared no negative experience of being criticized by the staff members and teachers of the universities. They were given the chance to talk and were listened to. They felt supported and could manage their feelings of anxiety. Therefore, with the support of the universities' teachers and staff members, students were able to develop effective communication within the new unfamiliar university environment (P3). This shows the importance of host positive attitude towards favorable contact with international students which is influential in reducing anxiety in the unfamiliar culture (Hammer & Gudykunst, 1987a).

Supportive university environment

Participants reported their instances of feeling connected and "pleasantly satisfied" with the overall university environment. The orientation week and courses, helpful university environment and classroom helped the students in their anxiety management. Having no discrimination and experiencing the respect for other cultures and religious values inside the university worked as a positive source of comfort and confidence. According to Gudykunst (2005), self- confidence is important in communication and influences communication willingness or avoidance. So, gaining confidence to communicate with the support of university environment helped the students in being comfortable and feeling connected. This relates with the study of Russell et al. (2010) where he confirmed the feeling of connectedness as the reason of lower cultural stress and higher positive outcomes.

A more effective communication might have been possible if the students took part in different sports, cultural and social events organized by the universities. Only one participant did participate in events and sports. The reason could be the fluency of both Finnish and English of her (P1) and the confidence as she was born and spent a certain period of her school- life in

Finland before moving to Bangladesh. Other participants mentioned family issues regarding their children, cultural issues, having no friends of their own culture to join the events with as well as religious restrictions for not attending those events. As the participants also associated with language and other related anxieties, they avoided such scopes of communication. People who perceive themselves as lacking communication competence often feel more anxious during interactions (Florack et al., 2014). The study of Heggins and Jackson (2003) shows that Asian students were uncomfortable in using the university support system and they looked for social familiar networks. Unlike studies like this, Bangladeshi students felt comfortable and easy to go for university support system whenever they wanted to in Finland. Apart from teachers and supervisors, students found other staff members as helpful, professional and responsible. The students shared their experiences with librarians, international students' office staff, psychiatrists and others where they felt uneasy or anxious initially because they expected them to be busy, not available or a superior figure as is the case in most of the Bangladeshi university contexts. Similar studies have been found in the Australian universities where students complained of the inadequate support services and non-approachability of the staff members (Lloyd, 2003; Robertson et al, 2000). On the contrary, participants in this study found the staffs quite friendly, available and professional. So, participants mentioned slowly coming out of their tensed and nervous feelings and becoming easy and confident in communicating with the university members. Lee (2008) emphasized the support of both the department and the institution in question reflecting care and concern, which would help students in reducing their distress, their academic and professional well-being.

An important point to note that participant (P3) had to go to the psychiatrist of her university because she was depressed and felt anxious all the time. The psychiatrist supported

her, listened to her and helped her throughout her study period. However, the lack of research on

Bangladeshi students made it difficult for the psychiatrist to completely understand the cultural

and religious factors of the participant (P3). So, it is important for the mental health clinicians or

care providers to be aware of the cultural factors of international students in order to reduce

anxiety and communication barriers as much as possible (Chalungsooth & Schneller, 2011).

From the theoretical prospect, this study examined Gudykunst anxiety/uncertainty

management (AUM) theory. According to the theory, anxiety is the predominant factor which

affects the willingness to communicate. Reducing anxiety ensures effective management of an

intercultural interaction (Gudykunst, 2005). And if anxiety/uncertainty is high, effective

communication is not possible. In intercultural encounters, individuals can face both anxiety and

uncertainty and management of these leads to successful intercultural communication. In line

with the theory, this study examined anxiety of Bangladeshi students and how support in its

management led to communication effectiveness in the Finnish university environment.

Institutional support received by the participants reduced anxiety, established positive attitudes

towards the host society and ultimately, led to effective communication. So, the present study

strongly supported Gudykunst AUM theory in relating anxiety and effective communication.

However, the study did not examine effects of uncertainty (another important variable of the

theory) in intercultural communication which can be studied in future for a better understanding

of this particular group of students arriving from Bangladesh.

7   Limitations of the study

This study addressed the feelings of anxiety of Bangladeshi students in Finland and how the

university support system helped them in effective communication. However, limitations of this

study should be considered. Firstly, the study examined only a small sample size of 6

Bangladeshi students in Finland. Examining more participant could bring out more information in this case. Secondly, interviews are useful for observing facial expressions, determinations and ambitions of participants (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). I tried to conduct the interviews face-to-face. However, due to lack of time or the participants' residence in different cities, the plan of face-to-face interviews could not be realized. As anxiety is a sensitive psychological phenomenon, observing facial expressions, pauses and impressions could have brought out a clearer interpretation of the data. Thirdly, all the participants were female. So, the study could not find out if gender difference plays any role in the negative situation or if the support system works differently for them. Fourthly, none of the participants were living alone and always had the family support with them. Participants recalled instances of anxiety feeling and having family as the first support system they went to. Thus, it would be beneficial to examine students who lived on their own and struggled in the new environment without any support at their home. Lastly, no participants had to deal with the financial crisis in the country except for small factors like transport cost. Participants were either not eligible to pay tuition fees, received scholarship or did not have to worry about it because they received financial support from their family. A better understanding would have been possible in examining students who had to go through financial crisis, how it affected them mentally, how they received help or support in such situations and if it affected their communication.

8   Conclusion

Findings of this paper show that linguistic, cultural, religious and academic differences between Finland and Bangladesh made Bangladeshi students nervous, stressed and anxious at times in the Finnish university context; as Kell and Vogel (2008) stated that the urge of trying to cope-up in a new geography, culture and community creates disorientation among international students. This

kind of negative feeling can affect students' psychological and emotional state. Managing

anxiety in such instances are very important for effective communication. According to

Gudykunst (2005), effective communication is established when transmitted message is

interpreted with a similar meaning. Students in this study mentioned their journey from being

afraid and stressed to becoming able to communicate effectively in the Finnish university setting.

Though anxiety was present among the students, it was managed when the students found

support around them.

Studies such as Singh (2005), Shen (2007), Rahman and Rollock (2004), Poyralzi and

Lopez (2007) showed negative experiences and acculturation problems faced by international

students and how support system was insufficient for the students (Frey & Roysircar, 2006). This

study clearly showed reasons of anxiety and how it made the students uncomfortable; there was

no lack of support from their respective institutions as has been stated by the students. Students

found teachers and other staff members helpful, friendly, professional, approachable and

supportive. This lowered students' stress and thus, positive outcome was high which lead to

feeling of connectedness as is approved in the study of Russell et al. (2010). Care and concern of

the institution in question reduced anxiety of Bangladeshi students.

In a broader sense, effective communication is the fundamental step in developing

intercultural communication and managing anxiety plays a major role in intercultural contexts.

Gudykunst (1993) stated that when uncertainty and/or anxiety is high, accurate communication

in intercultural interactions is not possible. Duronto et al. (2005) and Gudykunst and Nishida

(2001) also demonstrated the importance of anxiety free context in facilitating intercultural

contacts. Findings of this study demonstrate that if necessary support received, successful

communication effectiveness is possible which is a positive contribution in developing

intercultural relations. A basic implication of this research is to highlight the necessity of support in anxiety reduction and management of international students and in facilitating effective communication which is beneficial for the greater importance of international education. The study has also brought out Bangladesh students' perceptions, expectations and struggles as a guideline for the international universities in understanding this group's mindset in general. Though it is always impossible to generalize someone based on his/her culture, religion or nationality, the study can help in better knowing the cultural, linguistic and religious struggles of Bangladeshi students. University support system can affect the academic, social and emotional well-being of international students. As this study also illustrated Finnish universities' supportive attitude in brief, this can help other international students and more Bangladeshi students to be motivated and confident in finding a better environment to study for higher education.

A lack of necessary training from Bangladeshi students' home country was noticed during this study. Students almost did not receive any training prior to their arrival in Finland. Religious and cultural issues along with linguistic incompetency were found more or less among all the participants. They also lacked knowledge about the academic system of Finnish universities. Therefore, suffering and struggling lasted long and was harder for them. This shows the necessity of proper training and knowledge about the host culture and country before they arrive in the host country to avoid miscommunication, stress and negative attitudes as is shown in Hullett and Witte's (2001) study of adaptation and isolation of international students in the U.S.

Future research can be done considering gender, age and economic factors to expel any potential influencer in anxiety and effective communication. Also, as the study only examined anxiety as the variable of AUM theory, examining uncertainty can bring out the perceptions and

feelings of Bangladeshi students more clearly. In addition, a large sample size is possible to examine as the number of Bangladeshi students in different countries is increasing every year. Only then is it possible to understand this particular group in a general level. Research can be done on other religious or none-religious population of Bangladesh to find similarities or differences in their feelings of anxiety and if the support system works the same for them. More studies should be done in other academic varieties and situations to better assess effective communication of Bangladeshi students elsewhere. Addressing these additional issues will help Bangladeshi students to better prepare as well as host institutions in determining these students' psychological needs for future improvement of communication satisfaction.

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Appendices

APPENDIX I: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Name
- Age and major
- Nationality
- Have you studied abroad before coming to Finland? If so, where and when?
- How long have you been living in Finland?
    - What have you done during this time?

- What is your general experience of studying in a Finnish university? Please share in brief
- Who or what do you think encouraged you in your study?
- Language anxiety and exam anxiety, did or do you feel any of it or both of it?
- Did you face anxiety while giving a presentation or asked to talk without preparation in the class?
- How did you overcome those anxieties mentioned above?

- How is your interaction with your teachers?
    - Could you give me a concrete example? Could you tell me more?
- How is your interaction with other staff members at the university?
- What do you like or appreciate while interacting with staff members and teachers?
- Have you encountered any challenges while interacting with staff members and teachers?
- How would you rate your English-speaking skills?
- How would you rate your Finnish speaking skills?
- How do you feel about communicating in English with your teachers?
- Have you encountered any difficulties related to language?
- How do you think you overcame your anxiety and develop good communication with your teachers, staffs or any member of the university?
- If you think of your time studying in a Finnish university, have there been times when you have felt anxious or uncertain or afraid, or negative in any way regarding your studies?

- Do you still feel those anxieties?

- What did you do / what do you do to make yourself feel more at ease?

- Did the university or its staff help you in any way when dealing with those anxieties?

- Do you have any suggestion for the Finnish universities that could help you or other students in similar positions further in this matter?

- Do you take part in events or sports organized by your university?

APPENDIX 2

Interview consent form

Thesis title: Bangladeshi students' experiences of institutional support in Finnish universities

Author of the thesis: Sadaf

Email: sasadaf@student.jyu.fi

Interview participant name:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The interview is a part of master's thesis project written for the subject of Intercultural Communication at the University of Jyväskylä. The study analyzes Bangladeshi students' experiences in the context of Finnish higher education.

The consent form is essential for you to understand the purpose of the thesis and to agree with the conditions of participating in the interview. Please, read the information below and sign the form to certify your approval to be interviewed.:

a) The interview will be recorded and transcribed

b) Access to the interview recording will be limited to the interviewer and the academic thesis supervisor

c) The interviews will be transcribed and anonymized

d) Direct quotation or summarized content of the interview will be anonymous when published in the thesis; this means that you cannot be identified

e) The original recording of the interview will be destroyed after the publication of the thesis

f) If you wish, your interview transcription can be sent to you for commenting

I have read the information sheet and signing the form with full consent.

Participant's signature: date:

Interviewer's signature: date: