Introduction to JCIHE Emerging Scholar Research Summaries

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Dear Readers -

I would like to welcome you to the *Journal of Comparative and International Higher Education* (JCIHE) Emerging Scholars Research Summaries Issue. This issue highlights Graduate Student Work-in-Progress with contributions from graduate students from around the world who are currently studying in a doctoral program. The purpose of the Emerging Scholars Research Summaries is to share cutting-edge research that is of broad significance to the field of comparative and international higher education. Each article received a Letter of Support from the student's Supervisor/Chair indicating their approval for the potential publication. In that the focus is on work-in-progress, some of the articles provide foundational information while others include preliminary findings.

Contributions for the 2022 JCIHE Emerging Scholar Research Summaries Issue examine issues of higher education in five countries and regions: Australia; Canada; Spain; Vietnam, and the United States. The graduate student authors are studying at the following institutions:

Australia: Monash University
Canada: McGill University; Thompson Rivers University; University of Windsor
Spain/Brazil: Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo, Brazil/Universitat de Valéncia, Spain
Tasmania: University of Tasmania
United States: Ohio State University; University of Maryland; University of North Georgia

2022 Graduate Student Themes

For the 2022 Graduate Student issue, much of the research was conceived during COVID-19 and the implications of the pandemic are apparent in the research presented. Two broad themes are found: Policies and Student Voices.

Policies

Articles focus on national, institutional, and programmatic policies. National and program policies are explored in Vietnam universities with the adoption of nationally focused international career-oriented programs. Institutional policies are examined in how U.S. global liberal arts campuses adopt education for religious understanding, also known as worldview diversity education. Programmatic policies are found in U.S. curricular adoptions of transnational virtual classroom and virtual exchanges that need to adjust to complications from COVID-19 and the ever-changing landscape of immigration policies. Using a decolonial lens, institutional policies are explored in terms of the different meanings of internationalization of higher education in which international mobility of the academic community is related to the construction of internationalization. A postcolonial lens is applied to understand how Africa is represented in the imagery of study abroad programs as othering or in a subjugated manner.

Student Voices

The focus on the voices of students informs how students think about employability and how they interpret their own engagement and self-growth. The topic of employability is explored in how Chinese international graduates use six forms of capital (human, social, cultural, psychological, identity, and agentic) and apply it to their careers in Australia. International student engagement is explored via gendered experiences of Iranian international students' experiences of human dignity in Canadian universities. Engagement is also seen in a comparison of Canadian and Iranian international students' conceptions of critical thinking during their graduate studies in Canada. Intercultural development is seen through the voices of Chinese foreign language learners who participate in Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) at a regional U.S. university and their development of intercultural communication competencies. Finally, international students from around the world who study in the U.S. share how their personality traits influence the ways they deal with acculturative stress.

Articles

The Following Articles are included in this Issue:

Renee L. Bowling *(The Ohio State University, USA). **Worldview Diversity Education at Global Liberal Arts Campuses***

This article expands inquiry into the framing of education for religious understanding, also referred to as worldview diversity education. The article attempts to understand the manner

and degree to which global liberal arts campuses are engaging intentionally with religious diversity. Using a social justice lens, Bowling argues for alignment between global citizenship education and worldview diversity education that champions interactional diversity. In attempts to clearly define humanistic goals in international higher education strategies and pedagogies, this article proposes education for religious understanding as a purposeful companion to diversity, intercultural, and global citizenship education within the expanse of global learning.

Yizhe Huang *(University of North Georgia). Investigating Student Development of Intercultural Communication Competence through Collaborative Online International Learning*

This article is a qualitative case study that details the intercultural communication competence (ICC) development of seven Chinese foreign language learners. These students participated in Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) activities at a regional U.S. university with a group of native Chinese speakers over a two-year period. Drawing on sociocultural and transformative learning theories, the study examines the barriers to the implementation of COIL, and the ways in which Chinese Foreign language learners develop ICC in foreign language coursework. The findings are shared that practitioners and researchers can build upon to promote language development and intercultural learning in foreign language coursework through virtual exchange.

Thi Kim Thu Le *(University of Windsor, Canada). Dealing with Acculturative Stress: How International Students' personality traits help?*

This article adds to the literature on international students' experiences with acculturative stress by adding specific information on how personality traits influence the ways that international students deal with acculturative stress. This study investigates acculturative stress-related experiences of 10 international students from 10 countries who are studying in the US. The study describes the levels of stress that these students encounter and explores how their personality traits shaped by social, cultural, and political contexts influence their acculturative stress levels and their ability to get over these experiences.

Ana Rachel Macedo Mendes *(Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo, Brazil/Universitat de Valéncia, Spain). The Role of Academic Mobility in the (De)Construction of Internationalization: Dialogues and Perspectives From, In and On Global South & Global North*

This article details the different meanings of the internationalization of higher education using ideas from the Bakhtin Circle regarding language as an ideological phenomenon and decolonial studies to influence the theoretical construct and methodology of the study. The focus on international academic mobility is justified in this research due to its central role in the views, policies and actions of internationalization of higher education, despite representing a highly

excluding, elitist process with flows that tend to reinforce asymmetrical relationships and colonial domination by the Global North of the Global South. Given this scenario, this study investigates how international mobility of the academic community is related to the construction of internationalization. The views of undergraduate and graduate students and professors participating in academic mobility of one university in Brazil, the Global South, and another in Spain, the Global North, are analyzed using (de)construction of theoretical models, before, during and after their mobility experience. These views are also contrasted with the documental analysis of the official texts on internationalization of both institutions. The aim of the research is to understand the role that international academic mobility can play in the (de)construction of the perspectives and practices of internationalization of higher education institutions.

Thi Duc Phung *(The University of Tasmania).***The Inter-play of Teacher Agency and Student Agency in Enhancing Graduate Employability: A Study of the International Career-Oriented Programs in Vietnam**

This article examines the impact of globalization to the graduate labor market which as has resulted in the under-employment of new graduates in many countries. Although the Vietnamese government has launched numerous initiatives to develop employability for students, half of Vietnamese university graduates are unable to find jobs in their area of specialization. To address this issue, the Vietnamese HE sector introduced the international career-oriented programs (ICOPs) to raise the quality of graduates and to ensure that it is on par with international standards. This research focuses on three ICOPs to explore the interaction between teacher agency and student agency in enhancing graduate employability. This research draws on Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital and habitus to investigate how academics and students perceive and exercise their individual agency. The position theory is adopted to shed light on the ways academics and students either comply with or disrupt the traditional hierarchical positioning within education systems to practice their co-agency. The study employs a qualitative approach with a combination of various data collection methods, including document analysis, interviews and focus groups to explore the role of teacher agency, student agency and their co-agency in enhancing graduate employability in Vietnam.

Erfaneh Razavipour *(McGill University). **Gendered Experiences of Human Dignity within Canadian Universities: The Case of Iranian International Students***

This article explores Iranian international students' (IISs) experiences of human dignity (HD) within Canadian universities. Drawing on in-depth interviews with 24 current and former IISs, I created a conceptual HD framework to analyze the data. Three themes emerged as key to IISs' experiences of HD in the context of postsecondary education: 1) the relationship between students and university faculty/staff, 2) gender equality and freedom, and 3) having a minority or marginalized identity. It concludes with observations about how an awareness of students' HD experiences could strengthen the support offered to international students (ISs).

Farzaneh Ojaghi Shirmard *(Thompson Rivers University, Canada). **Canadian and Iranian Graduate Students' Conceptions of Critical Thinking: A Comparative Study***

This article study compares Canadian and Iranian international students' conceptions of critical thinking during their graduate studies in Canada. Critical thinking is an essential skill in Canadian higher education. The lived experiences of four Canadian and four Iranian graduate students from different master's programs help to identify experiences and notions of critical thinking during their time at the university. Preliminary findings show that while all Canadian participants held the concept of critical thinking, Iranian students needed more knowledge to build their critical thinking conceptualization. At the university, content knowledge, instructors' competence, and teaching methods significantly influenced students' critical thinking development. The comparisons provide insight into future pedagogical and curriculum building strategies in the development of critical thinking skills.

Melody Tang *(Monash University, Australia). **Contributions of Capitals to Chinese International Graduates' Employability in Australia***

This article explores the employability of Chinese international graduates in the Australian labor market. Employability is examined in light of six forms of capital (i.e., human, social, cultural, psychological, identity, and agentic) that Chinese international graduates develop and apply to their careers in Australia. The research employed Bourdieu's theory of practice and a capitals-based approach as the theorical framework. The findings reveal that in addition to getting employment in Australia, the graduates also benefited from developing and utilizing these six capitals in terms of sustainable employment, professional growth, and wellbeing. As such, a broad definition of employability which includes different capitals as the inputs and different aspects of employability outcomes as the outputs, namely, employment outcomes, sustainable employments, professional growth, and wellbeing, becomes important in studies on employability.

Zuleka Woods *(Virginia Tech, United States). **What's in an Image? A Critical Look at Study Abroad Programs Going to Africa***

As the U.S. continues to prioritize the internationalization of higher education, study-abroad participation has doubled in the last decades. To correspond with this increased interest and prepare students for an intercultural workforce, study abroad programs have diversified travel destinations to include countries on the continent of Africa, most of which have colonial histories. However, many scholars have contended with the problematic nature of study abroad programs, especially interactions with host countries in the Global South. Specifically, the depiction of Africa is often othering or in a subjugated manner. Additionally, there is a lack of concise scholarship on the representation of people and places of travel destinations in study abroad programs images. As such, this exploratory study uses a postcolonial lens to understand

how Africa is represented in the imagery of study abroad programs at selected Research 1 universities in the U.S. Results of the study and practical implications are presented.

The *Journal of Comparative and International Higher Education* (JCIHE) serves as a place to share new thinking on analysis, theory, policy, and practice that relate to issues that influence comparative and international higher education. The JCIHE is the official journal of the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) Higher Education Special Interest Group (HESIG). JCIHE is dependent on the volunteer efforts of many scholars in the field of comparative and international higher education. I want to give special thanks to the JCIHE Peer Reviewers for the Winter Special Issue: Michael Lanford, Samantha Thompson, Rachel McGee; and Prashanti Chennamsetti. Thank you for the time you give to making sure that the articles are publication ready.

Finally, I want to thank several individuals on the JCIHE management team who were instrumental in the publication of this issue: Senior Associate Editor, Hayes Tang, Associate and Technical Editor, Yovana Parmeswaree Soobrayen Veerasamy, Managing, Copy-Editor, Prashanti Chennamsetti, and Assistant to the Editor, Hannah Hou. Special thanks go out to the Production Team with Lead Production Editor, Adeline De Angelis and Assistant Editor Marissa Lally.

Editor in Chief, Rosalind Latiner Raby
December 2022

Worldview Diversity Education at Global Liberal Arts Campuses

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Abstract

In this emerging scholar summary, the author joins together scholarship on religion and culture and advocates for socially just education for religious understanding that is linked to global citizenship and diversity education. A comparative case study methodology that incorporates a survey and elite interviews is used to explore the manner and degree to which global liberal arts colleges and universities are engaging with religious diversity. Three axes are applied to analyze the ways education for religious understanding may function across place, space, and time within global education policy networks.

Introduction

As inclusion, equity, and diversity initiatives become increasingly foregrounded in comparative and international education (CIE) (Deardorff et al., 2021; Hunter et al., 2022), it is essential to note which identities, communities, and topics are commonly excluded from the discussion. This is necessary from the perspective of seeking epistemic justice (Clarke, 2021) for Indigenous and spiritual knowledge (Lin et al., 2021), for creating equitable and inclusive campuses, and in preparing students to address global challenges. Authors in this journal have noted that intentionality is required to counter "the mainstream Anglo-American imaginary" (Castiello-Gutiérrez, 2020, p. 94) and to reimagine internationalization in and across contexts for the common good. Many international higher education institutions have missional commitments to develop global citizens (Castiello-Gutiérrez, 2020; Marinoni, 2019), yet religious, secular, and spiritual worldviews, referred to in higher education spiritual and interfaith development literature as "RSS" (Snipes & Manson, 2020), are often absent, despite their interwovenness with culture. This inquiry into leaders' framing of education for religious understanding, also referred to as worldview diversity education (Edwards & Kitamura, 2019), is an exploratory attempt to understand the manner and degree to which global liberal arts campuses are engaging intentionally with religious diversity.

I join with scholars who link global and domestic diversity agendas from a social justice lens (Deardorff et al., 2021; Özturgut, 2017; Williams, 2013) and with those who argue for alignment between global citizenship education and worldview diversity education that champions interactional diversity (Edwards & Kitamura, 2019, Geibel, 2020). These authors share a humanistic orientation to the common good mission of the university, a rhetoric that many universities espouse but that is frequently found to be in the service of neoliberal aims (Brunner, 2022; Zhang, 2020). To counter the dominant imaginary, humanistic goals must be clearly articulated and woven into international higher education strategies and pedagogies (Castiello-Gutiérrez, 2020; Geibel, 2020). Thus, I propose education for religious understanding as a purposeful companion to diversity, intercultural, and global citizenship education within the expanse of global learning (Green & Hassim, 2022).

Informed by Critical Lenses

CIE and religious studies scholars frame religion and spirituality as aspects of identity, culture, and knowledge (Edwards, 2018; Lin et al., 2021; Shahjahan, 2010) that are dynamically interconnected with politics, history, and geography (Beyers, 2017; Moore, 2022; Sivasubramanian & Hayhoe, 2018).

Religion & Secularism

Higher education's neutrality on the topic of religion in many locales demonstrates a privileging of secularism in the academy that devalues what are, for many, meaningful ontologies and epistemologies (Dei et al., 2016; Lin et al., 2021; Shahjahan, 2010; Zine, 2004). Paradoxically, this secularism often functions within larger societal religious hegemony (Blumenfeld, 2020; Small, 2020) that may also be present in global liberal arts contexts. The modernist division of sacred/secular is itself asserted to be a Western construction rooted in the modern/colonial imaginary (Horii, 2019; Stein & de Oliveira Andreotti, 2017). These perspectives inform my approach to the study from a critical internationalization studies lens (Stein & McCartney, 2021).

Critical and Decolonial Approaches to Internationalization

My racial, citizenship, and religious heritages as a White American Protestant Christian, experiences living and working in religiously plural contexts, and the histories in which contemporary religion and education are embedded, including Christian privilege and secular bias in Western-patterned institutions, sensitize me to the importance of decolonial and contextualized approaches to education for religious understanding (Edwards, 2016, 2018; Shahjahan et al., 2021; Vázquez, 2015). Similarly, a critical approach to qualitative research (Bhattacharya, 2022) informs my posture toward both the inquiry – rejecting objective neutrality – and people: valuing leaders as collaborators and fellow human beings, not sources of data. In response to authors who advocate for the explicit naming of values in comparative education research (Appadurai, 1990; Hayhoe, 2021), I disclose that I am motivated by my faith to seek decolonial and contextual approaches to education for religious understanding to enhance global justice and peace.

Research Questions

The forthcoming study is guided by the following research questions:
(1) To what extent education about religious diversity is a concern of global liberal arts colleges and universities;
(2) How it is expressed by senior leaders in relation to select campuses' purposes, priorities, or initiatives;
(3) What approaches to worldview diversity education are these campuses adopting and why.

Purpose of the Study

The study explores the extent to which education about religious diversity is an area of attention at global liberal arts colleges and universities (GLAC&U) through the perceptions of senior university leaders. Building on research by

Godwin (2013, 2015a, 2015b) and others (Bowling, in press; Boyle, 2022; Jung et al., 2019; Yang, 2016), GLAC&U are self-identifying campuses that combine interdisciplinary undergraduate teaching with foci on the liberal arts and developing students' global citizenship. As of a decade ago, there were over 200 global liberal arts programs located outside of North America (Godwin, 2013), including international branch campuses and American Universities Abroad (Long, 2018), although most GLAC&U campuses partner with a regional institution (Godwin, 2015b). As institutions characterized by an intentionally high degree of student mobility and internationalization of the curriculum, they are environments poised for interactional worldview diversity.

Conceptual Framework

I follow Rizvi and Lingard (2010) in conceptualizing educational practices and discourses as policy that can be studied across global networks and flows. Responding to calls for multidisciplinary research from international education scholars (Ball et al., 2017; Carnoy, 2021; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Stromquist, 2002), the study considers qualitative nuance, layers of culture and context, and global education networks and policyscapes. I incorporate concepts such as *connected sociologies* (Bhambra, 2014) from the social sciences, ecological network theory (Neal & Neal, 2013), and complexity leadership theories (Lichtenstein et al., 2006; Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2009) to understand global higher education leadership and global education practices as adaptive, emergent, and connected. Higher education interfaith development studies have underscored the importance of interactional diversity for students' growth in a "pluralism orientation" (Mayhew et al., 2016, p. 2), convergent with its importance for intercultural learning (Geibel, 2020). In keeping with a critical lens, I incorporate Stein's (2021) matrix of internationalization rationales and purposefully decenter Western individualistic and belief-centered understandings of religion, instead conceptualizing religion and culture as interconnected and related to belonging and practice for many communities (Benson & Roehlkepartain, 2008; Edwards, 2018; Iliško, 2017; Sivasubramanian & Hayhoe, 2018). Leaders, too, are conceptualized as embedded in religious cultures and both shape and are shaped by the policyscapes in which they move.

Methodology

Research Method

To study multiple levels and layers of CIE, including the local, regional, and transnational across space, place, and time, I selected Bartlett and Vavrus' (2016; 2020) comparative case study (CCS) methodology. It is compatible with my critical realist (Maxwell, 2012) view of a Reality of which there are multiple situated perspectives. Given that "internationalization is less about geographic location and more about the participants involved" (Geibel, 2020, p. 72), CCS studies "look at how policies or processes unfold, influenced by actors and events over time, in different locations, and at different scales, including transnationally" (Vavrus & Bartlett, 2009, p. 1). I focus on approaches to education for religious understanding as the unit of analysis across three axes. A horizontal axis guides comparison across sites, a vertical axis by scales ranging from local campuses to regions to transnationally, and the transversal axis is used to trace networks and policyscapes temporally. In CCS methodology, contexts are viewed as constructed (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2019) and research is seen as an iterative process.

Stages of the Study

The study will unfold in two stages. In the first stage, I broadly survey GLAC&U campuses to better understand the landscape of education for religious understanding. From this pool, a smaller sample of three to five senior leaders will be purposively selected for the second stage of elite interviews. Selection criteria were established to capture variation in approaches to religious diversity and a range of senior positions relevant to worldview diversity education. The survey incorporates network generator questions to aid in mapping approaches to global education policy discourses.

Analysis

Emergent networks and descriptive statistics will be analyzed post-survey. Prior to the interviews, I will explore the historical and contextual background of the campuses and their regions, and following the interviews I will extend member check opportunities to center leaders' meanings and interpretations. The three axes of CCS serve as both guides and analytic tools of the developing inquiry. I will utilize codebook thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) and may incorporate mapping and network visualization tools that may be incorporated per the developing inquiry. Given the iterative, qualitative nature of the study and the potential for positionality issues with elite interviewing (Dexter, 2006), the study incorporates reflexive memoing and audit trail practices.

Conclusion

As a proponent of socially just international education for the common good, I am keenly aware of the harm that has been done by linking religion and education in the past and of the damage done in the present by divorcing religious worldviews from global learning. This includes harm done to students whose worldviews are marginalized or unwelcome in higher education, and to global society, which needs future leaders capable of navigating RSS diversity to solve global challenges. I advocate for the intentional inclusion of decolonial and contextual approaches to worldview diversity in conversation with other types of diversity as a necessary component of global learning. Through this comparative case study, I aim to explore the extent to which religious, spiritual, and secular diversity are being addressed on global liberal arts college and university campuses, and the larger policyscapes that approaches to education for religious understanding may be embedded in.

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Investigating Student Development of Intercultural Communication Competence through Collaborative Online International Learning

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Abstract

This dissertation is a qualitative case study detailing the intercultural communication competence (ICC) development of seven Chinese foreign language learners who participated in Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) activities at a regional U.S. university with a group of native Chinese speakers. Multiple qualitative data sources - including semi-structured interviews, observations, questionnaires, and reflection journals - were collected over two years. Drawing on sociocultural and transformative learning theories, this study disclosed four findings that practitioners and researchers can build upon to promote language development and intercultural learning in foreign language coursework through virtual exchange.

Keywords: Chinese as a foreign language, collaborative online international learning, intercultural communication competence, virtual learning

Introduction

The global workforce acknowledges the need for professionals with intercultural competence (ICC), as ICC can alleviate cultural barriers, misinterpretations, biases, and miscommunications (e.g., UNESCO, 2007; Spring, 2008). Therefore, it is imperative that policymakers and educators in higher education embrace innovative pedagogical strategies to develop ICC and globally-oriented perspectives among current and future university graduates (Damari et al., 2017; Hora et al., 2019). Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) is a form of virtual exchange that facilitates intercultural exchange for participants in two or more countries. COIL was especially well suited to educational environments in 2020,

as many study abroad programs were paused due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The purpose of this study was to better understand Chinese as Foreign Language (CFL) learners' intercultural communication competence (ICC) development in their coursework and their experiences in COIL projects. Two research questions were addressed:

1.   What are the barriers to the implementation of COIL?

2.   Drawing on transformative learning theory and sociocultural theory, in which ways might CFL learners develop ICC in foreign language coursework?

Literature Review

Current scholarship indicates virtual exchange can connect students across geographic distance and increase participants' intercultural competency (Dorroll et al., 2019). Moreover, COIL is a cost-effective approach to enhancing students' ICC in higher education (Griffith et al., 2016). However, most empirical scholarship on COIL focuses on English as the *lingua franca* (Diao, 2014) and investigates ICC development in English as a Second Language coursework using English-language-dominated social networking sites such as Facebook and YouTube (e.g., Collins & Callaghan, 2022; Dorroll et al., 2019). With some exceptions (Jin, 2017; Luo & Yang, 2016; Luo & Gui, 2019), few studies have been conducted on ICC development in other languages. This classroom-level case study addresses these identified research gaps by shedding light on ICC development through COIL from the perspectives of Chinese as Foreign Language learners.

Theoretical Construct

Transformative Learning Theory

Transformative learning (TLT) is "the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action" (Mezirow 1996, p. 162). The purpose of TLT is to reflect on one's existing meaning scheme to "transform" to a new frame of perspective. According to TLT, an individual's development of new perspectives, as well as the construction of schemes, can be achieved through critical reflection, rational discourse, and by centering one's experience through real-world experiences.

Sociocultural Theory

Sociocultural Theory (SCT) contends that an individual's cognitive development is the result of interpersonal communications and interactions in various social contexts that influence how people respond and react to each other (Vygotsky, 1978). Language communication is one of the most influential cultural experiences through which a person mediates their connection to the world, to other members, and to themselves (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). As a result, SCT provides a framework for understanding a foreign language learner's connection to the world (through provided scenarios), to other members (the interaction with their American peers and Chinese partners), and to themselves (self-reflection).

Research Methods

Case Study

This study used a qualitative case study approach detailing the ICC development of seven Chinese foreign language learners who participated in COIL activities for two academic years at a regional U.S. university (Red Mountain University) with a group of native Chinese speakers. This interpretive classroom-level case study approach was used to examine individual and shared social meanings pertaining to ICC development. Congruent with this study's theoretical framework and qualitative case study design, the researcher approached the research questions from the perspective that both language and intercultural development are socially constructed through collaboration and social interaction (Mezirow, 1996).

Data Collection and Participants

Multiple qualitative data sources were triangulated to establish data credibility, including semi-structured interviews, observations, questionnaires, and reflection journals (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). All seven participants were selected through convenience sampling, as they were students in the researcher's two Chinese language courses. In this study, convenience sampling facilitated rich qualitative data collection. Students were asked to participate in two individual interviews with the researcher through zoom at the beginning of the semester and at the end of the semester after they completed their COIL activities and their coursework.

Positionality and Trustworthiness

Due to my positionality as an instructor of Chinese, I assured participants that their evaluations would not be dependent on participation in the study, and I utilized several techniques to ensure trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I documented my preconceptions, beliefs, values, and assumptions in a reflective journal and wrote about how these issues may have impacted participant responses. I documented participants' responses in the language of their choosing. Additionally, I had prolonged engagement with participants, cultivating a welcoming in-class environment for students to express their ideas freely. To ensure confirmability, I engaged in member checking by inviting participants to review interview transcripts, better understand participant responses, and confirm the accuracy of data analysis.

Data Analysis

Three coding methods — open-coding, axial-coding, and focused coding — were sequentially employed to recognize emerging themes (Saldaña, 2011). The principle of constant comparison of preexisting theories was employed in data analysis where connections between themes were identified and findings were developed (Fram, 2013). Additionally, I employed multiple theoretical perspectives to ensure a rich and robust understanding of the data (Creswell, 1998).

Findings

Four findings were identified through data collection and analysis.

1. *Barriers to the implementation of COIL.* This first finding relates to the study's initial research question**.** Existing scholarship indicates that one of the greatest indicators of global inequalities concerns access to digital technologies (e.g., Vassilakopoulou & Hustad, 2021). In this study, this "digital divide" was most apparent within the United States (rather than between the U.S. and China), as Red Mountain University is located in a rural mountain environment where internet connectivity is relatively scarce. Four factors - accessibility, familiarity, convenience, and affordability - impacted participants' decisions concerning which communication platforms they utilized. Socioeconomic, demographic, and individual factors related to personality traits (e.g., openness, extraversion, and conscientiousness), as well as students' digital skills, also contributed to participants' occasional reluctance to engage with COIL partners.

2. *Increased understanding of cultural differences and similarities, as well as increased awareness of cultural heterogeneity.* The remaining three findings relate to the second research question concerning the potential efficacy of COIL. Participants felt they were immersed in Chinese culture through the COIL project, as it offered them first-hand information and authentic materials shared by COIL partners, often through screen-sharing videos and images that were impossible to access from the other participant's country. One participant summarized his realization about regional cultural differences in China by saying, "As collective as they are, [they are] as diverse at the same time." As stated by another participant, "I like video chatting just because I'm able to pick up on body language, which sometimes says more than words." This ability to engage in non-verbal communication was perceived by participants as a key benefit of COIL, and it reflected how sociocultural interaction had a positive impact on students' cultural development (Gee, 2015).

3. *Increased tolerance and open-mindedness to foreign concepts and cultural norms*. COIL promoted cultural empathy, respect, and understanding among students when they expressed diverse viewpoints and interacted with people from diverse backgrounds. It offered opportunities for students to reflect on their own culture, implicit stereotypes, and ethnocentric bias. For example, one participant stated that "I used to believe that it was weird to take pictures with random foreigners; however, now that I understand the culture and the reason why people do so, I no longer think it is weird and would not get offended or annoyed by it." Moreover, COIL allowed students to have open dialogues to freely exchange ideas. As one participant explained, "What I learned is trying to put myself in [my partner's] shoes... It doesn't mean I would do the same thing."

4. *Improvement of participants' communication skills*. Participants stated that COIL helped them learn new words and idioms while improving their overall proficiency with the Chinese language due to consistent interactions with native Chinese speakers. Furthermore, participants stated that they were more confident and comfortable in communicating with native speakers of Chinese. Participants were also appreciative of their COIL partners' helpfulness, enthusiasm, and high degree of preparedness. Hence, they indicated a willingness to similarly serve as cultural ambassadors on behalf of the United States.

Significance and Implications

Implications for Theory

The findings from this study demonstrated that participants engaged in the critical reflection necessary for self-transformation and a mature understanding of cultural differences and similarities (Mezirow, 1996). Moreover, it affirmed the importance of interpersonal communication in the development of language and cultural understanding (Vygotsky, 1978). This study also revealed inequities in technological access. Hence, a theoretical framework which critically examines inequalities might be appropriate to address equity concerns regarding COIL and communication between CFL participants and their language partners.

Implications for Practice

The implications for practice include the identification of activities that promote ICC development, such as critical reflection, rational discourse, and the use of online communication tools such as social media. Barriers to effective ICC implementation include digital access, different personalities and communication styles, and disparities in beginning cultural knowledge and foreign language proficiency.

Participation in an online international exchange project like COIL takes someone who might exist within a "space of places," limited in their international perspective, and places them within a "space of flows," as theorized by Castells (2009), where they can have continuous international and intercultural exchange. This opportunity is especially important for institutions with limited financial, human, or intellectual resources, such as regional public institutions like Red Mountain University. Nonetheless, such HEIs may need to invest in broadband service and replace outdated devices. In many cases, they may also need to provide students with digital access to necessary devices and tools.

Conclusion

The findings from this study lead to the following conclusions. First, a carefully designed and successfully implemented COIL project enables learners to interact with native speakers, obtain an immersive cultural experience, and develop intercultural communication competence, even when they are unable to travel to a foreign country. Second, the study findings relating to COIL and intercultural development can help regional HEIs create new cost effective, accessible, and sustainable global learning opportunities. This is not to suggest that COIL is a replacement for study abroad, which confirms the finding of Liu et al. (2022); instead, the virtual cross-cultural interactions offered by COIL could be a pathway

to a more equitable transnational experience. Third, this study's findings demonstrate that COIL can be a tool to not only improve students' language skills, but also to help them develop a greater appreciation for cultural differences.

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Dealing with Acculturative Stress: How International Students' personality traits help?

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ABSTRACT

Studies on international students have gained popularity over the past decades, especially; international students' experience on acculturative stress has been a significant research topic for researchers in different countries. However, there remains a gap in how personality traits influence the ways that international students deal with acculturative stress. This study aims to investigate acculturative stress-related experiences of five international students from five countries studying in Canada. Applying a collective case study as a qualitative research method and collecting data from semi-structured in-depth interviews, this study expects to describe levels of stress that these students encounter and explore how their personality traits shaped by social, cultural, and political contexts influence their acculturative stress levels and their ability to get over these experiences.

Keywords: acculturative stress, international students, sociocultural theory, personality traits

Introduction and Literature Review

Studies on international students' (I.S.s) acculturative stress-related experiences show that studying in a foreign environment brings about psychological and contextual stressors such as isolation and disconnectedness (Bertram et al., 2014; Ma et al., 2020), lack of social support (Franco et al., 2019; Sullivan & Kashubeck-West, 2015), language barriers (Bertram et al., 2014), financial difficulties (Cayetano-Penman et al., 2021), and academic challenges (Li & Li, 2017; Ozer, 2015). However, the levels of stress that I.S.s encounter depends on their demographic, social, personal, and psychological characteristics (Berry et al., 1987; Ra, 2016). In other words, different I.S.s significantly experience different types and levels of acculturative stress. Many studies have been previously conducted to examine acculturative stress from a particular group of I.S.s such as Japan (Mori, 2000), China (Bertram et al., 2014; Ge & Durst, 2022; J. Zhang & Sustarsic, 2022), Korea (Cao & Meng, 2019; Ra, 2016), Iran (Falavarjani et al., 2020), Philippines (Pinamang et al., 2021), and Vietnam (Nguyen & Le, 2021; Tran et al., 2021). Several studies (Kim et al., 2022; S. Zhang et al., 2022)

discussed the experience of a multi-international group of students in general but without a comparison among them. Subgroup differences among I.S.s should be emphasized since they cannot be treated as a homogeneous group (Bhattacharya, 1998). In addition, most research in the field was quantitatively studied, so they only "provide a general picture of trends and relationships, they do not tell us about the processes that people experience…and their deeper thoughts and behaviors that governed their responses" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 84).

Therefore, drawing upon these two above-identified gaps, by applying a qualitative design, the current study aims at exploring and comparing how five I.S.s deal with acculturative stress based on an analysis of their personality traits. By analyzing the influence of I.S.s' personality traits, the researcher discusses the underlying factors that attribute to their experiences, interpreting and achieving an understanding of how I.S.s buffer the stress differently (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Acculturative stress was conceptualized by Berry et al. (1987) as "one kind of stress, that in which the stressors are identified as having their source in the process of acculturation" (p. 492). It also refers to responses or changes that individuals make to life events that stem from intercultural contact or during cross-cultural adjustment (Sam & Berry, 2006). Therefore, I.S.s who leave their home countries in pursuit of international education always suffer from a particular amount of acculturative stress.

Literature indicates that there is certainly a close relation between personality and acculturative stress. First, some evidence shows that personality is one of the two factors responsible for I.S.s' psychological problems (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994). Supporting this evidence, Duru and Poyrazli (2007) and Poyrazli et al. (2010) found that adaptive personality dimensions were predictor factors for acculturative stress. Second, research reveals that personality is a positive force in the cross-cultural adjustment process (Pentón Herrera et al., 2021). Especially, Bertram (2014) concluded that Chinese students tend to withdraw and internalize difficulties when they experience emotional distress and anxiety due to their collectivistic nature in an individualized society. Similarly, Cao and Meng (2019) stated that I.S.s from collectivist cultures usually suffer from a magnification of academic stressors in western countries where individualism is valued.

Based on these cultural-based findings, this study adopts sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) and critical aspects of collectivism and individualism (Hofstede, 1985) as a theoretical framework to analyze the data. Through the argument that social and cultural aspects, including values, morals, and beliefs of the communities where I.S.s come from model and control their behaviors, the researcher discusses how I.S.s from different cultures deal with acculturative stress differently.

Methodology

This study employs a collective case study approach since it focuses on a single issue of how I.S.s' personality traits impact their acculturative stress experience. Interview data come from multiple cases to show different perspectives on the issue for the inclusion of qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Particularly, the analysis from multiple cases is for the purpose of comparison, which is often considered as more compelling and robust (Bryman & Bell, 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). By examining similar and dissimilar results across cases, this study is more generalizable and powerful (Bryman & Bell, 2019; Yin, 2013), significantly contributing to the existing literature of I.S.s' stress-related experience.

The researcher applies a purposeful sampling method to recruit full-time international graduate students from China, India,Vietnam, France, and Korea. Students from these five countries account for the highest number of I.S.s in Canada in 2021(Erudera, 2022), so the selection of these representatives guarantees the diversity, reliability, and trustworthiness of the study. Five one-on-one semi-structured in-depth interviews, which aim to "elicit and ascertain participants' perspectives to confirm, correct, or discover new knowledge pertaining to the focus of inquiry" (McIntosh & Morse, 2015) will be conducted online via the Zoom platform. The use of Zoom considered as I.S.s' social window and outlet during the pandemic (Collins & Callaghan, 2022) as a medium for collecting data is to ensure participants' privacy when it comes to sensitive questions that they prefer the anonymity and confidentiality of the computer, and to make it

convenient for both the researcher and participants when they live in different places across Canada. During a 60-minute interview, each student is asked to describe their acculturative stress experience, then re-story a situation in which they manage to buffer the stress. Semi-structured interviews allow follow-up questions to focus and emphasize how personality traits influence the ways students overcome stress (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The data will then be analyzed by applying the thematic approach in addition to a section for a cross-case analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The overarching goal of this analysis is to identify the similar and different issues embedded within the data set among different I.S.s and then purposefully examine the themes that commonly transcend the cases (Yin, 2018).

Expected Findings

This study offers a deeper understanding of I.S.s' acculturative stress-related experience. First, it is expected to find out that I.S.s suffer from different extents of acculturative stress. Second, their personality traits significantly impact I.S.s' levels of acculturative stress and their ways of overcoming them. However, since personal characteristics are socially and culturally constructed, the researcher hopes to find out that I.S.s who originally come from the same social and cultural contexts witness the same levels and types of stress. For example, Asian students such as Vietnamese, Korean, and Chinese are prone to feelings of disconnectedness, isolation, and academic difficulties since they are used to a collectivist society that emphasize on interdependence, harmony, conformity, and reciprocity. This finding is in alignment with results from (Agostinelli, 2021; Bertram et al., 2014; J. Zhang & Sustarsic, 2022). The research is also predicted to reveal that acculturative stress experience changes in the time since I.S.s express a belief that it is their mindset, willpower, inner strength, and readiness skills that determine how they acculturate and adjust to the new learning foreign environment. This echoes (Lysgaand, 1955) theory of adjustment in a foreign society (Dailey-Strand et al., 2021).

The study suggests a potential implication that there should be a personality test, consultation service, psychoeducational workshops, social support groups, and training programs preparing I.S.s with essential coping skills to successfully deal with acculturative stress. By emphasizing cultural awareness and international diversity, this study advances previously published studies by providing a deeper understanding of the influence of social, cultural, educational, and political aspects on I.S.s' acculturation. Eventually, it asks both education practitioners and researchers to consider equity, diversity, and inclusion in developing internationalization policies and designing intercultural educational programs to promote and strengthen comparative and international higher education in terms of equal global education.

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The Role of Academic Mobility in the (De)Construction of Internationalization: Dialogues and Perspectives From, In and On Global South & Global North

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Abstract

International mobility has played a central role in the views, policies, and actions of internationalization of higher education, despite representing a highly excluding, elitist process with flows that tend to reinforce asymmetrical relationships and colonial domination by the Global North of the Global South. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate how the international mobility is related to the construction of internationalization. To this end, the views of students and professors participating in the academic mobility of one university in Brazil, the Global South, and another in Spain, the Global North, will be analyzed through interviews and later they will be contrasted with the documental analysis of the official texts on internationalization of both institutions. Data will be approached qualitatively, aiming at enabling the understanding of the role that international academic mobility can play in the (de)construction of the perspectives and practices of internationalization of higher education institutions.

Introduction

Internationalization of higher education has been on the agenda of higher education institutions (HEIs) as the subject of policies, debates, and research in the last three decades. Research on internationalization has shown that a 'common-sense' belief is that international mobility is highly related to the quality of HEIs (de Wit, 2011; Finardi, et al., 2021; Knight, 2011) and that it has been playing a major role in higher education all around the world (Chiappa & Finardi, 2021; Liu et al., 2022; Martel & Goodman, 2022; Morosini & Corte, 2018; Wang & Wang, 2022). In Spain and in Brazil, the countries being addressed in this comparative study, international academic mobility (or exchange) has acquired great visibility,

especially after Erasmus (Altbach & de Wit, 2015) and the Science without Borders program (Freire Júnior & Panico, 2021; Sehnem, 2019), respectively. The benefits of the international interchange that take place in mobility are widely known, for example, the gain in intercultural and linguistic competence, personal, academic scientific, and professional development, expansion of partnerships between institutions and countries, improvement of the quality of research and higher education (Dias et al., 2021; Morosini & Corte, 2018; Ramos, 2018).

However, studies in the field of comparative and international higher education (Liu et al., 2022; Tabasum Niroo & Williams, 2022; Zewolde, 2022) have highlighted some ethical and equity issues as well as the recent field of critical internationalization (Pereira et al., 2018; Stein & Silva, 2020) that has criticized the elitist, exclusivist and colonial aspects of how academic mobility has been carried out throughout the years. Data from UNESCO's website shows that in 2019, international mobility students accounted for only 2.6% of HEI students worldwide. According to Díaz (2018) and Wang (2022), students' most chosen destinations are located in the Anglophone Global North and have English as their official or preferred language of academic instruction. These numbers show internationalization and mobility have favored only a small percentage of the academic community and brought more benefits to the Global North than to the Global South (Piccin & Finardi, 2021).

Conceptual Framework

From a critical perspective, this scenario has been built on ideologies that conceive Global North culture and knowledge as superior to the Global South (Pereira et al., 2018; Stein & Silva, 2020). In the Latin American decolonial framework, Quijano (2005) claims that the dominant global imaginary is governed by the modern pattern of power that began with the territorial 'conquer' of America in the colonial period using race to impose supremacy. The dominated peoples, along with their epistemologies and cultures, have been considered naturally inferior in this system of 'universal' eurocentric classification, which has prevailed economically, cognitively, and socially until today (Quijano, 2005).

For Bakhtin (2006), ideologies are formed in the complex process of social communication through language, which is an essentially dialogic phenomenon considering its linguistic and discursive dimensions. Thus, every text leads to another text in a way that discourses are built on and in contact with other discourses that have been (re)(de) constructed historically (Bakhtin, 2006). In this view, discourses about the internationalization of HEIs are multiple, as well as the perspectives, purposes, and ways in which these meanings are materialized in daily university life.

Literature Review

Research in the field of internationalization shows 'common-sense' highlights the importance of mobility for the institution's quality (Finardi et al., 2021). In fact, it has been found that mobility can bring about many benefits, such as the dissemination of global citizenship and interculturality, personal growth and sense of identity, the acquisition and development of intercultural, scientific, linguistic, academic, technical and pedagogical competences, expansions of partnerships between HEIs and countries, improving the quality of research, scientific production and higher education (Dias et al., 2021; Morosini & Corte, 2018; Ramos, 2018). Many students and professors/researchers engage in mobility motivated by getting to know new cultures, languages, places, and people and by improving their chances of getting better jobs or at their jobs (Oliveira & Freitas, 2017). In view of such potential, mobility has been encouraged and even promoted by government programs such as Erasmus in Europe (Altbach & de Wit, 2015) and the Science without Borders program in Brazil (Freire Júnior & Panico, 2021; Sehnem, 2019).

However, one of the most evident aspects of mobility is its cost, as international travel and stay represent high expenses for most people. As a matter of fact, only 2.6% of higher education students worldwide went on mobility in 2019, according to UNESCO. Therefore, mobility can be considered exclusive and elitist, after all, it is restricted to those who can afford international mobility or to those who can earn some financial aid or scholarships. Besides being available only for a few, OECD (2021) found that 67% of international students in the OECD area come from developing countries. As

for their destination, Wang (2022) shows that only ten countries host around 80% of all international students: the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, China, Australia, France, Russia, Germany, Japan, and Spain. Based on this data set, it is noticed that mobility flow is still mainly from Global South to Global North.

Morosini and Corte (2018) understand this evident unbalance in mobility flow from South to North reveals the discrepancy of intentions between the countries of each geopolitical region. HEIs in the Global North have made enormous efforts to recruit and attract international students from developing countries as their main internationalization strategies (Wang, 2022). International students represent a significant source of income: they usually pay higher academic fees than nationals and generate several other revenues for the country, region, and HEIs with their expenses with consular fees, accommodation, food, local transport, health, tourism, etc. Furthermore, it is assumed that the more "international" a campus, the more attractive it becomes for new international students (Dias et al., 2021). Also, mobility has shown to be an essential contribution to brain drain (Dias et al., 2021), in which highly qualified students and professionals from the Global South leave for the Global North in search of better career opportunities and life quality, a phenomenon that can also lead to an increase in inequalities among these regions (Pereira et al., 2018).

As a response to the Global North´s internationalization initiatives, HEIs in the Global South, including the countries as a whole invest their human and financial resources in sending students and professors to the North and in importing knowledge and culture from there as means of meeting international standards for quality and achieving recognition by 'global' rankings (Leal et al., 2018). However, Leal et al. (2018) point out the current dynamics of internationalization have actually reinforced inequalities between the Global North and the Global South. As Leite and Genro (2012) and Finardi and Guimarães (2017) warn, these international quality indicators used by the rankings are established by the institutional model of countries in the Global North and mostly do not benefit the Global South, but rather disregard contextual specificities of universities and research agendas.

Research Design

This work is the summary of a work-in-progress dissertation for a Doctoral degree in international cotutelle between two partner universities, one in Brazil and the other one in Spain. The cotutelle agreement between both universities establishes that the research candidate is enrolled and fulfills a research stay at both universities with joint supervision from each institution. This study questions the role of mobility in the (de)construction of the meanings of internationalization, acknowledging that academic mobility and the internationalization of HEI have been predominantly infused with and guided by colonial discourses. Drawing on Bakhtin's (2006) theory regarding language as an ideological phenomenon and on Latin American decolonial studies (Quijano, 2005) regarding modernity and coloniality, this research endeavor analyzes how the mobility experience has (trans)formed the discourses and perspectives on internationalization which, in turn, determine how internationalization is implemented through policies and practices in HEIs. Similar to other researches on international mobility in the field of comparative and international higher education (Krsmanovic, 2022; Liu et al., 2022; Tabasum Niroo & Williams, 2022; Zewolde, 2022; Zhang & Unger, 2022), participants experiences and voices play a central role in the methodology approach for this study. To this end, students and professors/researchers participating in the academic mobility of two HEIs located in the Global South and in the Global North - one in Brazil and the other one in Spain - have been invited to participate in this research. The criteria for choosing the institutions was based on the fact that the researcher who has been conducting this study is a doctoral student in the Brazilian institution in mobility for international cotutelle in the Spanish institution. Students and professors/researchers perspectives and discourses have been gathered through surveys and interviews about the mobility experience and contrasted with the document analysis of the official texts on internationalization from both institutions. Data from the Brazilian HEI was from 34 survey answers, 21 interviews and 3 official documents to be contrasted with data from the HEI in Spain, still to be collected. This present work focuses on the findings from the Brazilian HEI, as data from the Spanish HEI is still being produced.

Table 1: Interviewees' Home and Host Countries

Home Country	Host Country	Student or Professor
Haiti	Brazil	Student
Colombia	Brazil	Student
Venezuela	Brazil	Student
United Kingdom	Brazil	Professor
Brazil	Portugal	Students (5)
Brazil	Italy	Students (2)
Brazil	Germany	Student
Brazil	France	Students (2)
Brazil	England	Students (3)
Brazil	United States	Students (2)
Brazil	Spain	Student (1)
Brazil	Portugal, Spain and Ireland	Professor

Preliminary Findings

Work done so far has made it possible to notice some of the ruptures and continuities brought about by the Brazilian HEI interviewee' mobility experience, summarized in Table 1.

One of the disruptions was in the assumption made by Brazilian students that Global North HEIs would offer better quality education. After their mobility experience, these seemed to have developed a greater appreciation for their home HEI. For other Brazilian students abroad, international attractiveness and welcoming of their destination HEI reinforced the imagery of European cultural and epistemological superiority. One aspect highlighted by international students in Brazil was that studying in a tuition- free public HEI (all public Brazilian HEI are tuition-free) favored the view of education as a social common good. On the other hand, Brazilian students who went to public (but with tuition fees) HEIs abroad have found benefits in such institutions and strengthened the view of education as a product to be commercialized.

In participants' discourses, there was evidence that participating in Global South-South cooperation programs promoted a more solidarity-focused internationalization and a peaceful coexistence of different cultures and knowledge in the HEI. Conversely, in Global South-North mobility flows, some Brazilian students claimed they should act as agents of globalization by importing models and knowledge from the North applying to their home HEI to make their education more international, clearly in a eurocentric model. Also, other Brazilian students conceived mobility as an improvement to their academic records to find better jobs once they graduate, thus highlighting the view of education as a product and of internationalization as an international market for this.

Professor/researcher mobility differs in many aspects from students' mobility as it mainly happens for research (doctoral or postdoctoral studies and research cooperation) or for shorter stays with participation in events or technical visits. However, motivations for mobility seem to be fairly similar to the general drive to benefit from having an international experience in a superior country, Regarding professor/researcher views, the mobility experience disrupted the romantic view of internationalization by revealing the perverse colonial logic that expects submission from the South. However, later on, mobility was found to be a way to subvert the hegemonic internationalization showing resistance to the dominant logic while operating in alternative logics of horizontal relations, even in South-North relations.

Discussion

Results have shown that HEI view of education and internationalization greatly influence mobility participants' perspectives. In addition, mobility programs are also decisive in terms of the offer of destination countries, weight of the language, and financial conditions for carrying out the mobility, which can restrict or expand access to mobility, as well as favor certain regions and HEI. On the other hand, power relations are not exclusively determined by the flow of interactions, as there was evidence of colonial South-South relations as well as cooperative South-North. Although it does have great importance, the potential for rupture and/or strengthening discourses and imaginaries on internationalization and mobility is mainly related to the awareness of participants, in assuming responsibility and agency in this process.

In addition, as for the relationship between the (trans)formed perspectives and HEI internationalization process, Brazilian HEI official documents place professors/researchers as the main agents of the institution's internationalization. Thus, the flows and dynamics established in professors/researchers mobility are essential for the paths that the HEI internationalization takes. This research has found there are other paths to be followed and other interaction dynamics to be established besides the prevailing Global North-South domination. In this sense, there's also a strategic role that should be played by Southern HEI's managers/stakeholders/staff in order to establish more intentional, decolonial, and active policies aligned with their own view of education instead of importing policies from the Global North.

Expected Contributions

This study is expected to contribute to discussions on international academic mobility and internationalization in the field of comparative and international higher education (Krsmanovic, 2022; Liu et al., 2022; Martel & Goodman, 2022; Tabasum Niroo & Williams, 2022; Wang & Wang, 2022; Zewolde, 2022; Zhang & Unger, 2022). We hope that, by contributing to the understanding and evidence of the role of mobility in internationalization and higher education, the process of internationalization in HEIs can be viewed and practiced in a more, decolonized, inclusive and intentional way to yield more benefits to a larger part of society.

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The Inter-play of Teacher Agency and Student Agency in Enhancing Graduate Employability: A Study of the International Career-Oriented Programs in Vietnam

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Abstract

Although the Vietnamese government has launched numerous initiatives to develop employability for students, half of its university graduates are unable to find jobs in their area of specialization. In order to address this issue, the Vietnamese higher education sector has introduced international career-oriented programs (ICOPs) to position the quality of Vietnamese graduates on par with international standards. This research focuses on three ICOPs to explore the interaction between teacher and student agency in enhancing graduate employability. This research draws on Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital, and habitus to investigate how academics and students perceive and exercise their individual agency. The position theory is adopted to shed light on how academics and students either comply with or disrupt the traditional hierarchical positioning within education systems to practice their co-agency. The study employs a qualitative approach with various data collection methods, including document analysis, interviews, and focus groups on exploring the role of teacher agency, student agency, and their co-agency in enhancing graduate employability in Vietnam. The preliminary findings show that students have a more in-depth understanding of employability than academics. The research data also reveal the ICOPs provided opportunities and imposed challenges for academics and students to manifest their individual agency. This research proves the intrinsic motivation of academics and students enabled them to become agentic in developing students' employability. However, their co-agency was not strong enough to be a push and pull factor in achieving the programs' goals.

Introduction

In Vietnam, rapid changes in the massification of higher education (HE) and the graduate labor market under globalization have called for responsiveness to growing concern over graduate jobs supply, skill utilization, career opportunities and graduate employability globally (L. H. N. Tran, 2018; T. T. Tran, 2019). Accordingly, the Vietnamese government has taken numerous measures to enhance graduate employability in order to meet demands from the domestic labor market and international markets (Be, 2020; L. H. N. Tran, 2020; T. T. Tran, 2016a; T. T. Tran, 2016b; Truong et al., 2018). One of these efforts was the introduction of international career-oriented programs (ICOPs), which originated from the Profession Oriented Higher Education (POHE) in the early 2000s (Nguyen, 2017). The ICOPs exemplify new curriculum initiatives which aim to increase the quality of the Vietnamese labor force by placing it on par with international standards by combining "international training" and "professional training".

This research investigates the interaction between teacher agency and student agency in enhancing graduate employability because they are the two key players in university teaching and learning. Teacher agency and student agency have been the subjects of considerable research in the *Journal of Comparative & International Higher Education* (Yu, 2021; Liu, 2021; Qin, 2022). However, less attention has been given to the role of their individual and respective agency in graduate outcomes (Nicol, 2010) and what is neglected is the interplay of teacher agency and student agency in developing graduates' employability (Pham et al., 2019). This research takes a step toward this goal by investigating how individual agency and co-agency of academics and students are exercised to target the goals of the ICOPs by seeking answers to three research questions: (1) What are the institutional policies and practices of employability enhancement at Capital University? (2) How do academics and students conceptualize, perceive and exercise their agency in developing students' employability in the ICOPs? (3) How do academics and students impact each other's agency in developing students' employability in the ICOPs?

Theoretical Framework

This research draws on Bourdieu's Practice Theory (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990) as the overarching framework in order to explore the extent teachers and students perceive and exercise their individual agency though the concepts of field, capital and habitus. Positioning Theory (Harre, 2012; van Langenhove & Harré, 1999) is adopted to examine how academics and students conceptualize and position their agency as well as how they position each other's agency in developing graduate employability. Positioning Theory can also help to explain how students and academics might either comply with or disrupt the traditional positioning within education systems.

Research Method

This research uses a qualitative approach to explore the role of teacher agency and student agency in enhancing employability at Vietnamese HE. This approach can provide the researcher with an understanding of participants' perceptions, practices, motivations, and meanings (Bryman, 2008; Creswell, 2003; Miles et al., 2014). A case study is a suitable design for this study because it provides unique examples of real people in real situations. Thus, the findings can be gained through different sources of information with thick and vivid description from participants' experience, thoughts and feelings of the situation (Cohen et al., 2000). For this qualitative research, purposeful sampling is employed as the strategy for selection of participant, which allows the researcher to select a diverse sample and hear the opinion of experts in the particular topic of interest (Patton, 2015).

Capital University (a pseudonym) is recognized as one of the top business universities in Vietnam, with high-quality teaching and learning. The university aims to produce competent graduates with employability skills by equipping students with economics knowledge, foreign language proficiency, and work readiness. Capital University has been very proactive in enacting the employability agenda by offering the International Career-Oriented Programs since the academic year 2016-2017 in three selected disciplines i.e. Finance, Logistics and International Business.

My study draws on three ICO programs including Accounting Program, Logistic Program and International Business Program as three cases which were based the management mechanism of the High-Quality Programs of Capital University, but specifically focused on occupational training. These programs aim at exposing Vietnamese students to career knowledge and practices by cooperating with offshore institutions and occupation associations. The curriculum is partially translated from the standard curriculum, and is enhanced by adopting and adapting to the curricula of various foreign HEIs and professional associations (Nguyen, Walkinshaw, & Pham, 2017). Students enrolling in these programs must obtain the National Exam benchmark set by institutions for specific disciplines and pass the university's English test. In addition, textbook selection for the courses prioritized English texts published in English speaking countries and occupational materials published by the counterpart institutions and associations.

This research employs three main methods of data generation: document analysis, interviews and focus groups. As documents are useful to convey meaning, develop understanding about the insights into its research problem (Merriam, 1998), the selected documents for this study come from national and institutional levels to provide information about the policy settings for enhancing graduate employability. Institutional documents also reveal how these national visions are translated into strategic plans by HE through institutional strategies and initiatives for employability enactment by increasing teacher agency and student agency.

Semi-structured interviews with three targeted groups including one university executive, three faculty executives and nine academics from three ICOPs to understand what academics and students perceive employability, how they practice their individual agency and how they exercise their co-agency. Each interview was audio-recorded with the permission of the participants, and later transcribed for thematic analysis. The first and the second group of interviewees are expected to provide ideas about and intention behind the national and institutional policies in employability development at HE because they have good insight into the institution and the programs. The third group includes nine academics from the three programs who have been working in the programs for at least two years to ensure that they have sufficient lived experience within the institution and the program. They will talk about their agency and their students' agency in developing employability, and will reveal how they conceptualize, perceive and exercise agency in equipping students with employability.

Focus group were conducted among 36 students from three programs to explore what students think about their role and what strategies they employ to enhance their employability. This data collection method enables the researcher to describe complex interactions with rich responses, because the interactive environment enables students to discuss the issue with each other freely. For each program, there will be three focus groups, each of them consists of four to six students, who will be invited to join the focus group to discuss the topic under research. The discussions will be held separately, using identical questions and prompts to seek the participants' opinions on their agency, their teachers' agency and their influence on their teachers' agency in developing employability.

Preliminary Findings

Based on academic data, employability is viewed as the ability to get a job, including highly desirable jobs. In their understanding, those equipped with employability have ability or capability which constitutes soft skills and hard skills and a set attitude, skills and knowledge. In the meantime, students in this research held a number of different perceptions beside sharing similar conception of employability with their academics. As such, students' conception of employability is not only

about the ability to get a job but also about the dispositions to maintain the job and succeed in their future career. As discussed earlier, in this research, I employ the employability definition given by Yorke (2006) and the Confederation of British Industry (CBI, 2007) to shed light for further investigation of graduates' employability in the ICO programs at Vietnamese higher education: *"Graduate employability is understood as the combination of "a set of achievements" and "capabilities" that graduates need to not only find a job but sustain a job, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy"* (p. 11). This concept is particularly relevant to the research on graduates' employability and agency in the Vietnamese context.

In this research, teacher agency and student agency were constructed through the opportunities and challenges presented in the field of the ICOPs. The research unearthed the enablers and barriers to teachers and students manifesting their agency, including the university's policies, the objectives of the ICOPs, the labor markets' demands and the Vietnamese economy's current operation. The data analysis revealed that academics' habitus was evidenced in their motivation to join in the ICOPs, and their competence and dispositions as their source of power to overcome challenges in the new teaching contexts. Through the lens of The Theory of Social Practice (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990), the research explored four forms of capital provided by the ICOPs, which was a source of support for the research participants in facing challenges and tackling obstacles. The participants placed more significant emphasis on cultural and social capital in assisting them to develop students' employability and their career prospects. Another noted finding was that academics' habitus played the most important role in deciding the success or failure of the strategies they devised. Accordingly, it was concluded that habitus significantly influences teacher agency. Five types of agency practiced by the participants under investigation (i.e., becoming agency; needs-response agency; struggle and resistance agency; supporting agency; and connecting agency) were identified. Among these forms of agency, becoming agency and needs-response agency played more important roles than the others, as they provided drivers and tools for academics and students to handle challenges.

In the following chapters, the research is expected to explore how teachers and students interact to develop employability through the lens of Positioning Theory (Harre, 2012; van Langenhove & Harré, 1999). It also unearths the influencers on their co-agency in developing students' employability in order for the implications to enhance graduate employability in the ICOPs in Vietnam.

Contribution to International Higher Education

This research makes a significant contribution to the literature of the global internationalization landscape from implementing International Career-Oriented programs. The findings in this research have implications for building the conceptualization of employability for university graduates. Although teacher agency and student agency has been heatedly discussed in the context of international higher education, there is not sufficient research on the inter-play between teacher agency and student agency in the context of internationalization. My research contributes to the literature by filling a gap based on empirical data about co-agency of academics and students' in enhancing graduate employability. Through the lens of Bourdieu's Theory of Social Practice and the positioning theory, my research suggests a list of individual agency and co-agency that teachers and students manifested to enhance graduate employability. In the meantime, it unearths enablers and disablers of individual agency and co-agency in specific contexts, thus leading to theoretical contributions to studies on agency, co-agency and employability.

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Gendered Experiences of Human Dignity within Canadian Universities: The Case of Iranian International Students

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Abstract

This article explores Iranian international students' (IISs) experiences of human dignity (HD) within Canadian universities, compared to Iranian ones. Drawing on in-depth interviews with 24 current and former IISs (10 women and 10 men in Montreal and two women and two men who had left Canada), I created a conceptual HD framework to analyze the data. Three themes emerged as key to IISs' experiences of HD in the context of postsecondary education: 1) the relationship between students and university faculty/staff, 2) gender equality and freedom, and 3) having a minority or marginalized identity. I conclude with observations about how an awareness of students' HD experiences could strengthen the support offered to international students (ISs).

Introduction

Every year, a considerable number of exceptionally accomplished students migrate from Iran to study abroad (Iran Migration Observatory, 2021). Iranian International students are overrepresented among postgraduate international students in Canada, at 11 percent in 2019-2020 (Statistic Canada, 2021). Yet, scholars have rarely focused their work on IISs' experiences and challenges in Canada.

People are exercising their human dignity when they choose to migrate (Crépeau & Samaddar, 2009). In the case of ISs, as a category of voluntary migrants, they migrate to fulfill various personal, academic and career aspirations. Therefore, understanding ISs' expectations and experiences could help universities to improve their policies concerning student retention and integration in both home and host countries, while acknowledging and respecting their differences. Gender, as a social construct (Beauvoir & Thurman, 2011), has the potential to inform perceptions of lived experience, treatment, and behavioral expectations. Studies indicate that gender plays a role in shaping ISs' experiences in Canada (Fais, 2012). While some scholars have discussed the role of gender in shaping cross-cultural adaptation (Chirkov et al., 2008), others indicate various factors influencing women's academic and personal experiences in Canada (Alqudayri & Gounko, 2018) and their decision to stay in Canada after graduation (Fais, 2012). These include Muslim women ISs' specific challenges regarding stereotypes, Islamophobia (Abukhattala, 2004; Hojati, 2011; Khosrojerdi, 2015; Mehrabi, 2019; Mostafa, 2006), discrimination and marginalization (Abukhattala, 2004; Ahmed, 2016; Gutmann, 2004; Hojati, 2011; Khosrojerdi, 2015; Mehrabi, 2019; Samuel, 2005).

As settings dedicated to learning, universities can both affect dominant perspectives and reflect and reproduce new discourses. Within the existing literature on gender and ISs, only a few studies discuss IISs, with a focus on transition and acculturation issues (Didehvar, 2020; Sabouripour & Roslan, 2015; Nahidi et al., 2018; Najmi, 2013). There is a dearth of research on students' understanding of HD (Kianpour, 2016; Oleinik, 2016), and the relationship between ISs' trajectories and gender remains understudied. Increasing awareness of how IISs experience HD will contribute to better support upon their arrival and throughout their integration in Canada. With this in mind, this study explores: 1) how IISs experience and perceive HD in their educational life in Montreal, Canada compared to Iran and 2) how gender affects their experiences of HD in this context.

Conceptual Framework

Human dignity (HD), as a subjective concept, refers to an inner feeling of worth which depends on one's perceptions and life experiences (Fox-Decent et al., 2009). Most people seek to live in conditions that respect their HD as part of the inherent right to equal worth detached from societal signifiers such as race, gender, wealth, etc. (Teji et al., 2020). HD has recently been highlighted in studies related to the motivation to migrate as well as the experience of settlement in a new country (Crépeau & Samaddar, 2009). Studies have explored how individuals' motivations to migrate (lack of opportunity, recognition, respect, freedom, equality, etc.) represent claims for preserving and exercising human dignity (Crépeau & Samaddar, 2009; Kazemi et al., 2018; Preston, 2014; Tsapenko, 2015; Van Hear et al., 2012). While seeking dignity is an important factor in human migration, human rights tend to be focused on the legal relationship between the State and its citizens, and immigrants are often excluded. Therefore, a human dignity discourse can provide a context in which im/migrants, including international students, can resist rights violations. The concept of human dignity reinforces "the idea that underlies human rights, notably that human beings ought to be treated as an end rather than as a means" (Crépeau & Samaddar, 2009, p. 9). The literature in relation to student migration, however, is sparse, and the role of HD in this context would benefit from further exploration (Crépeau & Samaddar, 2009; Dhungana, 2020; Monteiro, 2009).

In light of the lack of consensus on a theoretical definition of HD, this study relied on an HD framework based on empirical research with students in Canada and Iran (Kianpour, 2016; Oleinik, 2016). The key HD concepts that emerged from the interviews were freedom, honor, equality, self-esteem, self-respect, respect, fulfillment, humanity, "God-given gift," and human rights have formed my HD framework (Figure 1). Each individual placed emphasis on different aspects of HD.

Figure 1: Human Dignity Conceptual Framework
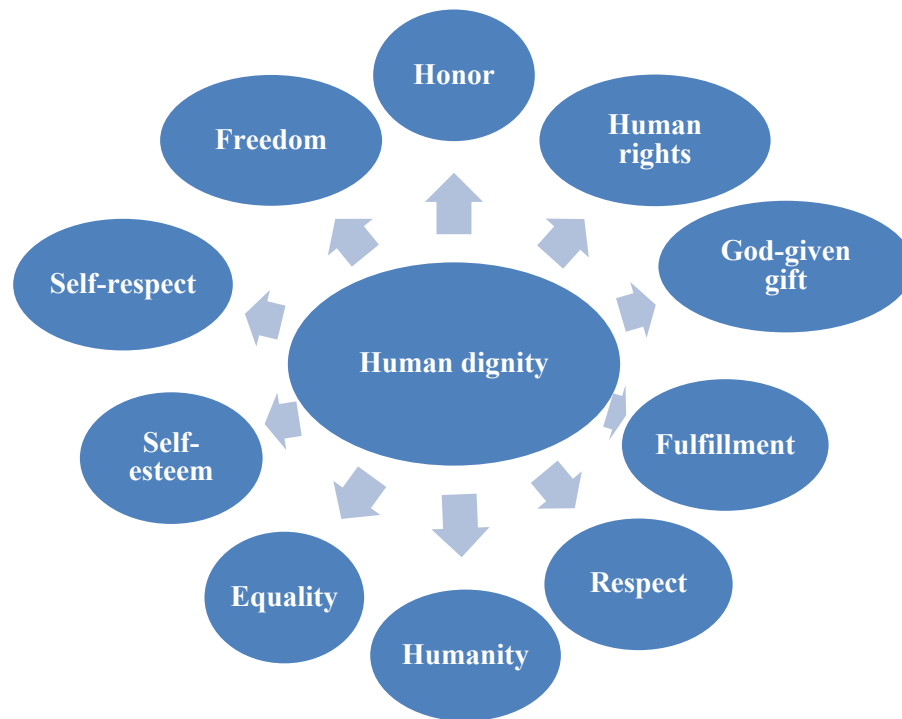
Research Method

Data from semi-structured interviews with 24 (12 men, 12 women) Iranian international graduate students informed this qualitative case study. As most research conducted about IISs in Canada has focused on women (Hojati, 2011; Khosrojerdi, 2015; Sadeghi, 2008), in this study I chose to recruit a gender-balanced sample. Recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and I undertook the thematic analysis strategies recommended by Mile and Huberman (1994): 1) broad coding, 2) pattern coding and memoing, 3) distilling and ordering, and testing executive summary statements, and 4) developing propositions (Houghton et al., 2015). The quoted passages used in this summary were translated from Farsi to English by the author. Debriefing, self-reflexivity, peer review, and triangulation with other data sources, such as Statistics Canada and the Statistical Center of Iran, ensured rigor and trustworthiness (Creswell, 2013). As an Iranian international woman student living in Canada more than 8 years, having an insider identity has been helpful to my research within Muslim communities, as I am able to establish trust and build rapport with participants relatively easily due to a shared cultural background and language (Giwa, 2015; Rezai-Rashti, 2013), which was particularly helpful in the context of qualitative interviews that involved a significant degree of self-disclosure.

Results

In comparing IISs' perception of HD in Canadian higher education institutions with their perception of HD in Iran, this study contributes to knowledge about the experiences, needs, and challenges of the IIS minority population and ISs in general. Most of the IISs interviewed identified educational methods and access to resources as the most significant differences between the Canadian and Iranian educational systems (Abukhattala, 2004). In addition to having more access to resources and being able to pursue a higher level of research in Canada, students spoke favorably about teamwork, contractual course outlines, clear expectations for assignments, and student evaluation of courses and of professors. Most students found a sense of fulfillment in the Canadian educational system's provision of adequate educational resources and support for students, which may be considered an aspect of HD.

Students described disparities between the type/quality of the relationship between students and university faculty/staff in Canada and Iran, and the fact that evaluation was based on achievable criteria and individual efforts in Canada. The level of personal connection, support, respect, humanity, and comparative rank and status led to students' sense of their HD being respected. This critical role of supervisors in ISs' academic experiences corresponds to the experiences of ISs in other countries like the US (Tang & Flint, 2022), as well as a short-term exchange student program in Canada (Kang & Metcalfe, 2021).

In contrast to their experience at Iranian universities (Soltani et al., 2020), women students said that their Canadian supervisors provided emotional support still respecting their privacy and autonomy, giving them a sense of equal status with their professors, respecting their HD. Additionally, women students perceived their HD to be recognized by their Canadian supervisors because of their efforts, personality, and competence rather than their religious beliefs or their family's socioeconomic status. In contrast, students believed religious beliefs and family status were important factors in some Iranian professors' evaluation of their merit, representing a violation of the notion of honor as a component of HD. For example, Neda (W) shared:

> In Canada, while you are very close with your teacher, you go out or go to a cottage with him/her, when doing work or a project or an exam, it [the relationship] is very formal and serious. The supervisor never asks me about my family, my religion. But if I am upset, he [supervisor] asks me why, and: Can I help you? However, in Iran, they ask about your families, ask who your father is, who your mother is, what they do, where they live. In Iran, people's privacy is invaded. If you are religious or if you do some specific practices or behaviors [related to Islamic religion], your position is better. That is, your position is measured by your opinion. But here [in Canada], what you do and present [in your work] determines your position.

Most of the men interviewed focused on the cultural and policy differences between Canada and Iran. For example, they discussed how teachers are honored in Iranian culture, placing them at a higher status than their students (Eghtesadi Roudi, 2021). According to some students, both professors' lack of honored status and undergraduate students' market/client relationship to the university in Canada undermine the HD of all concerned. Further, men felt that, as most graduate students are funded by Canadian universities or their supervisors, ISs were more vulnerable due to their being funded at higher rates than domestic students. Soheil (M) mentioned:

> In Canada a university is considered an economic enterprise. That is, the teacher considers himself very weak in front of the student, which of course is a problem. This issue has two sides to the coin, one side is that it gives the student self-confidence to speak and the other side is that they have no respect for the teacher… That is, the relationship between professors and students is a money-making system because of the system of capitalism. In this system, universities force the professor to respect the student. Especially at the undergraduate level. Whatever is considered respect for a professor in Iranian culture does not exist in Canada and this is a flaw. However, I believe this type of relationship doesn't exist at the post graduate levels since for those levels, it is mostly the university that funds students.

The second theme, gender equality and freedom, was addressed by both genders, but in different ways. While gender pay inequity and workplace discrimination exist in Canada (Schirle & Sogaolu, 2020), IISs referred positively to their Canadian experiences in terms of quality of work and salary range, unbiased gender attitudes, freedom of expression, and freedom from any type of abuse. These observations reflect positive support for HD. However, women students admired the prevalence of women's empowerment and gender equality at Canadian universities. They felt their HD to be

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respected when they were taken seriously and given autonomy. Men students raised the presence of meritocracy as a strong point while discussing HD. Both genders criticized Iranian universities for limiting students' freedom to speak out or air disagreements, and perceived this situation to be against their HD.

The third theme focused on IISs' experiences of marginalization in the Canadian educational system, in part due to having been misled about the possibility of studying in English at certain Quebec universities, and discrimination based on their nationality, race, and religion. Such discrimination undermines HD and should be considered a violation of human rights on prohibited grounds. Experiences of marginalization contradicted IISs' expectations of Canadian society as multicultural and bilingual (Hojati, 2011).

Students further expanded the issue of marginalization to include conditions that Western countries have created or supported by imposing sanctions against nations like Iran. Sanctions have caused many challenges, including limiting students' access to research resources and materials. In the view of participants, sanctions limit ordinary people's ability to meet their needs and flourish, hence putting people's HD at risk and creating motivation to migrate to study in Western countries. For example, Sina (M) explained:

> In … fields of study that need different laboratories and materials, it is more advanced here [Canada]. But in Iran because of the sanctions, they [Western companies] do not sell the equipment to Iran…. In fact, we [Iranian students], when participating in software competitions in writing codes, are very successful. So it shows that we, Iranians, are very smart. But when there is a need for money, a need for facilities and equipment, Canadian students are better. [So it can be] best [for us] here in Canada. It means that if Iranians come to work here, they will be very successful.

Discussion & Conclusion

To the best of my knowledge, this is the first study comparing higher education between Iran and Canada using the concept of HD to explore IISs' experiences. The interviews revealed students' contradictory experiences. While students disclosed experiences of vulnerability and racism in Canada, they also mentioned positive experiences in terms of Canada being a place to reach their goals, explore, and find more opportunity for progress, freedom, peacefulness, and equal gender rights. They appreciated Canadian codes of conduct with regard to being responsible, honest, accountable, and respectful, the level of acceptance of immigrants, and the respect they observed in Canada for character, feelings, intellect, honesty, and humanity. In contrast, IISs also disclosed challenges in Canada concerning language barriers, relationship difficulties, cultural gaps, settlement struggles, loneliness, and financial insecurity. IISs also mentioned that while the university community tended to treat foreign students appropriately, the general public was more likely to exhibit racist attitudes.

IISs' experiences of HD within the Canadian educational system provide empirical evidence for the concepts within my adopted HD framework - including respect, freedom, equality, fulfillment, human rights, and humanity - highlighting the importance of the relational versus the individual quality of human dignity within the postsecondary education system. While students perceived that their HD was respected in many ways, gendered controversy arose concerning the issues of marginalization, course quality, and supervisors' authority over international graduate students in Canadian universities.

ISs play a significant role in universities' financial goals, research contributions, and international rankings (Cao, 2019). This study gives voice to ISs' experiences of HD at Canadian universities and explores situations that put students' HD at risk in order to inform Canadian university policy reform with respect to hiring university staff with cultural awareness regarding international students, as well as providing expert supervision to support the quality of course content and ensure that faculties provide appropriate guidance and services for ISs. In parallel, if university policymakers in Iran

aim to retain their most talented students, limiting brain drain (Azadi et al., 2020), it is critical to address students' disappointing experiences of HD within the Iranian academy and change the situation according to students' interpretation of HD rather than the one the government prescribes (Kianpour, 2016).

The issue of students' experiences of marginalization in the Canadian educational system necessitates further study. The question of whether students decide to stay in Canada after their graduation, and if so, what factors contributed to their decision, merits further exploration. More research is also required to better understand IISs' misperceptions regarding gender inequality in Canada. Finally, I recommend that research be conducted regarding professors' experiences of HD in the Canadian educational system in order to better inform future policy.

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Canadian and Iranian Graduate Students' Conceptions of Critical Thinking: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

This study compares Canadian and Iranian international students' conceptions of critical thinking during their graduate studies in Canada. Critical thinking is an essential skill in Canadian higher education. It enables students to make reasoned judgments from their observations and experimentation. This narrative inquiry using open-ended interviews describes the narratives of eight students from different master's programs at a university in western Canada to examine their experiences and notions of critical thinking. The preliminary findings reveal that while all Canadian participants had knowledgeable perspectives about critical thinking, Iranian participants required more knowledge to build their critical thinking conceptualizations. Moreover, content knowledge, instructors' competence, and teaching methods significantly influenced students' critical thinking development. Results offer a comprehensive understanding of how Canadian higher institutions and curriculum developers need to provide appropriate opportunities and curricula for cultivating and developing critical thinking among local students while paying attention to Iranian students' needs and academic preparedness.

Introduction

In western higher education, critical thinking (CT) is one of the main learning outcomes for students. CT encourages students to appraise knowledge and values critically in their studies (Zhong & Cheng, 2021). While there is no specific definition for CT, Ennis (1985) defines one meaning that higher education professionals regularly cite. He noted that "critical thinking is reflective and reasonable thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do" (p. 45). CT is recognized as a necessary skill for students, which leads them to enhance their reasoning, communication talents, and problem-solving skills (Zara & Othman, 2013). Additionally, Islamiyah and Sholakhuddin Al Fajri (2020) highlighted international students who had completed schooling in non-western academic contexts need to adapt to this western

academic convention, which might differ from what they have learned in their home countries' education systems, to meet the requirements of the academic community. Moreover, O'Sullivan and Guo (2010) explained that while some Canadian-educated learners are unprepared to engage in the expected level of criticality when they enter university, international students who were educated in various cultural contexts and vastly diverse educational systems face significantly greater intellectual challenges because of different learning approaches and lack of teaching CT as the core component in their educational systems. Hence, in their investigation, Howe and Xu (2013) stressed the importance and need of incorporating transcultural thinking and education into curriculum, teaching and learning that aims to develop people's critical views to value different local and international cultural contexts. Therefore, there is a need to focus more on the needs of international students to meet the standards of educational evaluation, which is recognized on the premise that "knowledge exists in and through critical thought" (Paul, 1992, p. 5).

In this regard, while there have been several research on how international students develop their CT during their studies in western countries, no studies were found to examine international students' perceptions of CT in Canadian universities. Therefore, this study aims to analyze Canadian and Iranian international students' conceptions of CT to clarify their knowledge about CT and discover the factors that affect their CT development during their higher education.

Research Design

Research Problem

The participation of international students pursuing a higher-level educational degree in western countries has been increasing due to the open-door policy and marketization of institutions in recent decades. Although passing different language tests such as IELTS (International English Language Testing System) is a mandatory requirement for non-English speaking students to show their English proficiency to enter universities; these exams nonetheless do not indicate students' critical academic literacy (Mat Daud et al., 2011; Ewert, 2011). Nevertheless, international students must demonstrate CT in an academic context, such as scholarly content production. Therefore, entering a western academic community and becoming a critical thinker might be challenging for some international students, and their educational outcomes might be below academic standards. Consequently, this study aims to look deeply into the experiences of Iranian international students as the concept of CT, developed in the western world, is absent in the Iranian educational system (Eghbali et al., 2021). The research intends to discover their stories about CT and the impact of Canadian academic experiences on their CT development and compare their conceptions with Canadian students.

Research Questions

This comparative study focuses on two research questions: 1) What are Canadian and Iranian graduate students' conceptions of critical thinking? 2) How does the experience of studying at a Canadian university impact graduate students' critical thinking?

Literature Review

CT is rooted in three primary academic disciplines: philosophy, psychology, and education. Thus, CT is a rich concept with various approaches open to being defined from multiple perspectives (Sternberg, 1986; Lewis & Smith, 1993). The earliest attempts to explain this complex thinking began over 100 years ago based on Dewey (1910), who coined the term CT for the first time in what he called "reflective thinking" as an "active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusion to which it tends" (p. 6). In his definition, he emphasizes that reflective thinking leads individuals to ask questions about what to believe by evaluating reasoning and considering the implications of one's beliefs. Therefore, CT is a powerful resource in an individual's personal and civic life and is a pervasive and self-rectifying human phenomenon

(Facione, 1990). Students as future citizens of the fast-growing and challenging world not only have to build their knowledge capacity but also need to improve their higher-order thinking skills, such as CT and problem-solving, to "facilitate the transition of students' knowledge and skills into responsible action, regardless of their particular future role in society" (Miri et al., 2007, p. 354).

In terms of the position of CT in British Columbia's (BC) education system, several scholars (e.g., Howe, 2003; Hymel et al., 2017; Fillion, 2020) have revealed that the BC education system is undergoing an extensive transformation in terms of applying CT components in the curriculum with aims to stress on problem-solving, literacy and communication, teamwork, and information technology in order to coordinate with the realities of 21st-century education.

On the other side, Iran's Islamic Revolution in the late 1970s affected significant changes in social systems, including the educational system, which has changed in numerous dimensions, including the content of school textbooks, which became based on Islamic frameworks and the rejection of non-Islamic ideologies (Salehi Abari & Nikdoosti, 2021; Hashemi et al., 2010; Shahnazari, 1992). According to Fahim and Bagheri (2012) while some of the fundamental points of promoting CT among Iranian students are to teach them to familiarize themselves with conflicting beliefs, to develop the ability to ask profound questions, and to acknowledge the fact that knowledge is always subject to change, yet "it is never possible to question the beliefs and values in the name of fostering critical thinking" (p. 1125). Therefore, in their research, Hashemi et al. (2010) discovered that in the Iranian education system, educational assessment stresses knowledge transmission and learning is generally limited to memorizing resources. In this light, Eghbali et al. (2021) revealed that despite claims from officials, instructors, and administrators within Iranian education that there is stress on developing CT among students, "there is not enough will and motivation to encourage students to think and specially to use critical thinking in practice" (p. 28).

The above evidence demonstrates that most Iranian students are not taught nor educated to become critical thinkers in their educational journey. Thus, practicing CT in western educational communities might be problematic and complicated for some Iranian students. Through the comprehensive meta-search of the current literature, no studies were found examining Iranian students' experiences of CT in Canadian higher education. This study aims to fill the gap in the related literature. Also, the study results call attention to Canadian higher education to address this lack of CT preparedness in Iranian international students through curricula.

Research Methodology

Research Method

This comparative study utilizes narrative inquiry (NI) to compare and contrast Canadian and Iranian graduate students' conceptions of CT. NI and other interpretive forms of qualitative research are frequently used to discover a detailed understanding, perception, and outlook of complex phenomena (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2012). According to Creswell and Guetterman (2019), the theoretical lens in NI is a guiding viewpoint or ideology that delivers a structure for supporting groups or individuals' experiences in the written report to indicate an educational research issue. Indeed, the focus on an individual's personal and social experience draws on the philosophical thoughts of Dewey, who saw that "individuals experience was a central lens for understanding a person" (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 518). Further, several NI scholars like Connelly and Clandinin (2000) were inspired by Dewey's perspective and underlined NI as an approach to a collaborative and reflective understanding of individuals' experiences. Moreover, Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000) highlighted through an interview in NI; investigators can gather stories from their participants about their experiences with a particular phenomenon to "externalize his or her feelings and indicate which elements of those experiences are most significant" (Elliott, 2005, p. 4). Thus, NI was chosen for the present study as Fraser (2004) pinpointed it can be an "effective method in cross-cultural work" (p. 181).

Research Site and Participants

This research took place in a public mid-sized university in the interior of BC. A combination of purposive and snowball sampling was used to recruit eight students (four Canadian and four Iranian) from different master's programs, namely education, data science, environmental science, and business administration, who were willing to share their lived experiences voluntarily. In this study, Canadian students refer to individuals who were raised in Canada and, most importantly, their familiarity with Canadian school systems regardless of their race, ethnicity, and gender. Iranian students refer to participants who were raised in Iran and had done schooling in Iran and, during the data collection, were identified as international students in the university. All students had successfully finished the first year of their programs. Canadian students consisted of two women and two men. Iranian participants included three women and one man. The paper delivers preliminary findings based on open-ended interviews conducted online and face-to-face.

Significance of the Study

Based on the idea that CT is an essential part of academic literacy acquisition for graduate students (Zhong & Cheng, 2021), a study about Canadian and Iranian international students' experiences regarding the development of CT in higher education provides several significant pieces of information. First, this research offers much-needed insights into the impact of Canadian educational experiences on postgraduate students' conceptions of CT by examining Canadian and Iranian students' opinions, challenges, demands and barriers they encountered during their master's level. Second, through understanding Canadian and Iranian international students' outlooks on CT, curriculum developers will have more knowledge to design curricula that consider developing these essential skills among local students while paying attention to Iranian international students' needs and academic backgrounds. Similarly, higher education institutions, department heads, and instructors at colleges and universities may use the study results to design, plan, and implement CT instructional strategies with consideration of culturally relevant pedagogies. Another unique perspective the study offers is adding knowledge to comparative and international higher education fields. Through a vast meta-search of the literature regarding international students' conceptions of CT in western countries, several scholars (e.g., Tiwari et al., 2003; Egege & Kutieleh, 2004; Fella & Lukianovaa, 2015; Song, 2016; Islamiyah & Sholakhuddin Al Fajri, 2020; Chaisuwan et al., 2021; Zhong & Cheng, 2021) mainly focused on Asian international students' conceptions, experiences, and challenges in terms of the concept and practice of CT in the U.S and the U.K universities. Likewise, the literature review found no research focused on Canadian and Iranian students' perceptions of CT at Canadian universities. The current emerging study aims to enrich the scholarly debate on the subject and contribute to the literature on comparative and international higher education studies. Also, it opens new doors for researchers interested in comparative and international studies to get a snapshot of Canadian and Iranian students' perceptions of CT and how Canadian educational experiences impact their CT development during higher education.

Conclusion

This investigation explores Canadian and Iranian students' experiences of developing CT during their master's studies in Canada. The preliminary findings of this research indicate that while all Canadian participants had a reasonable perception of CT, some Iranian students require more knowledge to improve their awareness of this concept. Other factors that play vital roles in influencing CT development among both groups of students include content knowledge, instructors' competence, and teaching methods. This study has meaningful implications for academic staff who teach Iranian students at Canadian and Western-tradition institutions of higher learning. Also, for the next steps, future researchers, through understanding Canadian and Iranian students' perceptions and experiences about CT, can investigate studies on how designing a curriculum with interculturally competent can support these students. It is hoped that the current research brings more awareness of the challenges and opportunities associated with developing the concept of CT among Canadian students and opens a new window to better understand Iranian students' obstacles and demands for CT

development during their studies in Canada.

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Contributions of Capitals to Chinese International Graduates' Employability in Australia

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Abstract

This research explores the employability of Chinese international graduates in the Australian labor market. It captures the significance of six forms of capital (i.e., human, social, cultural, psychological, identity, and agentic) to Chinese international graduates when they develop their careers in Australia. The research employed Bourdieu's theory of practice and a capitals-based approach as the theoretical framework. Data were collected via an online survey (N=203) and in-depth interviews (N=14). The findings reveal that in addition to getting employments in Australia, the graduates also benefited from developing and utilizing these six capitals in terms of sustainable employments, professional growth, and well-being. As such, this research argued for a broad definition of employability which include different capitals as the inputs and different aspects of employability outcomes as the outputs, namely, employment outcomes, sustainable employments, professional growth, and well-being. The findings also implied that various stakeholders should share responsibilities to support international students in building multiple capitals.

Keywords: agency, Bourdieu, capital, graduate employability, international students, mixed method

Introduction

Australia's well-established education industry is the second most popular destination for international students (OECD, 2021). However, there is a large gap between this high popularity as the study destination for international students and the employability outcomes of international graduates after they graduate in Australia. According to the Australian Census in 2016, less than half of international graduates were in full-time employment (Chew, 2019). International

graduates had difficulties securing a job in the field of study (Tran et al., 2019), were underemployed, and were doing low-skilled jobs (Chew, 2019). Previous studies have reported the possible reasons leading to the situation, such as structural factors relating to governmental policies and economic situations (Blackmore et al., 2017; Tran et al., 2019), employers' unconscious bias against international graduates (Blackmore & Rahimi, 2019), and international graduates' difficulties in proving their competitiveness (Blackmore & Rahimi, 2019; Jackling & Natoli, 2015; Tang, 2022).

Chinese international students represent the most significant proportion of all international students in Australia (Australia Trade and Investment Commission, 2021), and experienced similar challenges as mentioned above (Blackmore et al., 2017; James & Otsuka, 2009; Tharenou, 2015). Particularly, according to the 2016 Australian Census, Chinese international graduates represented the lowest employment rate in the Australian labor market (Chew, 2019). This issue drew the author's attention to explore Chinese international graduates' employability in Australia.

Literature Review

Although employability has different definitions based on different perspectives, philosophies, and disciplines (Williams et al., 2016), the most acknowledged definition is from Yorke (2006) who defined employability as "a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefit themselves, the workforce, the community, and the economy" (p. 4). For the outputs or outcomes of employability, in addition to employment outcomes (Hillage & Pollard, 1998), recent research has extended this definition by arguing that employability outcomes at least include other aspects, such as sustainable employments (Clarke, 2018), well-being (van Casteren et al., 2021), and professional growth (Pham & Jackson, 2020).

The employability outcomes are found to be primarily determined by a range of factors at the macro (i.e., government, society), meso (i.e., employers, universities, parents), and micro levels (i.e., individuals) (Pham & Jackson, 2020). Previous studies explored how the factors at macro and meso levels influence international graduates' employability outcomes (e.g., Blackmore & Rahini, 2019; Cameron et al., 2019; Niu et al., 2022). However, there is currently limited research investigating how individual graduates develop and utilize different resources to navigate the host labor market and achieve their desired employability outcomes at the micro level. According to Tomlinson (2017) and Pham and Jackson (2020), at the micro or individual level, these individual inputs and resources of employability can be categorized into six capitals as follows: human capital (professional knowledge, professional skills), cultural capital (cultural knowledge and embodied behaviors), social capital (effective networks), identity capital (professional identity), psychological capital (resilience, adaptability), and agentic capital (the capacity to strategize various resources).

The six capitals have been argued as significant resources for graduates to navigate the labor market (Tomlinson, 2017; Pham et al., 2019). However, little is known about the significance of these six capitals to international graduates' employability trajectories. This study aims to fill this research gap by exploring how these six capitals contribute to Chinese international graduates' employability in Australia. This study was guided by an overarching research question: How do capitals contribute to Chinese international graduates' employability in Australia?

Theoretical Framework

This study employed a combination of Bourdieu's (1984) theory of practice and a capitals-based approach (Pham, 2021a) as a theoretical framework. Bourdieu's four capitals (i.e., economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capitals) can be applied universally to understand human practices in different research fields. In the field of graduate employability, the notion of capital has drawn great attention by researchers. A capitals-based approach is the subsequent work developed by Pham (2021a) based on the graduate capital model of Tomlinson (2017). Tomlinson (2017) and Pham (2021a) expanded Bourdieu's (1986) four capitals by claiming that graduates need to develop and utilize six capitals, including human, cultural, social, psychological, identity and agentic for optimal employability outcomes.

Under the Bourdieusian approach, international students are viewed as a marginalized group because, similar to the migrants, international students' capitals are often undervalued (Lusis & Kelly, 2006). As such, their agency is considered constrained because they have limited power over the rules set by the mainstream values in the field of host country (Tholen, 2015). This is where a capitals-based approach complements the Bourdieusian approach and provides a perspective departing from viewing international graduates as the deficit group. Therefore, the underpinning theoretical framework of this research offers a holistic approach to understanding international graduates' employability.

Table 1: Demographic details of the Chinese international graduates who completed the online survey (N=203) and in-depth interviews (N=14)

Variable	Sub-groups	Survey Respondents		Interview Participants	
		N	%	N	%
Gender	Male	82	40.4	7	50
	Female	121	59.6	7	50
Age	18-23	10	4.9	1	7.1
	24-29	122	60.1	6	42.9
	30-35	62	30.5	5	35.7
	36-41	9	4.4	2	14.3
Highest degree	Bachelor's degree (coursework and honors)	54	26.6	2	14.3
	Master's degree (coursework and research)	143	70.4	10	71.4
	PhD degree	6	3.0	2	14.3
Graduation length from the first degree obtained in Australia	0-1 year	31	15.3	6	42.9
	1-3 years	73	36.0	1	7.1
	3-5 years	30	14.8	3	21.4
	5-10 years	52	25.6	2	14.3
	More than 10 years	17	8.4	1	7.1
Discipline (multiple disciplines are applicable)	Non-STEM	175	75	13	59.1
	STEM	58	25	9	40.9
Employment status (multiple statuses are applicable)	Employed full-time	106	52.2	6	42.9
	Employed part-time	31	15.3	2	14.3
	Employed causal	34	16.7	4	28.6
	Unemployed looking for work	18	8.9	1	7.1
	Study (doing PhD)	20	9.9	2	14.3
	Self employed	10	4.9	1	7.1

Note: These categories are not mutually exclusive which indicates the nature of complex employability trajectories.

Methodology

This research employed the sequential explanatory mixed-method approach to answer the research question. With ethics approval obtained, it started with an online survey measuring the participants' self-perceived contribution of capitals to their employability (N=203). The survey results were used to conduct the interviews (N=14) to help explain in more detail the initial survey results (Creswell, 2014). The recruited respondents met the following selection criteria: 1) They are originally from China; 2) They came to study in Australia as an international student; 3) They obtained a degree(s) in Australia; and 4) They had working experiences in Australia. The demographic details survey respondents and interview participants were reported in Table 1.

The quantitative data from survey was analyzed using SPSS v28. The principal components analysis was conducted to measure validity with all factor loadings exceeding 0.5 (Hair et al., 2006). Inter-item consistency was assessed by Cronbach's alpha, each exceeding 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978). Six new variables were computed to integrate the items under each capital. Descriptive statistical analysis in Table 2 was conducted to calculate means and standard deviations. Thematic analysis was applied and was mainly theory-driven in analyzing qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Findings

Based on the survey results, social capital was given the lowest score among all the capitals in terms of the contribution on the graduates' employability. The interview data provided insights by revealing that the participants had limited control over the impact of social networks on their employment outcomes, as such were more willing to develop other capacities such as professional skills, English proficiency, cultural understanding. One participant shared,

> I don't rely a lot on other people. We can't expect job referrals equal job offers… Additionally, it's not easy to build social capital, so it's easier to build up other capacities. (a postgraduate in speech pathology)

The qualitative findings also revealed that utilizing these six capitals in addition to being employed, benefited the participants in many other aspects. For instance, the participants acknowledged the social support from their peers and significant others in terms of increased well-being from companionship, professional skills growth from job preparations, and development of professionalism. Additionally, the participants could better sustain their job when applying their identity capital in aligning their career goals with their passion. They could also enhance their professional skills when undertaking agentic capital in engaging proactive actions and effectively strategizing resources.

Table 2: Respondents' self-perceived contributions of each capital to their employability in Australia (N=203)

	M	SD
Contribution of Human Capital to employability (8 items)	3.938	.807
Contribution of Social Capital to employability (9 items)	3.690	.821
Contribution of Cultural Capital to employability (6 items)	4.033	.726
Contribution of Psychological Capital to employability (8 items)	3.859	.729
Contribution of Identity Capital to employability (8 items)	3.906	.675
Contribution of Agentic Capital to employability (10 items)	3.914	.688

Note: Strongly disagree = 1; Disagree = 2; Undecided = 3; Agree = 4; Strongly agree = 5. *M* = Mean, *SD* = Standard Deviation. There are 49 items in total.

Discussion

This study argued for a broad definition of employability which entails different capitals as the inputs and different aspects of employability outcomes as the outputs. In other words, in addition to human capital, other inputs of employability include social, cultural, psychological, identity, and agentic capitals. For employability outcomes, it does not merely include employment outcomes, but also include sustainable employments, professional growth, and well-being (Clarke, 2018; Jackson & Tomlinson, 2020; Pham, 2021b). The findings revealed that although some participants were employed, their well-being was negatively affected because of labor exploitation in terms of low pay. Therefore, it is essential to have psychological capital to be resilient and adaptable so that the participants could maintain their well-being to cope with the adversities. Additionally, although some participants were doing low-skilled jobs or voluntary jobs, they did not complain because these activities met their needs for professional growth in terms of accumulating work experience and strengthening their professional skills.

This research will help international students and graduates better understand how to develop and utilize capitals as their resources and inputs of employability to better navigate the Australian labor market and achieve different aspects of employability outcomes. This study will advance the comparative and international higher education field in terms of deploying an innovative capitals-based approach as an underpinning theoretical framework in understanding international graduates' employability. Especially, it is essential for higher education to embed both human capital and other five employability capitals in their teachings or programs to prepare international graduates' employability better. Potentially, this study will support the government in issuing more appropriate policies to enhance international graduates' employability outcomes, and hence maintain competitiveness in the global international education market. Likewise, this study will help Australian employers better understand the resources and capitals possessed by international graduates to develop more effective collaborations with relevant stakeholders to support international graduates. Finally, this study will initiate ideas and principles that could guide comparative research on the employability of international graduates from different nations in the future.

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What's in an Image? A Critical Look at Study Abroad Programs Going to Africa

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Abstract

As the U.S. continues to prioritize the internationalization of higher education, study-abroad participation has doubled in the last decades. To correspond with this increased interest and prepare students for an intercultural workforce, study abroad programs have diversified travel destinations to include countries on the continent of Africa, most of which have colonial histories. However, many scholars have contended with the problematic nature of study abroad programs, especially interactions with host countries in the Global South. Specifically, the depiction of Africa is often othering or in a subjugated manner. Additionally, there is a lack of concise scholarship on the representation of people and places of travel destinations in study abroad programs images. As such, this exploratory study uses a postcolonial lens to understand how Africa is represented in the imagery of study abroad programs at selected Research 1 universities in the U.S. Results of the study and practical implications are presented.

Keywords: Africa, internationalization, postcolonial, representation, study abroad

Introduction

Prior to the covid-19 pandemic, there was a steady increase in the United States (U.S.) study abroad programs in efforts to offer students the opportunity to build a sense of global citizenship (Wynveen et al., 2012) and to acquire internationalization (Bishop, 2013). Internationalization refers to integrating intercultural or global dimensions into the higher education experience (Knight, 2008). Study abroad programs are vital to these efforts as more institutions incorporate a 'global mandate' into their academic plans (Jorgenson & Shultz, 2012). Other U.S. institutions have sought to reflect the world's connectedness in ways that have expanded their curricula and their campuses and learning opportunities (Bjarnason et al., 2000). As institutions push for "borderless education" (Bjarnason et al., 2000), study abroad was a growing part of that experience at most U.S. colleges and universities (IEE, 2019).

Research on study-abroad highlights several significant benefits for participants. Among these are global competency, intercultural learning, transformative learning, students' academic performance, global citizenry, serving-learning, and communication skills (Asada, 2019; Hunter, 2015; Lui et al., 2022; Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2014; Salisbury et al., 2013). To offer these experiences to students, U.S. study-abroad destinations are diversifying to include regions beyond the popular European destinations (i.e., Latin America/Africa). It is essential to "educate [U.S. students] about a multitude of cultures to diversify student perspectives on world cultures and politics" (Soobrayen Veerasamy, 2021, p. 11). Without taking away from the benefits of study programs to these destinations, unintended consequences include challenging intercultural situations (Asada, 2019) and saviorism (Nordmeyer et al., 2016). Although few scholars (Oyenekwu, 2016; Oyenekwu et al., 2017; Khoo, 2011) have examined colonialist discourses and the effects of representation on creating a 'global citizenry' in the emerging intercultural world, there is still a need for extensive research in this area. Former colonies, mainly those in Africa, are often presented in a subjugated manner (Mudimbe, 1988). As such, this study sought to understand how study abroad programs from U.S institutions represent Africa.

Theoretical Framework

This study uses the postcolonial lens of V.Y. Mudimbe (2013) to examine images created by U.S. study-abroad programs in Africa. Postcolonial theory critically analyzes the representation of non-Western subjects in an 'us' versus 'them' dichotomy (Said, 1994). In doing so, a postcolonial study investigates issues of power and control used to examine how images of non-westerners are constructed by western societies (Fanon, 1991). A postcolonial view of Africa speaks on representation by departing from the western trope of a constructed Africa through western hegemony (Mudimbe, 1988). Mudimbe specifically identified three core elements to look for in Western representation of Africa: 1) The colonial attempt to transform savage spaces into civilized settings, 2) the anthropologist codifying humans, beliefs, and institutions, and 3) the Christian missionary self-sacrifice to be among the primitive to show them the true light (Mudimbe, 2013). These elements were useful in analyzing images from Africa as they are presented through U.S. higher education institutions' websites.

Methodology

This study is a pilot of a dissertation that uses content analysis as a qualitative research approach. Content analysis provides researchers the advantage of studying documents and artifacts to examine available patterns in a systematic or replicable manner (Marying, 2000). Particularly, influenced by the study methods from Buzinde et al. (2006), which looked at ethnic representations of destination imagery, I explored how Africa is represented in study abroad programs by examining images on institutional websites.

Data Collection

The four selected institutions for this study, ranked in the top 75 higher education institutions in the U.S. (U.S. News Report, 2020). All four institutions have a mandate to support study-abroad as a tool to create a global community. Specifically, I selected Predominately White Institutions (PWI) institutions where most study-abroad participants were White students (IIE, 2019). I intentionally targeted four-year research institutions (R1) with at least five programs going to African countries from the east, west, and mid-Atlantic region for broad-based representation of U.S. institutions.

Collectively, the institutions have study abroad programs going to more than 15 countries in Africa. Each institution offered more than 10 programs and their websites have regional search features, allowing me to target search 'Africa'. Using this feature and focusing on the representation of Africa and African people, I searched 46 study abroad programs going to Africa on the institutions' websites; and collected imagery and text used to market the programs. I found and retrieved 111 photos. These photos were downloaded and saved with accompanying text descriptions in a folder for analysis.

Table 1: Definitions of Themes

Theory (Mudimbe, 2013)	Description	Total Images
1) The colonial attempt to transform **"savage spaces"** into **"civilized settings"**	Images include wild animals, torn up, no clothing or shoes, mentions of wildlife, wilderness, red dirt roads, or transformation	49
2) The **anthropologist** codifying humans, beliefs, and institutions	Images include people gathered around U.S. students, things described as "exotic", rituals, cultural ceremonies, note-taking, fieldwork, and everyday activities (cooking, fetching water, etc.)	31
3) The Christian missionary **self-sacrifice** to be among the **"primitive"** to show them the **"true light"**	Images include development-related programs (i.e., building wells, painting, building houses, etc.), religious figures, children, mentions of development	11

Data Analysis

In the analysis of images, many layers of meaning can be conveyed (Pieterse, 1995). By this, no one image was bonded to one theme, but for consistency, images were not placed in more than one theme. The multidimensionality of the images was leveraged to have them assigned to categories based on Mudimbe's (2013) three elements of Western representations of Africa (colonizer through "savage spaces", missionary, and anthropologist), which are critical in exploring how the West subjugates Africa. This was done after several hours of sorting and paying attention to every aspect of the images, with all contexts considered through reading descriptions of the programs.

A total of 91 images are categorized using the prior coding scheme (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Weber, 1990) and 20 images were excluded as they did not conform to Mudimbe's (2013) elements.

Results

Using the postcolonial theoretical lens in the data analysis enabled me to present my findings under three major categories per Mudimbe's (2013) elements: *The Missionary, Savage Space, and The Anthropologist.*

The Missionary

Overall, there were more images containing children than any reoccurring theme. Many images had people holding children or petting them like you would a baby animal. Other images included children by themselves or in a classroom setting. For one program, there was a slide of 39 photos; 24 of them contained children. That is an astounding 62% of their images represent Africa. So, images of children were used to link study abroad experiences. Similarly, in the case of an education program images of wildlife and mentions of excursions to local orphanages. Again, an incomprehensible relationship between the children portrayed and the program. Similarly, images of children in classroom settings had no connection to the orphanage's exertion mentioned. These images suited *The Missionary* category due to the impressionable characteristics of children and the ways missionaries aim to show audiences the "true light".

Savage Space

The second reoccurring theme was wild animals (elephants, lions, zebras, etc.), which were placed in the *Savage Space* category. Essentially, most of these programs were ecology and conservation-focused. However, some programs

with wildlife images had no bearing on conservation, ecology, and safari excursions. For example, a pharmacy program going to an East African country had images of elephants and zebras. Also in this category, students were posing with huts, on red dirt roads, or the images were spotted with locals wearing little to no clothing. Program descriptions in this category read "transformation from economic challenges".

The Anthropologist

In this category, the images were of people doing everyday chores like cooking, fetching water, and walking. These were documented as the anthropological gaze on the community. Often, these images were taken when the locals were not paying attention to the camera. This mirrors the interactions of anthropologists during fieldwork in Africa. Another example of codifying everyday activities of people's lived experiences that might seem alien to visitors. Additionally, descriptions of some of the program's cultural excursions were referred to as "exotic," offering students "exotic animal interaction." The emphasis on 'exotic' is a fetishization that presents Africa as a subjugated and unknown place that needs discovery.

Discussion

This study aimed to explore Africa's representation in U.S. study abroad programs through a postcolonial lens. Postcolonial scholarship highlights the colonial attempt to "other" certain people and places. The study results showed U.S. study abroad programs' representation mirrors the missionary, savage space, and anthropologist narratives from colonial eras. The promise to transform or the helping and self-sacrifice of U.S. students going to Africa directly connects with Mudimbe's (1988) critique in "Invented Africa." Though Africa has a variety of wildlife, impoverished people, and many low-income countries, it is not the ultimate representation of Africa. By portraying Africa solely as a jungle that is lagging in civilization, needing transformation, and a savage space, these images align with a colonial lens and deprive students of the depth of a diverse continent.

This study is well situated in comparative and international education's scope, advancing cross-cultural scholarship and practices. Specifically, the study speaks to study abroad programs on the role of being culturally and ethnically conscious in representing travel destinations. This research suggests that in the glitz and glam of study abroad, institutions must ask the question of representation to avoid unintended consequences (Asada, 2019). Previous work in *JCHIE* shared constraints and possibilities of study abroad experiences and other shared lived experiences and quest to find new destinations (Asada, 2019; Woodman, 2019). This work brings into that conversation African countries and connects postcolonial studies to the field of study abroad while also asking to what extent are images detrimental in aligning with colonialist discourses.

Conclusion

Higher education institutions must recognize that images influence the representation of people and places. Therefore, they are responsible for creating culturally relevant images that consider the colonial history of people and places. As such, future researchers must consider the general question of knowledge production and representation of Africa and African people in study abroad by interviewing host communities about their interpretations of Africa as it is presented in U.S. programs. This is vital when we consider colonial subjects' silence and the co-production of knowledge in a global society.

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