

## CHALLENGES, ADAPTATION, AND BELONGING: MY TRAJECTORY AS A FOREIGN STUDENT IN BRAZIL

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### ABSTRACT

Studying at the Universidade Estadual do Sudoeste da Bahia (UESB) has been a life-changing experience that goes beyond academic training. Coming from Pakistan to Brazil for my doctoral studies, I encountered new challenges, new ways of learning, and new cultural perspectives that have reshaped both my academic and personal journey. The first and most demanding step was adapting to the Portuguese language, which was not only a tool for communication but also a gateway to deeper cultural understanding. At the same time, the process of integration into academic life required resilience in navigating different teaching styles, research expectations, and daily practices that were very different from those in my home country. Life outside the classroom was equally transformative. Living in Bahia has allowed me to experience Brazilian hospitality, cultural diversity, and traditions that broaden my worldview. At the same time, moments of homesickness and distance from family tested my strength and pushed me to create new forms of belonging in Brazil. Friendships with other international students who, like me, face similar struggles have become an important support network and a source of solidarity. Through this trajectory, I realized that internationalization is not an abstract concept, but a lived experience that touches every aspect of life. Being a foreign student at UESB means contributing to a multicultural environment, while also learning to adapt, grow, and share my own culture. My journey is one among many, but together we embody the richness of dialogues without borders, showing how academic spaces can become places of connection, transformation, and mutual learning.

**KEYWORDS:** Adaptation; Cultural Exchange; Internationalization; Resilience.