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Introduction

Rosalind Latiner Raby

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Editor-In-Chief

Dear Readers –

I am pleased to share Volume 15, Issue 4, 2023 of the ***Journal of Comparative and International Higher Education*** (JCIHE). JCIHE publishes new and emerging topics in comparative and international higher educational whose themes represent scholarship from authors from around the world. In this issue 15(4), 2023, the articles explore and/or compare international higher education in seven countries: Canada, Ghana, Nigeria, Norway, Turkey, United Kingdom, and United States. The articles reflect on international students from Turkey and from India studying in the United States, from China studying in the United States, Chinese international students studying in the United Kingdom, international students studying in Canada, and international students studying in Turkey. Two comparative studies examine library archival comparisons of Nigeria and United States and experiences of bullying in Ghana and Norway. We conclude this issue with two Book Reviews. The first is by Haniyeh Kheirkhah Abkenari in a review of S. Hanada, *International Higher Education in Citizen Diplomacy: Examining Student Learning Outcomes from Mobility Programs.* The second is by Thi Thu Huyen-Nguyen in a review of the book by L. H. Phan and B. N. Doan, *Higher Education in Market-Oriented Socialist Vietnam: New Players, Discourses, and Practices.*

JCIHE is an open access, independent, double-blinded peer-reviewed international journal publishing original contributions to the field of 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). The mission of the journal is to serve as a place to share new thinking on analysis, theory, policy, and practice, and to encourage reflective and critical thinking on issues that influence comparative and international higher education. JCIHE showcases new and diverse international research that uses rigorous methodology that focuses on theory, policy, practice, critical analysis, and development analysis of issues that influence higher education. JCIHE has as its core principles: a) comparative research; b) engagement with theory; and c) diverse voices in terms of authorship.

In the 15(4) 2023, three broad themes are represented in the articles: student learning strategies, pedagogical strategies, and comparative and international studies.

Student Learning Strategies

Rajabbeigi, Dellaneve, Schmieder-Ramirez, and Amin use various types of quantitative analysis to find that international student character strengths and learning strategies predict academic performance whereas demographics did

not. **Chennamsetti and Khawaja** detail the coping strategies used by Indian international students in the United States and show the ways in which coping strategies can be acquired. **Levent and Aktaş** detail the experiences of international students studying in Turkey at the start of COVID-19 focusing on their various scenarios, difficulties, and outcomes. Finally, **Mushfiq** details the constraints that some international students have while studying in Canada with particular attention on acculturative stress and lack of communication and how attention to these issues can become an intervention to better support the students.

Pedagogical Strategies

Gies uses student voices to highlight the need for an inclusive pedagogy that can accommodate the various iterations of the imagined community through which expatriate Chinese students view human rights criticism targeted at China.

Comparative and International Studies

Cermak compares structural disparities in archives at University of Nigeria Nsukka and Michigan State University and notes unequal distribution of archival power with some Nigerian scholars reclaiming ownership over their own archival contents and narratives. **Tay and Cameron** compare forms of bullying experienced by students in universities in Norway and Ghana. Finally, **Dzimbiri and Malin** examine merit-based access and outcomes in Malawi to understand how to address and reduce societal injustices.

Article in Issue 15(4) 2023

Independent Empirical Articles

Hadi Rajabbeigi, Pepperdine University, USA, **James Dellaneve**, Pepperdine University, USA, **June Schmieder-Ramirez**, Pepperdine University, USA, **and Fereshteh Amin**, California State Polytechnic University, USA. **Investigating Factors Affecting International Students' Academic Performance in Higher Education in the United States**

This article examines the psychological factors that influence academic success of international students studying in the United States. Using a quantitative survey grounded in positive psychology and learning theories, the correlations between student character strengths, learning strategies, and academic performance were analyzed to determine the predictability of these students' academic performance. Findings show that character strength variables and learning strategies best correlated with academic performance and learning strategies. Multiple regression analysis revealed that both character strengths and learning strategies predicted academic performance whereas demographics did not.

Emmanuel Mensah Kormla Tay, University of Agder, Norway **and David Lansing Cameron**, University of Agder, Norway. **The Nature of Bullying in Higher Education: A Comparative Study of Students' Experiences in Ghana and Norway**

This article compares negative behaviors that constitute bullying as reported by students in two markedly different national contexts, that of Ghana and Norway. Approximately 40% of the Ghanaian students and 20% of the Norwegian students responded that they had been bullied. Differences found that in Norway, there was more relational forms of bullying (e.g., being excluded) while in Ghana, there were more direct and verbal forms of bullying, such as name-calling and being taunted.

Robert M. Cermak, University of Louisville, USA. **Power in University Archives: Imperialism and Disparities in Nigeria and the United States**

This article examines the structural disparities between the archives at the University of Nigeria Nsukka (UNN) and Michigan State University (MSU). While Nigerian archivists work to preserve their institutions' local content, they must contend with cultural and infrastructural constraints foreign to their American counterparts. Using physical archives at UNN and MSU, along with digital artifacts, the contents and accessibility of hardcopy and digital collections were compared. Findings conclude that the ongoing and uneven footprint of imperialism, both socio-cultural and infrastructural, results in an unequal distribution of Trouillot's 'archival power.' Conclusions also share of some Nigerian scholars are contesting imperialism to reclaim ownership over their own archival contents and narratives.

Prashanti Chennamsetti, Texas A&M University, USA **and Nigar G. Khawaja**, Queensland University of Technology, Australia. **Coping Strategies Used by Indian International Students to Overcome Transitional Challenges in the United States**

This article examines the experiences of Indian international students who study in American colleges and universities. The study investigates the coping strategies employed by six Indian international students studying in the United States, using

phenomenological data analysis methodology. Participants identified four specific coping strategy themes: (1) open-mindedness, (2) goal-orientedness, (3) an independent attitude, and (4) showing gratitude. Findings also showed the ways in which coping strategies could be acquired.

Lieve Gies, University of Leicester, United Kingdom. **Freedom in Times of Pandemic: Chinese International Students' Readings of Human Rights Criticism During the UK's First COVID-19 Lockdown**

This article examines how Chinese international students in the United Kingdom understand and voice their opinions and understandings on human rights principles. The interviews coincided with the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. Most of the students legitimized China's human rights record. When compared to Stanley Cohen's acclaimed study of human rights denial, the students provide an example of the distinction between state actors' denial and citizen denial. The students struggle to trust foreign media reports, reappraise their circumstances during the pandemic and do not acknowledge China's human rights violations. These findings highlight the need for an inclusive pedagogy which is accommodates the various iterations of the imagined community through which expatriate Chinese students view human rights criticism targeted at China.

Faruk Levent and Abdussamet Aktaş, Marmara University, Turkey. **The Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on International Students**

This article examines the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on international students studying in Turkey. Interviews shared the difficulties that some students experienced at the beginning of COVID-19. Those who could not return to their home country went through intense stress and anxiety in terms of accommodation, having access to food, financial resources, and medical supplies. This experience has caused international students to become more skeptical about continuing with mobility and to change their countries of preference.

Merab Mushfiq, Wilfrid Laurier University, Canada. **International Student Transition to Canadian Post-Secondary Institutions**

This article examines the elements needed for successful transition into Canadian culture and academic environment from international students. A focus is made on the challenges these students have, including acculturative stress and a lack of communication that influences the ability to make friendships.

Essay

Mastano N. Dzimbiri, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio, USA, **and Joel R. Malin**, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio, USA. **Meritocracy: A Remedy to Addressing Social Injustices in Selecting Students to Public Higher Education in Malawi?**

This essay examines the merit-based policy of selecting students for public higher education in Malawi and investigates if a meritocratic process can act as a remedy to ameliorate social injustices. The essay argues that the merit-based policy is very likely to perpetuate rather than ameliorate social injustices in education in Malawi, especially for students from under-resourced schools.

JCIHE Support

I want to thank several individuals who remain instrumental in the publication of this issue. First, I want to thank the chair of the CIES HE-SIG, Maia Chankseliani, University of Oxford for guidance and leadership to the journal. Second, I want to thank the JCIHE Senior Associate Editor, Hayes Tang, University of Hong Kong and Senior Board Consultant Bernhard Streitwieser, George Washington University who have been supporting the journal with their insight and creativity. Third, I want to thank Chris Glass, Boston College who oversees the OJED system that enables the publication of JCIHE issues.

The running of the journal could not be conducted without my extraordinary team. This includes Associate Editor, Yovana Parmeswaree Soobrayen Veerasamy, Stony Brook University, Assistant to the Editor, Hannah (Minghui) Hou, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, Book Review Editor, Radomir Ray Mitic, University of North Dakota, Social Media Director, Peter G. Ghazarian, Ashland University, Communications Editor, Angel Oi Yee Cheng, American International University, Kuwait, Webinar Manager, Andrea Lane, South Africa, and Copy-Editor Manager, Mohammadali Dabiri, University of Missouri- Columbia, MO, USA

Finally, the timely publication of the issue is dependent on the expert management of the journal by the JCIHE Production team who I also want to extend my sincere thanks for their dedication and commitment in the timely production of each issue, including this one. Production Editors: Hannah (Minghui) Hou, Marisa Lally, Kyunghee Ma, Adeline De

Angelis, Son (Harrison) Pham. Production Assistant Editors: Zhongyu (Krystal) Wang, Nadia Di Martino, Thomas Crown, Lea Simek, Juliana Sofía Riaño Sánchez, Sofia Ali, Katie Bell.

Finally, 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 this issue. Thank you for the time you give to making sure that the articles are copy-edited and publish ready.

Vol. 15, Issue 4, 2023: Peer Reviewers: Samar Abid, Bhuwan S. Bhatta, Andrea Custodi, Barry Holmes, Bessie Karras-Lazaris, Bharat Prasad Neupane, Maylia Pramono Sari, Dr. Sarah Schiffecker, Laura Vaughn.

It is important to note that JCIHE serves as a place to share new thinking on analysis, theory, policy, and practice, and to encourage reflective and critical thinking on issues that influence comparative and international higher education. The issue, Issue 4 achieves this by bringing together voices from throughout the world to showcase worldwide scholarship. The articles in this issue reflect author diversity, subject diversity, and high levels of analytic scholarship.

Editor in Chief, Rosalind Latiner Raby
September 2023

Empirical Article

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Investigating Factors Affecting International Students' Academic Performance in Higher Education in the United States

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This article was not written with the assistance of any Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology, including ChatGPT" or other support technologies.

Abstract

Although international students represent around 5% of the higher education population in the United States, research on psychological factors that result in this segment's academic success remains limited. This study sought to help fill this knowledge gap by exploring success factors that affect international students' academic progress. Specifically, we examined psychological characteristics and learning strategies influencing these students' achievement. Quantitative data were collected from 85 international students in the United States. Using a survey grounded in positive psychology and learning theories, we studied correlations between their character strengths, learning strategies, and academic performance. A linear regression model was used to determine the predictability of these students' academic performance. Character strength variables correlated with academic performance and learning strategies. In addition, learning strategies correlated positively with academic performance. Multiple regression analysis revealed that both character strengths and learning strategies predicted academic performance whereas demographics did not.

Keywords**:** academic performance, character strengths, international students, learning strategies, perseverance, positive psychology, self-regulation

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Factors Affecting International Students' Academic Performance in Higher Education in the United States

Roughly one million international students have enrolled in American higher education institutions annually since 2010 (Institute of International Education, 2021). Overall, these students have constituted around 5% of the higher education population over the past decade (Institute of International Education, 2019, 2021). The quality of education, job opportunities, and professional development in the United States (US) motivate students from around the world to continue their education in this country. Yet alongside appealing aspects of their journeys, international students encounter

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social and psychological difficulties that influence their learning and career (He & Hutson, 2018; In, 2016; Jackson et al., 2013; Lowinger et al., 2014; Poyrazli & Isaiah, 2018; Wang et al., 2018). This study was an attempt to realize how international students can overcome these challenges according to the character strengths model developed by Peterson and Seligman (2004) and learning strategies proposed by Pintrich et al. (1991). Thus, we selected four strengths from Peterson and Seligman's (2004) character strengths model that were relevant to our study and other scholars previously determined their impact on academic success of international students: love of learning, self-regulation, perseverance, and social intelligence (Jackson et al., 2013; Liao et al., 2012; Mamiseishvili, 2012; Poyrazli & Isaiah, 2018). Also, we extracted the components from learning strategies proposed by Pintrich et al. (1991) in their strategies for learning questionnaire (Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire; MSLQ).

Prominent scholars previously identified character strengths and learning strategies affecting academic performance of students. For instance, Duckworth (2016) researched how students persisted passionately on achieving their goals and concluded that gritty students have higher levels of perseverance; they make a considerable amount of effort to achieve their goals and spend more time on their assignments at home and outside of the classroom. Peterson and Seligman (2004) defined self-regulation as "…how a person exerts control over his or her own responses so as to pursue goals and live up to standards" (p. 500) and realized students with high self-regulation might get better grades. Another character strength we studied was social intelligence; this strength is defined as "…the ability to understand people and effectively relate to them" (American Psychological Association, 2020, Social Intelligence section). Although social intelligence plays an important role in academic success of students, this strength is studied less than other strengths such as self-regulation and perseverance in educational institutions.

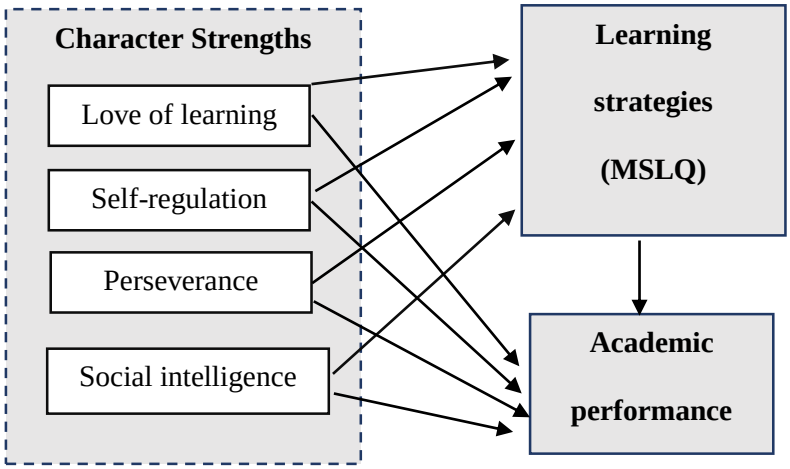
The purpose of this quantitative survey research was to explore the relationship between character strengths variables (love of learning, self-regulation, perseverance, and social intelligence) derived from Peterson and Seligman (2004), learning strategies derived from the MSLQ (Pintrich et al., 1991), and academic performance of international students in the US. Additionally, the study examined the linear relationship between mentioned variables and academic performance when accounting for the demographic background of international students.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework guiding this effort is depicted in Figure 1, illustrating relationships between the variables of interest. We hypothesized that the chosen character strengths (love of learning, self-regulation, perseverance, and social intelligence) would correlate with international students' learning strategies and academic performance. Learning strategies were also expected to correlate with academic performance.

Figure 1

Theoretical Framework



Research Questions and Hypotheses

In the present study, we conducted a quantitative survey with a sample of international students in the US to clarify the relationships between (a) relevant character strength variables derived from Peterson and Seligman's (2004) model, (b) learning strategies, and (c) academic performance. Our work was underpinned by the following research questions:

RQ1: Does any relationship exist between character strengths and academic performance?

RQ2: Does any relationship exist between character strengths and learning strategies?

RQ3: Does any relationship exist between learning strategies and academic performance?

RQ4: Does a linear relationship exist between academic performance, learning strategies, and character strengths when accounting for demographic factors?

We formulated the following hypotheses for this study:

H1: Correlations exist between international students' character strengths and academic performance.

H2: Correlations exist between international students' character strengths and learning strategies.

H3: Correlations exist between international students' learning strategies and academic performance.

H4: A linear relationship exists between international students' academic performance, learning strategies, and character strengths when accounting for demographic factors.

Literature Review

International students' character strengths are integral to their scholastic and career accomplishments (He & Hutson, 2018; Liao et al., 2012; Muenks et al., 2017; Seligman, 2011). Love of learning, self-regulation, perseverance, and social intelligence are among the strengths thought to most heavily influence international students' learning, achievement, and academic performance.

Love of Learning

Students' positive feelings toward learning are associated with psychological constructs such as love of learning (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017), self-regulated learning (Bandura, 1997; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1998), flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991), and well-developed interest (Hidi & Renninger, 2019). A love of learning facilitates students' pursuit of academic goals (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Schunk, 2012; Zull, 2002, 2006).

Zull (2002) emphasized the role of emotions in learning, claiming that "Our emotions still seem very important, and if we want to help people learn, we must expect to encounter emotion, and we must take it seriously" (p. 52). Research suggests that students who experience positive emotions during the learning process are more engaged in their academic tasks than other students (Alt, 2015; Ciarrochi et al., 2016; Cohn & Fredrickson, 2012; Dismore et al., 2018; In, 2016; Rowe et al., 2015).

Self-Regulation

Although most of the research on self-regulation is conducted in clinical and experimental settings, recently researchers studied educational institutions to see how self-regulation helps students monitor their learning through goal setting, planning, organizing, and evaluation (Schunk, 2012). Students who set goals for academic activities and assess their progress according to these standards are self-regulated: They pursue their goals through effort. Self-regulation is like a muscle that becomes stronger with more exercise, thus instructors who give some degree of autonomy to their students will help them to develop this strength and become self-regulated learners (McCarthy, 2015; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Ryan & Deci, 2017; Schunk, 2012). For instance, some instructors may allow students to select a project topic rather than assigning predetermined choices, thus students have the opportunity to think, plan, assess their interests, select a topic, and become self-regulated learners. Similarly, self-regulation influences students' academic performance through goal setting, which in turn facilitates learning (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Sommet & Elliot, 2017). As an example, students who study abroad set goals to improve their foreign language skills, deploy more complicated learning strategies, and engage in deep learning when they have more agency over their learning (Sommet & Elliot, 2017).

Perseverance

Gritty students navigate their academic careers partly by overcoming setbacks (Duckworth, 2016; Liao et al., 2012; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). In the US, international students often struggle to persevere more than domestic students; the former group may encounter an array of psychological and social obstacles such as homesickness, cultural barriers, and social anxiety (Jackson et al., 2013; Lowinger et al., 2014). Even so, Liao et al. (2012) discovered that many international students persevere in the US higher education system and continue their careers.

Several variables correlate with academic performance. However, perseverance has been identified as the best predictor of such performance among multiple influencing factors (e.g., self-regulation, self-efficacy, goal setting, and learning strategies) (Liao et al., 2012; Muenks et al., 2017; Wolters & Hussain, 2015). Muenks et al. (2017) performed a regression analysis and demonstrated that perseverance forecasts international students' academic performance. Additionally, grittier students have been found to earn higher grade point averages (GPAs) than students with less endurance (Mamiseishvili, 2012).

Social Intelligence

Bandura (1997) noted the importance of the relationship between students and their social environment in his social cognitive theory. Students learn from peers, teachers, and parents; they should be able to interact with the people around them and cultivate meaningful relationships in an academic setting. Social intelligence and social skills enable students to use their environment to realize academic goals (Gulliford et al., 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Seligman, 2011). Although international students frequently face social barriers (e.g., in terms of language, cultural adjustment, and social anxiety), their social skills can improve given adequate effort, self-efficacy, and social support (Jackson et al., 2013; Pajares, 2008; Slantcheva-Durst & Knaggs, 2019).

Learning Strategies

Students apply diverse cognitive, metacognitive, and motivational strategies to learn academically (Schunk, 2012). Students who employ cognitive strategies such as rehearsal, elaboration, and organization perform better on their final exams than classmates who do not know about these strategies (Warr & Downing, 2000). Students generally rely on metacognitive strategies such as goal setting, time management, planning, and emotional control to meet scholastic goals (Hofer et al., 1998; Pintrich et al., 1991). The use of learning strategies to accomplish academic objectives has also been observed among international students in particular (Lee & Durksen, 2018).

Academic Performance

Scholars have explored elements that mold students' academic performance. Aspects of interest include self-efficacy (Fonteyne et al., 2017; Schunk, 2012; Zimmerman et al., 1992), self-regulated learning strategies (Lucieer et al., 2016; Schunk, 2012; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1998), student–faculty communication (Poyrazli & Isaiah, 2018), and feedback (Brown et al., 2016). Factors affecting international students' achievement have also garnered attention. Self-regulation (Asikainen et al., 2018; Hofer et al., 1998; Lucieer et al., 2016; Thibodeaux et al., 2016), love of learning (Alt, 2015; Ciarrochi et al., 2016), social intelligence (Jackson et al., 2013; Slantcheva-Durst & Knaggs, 2019), and perseverance have been deemed critical (Liao et al., 2012; Lowinger et al., 2014; Mamiseishvili, 2012).

Methodology

This study answered the research questions through a quantitative survey design. We examined the relationships between independent variables (character strengths, learning strategies, and demographic background) and dependent variable (academic performance) through developing a survey according to available standardized questionnaire (see Appendix). Our study was a cross-sectional design and we collected data at one point in time through the Qualtrics platform. Then we explored the collected data through correlation and regression data analysis with SPSS to examine the hypotheses of the study.

Respondents

We used convenience sampling together with snowball sampling to recruit international students in the US after determining an appropriate sample size. To verify the sample size, we applied Field's (2009) calculation and considered the desired statistical power of 0.80 with a medium effect size of $r = 0.30$ at a standard alpha level (0.05); thus we indicated that 85 would be a sufficient sample size for our study. Of the 85 respondents, 43 were male (50.6%) and 42 were female (49.4%). Most were between the ages of 18 and 24 (41.2%) or 35–44 (9.4%). Respondents identified as White (47.1%), Asian (28.2%), Black (10.6%), and Other (14.1%). They were enrolled in bachelor's (47.1%), master's (42.4%), or doctoral (10.6%) programs in the US at the time of data collection.

Procedures

After receiving the University's Institutional Review Board approval, we posted flyers on social media platforms such as LinkedIn and Facebook to recruit international students. Respondents could click on the Qualtrics link provided on the flyer and fill out the survey online. All participants in this study received an invitation to participate voluntarily and a consent form positioned at the beginning of the Qualtrics survey. Once surveys were completed, all data were downloaded as an encrypted file from Qualtrics for subsequent analysis via SPSS.

Instruments

The survey consisted of four sections (see Appendix). The first section contained demographic questions soliciting respondents' age, gender, race, ethnicity, country of origin, educational level, educational program, and university or college they were attending. The second section included items from VIA-120 (VIA Institute on Character, 2017), scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *does not describe me*, to 5 = *describes me extremely well*). These items measured four variables related to character strengths: love of learning, social intelligence, self-regulation, and perseverance (Peterson & Seligman,

2004). Each variable in this section was assessed using five items, such as "I am thrilled when I learn something new." (love of learning), "I am a highly disciplined person." (self-regulation), "I know how to handle myself in different social situations." (social intelligence), and "I never quit a task before it is done." (perseverance). The third survey section featured 28 items adapted from the MSLQ (Pintrich et al., 1991); items were scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *never* to 5 = *always*) to evaluate respondents' learning strategies (e.g., "When reading for courses, I make up questions to help focus my reading."; "I ask the instructor to clarify concepts I don't understand well."; "I try to identify students whom I can ask for help if necessary."). Finally, academic performance was assessed via a self-report measure consisting of six items scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *poor,* to 5 = *excellent*; e.g., "Usually, how do you perform in your exams, quizzes, and other class assessments?").

Data Analysis

Survey data were analyzed based on our four hypotheses using correlational analysis and multiple regression. We employed the non-parametric method of Spearman's correlation because the variables did not follow a normal distribution. Multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the probability of predicting academic performance through character strengths and learning strategies while accounting for students' demographics. The two independent variables were character strengths and learning strategies; academic performance served as the dependent variable.

Results

Table 1 lists descriptive statistics and Cronbach's alpha values for the study scales. All alpha values were greater than 0.70, indicating acceptable internal consistency (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Regarding the normal distribution of scores, Table 1 shows that all scales except for self-regulation displayed negative skewness. Therefore, during hypothesis testing, we used Spearman's correlation coefficient to identify correlations between variables.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, Cronbach's Alpha Values of Scales

Scale	*M*	*SD*	α	Skewness	Kurtosis
Social Intelligence	18.55	3.96	0.84	-0.56	0.14
Love of Learning	19.46	3.97	0.79	-0.63	-0.57
Self-Regulation	17.38	4.32	0.77	-0.05	-0.71
Perseverance	19.87	3.95	0.87	-0.71	0.19
Learning Strategies	109.80	17.98	0.95	-0.53	0.14
Academic Performance	26.69	3.18	0.86	-1.00	0.68

Correlational Analysis

As listed in Table 2, the character strength scores (social intelligence, love of learning, self-regulation, and perseverance) each exhibited a significant ($p < .01$) correlation with learning strategies (i.e., as per MSLQ items) and academic performance. Respondents' character strengths were therefore correlated with their learning strategies and academic performance. A significant ($p < .01$) correlation also existed between respondents' learning strategies and academic performance.

Table 2

Spearman's Correlations

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Social Intelligence	-					
2. Love of Learning	0.58**	-				
3. Self-Regulation	0.56**	0.48**	-			
4. Perseverance	0.60**	0.61**	0.61**	-		
5. Learning Strategies	0.50**	0.56**	0.46**	0.58**	-	
6. Academic Performance	0.42**	0.48**	0.38**	0.57**	0.57**	-

Note. $^{**}p < .01$.

Multiple Regression Analysis

The following linear model was applied in this study:

$$Academic\ Performance = b_0 + b_1 Age + b_2 Gender + b_3 Race + b_4 Edu\ Level + b_5 Lear\ Strg + b_6 Chr\ Str + \varepsilon_i$$

Table 3 summarizes the multiple regression results from SPSS. The linear coefficient of learning strategies was significant at $p < 0.05$, and the coefficient of character strengths was significant at $p < 0.01$. None of the demographic

variables had significant coefficients at $p < 0.05$. Thus, international students with high scores on self-regulation, perseverance, social intelligence, and love of learning who also scored high on learning strategies demonstrated strong scores on academic performance. Demographic variables such as age, gender, race, and educational level did not predict academic performance according to our multiple regression model.

Table 3

Multiple Regression Analysis for Predicting Academic Performance

Variable	*B*	β	*SE*	*p*
Constant	11.67		2.56	0.00
Age	-0.51	-0.18	0.34	0.14
Gender	1.01	0.16	0.62	0.10
Race	0.13	0.05	0.26	0.62
Educational Level	0.58	0.12	0.49	0.24
Learning Strategies	0.04	0.25	0.02	0.03
Character Strengths	0.11	0.47	0.03	0.00

Discussion

This quantitative study was intended to uncover relationships between several attributes of international students in the US: 1) certain character strength variables (social intelligence, love of learning, self-regulation, and perseverance) from Peterson and Seligman's (2004) character strengths model; 2) learning strategies, as derived from Pintrich et al.'s (1991) MSLQ; and 3) academic performance.

Relationships Among Character Strengths and Learning Strategies

Character strengths and learning strategies were positively correlated. Results also revealed a significant positive correlation between love of learning and learning strategies. In other words, international students who scored higher on love of learning used more complex strategies to achieve their academic goals. This correlation is likely attributable to intrinsic motivation, interest, and positive emotions—international students who experience positive emotions about learning adopt more useful learning strategies than students with negative feelings toward learning. This positive correlation has further been substantiated in relation to international students' cognitive and social capabilities (Cohn & Fredrickson, 2012; Rowe et al., 2015).

We also found a positive correlation between self-regulation and learning strategies: Respondents who scored higher on self-regulation scored higher on learning strategies. Findings from positive psychology indicate that students' self-regulation is pivotal to their use of learning strategies and, by extension, their academic performance (Asikainen et al., 2018; Bernardo et al., 2019; Bruso & Stefaniak, 2016; Kickert et al., 2019; Lucieer et al., 2016; Thibodeaux et al., 2016; Wilson & Narayan, 2016).

Perseverance and learning strategies were positively correlated as well: Students who deployed suitable strategies persisted in achieving their academic goals. Earlier work provided clear evidence of this relationship (Mason, 2018; Muenks et al., 2017; Shi, 2018; Wolters & Hussain, 2015). For instance, Muenks et al. (2017) noted a positive correlation between self-control and perseverance. Shi (2018) pointed out that students who use self-regulatory learning strategies proceeded to accomplish their academic goals. Relatedly, Wolters and Hussain (2015) demonstrated that students who adopt appropriate learning strategies endure in academic tasks.

Moreover, a positive correlation emerged between social intelligence and learning strategies. Previous studies also confirm this positive correlation through help-seeking behavior which is one of the learning strategies used by self-regulated learners (Bembenutty, 2016; Hofer et al., 1998). Although there is little research on the relationship between social intelligence and help seeking, in our study we found that students who scored high in social intelligence scored high in learning strategies. This positive correlation might occur because these students typically establish meaningful relationships with professors, administrators, and peers; thus, they seek help from them in their academic challenges.

Relationship Between Learning Strategies and Academic Performance

We identified a positive correlation between learning strategies and academic performance. Specifically, respondents who scored higher on learning strategies scored higher on academic performance. This finding echoes prior work concerning the effectiveness of international students' learning strategies (Bruso & Stefaniak, 2016; Kickert et al., 2019; Shi, 2018).

Relationships Between Character Strengths and Academic Performance

Character strengths, including love of learning, self-regulation, perseverance, and social intelligence, were found to correlate with academic performance. Consistent with other studies (Bruso & Stefaniak, 2016; Isik et al., 2018; Liao et al., 2012), we unveiled a positive correlation between love of learning and academic performance. Isik et al. (2018) similarly observed a positive correlation between international students' intrinsic motivation and academic performance.

The identified positive correlation between international students' self-regulation and academic performance mirrors previous research (Poyrazli & Isaiah, 2018; Shi, 2018). For example, Poyrazli and Isaiah (2018) discovered that international students who use metacognitive strategies can raise their GPAs. These strategies entailed numerous self-regulatory methods such as planning, goal setting, and time management. The authors also noticed that students who applied these strategies were more academically successful than those who did not.

A positive correlation manifested between perseverance and academic performance. This pattern coincides with the finding that students with greater perseverance earn higher GPAs than students with less stamina (Mamiseishvili, 2012). Likewise, perseverance is a strong predictor of high GPAs among international students in the US. These students can regulate their learning, adapt to the culture, and increase their academic performance thanks to grit. In a study of European countries, Bernardo et al. (2019) studied the impacts of learning strategies and self-regulated learning on students' perseverance. Students who used self-regulated learning strategies persisted more than others in their academic careers; these students set goals and continued to achieve them. In general, students' perseverance is essential to their academic performance. Students with more grit are more apt than other students to graduate from post-secondary institutions (Duckworth, 2016).

We also found a positive correlation between social intelligence and academic performance, supporting studies indicating that students with higher social intelligence developed meaningful relationships with their classmates, professors, and educational leaders. These students could therefore accomplish their academic goals with stronger motivation (Gulliford et al., 2019; Jackson et al., 2013; Zautra et al., 2015). Such students have been found to enjoy better academic performance and to maneuver within their social context more effectively than others. Social intelligence is particularly important for international students who hail from a different culture; more energy must therefore be devoted to developing a social network in the US. International students who forge impactful relationships in their social environment can also continue the learning process until they achieve acceptable results (In, 2016).

Predictability of Academic Performance

Although multiple regression analysis did not support the predictive nature of demographic variables, findings revealed that character strengths and learning strategies can partially forecast academic performance. International students who use appropriate learning strategies and develop their character strengths should therefore be academically successful in the US. The multiple regression analysis provided compelling evidence that educational leaders in the US should create learning programs to enable international students to develop their character strengths while familiarizing these students with appropriate learning strategies (e.g., cognitive and metacognitive techniques).

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Several limitations of this study open avenues for future work. Our main limitation concerns the sampling strategy. Robust quantitative research calls for random sampling, such that all members of the population have an equal chance of being selected. Researchers must therefore have access to the population of interest (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Field, 2009). We used convenience sampling because we could not reach all international students in the US. Our sample might not be representative of the population, tempering the generalizability of our findings. Another limitation involves the sample size: Although we used a suitable statistical method to determine size, larger samples allow for more accurate results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). We relied on the computed sample size due to the time and financial constraints associated with recruiting large samples. Future studies should feature more participants to draw more robust conclusions.

Our research design also led to limitations. Again, because of time and budget restrictions, we used a cross-sectional survey to study relationships between variables. However, causality cannot be determined via this approach. To identify potential cause-and-effect relationships between international students' character strengths, learning strategies, and academic performance, a more comprehensive design (e.g., experimentation) is required (Field, 2009). The second limitation in this regard involves international students' living experiences. Our method did not reveal how international students applied learning strategies to achieve their academic goals. Findings also did not provide sufficient information about the quality of character strengths influencing these students' academic performance. A mixed method could offer a clearer sense of international students' living experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Conclusion

Our study can aid scholars and practitioners in the US in facilitating international students' learning paths. We unearthed positive relationships between character strengths, learning strategies, and academic performance. This evidence can guide educational leaders in crafting programs that foster international students' educational development. Associated curricula and resources can also help these students become self-regulated learners.

Our findings will further enable educators and institutional leaders to evaluate international students' academic performance on the bases of students' character strengths and learning strategies. Additionally, these results could help international offices in universities to implement interventions that nurture students' self-regulation, perseverance, social intelligence, and love of learning. This study also carries implications for the design and implementation of supports that influence international students' learning strategies to enhance academic achievement. Educational leaders can tailor students' experiences accordingly. For example, the identified correlation between social intelligence and academic performance indicates the need for non-curricular opportunities that can in turn shape international students' accomplishments. The documented correlation between perseverance and academic performance implies that higher education institutions' resources should stress perseverance. International students' social intelligence can be cultivated through meaningful socialization (e.g., with peers). These students could even mentor non-international students in effective learning strategies and academic success; their social networks and activities would expand in kind.

Researchers who wish to study international students' academic performance should consider the relationship between educational character strengths, learning strategies, and academic success. Either longitudinal or experimental designs can be employed to investigate the causal relationships between these variables. Scholars should also qualitatively explore international students' academic careers in the US. Data describing participants' lived experiences may provide a more vivid picture of observed correlations.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire

Demographic Background

1) How old are you?
2) What gender do you have?
3) What is your country of origin?
4) Please indicate your race.
5) What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed?
6) What educational level you are currently attending in the United States?

Educational Character Strength

Social Intelligence

7) I know how to handle myself in different social situations.
8) No matter what the situation, I am able to fit in.
9) I have the ability to make other people feel interesting.
10) I am good at sensing what other people are feeling.

11) I always know what to say to make people feel good.

Love of Learning

12) I am thrilled when I learn something new.
13) I am a true life-long learner.
14) I read all of the time.
15) I read a huge variety of books.
16) I love to read nonfiction books for fun.

Self-regulation

17) I have no trouble eating healthy foods.
18) Even when candy or cookies are under my nose, I never overeat.
19) I am a highly disciplined person.
20) I never want things that are bad for me in the long run, even if they make me feel good in the short run.
21) I can always stay on a diet.

Perseverance

22) I never quit a task before it is done.
23) I always finish what I start.
24) I finish things despite obstacles in the way.
25) I do not give up.
26) I stick with whatever I decide to do.

Learning Strategies

27) When I study the readings for courses, I outline the material to help me organize my thoughts.
28) When studying for courses, I try to explain the material to a classmate or friend.
29) I study in a place where I can concentrate on my course work.
30) When reading for courses, I make up questions to help focus my reading.
31) When I study for classes, I practice saying the material to myself over and over.
32) Even if I have trouble learning the material in the class, I try to do the work on my own, without help from anyone.
33) When I become confused about something I'm reading, I go back and try to figure it out.
34) When I study for courses, I go through the readings and my class notes and try to find the most important ideas.
35) I make good use of my study time.
36) I try to work with other students to complete class assignments.
37) When a theory, interpretation, or conclusion is presented in a class or in the readings, I try to decide if there is good supporting evidence.
38) I make simple charts, diagrams, or tables to help me organize course material.
39) When studying for my academic courses, I set aside time to discuss course material with a group of students from the class.
40) When I study for a class, I pull together information from different sources, such as lectures, readings, and discussions.
41) Before I study new course material thoroughly, I skim it to see how it is organized.
42) I ask myself questions to make sure I understand the material I have been studying.
43) I ask the instructor to clarify concepts I don't understand well.
44) I memorize key words to remind me of important concepts.
45) I try to think through a topic and decide what I am supposed to learn from it rather than just reading it over when studying.
46) I try to relate ideas in an academic subject to those in other courses.
47) When reading for a class, I try to relate the material to what I already know.
48) I try to play around with ideas of my own related to what I am learning.
49) When I study for a course, I write brief summaries of the main ideas from the readings and my class notes.
50) I try to understand the material in the class by making connections between the readings and the concepts from the lectures.
51) I make lists of important items for a course and memorize the lists.

52) I try to identify students whom I can ask for help if necessary.
53) When I study for a class, I set goals for myself in order to direct my activities in each study period.
54) I try to apply ideas from course readings in other class activities such as lecture and discussion.

Academic Performance

55) Your overall GPA is about: (1 = "*0.00 – 0.40"* , 2 = "*0.50 – 1.40"* , 3 = "*1.50 – 2.40"* , 4 = "*2.50 – 3.40"* , 5 = "*3.50 – 4.00"*)
56) Which of the following shows your academic performance in comparison with the class average? (1 = *Far Below Average* … 5 = *Far Above Average*)
57) Usually, how do you perform in your exams, quizzes, and other class assessments? (1 = *Poor* … 5 = *Excellent*)
58) Which one shows your most repeated grade in courses? (1 = *F* … 5 = *A*)
59) How do you perform in your class assignments? (1 = *Extremely Bad* … 5 = *Extremely Good*)

When your classmates evaluate your assignment, usually the result is: (1 = *Poor* … 5 = *Excellent*)

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The Nature of Bullying in Higher Education: A Comparative Study of Students' Experiences in Ghana and Norway

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was twofold: (a) to identify the negative behaviors that constitute bullying in higher education as reported by students, and (b) to explore differences in student experiences in two markedly different national contexts. A sample of 1,189 respondents from two universities in Ghana (n = 751) and two universities in Norway (n = 438) answered the same questionnaire. Approximately 40% of the Ghanaian students and 20% of the Norwegian students responded that they had been bullied. Although less frequently observed than in Ghana, relational forms of bullying (e.g., being excluded) were more prevalent in Norway compared to other behaviors. In contrast, direct and verbal forms of bullying, such as name-calling and being taunted, were most common in Ghana. The findings provide insights into cultural and national variations with respect to negative social

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behaviors related to bullying in the context of higher education.

Keywords: bullying, Ghana, higher education, negative behaviors, Norway

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Introduction

Human variation can be seen in all aspects of life, from social class, gender, physical characteristics, race, religion, sexual orientation, and so on. These differences are sometimes linked to differences in power dynamics, where some individuals or groups perceive themselves as superior to others, and those with less power are often mistreated. In the course of research and prevention efforts in both schools and other social contexts, this phenomenon has become known as "bullying."

Although the definition of bullying varies in the literature, there is a large degree of agreement with respect to the central tenets of the phenomenon. It comprises a situation in which the target or targets find it difficult to defend themselves from a superior or stronger perpetrator who repeatedly misuses their power to harass and cause them harm (Einarsen, 2005). Bullying is not about random aggression or intimidation, arguments, disagreements, or fights between equals. However, according to Olweus (1993), in extreme cases, a single instance of intimidation and unfair treatment may have long-lasting effects on the victim. Bullying can include a range of aggressive behaviors, either directly (e.g., threats, kicking, name-calling, and hitting) or indirectly (e.g., excluding, ignoring, and spreading rumors) (Cowie & Myers, 2016).

Literature Review

Bullying research has largely focused on children and adolescents. While studies of bullying in higher education are limited, emerging evidence suggests that it is a significant challenge faced by many universities around the world (e.g., Gómez-Galán et al., 2021; Pörhölä et al., 2020). Yet, several authors have observed that bullying takes on subtler forms in higher education than it does in compulsory schools (Chun & Feagin, 2020; Hodgins & Mannix-Mcnamara, 2021; Rayner & Hoel, 1997; Rayner et al., 2002). For example, Cowie and Myers (2016) report that bullying after adolescence includes spreading spiteful, mean, and malicious rumors about personal characteristics such as religion, race, gender, or sexual orientation. Other bullying behaviors among adults include social exclusion, mocking or humiliation, unwelcome sexual advances, threatening others, stalking, and violations of privacy (Einarsen et al., 2011).

Universities are workplaces too, and many of the challenges related to bullying and harassment in such settings also occur in higher education (Smith &

Coel, 2018). University leadership, staff, and administrators may lack cultural sensitivity or make unwarranted criticisms and demeaning comments (Twale & De Luca, 2008). Heffernan and Bosetti (2021) studied a university workplace and found that bullying among university faculty manifests subtly, including derogatory comments, intentional misinterpretation of instructions, and rumor spreading. In a recent study of bullying among students at 17 universities in the United Kingdom, Harrison et al. (2020) found that bullying takes the form of active exclusion from group projects; rumor spreading or ostracism; racist, sexist, and homophobic comments; unwanted sexual remarks and groping; and efforts to degrade the status of others.

In one of the few cross-national studies in the literature, Pörhölä et al. (2020) investigated bullying in higher education among students and personnel in Argentina, Estonia, Finland, and the United States of America. The findings revealed considerable differences in the prevalence and forms of bullying across the countries, with rates of victimization varying from a low of 2% in Estonia to a high of 25% in Argentina. Students' bullying of their colleagues at least occasionally occurred, with the highest rate in Argentina (5.5%), followed by the USA (3.5%), Finland (2.3%), and Estonia (1.7%). At the same time, denigration of academic performance was identified as the most frequently reported form of bullying in all four countries.

With respect to the current study, evidence of bullying in higher education in Norway and Ghana is sparse, particularly for the latter. In Norway, Sivertsen, Nielsen, et al. (2019) collected data from over 50,000 participants, comprising 69.1% of women and 30.9% of men between 18 and 35 years of age, in a national student health survey. They found that 24% and 17% reported incidents of sexual harassment within their lifetimes and within the past year, respectively. Sexual harassment occurred in the form of suggestive sexual comments about the body, sexual expression, and unwelcome hugging, touching, and kissing, with fellow students being the most prolific perpetrators (18%–29% of the cases) and university staff being culprits in 0.6%–4.6% of the cases. Lund (2017) surveyed 3,254 university students in Norway and found that 9% of the participants experienced acts of exclusion, such as being ignored or purposefully left out of group activities.

In Ghana, Sam et al. (2019) studied cyberbullying among high school and university students and found that 83% of the 476 university students (i.e., 221 male and 255 female students) who participated in the study had received "nasty text messages" at least once in the past six months. As many as 96.4% of male and female students experience cyberbullying at least once in their studies.

To the best of our knowledge, no previous studies have focused exclusively on bullying in higher education in Ghana. However, Chan et al. (2020)

studied stalking among 371 university students (i.e., 188 females and 183 males of an average age of 24.09 years) in Ghana. They found that over half of the participants reported having experienced such behavior, most frequently in the form of death threats, vandalism to property and criminal damage, verbal abuse, and unwanted communication.

Types of Bullying

Given this varied background, bullying in higher education reflects both person-related and work-related acts (see Einarsen et al., 2009), including physical, verbal, and relational bullying (e.g., Sinkkonen et al., 2014), sexual harassment (e.g., Bondestam & Lundqvist, 2020; Fitzgerald et al., 1988; Karami et al., 2020), and cyberbullying (e.g., Akbulut & Eristi, 2011; Vismara et al., 2022).

Generally, "person-related bullying" refers to acts directed at a victim. Verbal forms of bullying include audible acts like cursing, yelling, name-calling, degrading comments, unwanted communication, and other similar behaviors (see Pörhölä et al., 2020; Salmivalli et al., 2000). Physical acts may include punching or shoving, hitting, kicking, and vandalism to property (Pontzer, 2010).

Person-related bullying also takes indirect forms like social isolation (such as physically cutting off communication or excluding a person from social events), information manipulation (i.e., delaying the time a piece of information takes to get to a target) (see Escartín et al., 2011), backstabbing, rumor spreading, and gossiping (Einarsen et al., 2009; Van der Wal et al., 2003).

Some bullying is sexually oriented, which is termed "sexual harassment." These may include unwanted sexual remarks, groping, and pulling off clothing (see Harrison et al., 2020; Pörhölä et al., 2020). Sexual harassment occurs in various ways, as outlined in our results, and may cover domains like gender harassment, sexual coercion, seductive behavior, sexual bribery, and sexual imposition or assault (see Till, 1980).

Indirect acts of bullying may target the victims through their work and are termed "work-related bullying." These may include constant criticism or undermining of work performance, overloading a victim with work, intimidation concerning professional standing, or confusing the victim (see Rayner & Hoel, 1997). Other acts of work-related bullying are in our results.

With the advent of innovative technologies, bullying manifests by electronic or digital means and is termed "cyberbullying." Cyberbullying involves deliberately hurting someone by using a cell phone or computer to text or transmit harmful messages or images. It may include emails or instant messages, posting messages in chat rooms and on social networks, such as Facebook and YouTube, and discussion rooms that repeatedly target the victim(s) (Kyriacou & Zuin, 2016; Zalaquett & Chatters, 2014).

Perpetrators of Bullying

The formal and informal positions of people in the hierarchical structure of institutions or society contribute to determining who falls into the role of perpetrator. Superiority enhances bullying, so "stronger" individuals or groups mostly carry out bullying (Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Olweus, 2005). In the academic sector, power disparities may occur between many different groups. Bullying can occur between academic faculty, superiors, administrators, fellow students, colleagues, higher-level students, other university employees, or subordinate staff. In all these social classifications, those who, for one reason or another, are in a subservient position become victims of bullying.

Effects of Bullying

While research on the effects of bullying in higher education is limited, studies have demonstrated how workplace bullying has adverse effects on mental health and well-being for victims, bystanders, and their families (Boudrias et al., 2021; Rodríguez-Muñoz et al., 2017; Sarwar et al., 2021). As in other contexts, bullying in higher education can negatively affect academic performance (Nakamoto & Schwartz, 2010) and lead to more absenteeism and dropouts (Cornell et al., 2013). These effects are the outcomes of various emotional and social effects (i.e., upset or sadness, anger, aggression, lowered self-esteem, loneliness and embarrassment, social apprehension, isolation, and difficulty with concentration or learning) (Cowie & Myers, 2016).

Sources of Cross-national Variations in Bullying

With cross-national variations in the prevalence and types of bullying behavior cited above, we agree with Monks et al. (2009) that the acts that constitute bullying, how they are interpreted, and commitments to their prevention vary across regions. To fully understand bullying, one must look beyond individual behaviors and examine the societal and cultural dynamics and conditions in which they occur. Elements such as cultural predispositions, life conditions, attitudes toward bullying, and a community's moral values and expectations concerning social behaviors are all likely to influence students' experiences of bullying (Barratt-Pugh & Krestelica, 2019; Kyriacou et al., 2016; Salin et al., 2021).

A well-known framework for international comparisons of organizational culture was developed by Hofstede (1983) and emphasizes how national cultures vary in relation to differences in values that dominate people's lives and are passed on from generation to generation. Taking Hofstede's framework as a point of departure, bullying researchers have focused on examining societal differences with three primary dimensions: (a) power distance, (b) individualism versus collectivism, and (c) masculinity versus femininity (Ahmad et al., 2021), with power distance being most related to bullying.

Cultures that emphasize "high power distance" do not strongly frown upon the bullying of people in lower positions by their superiors (Vogel et al., 2015),

whereas “low power distance” societies are much more critical of inequality and the abuse of power (see Ahmad et al., 2021). Samnani and Singh (2012) argue that there is a greater risk of bullying in individualistic societies, in which power distances are high and the masculinity dimension dominates.

Given this evidence, there is a clear need for research to identify and compare the forms bullying takes in different societies to contribute to its prevention. Moreover, while studies on bullying in the workplace are informative, the knowledge base concerning bullying in higher education is lacking (Vveinhardt et al., 2020). Therefore, this study aimed to explore differences in student experiences of bullying in two markedly different cultures of higher education, namely Ghana and Norway.

Norway and Ghana as Cases

Citing Rayner et al. (2002), the egalitarianism of Scandinavian countries and their caring social values have placed this region at the forefront of efforts to increase awareness of bullying. Mikkelsen and Einarsen (2001) hypothesized that egalitarianism (i.e., low power distance), individualism, and “feminine” values in Scandinavian countries (like Norway) lead to low rates of bullying. For the individualism dimension, this perspective is somewhat contrary to that of Samnani and Singh (2012), who suggest that individualism is tied to competitive behavior and may lead to bullying and cite higher rates of bullying in the United States of America and the United Kingdom compared to Scandinavian countries. Nonetheless, this particular cultural dimension may have less impact than aspects of power and gender inequality.

In Ghana, studies suggest that gender inequality, socioeconomic disparities, and cultural norms associated with gender roles can create an atmosphere conducive to aggressive behavior and bullying. For example, a study by Leach (2003) on bullying in a sample of African countries, including Ghana, revealed that boys tend to bully girls and younger students. The authors concluded that such behavior reflects a cultural norm that endorses masculinity through male competition and sexual discrimination. Moreover, several studies (Adom et al., 2018; Anlesinya et al., 2019; Marbell, 2014) have referred to Ghana as having a collectivist, masculine, and high-power distance cultural predisposition. As noted above, these assertions are also consistent with the views of other authors, who speculate that masculinity is associated with power dominance and bullying (e.g., Ahmad et al., 2021; Samnani & Singh, 2012).

Policies and regulations to prevent bullying can be found in Norway and Ghana. In Norway, there are state laws for zero tolerance and the prevention of bullying and discrimination (Roland et al., 2010). The Norwegian Education Act (Ministry of Education and Research, 1998) mandates that school environments guarantee safety, health, and well-being. Offensive language, acts of bullying and

violence, discrimination, and racism based on ethnic differences, gender, sexual orientation, and religious or ideological beliefs are specifically forbidden, which we believe also applies to universities. The Ministry of Education also forbids harassment and sexual harassment in universities (Ministry of Education and Research, 2005). There are also procedures for reporting harassment in Norwegian universities (e.g., internet platforms and walk-in mental health services).

In contrast, Ghana has no specific national legislation to prevent bullying (Arhin et al., 2019). Sam et al. (2019) point out that exposure to bullying in Ghanaian secondary and tertiary schools is often considered a rite of passage. However, many Ghanaian universities have policies and provisions to inform and protect against bullying. These include websites, electronic billboards, and student handbooks, which provide general information about expected behavioral conduct, harassment protections, and avenues for redress. Nonetheless, these efforts are relatively new. For example, the first university to introduce a sexual harassment policy did so in 2007.

Differences in national wealth and living standards also make comparing these two countries worthwhile. According to the most recent statistics, the Human Development Index (United Nations Development Programme, 2020) shows that Norway ranks highest globally, whereas Ghana ranks 138th. Resource scarcity, which can create conditions that lead to bullying, is prevalent in Ghana. Economic differences also parallel the extent of research efforts in Ghana and Norway. Recent studies in Norway provide a picture of students' health and well-being in higher education (Sivertsen, Hysing, et al., 2019; Sivertsen, Nielsen, et al., 2019), whereas similar research along these lines is almost nonexistent in Ghana.

The current study represents an effort to remedy that deficit. In addition, these two markedly different national contexts can serve as valuable case studies for which comparative research can provide insight into how differences in national, institutional, cultural, and economic factors might influence both the occurrence of bullying and the understanding of what behaviors constitute bullying in higher education. Bronfenbrenner (1979)'s theory on the ecology of human development provides a window of insight into interpreting these phenomena.

Theoretical Framework

The Ecology of Human Development

Bronfenbrenner (1979) proposed that environmental systems, ranging from interpersonal interactions to the broader culture, influence a person's development. These systems are referred to as the "microsystem," "mesosystem," "exosystem," and "macrosystem" (p. 22). The microsystem embodies the roles, activities, and interpersonal relationships people experience in a particular setting, which influence their growth. The mesosystem describes settings within which a

person actively participates, such as school and peer groups, places of worship, social life, and work, thus making the mesosystem a system of microsystems.

The exosystem describes external sources of influence where the developing person may not be physically present, yet events within it can still affect an individual's development. Examples include educational systems, community structures, mass media, medical institutions, shopping centers, transportation systems, and the workplaces of parents or other significant relatives. A country's educational system and leadership at all levels determine how schools are managed, which invariably affects the individual. At the same time, what happens in the mass media may affect a person's perception of violence or their reactions to it (Anderson & Bushman, 2001).

The macrosystem is particularly significant to the current study because it influences consistencies in the content and form of the micro-, meso-, and exosystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) or shapes institutions and other social trends (Cross et al., 2015). The macrosystem comprises the cultural patterns, or "blueprints," political philosophies, economic policies, and social conditions that govern the lower microsystems and the entire social structure (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Thus, since political ideologies and laws reflect a nation's culture, they reinforce or endorse somewhat unconscious and concealed behaviors. For example, when state laws limit the rights of people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ), these individuals may be more likely to suffer discrimination, prejudice, and bullying on university campuses (Formby, 2017).

Purpose of the Study

The current study has two main objectives. First, it seeks to identify negative behaviors and bullying experiences reported by students in higher education. Second, we explore differences in the experiences of students in Ghana and Norway. Analyzing Norway's and Ghana's structures using the same method provides a comparative design (Bryman, 2012) and an opportunity to gain holistic knowledge (Esser & Vliegenthart, 2017) about bullying and related behaviors from an international and multicultural perspective, which few studies have considered to date (Lund & Ross, 2017). It also provides insights into how national, institutional, and cultural predispositions account for the prevalence and nature of bullying. To achieve these goals, we developed the following research questions to guide our investigation:

1. What are the most frequently experienced negative, bullying-related behaviors reported by students in universities in Norway and Ghana?
2. How do reports of negative behaviors and bullying among Ghanaian and Norwegian university students differ?
3. Who are perceived as the perpetrators of bullying in the two countries?

Methodology

This study applied a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design with an international comparative approach. Although multiple challenges arise in comparative research of this kind, the use of an identical, albeit translated, instrument can reduce the methodological error that occurs when comparing national databases or data previously collected for other purposes (Jowell, 1998).

Participants

The participants comprised students enrolled in bachelor's, master's, and PhD degree programs at two universities in Norway (n = 438) and two universities in Ghana (n = 751). Bachelor's degree students were selected from those in their final year of studies to ensure that they had sufficient exposure to the learning environment. First-year students had experienced less than six months of exposure to the university environment, typically considered the minimum when assigning a pervasiveness prerequisite for determining whether negative behavior constitutes bullying (Leymann, 1996). The demographic information of the participants is presented in Table 1.

The two samples differed in a number of ways that are noteworthy. First, female students were overrepresented in the Norwegian sample, whereas the genders were found to be roughly equivalent in terms of the Ghanaian participants. Second, while the distribution of age groups did not differ significantly, the students in the Ghanaian sample were more likely to have studied for a longer period of time at the universities where the data were collected. Finally, a larger proportion of Norwegian participants were enrolled in master's degree programs, whereas the Ghanaian sample was comprised almost entirely of students at the bachelor's degree level.

The study procedures and instrument were registered with the Norwegian Centre for Research Data to ensure that ethical standards were met. Given the sensitivity of the topic under investigation, the ethics review board required much of the identifying information regarding students' demographics to be removed from the instrument. In Norway, the survey was completed in Norwegian and English, meaning that international students had an equal opportunity to participate, resulting in a relatively large percentage of students who said they were from a "minority background." This percentage was slightly higher in Ghana (Table 1). On a national basis, approximately 9% of students in Norway are considered international students, defined as citizens of other countries attending Norwegian universities (DBH, 2022). While data from Ghana is more challenging to obtain, previous studies have found that approximately 8%–10% of students were non-Ghanaian citizens (e.g., Adu, 2019).

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Ghana and Norway

	Norway (n = 438)		Ghana (n = 751)	
	n	%	n	%
Gender				
Male	161	36.8	391	52.1
Female	271	61.9	360	47.9
Other	6	1.3	0	0
Age group				
18- 22 yrs.	105	24	250	33.3
23 - 27 yrs.	200	45.7	406	54.1
28 -32 yrs.	62	14.2	76	10.1
33 -37 yrs.	37	8.4	12	1.6
38 - 42 yrs.	12	2.7	2	0.3
43 - 47 yrs.	12	2.7	4	0.5
≥ 48 yrs.	10	2.3	1	0.1
Years at university				
1 yr.	30	6.8	44	5.9
2 yrs.	100	22.8	71	9.5
3 yrs.	134	30.6	176	23.4
4 yrs.	50	11.4	431	57.4
5 yrs.	67	15.3	19	2.5
≥ 6 yrs.	57	13	10	1.3
Academic level				
Bachelor	195	44.5	708	94.3
Masters	211	48.2	25	3.3
PhD	26	5.9	5	0.7
Minority background				
Yes	93	21.2	207	27.6
No	345	78.8	544	72.4

Note. Some categories do not sum to 100% due to missing data.

Data Collection

Students in Norway were sent an internet-based questionnaire between October 2020 and February 2021, followed by three separate reminders. The administrative offices at the two universities provided 5,861 email addresses of students deemed eligible for participation. Of the responses, 285 were incomplete and therefore excluded. As noted above, this left 438 usable questionnaires. The data collection procedure did not allow for verifying whether the email addresses were active or whether the recipients had received the questionnaire. Anecdotal correspondence with students suggests that many invitations to participate were lost due to automatic email filtering.

Given that the data collection in Norway was conducted first, we sought to balance the comparison groups by recruiting a similar number of respondents from the two universities in Ghana. Due to Ghana's limited internet infrastructure, it was impossible to collect responses via email. Therefore, teaching assistants assisted in distributing and collecting paper-based questionnaires. Students were contacted in person in communal areas of the campuses. The selection process was based on convenience sampling, where we simply selected the most easily accessible students, and on purposive sampling, because we ensured that the participants met the criteria for inclusion in the study (i.e., the required academic level) (see Bryman, 2012). A total of 762 questionnaires were collected using drop-in boxes (446 from one university and 316 from the other), of which 751 were

sufficiently complete to be included in the analysis.

Instrumentation

The instrument comprised a questionnaire with 14 items from the Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ-Revised) (Einarsen et al., 2009), eight items from the Sexual Experience Questionnaire (SEQ) (Fitzgerald et al., 1988), and six items from a survey of cyberbullying (see Akbulut & Eristi, 2011). Some items were adapted from the original scales to meet local and demographic conditions. We also adapted perpetrator categories from the existing literature to show the relationship between the bully and the victim. The strong reliability of the original scales has been reported. However, we also checked the items' reliability in terms of our samples. The Cronbach's alpha for the 30 bullying-related negative behavior items in this study was 0.94, and construct-specific groupings also produced reliable alpha values. All the items employed a five-point response scale (e.g., 1 = *not at all*, 2 = *now and then*, 3 = *monthly*, 4 = *weekly*, 5 = *daily*) to reflect the frequencies of occurrence.

The NAQ contains behavioral constructs and a self-labeling component (Einarsen et al., 2009; Salin, 2001). The self-labeling portion is given after participants have indicated the negative behaviors that they have experienced. The following definition of bullying served as a measure for participants to self-label their experiences as bullying:

> We define bullying as a situation where one or several individuals persistently, over a period of time, perceive themselves to have experienced negative actions from one or several others. It is a situation that the target or targets find difficult to stop or in which they find it challenging to defend themselves from a superior or stronger perpetrator. This could be a fellow student, a lecturer, or an administrator who repeatedly and intentionally misuses their power, verbally or physically, to harm the target or targets. Bullying can happen in person or online. It can be obvious or hidden. Bullying is not a single incident of conflict, social rejection, nastiness, or spite. It is also not random acts of aggression or intimidation, mutual arguments, disagreements, or fights between equals. In an extreme case, there can be a single instance of intimidating and unfair treatment that the target or targets feel has a long-lasting and embarrassing effect on them.

Through behavioral and self-labeling components, information is obtained about the behaviors and subjective evaluations of the victims (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2001).

Analysis

Initial screening identified skewness in the data, which is common in research on bullying (Notelaers & Einarsen, 2013). Given this concern and the

broad objectives of this comparative study, we chose to limit the analysis primarily to descriptive and non-parametric statistics. However, *t*-tests were performed to assess differences in the total number of negative behaviors within and between the countries. In this case, the responses were dichotomized (i.e., not at all vs. any occurrence) to allow measurement on an interval scale, and no problems were identified with regard to skewness. Mean ranks were calculated for the various negative behaviors in each country to determine which of these occurred most frequently, and the overall mean rank was used as a cut-off to define the "most common" behaviors.

The chi-square test of independence was used to examine bullying in relation to the students' characteristics. In order to assess if demographic variables contributed to the frequency with which participants reported experiencing bullying, tests were conducted with respect to age, years spent attending the university, gender, and minority status. Marital status and academic level were not included in these analyses due to the low numbers in the sub-groups of these variables. In addition, given that there were high proportions of cells with very few or no expected counts, we collapsed levels of the bullying variable and some of the ordinal variables (e.g., age) when conducting the non-parametric statistical analyses. These adjustments are described in the results section below for each of the tests performed.

Results

Frequency of Negative Behaviors

Participants indicated the frequency with which they experienced 30 different negative behaviors on a 5-point scale (i.e., 1 = *not at all*, 2 = *now and then*, 3 = *monthly*, 4 = *weekly*, 5 = *daily*), grouped based on four broad behavioral constructs (i.e., person-related bullying, sexual harassment, work-related bullying, and cyberbullying). The mean ranks, frequencies, and percentages of the behaviors are provided in Tables 2–5. For the purpose of clarity, behaviors reported as occurring monthly, weekly, or daily were combined (> monthly) to calculate the frequencies, while "now and then" responses are listed in a separate column (< monthly) in the tables. Using the overall mean rank as a cut-off (M = 15.50), we identified each country's "most common" behaviors. These comprise 10 behaviors in the Ghanaian sample and 13 behaviors in the Norwegian sample (*items in Tables 2–5).

Table 2

Person-related Bullying: Percent, Frequency, and Mean Ranks across Countries

Behaviours	Norway (n = 438)					Ghana (n = 751)				
	< monthly		≥ monthly		M rank	< monthly		≥ monthly		M rank
	%	(n)	%	(n)		%	(n)	%	(n)	
1. Spreading of gossip and rumours about you.	13.9	(61)	2.5	(11)	16.78*	25.0	(188)	13.7	(103)	17.52*
2. Practical jokes by people you do not get along with.	11.6	(51)	1.4	(6)	16.23*	26.9	(202)	12.6	(95)	17.25*
3. You are called names, made fun of, or taunted.	8.4	(37)	2.5	(11)	15.99*	24.4	(183)	16.5	(124)	17.75*
4. Someone stares at you in a way that makes you feel intimidated.	11.4	(50)	3.4	(15)	16.65*	24.5	(184)	16.9	(127)	17.78*
5. You have been harassed or negatively treated because you were a new student.	5.5	(24)	1.4	(6)	15.38	16.4	(123)	10.5	(79)	15.31
6. You have been hit, kicked, shoved, pushed, or tripped.	0.5	(2)	0.0	(0)	14.41	9.9	(74)	8.1	(61)	14.13
7. You receive insults or offensive remarks about your person, your attitudes, or your private life.	10.3	(45)	3.4	(15)	16.47*	20.0	(150)	11.7	(88)	16.13*
8. You have had your property destroyed or taken forcefully.	0.9	(4)	0.2	(1)	14.54	18.5	(139)	8.9	(67)	15.30
9. Nasty, spiteful, mean, and malicious rumours are spread about your sexual orientation.	1.4	(6)	0.7	(3)	14.66	13.0	(98)	8.0	(60)	14.50
10. Being shouted at or being the target of spontaneous anger.	3.2	(14)	0.5	(2)	14.89	19.4	(146)	11.5	(86)	15.94*
11. Being ignored or excluded.	17.1	(75)	7.8	(34)	18.25*	16.5	(124)	11.7	(88)	15.46
12. Being ignored or facing a hostile reaction when you approach.	11.9	(52)	3.9	(17)	16.76*	20.9	(157)	12.9	(97)	16.48*

Table 3

Sexual Harassment: Percent, Frequency, and Mean Ranks across Countries

Behaviours	Norway (n = 438)					Ghana (n = 751)				
	< monthly		≥ monthly		M rank	< monthly		≥ monthly		M rank
	%	(n)	%	(n)		%	(n)	%	(n)	
13. Someone tells suggestive stories, makes sexist and offensive jokes, or displays offensive materials about you.	6.6	(29)	1.1	(5)	15.51*	14.1	(106)	11.3	(85)	15.04
14. You are being maltreated, ignored, or put down in a condescending or demeaning manner because of your sex	8.2	(36)	1.4	(6)	15.78*	15.2	(114)	8.9	(67)	14.77
15. Your body (breast, thigh, neck, waist, arm, sexual organ) is touched or kissed without your approval	4.6	(20)	0.7	(3)	15.16	14.4	(108)	9.1	(68)	14.83
16. You are harassed repeatedly for drink dates etc., despite you saying no.	1.6	(7)	0.0	(0)	14.55	15.0	(113)	8.9	(67)	14.88
17. Someone makes sexual advances, looks, gestures, jokes, or remarks towards you, which are sexually inciting and discomforting.	6.2	(27)	0.9	(4)	15.43	18.0	(135)	10.7	(80)	15.54*
18. You are promised favours, rewards, or spared some form of punishment or exposure if you oblige to a sexual relationship	0.2	(1)	0.0	(0)	14.39	16.9	(127)	8.4	(63)	14.99
19. You are threatened with some sort of retaliation or bad treatment if you do not sexually cooperate	0.0	(0)	0.2	(1)	14.40	14.9	(112)	8.3	(62)	14.66
20. Someone repeatedly tries to remove part of your clothes without your consent or tries to sexually abuse you.	1.1	(5)	0.0	(0)	14.50	13.3	(100)	8.9	(67)	14.57

Note. *Most frequent behaviours using the grand mean for ranks across countries as a cut-off.

Table 4

Work-related Bullying: Percent, Frequency, and Mean Ranks across Countries

Behaviours	Norway (n = 438)					Ghana (n = 751)				
	< monthly		≥ monthly		M	< monthly		≥ monthly		M
	%	(n)	%	(n)	rank	%	(n)	%	(n)	rank
21. Someone withholding information that affects your performance.	8.9	(39)	2.5	(11)	16.12*	18.0	(135)	10.1	(76)	15.48
22. Repeatedly reminded of your blunders, errors, or mistakes	10.0	(44)	2.7	(12)	16.31*	23.3	(175)	11.2	(84)	16.39*
23. A persistent criticism of your work and your efforts	12.1	(53)	3.2	(14)	16.65*	21.2	(159)	12.8	(96)	16.45*
24. You are denied the right to claim what you are entitled to (e.g., grade)	5.0	(22)	1.6	(7)	15.41	16.2	(122)	10.5	(79)	15.31

Note. *Most frequent behaviours using the grand mean for ranks across countries as a cut-off.

Table 5

Cyberbullying: Percent, Frequency, and Mean Ranks across Countries

Behaviours	Norway (n = 438)					Ghana (n = 751)				
	< monthly		≥ monthly		M	< monthly		≥ monthly		M
	%	(n)	%	(n)	rank	%	(n)	%	(n)	rank
25. Unwanted, derogatory, or threatening comments that you do not want to share is circulated about you online	1.4	(6)	0.7	(3)	14.63	16.0	(120)	8.9	(67)	14.96
26. Embarrassing and offensive pictures or videos of you have been spread online or sent to others without your consent	1.1	(5)	0.0	(0)	14.51	16.9	(127)	8.4	(63)	15.15
27. You are excluded from digital communication or social networks.	10.7	(47)	3.9	(17)	16.58*	11.5	(86)	8.0	(60)	14.25
28. You receive unpleasant digital messages or emails.	2.3	(10)	1.4	(6)	14.92	18.1	(136)	9.3	(70)	15.30
29. Unpleasant instant messages about you on social network sites and in chat rooms	1.3	(7)	0.2	(1)	14.59	11.7	(88)	8.3	(62)	14.13
30. Your credentials or identity information is appropriated	0.9	(4)	0.5	(2)	14.57	12.1	(91)	10.4	(78)	14.76

Note. *Most frequent behaviours using the grand mean for ranks across countries as a cut-off.

Concerning person-related bullying, seven items were identified as the most common behaviors in both Norway and Ghana (Table 2). One item in Ghana and two in Norway were ranked highest concerning sexual harassment (Table 3). Three items in Norway and two in Ghana were associated with work-related bullying (Table 4). Only one item, found in the Norwegian sample, was identified with regard to cyberbullying (Table 5). Eight items were ranked among the most frequently reported behaviors in both countries, six of which were in the person-related category:

a) Spreading gossip and rumors about you (item 1).
b) Practical jokes by people you do not get along with (item 2).
c) You are called names, made fun of, or taunted (item 3).
d) Someone stares at you in a way that makes you feel intimidated (item 4).
e) You receive insults or offensive remarks about your person, your attitudes, or your private life (item 7).
f) Being ignored or facing a hostile reaction when you approach (item 12).

In addition, two similar items appeared in the category of work-related behaviors in both countries: (a) repeatedly being reminded of your blunders, errors, or mistakes, and (b) persistent criticism of your work and your efforts.

Differences in Negative Behaviors

Ghanaian students reported experiencing more negative behaviors than Norwegian students across all 30 items. The differences between the countries varied from 4% to 14% concerning "frequent" exposure to negative behaviors (i.e., combined ratings of daily, weekly, and monthly occurrences). The difference was smallest regarding the "being ignored or excluded" item and greatest for "being called names, made fun of, or taunted." Similarly, the total number of negative behaviors each participant reported in Ghana was higher than in Norway. Based on a dichotomization of the rating scale (i.e., not at all vs. any occurrence), we found that the Ghanaians reported experiencing, on average, 8.37 (SD = 7.7) negative behaviors per student. In contrast, the Norwegian students reported exposure to an average of 2.27 (SD = 3.63) negative behaviors, $t(1187) = -18.35$, $p < .001$.

Differences in Reported Bullying

The participants were asked whether they were being or had been bullied at their universities as per the definition provided above. Possible responses were (a) no, not at all; (b) yes, but only rarely; (c) yes, now and then (monthly); (d) yes, several times per week; and (e) yes, almost daily. Looking first at the combined "yes" responses (i.e., items b through e), we found that 20.1% (n = 88) of the Norwegian participants indicated that they were bullied compared to 39.2% (n =

294) of the Ghanaian students. Considering the distribution of the responses across all five response categories, the chi-square results showed a significant relationship between the country of the respondents and the frequency of the reported bullying ($\chi^2 = 47.81$, $df = 4$, $p < .001$).

As predicted, students who reported being bullied also reported experiencing more negative behaviors. Among the Norwegian students, the average number of negative behaviors was significantly higher in this group ($M = 6.49$, $SD = 0.52$) when compared to students who did not report bullying ($M = 1.22$, $SD = 2.25$), $t(436) = -14.56$, $p < .001$. A similar significant result was found when comparing "bullied" ($M = 12.52$, $SD = 8.06$) versus "non-bullied" ($M = 5.71$, $SD = 6.28$) groups within the Ghanaian sample, $t(749) = -12.95$, $p < .001$.

Bullying in Relation to Student Characteristics

No significant differences were found with respect to the proportion of reported bullying among different age groups in Ghana. However, a significant difference was found in Norway regarding this variable ($\chi^2 = 14.44$, $df = 6$, $p = .025$). Students who were 33 years of age or older were proportionally overrepresented among "rarely" bullied students, with 28.2% of this age group providing this response, compared to less than 15% of younger students. The proportion of participants indicating more frequent exposure to bullying (i.e., $\geq$ monthly) did not vary significantly across the age groups (range = 3.2%–7.0%).

Whereas no significant association was found between bullying and the number of years the students had attended university in the Norwegian sample, the chi-square tests showed a significant relationship between these variables among the Ghanaian students ($\chi^2 = 29.75$, $df = 8$, $p < .001$). In general, the longer students had attended their universities in Ghana, the more likely they were to report having been involved in bullying. For example, 42.9% of fourth-year students and 62.6% of fifth-year students reported being bullied, compared to less than 30% of first- and second-year students.

In addition, we found that the proportions of students exposed to bullying did not differ based on gender in either country. Having a minority background was not associated with reported bullying in Ghana, yet this relationship was significant in the Norwegian sample ($\chi^2 = 9.16$, $df = 2$, $p = .010$). Students with a minority background were underrepresented among those who did not report bullying (68.8% vs. 82.9%) and overrepresented among students who responded that they were "rarely" bullied (23.7% vs. 12.5%). Differences concerning more frequent levels of bullying pointed in the same direction but were not significant (range = 4.6%–7.5%).

Perpetrators

The respondents were provided with a list of seven alternative categories of possible perpetrators from which to choose. Multiple responses per participant

were allowed. The numbers and percentages of the responses for each country are presented in Table 6. The percentages are based on the sub-groups within each country who reported being bullied (n = 88 in Norway; n = 294 in Ghana). As can be seen in Table 6, perpetrators most often fell into the category of fellow students: 61.4% and 41.4% for Norway and Ghana, respectively. The second most common group was academic staff and supervisors in Norway (38.6%) and higher-level students in Ghana (23.5%). The category of faculty and supervisors was also frequently indicated in Ghana (17.3%). The remainder of the responses were observed considerably less frequently, comprising approximately 10%–12% of the total responses or less.

Table 6

Reports of Perpetrators among Participants Who Experienced Bullying

	Norway (n=88)		Ghana (n=294)	
Perpetrators	%	(n)	%	(n)
Fellow student(s) or colleagues	61.4	54	51.4	151
Academic faculty fellow or supervisor	38.6	34	17.3	51
Students at higher levels	8.0	7	23.5	69
Other superiors or administrators	5.7	5	12.6	37
Other university employee	10.2	9	3.7	11
Subordinate staff(s) or student	4.5	4	4.4	13
Other	6.8	6	5.1	15

Discussion

Across both countries, the most frequently reported negative behaviors were in the person-related category, and these were followed by behaviors in the work-related category that were quite similar in nature. By and large, these behaviors reflect direct, non-physical forms of bullying, such as name-calling, insults, ignoring, and repeated criticism. Between-country comparisons revealed that students in Ghana more often reported being bullied and being exposed to a broader range of negative behaviors than students in Norway.

Frequency of Bullying and Related Behaviors

With respect to the first research question, many of the behaviors that

ranked highly in the current study (e.g., gossiping, withholding information, and insults) have also been found to be prevalent in research on workplace bullying (e.g., Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2001; Notelaers et al., 2019). The finding that participants in this study rarely encountered physical aggression is also consistent with previous research. For instance, Gómez-Galán et al. (2021) identified verbal and relational bullying at Spanish universities but found little evidence of physical bullying. Rayner and Hoel (1997) observed how physical bullying gives way to indirect, relational, and more subtle forms of bullying as young people become adults. Thus, it is perhaps to be expected that adult university students less often experience physical aggression.

Einarsen and Skogstad (1996) argue that victims themselves should determine when repeated negative behaviors should be labeled bullying. This method is considered superior to using only behavioral indicators because it has convincing face validity and high construct validity (Nielsen et al., 2011). However, this approach also has weaknesses related to bias, as emotional and cognitive factors may affect (usually reduce) the disclosure of bullying (Nielsen et al., 2011). Thus, the fact that 20.1% and 39.2% of students in Norway and Ghana, respectively, report that the negative behaviors they experienced constitute bullying is upsetting, given that some studies have reported much lower percentages (Hoel et al., 2001; Nielsen et al., 2009; Zabrodska & Kveton, 2013). On the other hand, Keashly and Neuman (2010) and McKay et al. (2008) similarly found a range between 18% and 32% in higher education settings.

Most respondents experienced bullying "only rarely," and progressively fewer participants indicated that they were bullied as the time intervals became less prolonged. These patterns are consistent with previous studies using the NAQ, indicating relatively low levels of negative behaviors despite high percentages of self-reported bullying (see Hoel et al., 2001). Thus, even "rare" instances may still be enough for many participants to say that bullying has occurred.

Not surprisingly, we found that students who reported being bullied were exposed to a wider range of negative behaviors. For example, Norwegian students who did not feel that they were bullied reported experiencing, on average, less than two of the thirty behaviors listed in the survey—in contrast to more than six behaviors among those who had been bullied. Interestingly, the average number of negative behaviors experienced by students who did not report being bullied was considerably higher in Ghana ($M = 5.71$), indicating that the threshold for labeling behaviors as bullying is substantially higher among students in Ghana.

Country Comparisons

Regarding the second research question, the findings indicate that bullying is significantly more prevalent in Ghana than in Norway. This difference may be related to several factors, including differences in the countries' cultural

predispositions to acts that constitute bullying, the national commitment to bullying prevention (as reflected in laws and regulations), and economic conditions.

First, it is possible that Norway's prominent national policies regarding bullying influence institutional commitment to anti-bullying structures in higher education, resulting in a lower prevalence. Second, the population's emphasis on egalitarianism (see Ministry of Education and Research, 1998; Rayner et al., 2002) may also serve to mute power imbalances associated with bullying. It is likely that economic conditions also play a role with respect to the prevalence of bullying behavior. Research considering the relationship between socioeconomic status and bullying suggests that unfavorable economic conditions and resource scarcity are precursors to bullying (Sinkkonen et al., 2014).

Perhaps also related to economic conditions is the finding that being excluded from digital communication or social networks was among the most common forms of bullying in Norway, yet was proportionally much less common in Ghana (albeit higher than in Norway). On the one hand, it could be argued that the more stable infrastructure and internet availability in Norway contributed to this issue. However, it must be noted that "being ignored or excluded" was by far the most common form of bullying in Norway, indicating that it is most likely the "exclusion" component of this behavior that led to its prominence and not the fact that the behavior occurs in a digital environment.

Indeed, the finding speaks to the individualistic cultural predisposition of Norwegian society compared to the collectivist predisposition in Ghana. Samnani and Singh (2012) and Ahmad et al. (2021) argue that individualism can lead to bullying, but we advise caution when interpreting this with regard to Norwegian society. Individualism in Norwegian society can be described as a private life predisposition. People do not share their private spaces to the same extent as individuals in many other countries do. As a result, people living in Norway who come from more collectivist societies, who might also constitute a minority group, could experience cultural shock when they are left out. Nonetheless, universities are supposed to provide avenues for collaborative learning and the exchange of ideas. Private life predispositions can be a source of exclusion for different people. This is in line with Bronfenbrenner (1979)'s theory that people's behavior is an expression of their culture, and to change such a culture, awareness must be created about its effects.

In the case of Ghana, we would argue that cultural predispositions, particularly regarding power distance and masculinity (see Adom et al., 2018), account for the higher prevalence rates of negative behaviors and bullying. More so, in his broader work, Bronfenbrenner (1979) argued that when people know about an environment before entering it, they observe certain social expectations. In this case, had there been a cultural and national consciousness regarding

bullying, we would expect it to be reflected in the institutional commitment to preventing bullying. Our results indicate that quite a few confrontational behaviors occurred in the Ghanaian sample. This suggests that people are less deterred from bullying others, which again points to the need for increased consciousness about bullying among students in higher education.

At first glance, the findings relate to the number of years the students had attended university, and their academic levels appear to be in conflict. Norwegian students at the master's degree level were significantly more likely to report being bullied, whereas no differences were found among the academic levels in Ghana. At the same time, in Ghana, students who had attended university for longer were more likely to report being bullied. We suspect that the different findings in the two countries reflect differences in the two samples, in which students at the master's degree level were largely overrepresented in Norway (ca. 48%) and underrepresented in Ghana (ca. 3%).

We found no association between gender and reported bullying in either country, and minority status did not appear to influence self-reported bullying in Ghana. Although these reports most often fell into the "rarely" category, students from minority backgrounds in Norway were significantly more likely to report being bullied than other students. The concept of "minority" was defined broadly in the survey, in which participants were asked to answer the following question: "Do you belong to a minority group, for example, because of language, origin, or any other reason?" Thus, it is impossible to know more about the specific backgrounds of these participants. This also makes it difficult to speculate as to the potential reasons for the different findings in the two countries. Nonetheless, school-based research in Norway has shown that students from minority groups experience bullying at higher rates than other students (Bjereld et al., 2015; Hansen et al., 2010; Hansen & Sørlie, 2012). Thus, our findings suggest that this trend may carry over into higher education.

Perpetrators of bullying

In both countries, fellow students were most often reported as bullying perpetrators. University students typically have closer interpersonal relationships with their fellow students than with other people in these settings, and such relationships are generally seen as a prerequisite for bullying to exist (Ledlow, 2008). Beyond fellow students, the Norwegian participants reported faculty and other employees as being the most frequent perpetrators of bullying. In Ghana, senior students were the second most frequently reported group, followed by faculty and other higher administrative employees. These results underline the notion that a central component of bullying is an imbalance in the distribution of power among those involved (Olweus, 1993). In many cultures, superiors are treated with some reverence. However, those in positions of authority may become

less mindful of their actions with regard to their subordinates, which explains why academic faculty and advisors are seen as perpetrators of bullying—even in Norway, where the abuse of power should be less likely, given the cultural emphasis on equality (Hofstede, 1983).

Limitations

There are a few limitations to the current study that are noteworthy. Although the use of purposive sampling makes the need for statistical representation less of an issue (Mason, 2002, p. 134), we cannot be certain that low response rates and selection bias did not contribute to the relatively high percentage of participants who reported being bullied in each country. In addition, the different data collection strategies used in Norway and Ghana may also raise questions about comparability. However, given that paper-based surveys, which were used in Ghana, tend to have higher response rates (Converse et al., 2008), it can be assumed that this approach likely resulted in a more representative sample in Ghana. In theory, using a more selective procedure (i.e., an email survey) would result in a greater number of participants who had previous experience of bullying being included in Ghana, thereby increasing the already considerable and significant differences between the two countries. Imbalance with respect to the demographic characteristics of the two samples, including a larger proportion of female and master's degree-level students in Norway, also means that caution should be used when interpreting these findings. Finally, due to concerns raised by the instrument's ethical review, it was impossible to collect more detailed demographic information about the participants (e.g., their field of study, ethnicity, and race). Factors such as these are also likely to play a role in how bullying is experienced and merit consideration in future research.

Implications for Research and Practice

The evidence derived from this study contributes to research on bullying in higher education by providing a first step toward a more objective means of measuring bullying within this context. This is because the questionnaire for this research contains behavioral items that reflect acts of bullying that are typical of the study environment (e.g., sexual harassment) but are not part of a typical NAQ used in most university and workplace bullying research.

In addition, the comparative approach adds insight into how to conduct and interpret bullying data across different cultural and national conditions. Indeed, the findings underline how results on bullying prevalence are less meaningful when they are only considered in relation to one population within institutional, cultural, or national contexts. More so, as much as a culture might determine people's attitudes towards bullying, culture itself is dynamic, as our needs and

goals vary in time and are discarded, re-structured, or developed further (Freiherr Von Fircks, 2022). There might be a need to educate people about attitudes that breach fundamental rights. For example, family dynamics that defined the position of women as subordinate to men in older patriarchal traditions are no longer present. Such power dynamics, which still influence women's bullying in contemporary times, must change.

Concerning practice, we posit that education directed toward the most prevalent negative behaviors identified in research of this kind can lead to increased student awareness of offensive and dangerous bullying behaviors. The findings suggest that efforts to prevent bullying at universities must start with national commitments, which are comparatively absent in Ghana. In addition, educators must be careful when organizing groups to facilitate diversity and the inclusion of "at-risk" individuals. Moreover, our findings indicate that risks of exclusion should be considered early in educational programs and highlighted through teaching and policy to make students and staff more conscious of and receptive to the needs and vulnerabilities of others.

Researchers have primarily used the NAQ for workplace bullying (Einarsen et al., 2009). Our results indicate that some negative behaviors frequently appeared in Norway and Ghana, yet they were not part of the NAQ. Future research should consider incorporating these results when seeking to develop more universal questionnaires to study bullying in higher education.

Conclusion

This study provided insight into university students' exposure to negative behaviors and reported bullying, thereby contributing to the knowledge base. We found that bullying at universities takes on subtler forms than in schools, which could make its prevention difficult. We identified behaviors such as spreading gossip and rumors, practical jokes by people with whom the victims do not get along, name-calling, and making fun of or taunting the victims. In other cases, the participants mentioned staring at victims to make them feel intimidated and making insults or offensive remarks about the victims' beliefs or private lives. People reported being ignored or facing hostile reactions when approaching the perpetrator. Some of these behaviors can be considered confrontational, but they still do not meet the specific description of physical and aggressive behaviors.

We also found a higher incidence of bullying in Ghana than in Norway, including more confrontational behaviors in Ghana. This points to cultural variations that may reflect national consciousness, which determines how people in different cultures perceive and react to bullying. Inferring from the ecology of human development theory, we can say that the cultural differences we identified between Ghana and Norway could account for variations in national consciousness

and institutional commitments to bullying prevention since the broader cultural blueprint influences the universities in the mesosystem. When the culture favors aggressive behavior, it is difficult to challenge such behaviors when they occur. As such, this study confirms previous research that demonstrates that bullying behavior is culturally specific and that creating more preventative conditions requires ambitious efforts to change cultural assumptions.

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Power in University Archives: Imperialism and Disparities in Nigeria and the United States

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This article was not written with the assistance of any Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology, including ChatGPT" or other support technologies.

Abstract

This article examines the structural disparities between the archives at the University of Nigeria Nsukka (UNN) and Michigan State University (MSU). While Nigerian archivists work to preserve their institutions' local content, they must contend with cultural and infrastructural constraints foreign to their American counterparts. To elucidate these differences, this analysis builds upon Stoler's 'archival turn' framework which shifts the gaze on archives to consider them as subjects of inquiry rather than mere sources of data. Reflecting on my own experience working with physical archives at UNN and MSU, along with digital artifacts from these institutions' websites, I analyze the contents and accessibility of hardcopy and digital collections at both universities. In conclusion, I argue that the ongoing and uneven footprint of imperialism, both socio-cultural and infrastructural, results in an unequal distribution of Trouillot's 'archival power' amongst global institutions like UNN and MSU. Additionally, I highlight means by which some Nigerian scholars have contested imperialism to reclaim ownership over their own archival contents and narratives.

Keywords: archives, general studies, imperialism, Nigeria, power

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Introduction

In 2019, as part of research on general education in Nigerian higher education (Cermak, 2021a, 2021b), I traveled

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to the University of Nigeria Nsukka (UNN) to explore documentary materials concerning that institution's general education curriculum—the General Studies Programme (GS)—preserved by various units and actors at UNN over more than half a century. The irony of this trip, costly as it was to myself, my Nigerian hosts, and my funders in the United States (U.S.), is that in a more equitable world, an in-person visit would not have been necessary. The materials I was interested in, such as departmental handbooks and academic catalogs, are neither rare nor sensitive, and more well-resourced institutions in the U.S. are typically able to make similar information freely available online. I contend that this imparity in what American research universities and their counterparts in developing nations can preserve, curate, and make accessible to the wider scholarly community represents an imbalance in "archival power," to use Trouillot's term, which determines what are (and are not) legitimate topics of research, and thus what deserves to be archived (2015, p. 99). Though this article addresses university archives broadly, I emphasize the documents and collections that deal explicitly or implicitly with GS as these informed my experiences conducting archival research in both Nigeria and the U.S.

My work at UNN was primarily about 'extracting' information about GS, that is, about "archive-as-source." In this article, I instead take Stoler's "archival turn" and consider the archives at UNN, as compared to those at Michigan State University (MSU) in the U.S., as the 'subject' of inquiry rather than as a mere source of data (2009, p. 44). By exploring what kinds of internal information these two very differently situated institutions choose, and are able, to preserve, digitize, and make accessible to internal and external audiences, I hope to delineate how they are differentially (and unequally) positioned to tell stories about themselves and be (re)interpreted by others. My analysis explores the contents and accessibility of both hardcopy and digital archival collections at these institutions in order to clarify two of the forces—socio-cultural imperialism (Okon & Ojakorotu, 2018) and infrastructural imperialism (Vaidhyanathan, 2012)—that influence disparities in archival power between universities in developing and developed countries.

Context: The Universities

UNN is a federal research university located in Nigeria's southeastern state of Enugu. It was founded in 1960 as Nigeria's premier post-independence university through the leadership of the nation's first president, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, who had long been highly critical of British colonial rule in the country, and especially of the highly specialized system of higher education modelled on British institutions that reigned at the time (Pettit, 1969; Poloma & Szelényi, 2018). Azikiwe was "determined to found a university which would be strikingly different" from this prevailing model (Pettit, 1969, p. ii). Today, UNN is a nationally prominent university and economic hub that enrolls more than 36,000 students across four campuses in Enugu State (University of Nigeria Nsukka, n.d.). This research focuses on the main campus located in the town of Nsukka, Nigeria.

Among the many innovations championed under Dr. Azikiwe's early leadership was the introduction of Nigeria's first general education curriculum for undergraduates, which would function as a "formal liberal education" component in answer to the specialized courses of study which dominated elsewhere (Pettit, 1969, p. iii). Established at UNN in 1961 as the General Studies Programme (GSP), or General Studies (GS), this general education curriculum was designed specifically for the Nigerian context through the collaborative efforts of local scholars and foreign advisors from both Michigan State University (MSU) and the British Inter-University Council (IUC). While the curriculum thus represented a unique hybrid model of general education that drew upon diverse intellectual traditions, it has been repeatedly upgraded by subsequent generations of Nigerian educators to more closely reflect the Nation's values and priorities (Nwosu, 2017a; Pettit, 1969). Furthermore, since the GSP's genesis at UNN, the curriculum has since been nationalized across Nigerian higher education making it an important originator of general education in West Africa (Okafor, 2012). This unique history, along UNN's close historical ties to my then home institution of MSU, informed my selection UNN as the site of this research.

MSU is a state-level public research university located in the state of Michigan. Founded in 1855 as the Agricultural College of the State of Michigan, it was the country's first land-grant university and served as the prototype for the dozens of other land-grant institutions across America. Today, MSU enrolls approximately 50,000 students on its 5,300-acre East Lansing campus (MSU Facts, n.d.). In addition to extensive archival holdings detailing its own institutional history and productivity, MSU currently houses a large collection of documentary resources on UNN's early years due to its historic connection to UNN in the 1960s, the "University of Nigeria Program Records" collection (University of Nigeria Program Records, 2011). The records pertaining to UNN's genesis and early development represent a "migrated archive," or one that has been removed from its country of origin (Migrated Archives, n.d.). The presence of this migrated archive, and its

centrality to my research on GS at UNN, informed my selection of MSU as the comparison site for this inquiry. That said, the inequities, both of access and power, inherent in such migrated collections will be problematized in my findings.

Located as they are in the Nigeria and the United States respectively, UNN and MSU are differentially and unequally positioned in the global hierarchy of higher education institutions. A developing nation whose economy in reliant primarily on the export of crude oil, agriculture products, and minerals, Nigeria has a Real GDP of approximately $4,900 per capita as of 2021 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2023) and a 9% bachelor's degree attainment for those 25 years and older in 2006, the last year data is available (The World Bank, 2023). Conversely, the U.S. is an economic powerhouse boasting a highly diversified post-industrial economy, a Real GDP of approximately $63,700 per capita in 2021 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2023), and a bachelor's degree attainment of 37.5% in 2020 (The World Bank, 2023). Given that proxies for status among higher education institutions, such position in global higher education rankings, often reflect the "highly inequitable distribution of… public resources [such as] subsidies for student attendance and infrastructure development," Nigerian universities are much more at the mercy of imperialistic forces that lessen and delegitimize their archival power compared to their American counterparts (Pusser & Marginson, 2013, p, 558).

Literature Review

When one thinks of an archive, the vision that comes to mind is an old, venerable institution—often associated with a library, university, or government, or perhaps independent—staffed by professional archivists and filled with rows of books and boxes of files, manuscripts, and documents. This antiquated model still describes many archives around the world, but not all as it neither accounts for the diversity of institutions, the varied actors at play, nor the wide array of materials, information, and formats contained therein. In Africa, the archive is in some instances "perceived as a site of retrieval and representation, in others as a site of power, and in others it is viewed as a site where the production of history is already underway" (Lalu, 2007, p. 28-29). I take a broad view, in line with the late anthropologist Trouillot, in defining archives as any and all "institutions that organize facts and sources and condition the possibility of existence of historical statements... Archives *assemble*" (Trouillot , 2015, p. 51).

Such assemblages do indeed include more formal collections, such as those contained at UNN's Nnamdi Azikiwe Library and MSU's Main Library and Archives and Historical Collections, but also encompass what collective memory scholar Assmann calls "hidden deposits" (Assmann , 2011, p. 337). Assmann acknowledges that "archives are selective… they are in no way all-inclusive but have their own structural mechanisms of exclusion in terms of [power]," but fortunately for the researcher "there is not only [formal and] intentional but also [ad hoc and] accidental preservation when hidden deposits are discovered" (p. 337). Such hidden deposits became important to my research as will be described in the discussion of the hard copy archival collections at UNN.

Further complicating the vision of the conventional, paper-filled archive, African library and information scientists Fasae, Larnyoh, Esew, Alanyo, and Holmner explain that in the 21st century "digitization is rapidly becoming one of the standard forms of preservation for archival institutions, libraries and information centres of analogue materials" (Fasae et al., 2017, p. 5). At universities like those described in this article, digitization efforts often take the form of Institutional Repositories (IRs). According to librarians at UNN, IRs are open-access online forums for preserving and showcasing the local contents (LCs) of an institution (Ukwoma & Okafor, 2017). LCs can broadly be thought of as the "totality of the culture, values, heritage materials, and indigenous knowledge of a group of people with common interest in a given locality," but at universities typically include "research outputs, theses and dissertations, inaugural lectures, newsletters, examination question papers, course contents, etc." (Ukwoma & Okafor, 2017, p. 48). Which of these content types are prioritized, and why, in the IRs of UNN and MSU is a subject of analysis in my examination of the digital archival collections at these institutions.

Archival Power

As indicated by Assmann's statement about archives' criteria for inclusion and exclusion, these assemblages are not only sites of information and history, but also arenas of power. Trouillot (2015) insightfully coined the term "archival power" in acknowledgement of this reality. He expounds that archives, by merit of their selectivity, hold the power to determine what are and are not legitimate bodies of information and areas of inquiry, and thus constrain researchers' ability to drive research agendas, (re)interpret history, and choose stories worth telling (p. 99). Archival power is neither evenly nor equitably distributed around the globe. Trouillot explains that archives remain "products and symbols of neo-colonial

domination" and "unequal access to [them]… continue[s] to handicap" academics and research projects at institutions in the developing world to a disproportionate degree (p. 105).

The power differentials between university archives underscores the necessity for taking Stoler's "archival turn." Her framework is premised on the assertion that "to understand an archive, one needs to understand the institutions that it served" (2009, p. 25). Therefore, this analysis follows Stoler's "methodological shift: to move away from treating the archives as an extractive exercise to an ethnographic one" (p. 47). Here, I not only extractively examine the contents of the archives at UNN and MSU, but also explore social and structural forces that regulate archival power at these organizations, namely "socio-cultural imperialism" (Okon & Ojakorotu , 2018) and "infrastructural imperialism" (Vaidhyanathan, 2012).

Archival Culture and Socio-Cultural Imperialism

Archives are cultural bodies which cannot be divorced from the societal and institutional cultures, conventions, and priorities in which they are embedded. Historian Kristen Weld writes that "archival culture" determines what value a society or institution ascribes to documents and what it deems worth preserving and making accessible. For instance, Weld describes how the archival culture in Guatemala in recent decades branded documents as "*basura*—trash to be eliminated, not resources to be protected" (2014). Archival culture is heavily influenced by relations of power, as seen in Weld's research in Guatemala where state archives were devalued in large part because meaningful preservation and public access was not in the political interest of conservative elites, the military, and the National Police.

Similarly, power and status in the worldwide higher education community also influence the archival cultures of individual universities like UNN and MSU. In sub-Saharan Africa, universities' archival cultures are regulated by ongoing socio-cultural imperialism, or the devaluation of African cultural institutions and knowledge systems. For example, authors in Nigeria and South Africa note that "there is no African research methodology or source of knowledge which is acceptable in academic circles" (Okon & Ojakorotu, 2018, p. 240). Instead, African archivists must adhere to global norms, meaning those originating in the Global North, in order to be perceived as legitimate. While the existence of such norms ostensibly lends a degree of validity to archival practice across contexts and geographies, the logics determining which types of LCs deserve to be preserved and curated derive from a system of global socio-cultural imperialism that centers some nations and regions while relegating others to the periphery. This has the potential to rob Nigerian archivists and scholars of the agency to interpret their own history and tell their own stories.

Thus, Nigerian universities, who stand at a disadvantage compared to their more well-resourced and influential American counterparts, use archival resources, such as IRs, to pursue heightened "global visibility" and prestige in the international higher education sector (Ezema, 2013; Fasae et al., 2017; Ukwoma & Okafor, 2017). To do so, they typically concentrate their efforts and resources on preserving, digitizing, and showcasing content that speaks to a commonly cited proxy for institutional standing—research productivity. In the era of globalization, research has shown that socio-cultural imperialism is manifested in the outsized role that a university's research productivity and output plays attaining "World Class University" status (Deem et al., 2008) and positioning in global higher education rankings (Pusser & Marginson, 2013).

In Nigeria, several researchers have connected greater visibility of faculty, staff, and student research to increases in the citation impact of publications (Ezema, 2013) and the webometric ranking of higher education institutions (Ukwoma & Okafor, 2017). Furthermore, a survey of seventy-two librarians across seven Nigerian universities identified the three greatest perceived benefits of IRs as (1) increasing the visibility of the authors, (2) promoting the global ranking of universities, and (3) increasing the research impact of authors (Ezema, 2013, p. 330). The archival culture at UNN reflects this nation-wide emphasis on research outputs, with the vast majority of its IR (98.99%) being comprised of artifacts of research productivity, specifically theses, dissertations, journal articles, conference proceedings, books, and book chapters (Ukwoma & Okafor, 2017, p. 52). Meanwhile, this leaves the materials that concerned my research—institutional documents about GS and the program's curricular artifacts—undervalued, largely inaccessible, and often unpreserved to begin with.

Digitization and Infrastructural Imperialism

Differences in what universities are able to preserve in their archives, and the choices they must therefore make, reflect not only socio-cultural inequities, but also disparities in their infrastructural capabilities. In his book, *The Googlization of Everything*, media scholar Vaidhyanathan provides the concept of "infrastructural imperialism," an imperialism derived from the unequal distribution of the "pipelines and protocols of culture… the formats of distribution of

information and the terms of access and use" (2012, p. 109). In today's world, where technological sophistication and power are inextricably linked, access to and facility with the conduits of cultural and knowledge exchange—whether the internet and information and communication technologies (ICTs) broadly or specific information retrieval platforms such as Vaidhyanathan's subject, Google—positions some subjects, organizations, and societies as dominant to others. At the same time, these new technologies and mediums also force each of us to adapt as knowledge producers and consumers. Just as Vaidhyanathan argues that those of us in the U.S. have been "Googlized," it could also be said that archival practice and research has been "digitized" as Fasae et al. contend:

> In his discussion of the internet, Vaidhyanathan explains that those of us concerned with online retrieval of information about both hard copy and digital content, must confront the discrepancies of access and skills across the world. Often discussions of the effects of Internet and other communicative technologies… assume something close to universal access… In fact, fewer than one in five people in the world have domestic access to the Internet at speeds that allow the viewing of the simplest YouTube video. (p. 137-138)

Though now dated, Vaidyanathan's 2012 analysis of internet access still resonates with the lived experiences of Nigerians today. Survey studies of Nigerian university library users, namely students and researchers, and staff have reported results that highlight the deleterious impact of infrastructural imperialism on information accessibility.

Edem and colleagues' 2009 survey of more than 500 Nigerian undergraduates reported a perceived lack of computer resources as the area of greatest dissatisfaction, and these same students noted greater access to and education on ICTs as the most pressing need in order to produce effective consumers of archival information (Edem et al., 2009). In 2011, Igbo and Imo examined the experiences of users more like myself—150 plus graduate-level student researchers—in the same archival institution I visited, UNN's Nnamdi Azikiwe Library. These researchers reported general dissatisfaction across their respondents with the accessibility of library resources and recommended that UNN "support the library in stepping up efforts geared towards digitizing library resources and provide electronic infrastructures like computers with internet connectivity for easy access to… the content of the library" (Igbo & Imo, 2011). As recently as 2017, authors writing from Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa continue to cite the constraints of poor ICT infrastructure, low internet bandwidth, and an unstable power supply as limiting Nigerian librarians and archivists from making local contents accessible online (Ezema, 2013; Fasae et al., 2017). These infrastructural constraints hamper both uploading digital contents to IRs for immediate access and providing digital information on hard copy collections to guide researchers and incentivize them to visit Nigerian universities.

Methods

This comparative analysis stems in large part from critical reflections on my experiences working with hard copy archived documents at both MSU and UNN in 2019, along with a comparison of these institutions' archival presence online. Between March and July 2019, I spent several days going through the "University of Nigeria Program Records" collection in the MSU Archives and Historical Collections (University of Nigeria Program Records, 2011). MSU's stewardship of this sizable, migrated collection of administrative and faculty records, which documents UNN's genesis and early development between 1958 and 1970, is owed to the University's formative relationship with UNN in the 1960s. Over the course of 2019, I also familiarized myself with the holdings at the MSU Main Library to identify relevant materials kept in that institution's special collections and remote storage. Furthermore, I spent three weeks at UNN's Nsukka campus in August of 2019 identifying, retrieving, and assessing documents related to GS preserved at the Nnamdi Azikiwe Library and the School of General Studies (SGS).

These forays into archival investigation enable me to make some evaluative generalizations about the contents and scope of the hard copy collections at UNN and MSU. I also rely on digital artifacts culled from the UNN and MSU websites and IRs, both of which I became familiar with throughout my inquiry, to compare the digitized archival collections that are openly accessible from each school. In doing so, I have two primary objectives in this critical reflection. First, I seek to interrogate how the constraints and logics of global imperialism impact archival power, and thus patterns of preservation and access, at UNN and MSU as representative universities of their respective world regions. Second, my original research at UNN was largely extractive, and therefore arguably risked reifying an inequitable "global academic division of labor" that positions African institutions and scholars as mere "'case' or 'data' producers for [use in] northern theory" (Ergin &

Alkan, 2019, p. 260). However, by taking Stoler's (2009) ethnographic "archival turn" I aim to the recenter personal agency and self-determination of Nigerian archivists.

The trustworthiness of the findings I offer below is bolstered by two common metrics of reliability in qualitative research, namely triangulation and member checking. First, my research on GS at UNN included multiple sources of data (Cermak, 2021b). In addition to the primary textual sources collected from archives at UNN and MSU, I also reviewed secondary sources on the history and makeup of GS, both at UNN and across Nigerian higher education, and conducted eleven semi-structured interviews with senior faculty across the GSP's constituent academic units at UNN. Thus, my interpretations of archival data were "triangulated," or cross checked, with the lived experiences of contemporary Nigerian stakeholders (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Furthermore, after initial findings were generated from these three data sources, a memo outlining the findings was provided to my faculty interviewees so they could "member check," or "confirm the credibility" of my work (p. 127). Ultimately, five of the original eleven interviewees were available provided feedback on my interpretations. They confirmed the credence of both my interpretations and my characterization of the state and scope of archival holdings at UNN.

Results

Hard Copy Collections

In this section, I begin my discussion of hard copy archival assemblages by reviewing my experience gathering documents on GS at UNN. I then consider how accessing, navigating, and working with MSU's collections differs. Over a three-week period in August 2019, I visited UNN to review and retrieve documents preserved by various institutional actors and units which reflect the current state and past iterations of the GS curriculum. I was especially interested in curricular artifacts detailing course contents and requirements at the SGS over time, such as student handbooks, academic catalogs and prospectuses, and departmental textbooks.

While, at the outset, I anticipated spending most of my time in the University's formal archival institutions, the Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, I ended up having the greatest luck in the personal office libraries of SGS faculty and administrators. As shown in Table 1, the majority of pertinent documents (91%) came from these informal archives, and this included all (100%) of those materials dealing exclusively with the GS curriculum. I only ended up retrieving three (3) documents—university-wide academic prospectuses (or program catalogs)—from the library, and then was only able to do so with the help of a reference librarian. What is more, these prospectuses contained comparatively sparse information on the GS curriculum.

Table 1

Hard copy documents collected at UNN, August 2019

Documents	SGS Faculty & Staff Offices		Nnamdi Azikiwe Library	
	Number (N)	Percent (%)	Number (N)	Percent (%)
SGS Handbooks	7	100	0	0
Unit Textbooks	24	100	0	0
UNN Prospectuses	0	0	3	100
Total	31	91	3	9

The relative richness of the informal archives featured on bookshelves lining the office walls of SGS faculty and staff illustrates the importance of "hidden deposits" for redressing the innate silences of formal collections due to their inherent exclusivity and selectivity (Assmann, 2011, p. 337). I was fortunate to gain access to these deposits, and to find preserved what materials I did, as these privately curated assemblages are not open to the public in the same way the Nnamdi Azikiwe Library is. I had to know and build rapport with SGS stakeholders to negotiate entry to these deposits and, indeed, to even know they existed at all. Weld explains that "scholars of archival… science often link the accessibility of [institutional] archives to that [institution's] levels of accountability" (2014, p. 51). Thus, these ad hoc, personal collections speak to UNN's devaluation of and lack of institutional accountability for the preservation of curricular objects relative to relics of research productivity. This state of affairs reflects an archival culture at Nigerian universities that privileges the preservation of research outputs over curricular materials.

In the months prior to traveling to Nigeria I invested time at MSU's University Archives and Historical Collections going through the "University of Nigeria Program Records" collection. This collection constitutes a significant trove (87 cubic feet) of early UNN administrative and curricular documentation, especially concerning the role that MSU representatives played in the University's genesis (University of Nigeria Program Records, 2011). Despite its relative expansiveness compared to the deposits I worked with in Nsukka, the collection at MSU is highly accessible and easily navigable thanks to the availability of an online finding aid which directed my research. The finding aid is quite extensive (230 pages when converted into a PDF) and comprehensive, providing a wealth of guiding information in contrast to the greater ambiguity which characterized my time at UNN. Despite its size the finding aid is a searchable document, allowing me to focus in, via a keyword search (general studies, GS, GSP, SGS, etc.), on boxes and folders containing documents pertinent to my research. I was therefore able to quickly identify and review the most relevant materials and ended up photographing the contents of thirty-five folders from four boxes, accounting for a small portion of the total collection.

In a 2016 article, Hiribarren described working in a French colonial archive in the Republic of the Congo in Central Africa. While there, he set up a static website for the archive to inform and attract foreign researchers. While his website was problematic in a variety of ways and failed to meaningfully engage local stake holders, he crucially highlighted the need for similar resources, like the finding aid at MSU, to guide researchers' working in Africa. My experience at UNN resonates with his assertion that "many researchers do not actually undertake research in Africa because they do not know what to expect when they arrive in an archive… As research time is precious, a couple of hours in front of a screen might save time while physically in situ" (Hiribarren, 2016, p. 378).

Moreover, the greater ICT infrastructure at the MSU Main Library also facilitates the retrieval of materials that might more intuitively be envisaged at UNN's Nnamdi Azikiwe Library. For instance, compared to the three UNN prospectuses I identified in Nsukka with the help of a librarian (Table 1, Appendix A), I was able to personally find eleven similar UNN catalogs that had been removed, or migrated, from UNN through the MSU Library's online interface and requisition them for delivery from remote storage. These discrepancies illustrate ongoing socio-cultural imperialism wherein developing nations function as data-producers for northern archival collections. While the UNN course catalogs at MSU do not detail instances of colonial-era violence, and so might be viewed with less suspicion than other migrated archives from the colonial and early national periods in Africa (Badger, 2012), they nonetheless highlight the problematic discrepancies in archival power afforded to African university archivists relative to their counterparts in the U.S. It is also evident that infrastructural imperialism's uneven footprint has real effects on university researchers and archivists, even concerning hard copy archival collections. The relatively well-resourced position enjoyed by MSU empowers it to foster a more inclusive archival culture—to preserve more kinds of materials and make them readily accessible—than is evident at UNN.

Digital Collections

It has already been established that the archival culture which guides institutional repositories (IRs) in Nigerian universities, where local contents (LCs) are ostensibly made openly accessible to the wider online public, prioritizes institutional research outputs over other types of materials to increase visibility on a socio-culturally imperialistic global academic landscape (Ezema, 2013; Fasae at al., 2017; Ukwoma & Okafor, 2017). In 2017, Nigerian library scholars Ukwoma and Okafor reviewed the more than twenty-thousand documents then available on UNN's IR through OpenDOAR, a UK-based online listing of open-access IRs, in order to tabulate a typology of LCs. While Ukwoma and Okafor verified the predominance of research outputs (theses, dissertations, journal articles, conference proceedings, books, and book chapters), the inequities of infrastructural imperialism hampered my ability to confirm their findings as the link to UNN's IR was no longer accessible through OpenDOAR during my original research period in 2019. Nevertheless, the connection to UNN's repository has since been re-established and my subsequent review in turn bears out the privileged digitization of such research products (University of Nigeria Nsukka Institutional Repository, n.d.).

Conversely, MSU's IR is much more comprehensive both in terms of the raw number of contents and in their variety of types (Digital Repository Collections, n.d.). For instance, MSU's electronic theses and dissertations collection alone, totaling more than fifty-thousand discrete files, contains several times as many digital records as UNN's entire IR (MSU Libraries, n.d.). The complete IR at MSU is far larger still and contains a myriad of cultural artifacts in a variety of formats beyond such research outputs, such as audio files, newspapers, posters, and sundries like buttons, shirts, and other wearables. Moreover, outside of its IR, MSU also digitally archives historical information on its academic programs similar to what can be found in the SGS handbooks and UNN prospectuses, information which is undervalued and therefore available

almost exclusively in hard copy in faculty and staff offices at UNN. The Registrar's Office at MSU archives academic program descriptions from the past 20 years and course descriptions going back to 1970 (Archived Academic Programs, n.d.; Archived Course Descriptions, n.d.). Therefore, a researcher conducting a study of MSU's curriculum over much of the timespan that concerned my work at UNN would be able to conduct most of his or her research from anywhere in the world, provided an internet connection and a digital device. Overall, MSU's greater archival power in the digital sphere, driven by its greater ICT infrastructure and know-how and emboldened by its unrestrictive archival culture, far outstrips that of UNN.

Discussion

In this comparative analysis, I have taken Stoler's (2009) "archival turn" to show how UNN and MSU, as representatives of universities in their respective world regions, are differentially endowed with Trouillot's (2015) "archival power." Given the realities of socio-cultural imperialism (Okon & Ojakorotu, 2018), UNN, peripherally positioned on the global higher education landscape along with other African universities, enjoys relatively little agency in choosing which types of local contents to preserve and curate. Instead, UNN focuses the limited resources it has to leverage in fashioning its archives to almost exclusively showcase a single type of LC deemed most legitimate in the Global North, research outputs, over local heritage and curricular artifacts (Deem et al., 2008; Ezema, 2013; Pusser & Marginson, 2013; Ukwoma & Okafor, 2017). Thus, UNN has adopted a straitened "archival culture" (Weld, 2014), which regulates archival power according to the conventions of a world-wide tertiary education system designed by and for more powerful institutions.

Furthermore, UNN is also much more at the mercy of "infrastructural imperialism" (Vaidhyanathan, 2012) than its American counterpart. The inequitable distribution of the "pipelines and protocols… of information" (p. 109), namely internet connectivity and ICT infrastructure (Edem et al., 2009; Ezema, 2013; Fasae et al., 2017; Igbo & Imo, 2011), leaves UNN with an Institutional Repository (IR) many times smaller than MSU's (MSU Libraries, n.d.; University of Nigeria Nsukka Institutional Repository, n.d.). UNN is also hampered in disseminating online resources which might otherwise draw foreign researchers to its hard copy collections and on-campus spaces, such as Hiribarren's (2016) website in the Republic of the Congo and the finding aid I used in MSU's University Archives and Historical Collections (University of Nigeria Program Records, 2011).

The constraints imposed upon Nigerian universities by ongoing and pervasive imperialism negatively impact the experiences of local users and archivists as well as those of researchers from overseas who find themselves in Nigerian archives. These constraints signify an imperialistic imparity in access to Nigerian LCs whereby Nigerian histories and stories may actually be more visible in the U.S than in Nigeria, as evinced by my experiences working with "migrated archives" (Badger, 2012; Migrated Archives, n.d.) from UNN at MSU. For instance, I was able to independently find eleven UNN catalogs and scan thirty-five archival folders pertinent to GS at UNN with relative ease over a matter of days at MSU. Conversely, it took weeks and the help of numerous stakeholders to locate just thirty-one comparable records at UNN (see Table 1), mostly from "hidden deposits" (Assmann, 2011). Hence, the cultural and infrastructural inequities which act upon UNN limit the archival power of Nigerian universities in ways that keep them at a structural disadvantage to American institutions like MSU. This state of affairs reinforces an insidious 'global invisibility' rather than fostering the 'global visibility' Nigerian academics seek (Ezema, 2013; Ukwoma & Okafor, 2017).

Implications and Conclusion

One of my primary objectives in writing this manuscript was to contest the notion that African researchers produce only 'data' for others to interpret (Ergin & Alkan, 2019). Instead, the scholars I met at UNN are the authors of their own narratives and histories. It is then important, I believe, to highlight the agency of faculty and staff at UNN's SGS who bucked the university's restrictive archival priorities by preserving their curricular artifacts in the form of SGS handbooks and unit textbooks in their workspaces. By taking it upon themselves to preserve their curricular heritage, they have been able to tell their self-actualizing stories and celebrate their curricular innovations. They have done so in recent years by collectively authoring a book on the GS curriculum (Nwosu, 2017a) and hosting two international conferences on the role of GS in Nigerian postsecondary education in the 21st century (Agbo et al., 2019; Nwosu, 2017b).

These self-designated archivists in the SGS have done all this in spite of UNN's straitened archival culture, the restrictions of socio-cultural and infrastructural imperialism, and the limited archival power nominally assigned to them by

the University. Significantly, the 2017 book itself references several editions of the SGS handbooks that I found preserved on SGS office bookshelves. The owners of those bookshelves were also, in many cases, contributing authors to both the book and conferences in 2017 and 2019. These same documents in turn became yet another source of information in my own research, demonstrating the power inherent in this type of self-driven preservation. It was thanks to these individuals that I was able to move forward with my own research at UNN and I owe my Nigerian colleagues a debt of gratitude. I call for continued self-driven archival preservation primarily as a means to center the voices of the SGS faculty themselves, legitimize their power as archivists and storytellers, and contravene the persistent impacts of imperialism.

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Coping Strategies Used by Indian International Students to Overcome Transitional Challenges in the United States

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This article was not written with the assistance of any Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology, including ChatGPT" or other support technologies.

Abstract

Many Indian international students are studying in American colleges and universities. Education abroad in an unfamiliar environment can be challenging for students. Thus, the present study investigated the coping strategies employed by six Indian international students studying in the United States (U.S.), using phenomenological data analysis methodology. Participants expressed invariant constituents, classified into four coping strategy themes: (1) open-mindedness, (2) goal-orientedness, (3) an independent attitude, and (4) showing gratitude. Further, emerging from the data were the ways in which these coping strategies could be acquired. Findings have implications for international student advisors working in the university sector. Universities can play a vital role in promoting such coping strategies to enhance the well-being of international students.

Keywords: adjustment, Asian international students, challenges, coping strategies, Indian international students

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Introduction

Many international students travel to Western countries to pursue higher studies. According to UNESCO (2019), the international student population increased from 2 million in 2000 to over 5.3 million in 2017. More than 50% of these students are enrolled in the U.S., Europe, and Australia. After China, the second most common international students come

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from India (WENR, 2018). The UNESCO data indicated that Indian international student enrollment in higher studies abroad increased from 134,880 in 2004 to 278,383 in 2017 (WENR, 2018). Specifically, according to the Institute of International Education (IIE, 2018), approximately 196,271 Indian international students are currently studying in American colleges and universities.

The Transitional Challenges of International Students

Transiting international students experience various transitional challenges as they progress from familiar to unfamiliar cultures and academic environments (Prescott & Hellsten, 2005; Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2005). Some of the challenges include experiencing anxiety related to communicating in a second language, studying in a new educational setting, leaving friends and family back home, having to network in a new social environment, and paying high tuition rates (Bista, 2015; Chennamsetti, 2020; James, 2018; Park et al., 2016; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Ward & Kennedy, 1999). As the students' stress related to adapting to the host country's culture increases, their difficulties associated with fitting into the host country's social life also increase (Mahmood & Burke, 2018). For example, a qualitative study conducted by Poulakis et al. (2017) found Greek international students to lack knowledge about everyday life in the U.S., leading to difficulties in balancing work and personal lives, communicating in English, and understanding the American accent. Further, the sudden culture shock of becoming a minority in the host country, in contrast to being a majority in their home country, was also challenging (Poulakis et al., 2017). Park et al. (2016) interviewed nine Chinese, Korean, and Taiwanese students studying at a university in the U.S. They found that the language barrier was a significant challenge for these students, restricting their social interactions with the local students, leading to fewer friends and fewer social skills. The language barrier also hindered the students' participation in classroom activities and academic performance.

International students transitioning to countries other than the U.S. have also been found to experience similar transitional challenges. For instance, Alhazmi and Nyland (2010) explored two Saudi international students studying at an Australian University. Being a foreigner, using an alien language, encountering an unknown academic system, and mingling with their Australian peers were all challenging for these students. Adisa et al. (2019) investigated the transitional challenges of a hundred and four international students studying in the United Kingdom (U.K.). They found that students from non-English speaking countries struggled to understand the British accent; because of this, they had difficulty interacting with Britishers. This barrier hindered their classroom participation. In addition, they encountered trouble understanding the London transportation system, struggled adjusting to the climatic conditions, and feared criticism and rejection from society. In another study, Seijas (2020) explored international students studying in Japan and found that they struggled to make Japanese friends, communicate in Japanese, and find accommodation. Thus, most international students encounter transitional challenges regardless of the destination country.

The Transitional Challenges of Indian International Students

The transition of Indian international students to the U.S. is complex due to a wide gap between the countries' cultures and academic systems. Kaur (2006) conducted a qualitative study to explore the factors that impacted six Indian international students' academic adjustment in the U.S. The findings indicated that participants encountered challenges related to unfamiliarity with the course selection process and maintaining successful instructor-student relationships. To examine sociological adjustment, Atri et al. (2007) conducted a study using one hundred and eighty-five Indian international students in the U.S. They found that a lack of social support and difficulty assimilating into the host culture resulted in unhappiness and stress. Moreover, Meghani and Harvey (2016) explored the trends of depression, acculturation, and enculturation among one hundred and fourteen Indian graduate students in the U.S. They found that 75% of the students found adjusting to American culture difficult during their first academic year, and subsequently developed depressive symptoms.

Besides the U.S., Indian students were also found to encounter transitional challenges in Australian and Canadian Universities. For instance, Singh and Cabraal (2010) found in their study that the significant challenge of Indian international students studying in Australia was a lack of knowledge about Australia's general lifestyle, resulting in participants being passive and vulnerable to attacks and robbery when traveling alone, late at night with expensive personal gadgets. Pham and Tran (2015) observed a sample of twenty-two Indian international students in Australia and found that they felt disconnected from the local population, encountered communication difficulties, and reported that teachers over international students favored local students. Similar findings were found in a study that explored the experiences of two Indian students studying at a Canadian University (Houshmand et al., 2014). The participants encountered difficulties in terms of feeling excluded on campus, as their personality traits were attributed to racial and cultural stereotypes.

Impact of Transitional Stress on Students

The process of leaving their home country to study overseas makes international students homesick and alienated. They encounter culture shock due to the new academic environment, food, and unfamiliar climatic conditions. This transition process causes transitional stress among international students (Arthur, 2003; Johnson & Sandhu, 2007), negatively impacting their psychological, emotional, sociocultural, and academic well-being (Arthur, 2003). The transitional stress is manifested in various ways, such as anger, anxiety, cognitive impairment, confusion, exhaustion, defensiveness, depression, disorientation, exhaustion, fatigue, fear, gastrointestinal problems, headaches, homesickness, inferiority, insecurity, insomnia, irritability, lack of energy, loneliness, loss of appetite, loss of control, mood swings, muscle tension, overeating, resentment, sadness, sense of loss, unfamiliar body pain, and vague bodily sensations (Arthur, 2003). These findings were recently confirmed by other research studies, for instance, by Ching et al. (2017) and Kornienko et al. (2018).

There has been a concern that international students might have low graduation rates because of the academic difficulties they encounter, such as being weak in the English language (Fass-Holmes & Vaughn, 2014), not understanding American teaching style (Ota, 2013; Roy, 2013), difficulty in maneuvering through new campus environment (Ota, 2013), and difficulty in interacting with fellow American peers and faculty (Roy, 2013). Though international students encounter academic challenges, they have been found to succeed academically (Fass-Holmes, 2016). However, their self-esteem decreased because of academic difficulties (Constantine et al., 2004; Lyken-Segosebe, 2017), reducing their work and personal life satisfaction (Shupe, 2007).

Coping Strategies

According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), coping is a process where people evaluate their situation and consciously choose an effective coping strategy to solve their problems. Coping strategies are classified into emotion-focused and problem-focused (Lazarus, 2006). An emotion-focused coping strategy is where people try to distract themselves from stressful situations or reduce the negative emotions caused by such situations, for instance, by exercising, meditating, praying, or using relaxation techniques. A problem-focused coping strategy is where people solve stressful situations, for example, by identifying the source of the stress and eliminating it, seeking help to manage the situation, or detaching oneself from it (Folkman, 1997, 2013). In most stressful situations, particularly in transitional stress, using emotion and problem-focused coping strategies are found to have influenced with effective outcomes (Lazarus, 2006).

Prior research has highlighted that international students use diverse emotion-focused and problem-focused coping strategies to overcome transitional challenges (Alazzi & Chiodo, 2006; Vasileiou et al., 2019). For instance, Alazzi and Chiodo (2006) conducted a qualitative study with eight Middle Eastern students studying at a U.S. university. They found that the participants identified the cause of a problem and understood the consequences that could occur if the problem was not solved. In addition, the participants who considered themselves capable of solving their challenges had superior coping skills. Further, participants coped with loneliness and homesickness by engaging in religious activities, keeping themselves occupied at work, and maintaining good relations with family and friends. Such coping strategies were found to increase the confidence and happiness of the students (Alazzi & Chiodo 2006). Similarly, Poulakis et al. (2017) conducted a qualitative study to explore transitional stress among eight Greek international students studying in the U.S. They found that the participants developed strong relations with their families and peers to overcome their homesickness that helped them in gaining emotional support. In another study, engaging in positive self-talk, listening to music, and diverting oneself from thinking about home served as helpful coping strategies and promoted the overall well-being of fifteen international university students studying in the U.K. (Vasileiou et al., 2019). Concurring with this finding, a qualitative study conducted at a Malaysian university found that positive thinking and engaging in extracurricular activities such as exercising, reading, and praying increased students' self-esteem (Saravanan et al., 2019). Additionally, taking the responsibility to understand the academic system of the host country, and honing their English language and social skills, helped five Latin American students overcome academic fears at a U.K. university (James, 2018). Also, focusing on developing communication skills, working hard, and engaging in community activities overcame transitional stress among 413 international students studying at a U.S. university (Mahmood & Burke, 2018).

The Goal of the Study

Literature indicates that transition is a process where regardless of the country international students transit to, they initially encounter transitional stress. Additionally, the more the difference between the home and the host countries in terms

of cultures, attitudes, and academic systems, the more the transitional challenges and stress (Pham & Tran, 2015). Students transiting from India to the U.S. encounter significant transitional challenges because of the vast difference in the cultures and academic systems of India and the U.S. Therefore, to help students from India adjust to the U.S., it is vital to know the coping strategies used by previous Indian international students to overcome their transitional challenges. However, minimal research has focused on the coping strategies employed by Indian international students in the host countries. Thus, this study aims to (1) explore the coping strategies used by students from India to overcome the challenges in the U.S.; (2) promote awareness about various coping strategies; and (3) provide information to international student counselors to enhance the coping of Indian international students.

Method

Design

A qualitative phenomenological methodology was employed to conduct this study. Considering that Creswell (1998) suggested a sample size ranging from five to twenty-five participants, while Morse (1994) recommended a minimum of six participants, a convenience sample of six Indian international students enrolled in a research-intensive public university in the southern United States was selected. The participants for this study were selected using the purposive sampling criterion, wherein participants are chosen based on their ability to provide comprehensive information concerning the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 1990). To conduct purposive sampling, it was imperative to specify parameters for selecting study participants (Merriam, 1998). Accordingly, the following criteria were used: Participants must have been born and studied in India; they must not have visited the U.S. or any other country before enrolling as graduate students in the U.S; they must have lived in the U.S. for over a year; and they must be graduate students.

Participants

Six international students from India took part in the study. Of these, five were doctoral students, and one was a master's level student. At the time of data collection, the participants had lived in the U.S. for 2-11 years. All the participants were given the following pseudonyms to protect their identities: Krishna, Vishnu, Pragya, Shreya, Rishi, and Arjun.

Procedure

Upon obtaining the ethical clearance for this study from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), participants were invited for an interview. The interview protocol consisted of seven probes that explored the coping strategies used by the participants to adjust well in the U.S. The duration of the interviews ranged from 1-2 hours. The first author conducted interviews in the university's library, labs, and cafeteria. We informed participants about the confidentiality procedures before the interview. We took permission from them to record and transcribe the interviews. They were also told that they could withdraw from the interview at any time. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcribed data were analyzed using the phenomenological methodology.

Data Analysis

Based on Moustakas' (1994) modified version of Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen's method, the data analysis was performed using the following ten steps: (1) Epoche: When applying Epoche, Moustakas emphasized that the researcher must avoid preconceived notions about the phenomenon under study and instead concentrate on the data provided by the participants to understand the phenomenon from a newer perspective. Accordingly, the authors refrained from their thoughts, feelings, and assumptions regarding the coping strategies to obtain a newer understanding of the various coping strategies that can be employed for successful adjustment in the host country; (2) Obtaining an understanding of the data: To understand the data, all six recorded interviews were listened to multiple times to ensure the accuracy of the transcripts. Also, the transcribed interviews were read multiple times to better understand the participants' viewpoints; (3) Horizonalization: This is a process of identifying verbatim parts of the transcribed interviews that explain the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Accordingly, all interviews were thoroughly analyzed to determine significant verbatim parts describing the phenomenon of coping strategies; (4) Identifying the invariant constituent: Invariant constituents were identified by abstracting and labeling the statements essential in understanding the coping strategies. The statements that did not meet the criteria were repetitive, overlapping, or vague were deleted; (5) Identifying themes: The identified invariant constituents were placed under each heading, forming the fundamental themes of coping strategies; (6) Individual textural descriptions: In this step, descriptive narratives of each participant were developed based on the horizonalized statements, invariant constituents, and the themes identified in the previous step; (7) Individual structural descriptions: Here "Imaginative

Variation" was applied (p. 33) "to arrive at structural descriptions of an experience, the underlying and precipitating factors that account for what is being experienced." (Moustakas 1994, p. 98); (8) Composite textural description: Inductive reasoning and analysis were used to combine the individual textural descriptions of all the participants formulated in step 6 to present a portrayal of the descriptive narratives of all the participants as a group; (9) Composite structural description: The individual structural descriptions were combined to formulate a composite structural description using imaginative variation, to describe what the participants, as a group, experienced and how they felt after employing those strategies; and (10) Textural-structural synthesis-essence of the phenomenon of coping strategies: This step involved combining textural and structural descriptions to understand the essence of the coping strategies from the participants' perspective, which is the goal of this study. Lastly, member checking was performed to establish the trustworthiness of the transcribed data. The participants were contacted a second time after the primary interview to peruse their transcribed interviews and make any changes to ensure the accuracy of their responses.

Findings

The phenomenological data analysis resulted in the following four coping strategy themes: (1) open-mindedness, (2) goal-orientedness, (3) independent attitude, and (4) showing gratitude. The participants utilized these strategies to solve the transitional challenges encountered in their personal and academic lives in the U.S. The findings also indicated specific thoughts and actions that helped the participants acquire the identified four coping strategies, as shown in Figure 1.

Open-Mindedness

When the participants transited to the U.S., they struggled to form friendships and missed their home country's culture and atmosphere. For instance, Pragya stated:

> If there was a word that could multiply miserable times by thousands, that's how I felt. I did not like it here at first. I didn't want to meet anybody. I just wanted to go back home. I feel lonely, not being able to express my true feelings to somebody. Having to suppress my feelings and not being able to talk about certain things certainly makes me feel lonely.

One coping strategy that helped participants form social bonds was being open-minded. According to the participants, open-mindedness is a mindset where students accept diverse people, ideas, and information. They demonstrated open-mindedness in various ways. For example, Shreya became more flexible, discouraged herself from judging people, initiated contact, and learned to be more expressive. Explaining, she commented:

> I had to keep an open mind and let things go. You cannot have everything according to the way you want, as you have it in India. Do not judge anyone based on their actions. Keep in contact and good contact with as many professors and administrative people over here in the university. And if problems arise, tell them immediately. Do not wait or think it will not be done. Just ask them.

Arjun gave up generalizing and stereotyping. He expressed:

> I learned that many perceptions are out there; they are all different, not right or wrong. They are just different. Also, when you are in India, you have some stereotypes, but when you start interacting with people from different countries, you start realizing that, 'I need to discard a lot of these stereotypes that I carry.' I have broadened my thinking and my mindset. In terms of my worldview, I have broadened.

Rishi became more accommodating. He opined:

> One needs to learn how to share an apartment and how to share life with others. You have to be really flexible and open to adjusting to the setup here. One can't be firm and say, 'No, I like to do this; I won't do that.' You must be open and adjust; that's the only way to survive.

Rishi also invested an effort to understand the host culture:

> I understood that if you are in a society, you must understand it. For that, you need help from Americans. You need to open up more with Americans; ask them general questions about their background or education, but avoid personal questions. Once you start approaching, maybe others will also begin approaching from their side. That way, communication develops.

Further, emphasizing on being more versatile, Rishi said:

> Most Indian students are very academically oriented. Outside of studies, they don't know anything. But they can change all those perspectives here. For example, they can join a hiking club. They can learn salsa, develop an all-round personality, and not just confine themselves to their department and apartment.

Vishnu learned to be forthright. He explained:

> You need to be a lot franker over here. I wouldn't say just Indians, but Asians, in general, have this tremendous respect that comes into the way of expressing what you feel, and you kind of feel that if they tell it to you, then that's what you have to do. You never argue or make a point. That really needs to stop, and it took me a few years to get over that and today if I cannot do something, I just cannot do it. Initially, whatever my advisor threw on me, I used to do it, no matter what, whether I could or could not. Most of them I accomplished, some of them I just could not, and he was like, 'just say no to me!' just say you can't do it and that's fine, but if you say you can do it, I expect a solution or an answer.' So, I don't take anything more than I can handle. I got to a point where I understand what can be detrimental to my progress (smiles). So, I say no to things pretty straightforward.

Vishnu ceased being judgmental and instead mingled with diverse individuals to build his social life. He suggested:

> Don't make your judgments based on your first impression. Don't get offended. Develop a social life. Just be free. Talk to everyone and don't be in a closed shell. It's good to have a healthy social life, without getting into issues or problems. Staying aloof, not talking to people, not socializing is not helpful. It's how well you deal with people is what improves your social relationships. It's a very small community, so you don't want to make enemies.

Krishna interestingly became open to receiving the challenges. He stated, "Be open to the problems, but be prepared and don't panic. Make loads of friends and don't restrict to people from the same country." Being open-minded helped participants develop a positive attitude, preventing them from judging people. Their lives were enriched by learning about other cultures, and they became more accepting of diverse cultures and people. Thus, open-mindedness prevented the participants from encountering culture shock. Vishnu emphasized, "when you have an open mind, you are not shocked. It helps one to adjust to the host country successfully."

Goal-Orientedness

Participants got absorbed into the problems they encountered in the U.S. For instance, Shreya felt unhappy and angry when she saw a difference in her professor's treatment of her and her colleagues. She explained:

> When you see a difference in the treatment from anybody, you really get very angry and frustrated because you cannot speak up. Because you know that if you speak out, people will not like it and the relationship with them would be affected. You cannot go to your seniors, because for them it's a trivial matter and you think as to what they would think about me if I go every time and complain every time this happens.

To overcome such difficulties, participants emphasized being focused and goal-oriented. Shreya explained, "you have come here to achieve a goal. Keep your goal in mind and keep doing that." Pragya believed that "the incoming students should imagine themselves five years from now. They should have a goal in mind, which could be educational, professional, personal, economical, or social, and try to reach it." Rishi said: "Success rate in graduate school determines the student's career and, accordingly, his/her happiness. Therefore, students should be earnest in setting goals and work diligently to accomplish them." Vishnu's goal was to excel in academics. He explained:

> Having a goal in mind in very essential. Enrolling in courses with a 'whatever works' attitude is a serious mistake. Instead, courses should be selected based on interest and passion, so that we continue to excel in them. My goal was also to make my life in U.S. smooth. I had already met people; spoke to people right in India; we had gotten to know each other; we came here as a group; I already knew my roommate, fixed over there; and we had an apartment. I came to know of the India Association at Nurture University, who helped us.

Arjun explained the importance of being goal-oriented and said, "If you are goal-oriented and focused, you can come out with good outcomes in the U.S. You have an opportunity to be recognized and excel if you want to. So, one must focus."

Independent Attitude

Another challenge that participants had to overcome was being dependent. Pragya stated: "my parents would protect me a lot, as a result of which I was much more dependent on them for decisions. Here, I am on my own, which is difficult." Similarly, Shruti stated:

> In India, you are not working when you are studying. So, when you are studying, you are concentrating a lot on your studies and your parents are very supportive throughout those 3 years. So it's basically just studying and you are not expected to do much else. But, here it's very difficult, like when you are just 18, and you have to adjust to cooking, cleaning and living on your own, navigating through classes and making all the decisions on your own. It's difficult. Back in India, parents take care of a lot of things, which would not be the case here. So, you would have to adjust to many new things after coming here.

Participants emphasized cultivating an independent attitude to overcome this barrier, where they depended on their capabilities to accomplish tasks instead of relying on others. Participants had to completely change their beliefs about becoming self-reliant and independent. Explaining, Vishnu stated:

> In the United States, you are not just a student; you need to do everything by yourself in terms of cooking, laundry and so on. In India, you can just sit and study and your mom brings you tea or coffee. Here, if you want coffee, go make your coffee. You have experienced being pampered and living a happy life. Now go out to the real world and do the same things without all that support.

Further, Rishi commented:

> Developing independent thinking and taking charge of your own life is very important. Rediff.com has a section for prospective students coming from India to the United States. India Association has a nice FAQ list, things to do, what to expect. Reading this information helps. Reading and talking to students already in the United States helps.

Krishna took the initiative to solve problems on his own:

> I believed that I will get over the situation. I asked for help from my friends or relatives. I asked myself as to what makes me happy in U.S., instead of dwelling in negative thinking. And once I did this, I knew what exactly I needed to do.

Re-emphasizing taking one's responsibility, Shreya stated:

> I learned not to keep too many expectations. I prepared mentally that I am alone here, I have to stand on my feet and take care of myself; there is not going to be anybody to take care of you. There will be problems, and it will take time to adjust.

Similarly, Vishnu said, "I feel that you are 23, you are grown up and are responsible. Start living your life. So, I think having at least that confidence level is fair. Don't expect anyone to pamper you at this point." On similar lines, Pragya stated:

> We must be independent here. Life here is not as rosy as you see on television. It's shockingly different. Therefore, its important to go out and meet different people, but never forget your goal, which is to study and be responsible. Reading, keeping in touch with current affairs of United States, asking as many people as possible for their opinions are all important.

Being independent helped the participants increase their self-confidence and inner strength. They became their own support system. Vishnu commented, "being independent helps you grow emotionally and mentally. That's how you learn things and solve problems on your own."

Showing Gratitude

Difficulties in the U.S. made participants delve into negative thinking, making them sad and stressed. For instance, Krishna described his initial days in the U.S. as "hell." Explaining, he stated:

> The daytime was split between loads of academic formalities, facing fierce competition for funding and course enrollment, meeting professors and prospective employers, sorting out living situation

(lease, grocery, account, purchases), and staying in touch with family and friends back in India. In whatever little that was left of nighttime, it was very common to think of the reasons for coming here; occasional crying, self-consoling and wondering if all of it was worth the efforts.

To overcome this challenge, participants began identifying the reasons they were thankful for. Vishnu stated:

> I am thankful that this country has accepted me. You came here to study. Do what you have to do and continue with your life. We are in a foreign land, and it is important to express our gratitude to the country that is providing us the opportunity to pursue our academic dreams and aspirations. Yes, if you cannot get into NASA, there is nothing wrong, because they ask for citizenship, and you are not a citizen. Sometimes people would say, 'I am not feeling good,' and I would say 'think of any other international who were in India and think about what they would be going through.' I mean, socially, we may also not be perfect, you know, in terms of treating an outsider in our community. So you need to think of it in that aspect and say, 'ok, this is not something really bad that happened to me, this is something that people sometimes undergo,' not a big deal.

Further, showing gratitude to his professor, Vishnu stated:

> My advisor has been great as far as mentoring is concerned. I like his style because he is an advisor and that's all he does, advise. He says, 'I am your advisor, and you are my student. We should always keep arguing and when you start winning more arguments than I do, it's time for you to graduate; that's a very cool concept, and I love that idea.' He's been a very good mentor and a role model that I would like to be like. He sends us out to conferences and says, 'Go talk to the professors; find out what they are doing, what their students are doing and try and see if you can collaborate with them.' So, things like this really help in the long run. I would have to give a lot of credit to my advisor for allowing us to do all this.

Shreya expressed her gratitude by returning favors. Explaining, she commented:

> Friends help you a lot in adjusting. If someone helps me, I make sure that I return the favor or at least stay in touch with them. Just making use of a person and going is not good. That starts affecting other people too. House some people in your apartment, because they really need it, and the people who stay there should take care of people living in the house. Just don't be a problem for the person.

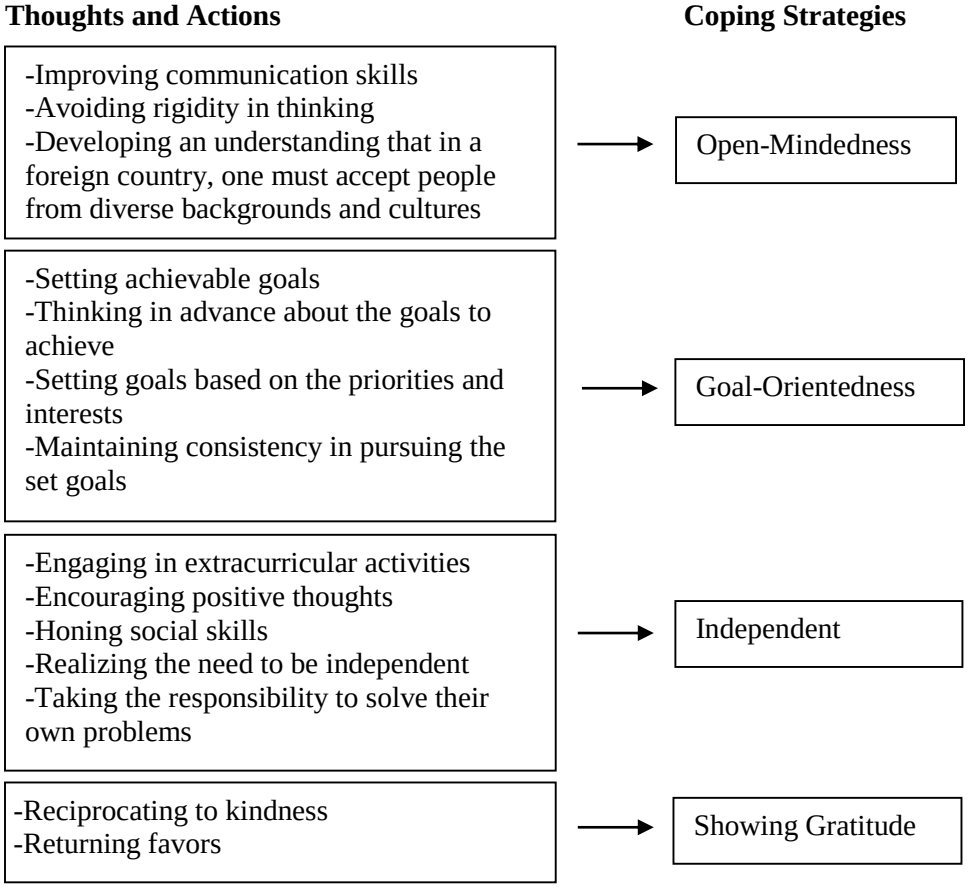
In terms of expressing gratitude to the host society, Rishi stated:

> Whenever I go and talk to Americans, I know I am an outsider. I am not a part of this society, be it in terms of language or culture or anything. Usually, I talk with a sense of gratitude. I ask myself this question - suppose the same situation was reversed; let's say, this is India, you are an Indian, and they are Americans; it's like role reversal, will you be so acceptable? Will you be so welcoming to other cultures? Will you be so forthcoming to help others? If you see everything in that light, then what you see is definitely a service to you. So, in that sense I don't have any questions.

Participants expressed that showing gratitude developed a positive frame of mind, which helped them integrate into the academic and social lives of the host country successfully. Thus, showing gratitude served as an effective coping strategy to adjust to life in the host country.

Figure 1

Thoughts and Actions That Led to the Identified Coping Strategies



Discussion

The present qualitative study examined the coping strategies of Indian international students in U.S. higher education. Four specific coping strategies were identified: open-mindedness, goal-orientedness, an independent attitude, and showing gratitude. The participants reported that being open-minded helped them develop a more positive approach to dealing with challenges in the host country. Establishing clear goals for oneself helped them adjust to their academic and social life. Furthermore, a belief system that one must be independent and not rely on others increased participants' self-esteem and happiness. Finally, developing the trait of having gratitude aided the participants in valuing the opportunities they received. Additionally, this study identified ways in which the above-mentioned four coping strategies can be acquired, as delineated in Figure 1.

The results of this study indicated that the coping strategy of being open-minded aided participants in becoming more flexible in integrating and making friends from diverse cultures instead of limiting themselves to their own culture. This prevented them from experiencing major culture shock and transitional stress in the host country. These findings concur with previous studies wherein open-minded students understood other cultural viewpoints better and adjusted effectively to the host country (Alsahafi & Shin, 2016; Mahmood & Burke, 2018; Zhou et al., 2018). Participants adopted open-mindedness by improving their communication skills, avoiding rigid thinking, and accepting people from diverse backgrounds and cultures.

The second coping strategy is goal-orientedness. Focusing on achieving the set goals increased participants' confidence, they excelled in academics, and consequently, their stress levels were reduced. This finding adds to the previous research, where the results indicated that goal-oriented students are more competent, less focused on problems, and less challenged due to transitional stress (Mahmood & Burke, 2018). Further, the present study's findings are consistent with Park et al. (2016), who emphasized that setting goals related to developing a support system in the host country made

the students feel more accepted by the host community. Participants achieved goal-orientedness by thinking in advance about the goals they wanted to achieve, setting achievable goals related to their academics, health, finances, and social skills, prioritizing their goals, and maintaining consistency in pursuing them.

The third coping mechanism is to develop an independent attitude, which helped the students grow emotionally and psychologically, aiding them in solving problems. Independent thinking increased participants' self-esteem. Vasileiou et al. (2019) viewed an independent attitude as a self-reliant coping strategy where the students recognized and accepted the problems and made a conscious effort to comfort themselves. According to Alsahafi and Shin (2016), independent students are responsible for improving their lives by developing healthy habits, such as avoiding substance abuse, encouraging more positive thoughts, honing their social skills, listening to music, and engaging in writing. Concurring with this finding, participants in this study took the responsibility to overcome their transitional challenges by becoming more independent. Participants achieved an independent attitude by realizing the need to be independent, taking the lead to better their lives, engaging in extracurricular activities, encouraging positive thoughts, honing their social skills, and taking the responsibility to solve their problems. The final coping strategy is showing gratitude. Being thankful helped the participants see the positive aspects of life and value the opportunities they received. This increased their satisfaction with the university, social interactions, academic system, and life, in general, in the host country. These findings were consistent with the previous literature that indicated a high correlation between expressing gratitude and contentment with the university experiences (Froh et al., 2008), developing healthy, long-lasting relationships (Emmons & McCullough, 2004), and enhancing student participation in the classroom (Flinchbaugh et al., 2012). Participants showed gratitude by returning favors and reciprocating to the kindness of others.

Implications

The participants in the present study employed four coping strategies that helped them successfully transit to the U.S. The most common resource materials provided by international student support services include online reading materials on their website, newsletter articles, and brochures (Madden-Dent et al., 2019). Therefore, the coping strategies identified in this study can be valuable to include in such resource materials to encourage coping skills needed for successful cross-cultural transition and adjustment.

Limitations and Future Direction

Although the sample in the present study met the requirements of saturation and phenomenological qualitative study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), future studies should select larger samples. India is a large population where people differ based on their socioeconomic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds. A larger sample of international students from India may allow students from different backgrounds to express their experiences. This information may be more beneficial for the diverse Indians who study overseas.

Conclusion

This study has highlighted the positive coping strategies that Indian international students use to combat transitional challenges encountered in the U.S. The findings indicate that the students can cope with such challenges by changing their thought processes and behaviors. Further, the findings add to the literature by discovering the role of open-mindedness, goal-orientedness and showing gratitude for the first time in the international student population. The findings have implications for the stakeholders. The suggested coping strategies can be considered by higher education and could be recommended to the students during international student orientation and counseling sessions to help them manage their cross-cultural transitional challenges.

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Freedom in Times of Pandemic: Chinese International Students' Readings of Human Rights Criticism During the UK's First COVID-19 Lockdown

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This article was not written with the assistance of any Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology, including ChatGPT" or other support technologies.

Abstract

This research project set out to study how Chinese international students in the United Kingdom understand human rights principles. The principal method involved semi-structured interviews which were primarily intended as an exploratory exercise giving participants the opportunity to voice their views on human rights. The discussions were explicitly centered on participants' own definitions and understandings. The interviews coincided with the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite holding conflicted views on the subject, most participants sought to legitimize China's human rights record. While their reactions echo Stanley Cohen's acclaimed study of human rights denial, sufficient distinction needs to be made between state actors' denial and citizen denial. Participants' struggle to trust foreign media reports, their reappraisal of their circumstances during the pandemic and their lack of exposure to human rights abuse acted as barriers in acknowledging China's human rights violations. These findings highlight the need for an inclusive pedagogy which is capable of accommodating the various iterations of the imagined community through which expatriate Chinese students view human rights criticism targeted at China.

Keywords**:** COVID-19, denial, human rights, imagined community, international student mobility

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Introduction

What kind of meaning do Chinese international students studying at UK universities give to human rights? That is the principal research question at the heart of this study. Human rights remain an incendiary and heavily censored topic in the People's Republic of China. Official Chinese government discourse has been described as "double speak" which paints

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liberal human rights as a Western threat to the stability of the party-state (Chen & Hsu, 2018). Strong official opposition to liberal human rights in China belies the fact that international charters such as the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNHR) bear the hallmarks of traditional Chinese values and Confucian philosophy (Tseng, 2017). Despite long-standing pressure from the international community and significant economic reforms transforming China into a global economic player, a political liberalization has yet to take place in the country. From a Western perspective, human rights are principally defined as the classic complement of basic, inalienable rights enjoyed by all human beings which have been laid down as a matter of law in international treaties and domestic constitutions. However, this approach, with its emphasis on individual liberty, is contested in a Chinese context. Instead, Chinese human rights doctrine places good governance and the state's capacity to provide for its citizens at the core of human rights (Chen & Hsu, 2018).

Chinese international students studying in the United Kingdom (UK) may struggle to recognize the significance of Western human rights doctrine and understand its practical application because relevant principles remain unmentionable in Chinese higher education itself (Tseng, 2017). The rationale for this project was to identify ways of engaging this particular student population better in human rights teaching in UK higher education which is largely premised on the idea that human rights exist to protect citizens against undue state interference with their individual liberty. It has been rightly argued that the ascendancy of human rights as the hallmark of cosmopolitanism is the product of specific historical circumstances, as "there is nothing natural, let alone inevitable, about ordering societies around the idea of universally equal and unalienable human rights" (Madsen & Verschraegen, 2013, p. 6). However, it is also the case that human rights are the prevailing currency of international law according to which there can be no legitimate statehood without at least a semblance of respect for human rights. For better or for worse, human rights are the yardstick used by the international community to measure individual freedom in a global context (Douzinas, 2000).

The status bestowed on human rights matters greatly in an international education system which is still dominated by Western ideology. An absence of human rights awareness may leave some international students vulnerable to discrimination and exploitation (Marginson, 2012). Because of their cultural background or national origins, many international students in the West are not well versed in the core principles of human rights and may struggle with many aspects of the curriculum across a range of academic disciplines. Human rights should not just be conceptualized as taught content, but also as something that is embedded in academic practice itself, for example, in the form of research ethics. The purpose of this paper is to encourage a wider debate about achieving an inclusive human rights pedagogy in the context of international higher education. Educators should not take students' familiarity with human rights as a given but should instead commit to providing ample opportunity for debating and appropriately interrogating such concepts (Douzinas, 2000).

The principal method used in this study involved semi-structured interviews which were primarily intended as an exploratory exercise giving participants the opportunity to voice their views on human rights. The discussions were explicitly centered on participants' own definitions and understandings. The interviews coincided with the first national COVID-19 lockdown in the UK. The COVID-19 Pandemic proved more than circumstantial. The interviews, ten in total, reflected the increasing tensions between China and the US over the pandemic, with US President Donald Trump effectively blaming China for failing to stop the virus (Zhao, 2020) and making pejorative references to the "Chinese virus" and "Kung Flu" (Yu, 2021b). Moreover, with university life ground to a halt, students were living in an almost deserted university town, unable to return to China owing to the limited availability of flights and expensive airfares. As a result, they found themselves in a state of limbo, cut off from direct contact with both British and Chinese society. Reports of racial abuse targeted at Chinese and Asian people left some interviewees too frightened to go out, adding to their isolation and feelings of homesickness during the lockdown.

As well as influencing participants' perceptions of human rights, this unique set of circumstances also set the scene for a display of heightened defensive patriotism (Hail, 2015). The irony of having their freedom severely restricted at a time when, according to media reports, the COVID-19 Pandemic had been brought under control in China and citizens there were moving about more freely again was not lost on interviewees. Even neutral and general questions (e.g., "What do you think of when you hear the words 'human rights'?") elicited answers that were explicitly defensive of China. Despite expressing mixed feelings on the subject, research participants mostly sought to legitimize China's human rights record. Their response displays the hallmarks of what Cohen (1996) terms human rights denial. However, whereas it is disingenuous for governments to deny their involvement in human rights abuse, the situation is arguably different when it is citizens doing the denial. The students taking part in this study struggled to trust foreign media reports, which combined with other factors

such as the absence of any direct experience of grave human rights abuse, the Chinese government's control of the media, and students' reappraisal of their own circumstances during the pandemic, rendered their accounts credible and sincere. Moreover, the opposite of denial, an acknowledgment of human rights abuse, would be tantamount to distancing themselves from their country and relinquishing an important part of their own identity in favor of victimhood. While human rights denial is portrayed in the academic literature as a disingenuous speech act, this article will conclude that allowance should be made for the possibility that citizen denial of human rights breaches reflects genuinely held beliefs which help individuals to maintain a positive identification with their imagined community (Anderson, 2006).

The structure of the article is as follows: The first section reviews some of the literature on international student mobility, with a specific focus on Chinese student mobility. The second section outlines the theoretical framework involving Stanley Cohen's work on the performance of denial in response to allegations of human rights violations. The third section sets out the method and research design used in this study. The fourth section presents the findings, exploring the arguments research participants used to explain and legitimize the limitations placed on human rights in China. The fifth section provides a discussion of the principal findings with reference to the concept of denial.

Literature Review

International Student Mobility and Chinese Students

The People's Republic of China sends more students to study abroad than any other country in the world (Spencer-Oatey et al., 2017). One of the main beneficiaries are UK universities which have seen the number of Chinese students grow by 34% in the period 2014–2019 (Jeffreys, 2020). UK universities are increasingly dependent on the income generated by the admission of Chinese international students and the wider benefits to the UK economy are considerable (Hillman, 2021). How well Chinese students are able to integrate in university life in the UK and the obstacles they face in this regard is a little-studied topic (Spencer-Oatey et al., 2017). However, a recent study offers a fascinating insight into the social lives of their peers studying at Canadian universities, arguing that interactions with other Chinese international students should not be devalued in favor of integration (Li, 2019). The ethical and political implications of international student mobility, including the fact that international students are increasingly regarded as "cash cows" by the neoliberal Western academe, have also received limited attention (Yang, 2020). It should be noted that these issues are gaining prominence in research (e.g. Sperduti, 2017; Yu, 2021a). Marginson (2012) argues that students from the Global South are often constructed as undesirable "Others" in a Western political discourse which oscillates between praising the perceived benefits their presence brings and cultivating fears that the presence of international students fuels illegal immigration, crime and even terrorism. As temporary migrants, students have reduced access to key services and enjoy fewer rights. Also, a limited command of English is capable of creating significant communication barriers, leaving international students vulnerable and excluded in many areas, making them "second-class" citizens (Marginson, 2012).

Chinese international students are often perceived as passive learners. Challenging this perception, Heng (2020) observes that, instead, they display "agency and resourcefulness" (p. 542) and typically engage in very pro-active ways of problem solving. Several factors explain why Chinese students may be seen as quiet and timid when it comes to their participation in the classroom. Explanations range from students' limited English (for Chinese students overwhelmingly choose to study in English-speaking countries) to cultural factors including the prioritization of a collective mindset (Durkin, 2011), the wider influence of Confucian values (Heng, 2020) and students' fear of embarrassing themselves in front of their peers (Hodkinson & Poropat, 2013). Chinese students at UK universities have to adapt to a very different pedagogy in which independent, critical thinking is prioritized over values such as memorization and passive acceptance of knowledge which typically prevail in the Chinese education system (Zhang, 2021). Overcoming a lack of familiarity with core human rights principles which are taken as a given in Western higher education systems is part of "the culture shock" (Zhang, 2021, p. 233) this particular group of learners need to grapple with. The extent to which Chinese students' silence in the classroom may be an expression of hurt national pride, especially in cases where the teaching is explicitly or implicitly critical of China, is also worth considering.

A relevant study in this regard concerns the way in which the experience of studying abroad may boost Chinese students' patriotic feelings and strengthen their national identity (Hail, 2015). Chinese students studying in the US showed an acute sensitivity to Western criticism of China and saw it as their patriotic duty to defend the official Chinese position on controversial issues such as Tibet, in effect assuming the role of "cultural ambassadors." Moreover, Hail's (2015) study

suggests that a lack of a sense of belonging in the host country in which they are studying may make Chinese students feel even fonder of their home country, increasing their defensive attitudes vis-à-vis criticism of China. Thus, it is perfectly conceivable that the experience of being stranded abroad during the COVID-19 pandemic (including aggravating factors such as social isolation and xenophobia) will not only have fueled students' desire to return home but also made them more emotionally attached to their "imagined community" (Anderson, 2006), resulting in a display of heightened defensive patriotism. Indeed, Yu (2021b) observes that the effect of COVID-19-related Sinophobia on Chinese student mobility is likely to involve a shift from popular Western destinations such as to US to countries which are more aligned with Chinese culture.

Theoretical Construct: Denial of Human Rights Abuse

The avoidance strategies which governments use to respond to the exposure of human rights abuses form the focus of Stanley Cohen's acclaimed study of human rights denial. His principal concern involves the responses of "perpetrator governments" to allegations of human rights abuse. He argues that: "Three forms of denial appear in the discourse of official responses to allegations about human rights violations: *literal denial* (nothing happened), *interpretative denial* (what happened is really something else), and *implicatory denial* (what just happened is justified)" (Cohen, 1996, p. 522). Furthermore, he notes that these different registers are not mutually exclusive; instead, they are often used simultaneously or sequentially. When faced with visual evidence of human rights perpetrations, it is not uncommon for governments to respond by "shooting the messenger," typically, media organizations and actors may be accused of making up or manipulating footage. "The most common way to imply, rather than assert, literal denial is to attack the reliability, objectivity, and credibility of the observer" (Cohen, 1996, p. 524). Interpretative denial is less of a crude denial of fact than an attempt to "reframe and rename" (Cohen, 1996, p. 526), for example, by having recourse to euphemisms. Implicatory denial, which covers anything from "justifications" and "excuses" to neutralizations, can also take different forms. One such form is "righteousness" described by Cohen as the denial that there are universal human rights values, or alternatively, the claim that there are higher values that take precedence over human rights. Another one is "contextualization and uniqueness" which involves the argument that a country's unique circumstances provide a justification for ignoring human rights values. Yet another expression of implicatory denial is to "condemn the condemners," arguing, for example, that former colonial powers are ill-placed to judge the state of human rights in countries that historically suffered greatly at their hands (Cohen, 1996, p. 533). As we will see, implicatory denial featured prominently in the interviews analyzed below.

Cohen's analysis, which is mainly concerned with governmental denial, has been expanded to include media audiences and the citizens of perpetrator states. Seu's (2010) study of different ways of "doing denial" focuses on how audiences justify their lack of action in response to campaigns that seek to bring human rights abuses to their attention. Crucially, this type of research demonstrates that it is not just states but ordinary people too who are implicated in denying responsibility for human rights violations. Sutton and Norgaard (2013) highlight how citizens' avoidance strategies are part and parcel of "cultures of denial," even when their own administration is implicated in human rights abuse. Moreover, such denial by citizens can occur irrespective of whether the government in question is a democracy or an authoritarian regime. Citizens may wish to keep silent or refuse to know certain information as a way of coping with human rights abuses perpetrated by their own governments (Sutton & Norgaard, 2013). Unlike official state denial, citizen denial can be simply a matter of self-preservation, as it is a potential way for individuals to maintain a positive national identity in the face of international opprobrium. Indeed, according to Anderson (2006), such is the cohesive power of the imagined community that "regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (p. 7). Evidently, denial performed by citizens should not be put in the same league as state denial. The cost of openly recognizing the failings of one's own government may be much too high for citizens, whereas state actors have a choice when it comes to upholding human rights.

Method

The principal research question of this study is: "What kind of meaning do Chinese international students studying at UK universities give to human rights?" The research methods consisted of semi-structured interviews with 10 individual students. The interviews took place in May and June 2020.

Participants

The participants were all MA social sciences and humanities students enrolled at a university in the East Midlands, with their enrollment typically lasting 12 months. These students often stay in private rented accommodation. It is not unusual for them to be sharing a flat or house with other Chinese students. Ethical approval for the project was obtained from the responsible research ethics committee. Recruitment of participants was achieved by circulating an open email invitation to Chinese international students. Interested students were provided with a participant information sheet containing detailed information about the project. In order to take part in the interviews, participants were required to sign a consent form outlining, among other things, the project's data management protocol.

Data Collection

The interview script was organized around a list of open-ended questions, in line with established principles of qualitative research (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019; Strauss, 1987). The first question inquired into students' familiarity with human rights by asking them if they had come across any human rights-related topics in their course content. This was followed up by questions about what human rights meant to them and whether these had any positive or negative connotations. The third main group of questions concerned the issue of how well human rights were protected in China. A total of 10 interviews were conducted, each lasting between 53 minutes and one hour and 43 minutes. Participants were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality in line with standard principles of research ethics. For the purpose of dissemination, they were all assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity. The lockdown made face-to-face interviews impossible. Instead, the interviews took place in the virtual space afforded by Skype, Microsoft Teams, and Zoom.

One of the challenges was that participants had varying levels of proficiency in English, which, due to the lockdown situation, some had not spoken or had not spoken frequently for a few months. One interviewee said that they felt nervous about the interview for this reason while another apologized extensively for their limited English. To minimize misunderstanding and enhance the interaction, the interviewer summarized what the interviewee had said at regular intervals. Special care was taken to ensure that the interviewer was not putting any words into interviewees' mouth (Prior, 2014). This was achieved by cross-checking their understanding of what participants said. Similarly, interviewees were actively invited to seek clarification of anything that was not clear. They were encouraged to use a translator app or a dictionary as and when required. The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Data Analysis

The transcripts were manually coded and thematically analyzed following the process outlined by Auerbach and Silverstein (2003). This involved tagging responses for the three main topics raised by the interviewer to identify "repeating ideas" which were subsequently organized into broader themes and constructs that could be linked to theory. The "non-scripted" parts of the interviews were similarly coded by mapping out repeating ideas. This exercise resulted in the identification of three additional themes providing a theoretical link to human rights denial: the media and human rights, COVID-19, and Hong Kong. A discussion of principal themes is provided in the next section.

Findings

For nine of the interviewees, all from mainland China, a distinct pattern emerged in that their responses displayed characteristics of defensive patriotism. The tenth interview was an outlier in this respect: the interviewee in question identified as an Ethnic Chinese from Hong Kong. As a native Hong Kong citizen, Chen strongly opposed the policies that the Chinese Government is pursuing vis-à-vis the former British colony following its handover by the UK in 1997. Consequently, a denial of human rights violations did not figure in this interview. By contrast, Fen, who was actively involved in the Chinese Communist Party, expressed no criticism of China's human rights record. The eight other participants were more nuanced in their assessment of the human rights situation in China. Compared to males (n = 4), female participants (n = 6) overall tended to be less critical, but it is hard to make any generalizations on the basis of such a small sample.

Human Rights Are "Not Chinese"

One of the most striking responses to the opening question (whether participants had previously encountered human rights in taught content) came from Jia:

> Human rights? Actually, when considering human rights, I often link it to the Western culture of modern civilization because I think in China, in Chinese history or Chinese culture, I don't think we have this conception, because even if I learned this conception in my politics books when I was in high school, and I also think this conception is from

> Western culture or Western context. Maybe, maybe in a Chinese context, we also have this this idea … maybe we have another name, but I'm not sure.

Rather than answering with a straightforward "yes" or "no," Jia chose to explain *why* she had not previously been taught about human rights. Her explanation was that human rights were simply not Chinese.

> Huang, another participant, gave a very similar response when asked what human rights meant to him:
>
> Human rights, really, we don't think it is important topic. For me, maybe for most of Chinese students, because our background is it rather different, I think. Due to historical reasons, China has only been remembered in recent years thanks to 5G and Huawei, maybe compared with [the rest of the] world, for democratic rights we should obtain. And we are actually more focused on the economy or how to make money and live a better life [than to] get … human rights. And I think sometimes we don't have that idea, that much [of an] idea about human rights.

The same explanation was offered by Hui:

> Honestly, in China, we don't mention this term too much, but we can, you can see some news that in some places, some people are not treated justly. So, I sometimes I'll think about this topic. That's because schools, our universities in China and the official media don't give much information about human rights. So, mostly I try to surf the information on the Internet and to find [out about] the human rights situation in China, but there is many misinformation. So, it is pretty hard for me to detect which is wrong or right.

The deixis "we" in these excerpts is used to mean "Chinese students" and "Chinese people," positioning the interviewer as an outsider who needed to be made aware that human rights were "not Chinese." This argument should not be taken as an unequivocal defense of China's human rights record. For example, take this exchange with Wen:

> Wen: I think human rights for me is important, is very important and very basic. But I can't discuss the human rights with my classmates, especially the Chinese, because to some extent it's like a joke.
>
> Interviewer: Like a joke?
>
> Wen: Yeah, it's like a joke.
>
> Interviewer: What do you mean by that?
>
> Wen: Because I think one part of the human rights is the free speech.
>
> Interviewer: Mm hmm. Yeah.
>
> Wen: I can quote everything. I want to talk and we have somebody… But, you know, the censorship in China or whatever in the traditional media or the social media has become harder and harder. Yeah, especially after 2012.

Interestingly, later in the interview, Wen accused the West of complicity in allowing the crackdown on the pro-democracy movement in China in 1989 to go unpunished because of naked self-interest. In this sense, their stance still has a pre-emptive quality: Part of the blame for the state of human rights in China, in their view, needs to be shouldered by the wider international community.

Fen also chose to turn the spotlight on the situation in the West in response to the question of what human rights meant to her:

> And I do think this is a tough issue for me to answer. I mean, in the UK where some people say, 'oh, you don't have any freedom of speech or something,' but I don't think so ... Yes, I have more freedom of expression here [in the UK]. But I also face some discrimination here, for example, because of the coronaviruses, some people here just point at me and say 'Chinese virus,' that's another angle of this issue. But in China, we have such a large population, different regions, different traditions … I mean, it's just a different situation for us to think about this issue.

Make Money, Get a Better Life

Having established early on that Chinese citizens' enjoyment of human rights is different and, in some ways, is more limited that it is in the West, participants spent some time considering what life is like under these circumstances. In other words, they tried to explain how freedom is possible within the specific context of Chinese society. One way of doing this was to argue that they did have certain freedoms, but just chose not to make use of these. Take the following exchange with Jia:

> Interviewer: And do you have enough freedom of expression you feel?
>
> Jia: Oh, well, for me, I know our laws allow us to do this, but I seldom express my opinion on my social media or something like that. So, I couldn't give my own opinion because I have less, less experience. But I would if I, if I, needed to express my opinion, I think I can express them without hesitation.

Ling's comments on cultural reticence and free speech similarly reflect the value of 'positive energy,' in essence, favoring optimistic and non-critical viewpoints, promoted by the Chinese Communist Party (see Yang & Tang, 2018):

> Interviewer: What about things like free speech, the freedom to say what you want?
>
> Ling: And that's not a good idea because, you know, in China we, we have the freedom to speak. We speak, will speak freely, but we just don't like to. We are educated not to talk about too much about politics and the bad things about our party, the Communist Party. We have the freedom to talk about other political issues and about any other topics. And I think is the problem of atmosphere. I think for young people, we talk about [other] stuff and entertainment. Yeah, well, I think of other things on the Internet.

Huang more directly commented on the very real risks involved in asserting specific freedoms:

> As I said before, we should earn money to live a better life. But in the Western world, there is more freedom compared to us. It seems Western people don't sacrifice their life by [speaking freely]. We are scared [for our] life, our, you know, we want to live longer and we want to make more money. This too is the most important factor in our our mind, I think. … because I'm from the countryside in China, I know the life, [what] a poor life is like. Yes. Well, yeah. I think for me, if getting money and live better and live with my parents is, of course, the goal of my life.

Of course, an external observer might say that there is no real freedom of expression if citizens must avoid discussing politics and other big topics, or when speaking out endangers their life, as Huang intimated. Participants themselves, however, took a more pragmatic approach: rather than focusing on the things they cannot do, they look to the things they can do. One of the most important freedoms for them and their parents is the freedom to make money, be entrepreneurial and improve their living standards. Qian summed it up well when they said: "Human rights? [Long pause] Human rights. I don't really care about them. That's because I think I'm happy and I have money to live and it's enough, I'm safe." In a similar vein, a few participants cited the very fact that they were able to study abroad as living proof of the personal freedom they enjoyed. Rather more cynically, Zhang referred to this as the "gilded cage" where people can enjoy material wealth without political freedom. Others may brush off these limitations as trivial and unimportant in the larger scheme of things. Take Qian again: commenting on the censorship of social media around the anniversary of the 1989 Tiananmen Square Protests, they said that these restrictions were "just a little bit annoying, a little bit inconvenient" because most of the year they felt free to post what they wanted. Several participants reported using euphemisms, emojis and metonyms (e.g., "workers' rights" instead of "human rights") in their (online) communications to stay under the censor's radar (see Tang et al., 2016). Their pragmatism illustrates what could be termed the "glass half-full approach" in that it focuses on what is allowed rather than on what is not allowed. Interview participants had a keen (if selective) sense of history and showed an acute understanding of how much better off they are compared to previous generations of their family who had to endure grinding poverty.

Participants' willingness to condone with human rights violations could also be seen as confirmation of how powerful official propaganda in China is. If citizens are consistently deterred or blocked from receiving alternative reports, it is only to be expected that they will struggle to find fault with their government. However, as we will see later on, there appear to be relatively few obstacles when it comes to accessing foreign media. Hui, for example, pointed at an increased awareness of specific human rights issues among young people:

> I think my friends, especially young younger people, they don't agree with many of the things that the country does to the Uighur Muslims. But you know, they, we can't say it publicly. So, I think the situation is becoming better on an individual levels from the point of awareness. But there is a long way to go for the authorities to do something.

He added, in mitigation, that countries like China and Russia need a "strong leader," but also reasoned that this was nevertheless not an excuse to ignore human rights. Others were even less forgiving, and they resoundingly condemned the lack of human rights in China. Thus, Chen said: "if you say something regarding human rights in public, you may get into trouble if you are in China," while a lack of freedom in their respective professions made Shu and Zhang decide on a change of career which is likely to keep them abroad for the foreseeable future. Despite such criticism, participants also believed that universal human rights standards could not be simply transplanted to China.

For the sake of completeness, it should be pointed out that there were two participants who were far less nuanced in their assessment. They practiced "literal denial" by maintaining that they had all the freedom they wanted in China. A good example came from Jia who said that they had the right to protest because they had learned about this in a politics textbook, adding that protests were allowed provided organizers had the necessary permits. They said that they were completely

unaware of the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests, describing these as "news" to them. Fen was similarly upbeat, referring to their activism as a member of the local chapter of the Communist Party and how they were able to make a positive difference. However, when asked if they wanted to become a politician, they described how they did not have the right family connections to be able to rise through the ranks, an implicit admission that certain freedoms were being denied to them.

"Fox News Are Always Saying Bad Things About China": (Dis)trusting the Media

One of the reasons why the Chinese authorities seek to restrict citizens' access to the media is undoubtedly that they fear the impact of media reports that are critical of the Chinese Government. To Western eyes, the "Great Firewall of China" is a powerful symbol of a lack of free speech. If they were not already circumventing these restrictions by using a Virtual Private Network (VPN), Chinese students studying abroad certainly have the freedom to access media content that is routinely blocked in China. However, the extent to which this is an eye opener for them should not be overestimated. Contrary to previous research suggesting that Chinese students have comparatively more trust in Western media (Weber & Fan, 2016), several research participants spoke of their distrust when it came to Western news reports. Fen dismissed US news media as inherently biased and subjective in their reporting about China, adding:

> Why do so many Chinese people, most of us believe our government is great, is doing the right thing? If the Chinese government is not good enough, we would not follow it, right?

It may not be hugely surprising for Fen to express these views because, as we previously saw, they were very uncritical of the Chinese government overall. However, even more critical-minded participants struggled to trust Western news reports. For example, Huang said:

> Before I studied the media, I deeply trusted BBC, CNN and other media platforms. When I, when I got to know more about media and communication. Actually, now, I don't believe or trust anything written in the news because of the media moguls and other interest[ed parties] … their own opinion will lead kind of the reporting, [its] direction, right?

Hui also found it hard to know who to trust, given the incompatible reporting between Chinese and Western media:

> Hui: So mostly I try to surf the Internet [for information] and to find out about the human rights situation in China, but there is much misinformation. So it is pretty hard for me to detect which is wrong or right. … I researched the topic [of Uighur Muslims] in Chinese on Chinese Internet. I can see how the information says that the authorities are treating them well …, but when I search the likes of YouTube or Twitter the information is negative. So it's, it's a kind of polarization. So it's a huge gap between these two kinds of information. I think maybe the truth is not just who is evil or who is innocent. Maybe there are more some things I can't see, you know.
>
> Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah. And are you saying that you find it difficult to make up your mind because you don't know who to trust?
>
> Hui: Yeah. Yeah.

Iconic footage of "tank man," which to the West constitutes one of the abiding images of China's violent oppression of the Tiananmen Square protests, was dismissed by Hui as misleading: they said that a closer look revealed how soldiers tried to reason with the man blocking the tanks and that "friends" subsequently led them away to safety. Their interpretation could be seen as the denial of the visual evidence of human rights breaches described by Cohen. However, Hui's reading of the events was more subtle than that. When asked if they did not believe that protesters had been killed, Hui replied that they were in no doubt that there had been fatalities.

Other participants also indicated that the negativity of Western news reports left them angry, confused and doubtful. Their reactions point to something that is close to factual denial: Their lack of trust in Western media prevents them from believing negative reports about China. One of the reasons why they still preferred to believe Chinese media reports is that they felt that these more accurately reflected their own experience, as Qian explained:

> No, I don't think it is true [that China violates its citizens' human rights] because I have lived in China for 24 years. I am free. I am free to do anything. Legal, anything. Yeah. And sometimes I think we have a perfect, not perfect, the appropriate system of … government.

Ling expressed a similar view:

> Because, you know, in China, our life now is not like that, I think, the lifestyle in Shanghai and lots of big cities is very convenient. And we just live a happy life. Yes, we are happy with our home country.

When probed about Tiananmen Square, Qian argued that this was a thing of the past and that the new China, the China of their generation, was very different. By contrast, the Hong Kong protests were undeniably topical at the time of the interviews. A few participants chose to make sense of the coverage in Western media through the trope of double standards. The comparison was made with the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests, the wide-scale protests in the US and also parts of Europe following the police killing of George Floyd in May 2020. Qian accused Western media and leading politicians of hypocrisy when they condemned the BLM protests as the work of a violent mob, whilst praising the same type of violent protest in Hong Kong as a legitimate uprising against China. This view was echoed by Shu. Fen doubted the authenticity of the BBC's coverage of the Hong Kong protests and felt that it made the police look more repressive that they actually were. At the same time, there was also support and understanding for the demands of the Umbrella Movement, although opinion was clearly divided between those participants (like Chen, who was born in Hong Kong) who believed that their grievances were legitimate and those who believed that China had every right to seek tighter control over Hong Kong because "Hong Kong belongs to China," to quote Ling.

COVID-19

China's response to the COVID-19 pandemic led to strong geopolitical tensions, especially in US-Chinese relations, impacting Chinese international students' study abroad choices (Yu, 2021b). Interview participants expressed admiration for the fact that China had brought the pandemic under control when the rest of the world was struggling to contain it. Some even saw it as a vindication of the Chinese system of governance which was able to act swiftly and decisively by prioritizing the common good over individual rights: according to Zhang, it showed that "the socialist system really works". Here too, Shu could detect double standards at work in the Western news coverage. They cited the example of how one article on *The New York Times* website described lockdown in Wuhan and the restrictions the Chinese authorities placed on citizens as abhorrent, only for this to be followed 20 minutes later by a much more positive post bringing breaking news that a lockdown would be imposed in parts of Italy. "In the case of China, [they were using] human rights, [but] when they talk about what happens in most other Western countries, even if they do the same thing, they just say, OK, [they] are doing something good." Zhang, on the other hand, commented on negative reports in Chinese media about the COVID-19 policies pursued in the UK. They said that friends and family back home were greatly alarmed by Chinese news reports that the UK Government had decided to pursue "herd immunity" (basically, let the Coronavirus take hold and spread through the population so as to attain widespread natural immunity). Zhang was also concerned about reports that people in the UK were not wearing masks in public (see Yu, 2021b): "I always write something about COVID-19 on my blog because all my friends [back home think] I have a horrible life here. That's not true."

A striking effect of the pandemic was social isolation, making participants not only long for home but also made them see Chinese society and its system of governance in a more forgiving light. Thus, according to Ling:

> From the beginning, I have wanted to live here in the UK. … But, you know, since the coronavirus, I have stayed at home for almost four months, almost four months. I think life here is kind of boring [laughs] … I have less entertainment activities. And less friends here. Kind of feel lonely. Yeah. Maybe I will go back to China. Yes, this is totally different. So, yeah, when I first came here, I felt so excited and I felt I had the freedom. … I'm not so happy to be here [anymore] because … most of the time I feel lonely here.

Experiences of racism and hate speech as a result of the COVID-19 epidemic exacerbated participants' sense of loneliness and isolation. They spoke of being too scared to go out because they no longer felt safe on the street. Hui stated: "And during the Corona crisis, I heard from many my friends, my Chinese friends here, they were abused on the street, although I, I haven't [come across] this [personally], but I am afraid to be abused too."

The COVID-19 crisis consequently not only colored the students' experience of life in the UK but also their outlook on human rights. Their sense of freedom and security was evidently impacted by the pandemic and a growing hostility to Chinese people:

> Here [in the UK] I have always felt freedom and friendliness, kindness from the people. But from the beginning of the coronavirus, I have faced the three types of discriminations here. They [other people] didn't punish me or hurt me if they just used some words to hate me. (Fen)

Against this backdrop, it is perhaps no real surprise that participants were prepared to grant the Chinese Government a generous margin of error. Thus, in relation to the case of the whistle blower Dr. Li, Qian conceded that the authorities had made an error in trying to silence him, but they understood their decision, saying that "every government sometimes takes

the wrong decisions" and that the authorities probably thought it would have created too much panic if the public was alerted too early. Fen pointed out that allowing everyone to speak freely about such things in China would create chaos and that it would be better to let such information be made public through the official channels. Other interviewees were less forgiving of the Chinese Government's handling of the pandemic but still offered a nuanced view. One such critical assessment came from Wen who said that "freedom of speech would probably have stopped the disease." They were not just critical of China but of other countries as well. They felt that the Chinese Government had failed to learn the lessons of the 2003 SARS outbreak, blaming the problem on bureaucracy and its slow response, but interestingly they insisted that this was also the reason why Western countries had equally failed to contain the virus. They also felt that ulterior political motives were guiding the COVID-19 measures the US took against Mainland China. Chen, who was the most outspoken in their overall criticism of the Chinese Government, argued that China was to blame for rising tensions with the US: "They [China] refuse to cooperate. They refuse to be investigated. So, they are giving grounds for Donald Trump to bash them." However, they also implied that US President Trump was making political hay out of the COVID-19 crisis.

Discussion

Effectively stranded in their university accommodation, the screen was for the students who took part in this study virtually their only window on the world during COVID-19. They wrestled with the issue of who or what to believe in the midst of a pandemic, with its complex and evolving geopolitical dynamics. Some interview participants suggested that the human rights situation in the UK was suboptimal during COVID, citing issues such as hate speech. On the other hand, discussion of human rights in China was preempted by participants' statements that human rights were quite simply "not Chinese." Their response holds a vital clue as to why Chinese international students may choose to stay silent when the topic of human rights comes up in the classroom: if their first thought is that human rights are not Chinese, this may stop them from engaging with the teaching in a meaningful way.

Interviewees' response to Western criticism of China reveals intense patriotism, something Zhang unambiguously expressed when they exclaimed: "Some things [about China] in the Western media are so negative. I think: do I support this or challenge it as a good Chinese?" However, it should be stressed that there was support for the idea of greater freedom for the Chinese people. Participants appeared caught between a deep sense of loyalty to their country, Zhang being a case in point here, and a personal desire, for example, voiced by Wen and Hui, to see the human rights situation in China improve. Wen clearly signaled that, despite human rights being important to them personally, it was a topic they could not discuss with other Chinese students.

This study has highlighted various examples of what appears to be textbook human rights denial. There was little by way of literal denial to be detected in the opening stage of the interviews. None of the participants made an attempt to deny the general premise that there is a problem with human rights in China. Indeed, they readily brought up the issue themselves. What did emerge, however, are some elements that fit Cohen's implicatory denial, more specifically "contextualization and uniqueness" (the argument that China's exceptionality in cultural, political and historical terms places it outside human rights norms) and also "condemning the condemners" (the apportioning of some of the blame to Western countries) (see also Brownell, 2012).

Nevertheless, there are some striking differences between government and citizen denial which are important in developing and critiquing Cohen's original thesis. Denying human rights violations in an official capacity means taking a position that is disingenuous and indefensible. When it is performed by governments, it is a cynical ploy with which to escape liability and save face at an international and domestic level. Denial performed by citizens needs to be considered in a different light. Their rationalizations of human rights abuses represent a way of making sense of their lives without seeing themselves as victims. Rather than treating this as a form of complicity, it is much more instructive to consider the situation from the lived experience of citizens who genuinely feel a sense of freedom, despite the restrictions placed on their human rights. When citizens refuse to acknowledge that their country is involved in human rights abuse, it could be seen as an act of self-preservation. Fear also potentially plays a role. Although some participants in this study indicated that they were cautious when discussing with others anything the Chinese authorities may censor, it clearly did not stop them from doing so. For example, they would use euphemisms and emojis to evade censorship. Those who found their social posts had been blocked expressed annoyance instead of fear. Another possible explanation for citizens' willingness to deny human rights

abuse is that it is the result of propaganda and indoctrination. Again, this cannot be ruled out especially considering that many participants still preferred Chinese media over Western media.

However, a more compelling explanation for participants' denial is that as middle-class urban Chinese they struggled to recognize the human rights problems detailed in Western media. Poverty, as Huang and Qian intimated, is perceived as a far greater issue than the lack of political freedom. The denial and disbelief so clearly articulated by Qian and Ling ring true because these problems are a far cry from participants' own comfortable existence and rising standards of living. Evidently, this is a singularly weak argument for the factual denial of human rights abuse: If recognition hinges on whether individuals have first-hand experience of human rights violations, many more instances of abuse around the world would go unpunished. On the other hand, one needs to consider what it would mean for Chinese international students to acknowledge that their country is complicit to human rights abuse. By implication, it potentially involves not just donning the mantle of victimhood but also disavowing their national identity. Doing denial in this context is aimed at defending the nation as an imagined community.

Conclusion

This study had as its primary aim to learn more about Chinese international students' understandings of human rights; as it happens, their perceptions were bound up with their pandemic experience in the UK. By widening its scope to include COVID-19, this study contributes to an emerging body of scholarship mapping out the impact of the pandemic on international higher education (e.g., Bekele, 2021; Schiffecker, 2021; Yu, 2021a). Further research is required to refine our understanding of citizen denial and national belonging. However, what is clear is that othering Chinese students by confronting them with Western criticism of China's human rights record and turning the classroom into an arena of Western superiority is counterproductive. Instead, we need an inclusive pedagogy which is capable of accommodating the various iterations of the imagined community through which expatriate Chinese students view human rights criticism targeted at China.

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The Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on International Students

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This article was not written with the assistance of any Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology, including ChatGPT" or other support technologies.

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on international students. This study was conducted with the qualitative case study method, based on the experiences of an international student. The research found that with the declaration of the pandemic, some international students were besieged in their host countries; they were confronted with difficulties in returning to their homes, and their education and apprenticeships were interrupted. Students who could not return to their home country went through intense stress and anxiety in terms of accommodation, having access to food, financial resources, and medical supplies. This experience has caused international students to become more skeptical about continuing with mobility and has caused candidate international students to change their countries of preference. On the other hand, this does not appear to be the case for countries and universities that successfully managed the pandemic and did not spare their support for international students.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, higher education, international education, international student mobility

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Introduction

Universities, which are defined as higher education institutions that play an important role in technological and economic development, advancement of individuals in science, art and professional disciplines, and scientific research, play a role both in raising highly qualified manpower for professions and in producing scientific knowledge by providing advanced education and training in hundreds of fields. Interest in universities has always been kept alive by students who want to learn and increase their knowledge (Chellaraj, 2019). This interest was not only limited to the regions of the universities, but also had an impact on students abroad as it continues today (De Wit et al., 2015). Internationalization in

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higher education has become an inevitable consequence of the globalizing and knowledge-based economy of the 21st century (Altbach, 2006; Altbach & Teichler, 2001).

International education is specified as the education given in a region not being limited to the students in that region, as being open to the access of students from various regions of the world, and this form of education spreads abroad in various forms and can be named as cross-border, transnational, overseas, and unlimited education (Knight & McNamara, 2017). International education and student mobility contribute to the economic development and globalization of countries and to students' language competencies, acculturation, gaining experience and becoming world citizens (Negrusa & Horea, 2020; Restaino et al., 2020). Countries recognizing the importance of human resources with superior talent began competing to get a higher share of the international student market and to raise the number of international students (Levent & Karaevli, 2013). In this competitive market, students are involved in international student mobility in order to develop their linguistic skills, obtain income, attain foreign experience, and improve their knowledge and skills (Wiers-Jenssen & Støren, 2020; Wu, Chang & Sun, 2020).

International mobility is considered a priority issue not only by students but also by various universities and states (Levent & Karaevli, 2013). Geibel (2020) specifies the reasons why universities prefer international student mobility, such as attracting gifted students, increasing their reputation in international fields, and increasing their revenue through tuition fees. Countries, on the other hand, see international mobility as income and skilled migration and even enriching financial resources of the countries with expenses, such as education fee, accommodation, food, travel, and health, so that talented international students do not return after graduation (De Wit, 2015; Levent, 2016; Mlambo et al., 2020; Negrusa & Horea, 2020; Sun, 2017).

The particulars that cause students' interest in international mobility are generally named push-pull factors (Wells, 2014). These factors, which may arise from the country of origin or the destination country, are defined as the level of economic development, student population, quality of education, language learning opportunities, government policies, prestige of the university, tuition fees, and job opportunities (Levent & Karaevli, 2013; Sun, 2017).

The pandemic has recently constituted an important factor that affected international student mobility, which has reached serious numbers with increasing interest. The economic dimension of this effect (Codling, 2020; ICEF, 2020), current student dimension (Bilecen, 2020; Darmody et al., 2020; Gabriels & Aberg, 2020; Taşçı, 2020), prospective student dimension (BridgeU, 2020; Studyportals, 2020a; QS, 2020a) have been studied in various research. But in the literature review, it was seen that there was a limited number of studies examining the effects of the pandemic on international students. It is considered that a study examining the effects of the pandemic on international students, universities, and prospective students shall contribute to the field. In this direction, this research aims to reveal the impact of the pandemic on international students studying in Spain, based on the experiences of an international student. For this purpose, answers to the following questions are sought:

- How did the pandemic affect the views of international students in Spain about international education?
- How did the pandemic affect the opinions of international students in Spain about the universities at which they study?
- What effect did the pandemic have on the education and career plans of international students in Spain?
- How did the pandemic affect universities and countries in the context of international students in Spain?

There are some obstacles in front of international student mobility, with the increasing interest of universities, governments, and students and the benefits it offers to the parties interested in it (Falcone, 2017; Knight, 2007; Teichler, 1999). Regarding students, these obstacles are the financing they will need during their education, not having sufficient knowledge of English, the international language of education, being away from the family for a long time, and concerns about sending their talented students abroad in terms of source countries (Kehm, 2005). However, the biggest obstacle affecting international student mobility since the end of 2019 is the COVID-19 pandemic and the problems caused by the pandemic.

The pandemic has affected health systems, economies, and social life deeply, in general, all over the world (Bekirogullari, 2020; Fernandes, 2020; McKibbin & Fernando, 2020; Verma & Prakash, 2020). In this regard, the classification made by Haleem, Javaid, and Vaishya (2020) is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Effects of the Pandemic with Respect to Health, Economics, and Social Aspects

Health	Economics	Social Aspects
Difficulty experienced in diagnosing and treating cases	Slowing down production	Disruptions in service sector
Extreme load in current health system	Slowing down of product supply chain	Cancelation of sports organization and international travels
Negligence of case patients	Economic losses in trading	Closure of accommodation, beverage, food, and entertainment venues
Overload on health personnel	Increase in unemployment	Changes in cultural and religious events
Lack of medical materials and disruption of supply system	Nearly stopping of cash flow	Stress, fear, and psychological disruptions on people
	Serious slowdown in revenue increase	Distances between peers and families
		Disruption of education

As shown in Table 1, the pandemic has many effects with regard to health, economic, and social aspects. The most striking social effect is on education. The sudden spread of the disease and the declaration of the pandemic had serious effects on education threatening students, teachers, schools, quality education, and parents. According to a report by the World Bank (2020a), the pandemic affects education in two main ways: school closures and economic recession.

When international student mobility is examined within the scope of the pandemic, it is required to consider the economy of the countries primarily (Fernandes, 2020). This is because countries that have turned to austerity policy have made revisions in their budget expenditures about international students. For instance, the countries like Australia and USA have showed a decrease in revenues and an increase in expenditures. These countries have approached international students as immigrants/refugees in order to allocate their resources mainly to their own citizens, and they have implemented practices such as sending these students to their own countries and closing their borders (Raghuram & Sondhi, 2020). However, international students expected academic support, language support, psychological support, access to vital materials, and financial and accommodation support from their countries and universities during this process. This situation had a serious impact on the students' safety, legal status, quality and continuity of learning, and perspective on international education (Gabriels & Aberg, 2020).

It can be stated that student groups who could not return to their country or who managed to return to their country or who could not start their mobility during the pandemic process experienced great stress and anxiety (Darmody et al., 2020). Groups who could return to their country lived through the stress of returning, financial crisis, and anxiety about being late in relation to lessons; groups who could not return home experienced anxiety and stress of remaining alone during the crisis; and groups who could not start with mobility went through big stress and anxiety with the worry about not starting with mobility (Gabriels & Aberg, 2020). To be able to reduce these effects of the pandemic, universities implemented a three-step strategy: 1) coping, 2) continuity and improvement, and 3) acceleration. Within the scope of these strategies, practices, such as keeping in touch, providing financial support and convenience, and increasing efficiency in distance education, are covered (Word Bank, 2020b).

Due to the closure of campuses, universities focused on distance education to offer an acceptable solution to the pandemic conditions, regardless of whether the infrastructure was adequate or not (Gabriels & Aberg, 2020). In this way, universities that want to ensure the continuity of education try to offer students online courses and learning experiences. But universities that did not have enough time and experience in diversifying teaching, homework, and assessment cannot offer valid alternatives to the educational requirements and problems of international students (Schleicher, 2020). Besides, many international students who were not satisfied with the education they received expected a discount on their tuition fees or demand partial refunds (Bilecen, 2020). On the other hand, by means of online education and online mobility, universities had the opportunity to reach students in markets where they are not effective and to increase the number of

students in markets where they are effective, but still, switching to online education and online mobility requires the purchase of adequate practices (Schulmann, 2020).

The closure of universities for face-to-face education and the interruption of international education give rise to substantial economic losses (Al-Samarrai et al., 2020). For example, according to NAFSA (2020) data, there are serious concerns for the USA, which received approximately 39 million dollars from international students in the years 2019-2020. Similarly, it is anticipated that the financial loss of Australia will rise up to nearly 4.1 billion Euros, when all costs, such as wage reimbursements, accommodation, and reorganization of the academic calendar, are considered (ICEF, 2020). It is thought that the UK has lost approximately 14,000 students, especially from East Asian countries due to the pandemic and that it will have a current account deficit of 463 million pounds for the years of 2020-2021. UK government plans to provide financial support for tuition fees and fund research to minimize the economic pressure which this situation will cause to occur (Codling, 2020). Chiang (2020) mentions that Canada will also be seriously affected by this process and he states that the estimated contribution of international students to the country's GDP is around 21.6 million dollars, but that international students' interest in Canada will decrease due to various restrictions and barriers to entering into the country.

On the other hand, many difficulties cause international students to leave their university, freeze their educational programs, and return to their homes (Gabriels & Aberg, 2020). These difficulties include: the closure of campuses, elimination of job opportunities, ending of face-to-face education, the economic crisis, disruption of health systems, housing problems, and difficulties in securing food, medical products, medical support, visa, and residence permits. Travel restrictions constituted biggest challenge for international students while returning to their countries (Marinoni et al., 2020; Taşçı, 2021). Despite the pandemic, it is observed that some of the international students do not leave their country. This particular can be explained by factors such as the trust had in the country's health system, the payment of tuition or house rent in advance, and isolation due to the orientation to online education (FNAE, 2020). As a result of these effects of the pandemic, some of the international students stopped their mobility; some had to delay their graduation and internship plans; some stopped their education; and some were in uncertainty.

Methodology

Research Design

As one of the qualitative research methods, this study used the case study approach. The case study is realized to examine the individual, phenomenon, event, and social phenomena in depth and comprehensively (Yin, 2003). In case studies, the factors related to a situation are examined with a holistic approach, with a focus on how these factors affect the relevant situation and how they are affected by the relevant situation (Cohen et al., 2005). According to Yin (2003), case studies are divided into holistic single case, nested single case, holistic multiple case, and nested multiple case design. As there is only one unit of analysis and one participant, the current study used the holistic single-case design. This design was preferred to be able to analyze the research problem in detail, based on the experiences of a participant who was involved in international student mobility before the pandemic and experienced the pandemic during the mobility.

Participants

A purposive sampling method was used to determine the participant in this study. In this method, random selections are not made from the population and the sample is selected in accordance with certain features (Böke, 2009). In this study, the criterion in purposive sampling was comprised of being an international student and experiencing the pandemic during their international mobility. We worked with one participant. According to Morse (2000), the quantity of data is determined not by the large number of participants, but by the quality of the data and the number of interviews per participant. Morse (2000) also pointed out that there is an inverse relationship between the amount of available data obtained from each participant and the number of participants. In this case, a participant was hired in order to conduct more interviews with participants and obtain better quality data. In this study, the opinions of a female international student, who went to Spain for postgraduate education and returned to her country two days after the pandemic, were reviewed by means of the purposive sampling method. The reason for choosing Spain is that it is one of the countries that were affected by the pandemic the most. The particular that the research was conducted with a single participant also constitutes the limitation of the research.

Data Collection and Analysis

In this research, the interview technique was used as a data collection tool. In the interview, the main purpose is to collect private information, the researcher wants to learn what is in the mind of the participant (Patton, 2002). For this purpose, a semi-structured interview, which allows participants to freely express their thoughts on a particular subject, was used as a data collection tool (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

Before the interview questions were prepared, a literature review was made on the research topic. Afterward, the questions that would be used in the semi-structured interview were formed by consulting with two academics who specialized in international student mobility. Then, interviews were held with an international university student on the designated days and hours. These interviews were held in five sessions and on average for one hour. Therefore, the topic is dug deeper and more qualified data can be collected. Before starting with the interview, the participant was informed that the interview would take 45-60 minutes and her identity would be kept confidential. She was ensured that the results would only be used in scientific research. Interviews were held online through the Zoom program, taking into account the pandemic conditions.

Content analysis was used to analyze the data. Content analysis is the process of defining, coding, and categorizing data (Patton, 2002). The interview records obtained from the participant were transcribed by the researchers. Then, the obtained interview text was presented to the participant's approval to have parts that the participant wanted to add or correct. The data obtained in the research were analyzed one by one with the open coding method, categorized and analyzed by considering information obtained in the literature review.

Validity and Reliability of the Study

Within the scope of validity and reliability studies, firstly, attention was paid to the fact that the participant was a volunteer and the participant's information was kept confidential. Before the interview took place, the participant was informed about the study, her permission was taken, and the pseudonym "Sera" was used to transfer the data. Credibility, transferability, consistency, and confirmability criteria are considered important to assure the validity and reliability of the research (Guba & Lincoln, 1982).

A semi-structured interview form was used as a data collection tool for the credibility of the research. The data obtained were assessed with the content analysis method; more than one interview was made with the participant. The analysis results were assessed by the specialists, the data obtained from the participant and the data obtained by the literature review have been compared. In terms of the transferability of the research, the method and how the participant was selected were explained, and the data were transferred by using an understandable language by quoting directly. Regarding the consistency of the research, the research processes were explained in detail and the data obtained from the participant were also supported by the information obtained through the literature review. In this way, comprehensive data on the subject have been obtained, and similar and different aspects of these data have been revealed. As for the confirmability of the research, the data obtained in the research was clearly presented, the interviews with the participant were recorded, and the participant's opinions were transmitted as they were. On the other hand, to ensure the reliability of the research, the data of the research were coded by two different specialists and the agreement between the coders was calculated as .88. Based on this, the conclusion was made that the consensus among the coders was high, and the reliability of the coding was at a sufficient level (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002).

Findings

Based on the results of the data analysis, several codes were created under two themes—"its impact on international students and candidate students" and "its impact on country economies and universities." The themes and codes are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2

Themes and Codes

Themes	Codes
Its impact on international students and candidate students	Beginning of the pandemic
	Approach of countries to international students
	Anxiety and fear
	Internship and income generating work
	Accommodation
	Process of returning home
Its impact on country economies and universities	Impact on education
	Economic context
	Support for students
	New approach to international student system and country preferences

Theme 1. Its Impact on International Students and Candidate Students

Beginning of the Pandemic

The opinions of the participant regarding the code of the beginning of the pandemic are as follows:

Even though pandemic technically originated in China, it affected our university and my friends a lot… Life continued as usual until the declaration of the pandemic. Even conferences continued. Then the first case in the country was determined at our school. It was detected in a student who went abroad and came back… When things did not go well in the country in the following periods, all places, including our university, have been closed. (Sera)

Approach of Countries to International Students

The participant stated the following expression about this code:

In Spain, no restrictions, pressures or practices were applied with regards to international students in political sense. There were no practices that would affect our Chinese student friends, who have not returned to their country, either socially or politically. (Sera)

Anxiety and Fear

Participant's thoughts about this code are as expressed below:

Severity of the disease, which was treated like a normal flu, was considered with the idea that it would pass away, and even mocking those who wore masks, caused great excitement and fear, especially among international students, with the increasing number of deaths and the closure of every place. To be honest, I was nervous and scared on that day too. I wanted to return to my home and my country as soon as possible. As the flights were also cancelled, it was us who had to find a solution. This situation worried me more, causing different scenarios to come to life in my head all the time… There weren't even masks in the pharmacies, I don't remember how many pharmacies I visited... I couldn't afford to stay there because even during a normal examination it is difficult to tell about your problems... How would I be treated if I was sick, considering that I was not a citizen of that place, along with the deaths experienced there during the pandemic and the health system? I could have told the doctor, I don't know… One of our friends who could not return passed away during this process, we held his funeral online. (Sera)

Internship and Income Generating Work

The participant expressed the following about this code:

Friends like me, who had internships as research assistants at the university, did not lose their jobs during this process. They continued with their apprenticeship online and their salaries were not cut. As graduate students, we were lucky in this respect, however undergraduate students working in various businesses had to leave their jobs. This was one of the reasons that made it difficult for them to stay in the country. (Sera)

Accommodation

The participant stated the following expression about accommodation:

I have friends who do not prefer to return to their country for reasons such as not taking the disease to their families, not having a place to stay in their own country, staying there without the opportunity to return, and having paid their rent in advance. Some of my friends in this situation continued to stay in their homes because they had paid their rent in advance. As some of my friends continued to receive their apprenticeship fees during this period, they did not have any problems with paying rent and hence, they continued to stay in the country. Some of my friends received financial support from their own countries and in this way, they could stay. (Sera)

Process of Returning Home

The participant's experience of returning home is expressed as here below:

I was scared so much when the whole country was almost at home by closure all of a sudden. I wanted to return home as soon as possible, but direct flights to my country were canceled and I had to find a solution quickly. In fact, I had tickets that I had bought for a later date and I had paid for them, but I couldn't wait that much longer. I investigated how to go and I learned that direct flights from the neighboring country still continue. I went to the neighboring country and I don't even remember what time it was. I found a ticket for a direct flight to my country in the middle of the night, and actually the plane was packed with citizens of my country, everyone was running away. I went through the necessary quarantine process as I arrived, but I was very happy to return to my country. I was staying there in a house with a very high rent. I came without getting any of my belongings. Furthermore, my lease contract expired five or six months after I arrived. Hence, I came back for a little while, and after a week of research, I moved my belongings to a small, low-rent house. I'm paying rent right now, maybe I'll never go there. I do not know. I kept the room I was holding for six months, it is not clear whether I will extend it. Moreover, the pandemic will decrease and if I have to go, the rents will increase even more. When I shall go, I don't know where I will stay until I find a house. (Sera)

Theme 2: Its Impact on Country Economies and Universities

Impact on Education

The participant's opinions on this subject are as follows:

Campuses were closed, but our university turned to online education the next day. I can state that almost no day was lost. With this success of the school, the students who took lessons did not lose anything. However, there were problems in the early stages of the transition to online education among undergraduate students. The fact that the exams are online, the interaction in the courses is limited, the course hours do not coincide with the same time in every country, continuation of the exams and conferences online made it a bit difficult for my undergraduate students. There was not much difficulty for the graduate courses as the class size consisted of single digits. Since I am at the graduate level and in the thesis period, the course events did not affect me. The fact that the conferences are online has affected me positively, I think that the conferences have become more functional because there is no difficulty in transportation and travel. In addition, the work, procedures and ceremonies of the students whose graduations were coming were not postponed. Everything continued as usual and online ceremonies were held for graduates. Currently, face-to-face training has started in some basic courses for undergraduate students. (Sera)

Economic Context

The participant stated the following about this code:

With the closure of the university, many of my international student friends tried to return to their countries. Not only health but also economic reasons were effective in this, such as paying rent for nothing. Some even terminated or did not renew their lease agreements. Therefore, I can say that the number of international students in Spain has decreased significantly. (Sera)

Support for Students

The participant's opinions on this code are as follows:

First of all, Spain provided a certain amount of aid to citizens who were unemployed in this process. I know that international students who are there on a student visa also benefit from this assistance. All graduate students like me receive scholarships… But I know that it is easier for international undergraduate students to pay their tuition fees… University kept on informing us on matters such as how we can travel to the university during this process, how those who want to return to the country should act, the current situation on the campus, how to enter the campus, with which health institutions agreements are concluded. Currently, you can take a test at a contracted health

institution to enter the campus. I should add that my university in England, where I went for my master's degree, was more effective in financial support for the student in this process. They collected money from all former graduates like me and helped international students during a certain period of the pandemic. Some universities have provided laptops to international students who cannot access online education. They continue to assist international students who are still unable to pay their tuition fees. And from the very first moment, they continued to cooperate with health institutions. Continuously informing international students and prospective students, as in these examples, and prioritizing their health status and access to education will contribute positively to both current and prospective students. (Sera)

New Approach to International Student System and Country Preferences

The participant stated the following about this code:

Everything is going online for me right now. I am doing my internship online, they did not require me to be there and we continue to receive our fee. The cases decrease and if I have to attend classes as part of the internship, I will have to go. However, if the number of cases rises again and the pandemic intensifies in Spain, I will definitely not return... Thanks to my plans to have an internship and education abroad, to obtain the right to stay there for a long time, to have an economically profitable job, and as I have no problems with the English language, I preferred mobility. I can't say that I see it the same way right now and I want to live in my own country with my family… I chose the university in Spain because it is highly reputable and because it provides the opportunity to study with scholarship… The country I am in may have managed the process poorly, but the university managed it wonderfully. Online education and service were started immediately. There was no loss of course and there was no delay in graduation. No difficulties were caused to the students who were newly enrolled in the university but could not come later and accommodation arrangement was made for them. For this reason, I hear that there are still new registrations and that new students are going to the country… If I were to start mobility again despite these processes, I would still choose the same university. (Sera)

Discussion

During the pandemic process, international education has been moved to online systems, and benefits including culture and language learning, experience abroad, and job opportunities have significantly reduced (Janebova, 2020). In this study, the participant stated that she had to leave her plans, dreams, internships, and education and return home due to the pandemic, and that she experienced great anxiety and stress during this process by having difficulties in returning home, accommodation, finance, and access to food and medical supplies. According to the findings of the studies conducted by Studyportals (2020b) and BridgeU (2020), international students feel uneasy due to travel restrictions, the decrease in the budget allocated by their families for education, financial difficulties, health problems, and being alone. In this context, with the onset of the pandemic, it is understood that international students have concerns and difficulties in matters, such as travel, accommodation, health, security, and access to food and medical supplies.

Chinese and Asian students were the international students who felt the impact of the pandemic most strongly (ICEF, 2020; Spyrou & McDonald, 2020; Yu, 2021). In this study, the participant said, "My Chinese friends, who went to their country for the Christmas holiday, could not return because the events started there early." She stated that Chinese international students are more negatively affected by the pandemic process. It is thought that there are two reasons for this situation. First, with the onset of the pandemic, all countries suspended flights primarily China, so that students had difficulty returning to their countries and those who left early were considered lucky (ICEF, 2020). The second is that COVID-19 first emerged in China and Chinese students are exposed to psychological and verbal violence due to the exclusionary behavior and verbal and physical attacks of the host country's citizens towards them (Bilecen, 2020). The Chinese government warning of international students, who are its citizens, that they may encounter racist incidents and not returning to universities (Spyrou & MacDonald, 2020) and that East Asian students hang inscriptions stating that they are not Chinese in their bags during the most intense period of the pandemic are among the remarkable events regarding this issue.

On the other hand, according to the report published by Gabriels and Aberg (2020), 24% of Italian students and 19% of Asian students were exposed to discrimination and verbal attacks during the pandemic period. In this context, there are conflicts between students and citizens of countries close to China, where the virus first appeared, and countries that have serious health problems during the pandemic.

According to the participant in this research, international students work part-time while studying in their host country (Spain) to ease the financial burden of their families. However, the participant stated that international students had to leave their jobs and experienced financial problems during the pandemic. In his research, Bilecen (2020) drew attention to the unemployment and financial difficulties of students working in various fields, such as cafes, cafeterias, organizations, companies, due to the closure of campuses and workplaces caused by the pandemic. These closures also cause the postponement of internship for students who aim to gain work experiences (Mok et al., 2021). On the other hand, some countries generally allow international students to work part-time. It has been observed that countries such as Canada, which did not allow international students to work full-time before the pandemic, allowed these students to work full-time during the pandemic (Ing, 2020). At this point, it is seen that international students have difficulties in earning income during the pandemic and some countries that do not want to lose students provide financial aid to students in this process.

In this research, the participant used the phrase "If the number of cases in Spain rises again and the pandemic intensifies again, I will definitely not return." The most important factors that affect the plans of international students and will affect the preferences of international student candidates are the strength of the health systems against the pandemic (Taşçı, 2020), how the country manages the pandemic process (Ahlburg, 2020), and how the country approaches international students before and after the pandemic (Loo, 2020; Mackie, 2020). For example, it is thought that the USA's inadequacy in the fight against the pandemic, suspending the visas of students in the process, asking international students who study completely online to leave the country, and attempts to enact laws to prevent them from returning will affect the preferences of prospective students (Mackie, 2020; Loo, 2020). On the other hand, the participant said, "The country I am in may have managed the process poorly, but the university managed it well… If I were to start my mobility again despite these processes, I would still choose the same university." She stated that the university made positive efforts in this process. Accordingly, it can be said that universities that manage the pandemic process well and support international students will maintain their reputation in the eyes of international students and candidates.

According to the research conducted by Quacquarelli Symonds (2020b), which reached more than 19,000 international student candidates between February and June 2020, international students changed their plans due to the pandemic, did not show interest in online education, had more expectations from their universities in terms of health, and needed to have more information about the universities. In this research, the participant has stated her opinion: "Constantly informing international students and prospective students, prioritizing their health status and access to education will contribute positively to both current and prospective students." In a study conducted by Mok et al. (2021), with 2,739 students, it was revealed that 84% of students do not want to travel overseas. On the other hand, there are also studies stating that a single crisis will not completely eliminate international student mobility, and that regardless, students and families will be willing to do international student mobility (Wu, 2020). In the research conducted by the BridgeU Platform (2020) on more than 800 international student candidates from 83 countries, results supporting that the pandemic will not cause radical changes in international student mobility have been found. In the same study, the majority of the students stated that there was no change in their plans, but they changed their preferences about the countries where they wanted to study. In this research conducted in 2020, a decrease of 71% for the USA, 56% for the UK and 58% for Canada was observed, while an increase of 167% for Australia and 50% for Singapore was observed. With the change in the rankings of the countries preferred by international students, countries such as Australia, Singapore, and New Zealand came to the front in this period. The reason for this can be shown as the fact that these countries effectively manage the pandemic process (BridgeU, 2020). According to the study conducted by Studyportals, 36% of the students changed their international mobility plans due to the pandemic. It is seen that the ideas of freezing their enrollment, enrolling in online mobility programs, giving up international mobility, studying at a national university, or changing the preferred country come to the fore in the preferences of these students, respectively (Studyportals, 2020a).

Regarding the impact of the pandemic on the country's economies and universities in this research, the participant's following statement attracts attention: "I can say that the number of international students in Spain has decreased significantly." Considering the expected decline in the number of international students according to the OECD (2020) report, it is likely that there will be a decline in research and innovation in the coming years in countries that maintain their development and prestige through brain drain. On the other hand, it seems likely that countries, such as the USA and the UK, which see international students as financial inputs and owe a significant part of their resources to international students, will experience financial losses in the coming period due to the negativities in the pandemic process as well as the

deficiencies in their existing health systems. It can be said that the return of international students to their countries and their inability to pay their tuition fees will also put universities with a high number of international students in a difficult situation. However, this is the opposite for countries, such as Singapore and New Zealand, that have successfully managed the pandemic (Schulmann, 2020). In this context, it can be said that countries that are successful in pandemic management will have a great advantage in becoming a center of attraction in international education. It is expected that transoceanic countries and countries that cannot successfully manage the pandemic process will lose their place in the preference rankings (Calıkoglu & Gumuş, 2020). Accordingly, it is possible that there will be some changes in the preferred destinations for international student mobility after the pandemic, in terms of the financial inputs of the countries and the communication of universities with international students.

The pandemic has disrupted international students' plans to experience different cultures, access the foreign job market, network and learn languages, and have disrupted their learning experiences (Aristovnik et al., 2020). According to Gopinathan et al. (2020), universities that do not want to lose their value in the eyes of students give more importance to distance education, which makes it possible to participate in international education from home during the pandemic process. The concentration of universities on distance education has allowed students to participate in international mobility without requiring them to move. In this research, the participant pointed out that there were students who had problems accessing the courses remotely. She added that "Some universities provided laptop computers to international students who could not access online education." On the other hand, Buzatu et al. (2020) emphasize that distance education is not preferred by students and there are concerns about quality, while Zalite and Zvirbule (2020) emphasize that universities are not ready for online education as a digital infrastructure. With the transition to distance education, universities are experiencing problems with the inability to implement the online surveillance system, the limited interaction in virtual classrooms, and privacy and security (Aalst et al., 2020). If international mobility is transformed into virtual mobility through online means, it is seen that the costs are reduced and it is possible for students who cannot cross their physical limits to be included in the mobility. There exists the skepticism of students towards online mobility; the fact is that it is not possible to carry out the mobility with its full advantages and there are some disadvantages. It is thought that after the pandemic, student preferences will again be in favor of physical mobility.

Conclusion and Suggestions

When the findings obtained in this study are evaluated in general, it can be said that the pandemic has had many negative effects on international student mobility. During the pandemic, international students have been stuck in the country they are in and faced difficulties in returning to their homes. In addition, their education and internships have been interrupted and they have experienced intense stress and anxiety. Students who could not return to their country had difficulties in terms of accommodation, access to food, financial support, and medical supplies. The pandemic has caused current international students to be undecided about whether to continue their mobility, and prospective international students have changed their country preferences significantly, even if they do not give up on their mobility.

In accordance, the factors affecting international students and international student candidates to change their plans and destination preferences can be listed as: experiences lived through during the pandemic process, skills of countries to cope with the pandemic and the health system they own, approach of governments towards international students, success of universities in managing pandemic process, support and means which universities provide to international students regarding subjects such as accommodation, health, food, and financial issues, and alternative options offered with regards to lecturing. Therefore, overseas countries and universities, which were the center of international students before the pandemic, but were insufficient in the management of the pandemic, are expected to experience serious student loss and economic difficulties. In this context, universities can be advised to improve communication with students; to provide discounts on tuition fees considering the financial difficulties experienced by students and their families; to give importance to online education, international coordination and cooperation, and preventive measures; and to work on issues, such as establishing closer communication with international students. In the context of prospective international students, applications, such as ease of placement at the university, universities need to pay special attention to activities concerning registration, accommodation, nutrition, conduct studies to meet the students' health needs, and provide online interaction to address the concerns of students and parents.

In addition, developing countries, which have lost most of the talented young people, should spend this process by investing in higher education institutions and seeking ways to retain qualified human resources in their countries. On the other hand, this process offers serious opportunities to countries that want to be a center of attraction for international students. Especially countries that successfully manage the pandemic can become a safe and peaceful port for international students with their work and strong advertising campaigns. Turkey is one of these countries and it has been observed that international students' accommodation, education, health, and food needs are met during the pandemic. However, it was observed that some students went to their families. Education continued online. During the pandemic, Turkey brought its own citizens from abroad to the country by private planes. After all these situations, it has been observed that the number of international students in the country where many students have given up on going abroad has increased. As a final word, through future research, in case of a possible new closure, it would be beneficial for universities to focus on what steps should be taken and how countries can use such situations to their advantage.

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International Student Transition to Canadian Post-Secondary Institutions

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Abstract

The number of international students has been increasing in the last decade in Canada. International students are bringing revenue and boosting the local and federal economy. However, they may also face various challenges as compared to domestic students because of cultural and language differences. These students need proper support to transition into Canadian culture and academic environment. The purpose of this research was to find out the challenges that these students face as international students. A semi-structured interview was applied to elicit the experiences of international students studying in Canada. The data indicated that international students go through acculturative stress, and a lack of communication skills makes it even harder to connect and build relationships. Several implications have been indicated for support services that can enhance a smooth transition for these students along with social-cultural awareness so that they feel embraced at Canadian post-secondary institutions while away from home.

Keywords: Canadian post-secondary institutions, higher education, international students, international student transition, student engagement

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International Student Transition to Canadian Post-Secondary Institution

International students may face various challenges when they arrive in a new country often with no family or friends to support them. Most international students can struggle in the first year because it is an initial transition phase. Some of the struggles and challenges these international students may face including loneliness, language barrier, different academic environment, culture, and lack of social support and network, deteriorate international students' confidence leading to stress, depression, and eventually drop-out from the institution (Akhtar & Kröner-Herwig, 2015; Andrade, 2006; Calder et al., 2016). These students rely heavily on university-led support services and activities to engage and form social

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networks; however, access to social support networks is greatly reduced as these students arrive in a new country (Chong & Razek, 2014; Martirosyan et al., 2019) It is the post-secondary institutions' responsibility to help international students transition smoothly into the institutions' culture and community to promote equity, diversity, inclusivity, and social awareness. To sustain the growth of international students, it is critical for host institutions not only to offer the best quality of services to international students but also to provide appropriate guidance and support to them to become responsible and engaging members of the community.

There is a strong need for gaining a better understanding of factors influencing international students' engagement to improve services and support for international students' success in Canada. Institutions need to have conditions where student engagement and social-cultural activities can support international students' success, retention, well-being, self-esteem, and self-efficacy (Bowden et al., 2019). The purpose of this paper is to detangle factors that cause increased challenges for international students and provide recommendations for a smooth transition to postsecondary institutions. The research questions that were explored in this study were as follows:

1. How do international students describe their experiences of adjusting to Canadian post-secondary institutions?
2. What are some challenges that international students face as they arrive at a new country?

Literature Review

Acculturative Stress

Berry (1992, 1997) defined acculturative stress as a type of stress experienced during acculturation that negatively impacts mental health by causing anxiety, depression, fear of rejection, and identity confusion. Bhowmik et al. (2018) described some of the most common acculturative stress examples in their study include language barrier, discrimination, cultural differences, housing and transportation issues which lead to homesickness and force international students to self-isolate (Rajab et al., 2014). Self-isolation and homesickness can negatively impact one's ability to function and especially hinder their ability to navigate academic activities. Self-isolation leads to depression and loneliness which leads to a minimum to zero opportunity to socially interact with peers and make friends. Sawir et al. (2008) conducted a study where 200 students were interviewed and 65% of the international student expressed that "they suffered from loneliness because students felt they had no one to talk to, staying alone and managing everything by themselves was overwhelming " (p. 168). A sense of belonging is another challenge that they these students go through as they lack their social network and family support. Rivas and her colleagues (2019) did qualitative research and described the experiences of participants with a sense of belonging. These students look for various ways to get involved and to make friends but it is not an easy road.

International students mostly do not want to put additional stress on their families back home and that is why they refrain from discussing personal issues, academic struggles, and mental health challenges with their friends and family (Andrade, 2006). Akhtar and Kroner-Herwing (2015) described homesickness, isolation, and obstacles to not making friends and social networks as described by international students because they felt they had no family support or similar presence of relationships in the host country. When proper support is not provided to these students then their mental health could be negatively impacted which further could lead to drop-out, failing courses, and overall depression.

Language Barrier and Academic Difficulties

International students can struggle to communicate correctly in English in Anglo-Saxon countries mainly because of speaking different languages in their home countries. The language barrier is considered one of the primary stressors for international students (Misra et al., 2003). International students are given admission to post-secondary institutions based on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) or Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) tests. Some post-secondary institutions accept other forms of English language tests such as Duolingo, the Canadian English Language Proficiency Index Program (CELPIP), and the Pearson Test of English (PTE). Even those students who achieve higher scores in these standardized English language tests struggle in the academic environment because of various factors such as different academic settings, citation format, students' and professors' expectations, and cultural differences (Andrade, 2006).

Education in English is mostly required because it is an internationally recognized language. In countries where English is not an official or first language, there is now more focus on introducing and teaching in English (Rao, 2019). Despite the focus on teaching in English in schools and post-secondary institutions, international students still struggle with academic writing, understanding lectures, conversations with peers, and interaction in the classroom because of the different

ways they have been taught English at home institutions. This can be very different from expectations and student requirements from the host institution (Cennetsku, 2017).

Coming from diverse backgrounds where teaching pedagogies are different, and curricula are based on a cultural and/or religious basis, international students usually struggle with critical thinking analysis which is one of the basic requirements in Western education (Shaheen, 2016). Writing a paper with critical thinking is challenging and a hard concept for international students as they are more aware of traditional practices where they follow teacher guidelines and believe the books (Maringe & Jenkins, 2015). One of the teachers in Shaheen's (2016) study mentioned that international students are not aware of critical thinking writing assignments and that is one of the reasons they have a hard time understanding and putting it all together. A teacher in this study mentioned that most of her international students write their assignment in their native language and then translate it into English, which mostly leads to wrong interpretations (Shaheen, 2016).

Writing an assignment or paper in the native language seems appropriate to international students as they are comfortable, and it takes less time to write because they are familiar with writing mechanics in their native language however, when it comes to writing it in English, it is challenging because the meaning is lost, and the quality of writing is compromised as well. These students also have a hard time in class when they have to attentively listen to their professors and take notes (Kuo, 2011). Note-taking is usually encouraged so that students can study after class but if notes are not written properly or miss important concepts that were discussed during lectures, they can easily confuse students.

Language barriers cause poor academic achievement and increase the societal and parental pressures from back home to be successful in academics. International students feel lost and lose confidence in their abilities to learn, read, write, and speak because of accent differences (Khanal & Gaulee, 2019). Language proficiency causes these students to lie to their parents and make-up stories because they are not comfortable sharing their emotions and struggles because of societal expectations (Sien et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2015).

Residence Challenges

International students' on-campus residence is usually more expensive than domestic students and hence, most international students look for accommodation off-campus because it is a bit cheaper. The off-campus residence also gives freedom to cook food so these students can make their ethnic food and are not restricted to eating in on-campus dining halls (Zhou & Zhang, 2014). However, international students struggle to find affordable and suitable accommodation in proximity of the campus (Calder et al., 2016). It is important for these students to factor in commuting, bus routes, and bus passes when finding an off-campus residence which means these students have to navigate various challenges while finding accommodation off-campus.

Additionally, the on-campus residence has many restrictions such as the use of showers at certain times, food services hours of operation, and noise level policies as compared to an off-campus residence which aids these students to cook, study, and talk to their families back home. In the beginning, it is hard to navigate grocery stores, bank institutions, accommodation, transportation, and financial management institutions (Zhou & Zhang, 2014). The difference in food and finding ethnic recipes and items is also another adjustment that takes time to navigate and get used to. Specialty food items can be expensive as well, which international students need to budget for.

In the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) reporting, an international student stated that during his first year of higher education in Canada he stayed in a one-bedroom basement apartment with three other students and paid $400.00 CAD a month (Ricci, 2019). Finding an appropriate accommodation is important for these students so they can start feeling at home, however, due to various accommodation challenges, these students feel alone and deprived of friendships and a sense of belonging (Worsley et al., 2021). As the number of international students is increasing, finding accommodation can cause mental health issues.

Coping Strategies

The mechanism of the coping process plays a fundamental role in managing stress where cognitive and behavioral efforts are made to manage both external and internal sources of stress (Gustems-Carnicer et al., 2019). International students can be hesitant and unwilling to consult counselors for psychological needs and assessment. A very limited number of these students can overcome feelings of homesickness, loneliness, depression, and anxiety by using their own self-help techniques. In Sarvanan et al. (2019) study, 29 international students participated in the psychological assessment for depression and homesickness. Only nine students recovered from depression and homesickness and another 20 students did not recover. These nine students were then interviewed to explore more about how they were able to recover. Additionally,

the other 20 students were also asked to complete a questionnaire which explored the reasoning for not being able to recover from depression and homesickness.

These nine participants spoke to their family and friends that they missed, played sports, participated in physical activities such as sports clubs, had positive thinking and attitude, and connected a bit deeper in religious activities motivated them to stay stronger and helped them manage stress and homesickness. The other 20 students who were not able to recover faced various issues which involved language barriers, academic and family stress, loneliness, and social engagement. Berry (1992) argued that the presence of stressors is common; however, these stressors can be minimized if there are proper coping strategies and resources available. In one of his studies, Berry (2005) found that participants were able to cope with stressors when they were able to integrate into the host culture while maintaining their culture of origin and experienced less acculturative stress.

Theoretical Framework

This study utilizes Berry's acculturation stress theory (Berry, 1992, 1997) as the framework for understanding international students' transition into a new environment in a Canadian post-secondary institution. While there is literature available for international students in the USA (Cennetsku, 2017; Jackson et al., 2013; Misra et al., 2003; Kuo, 2011; Wu et al., 2015), Australia (Alsahafi & Shin, 2017; Kambouropoulos, 2014; Sawir, 2008), and Europe (Akhtar & Kröner-Herwig, 2015; Sovic, 2009), there is limited research on social adjustment and transition for international students in Canadian post-secondary institutions. Utilizing Berry's acculturative stress theory (Berry, 1992, 1997), this study analyzed international student's experiences, stress factors, and challenges while they were adapting to North American university environment and culture. This study was designed within a social constructivist paradigm which explores the factors that play a role in lived experiences and while there are multiple realities within this paradigm it is also focused on 'how' and 'what' revealed by the information disclosed in the data collection (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The researcher wanted to collect individuals' lived experiences and wanted to discover and describe the meaning of the participants' lived experiences in a Canadian post-secondary institution.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research method to investigate international students' experiences (Punch, 2013) using semi-structured interviews (Adams, 2015). Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to freely talk about their opinions, perceptions, and lived experiences (Vagle, 2018).

Context

University 1 (U1) is being referred to the institution in Southwestern Ontario, Canada where this study was conducted. This institution in the Southwestern region of Ontario is in the top 6% of universities worldwide based on quality of education, alumni employment, research performance and more than ninety nations represented in the study body. International student enrollment in recent years has gone up and according to the strategic plans, the aim is to increase the enrollment of international students in the upcoming years. In order to protect the identity of the participants, they were assigned codes. Semi-structured interviews were conducted via Zoom an online audio/video conferencing tool that lasted about 30 to 45 minutes in length. The detailed research plan was submitted to the Research Ethics Board (REB) and research was conducted once the approval was obtained.

Participants

Ten participants took part in this study with six being current international students and four recent alumni who attended the institution as international students and graduated within the last five years. All these participants were at different stages of their degree programs (first-year undergraduate to graduate students) and professional lives. Since the number of participants was more than one individual, this study was suitable for phenomenological design as it was focused on lived experiences (Vagle, 2018). The International Department and the Career Centre sent out mass emails to current students and recent alumni and participants who showed interest in discussing their lived experiences were given brief details about the research study. Once they expressed further interest in participating in this study, they were given the format of the study as well as the consent form.

All participants were provided with the consent form in advance of data collection and had details about the nature of the study, potential risks, benefits, their rights as participants as well as their ability to withdraw from the study at any

time before and during the interview. To keep anonymity, participants were assigned codes from P1 to P10. Before the data collection, participants were encouraged to ask questions. Participants were also given the chance to ask questions before the interview and at the end of the interview.

Data Analysis

The thematic analysis approach was employed to capture the participants' unique experiences and perspectives, which could only be understood within their specific context (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). To conduct the analysis, data was collected and subsequently coded. These codes were then grouped into potential themes derived from the gathered data, and appropriate themes were assigned to the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Results

The data revealed that international students encountered numerous challenges and experienced a wide range of emotions during their first year, reflecting the tumultuous nature of this period. Participants felt that they needed to be equipped with better communication skills to be able to make friends, participate in class, have the confidence to speak to professors and be able to write effectively and properly. P1 noted: "I want to improve my language skills to talk better. I have no confidence. I have no friends to talk [to] where I can improve. It is very hard for me to make friends."

Another participant from China struggled with the language barrier mainly communicating within a North American context and Canadian culture. P5 was a recent alumnus and completed a Master of Business Administration (MBA) and was working in British Columbia:

> professor gave the assignment to look up a tweet on Twitter. I had no idea what a tweet was ... Not a well-known app(lication) back home ... I was clueless and did not ask for help because I felt shy. (P5)

Most participants initially felt lost because they did not have a solid foundation of proper communication skills. Another participant mentioned that due to a lack of communication skills, I did not interact during the lectures and did not participate in any activities (P4). A participant from Pakistan (P8) also shared the struggle with communication especially because of a disconnect about South-East Asian culture on campus. Similarly, P9 did not participate in any activities while studying at the institution because of not having proper communication skills. He felt shy about talking to anyone and mostly spent time alone in his apartment watching movies and playing video games.

Finding a Suitable Residence

Certain international students choose to reside outside of campus due to the anticipation of lower expenses and the ability to prepare their customary cuisine, which may prove challenging within the campus dormitory. P10 never lived in the residence and thought that there was no way for her to make social connections because she was off campus. P3 was from Syria and did not live in the residence but wanted to participate in different activities to stay connected with the campus community so that "I can call it my home (P3)" however, felt a bit of hesitance because of not living in the residence. P3 wanted to live on campus but because of the higher residence fee, it was impossible to afford. P6 felt that because he did not live on campus there was a disconnect to get involved in various clubs and organizations.

Living on-campus would have made a difference, but it is "expensive and does not suit my lifestyle." P7 did live in the residence and struggled in the first year due to various reasons such as lack of communication skills and courage to participate in different activities in the residence hall. However, P7 felt more comfortable in the second year and luckily found a job as a residence staff and since then learned a lot about different activities and participated in various events. He elaborated: "Because I found a job in the residence, my dormitory fee was reduced quite a lot and I was able to afford it." Overall, his confidence was boosted, and established one of the clubs on-campus in which he was very interested.

Finding a Community

P10 from Sri Lanka also reported difficulties in finding socio-relational activities on campus but discovered opportunities outside of the campus by visiting temples and observing festivals. Another participant from Europe (P2) faced many difficulties in finding her community on campus and even though she knew some people from Europe living locally. She had a hard time connecting with her peers, and did not have friends who would share traditional cuisine and culture. P8 struggled to find his own South-East Asian community in the region. He felt a lack of support and was alone. He grew up in Dubai and lived in Saudi Arabia and had a great circle of friends and family but initially had to go through a tough time finding his community. However, he was very interested in bringing awareness of South-East Asian culture on-campus and

became a President of the Pakistani Association Club on-campus and contributed towards cultural awareness. P9 had no friends while completing his degree and hence mostly stayed quiet and focused on schoolwork to stay occupied.

Lack of Canadian Work Experience

P7 wanted to know more about resources, such as work opportunities, professional development, workshops, or webinars that are being offered on-campus that was especially available for international students for being successful but unfortunately, could not find anything helpful. He was not sure where to look for resources, especially in the first two years in terms of integrating into the host culture to successfully land a job. He also struggled with job search and interview skills because he was not able to connect with the different services available on campus. P10 showed frustration with not being able to work full-time during the academic year due to visa guidelines.

However, in the summer, when full-time work is allowed, it is hard to find internships or co-op positions as an international student because she felt she was not given proper resources for interview skills, job search strategies, employer agencies, and other resources that would be beneficial for international students. Most participants expressed that not being aware of resources or the lack of resources on-campus or in general for international students made it challenging to cope with stress, anxiety, and transitioning into Canadian culture and academic environment. Additionally, participants mentioned that social connection, peer networking, professional development opportunities, and awareness of events would be essential to adapt to a new environment.

Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this study was to discover factors that cause increased challenges for international students and provide recommendations for a smooth transition to Canadian postsecondary institutions. From the findings, it is evident that international students need proper support system and programming to meet their needs. There are many ways where institutions can provide support and develop various resources to help international students to feel at home in a host country. As prevalent in literature and through interviews the language barrier, finding a community, social-cultural awareness, and ability to make friends were some main challenges which participants felt hindered not only because of their communication skills but also the ability to make friends, ask for help during class, provide an opinion, or participation in group work.

Smooth Transition

It is significantly important for international students to feel welcome and build relationships right from the beginning. International students need to adjust to the host institution's policies, culture, and environment. After interviewing, it is evident that there is a significant need to have better opportunities and events so that these students can get acclimated to the university's culture. The very first interaction for these students happens during orientation week. The orientation week usually happens before classes on-campus and is also known as an introductory week or freshmen's week (Riordan et al., 2018). During this orientation week, international students get to interact with international support staff, other students, different support staff providing various services, and faculty members. While each institution has its own way of designing orientation week, it is important to re-think orientation week so that it can meet the needs of students. Introducing icebreaker activities throughout the week with faculty, staff, and domestic students would help initiate conversations. Meal vouchers for the on-campus food court and a gift card for an off-campus ethnic restaurant. This will be helpful for students to visit and enjoy their ethnic cuisine.

Additionally, it would not put pressure on students to cook food if they were living off-campus. Ethnic restaurants may not always be present around campus, and alternatively, they may offer cooking classes during orientation. Through the collaboration of the campus food court and international department, there should be an international food week in which its food court includes ethnic food varieties from various regions throughout the world. Representatives from various services should be invited and given an opportunity to speak with students. Drop-in sessions in the first few weeks so that students can get familiar with different services that are being offered across campus such as tutoring, counseling, accessibility, and services. Campus tours are usually offered during the orientation week. However, most of the campus tours happen once or twice. It is important to have multiple campus tours so that international students get familiar with the campus, and do not have to struggle to find their classes and other services on campus.

Peer mentoring is important for international students to have mentors who can help them get accustomed to their host institution. As participants during the interviews mentioned, there is a disconnect between international and domestic students and mostly international students build relationships with other international students and not with domestic

students. If domestic students can help international students as mentors, then it would be easier for international students to get familiar with domestic students and build social connections. Berry et al. (1989) also described the importance of peer relationships, social networks, and developing friendships to adjust to a new culture which indirectly reduces stress.

Student associations and clubs can play a positive role in promoting and encouraging students to join clubs and organizations where they can have the opportunity to interact with others (Calder et al., 2016). Student associations, international departments, and student support services collaboratively introduce buddy programs where international students can be paired with domestic students and can talk about the host country's culture and learn more about the surrounding. Meaningful friendships and social networking can gradually help international students to adjust smoothly (Rajapaksa & Dundes, 2002). Additionally, weekly and monthly events can be useful where different activities and guest speakers can interact with them to provide resources and information about different support systems available on- and off-campus.

Social-Cultural Awareness

As international students are increasing in Canada, it is important that institutions focus on raising awareness of social-cultural understanding and knowledge in the institutions' community. Social-cultural awareness increases positive relationships, decreases stereotypes, fosters growth and development, and broadens values and knowledge (Ameny-Dixon, 2004). International students on campus want to contribute to campus culture and mostly look for different ways to get involved. Social-cultural awareness can be incorporated in many various ways such as creating multiple events, international festivals, clubs, and organizations' involvement and events catered for all students and the community.

Some examples to create awareness of social-cultural aspects to the campus community would be to introduce a flag day, international festival, movie nights, and cuisines of the world programs and initiatives. International students would be delighted if flag days were introduced in higher education institutions because that would give them a sense of belonging and allow them to represent themselves. Proper resources and measures should be introduced for international students so they can feel like they belong. This would eventually help them to achieve their academic goals while they develop a sense of belonging (Chris et al., 2015). Students should be encouraged to promote their culture by wearing ethnic clothes, dancing, and singing, as well as given the opportunity to represent their culture and country in any form they would like. An international festival should be arranged once a term or annually where international students sign up for different activities such as cooking classes, dancing classes, and other traditional values and cultures they want to represent.

Having multiple booths in an auditorium and inviting community members would be an added advantage for students, and the community. Even various clubs and organizations should participate to advertise their clubs and organizations, which would also be an opportunity for them to get to know other students across campus. Movie nights, especially those displaying ethnic movies would also be another way to bring students together and to learn about other cultures. Introducing cooking classes or ethnic food themes throughout the semester in the food court would be another way to build student relationships. International students can show some cooking skills and traditional cooking styles to local community which would help them to interact with their peers and feel a sense of belonging

Limitations

Despite the contributions of the present study, the study also had a few limitations. The sample size of a total of 10 participants for semi-structured interviews was quantified via thematic analysis. While the sample size is small in number, participants represented their lived experiences which helped the researcher to identify needs and improve programming and the required support system that is needed. The value and experiences which international students brought might be applicable to many international students across the world. All the participants were either currently enrolled or recently graduated from the same institution. Even though all the participants represented one institution, the recommendations can be applied at any institution geared towards internationalization, student engagement, and international students. Even though participants showed strong interdependence of acculturative experiences to their transition in Canada, future research is needed to quantitatively measure their transition experiences among different postsecondary institutions in relation to their acculturative experiences.

Conclusion

International students are a great source of diversity and cultural experiences while also contributing to the revenues of the Canadian economy. It is important to shift our focus towards these students so their needs can be met and eventually remain competitive. As Canada's landscape of immigration, internationalization, and international student enrollment is evolving and increasing, it is important to focus on their needs too. From the interviews, it was evident that international students face various challenges as they arrive in a new country where everything is new for them. While support services catered especially towards international students are necessary, it is equally important to provide the resources and support that is needed for them to adapt to a new environment, culture, and academic learning.

All the initiatives and programming for international students would reduce their stress, depression, and anxiety and ultimately would help them to cope with acculturative stress. To retain international students and stay competitive, it is important to make sure that all the efforts are being made for a smooth transition to an academic environment and the surrounding community. Proper leadership, institutional planning, and financial planning are required to take innovative steps to ensure a smooth transition and awareness of social life and cultural values to establish long-term goals for these students. Additionally, proper training and resources should be developed for faculty members, support staff, and other stakeholders so that everyone on-campus would be able to emotionally connect with international students and guide them toward the right people and resources.

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Essay

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Meritocracy: A Remedy to Addressing Social Injustices in Selecting Students to Public Higher Education in Malawi?

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This article was not written with the assistance of any Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology, including ChatGPT or other support technologies.

Abstract

This essay analyzes whether an ostensibly merit-based policy of selecting students for public higher education can act as a remedy to ameliorate social injustices in Malawi's education system. We address this question through the lens of equity based on a broader discussion of ethnicity in Malawi. The paper is organized in the following sections. First, we provide an overview of the geography of Malawi. This is followed by a detailed review of the literature on the educational system focusing on access and equity between the predecessor quota system and the current merit-based policy. The article concludes by arguing that the merit-based policy is very likely to perpetuate rather than ameliorate social injustices in education, as the future of students accessing public higher education is in jeopardy if they have attended under-resourced schools. Therefore, we strongly recommend

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that the Malawi government consider re-adopting the quota system, which if designed carefully could serve to address social injustices in access to higher education.

Keywords: equity, higher education, Malawi, meritocracy, quota system, social justice

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Introduction

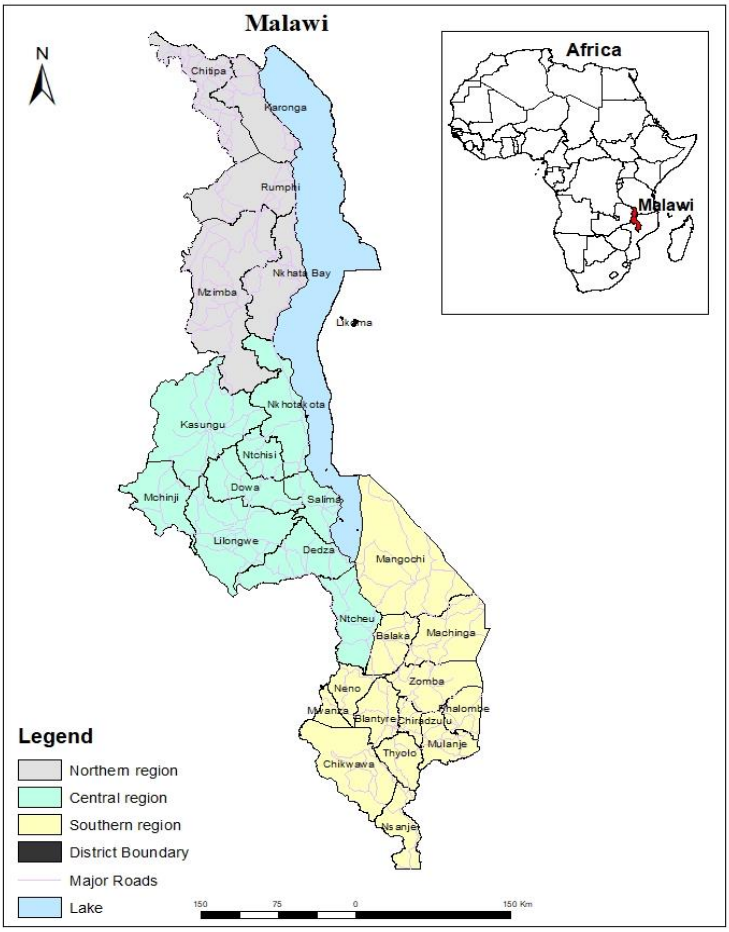
Our aim in this essay is to provide an analysis and recommendations regarding Malawi's higher education student selection policy, given that this policy: a) has been under active debate and revision; and b) has major implications for equity and social justice in this context. Our analysis and discussion of the policies center around social justice/injustice in Malawi's higher education system and present the perspective that the current "merit-based" policy poses threats to the basic principles of social justice in the context of access to public higher education in Malawi. To support this analysis, we apply Ashley Crossman's (2019) and Emma Smith's (2018) definitions of social justice in education as we analyze the likely effects of this new policy in context. We aim through this essay to provide a critical understanding of policy implications as well as strongly recommend to the Malawi government that they reinstate a quota system rather than continue with its current merit-based policy when selecting students to attend public higher education. Doing so, we argue, is the best way for the government to foster more equitable access to public higher education. Our essay accordingly begins by providing a concise background regarding the Malawian context. We then discuss and analyze issues of access and equity in higher education by debating two educational policies.

Overview of Relevant Context

Malawi is situated in the Southern part of Africa. It is bordered by Tanzania to the North, Zambia to the West, and Mozambique to the East via the South (Fig. 1). The country is geographically divided into three regions (northern, central, and southern) and has a total of 28 districts. Each of these regions is associated with distinct ethnic groups/tribes, which frequently come together around political issues. Therefore, the politics of Malawi often takes on a regional perspective with particular regions tending to favor particular party affiliations and sets of issues.

Figure 1

Map of Malawi Showing Districts by Region (Dzimbiri et al., 2022)



According to the Malawi population and housing census report of 2018, out of 17.6 million of the country's population, 44% reside in the southern region, followed by 43% and 13% in the central and northern regions, respectively (National Statistics Office, 2019). Once ruled by the British, Malawi attained self-rule in 1964; Hastings Kamuzu Banda became the first president, and he ruled Malawi for nearly 30 years. During Banda's autocratic regime, primary education was not free. In 1994, Malawi's new President, Bakili Muluzi, introduced free primary education (Inoue & Oketch, 2008). Free education, as used here, means the removal of direct expenditures for one to access education services; these costs include fees for tuition, uniforms, textbooks, and so on (UNESCO, 2002 as cited in Inoue & Oketch, 2008). From 1964, Malawi had only one public university

called the University of Malawi (Msiska, 2015) until 1997, when Mzuzu University (MZUNI) was established. In 2011, two other public universities were established: the Malawi University of Science and Technology (MUST), and the Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR).

More recently, in 2021, the Malawi University of Business and Applied Sciences and Kamuzu University of Health Sciences were also established. Per the new higher education admissions policy, selection of students to public universities is based on one's performance in the Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE); the exams are administered by the National Examination Board of Malawi in the final grade in senior secondary school (Galafa, 2019). Our essay does not attend to the properties of the exams themselves, such as the strength of their measurement of the constructs they purport to measure. These are important attributes that will affect the overall strength of the policy and should be the focus of additional research. Instead, we focus at a broader level—and with the assumption that, even if these exams are of impeccable quality, there are substantial issues associated with the application of the merit-based admissions policies, especially in highly unequal contexts. The merit-based policy is a major shift from the predecessor approach to selection into higher education.

During the one-party rule, the first president of Malawi introduced a quota system policy for selecting students to higher education, arguing that this constituted an affirmative action that would provide opportunities for students who are originally from the southern and central regions, as they were deemed underrepresented in the public universities (Mashininga, 2020). The quota system policy, however, faced considerable challenge and backlash, as certain groups argued it exacerbated social injustices regarding access to education (Galafa, 2019). For instance, some politicians—primarily from the central and northern regions—argued the policy was deliberately introduced in favor of a specific ethnic group/tribe or region to have access to public higher education.

Given the nature of Malawian politics, which is hugely associated with tribes, ethnicity, and regions, people from the north and central regions coupled with some civil society groups deemed the quota system as "political" and discriminatory in nature (Mashininga, 2020). Specifically, the Tumbuka tribe, who are predominantly in the north, coupled with the Chewa tribe from the central region, have been claiming to be the victims of the quota system policy. Thus, people from these two regions contend that this policy was unjust, and it had negative implications for educational opportunities arguing that the majority of the deserving students from the "Tumbukas" and "Chewas" were denied access to public colleges and universities as compared to other tribes from the southern region in Malawi. Consequently, there was a perceived need for a new, ostensibly merit-based policy in which students who have performed highly in their Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE) exams would be selected to public universities (Mashininga, 2020). Such challenges and concerns resulted in the Malawi government, through the ministry of education, abolishing the quota

system in 2020 and replacing it with the current, exam- and merit-based policy as a new strategy for admitting students to public colleges and universities.

The merit-based policy is perceived and presented by some as a fair strategy in selecting students to public universities in Malawi, while at the same time the earlier-used quota system is presented as a policy that aimed at marginalizing people from the northern region to access higher education (Gunde et al., 2021). In this essay, we describe the inherent unfairness of this new policy in this context and argue how the predecessor admission policy was substantially better at addressing issues of social justice relative to higher education access.

Theoretical/Conceptual Orientation: Social Justice, Equity, and Problematizing Meritocratic Admissions Policies

This article is guided by the theory of social justice across the lines of equity and meritocratic approaches to social justice education. We draw on the ideas of Ashley Crossman (2019) on meritocracy, and Emma Smith's (2018) definition of social justice in education to support our analysis and to advance a clearer understanding of the politics of social justice in relation to educational policy formulation. First, meritocracy is defined as a social system in which social status and success is based on people's abilities, talents and effort such that those who are successful are believed to have achieved that based upon their merit (Crossman, 2019). Smith (2018) defines social justice as equitable distribution of benefits of the society, which includes wealth, income, opportunities to education and other resources, and whereby this distribution is achieved based on the principles of equality, equity and merit. Regarding the principle of equity, Smith draws on the ideas of John Rawls who argued equity is the most important principle of social justice in as far as reducing inequality is concerned. Equity is based on the principle of need in the allocation of resources or opportunities as it recognizes the existing differences that make–certain group of people more disadvantaged in comparison to another. Therefore, our essay draws on social justice as equity to critically analyze whether the current merit-based policy of admitting students to public higher education can act as a remedy to ameliorate social injustices in Malawi's education system.

Discussion

Drawing on our analysis of student higher education selection educational policy, this section discusses the politics of social justice in Malawi and describes this policy's implications in perpetuating inequalities in access to public higher education. To do so, we first present and discuss critical issues regarding access to education in Malawi, and then we discuss the politics of equity and how this affects social justice education.

Pertinent Issues Regarding Access to Public Education in Malawi

After the dawn of democracy in 1994, Malawi's new President introduced a free primary education policy in the same year (Mbewe, 2002), which just one

year later had already produced a 50% surge in primary enrollment (Kadzamira & Rose, 2003). Over the years, there has been a continued rapid increase in primary school enrollment as a result of the ambitious educational reform—known as "universal primary enrollment"—which aims at increasing access to both primary and secondary education while also addressing issues of inequity (Kadzamira et al., 2003).

A recent report released by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) found that the enrollment rate in public primary schools grew by 1.9% on average in the 2018/2019 academic year (MoEST, 2019). Previous statistics also show that between 2015 and 2018 secondary education enrollment rate grew by 2.9% on average and that figure was higher compared to 2.7% for primary education enrollment (MoEST, 2019). The high enrollment rate in public secondary schools (2.9%) entails that a significant number of students who graduated from primary school have been unable to reach the secondary level. Likewise, the rapid increase in secondary education in Malawi has resulted in high and increasing demand and pressure for higher education, especially through Malawi's public universities (Mambo et al., 2016).

While the demand for public higher education continues to increase, the country's public universities do not have sufficient space to accommodate or absorb all qualified students. In fact, at present just a small fraction of secondary school graduates are able to obtain access to these universities: According to a report released by the World Bank on improving higher education in Malawi for competitiveness in the global economy, fewer than 30% of the graduates from secondary school in Malawi get admitted into public universities (Mambo et al., 2016). This situation is attributed mainly to limited capacity in the public's higher education system (Mambo et al., 2016).

The situation was even worse in the 2010 university admission process since only 19.4% of the students who graduated from secondary school and were qualified for higher education got selected to public universities (Mambo et al., 2016). Accordingly, we recognize that there has been a substantial growth of enrollment capacity, but that it is still quite limited. It was also in 2010 when the Malawi government, through the Ministry of Education, informed the general public that the selection of students to public universities was based on the "Equitable Access policy" (Mashininga, 2020). This was re-introduced as a remedy to address regional inequalities in access to education, in which public universities were deemed to be hugely dominated by students from the northern region (Mashininga, 2020). According to the quota system policy, the top ten students from each of the 28 districts across the country were being offered a place in public universities (Mashininga, 2020). This controversial policy resulted in criticisms from some quarters of the country's population, coupled with politicians arguing that it left out many of the "deserving students" from the northern region who could not access public universities, hence the demand for educational reform to the current, ostensibly merit-based policy.

The Politics of Equity: From Quota System to (Apparent) Meritocracy

Smith (2018) notes in her book *Key Issues in Education and Social Justice* that for the past decades, political ideologies have been the driving force on how people perceive schooling and also have a great influence on how the state promotes issues of social justice in education globally. In Malawi, for example, politics of social justice in public higher education, specifically on the issue of the Equitable Access to Education policy, increasingly became a major aspect of the political agendas of the then opposition parties supported by some other civil society organizations. Equity in terms of access to higher education and its implications is defined differently among scholars, educators, and others. Mambo et al. (2016) define equity as "equality of opportunity in access to, and success in, higher education, regardless of the place of birth, location, gender, ethnicity, religion, language, disability, and parental income" (p. 5).

Galafa (2019) states that the Equitable Access to Education policy aims at addressing the existing discrepancies in the access to higher education based on geography in Malawi. However, in our view, Galafa's critical understanding and appraisal of this policy are somewhat flawed as they are not well aligned with the basic definition of social justice in education. Smith (2018) describes social justice in the context of education as equity for everyone based on the principle of need. By contrast, Galafa (2019) argues that the "Equitable Access to Education" policy is not meant to address inequalities but rather it is meant to address what he views as the systemic discrimination of a certain group of people which exacerbates inequalities and promotes mediocrity over meritocracy in Malawi.

Such disparities in understanding the policy needs and the rhetoric about its implications can have a remarkable influence on people's perceptions and understanding of equity and access to public universities. Politicians and other civil society organizations accordingly may have strategically opposed the quota system policy in favor of the merit-based system to win votes from people mainly from northern Malawi, who viewed this policy as a form of tribalism and/or regionalism. Thus, according to the critiques of the quota system, the selection of students to public universities based on the districts and region of one's origin is discriminatory and unjust, and the only strategy to address this crisis was through a presumably more objective and fair merit-based system (Galafa, 2019).

While the quota system policy received a lot of criticism, a huge amount of evidence from many other countries serves to underscore how a well-designed quota system can be critical towards addressing structural inequalities; indeed, such approaches appear more capable of leveling the playing field in systems beset by inequalities than do merit-based programs that, though being argued as being more objective and meritocratic in nature, would instead invariably favor those whose backgrounds have afforded them greater access to resources and opportunities. In the USA, for example, the introduction of quotas in schools has been historically used as an affirmative action to address existing inequalities based on race and social class status (Galafa, 2019).

Crossman (2019), in his article on understanding meritocracy from a sociological perspective, defines meritocracy as a social system where one's prosperity and social status are attained based on their talents, abilities, and effort or hard work. This implies or assumes that success is inevitable for everyone in a society, so long as one works hard and has abilities to do something. This understanding ignores disparate psychosocial and physical challenges, families' socio-economic backgrounds, and societal systems and structure factors that may limit or disadvantage an individual or group of people to have access to resources and succeed. A recent study conducted in Canada, the USA, and Nigeria on meritocracy in the education system found that ostensibly meritocratic policies in determining student's access to higher education fail to take into account of the root causes of students' academic success or failures, which has implications on one's performance (Erivwo et al., 2021).

Regarding the shortfalls of the meritocratic system in education, Erivwo et al. (2021) cite Mijs (2015), and argue that "individuals are no longer deserving of their success because meritocracy itself is flawed in that it perpetuates a generational cycle where high achievers come from a generation of people that have found success in the meritocratic system" (p. 9). In accordance with the above argument, Crossman (2019) offers an example using Western societies where the merit-based system has historically, and continues to, put elite or wealthier people in advantageous positions to accumulate more wealth as well as power and influence over the poor or underprivileged communities. Crossman (2019) similarly argues that people who are born in wealthier families or neighborhoods/communities have more privileged access to better resources as compared to those from poor and underprivileged households. Thus, under such circumstances, disparities are inevitable in the context of access to quality education, such that students from poor families and underprivileged communities are more likely to access poor and under-resourced education facilities, and this has implications on students' performance.

A key implication, in other words, is that ostensibly meritocratic policies do not, in fact, support a meritocratic system—i.e., one that is consistently rewarding talent or hard work. Rather, notwithstanding lofty rhetoric to the contrary, many citizens find themselves unable to compensate for vast and growing social inequalities that constrain their opportunities (Sandel, 2020). Ultimately, such disparities between rhetoric and realities are processed by citizens who may obtain a sense of hypocrisy, betrayal, and educational injustice (Piketty, 2020). What this suggests is that politicians, rather than simply adopting meritocratic-appearing education policies, would do better to focus intently on identifying and redressing educational and societal inequalities and injustices. Notwithstanding, opportunity disparities in inequitable contexts create disadvantages in a variety of ways, including when they sit for high-stakes examinations. Some scholars argue that the basic principle of meritocracy can be inherently linked to Social

Darwinism, in which the life of an individual is subjected to the survival of the fittest (Mijs, 2016).

Thus, ostensibly meritocratic policies in education violate the principles of social justice, need, and equality (Mijs, 2016), as they do not consider individual differences, nor do they consider and account for internal and external hindrances that may affect students' performance. The introduction of such policies in education accordingly serves instead toward widening already existing divides and social injustices—and in this case, they cement inequitable access to higher education across Malawi. More specifically, this policy seems certain to favor already advantaged individuals and groups, who will be more likely to be deemed worthy of higher education admission (and who, subsequently, will benefit from widened professional opportunities and will pass these benefits on to their kin).

Given the persistent differences in the quality of education standards and the widespread poverty gap between and within rural and urban areas in which rural schools have poor and inadequate educational resources, this policy especially jeopardizes the performance of the vast majority of students from rural areas. This problem pushes many students from rural areas to migrate to urban areas of Malawi with the hope of accessing a better education to increase their opportunities of getting selected to public secondary schools (Mbewe & Nampota, 2007). Therefore, the gap in terms of educational quality between rural and urban areas puts a certain group of people from urban areas at higher chances of performing well in their National Exams, thereby increasing their opportunities of being selected to public universities. More broadly, students' socio-economic characteristics are also a factor that might affect students' academic achievements, and this has to be critically examined in relation to the merit system as a policy for selecting students for public universities.

A study that examines the inequality gap in children's educational attainment in Malawi found that 48% of children from wealthier households had attained access to early childhood education, in comparison to the 30% of children from low-income households having such access (Sosu et al., 2019). The outcome of this study provides a picture to suggest that students from wealthier families and those attending the best secondary schools have extra advantages to do well in their academic achievement/performance, and this increases their chances of benefiting from the new, test-based policy as compared to those who are poor and attend under-resourced schools. Thus, the new policy—despite being presented as merit-based—in fact has the potential to exacerbate the gap between the rich and the poor, as well as create and/or maintain an unequal society in terms of equity and access to higher education across the country.

A critical analysis of the literature in the Malawian context shows that there is a huge knowledge gap regarding the implications of merit-based policy in access to higher education, and this could be attributed to several factors, including politics of social justice. Related to this point, Kadzamira and Rose (2003) argued that the process of formulating educational policy in Malawi does not engage or

involve all concerned stakeholders such as parents, teachers, communities, local leaders, and other organizations that work on education projects. Since the merit-based policy can be argued to be part of a political agenda used by some politicians for their political capital, there has been little or no civic education and engagement with the general population and other stakeholders to critically analyze the implications of the policy in as far as social justice in education is concerned.

Horsford et al. (2018) argue that a critical analysis of and engagement with the proposed policy can provide a great deal of understanding of the implications of policies. This is particularly important as we live in a society where inequalities continue to increase, coupled with political divisions based on class, race, geography, etc. Using the ideas of Horsford et al. (2018) on the need for critical policy analysis across the lines of politics, class, and geography in Malawi's context, one can, therefore, argue that the implementation of the merit-based policy was either driven by political interests or by a lack of critical understanding of the "equitable access to education" regarding addressing social injustices in and beyond education.

Implications

We examined whether the current educational policy for selecting students for higher public education is a panacea for ameliorating social injustices in Malawi's education system. Accordingly, we have analyzed the educational policy shift from a quota system to a merit system and its implications towards achieving social justice in access to public higher education in Malawi, with an emphasis on equity and need. We found that a critical analysis of the literature reveals two fundamental issues: (1) the emerging policy dilemma is being driven by politics along with a failure to engage and involve all relevant stakeholders in the educational policy decision making; and (2) there is a dearth of knowledge and a lack of critical understanding of the policy implications in the context of social justice education via the principle of equity.

To support this analysis, we have drawn from the literature, especially from the work of Mijs (2015) who argued that meritocratic approaches create unfulfillable promises towards reducing inequalities in the education spaces. Thus, three lessons are drawn from meritocratic system in regard to its implications for social justice education and these includes: (1) educational institutions in practice significantly distort the ideal meritocratic process; (2) opportunities for merit are themselves determined by non-meritocratic factors; and (3) any definition of merit favors some groups in society while putting others at a disadvantaged position (Mijs, 2015).

Such issues may be ubiquitous, but in our view are especially problematic in highly unequal and/or tribalized contexts such as Malawi. Drawing examples from Western education systems (e.g., as in the USA) regarding efforts to reduce racial inequalities in access to quality education through affirmative action policy, we recommend that this offers a platform for the Malawi government and relevant

stakeholders to reconsider and rethink about the implications of the current merit-based policy relative to a quota-based system.

Informed by our understanding of social justice based on the principle of equity in education (Smith, 2018), we argue that the implementation of ostensibly meritocratic system for admitting students to public higher education puts the vast majority of students mainly from under-resourced schools and those from low socio-economic backgrounds into jeopardy and this poses a severe threat to social justice in education. Therefore, many schools with poor education standards are more likely to face stiff challenges to produce the best students who will make it to public universities under the current policy.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the current system perpetuates inequalities in access to higher education in Malawi. This review has revealed that policymakers and implementers failed to take account of the underlying principles of equity and need as far as social justice in education is concerned.

Our call to action is to recommend the Malawi government reconsider reversing the newly enacted policy and opt for a quota system, as it offers a justified affirmative action toward addressing injustices in access to higher education across the country. Besides, we recommend that it will be essential to collect and analyze data regarding the distribution of opportunities in Malawi (e.g., by geography, demography, etc.). We believe that such data would foster clearer conclusions regarding access and social justice and would further support evidence-informed policymaking in this regard. As well, institutions of higher education in Malawi could potentially help by voluntarily providing such data.

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Book Review

Hanada, S. (2022). *International higher education in citizen diplomacy: Examining student learning outcomes from mobility programs.* Springer Nature. 208 pp. $99.99. ISBN 9783030953072.

This book review was not written with the assistance of any Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology, including ChatGPT" or other support technologies.

Purpose and Central Argument

This book is a volume in the International and Development Education (INTDE) book series. Citizen Diplomacy (CD) has generally played a significant role in international higher education (IHE) as a strategy to strengthen links between people from various cultural backgrounds. As more people can influence international affairs both in person and online, the importance of citizen diplomacy has increased. As Geibel (2020) stated in this regard, although the word "internationalization" is wide and has many different meanings, it generally refers to the process of incorporating an international, intercultural, or global perspective into the goals, duties, or modes of delivery of post-secondary education. As a result, every human being or global citizen, who might be a student, a teacher, an athlete, an artist, a business person, a humanitarian, an explorer, or a tourist, has the right and the obligation to connect across cultures and foster common understanding through multiple mechanisms (Hanada, 2022). Along with creating interactions between individuals, citizen diplomacy also has the potential benefit of sustaining goodwill coming from awareness among foreign nations in the case that formal diplomacy is disrupted. Citizen diplomacy is a form of diplomacy that supplements formal diplomacy rather than substituting for it since it provides advantages and opportunities that formal diplomacy does not. Therefore, the primary argument of the book is how citizenship diplomacy is established and maintained through a variety of qualities, such as intercultural competence, awareness of the partnership nation, and other qualities like fluency in the language or languages used in the partner nation, acquaintance with that nation's culture and nation's principles, such as its political philosophy, economic structure, or religious beliefs by examining five mobility programs.

Overview of the Book

This book is structured with outlines and evaluation of five mobility programs (Outbound Study Abroad, Inbound Study Abroad, International Service-Learning, International Internship, and Online Study Abroad) that actively engage in/support citizen diplomacy within the Japanese context through both quantitative and qualitative empirical research in comparative and international higher education. Its scope encompassed funding several initiatives to better understand how citizen diplomacy may help through several disciplines engaging with them in IHE and primarily focuses on two characteristics of CD: the intercultural competence of the Japanese students and awareness of the students' partner countries in IHE programs through five basic mobility programs of IHE including international service-learning, international internship, and online study abroad programs, as well as outbound study and inbound study (Hanada, 2022).

This book is divided into ten chapters, the **first chapter** provided a concise overview of the book's objectives, which seeks to determine the impacts of the five main international higher education mobility programs on citizen diplomacy by empirically demonstrating their influence on promoting host-country awareness and intercultural competence as two

components of citizen diplomacy, however, I believe that proficiency in the language(s) used in the partner country, familiarity with the country, or acquaintance with values such as political philosophy, economic system, religion, etc. with the label of "other" factors—as the author referred to them, should be addressed when talking about citizen diplomacy because they are illustrations of significant capabilities of individuals, their experiences, and relationships with one another deserving equal consideration. As a result, people's identity aspect and positionality are left behind in this book while increasing awareness and intercultural competence are highly integrated into people's identity aspects as a subject of the studies, moreover, focusing on people's characteristics that may be addressed through a transformative and intersectional paradigm should be taken into account since it contributes to a better understanding of the people involved in these five mobility initiatives to increase awareness and intercultural competence and it is specifically discussing people and the ways that they are engaged in citizen diplomacy.

In **Chapter 2**, "A Review of International Higher Education in Diplomacy," the author paid particular attention to the role of diplomacy in IHE by investigating the historical background of expanding three types of diplomacy including citizen, public, and cultural diplomacy with their distinct characteristics through IHE (Hanada, 2022) and in **Chapter 3,** "A Review of International Higher Education," to the concept of IHE with its transformation over time in various literature. To provide readers with a better overview of the book, I have included the essential concepts of each chapter in this review chronologically. The research methods and methodologies utilized to address the research question, including instrumental instruments, sample size, data collection processes, and limitations are described in **Chapter 4** of the book. The efficacy of various kinds of IHE programs is experimentally examined in the following chapters and the study group included 716 students who participated in five distinct mobility initiatives run by their home or host universities between 2013 and 2021 (Hanada, 2022).

This study primarily employs developmental and psychological approaches based on the interpretivism viewpoint to understand how participation in mobility programs impacts students' intercultural competency and to what extent students' awareness of the host nation is enhanced. The results from the mobility programs are not intended to be applied generally. This study uses both quantitative and qualitative analysis to assess the results and employs the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), examining attitudes to evaluate intercultural competence and the KH Coder as a tool to analyze both the objective evaluation and the introspective assessment through students' reflections on their in-context learning experiences. The authors in this study conducted text-mining research from local and international students of various universities based on individual perspectives to explore how learning experiences alter students' understanding of the host country (Hanada, 2022). To provide the highest level of validity for this study, the diversity of location and university types was carefully taken into account (Hanada, 2022).

In **Chapter 5**, "Outbound Study Abroad Programs," to comprehend how these programs help students in improving their intercultural competency, the characteristics and environments of study abroad programs from Japan to other countries are examined. It aims to comprehend these factors and the justification for why certain qualities have statistical significance through an empirically based quantitative and qualitative analysis of 492 study abroad students. Finally, it is confirmed that these programs have successfully increased students' intercultural competence and empathy toward the host country (Hanada, 2022). In this respect, Asada (2021) also emphasized the significance of study abroad programs, stressing how those help students in increasing their awareness of the world around them, reflect on their own beliefs and prejudices and interact with it to learn more about it.

In **Chapter 6**, "Inbound Study Abroad Programs," study abroad opportunities for international students at Japanese universities are covered (Hanada, 2022). Since Japanese society has a high-context culture, non-verbal communication can reveal unspoken social virtues, corporate culture, and generally accepted values. In contrast to the other empirical research chapters, this chapter examines whether studying in Japan increases one's proficiency in the Japanese language as a factor in deepening one's awareness of the host country culture despite different communication styles. In such a culture, knowing the local language is crucial for assisting students in integrating into the community, particularly when interacting with locals and those outside of the institution. In this regard, it may be essential to debate whether Japanese universities ought to offer courses in the language of international students (Hanada, 2022).

In **Chapter 7**, "International Service-Learning Programs," the fundamental notion of service-learning and its relationship to higher education are utilized to investigate these programs. Following, and based on a literature review, domestic and international service learning are compared, specifically for program features and expected learning outcomes. This also examines the diplomatic consequences of international service-learning programs using a sample of 121 students (Hanada, 2022). The results, for international service learning, showed that students gained analytical and problem-solving

skills, intercultural competence, and communications with host country members, practiced foreign language skills, and others. Finally, the findings led to the design of international service-learning programs (Hanada, 2022).

In **Chapter 8**, "International Internship Programs," a literature review is employed to investigate the basic concept of internships as well as the features and anticipated learning outcomes of international internship programs in comparison to domestic internship programs (Hanada, 2022). In conclusion, Internship opportunities abroad were a part of the process of developing international competence. The majority of the student's reflections on awareness, when contrasted to the international service-learning program, however, were centered on interactions with colleagues. Participants claimed that social and cultural knowledge got less attention (Hanada, 2022).

Online study abroad programs are compared with on-site study abroad programs in **Chapter 9** to see how they impact intercultural learning. Instead of focusing on students, this chapter addresses programs. The demand for online study abroad programs as a viable alternative to on-site programs in higher education has increased, particularly during the COVID-19 epidemic. Through an experimental investigation, it utilized a sample of 18 students, to understand dialectical impacts of an online study abroad program (Hanada, 2022). The findings suggest that the online study abroad programs used for this study's analysis have some impact on fostering intercultural competency.

In **Chapter 10**, the research question and hypotheses posed in Chapter 1 are revisited. The interactive and emerging implications for international instructors and coordinators to enhance the effects of these mobility programs on citizen diplomacy are laid out in this chapter, which also summarizes the characteristics of the learning outcomes of students in each of the five mobility programs of IHE (Hanada, 2022). Author Shingo Hanada concludes by outlining three points implied by these results. To begin, simply offering IHE programs is not sufficient for fostering interpersonal ties that support citizen diplomacy. There is a need for mobility programs that give students learning opportunities to comprehend other people's perspectives. Second, as learning is a continual process, the study's findings indicated that learned experience in the context of the host country rather than a one-time experience there, will support citizen diplomacy. In this respect, Brandner (2016) noted that international competence—the desire and ability to interact, even shortly, with the unknown—is what will truly alter one's education abroad. Lastly, this study showed how mobility programs may be improved by being adapted to the needs of the students (Hanada, 2022).

Strengths, Weaknesses and Contributions

This book could benefit from taking a transformational and intersectional perspective to adopt a more critical viewpoint toward citizen diplomacy, which is concerned that every global citizen has a responsibility and a right to engage with people from different cultural backgrounds and advance understanding via genuine one-on-one interactions in IHE. Taking this paradigm provides an epistemological framework for examining interconnections among the fundamental principles of research and evaluation methodologies designated to critical theory, feminist theory, critical race theory, participatory, inclusive, human-rights-based, democratic, and culturally responsive and it helps us to better grasp how communication between individuals can strengthen citizen diplomacy by taking into account both the social positions that people hold in IHE as well as their vulnerability when stepping outside of their comfort zones (Leavy, 2017).

"Being" or "becoming international" is an aspiration behind which many different actors can unite and one that can be connected to several quite diverse, possibly even contradictory, educational agendas including global citizenship and human capital which refer to having the right and also obligations to consider diverse cultures in the context of higher education to gain more meaningful interactions to unite and resulting in continuing a discussion about liberalism and humanism (Buckner, 2019; Kraska et al., 2018). In this regard, Hanada (2022) argues that it is crucial to consider IHE in both the Global North and South. When discussing how we can use citizen diplomacy to increase awareness and intercultural competence as well as other factors, studies on the benefits and risks of IHE, the effects of transnational education, quality assurance, the commercialization of higher education, top-tier universities, and global university rankings are among those that should be taken into consideration.

In addition to the author's single-country focus, other countries must be taken into account when discussing citizen diplomacy in IHE. This work has the potential to inspire further research because it mainly focuses on international students and the importance of five migration programs in Japan.

The author makes a significant contribution to the field of diplomacy by thoroughly examining five different mobility programs and closely examining citizen diplomacy through each program's specifics. She also provided new concepts and elements by closely examining formal, citizen, and cultural diplomacy to help readers better understand how diplomacy is developed, in the other word, she brought citizen diplomacy into the spotlight in an innovative manner that

had not previously been considered and how well it incorporates the IHE. This book is intended for those considering engaging in programs provided abroad, including undergraduate and graduate students and campus leaders, program coordinators, practitioners in IHE, as well as advanced scholarly work in the area. The studies also provide academics and coordinators at institutions with empirical data on student learning outcomes to build up more organized IHE programs. Although Japan is used as an illustration, this study can also apply to an international context.

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Book Review

Phan, L. H., & Doan, B. N. (2020). *Higher education in market-oriented socialist Vietnam: New players, discourses, and practices.* Palgrave Macmillan. 393 pp. $139. ISBN 9783030469122.

This book review was not written with the assistance of any Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology, including ChatGPT" or other support technologies.

Brief Overview and Organization of the Book

Building upon the existing higher education (HE) literature in Vietnam and other countries in the world, the book *Higher Education in Market-Oriented Socialist Vietnam: New Players, Discourses, and Practices,* edited by Phan and Doan (2020) provides a description of Vietnam's HE reform efforts since the economic reform of 1986. The book has four main parts divided into 21 chapters. Part I includes six chapters focusing on emerging issues in the HE reforms agenda, three ideologies shaping and informing transformations in Vietnam's HE, an overview of HE research development, and factors affecting academic performance, which are followed by a discussion on critical inquiries viewed through a policy analysis lens and concepts of modernity and reflexivity. Part II critically analyzes new players in HE sectors including community colleges, new discourses and values presented in liberal arts education and autonomy, and new practices through mergers and acquisitions (M&A) in Vietnamese private HE. Part II also covers a wide range of topics including social mobility, semi-elite private HE, community colleges and their relationship with decentralization in Vietnamese HE, and academic freedom. Part III mainly focuses on internationalization and English as a medium of instruction (EMI). Finally, Part IV summarizes the in-depth discussions and analyses presented in previous chapters through insightful commentaries focusing on Vietnam's HE future landscape.

Purpose and Central Argument

The purpose of this book is to provide a broad and comprehensive understanding of Vietnam's HE system from the economic reform in 1986 to 2019. With the collaboration of 29 contributors, this book updates and nuances "a number of themes that have been examined to varying degrees within the existing academic literature, such as neoliberalism and the privatization of higher education" (Phan & Doan, 2020, p. xiii), and discusses issues that have not been addressed in previous books about HE in Vietnam including institutional autonomy, research development in universities, university rankings, and so on.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Book

This book differentiates itself from six previous books published since 1986 about HE in Vietnam (Harman et al., 2010; London, 2011; Nguyen & Shah, 2019; Nguyen & Tran, 2019; Tran & Marginson, 2018; Tran et al., 2014) by comparing and contrasting HE-related issues presented in different contexts including the Philippines and other Southeast Asian countries (Ortiga's commentary). Specifically, Chapter 13 of the book critiques that autonomy is quite popular in Southeast Asia where there is less monopoly from these countries' governments in HE. Countries like Singapore and Malaysia are reported to provide an open HE environment to attract international students and scholars, and Vietnam is not an exception. The increased autonomy of higher education institutions (HEIs) and presence of private institutions in Vietnam provide opportunities for more students to enter private institutions. Furthermore, the shift in the government's mindset towards an entrepreneurial approach makes Vietnam become a competitive player in HE. However, it is critical to note that the increase in M&A and the presence of dominant corporations pose challenges to Southeast Asian countries including

Vietnam and the Philippines. This book not only looks at the positive changes in HE reforms in Vietnam and compares them to other countries in the world, but it also critiques the negative side of such positive changes. Thanks to the contribution and collaboration of 29 contributors, the book covers a broad diversity of topics with one shared objective: writing a book about HE reform in Vietnam and its HE-related issues, and exploring Vietnam's HE reform from different angles and contexts.

The book also addresses the HE reform agenda in response to global and regional forces, with other interconnected issues including internationalization, autonomy, social mobility, community colleges, elitism, the development of research infrastructure, and academic freedom within the three ideologies informing Vietnam's HE: Confucianism, Socialism, and Neoliberalism. The discussion of each of these issues is presented logically with emphasis placed on the connections between them. For example, Chapter 11 describes institutional autonomy as shared governance that guarantees academic freedom and internationalization. Le's (2022) empirical study on the influence of institutional autonomy policy on the internationalization of Vietnam's HE supports the idea that a policy of autonomy in universities facilitates internationalization by removing ministerial barriers to promote international practices such as organizing international conferences, collaborating with scholars and researchers in the region and in the world, adopting international programs, and using textbooks published internationally. These practices, therefore, enhance the overall educational quality and international profile of Vietnamese universities. Le's study also draws on Neo-institutionalism or Neoliberalism as her theoretical framework to explore how autonomy related policy is executed in Vietnam. Neoliberalism is mentioned in the book as one of the three major ideologies that have contributed to both the development and fragmentation of Vietnamese HE due to the admixture of old and new practices in HE reform initiatives. This book, again, provides a detailed description and discussion on how Confucianism, Socialism, and Neoliberalism co-exist, contradict, and support each other. However, the interconnection of these three ideologies was discussed from articles that were published ten to 20 years ago (Hill & Kumar, 2012; Hursh & Martina, 2003; Unterhalter & Carpentier, 2010). Therefore, a more in-depth description of this connection under a constantly changing socioeconomic environment from the most recent articles should be provided as there have been significant changes in the past two decades.

One of the most valuable contributions of this book is its discussion of a critical, yet largely underexplored aspect of HE in Vietnam, research at universities from 1986 to 2019 (Chapter 4). This chapter differentiates this book from other previous works on Vietnamese HE. It provides an overall picture of Vietnam's universities since the Feudal period (between 938 and 1847), which focused mainly in teaching, to the present in which universities have changed their focus to both teaching and research, with a special attention on fostering research. In order to promote research in universities, a policy was promulgated in 1992 by the Chair of the Committee of Ministers, which combined both universities and research institutes into a single national Research and Development (R&D) system (Phan & Doan, 2020). Since this policy came into force, universities are expected to conduct research and apply the results of that research into practical applications.

The book also emphasizes the vision of the Vietnamese government through the establishment of three national projects on *"Training Scientific and Technical Cadres at Foreign Establishments with the State Budget"* (322, 911, and 89) as a strong commitment to promoting research. It also mentions that research productivity among researchers and academics is one of the main critical points needed in strengthening the research output of Vietnamese scholars and researchers. The authors call for a consensus and agreement from the Vietnamese government, scholars, lecturers, professors, and academics in the process of making research "a mandate, a culture, and a driver for HE development of Vietnam" (Phan & Doan, 2020, p. 81). Finally, four suggestions to the Vietnamese government to facilitate the development of research in Vietnam's universities were offered: (1) increase funding for university research, (2) restructure the state R&D system, (3) extend the application of a competitive funding mechanism to the entire R&D system, and (4) implement a comprehensive plan for developing the national academic workforce. The value of this chapter would have been strengthened had the author provided proposed solutions related to each of these suggestions. For example, it was suggested that the government should invest more in research in order to make full use of the research talent in universities (Phan & Doan, 2020). However, the authors did not suggest how or what should be done to increase research funding for universities.

Within the discussion of privatization, *Higher Education in Market-Oriented Socialist Vietnam: New Players, Discourses, and Practices* provides a detailed example of how Taiwan attracts international students by offering generous scholarships, a great evidence explaining why Vietnamese students select Taiwan as their study destination. It also explores the impact of Taiwanese's Southbound policy on Vietnamese students' decision to study in Taiwan. This is the only chapter in the book that discusses students who are supposed to be the main customers of the HEIs. However, the book does not explore other important aspects related to students such as students' voice (Pham & Bui, 2019), learning experiences during

the HE reforms, employability after graduation (Nguyen, 2011; Tran, 2012; Tran et al., 2022), and the employers' viewpoints in the job market (Tran et al., 2022; Van et al., 2012). These are among critical issues happening in Vietnam nowadays, which draws a lot of attention and debate from not only educators, researchers, but also from the public that should be explored further.

Contributions to the Field of Comparative and International Higher Education

Higher Education in Market-Oriented Socialist Vietnam: New Players, Discourses, and Practices contributes to the field of comparative and international higher education by providing a detailed picture of the HE system and reform agenda of Vietnam, an emerging and dynamic economy, through critical discussion and analysis of various issues in the higher education system of Vietnam. By addressing these issues in detail from a critical lens, and in a variety of relevant contexts, the book is currently the first among seven books about HE in Vietnam that has taken a detailed approach to the examination of many important aspects of Vietnam's HE system. The collaboration and contribution of 29 professors, scholars, and researchers around the world and valuable comparisons with HE systems in the Philippines, Brunei, Japan, Australia, and Trinidad and Tobago offer the reader invaluable insights into the current state of HE in Vietnam and the field of comparative and international higher education in particular.

This book does not address only a single issue as the previously published books about the HE in Vietnam nor the one published later about students' experiences in learning and teaching (Tran & Tran, 2021). Instead, the book presents almost every issue in the Vietnamese HE. Therefore, this book accomplishes its goal by comprehensively exploring Vietnam's HE system since the economic reform. Because of this, the book is for people interested in Vietnamese HE such as educators, teachers, lecturers, and researchers, who are teaching in universities and colleges both in Vietnam and other countries, especially those from emerging markets where the HE system has been through reforms, such as the Philippines, Indonesia, etc. It is also for policymakers, university leaders, department heads, and evaluators, who have been researching about Vietnam's HE to have a comprehensive of Vietnam's HE and its related issues so that these people are able to make right and timely decisions, which in turn, have a great impact on many people. By reading this book, undergraduates, graduates, and their parents are able to see how the HE system operates and how the HE reform works, then, they can provide timely feedback for policymakers and university leaders in their decision making process. This book is also for comparativists to provide an objective and comparative evaluation of different HE systems around the world.

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