

Inside and Outside the Homestay Experience: The Social and Gender Factors

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Abstract: Homestay is a prevalent type of residential arrangement, particularly in the realms of education and foreign exchange. This arrangement involves individuals or students opting to stay in someone else's residence, rather than their own, and typically engaging in communal living and daily activities with the host family. The paper examines the frequently neglected elements that contribute to a satisfactory homestay experience, utilising both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Specifically, it explores the impact of external social factors, such as educational institutions, communities, and organisations, as well as the influence of gender on the homestay experience. This research contends that extrinsic social elements have a substantial impact on students' perceptions of a satisfactory homestay experience. Furthermore, female and male students possess distinct standards when it comes to selecting a highly competent homestay family. The paper asserts that the consideration of social and gender variables should be given more attention when examining the perspectives of students regarding their homestay experience.

Keywords: Homestay experience, social factors, gender factors

1. Introduction

Homestay is a prevalent type of residential arrangement, especially in the realms of education and foreign exchange. In these arrangements, individuals or students opt to reside in someone else's residence, apart from their own, typically cohabiting and participating in the host family's everyday activities. Nevertheless, the influence of socioeconomic and gender issues on host families is not extensively studied, despite their crucial role in offering lodging and assistance.

Host families are significantly influenced by social variables. Host family selection and dynamics are frequently shaped by factors such as cultural norms, societal values, and socioeconomic standing. For instance, families with lower socio-economic status may be more likely to opt for host families in order to get more stable housing and access to educational possibilities. Furthermore, the social networks and support systems provided by host families can greatly influence the adaptation and growth of host students.

Gender variables can also influence the experiences and dynamics of host families. Cultural norms can shape the way host family members interact and divide responsibilities based on gender roles and expectations. For instance, in certain cultures, women may have a higher likelihood of assuming the duty for family care and household chores, resulting in distinct role assignments and expectations within the host family. Moreover, gender can also influence the manner in which boarding students

adjust and engage, thereby impacting their relationships and communication with their host family members.

Hence, it is crucial to examine the influence of social and gender issues on host families. By acquiring a more profound comprehension of how these elements influence the dynamics and experiences of host families, we may offer valuable perspectives for enhancing the host family system, delivering more efficient assistance, and fostering the comprehensive development of host students.

This work explores the compatibility of homestay students, hosts, and other social aspects. These three categories can be referred to as students' personal traits and willingness to participate in homestay, indicators within the household, and social elements outside the household. This study formulates a questionnaire about the aforementioned determining elements, which is then subjected to a thorough analysis and subsequent debate. Subsequently, this paper delves into the author's research-driven involvement in communal horticulture to enhance the quality of the homestay experience. It is expected that some useful recommendations will be offered for the advancement of this area in the future.

2. Literature Review

Generally speaking, the study of the homestay experience encompasses two parts: the dynamics between international students and their host families (referred to as within-the-household factors), and the influence of social factors outside the household that can either hinder or support the students' homestay experience.

The book *The High School Goes Abroad : International Homestay Exchange Programs* written by Phyllis J. Dragonas is a systematic pioneering book that delves into the psychological and social factors pertaining to homestay programs. Although holding a positive view of the homestay experience, Dragonas revolves around the state and the federal crucial roles in leading the homestay experience and providing guidance, syllabus, extracurricular activities, and so on to enrich these students abroad's learning experience [1]. Dragonas argues that the initial goals of homestay programs are to enhance language and academic performance, nurture cultural awareness for abroad students, and cultivate international consciousness amongst the local communities [1]. Such programs serve to enhance motivation for language learning, cultural awareness, positive attitudes toward the host country, and parental and public consciousness of other cultures. Nevertheless, Dragonas insists that regardless of the form of the homestay programs, the execution of it cannot be achieved without the provision of suitable funds and subsidies provided by the governmental institutions. With partial or complete government support, Dragonas puts forward several essential factors that should be incorporated into the homestay programs: pre-departure orientation and study period, parent and community involvement, family homestay immersion institute, individual student project requiring interaction with native speakers.

Richardson's paper "International Education: Homestay Theory Versus Practice" discusses the gap between homestay theory and practice [2]. The main theme of the study is that the initial ideal purposes of the homestay programs may not come true if the homestay hosts and other providers (such as facilitators outside the host family, teachers, and so on) do not properly address the practical issues. In the research, Richardson argues that, in theory, homestay guarantees after-school care for students under the age of eighteen; it also serves as an optimal environment to aid students in acquiring the target language and understanding different cultures [2]. Nevertheless, in practice, researchers may worry that homestay hosts and providers lack sufficient preparation for the services they are expected to provide. There is a pressing need to establish suitable selection procedures and maintain a comprehensive database; this would enable better matching of students with hosts, as well as facilitate ongoing monitoring and evaluation of homestay arrangements to ensure that they meet established standards of quality and safety [2]. Richardson concludes that enhancing the quality of

homestay service entails the implementation of training tailored for both the homestay providers and hosts since homestay is a definitive business that needs givers to receive adequate training, cross-cultural communication skills, and conflict-resolving strategies [2].

Kobayashi and Viswat's paper "A Relational Approach to International Education Through Homestay Programs" explores another prerequisite regarding homestay programs: the relationship between the host family and the abroad students [3]. Their study proposes that since participants must extend their understanding beyond cognitive boundaries to engage effectively with individuals from diverse cultures, employing a relational approach in international education may prove more fruitful than conventional intercultural training models [3]. Kobayashi and Viswat articulate that with the lens of a relational approach, although some aspects of cultural distinctions, like the display or regulation of emotional expressions, may remain irreconcilable, it remains feasible to acknowledge these differences and fusion several consensuses [3]. Therefore, Kobayashi and Viswat's research argues that the homestay experience requires a mutual willingness to communicate and negotiate because of the unavoidability of conflicts.

The study "Students' Immersion Experiences in Study Abroad" highlights homestays as potential catalysts for linguistic, academic, and social growth, contingent on students' willingness to embrace local culture. However, Goldoni stresses the need for additional local connections, cautioning against assuming homestays ensure complete cultural assimilation [4]. Failure to engage with the host culture risks cultural misunderstandings and clashes, complicating the immersion process [4]. Goldoni suggests a broader perspective on immersion beyond homestays to navigate cultural shocks effectively. "In preparing students for what can, and should, be powerful, transformative experiences, study abroad program directors, course coordinators, and instructors could take the roles of facilitators, guides, and coaches who assist students before, during and after the study abroad experience in developing increased levels of language proficiency and in acquiring knowledge and awareness of, as well as sensitivity and empathy toward, both the home and host cultures" [4].

3. Methodology

3.1. Questionnaire

This paper devised a questionnaire that we intend to deliver to the local homestay students and share online. Overall, this questionnaire consists of two categories of questions aimed at gathering information from overseas homestay students. The first category pertains to their experiences within the household, while the second category focuses on their experiences outside the household. The objective of this categorization is to acknowledge that the homestay experience is influenced by both the host families and the social and civic organisations in a mutually reinforcing manner. Upon gathering our data, we will compute the mean and mode of the data and identify any association that can provide additional insights into the research.

Questions 1-10 pertain to the homestay experience within the household, whereas questions 11-14 pertain to the homestay experience outside the household. Question 15 aims to establish links between participants' homestay experiences within and outside their household, and their overall satisfaction level.

To further categorize them, questions 1, 4, and 5 falls into the relation with the host family. Questions 2, 9, and 10 fall into the environment of the host family (comfortableness). Questions 6 and 7 relate to how much independent students can get from the host family. Question 11 is school-related, 12 is community-related, and 13 is institution-related. Question 14 reflects how students feel about their local culture. Question 15 tells how, overall, students feel about their homestay experience.

3.2. Data collection

The paper gathered 10 data points from local homestay students and two from online sources. Out of the 12 individuals being interviewed, half are male and half are female, as shown in table 1.

Table 1: Gender distribution of the data collection

| | Female | | | | | | Male | | | | | |
|-----|--------|----|----|----|----|----|------|----|----|----|----|----|
| | F1 | F2 | F3 | F4 | F5 | F6 | M1 | M2 | M3 | M4 | M5 | M6 |
| Q1 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 3 |
| Q2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| Q3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 5 |
| Q4 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 |
| Q5 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| Q6 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Q7 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 3 |
| Q8 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 |
| Q9 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 |
| Q10 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 |
| Q11 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 2 | 5 | 4 | 5 |
| Q12 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 5 |
| Q13 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 |
| Q14 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 5 | 3 |
| Q15 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 4 | 3 |

4. Results and analysis

4.1. Results and analysis of questionnaires

Initially, we observe that students who have a harmonious connection with their host family within the household and who are content with their surroundings are not content with their total homestay experience if they do not receive sufficient external support from schools, communities, and institutions. As an example, student F2 (a female student) has an average satisfaction level of 3.1 in the "within-the-household homestay experience." Based on inductive reasoning, it may be inferred that she should have achieved an overall satisfaction rate close to 3.1. Nevertheless, she gave a rating of 1.0 for her whole experience due to insufficient external assistance (scoring an average of 1.5 in questions 11-14). The same logic applies to the situation involving M3.

The article “Students’ Immersion Experiences in Study Abroad” discusses the often-overlooked factors that affect the efficiency of improving academic performance and language proficiency by virtue of homestay experience. Throughout the article, Goldoni maintains that the homestay experience may serve as a booster for students to grow linguistically, academically, and socially, but only under certain circumstances when students are willing to incorporate the local culture into their worldview and meanwhile, other social support structures can access students thereby assisting students in their growth [4]. Goldoni emphasizes that since studying abroad is inaccessible to most students, a homestay experience can potentially proffer crucial learning opportunities and valuable challenges to students abroad [4]. However, to maximize the effects of homestay, establishing other local connections (such as other institutions, local churches, and other local students) has to be ensured [4]. Goldoni mentions that the sole factor of being able to have a homestay host does not entail comprehensive assimilation into the local culture and society, “study abroad students are at risk of failing to engage with the host nation as well as failing to realize how ignorant they are of its culture” [4]. Goldoni contends that a smooth immersion experience can encompass many factors other than the homestay experience if the homestay experience (more often than not) engenders cultural shock and clashes between two or more cultures [4]. For some students, it seems very unrealistic that staying with their homestay hosts guarantees an immersive learning opportunity for apparent reasons: firstly, homestay hosts may not possess the parenting capacity to guide students to choose extracurricular activities and to help students grow academically; secondly, homestay students may not be cognitively mature to experience and learn from the first-hand abroad learning experience [4]. Therefore, the author can inductively argue that homestay must have an inner circle (within the host family) and an outer circle to ensure its success.

Secondly, we do find a gap between male and female’ perspectives of defining a good homestay experience. For females, homestay experience can be viewed as productive if students maintain a good relation with the host family. For F5 and F6, questions 1, 3, and 4 genuinely reflect their overall satisfaction (average for 1,3, and 4 = 3.33 and 3; the overall = 3 and 3) with all other numbers remaining close to the same. For F3, average for 1,3, and 4 = 2, and the overall = 2. Gutel’s article “The Home Stay: A Gendered Perspective” has a significant finding that male and female students, although in a large number of cases, share some similar parameters defining a good homestay experience, they do have different emphases in some nuanced aspects [5]. Gutel concludes that female students would evaluate the homestay experience as well-treating and greatly welcoming if they are treated as a part of the host family and feel emotionally attached to each other [5]. On the other hand, male students emphasize the importance of a comfortable and convenient living environment on their host families [5]. We can find data supporting Gutel’s argument. For example, M1 is exemplary in showcasing with all other factors remaining relatively unchanged, when the average for Q 9 and 10 is 1.5, his overall satisfaction rate is 1. Intriguingly, both male and female students agree that being given a suitable amount of freedom and independence would lead to a productive and smooth homestay experience [5]. From Gutel’s research, we can be reminded that when considering the homestay experience, gender is always a crucial facet; overlooking it could cause some ambivalent, thereby not-so-useful conclusions.

According to the research findings, we may present three arguments. The study demonstrates a crucial association between students' contentment beyond their residence and their overall experience of staying in a host family, thereby emphasising the importance of external assistance from educational institutions, communities, and organisations. Furthermore, the study validates Gutel's research on gender disparities in defining a satisfying homestay encounter, as females place importance on emotional bonding while males prioritise comfort. Furthermore, this research argues that acknowledging the intricacies of social and gender variables is essential for maximising the quality of homestay experiences.

4.2. Results and analysis of interviews

It is evident that social elements can have a significant influence on the overall homestay experience. Consequently, according to the author's research, a regular gathering was arranged for students who are staying with host families while studying abroad. The author shared a poster on Facebook and also spread the information within the local community. The study ultimately attracted a total of 12 participants, consisting of 10 Chinese students and 2 Indian students. Out of the group of 10 Chinese students, 8 are female and 2 are male. Both of these Indians are male.

Having social support from NGOs, local communities, or other governmental initiatives is crucial for fostering a positive homestay experience. Through the author's involvement, students were able to form connections with each other by sharing their own homestay tales. Several individuals were discussing recent events that had troubled them, seeking empathy from fellow homestay students. A few individuals were providing others with perceptive guidance. The majority of individuals experienced happiness and effective communication through this activity.

The author inquired whether the gendered perspective was true. All 8 girls unanimously expressed a preference for emotional relationships over comfort in their homestay. The majority of the males concurred that comfort is a key aspect in a homestay. Based on the acquired answers, the author urged female students to engage in greater communication with their host families, while advising male students to either take responsibility for house-cleaning themselves or propose that the host families make an effort to create a comfortable living environment. This collection process lasted for a duration of one month. Throughout the month, the author tracked their communication development with their host family by sending them messages and personally inquiring about it. After one month, the majority of them effectively conveyed their requirements to their host families. Several host families heeded the suggestions of students and improved their homestay experience by fostering stronger connections with the students and creating a more hygienic and comfortable living environment.

5. Conclusion

Firstly, this study reveals a critical correlation between students' outside-household satisfaction and their overall homestay experience, highlighting the significance of external support from schools, communities, and institutions. Furthermore, this study confirms Gutel's findings that gender differences in defining a fulfilling homestay, -emotional connection for females and comfort for males. All in all, this paper proposes that recognizing these nuances of social and gender factors is crucial for optimizing homestay experiences.

The study constraints of this paper include a small sample size for the questionnaire and a limited number of interviewees. Utilising a broader spectrum of data could have contributed to generating more compelling outcomes. In future research, the focus may be on investigating the effects of diversity and inclusion in residential homes. The objective would be to explore strategies for promoting gender equality, ethnic and cultural diversity, sexual orientation inclusion, and acceptance of physical differences in host families. This is aimed at creating an inclusive and supportive environment. In addition, it is important to analyse the extent to which host family policies and practices are responsive to social and gender variables. Furthermore, it is crucial to assess and enhance host family systems, policies, and support services to ensure equitable treatment and assistance for host students in terms of social and gender considerations.

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