

Teaching International Students In Western Universities: A Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

In this systematic literature review, reports of international students, faculty members, and researchers indicate that international students have difficulty with the reading, writing, listening, and speaking demands of their English-mediated academic contexts, and that many host-institutions are not equipped to effectively accommodate their linguistic needs. A significant number of the studies reviewed also report that the difference between international students' previous educational experiences and typical Western classroom practices, dynamics, and expectations can be sources of confusion and anxiety. Additionally, salient trends indicate that linguistic and cultural difficulties may persist throughout the entire course of study, that some instructors hold deficit views of international students, and that international and domestic students have limited interactions. Host-institutions that fail to adequately meet the unique needs of this population have a moral obligation to take each of these issues into consideration if they are going to continue to take international students' tuition dollars.

Keywords: faculty and student perceptions, international students, literature review

INTRODUCTION

In the U.S., Australia, and New Zealand the increase of international students in higher education is primarily a product of globalization. Globalization has resulted in more feasible international travel, the spread of the importance of linguistic capital in the form of English language skills, and the creation of new generations of young people with parents who have the financial resources to send their children abroad (OECD, 2014). In the U.K. these migration patterns have also been enhanced by initiatives such as the

Received January 17, 2020; revised April 6, 2020, July 15, 2020, August 22, 2020; accepted August 29, 2020; electronically published September 15, 2021

European Union Bologna Process that promotes and facilitates the intake of international students to British higher education institutions (OECD, 2013).

International students are attending Western universities in record numbers. Asia, with China and India at the forefront, is by far the top sender of international students to Western universities. Currently, international students make up over 13% of the enrollment of all tertiary students in Canada and around 20% in the U.K., New Zealand, and Australia, respectively. The U.S. has the largest international student population in the world at one million, or five percent of the total enrollments (OECD, 2017). Students are drawn to the U.S. for a variety of reasons, the main ones being the prestigious reputation of the higher education system, the resources available, the diversity of academic concentrations, and the possibility of working in the U.S. after graduation. Even though international student enrollments have been spread out across other internationally attractive higher education institutions (i.e., in Canada, Australia, and China) and an anti-immigrant political sentiment emerged with the election of President Trump (Fernandes, 2019), international student numbers rose by 0.05 percent in the U.S. in 2019 (Institute of International Education, 2019). However, these numbers will likely face a downward trend in the following years due to COVID-19 and the various barriers it poses to international student mobility (Marginson, 2020), which is not discussed in this review.

This literature review explores research related to teaching international students, particularly English language learners who graduated from K-12 educational systems in countries where English is not the primary language spoken, who are enrolled in Western higher education institutions in countries where English is the primary language spoken. The main aim of the review is to answer the questions: *What do we know about teaching international students in Western higher education institutions based on existing research? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current literature?*

As will be evident from this article, many Western higher education institutions that enroll large numbers of international students are under-equipped to meet their diverse needs. Many institutions lack the academic and social support systems necessary to help with the cultural, linguistic, and institutional barriers these students face in and out of the classroom. This is a major problem for the academic development and overall quality of life of international students, and as Hartshorn et al. (2017) argued, institutions that admit such students have an “ethical obligation to understand the specific needs of these learners and to help them to succeed in their academic pursuits” (p. 52).

Finally, this literature review is chiefly concerned with teaching international students in the higher education setting. This means that the large body of research pertaining to the social, emotional, and cultural barriers international students encounter outside of classrooms is beyond the scope of this article. Such barriers are naturally complex and difficult for institutions to account for, whereas teaching and academic support for these students can be adjusted by institutions to immediately and genuinely promote academic growth. By focusing on the teaching-related literature in this context, this review identifies current trends in this field, and also points to the inadequacy of many higher education institutions to meet the diverse academic needs of this growing population. Accordingly, the major purpose of this review is to identify and bring to light areas where colleges and universities can better academically support their international students.

METHODS FOR THE LITERATURE REVIEW

Because a primary aim of this literature review is to give readers a broad understanding of the

research that exists in this field, what Cochran-Smith & Villegas (2014) call a “landscape review” format was used. They suggest that a landscape literature review provides readers with a general overview of the “landscape” of developments in the field, including how research problems have been framed, what questions have been examined, what research methods have been used, and what the trends are in the findings. The Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), an online library database funded by the U.S. Department of Education, was used to systematically obtain the articles for this review because it is the largest database for education literature (Paperpile, 2020), free to access, and widely used by educational researchers. The researcher then searched the terms “international students,” “higher education,” and *university* to find studies that focused on the intended participant group, international students, in the desired context, higher education institutions. The terms *Faculty* and *teach* were also searched to yield studies that were related to faculty experiences and perceptions of teaching international students. This process yielded 210 total results, of which 28 were empirical peer-reviewed articles concerning teaching international students in Western, English speaking countries published during the past two decades.

These 28 studies were then organized according to four categories of participants the researchers relied upon to collect their data: (1) studies that investigate faculty perceptions of teaching international students, (2) studies that investigate student perceptions of Western classrooms, (3) studies that incorporate both student and faculty perceptions of Western classrooms, and (4) studies that use classroom observations. The first three sections were further separated into trends pertaining to the foci of the studies. These sub-sections include language-focused studies and classroom practices and dynamics focused studies (see Table 1).

Table 1: Organizational Framework

	Study Participants	Focus
Section 1	Studies of Faculty Perceptions of International Students (13)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language Studies (5) • Classroom Practices & Dynamics Studies (8)
Section 2	Studies of Student Perceptions of Classrooms (5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classroom Practices & Dynamics studies (5)
Section 3	Studies of Both Faculty and Student Perceptions of Classrooms (7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language Studies (2) • Classroom Practices & Dynamics Studies (5)
Section 4	Studies that Use Classroom Observation (3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language Studies (1) • Classroom Practices & Dynamics Studies (2)

FINDINGS

Studies of Faculty Perceptions of International Students

Studies that focus on faculty experiences and reflections regarding teaching international students have garnered the most interest in this body of research. The following 13 studies revolved around faculty perceptions of different aspects of international students’ English ability and classroom practices and dynamics.

Language-focused studies. The four studies in this section focused on faculty perceptions international students’ English ability. Trice’s (2000 & 2002) studies regarding faculty members’ perceptions of international students are the foundational work in this subfield, given that these studies were

the earliest citations in the search and were cited by seven of the other studies. Both studies utilized the same interview data from 54 university staff members, 21 of whom were instructors and the rest of whom were either deans, departmental administrators, student leaders, or other professionals across the campus who regularly worked with international students. Trice investigated how employees from four different departments accommodated international students. Trice (2000) was a more macro-level study of these adjustments at the institutional, departmental, administrative, and classroom levels while Trice (2003) exclusively analyzed interview data from faculty members; however, both studies reported teaching-related outcomes. Trice interpreted the findings using “issue-processing theory,” which suggests that individuals and institutions formulate unique perceptions of issues they face (in this case, working with international students) based on their context and backgrounds. Trice found that language issues were central to cultural and academic difficulties that international students face. Additionally, Trice found that faculty members’ international experience and background, in terms of living in another country or speaking another language, effectively altered how they accommodated international students on an individual basis. Trice also found that faculty members were conscious that they had different standards for international students and local students. Lastly, this study was unique in this body of literature concerning international students because it showed that their experiences were likely different across departments, and depended on faculty dispositions and departmental policies, or lack thereof.

Andrade’s (2010) survey study of 93 faculty members’ perceptions of international students’ language abilities on a U.S. undergraduate campus found that faculty members generally thought that international students’ English language abilities were sufficient for being productive students, but that it would be better for them and for faculty members if they improved their language ability. Faculty members also generally felt that international students performed better in passive tasks (reading and listening) than in active tasks (speaking and writing). Additionally, a number of instructors noted that they tend to overlook language-related errors students made in these active tasks in favor of focusing on the content, which may serve as a reason why many international students’ writing and speaking skills do not improve significantly during their course of study. Lastly, instructors generally expressed that they had the only moderate interest in the possibility of participating in formal professional development related to teaching international students, cross-cultural communication, or second language acquisition practices. However, they strongly agreed that outside resources such as tutoring services, ESL and English courses, study groups, and computer-assisted language learning tools were the best ways to improve students’ English abilities. Instructors’ moderate interest in professional development related to teaching international students was the strongest statistical trend in the study, and showed that faculty members did not see themselves as highly responsible for helping these students with language difficulties. This finding also seemed to point to a major fundamental discrepancy with how instructors tend to accommodate their international students’ linguistic needs.

In another language-focused study, Sheppard et al. (2017) sought to determine whether ESL instructors and university professors had different perceptions of international students’ speech. Each group evaluated the intelligibility of the same set of recorded international students’ speech. They found that there were no significant differences between the two groups’ ratings. Sheppard et al. (2017) believed that this finding was encouraging for future language-focused collaboration between ESL teachers and content faculty who teach international students.

Hartshorn et al. (2017) explored the reading expectations of 141 instructors from 80 departments

at a U.S. university for international upperclassmen. To examine reading expectations, they designed a survey to account for the department-specific linguistic demands of readings (i.e., general vocabulary and specialized terminology), amount of reading, purpose of readings (i.e., understanding concepts, synthesizing, critical thinking, etc.), and challenges with readings. There were no statistically significant differences between the reading challenges and expectations across disciplines, which indicated that institutional support programs, such as English for Academic Purposes programs, should be effective for promoting the reading development of international students regardless of major. They also found that vocabulary-related difficulties were seen to be the most problematic aspect of reading for international students.

Classroom practices & dynamics focused studies. The first four studies in this section used different forms of quantitative analysis to identify trends in survey-based data, and the next four were more qualitative in nature. In the first study, Arenas (2009) used an instructor background questionnaire in conjunction with the “Approaches to Teaching Inventory” (Trigwell & Prosser, 2004), which yields quantitative data regarding how regularly faculty members employ different types of teaching strategies, in order to explore how teacher attitudes affected their teaching tendencies. The results of the analysis indicated that the 20 instructors surveyed tended to use teacher-centered approaches such as lecturing and explicit instruction, rather than student-centered approaches such as group work and discussions, to accommodate and explain concepts to international students. This was an important finding because, as Arenas (2009) noted, the social nature of student-centered teaching methods better equips students to be critical thinkers (Carnell 2007). Therefore, Arenas (2009) called for the implementation of professional development sessions for faculty members who teach international students in order to fix this pedagogical oversight.

In another quantitative analysis, Haan et al. (2017) asked 192 instructors about their beliefs about instructional practices for international students in an original online survey. Their quantitative findings suggested a significant tendency of faculty to believe that additional academic support for international students was the responsibility of the institution and not the content-area instructors. They hypothesized that this trend led to conflict between faculty members and administrators, which intensified given the growing population of international students in the university. The researchers also stated that there was no consensus amongst faculty about what constituted the most effective teaching techniques for this population, and they suggested that teacher education programs could help faculty members be in accordance with about best teaching techniques.

While Haan et al. (2017) focused on instructional practices, Jin and Schneider (2019) took a more holistic approach by examining faculty perceptions of international students in general in their mixed-methods survey study of 261 faculty members in one U.S. university. They also investigated how faculty background might influence their perceptions of international students. After analyzing the open-ended questions using grounded theory and the quantitative data using descriptive statistical analysis, they concluded that faculty members recognized that the diverse backgrounds of international students were valuable for their learning environment. However, Jin and Schneider also found that faculty members reflected a deficit view of the academic ability of such students in that they felt that faculty members were not responsible for developing these perceived insufficient abilities. The other main finding was that faculty background had a number of statistically significant relationships with how faculty members viewed international students. For example, monolingual American-born faculty members were more likely to cite

language proficiency as an issue, while instructors who had lived abroad were more excited to have international students in their classes. The significance of instructor background may be considered a trend in the literature, as others also suggested that teacher background (i.e., language learning, travel, and international living experience) plays a central role in how instructors perceive and teach international students.

Cao et al. (2014) took a unique approach compared to the other studies in this category, in that they investigated how motivating factors behind faculty members' attitudes towards international students affected their teaching practices and, in turn, their satisfaction with teaching international students. By analyzing their survey data in terms of relationships between their variables of motivators, teaching adjustments, and faculty satisfaction, they found that faculty members who viewed internationalization as a positive trend and felt responsible and prepared to help international students also supported improvements in student learning outcomes. The researchers spent significant effort highlighting the need for more research on faculty perspectives of international students.

The last four interview-based studies in this section are more conceptual or qualitative in nature than the previous ones. In a study that used semi-structured interview data of 10 professors at a Canadian university, Heringer (2019) applied Ladson-Billings' (1995) theory of *culturally relevant pedagogy* to determine the extent to which faculty members facilitated the development and affirmation of international students' identity while helping them recognize and challenge inequality in the host university context. Heringer (2019) structured the interviews around the three tenets of Ladson-Billings' theory--conceptions of "self and others, social relations, and conceptions of knowledge," and identified the most relevant data and trends that fell under each construct. In this way, Heringer (2019) found that faculty members professed an admiration of diverse classrooms, but implicitly contradicted themselves by holding a deficit view of international students' academic ability. She also found that international students faced institutional marginalization because their cultural and linguistic backgrounds were admired on a surface level but pushed to the side and not used to inform instructor pedagogy, usually in the name of departmental curriculum requirements. Heringer also argued that Ladson-Billings' (1995) *culturally relevant pedagogy* framework is perfectly suited for evaluating the perceptions that faculty members have of this group of students.

In another study, Coryell et al. (2015) compared 11 experienced Italian professors' perceptions of what they learned by teaching international students with those of seven experienced American professors who had international students in their classes. The researchers analyzed their data through the lens of the theory of *communities of practice* (Lave & Wenger 1991) in order to understand how professors responded to interacting with international students at the academic and personal levels. The semi-structured interviews revealed that the most salient difference between American and Italian professors was that American professors were inclined to seek professional development opportunities to help them internationalize their curriculum and teaching, whereas Italian professors sought professional development related to using English more effectively as a medium of instruction. The most significant similarity between groups was that professor background, in terms of travel and language learning experiences, accounted for greater enthusiasm for teaching international students. Professors with such experiences were also more likely to seek or participate in informal professional development opportunities to help inform their teaching practices in diverse classrooms.

Skyrme and McGee (2016) analyzed semi-structured interview data using grounded theory from

12 teachers from three different New Zealand colleges in order to assess their knowledge of institutional academic support systems for international students, their perceptions of the academic ability of international students, and their beliefs about how to improve the quality of education for these students. They found that instructors generally struggled with adapting their previous teaching techniques to suit an international classroom, and felt that this dynamic fundamentally challenges their traditional beliefs of what a tertiary education should entail. That said, they also recognized the cultural benefits this group brings to the classroom and campus community.

In the only study of international students in Ireland, O'Reilly et al. (2013) also made the claim that there was a paucity of research related to faculty and staff perceptions of international students. The researchers gauged how staff members felt about working with international students by conducting semi-structured interviews with 11 staff members, two of whom were instructors and the rest of whom were international student service staff, chaplains, and health care workers. The researchers found that employees perceived that international students had difficulties adjusting to Irish culture and religious practices, and that there was a notable lack of interaction between Irish students and international students. They also reported that some international students felt homesick because of financial issues as well as the stress caused by cultural, religious, and social differences between the host community and their home countries. Furthermore, this study represented one part of a larger project that also encompasses international students' perceptions. Therefore, even though this study is categorized in the *Faculty Perceptions* section of this review, the authors recognized that solely focusing on this perspective offers a limited vantage point, which is a limitation of all of the studies in this section.

Studies of Student Perceptions of Western Classrooms

In contrast to the studies in the previous section, the researchers here relied upon data collected exclusively from international students. The first two studies in this section focused on the outcomes of two different pedagogical strategies, whereas the next three studies drew upon data from graduate students with culturally-similar backgrounds to explore student perceptions of teaching.

Classroom practices & dynamics studies. Simpson (2017) examined intercultural conversation in a mixed-nationality classroom, but with particular focus on how Chinese business students participated in collaborative activities. This study focused on the use of active learning pedagogies to create more student-centered classrooms and found through student interviews that students generally viewed these activities as positive because they allowed them to apply theories to practice and improve their teamwork skills. Simpson (2017) noted that students were able to develop intercultural communication skills through these types of structured active learning strategies. However, Simpson (2017) also showed that students had great difficulty participating in group activities and often felt ignored during discussions. The main takeaway that Simpson (2017) highlighted was that these students' difficulties with participation might not be a "language problem," but a "conversational problem" that is likely derived from their previous experiences with a Confucian style of education.

In a related study of active and collaborative learning techniques and their effect on student anxiety in the classroom, Khoshlessan (2013) used quantitative survey data from 85 international students. The researcher found that the use of active learning classroom practices, such as the group activities described in the previous study, lowers student anxiety. On the surface, it seemed like this study provided yet another reason for instructors to incorporate active learning techniques into their curriculum; however, one must consider that there was a "weak inverse relationship" between active learning techniques and less study

anxiety.

Furthermore, the following three studies in this section focused exclusively on graduate students with culturally similar backgrounds. Ai (2017) interviewed seven Chinese students to explore the communication patterns between them and their Australian instructors from the view of the students. The data collection methods Ai (2017) used in this case study were interesting because interview data was supplemented with four years of informal field observations of the researcher, who was a doctoral student in the same university as the participants. He found that the students were happy with their interactional patterns with their instructors, but that the accents of the Australian instructors and their own English language abilities were reasons for students to avoid speaking with their lecturers. Ai (2017) also noted that the Chinese students communicated with their lecturers according to the Confucian traditional etiquette they were used to from their previous educational experiences in China. This style of interaction was marked by the hierarchical relationship between teacher and student where the student is perceived as a passive learner and the instructor an unquestionable authority on the subject. Ai (2017) found that this dynamic was the root of many missed interactional experiences between instructors and Chinese students.

Lyken-Segosebe (2017) used in-depth interviews to investigate the acculturative stress and disengagement of seven East Asian graduate students both in and out of the classroom. The researcher found that language difficulties, more active teaching styles than the students were used to in their home countries, ambiguity of professors' grading process, and professors' Western-centric interests were all contributors to acculturative stress. The researcher also found that faculty development programs and the academic services at the university were inadequate to sufficiently support these students in their academic endeavors, and the researcher called for the intensification of faculty training and programing because voluntary writing centers and tutoring services are inadequate and offer only quick fixes. Lyken-Segosebe (2017) concluded that higher education institutions should implement robust conversation and writing supports that are easily accessible to this population. Finally, and importantly, the international students in this study were at different points in their graduate studies, and Lyken-Segosebe (2017) found that the acculturative stress these students face was not limited to a brief transition period after arrival to the host country and institution. Rather it was something that persisted throughout the entire course of their graduate studies. This was a concerning finding, especially since acculturative stress may be an indicator of an overall lower quality of life. Although there were only seven participants in this study, this finding may also indicate that this is a trend specific to East Asian students, which, if found to be conclusive, could be used by institutions to better accommodate the unique needs of this group. On the whole, this finding provided additional validation for the aforementioned steps higher education institutions need to take in order to improve the lives of these individuals.

While a significant amount of research focuses on international students in general or on Chinese international students, the following study offered a valuable and rare contemporary look at an understudied population that is widely represented in Western higher education institutions – Saudis. In fact, this group represented the fourth largest group of international students in the U.S. in 2014 (Institute of International Education). Yakaboski et al. (2018) described the interactions of Saudi graduate students on campus by using an interpretivist exploratory mixed methods approach that included interviews and a survey and yielded both qualitative and quantitative data. Yakaboski and colleagues found that these students generally had positive interactions with faculty members, but negative or limited interactions with American classmates. There was also a general consensus that faculty members played the most important role in

facilitating interactions between Saudi and American students, but they consistently failed to capitalize on this role and hence perpetuated the barrier between these two groups. Students also felt that all members of the host community needed to be educated about their unique culture, religion, and language abilities in order to better facilitate social and academic interactions between Saudi and American students. Finally, this study and Lyken-Segosebe's (2017) study, along with Sloan and Porter's (2010) study in the following section, are of interest because they use only graduate students as their participants. Studies like these or studies that differentiate between undergraduates and graduate students are important because failing to recognize the difference between these groups may lead to false conclusions. The fundamental limitation of the studies in this section is that they take only student perceptions into account and do not draw upon instructor perceptions to inform their conclusions.

Studies of Both Faculty and Student Perceptions of Western Classrooms

This section of the review is comprised of studies that address the aforementioned limitation in their designs. They do so by using both faculty members and international students as participants. The first two studies are focused on the English language needs and proficiencies of international students, respectively, while the following five are concerned with classroom practices and dynamics.

Language-focused studies. Zhu and Flaitz (2005) investigated the language needs of undergraduate and graduate international students by creating three focus groups consisting of graduate international students, undergraduate international students, and faculty and administrators, respectively. Each group participated in observed semi-structured discussions focusing on the linguistic needs of international students. Interestingly, the findings indicated that students and instructors had both overlapping and differing thoughts about what they considered to be the primary areas of difficulty for international students. Both groups considered writing an area of difficulty that persisted regardless of the amount of time spent at the university. The discussions in each group also differed in focus, in that the students' conversations revolved around their initial difficulties with passive skills (listening and reading), that gradually disappeared over time, and faculty members' conversations focused on student difficulties with active skills (writing papers and giving presentations) and difficulties with international graduate assistants. While these findings are all interesting in their own rights, the most important takeaway was that the triangulation method of different perspectives used in this study provided a more holistic picture of language difficulties faced by international students, which illustrated the importance of accounting for multiple perspectives when evaluating international students' needs. Zhu and Flaitz (2005) also called for English for Academic English programs to base their curriculum around authentic experiences that international students will face in their content classes, such as presentations, group work, listening to lectures, and writing papers.

More recently, Neumann et al. (2019) compared international students' English language proficiency, as determined by language exams such as the IELTS and the TOEFL, with their first-year performance evaluations to see if there were any relationships between scores. Language test scores, course grades, and first semester GPAs of 110 first-year business international students were collected and compared with a student background questionnaire, student self-evaluation, and the data gathered from semi-structured business instructor interviews. Their results indicated that there was a statistically significant correlation between language test scores and GPA during the first semester of study. They also found that faculty members viewed writing skills as the most significant indicator of student success. However, while these statistical outcomes were convincing, it must be considered that the researchers did

not account for the potential impact that university academic resource services and individual study strategies may have on first-year academic success.

Classroom practices & dynamics focused studies. The following five studies used data from faculty and international students to investigate the effectiveness of pedagogical strategies, classroom interactions, curriculum, and perceptions of teaching and learning, respectively. Robbins, et al.'s (2002) exploratory study of the effects of computer-mediated communication on the teaching and learning of international students used structured interviews of three faculty members and surveys and structured interviews of seven international students to gather qualitative and quantitative data. Summary and content analysis revealed that computer-mediated communication was effective for increasing the quality and volume of communication between instructors and students, improving international student writing and communication skills, allowing for a more diverse set of instructor teaching and learning techniques, and improving international student communication confidence. This study was the only one in the review that explored technology-related phenomena in this context. Thus, a strength of this study was its propensity to facilitate language development and teaching methodologies that could be used to support the specific needs of international students.

Nieto and Booth (2010) used a mixed methods approach, which consisted of quantitative and qualitative survey data as well as qualitative interview data, to explore how the cultural competence and intercultural sensitivity of students and instructors affected the teaching and learning outcomes of international students. They defined cultural competence in the educational context as the ability to effectively teach students from different cultures (Diller & Moule 2005) and intercultural sensitivity as, "the ability to discriminate and experience relevant cultural differences" (Hammer et al. 2003, p. 422). This was an important distinction because these terms recur in this literature, but can often seem like concepts with no clear accepted constructs. The researchers compared these concepts between ESL instructors, non-ESL instructors, and international students using a survey called the "Intercultural Sensitivity Scale" (needs cite). Their most significant findings were that: ESL instructors had greater cross-cultural competence in terms of interaction and engagement than non-ESL instructors; females were more intercultural sensitive than males; and, instructors were more intercultural sensitive than students. These data can be interpreted in a variety of ways; however, the main takeaway from the study is that instructors benefitted from intercultural experiences, and the main indicator for higher cultural competence was spending time interacting with and learning about people from different cultures.

Sloan and Porter's (2010) longitudinal study at a British university was unique in this review because it was a formal evaluation of an "English for Academic Purposes" program. After noticing that their program sessions were suffering from low attendance and curriculum issues, the researchers conducted a four-year study using questionnaires, focus groups, and in-depth semi-structured interviews of 150 business graduate international students and seven business program directors. Using quantitative analysis of the questionnaire data and grounded theory to identify trends in the interview data, they found that the existing program was insufficient for meeting the specialized business-related needs of the students. They also used their collected data to create a new program model that better prepared instructors to teach business related English skills.

In one of the oldest studies in this review, Robertson et al. (2000) used a coding technique called the Delphi method to examine written open-ended question responses from 408 undergraduate international students and 121 instructors at an Australian university, making it the largest participant group in this

review. They noticed that international students faced a variety of challenges, such as participating and interacting with classmates and faculty, which likely originated from language proficiency issues. They also found that instructors recognized this difficulty and adjusted to international students' needs by slowing their speaking speed. However, they also noticed a trend in faculty responses that indicated that they felt that international students did not take enough initiative when it came to improving their English skills. This finding starkly contrasted with a trend in the international students' responses – they felt instructors should be more empathetic to their specific needs.

The final study in this section focused on one specific nationality of international students – Vietnamese students. By using focus groups and in-depth semi-structured interviews, Huong et al. (2017) found significantly different perceptions about teaching and learning between 24 Vietnamese students and four staff members, one of whom was a lecturer. The students were generally dissatisfied with culturally and linguistically diverse instructors, meaning non-white Australian instructors, because they did not align with their preconceived notion or perception of what a Western educator looked or sounded like. Students also reported anxiety resulting from language proficiency issues and cultural differences. Lastly, these international students viewed lectures, with the instructor frontally positioned in relation to students, as the most important part of their education, which was likely derived from the Confucian education they experienced in Vietnam.

Studies that Use Classroom Observation.

It is reasonable to assume that research about teaching at the higher education level would include studies featuring classroom observations; however, in this review there are only three studies wherein the researchers actually stepped into classrooms to observe. Additionally, two of these studies actually utilized other data sources in addition to observations, but to emphasize the observational aspect of their research designs, they are discussed below.

Language-focused Study. In the only study that exclusively used observations from the classroom as its data source, Sheppard et al. (2015) conducted 40 hours of class observations at a U.S. university and used inductive analysis to investigate what kinds of speaking and listening demands international students encounter. They found that international students most commonly encountered language-related difficulties when listening to lectures, descriptions of data, and class announcements. They also proposed that the content instructors' pronunciation, use of idiomatic expressions, American-centric cultural references, and informal speech and tangential comments were sources of misunderstandings. They believed that this form of observational data collection was useful to inform teaching practices and that the institution's Intensive English Program needs to adapt to meet these needs.

Classroom practices & dynamics studies. Yefanova et al.'s (2017) study explored how instructors facilitated “cross-national interactions,” which can be described as any in-class interaction between domestic students and international students. To examine these interactions, the researchers conducted classroom observations and interviewed faculty members, local students, and East Asian international students enrolled in specific economics, public speaking, and biology courses at a U.S. university. They found that the instructor played the most important role in facilitating cross-national interactions, as students tended not to engage in conversation if the instructor did not facilitate it. They also found that cross-national interactions facilitated both the understanding of course content and intercultural communication skills, although only the faculty members recognized this. This study demonstrated that if instructors carefully incorporated cross-cultural interactions into their lessons, students engaged in intercultural communication that they would not have done previously.

Finally, Kraal's (2017) international comparative study investigated teaching methods in tax law courses with both international students and domestic students in four U.S. universities, one U.K. university, two Australian universities, and one New Zealand university by using semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. She found that instructors across contexts felt pressure to adapt their pedagogical strategies to accommodate international students because their traditional methods seemed ineffective. She saw this as a positive outcome because it showed that instructors were aware of international students' specific academic needs and responded by experimenting with new educational technology and informal teacher training. However, Kraal (2017) also found that instructors saw English-language entry tests, such as the TOEFL, as unreliable measures of a student's English ability that often created discrepancies in expectations of international students. She encouraged the widespread implementation and continuation of self-reflective practice as a way for instructors to adapt to more diverse university classrooms. The unique international and comparative aspects of this study make it valuable to this body of literature, especially considering that well-funded studies on teaching in higher education are rare. It also provided a solid methodological model for researchers who are interested in the classroom dynamic of comparative international education research.

CONCLUSION: STRENGTHS, LIMITATIONS, AND NEEDED DIRECTIONS

It is surprising that more studies in this review did not utilize a design that included data sources that represent students' perspectives and experiences, especially since they are central to this body of research. Studies that focus solely on faculty perceptions are useful in that they account for one fundamental aspect of classrooms with international students, but the overall omission of student voices inherently paints an incomplete picture of the context. A few of the researchers in this review, including Andrade (2010), O'Reilly et al. (2013), and Zhu & Flaitz (2005), rightly argue that stakeholders perspectives need to be accounted for when evaluating the needs of international students in order to gain a truly holistic perspective of their experiences in Western classrooms.

Furthermore, it is imperative for studies to differentiate between graduate and undergraduate students. Certain studies failed to present a fair depiction of their participants because researchers did not distinguish between these two distinct populations in their findings. This was largely the case in Arenas' (2012) and Skyrme and McGee's (2016) studies of faculty perceptions, and is admitted as a limitation of Jin and Schneider's (2019) faculty-view based study. Alternatively, three studies (Lyken-Segosebe, 2017; Sloan & Porter, 2010; Yakaboski et al., 2018) used only graduate students as their participants. This was notable because most of the research in this field is concerned with undergraduate international students because they represent a comparatively larger overall population in Western higher education institutions. However, studies that specifically focus on graduate students are important because they are fundamentally different from undergraduate international students in terms of age, demographics, status within the institution, and motivation for pursuing education. As can be seen by the small number of studies that at least partly focused on international graduate students in this review (10 total), this group is a relatively understudied population whose voice often gets overlooked or mixed together with undergraduates. This is an issue because, based on the literature, many graduate students also clearly face difficulties in higher education institutions, especially during their initial transition period, and their experiences necessitate further investigation to ensure their success and ethical treatment in their new context. If both undergraduate and graduate international students are indeed participants in a study, differences between these populations

must be taken into account. Such studies should make a clear distinction between each group when analyzing data and interpreting findings, as demonstrated by Zhu and Flaitz (2005), Kraal (2017), and Khoshlessan (2013).

Focusing on, or differentiating between, particular cultural groups of international students has the potential to offer a more accurate picture of how international students experience Western classrooms. There were notably only five studies that intentionally focused on specific cultural groups of international students (Ai, 2017; Huong et al., 2017; Lyken-Segosebe, 2017; Simpson, 2017; Yakaboski et al., 2018). For instance, Ai (2017) evaluated the communication patterns between lecturers and Chinese students, Huong et al. (2017), drew upon multiple perspectives to explore Vietnamese undergraduate international students' experiences, Lyken-Segosebe (2017) studied the adjustment challenges of East Asian international students, Simpson (2017) researched Chinese students' perceptions of active learning strategies, and Yakaboski et al. (2018) explored the classroom interactions of Saudi graduate students. All five of these studies provide specialized insights into the experiences of culturally and linguistically similar groups of international students. While individual factors such as personality and learning style should not be ignored, this category of research is invaluable for identifying salient trends or shared experiences of a group that may be derived from differences between the international students' native language and culture and the English language and the dominant culture of the host institution. For example, within the scope of this review, there was a trend that indicated that the role of Confucianism in East Asian society and education played an integral role in how international students from these countries adjusted to Western academic culture (Ai, 2017; Huong et al., 2017; Simpson, 2017). Without such culturally-specified focused studies, trends like this will continue to be overlooked in this field.

Another recurring theme in the literature was the call for more structured support for international students. The studies indicated that English for Academic Purposes programs and tutoring services should be more robust (Lyken-Segosebe, 2017) and should collaborate with other departments to better understand the skills international students need to succeed in their respective majors (Andrade, 2010; Sloan & Porter, 2010; Zhu & Flaitz, 2005). Ideally, opening up these new conduits of communication would allow academic support program coordinators to tailor their services to the varying discipline-specific needs of international students.

In a somewhat similar vein, multiple research reports indicated that professors did not see supporting international students' linguistic needs as their responsibility (Haan et al., 2017), assuming that their main strategy used for developing English language skills was to refer international students to other sources of English instruction, such as the university tutoring program (Andrade, 2010). Some researchers have also hypothesized that the ineffectiveness of instructors to adequately teach international students or accommodate their linguistic needs is exacerbated by the fact that it is not necessary for most faculty members to have any sort of formal teacher education in order to obtain a teaching post at the higher education level. This is related to the call from many researchers for the implementation of faculty professional development programs and formal policies related to international students as opposed to word-of-mouth informal department-specific policies that focus on teaching and support practices for international students (Arenas, 2009; Coryell, et al. 2015; Haan, et al. 2017 Trice, 2003).

Despite their long-time presence on Western campuses, such as in U.S. since the mid 1800s, many issues faced by international students have remained largely overlooked or avoided by higher education institutions' administrations, often resulting in students' isolation, low academic performance, or even

discrimination (Yeo et al., 2019). This is a situation that may be amplified by recent anti-Asian sentiments prompted by responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it is encouraging to see that researchers are investigating the effectiveness of existing academic support systems and practices, as well as employing a variety of different research approaches to investigate teaching this population. Additionally, it is noteworthy that book-length publications have sprung up in response to the linguistic and pedagogical difficulties that instructors of international students are experiencing (Carroll & Ryan 2005; Ryan 2012; Hayes, 2019).

As can be seen in the literature reviewed here, language-related barriers and cultural challenges are central to the issues international students face in Western classrooms. Reports of international students, faculty members, and researchers indicated that international students have difficulty with the reading, writing, listening, and speaking demands of their English-mediated academic contexts. A significant number of the studies also reported that the difference between international students' previous educational experiences and typical Western classroom practices, dynamics, and expectations could be sources of confusion and anxiety, which was found to be especially true for international students from traditionally Confucian cultures. Additionally, the research overall indicates that: linguistic and cultural difficulties persist throughout the entire time international students are at their institutions, not just at the beginning; some instructors hold deficit views of international students; and, international students and local students have limited interactions unless specifically supported by instructors. Each of these fundamental widespread issues needs to be taken into serious consideration by researchers and by host institutions at the institutional, departmental, and instructor levels.

Colleges and universities that enroll international students have the responsibility to help them in every way possible. In the implications or conclusion sections of much of the research I have reviewed here, researchers call for more robust institutional, departmental, and instructor level support for international students. Some of these suggestions included the implementation of language learning technology in the curriculum, more collaboration between English for Academic Purposes programs and specific departments, and hiring faculty members with international and language learning experience because these may be indicators of an effective instructor of international students. The two most salient trends among these proposals were that higher education institutions should provide professional development opportunities for faculty members to more effectively teach international students, and that higher education institutions need to provide strong English for Academic Purposes programs, writing centers, and tutoring services that adequately support international student's diverse linguistic and academic needs. Accordingly, it would be advisable for colleges and universities to rely heavily on high-quality English for Academic Purposes programs that are staffed with qualified instructors with the specialized knowledge necessary to effectively help this student group, while simultaneously providing formal professional development opportunities and collaboration opportunities with language specialists for instructors.

In light of this review and the trends noted in the discussion, there are some powerful research designs that should be utilized by future researchers in this field. First, there were very few studies that used comparative designs to compare and contrast different institutions, different departments, or different groups of international students. Comparative designs are useful for identifying both large scale and context-specific trends. Second, a major limitation of much of this research is that international students are lumped together into one homogenous group, and their diverse national, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and individual backgrounds are not differentiated in the analysis or interpretation of results. Furthermore, much

of this research does not distinguish between students' majors or between students who are undergraduate and graduate students. Failing to recognize the difference between groups leads to incomplete and inaccurate findings and conclusions. Ultimately, research that focuses on one nationality of international students, or differentiates between specific groups will provide a clearer picture of trends in this field. Lastly, more research needs to take on a holistic approach in order to understand teaching of international students in Western universities by using classroom observations in conjunction with both faculty and student reports. Depending on the scope of the study, drawing upon just one or two of these sources may be acceptable; however, using all three of these sources, although more difficult, will give researchers and readers a better understanding of the situation.

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