JCIHE: Vol 17(1) 2025
Introduction

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Dear Readers -

I am proud to share with the JCIHE readership the 17th issue of the *Journal of Comparative and International Higher Education* (JCIHE). JCIHE presents academic articles and essays on innovative and emerging topics in the fields of comparative education and international higher education. JCIHE is an open access, independent, double-masked peer-reviewed, international journal publishing original contributions to the field of comparative and international higher education. 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. JCIHE supports a professional forum for the development, analysis, and dissemination of theory-policy-and practice-related issues that influence higher education. JCIHE publishes a) empirical articles; b) scholarly research-based review/essays; c) emerging scholars research summaries; and d) book reviews. Please visit for guidelines: https://www.ojed.org/index.php/jcihe/about

To begin our 17th year, we offer the JCIHE 2024 Annual Report and Editorial that shares growths in research diversity, topic diversity, and unique special issues. Overall, JICHE had an 85% increase in readership, citations, and downloads since 2023. To maintain diversity of authorship and research topics, JCIHE targeted outreach to authors from around the world. One strategy is to ensure better access and equity to all is to invite known scholars to be Guest Editors in regional and global focused Special Issues. We were honored to host three special issues in 2024 that helped to enrich JCIHE authorship and research topic diversity. Combined the 2024 Special Issues included authors from Africa, Europe, including Ukraine and Russia, Latin America, Central America, the Caribbean, and Central Asia. In 2025, JCIHE will offer two special issues that will highlight Africa, South and Central America, and the Gulf Region. In 2026 the two Special Issues will target Africa and a cross-national examination on AI. Another strategy for inclusivity is the strategy to offer Abstracts in multiple languages to reach and to serve a broader audience as well as to give a written voice to authors

in their own languages. We are aware that there are still many geographic regions of the world whose voices continue to be invisibilized within comparative and international higher education literature. We invite authors worldwide to support, submit, read, and cite articles in JCIHE.

New to 2025 is the moving of the JCIHE the Emerging Scholar Summaries to a June issue. In so doing, JCIHE will now publish six issues annually.

In Issue 17(1) 2025, JCIHE is starting the New Year with a diverse issue of 11 Independent Empirical Articles and a Book Review. The articles in Issue 17(1) provides context on comparative and international higher education in six countries: Canada; China; Israel; Nigeria; Uganda; United States.

Themes Found in Issue 17(1) 2025

There are three themes found within the Empirical Articles in 17(1) 2025.

Impact on International Students
Murray Findlay, Guofang Wan, Anna Press, Keith E. Jones, Mark Maranto explore factors that contribute to International Graduate Students' sense of belonging and academic success. **Jacob W. Werst & Brandon B. Million** explore the experiences of international students who identify as LGBT+ to see how universities can support this population. **Meng Xiao** compares Canadian-focused and Chinese-Confucian focused interpretations of student engagement for Chinese international graduate students in USA. **Hilary Houlette, Jenny J. Lee, & Xiaojie Lia** explore how Chinese graduate students defined racial discrimination as a result of 2018 China Initiative policies.

Benefits of Studying Abroad and Contributions to Success
Emmanuelle Chiocca explores transformations in US, Denmark, and Australian students who participate in a study abroad program in Israel. **Neely Mahapatra, Carolyn Haney & Derek Waite** explore the impact of short-term study abroad on intercultural competence of US students who come from a frontier/rural campus. **Shizhu Liu, Desiree Baolian Qin**, **Adam Grimm, Mingjun Xie, Yemo Duan, Chi-Fang Tseng**, & **Mikiko Sato** explore the decision-making process of Chinese undergraduate to study abroad in the United States and to assess if the choice comes from the students, parents, or both.

HEI Context and Reforms
Christina Hand explores educational reforms at Makerere University connected to a land-grant domain. **Ndidi L. Okeke & Andrea R. Lee,** explore the teaching quality at a university in urban Nigeria to identify ways to improve teaching quality at the departmental level. **Joshua Patterson, Melissa Whatley, and Anna Kelly** compare web portrayals of Protestant Christian-oriented study abroad programs located in Majority and Minority world countries using postcolonial theory and informed by critical lenses of globalization. **Aml Amer & Nitza Davidovitch** explore Druze education reforms in Israel and subsequent Druze students' achievements in higher education.

Summary of Articles in Issue 17 (1)
Independent Empirical Articles
Christina L, Hand. Touro University California, USA. *A Case Study of Makerere University in Uganda* This article examines Makerere University, the flagship university of Uganda, which has survived colonialism, dictatorships, and economic disaster to become a leading university in Africa. The study analyzes Makerere University as a land-grant domain, focusing on tensions, facilitators, and barriers. Six major themes show Makerere's aspiration to be a research-led institution, impact of neoliberalism, challenges in undergraduate education, the importance of reputation and saga, the role of the Ugandan government, and the continuing effects of colonialism.

Emmanuelle S. Chiocca. Duke Kunshan University, Jiangsu, China. *Manifestations of transformative learning:*

A case study of a short-term study abroad program in Israel

This article examines students from Australia, Denmark, and the US who studied abroad in Israel to see if their time abroad was transformative and became a period of intense personal growth. The case study found that change emerged in the forms of (1) intercultural learning and sensitivity development, (2) learner expectations and behavior alteration, (3) ideological reconstruction or transition, and (4) academic and professional orientation conversion or refinement, suggesting that even short-term programs can lead to in-depth and broad transformation.

Ndidi L. Okeke, Nnamidi Azikiwe University, *Nigeria* **& Andrea R. Lee,** Austin Peay State University, Tennessee, United States. ***Perceptions and Measures to Improve Teaching Quality at a University in Urban Nigeria***

This article examines ways to improve teaching quality at a university in urban Nigeria. Findings show that different stakeholders have different perceptions for change. Lecturers focus on teaching quality of lecturers, which is not the focus of lecturers and students. Findings also identified ways to improve teaching quality, such as knowledge of subject content, effective feedback mechanisms, high student assessment, and a safe learning environment, among others.

Aml Amer, Department of Education, Ariel University, Israel **& Nitza Davidovitch,** Department of Education, Ariel University, Israel ***The Effect of the Druze Education Reform in Israel and Druze Students' Achievements in Higher Education***

This article examines the educational achievements in matriculation exams of Druze students living in Israel. Findings show that the historical educational separation policy has positively influenced Druze students' outcomes, with the Druze educational model yielding significantly better results than other Israeli school systems. Key to this success is strategic resource investment, innovative teaching methods, and a strong emphasis on academic excellence.

Hilary Houlette (University of Arizona, Arizona, USA**), Jenny J. Lee** University of Arizona, Arizona, USA**, Xiaojie Li** University of Arizona, Arizona, USA. ***Graduate Students and the U.S. China Initiative***

This article examines the 2018 China Initiative that systematically targeted international Chinese scholars as possible spies for China. Subsequent racial profiling resulted in scholars of Chinese descent feeling unwelcomed in U.S. despite their status as graduate students and senior researchers. The studies document the ways in which Chinese graduate students felt discriminated against and racially profiled. Framed by neo-racism, this research also assesses how those experiences impacted students' future educational mobility plans.

Joshua Patterson, University of California-Berkeley, California, USA, **Melissa Whatley,** William and Mary, Virginia, USA, **and Anna Kelly,** Minerva University, California, USA. ***To All the Nations of the World: A Postcolonial Analysis of Protestant Christian-oriented Study Abroad Programs***

This article examines Protestant Christian-affiliated institutions in the United States and their faith-integrated study abroad programming offered in Majority and Minority worlds. Using postcolonial theory and critical lenses of globalization, the research examined how Protestant Christianity is integrated into programs, how programs are described, the activities undertaken, and the images on websites used to promote them. Findings show stark and pervasive differences in how majority world programs are depicted compared to those in the Minority world, that reinforce negative stereotypes and colonial/imperial narratives.

Neely Mahapatra, University of Wyoming, Wyoming, USA**, Carolyn Haney,** University of Nebraska, Kearney, Nebraska, USA, & **Derek Waite,** Cheyenne in Wyoming, Wyoming, USA. ***The Impact of Short-Term Study Abroad (STSA) Program on Intercultural Competence of Students at a Frontier/Rural Campus***

This article examines the effectiveness of short-term study abroad programs for students who study in a frontier/ rural campus in the United States. The study measures intercultural competence and cultural adaptability before and after participating in a short-term study abroad program. Gains were made in each sector, and especially in the subscale knowledge for increased awareness of cross-cultural competence and complexities.

Shizhu Liu, Michigan State University, Michigan, USA, **Desiree Baolian Qin**, Michigan State University, Michigan, USA, **Adam Grimm,** Michigan State University, Michigan, USA, **Mingjun Xie,** Beijing Normal University, Beijing, China, **Yemo Duan,** Beijing Normal University, Beijing, China, **Chi-Fang Tseng**, Beijing Normal University, Beijing, China & **Mikiko Sato**, Michigan State University, Michigan, USA. *It Was Mainly My Own Choice: Examining the Decision-Making Process of Chinese Undergraduates and Their Parents on Study in the United States.*

This article critiques previous methodologies that study parent–child dynamics in decision-making situations because of the survey-based approach. This study uses interview data of Chinese international undergraduates at a U.S. university to study family communication processes underlying the decision of studying abroad. Findings show that the decision-making process was guided by students who initialized the idea and their parents. Different processes induced six profiles and five different levels of students' autonomy during the decision-making process.

Jacob W. Werst & Brandon B. Million, Ball State University, Indiana, United States**.** *International Higher Education: A Discussion on the College Experience for International Students Who Identify as LGBT+ and Development of an Interview Tool*

This article examines international students in USA who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or any additional sexual identity that falls within the spectrum (LBGT+) in higher education. A unique interview-protocol was used to see if these students are open about sexual identity, the unique needs of this intersectionality, and implications of what conducting interviews can mean for further study on the LGBT+ international students' population. Findings show various ways to improve support for international LGBT+ students.

Murray Findlay, Guofang Wan, Anna Press, Keith E. Jones, Mark Maranto. Loyola University Chicago, USA. *Hidden Struggles: Increasing International Graduate Students' Sense of Belonging*

This article examines how universities can better understand and accommodate international graduate students. Findings examine experiences of students and their sense of belonging that promote their success. Findings confirm that language barriers, unfamiliar U.S. social norms, academic expectations, and legal obstacles limit a sense of belonging. Most importantly international graduate students benefit from a supportive university community with culturally aware professors and peers, which foster a sense of belonging.

Meng Xiao. Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, Canada. *Culture Difference: Perceptions of Student Engagement of Chinese International Graduate Students at a Canadian University*

This article compares perspectives of Chinese international graduate students about student engagement at a Canadian university. The study shows how Western perceptions of student engagement fail to recognize the broader perceptions of student engagement from a global perspective. The Confucian perspective of student engagement that highlights teacher-oriented and deep-thinking engagement through academic achievement and exam-oriented activities is more supportive of this international student population. Finding show different ways of perceiving student engagement needs more attention to enhance their student engagement based on their experiences and cultural backgrounds.

JCIHE Support Teams

Journal of Comparative and International Higher Education
2024 State of the Field

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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 Journal of Comparative and International Education (JCIHE) shares the 2024 Annual Report with our readership. This report shows the growing readership for the journal, the diversification of authors, and range of topics being published. A key strength is that JCIHE is meeting its goals for increasing visibility and for increasing the diversity of authors and their global institutional affiliations.

Keywords: comparative, diversity, higher education, impact, international

Introduction

The *Journal of Comparative and International Higher Education (JCIHE)* is a full open access journal that is making a notable impact in expanding current and important discussions in the field of Comparative and International Higher Education. As Editor-in-Chief, I am pleased to share this Annual Report for the 2024 volume year that shows that JCIHE is meeting its goals for increasing visibility, increasing the diversity of authors based on their global institutional affiliations, and increasing the variability of topics being published. In addition to empirical articles and scholarly essays, in 2024, *JCIHE* published Book Reviews that hold significance for scholars and practitioners engaged in comparative and international higher education. New for 2024 is the inclusion of multi-language abstracts for selected articles. The 2024 State of the Field Report is divided into five sections: (1) Contributions to the Field: A Critical Assessment; (2) State of the Journal,

including Metrics & Downloads and Editorial Activity; (3) Authorship and Article Details; (4) Methodology and Themes in published articles; and (5) Academic Support.

Contributions to the Field: A Critical Assessment

This section examines the year in review and critically analyzes prominent and emerging themes for the field of Comparative and International Higher Education. These themes capture what scholars in the field are studying and why the findings of are interest to moving our field forward. Three areas of study are explored: 1) Methodologies and Theoretical Constructs; 2) Focus of Research; and 3) Themes of Research.

Methodologies and Theoretical Constructs

Research methods and theoretical constructs of articles published in 2024 lean towards criticality. Methods such as critical autoethnography, decolonial approach, and critical discourse analysis are grounded in critical internationalization methodology. Decolonality as a process and as an action was mentioned 11 times in keywords making it the third most mentioned keyword of 2024. Articles also used traditional quantitative methods, notably mixed methods. They also used qualitative methods including comparative study, longitudinal study, qualitative content analysis, and systematic review. An interesting trend is a focus on micro-level narratives of inquiry, small culture observations, and lived experiences. Although Issue 5 was a special issue on Micro-Level Internationalization, the use of micro-level narratives are found throughout articles in 2024. Finally, in 2024, 40% of all articles used a quantitative methodology while 60% were qualitative. As a goal for 2025, it will be important to focus on narrowing the gap in the types of methodologies published. Another goal for 2025 is to publish more articles that are comparative in nature and to include more comparisons without US as a partner.

Focus of Research

Research in the 2024 publications is categorized as: Regional, Institutional, and Individual Focus.

Regional Focus

In 2024, *JCIHE* published two different types of regional focused articles. First examines effects and pre, during, and post consequences of COVID. Second examines internationalization in the Global South. Many of these article address non-Anglophone regions of the world that have been understudied. Many of the articles on the Global South also include a critical internationalization perspective.

Institutional Focus

In 2024, a few articles and essays focused on institutional policies, practices, digitalization, and responses to the Ukraine-Russia conflict. The latter two were part of a special issue. Other areas of institutional focus examined institutional autonomy, reform efforts, and institutional support for mobility.

Individual Focus

The focus on the individual is a central theme in the 2024 articles and essays. The individual is explored with a focus on leadership, faculty, teacher assistants, mobility coordinators, administrative staff, virtual mentors, international spouses, undergraduates, graduate students, and post-graduates. Articles examine perceptions about engagement, employability, and agency. Other articles report lived experiences of international students with a noted focus on centrality in micro-level internationalization; Chinese international students in Australia, in China, in Japan, and in US; Arab students in US; and African international students in South Africa. Some articles examine graduates when they return home and factors of employability. The human dimension and transformative journey are evident in articles and essays published in 2024.

Themes of Research

In 2024, the most mentioned theme is self-growth with a focus on engagement and agency theory. Five other themes are also pertinent. First is traditional studies of international students with a focus on acculturation,

belonginess, acculturative stress, learning English-as positive and learning English with proficiency, crisis management, and cultural awareness of international students and the strengths they bring to the classroom. Second is access and equity in mobility programs with a sub-focus on social class, and race/racism and Whiteness. Third is internationalization of curriculum and pedagogy with a focus on critical thinking, decision-making, knowledge diplomacy, intercultural learning, and culturally appropriate assessment frameworks. Fourth is digitalization, which examines institutional reform, open online courses, age of big data, asynchronous virtual exchanges, and connections to neoliberalism and globalization. Finally, articles and essays reported on the Ukraine-Russia conflict, largely from a Special Issue that examine effects of geopolitics on internationalization of higher education with examples of education in exile as hope-making practices focusing on experiences of refugees from Ukraine studying in a Canadian community college, Indian international students using social media as sanctuaries, and mobility for Russian students and academic exodus.

State of the Journal

Metrics and Downloads

This section shows the growth of *JCIHE* readership as shown in the metrics from Google Scholar h-index and from ERIC annual reports on downloads. Table 1 shows the Google Scholar h5-index and h5-median (see https://scholar.google.com/intl/en/scholar/metrics/html#metrics). Table 2 shows the current ERIC Bi-Annual Report statistics for All Views & All Downloads in which *JCIHE* had 2,577 downloads in 2022 and 3,242 downloads in 2023. Table 3 shows the GoogleScholar list of top cited articles. Table 4 shows the title of articles with the top downloads in the ERIC report. Table 5 shows the authors and article titles with the top downloads in the Open Journals in Education (OJED) Platform of articles published 2018–2023. The growth in all the metrics shows how important it is for *JCIHE* readers to continue downloading, reading, and citing articles. This is how we gain stronger recognition in the field.

Table 1: Google Scholar h5-index and h5-median

Google Scholar	2020	2021	2022	2023
H5-index	4	5	8	13
H5-median	7	7	13	19

Table 2: ERIC Bi-Annual Report on All Views and All Downloads

DATE	ALL VIEWS	ALL DOWNLOADS
May 1 – December 12, 2024	7,699	5,181
January 1 – June 30, 2023	2,477	3,242
June 1 – December 31, 2022		2,577

https://eric.ed.gov/?api. **Journal of Comparative and International Higher Education**

Table 3: GoogleScholar Top Citations: January 1, 2024–December 23, 2024

Author	Title	Total Cites
A. Ballo, et al.	Applying student development theories: Enhancing international student academic success and integration	35
PA Nilsson	The buddy programme-integration and social support for international students	28
O Oyeniyi, et al.	A Comparison of First-Year International Students' Adjustment to College at the Undergraduate and Graduate Level.	22
A. Yamada	Japanese Higher Education: The Need for STEAM in Society 5.0, an Era of Societal and Technological Fusion	22
TA Bekele	COVID-19 and Prospect of Online Learning in Higher Education in Africa	22
S Wang, M Moskal	What is Wrong with Silence in Intercultural Classrooms? An Insight into International Students' Integration at a UK University.	19
BT Streitwieser	International Education for Enlightenment, for Opportunity and for Survival: Where Students, Migrants and Refugees Diverge	19
KP Paudel	Level of Academic Performance among Faculty Members in the Context of Nepali Higher Educational Institution.	18
L.R. Brunner	'Edugration'as a wicked problem: Higher education and three-step immigration	18
M Girmay, et al.	Understanding the Mental and Physical Health Needs and Acculturation Processes of International Graduate Students in the United States.	16
TA Bekele, DT Ofoyuru	Emerging University-Society Engagements in Africa: An Analysis of Strategic Plans	16
V Tavares	Theoretical Perspectives on International Student Identity	16

Table 4: ERIC Reporting Top 20 Views/Downloads: May 1, 2024–October 30, 2024

#	Item Title	ERIC #	Views	Downloads
1	Experiences of international students at a Canadian university: Barriers and supports	EJ1381323	713	377
2	Academic stress, social support, and adjustment among international students in India	EJ1403078	684	258
3	Investigating factors affecting international students' academic performance in higher education in the United States	EJ1406980	567	234
4	Information and communication technology in English language teaching: Some opportunities and challenges	EJ1363848	343	177
5	The ethics of research and teaching in an age of big data	EJ1427540	168	108
6	'Those first few months were horrible': Cross-cultural adaptation and the J-Curve in the international student experience in the UK and Norway	EJ1326576	147	57
7	The effects of ICT on higher education in Mexico	EJ1427072	134	95
8	Level of academic performance among faculty members in the context of Nepali higher educational institution	EJ1294740	119	40
9	Coping strategies used by Indian international students to overcome transitional challenges in the United States	EJ1406866	101	36
10	Inclusion and safe-spaces for dialogue: Analysis of Muslim students	EJ1233249	100	35
11	Periods of technological change in higher education	EJ1427444	88	38
12	Digital learning and higher education in Brazil: A multicultural analysis	EJ1427126	87	58
13	Japanese higher education: The need for STEAM in Society 5.0, an era of societal and technological fusion	EJ1294600	86	47
14	Digitalization of higher education in Ethiopia	EJ1427232	80	40
15	Digitalization of higher education in Japan: Challenges and reflections for education reform	EJ1427250	80	43
16	Exploring the disparity of minority women in senior leadership positions in higher education in the United States and Peru	EJ1313932	79	60
17	Internationalization Higher Education for What? An analysis of national strategies of higher education internationalization in East Asia	EJ1289584	76	49
18	"It is always hard at the beginning:" Peer-to-peer advice for international students transitioning to university life in the U.S.	EJ1436740	75	39
19	Public discourse and public policy on foreign interference in higher education	EJ1375644	73	28
20	Digitalisation, neoliberalism and globalisation of higher education in the Australian context	EJ1427053	73	52

Table 5: OJED Top 30 Downloads: January 1, 2024–December 23, 2024

Howe et al.	Experiences of international students at a Canadian university: Barriers & supports	2201
Alsulami	Challenges of the re-entry experiences of returning Saudi international students after studying abroad	1782
Merlin et al.	Academic stress, social support, and adjustment among international students in India	1466
Zhang	A comparison between pedagogical approaches in UK and China	1230
Gonzales et al.	Racial microaggressions experiences among international students in Australia and its impact on stress and psychological wellbeing: Racial microaggressions and international students	1110
Tavares	Theoretical perspectives on international student identity	1101
Tang	Contributions of capitals to Chinese international graduates' employability in Australia	934
Phan et al.	Why institutional scholarship policy matters: Its influences on graduate international students of a regional university in Taiwan	922
Brunner	'Edugration' as a wicked problem: Higher education and three-step immigration	890
Mushfiq	International student transition to Canadian post-secondary institutions	897
Poudel	Information and communication technology in English language teaching: Some opportunities and challenges	882
Collins et al.	'Those first few months were horrible': cCross-cultural adaptation and the J-Curve in the international student experience in the UK and Norway	818
Le et al.	Stressors and solutions: A preliminary examination of acculturative stress among international students	770
Tay et al.	The nature of bullying in higher education: A comparative study of students' experiences in Ghana and Norway	767
Rind et al.	Achieving access equity in education: An analysis of higher education reforms in Pakistan	763
Schartner et al.	International postgraduate students' lived experiences of academic, psychological and sociocultural adjustment during the COVID-19 pandemic	753
Sicka et al.	Dismantling the master's house: A decolonial blueprint for internationalization of higher Education	738
Adamu	Digitalization of higher education in Ethiopia	728
Kim et al.	Comparative analysis of international branch campuses in Korea and Japan: exploring success factors	720
Lally et al.	A critical analysis of the Fulbright Program from a world systems perspective	701
Cooley et al.	Foreign donations in the higher education sector of the United States and the United Kingdom: Pathways for reputation laundering	655
Lin et al.	Decolonization and transformation of higher education for sustainability: Integrating indigenous knowledge into policy, teaching, research, and practice	646
Sperduti	Internationalization as westernization in higher education	644
Zhang et al.	International doctoral students' sense of belonging, mental toughness, and psychological well-being	649
Maravillas	Filipino and American teachers: Their differences in psychological needs, performance, and culture	649
Cai et al.	Sexual harassment on international branch campuses: An institutional case study of awareness, perception, and prevention	639
Carr et al.	Epistemic (in)justice: Whose voices count? Listening to migrants and students	637
Ritter	Singapore's search for national identity: Building a nation through education	631
Hoyos Ensuncho	Decolonial practices in higher education from the global south: Systematic literature review	625
Udah et al.	Vulnerability and well-being: International students' experience in North Queensland, Australia	624

<h1 align="center">*JCIHE* Editorial Activity</h1>

JCIHE is dedicated to expediting the review and publication processes, but at the same time to maintain quality. In 2024, due to technology problems, *JCIHE* had several delays in receiving, peer-reviewing, and accepting quality articles on time. This greatly expanded the timeframe from submission to first decision. Table 6 shows the expanded *JCIHE* Editorial Activity for 2024. *JCIHE* has a strict review process that is shown in Figure 1. *JCIHE* is committed to Open Access with no charges to publish or to view articles. Transparency is also important to serve our authors and readers.

Table 6: *JCIHE* Editorial Activity: January 1, 2024–December 31, 2024

Submissions Received	160
Submissions Accepted	107
Submissions Declined	58
Submissions Declined (Desk Reject)	46
Submissions Declined (After Review)	12
Days to First Editorial Decision Description for Days to First Editorial Decision	25
Days to Accept	276
Days to Reject	46
Acceptance Rate Description for Acceptance Rate	46%
Rejection Rate Description for Rejection Rate	54%

Figure 1 *JCIHE* Review Process

Table 6: *JCIHE* Editorial Activity: January 1, 2024–December 31, 2024

Submissions Received	160
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Submissions Declined (Desk Reject)	46
Submissions Declined (After Review)	12
Days to First Editorial Decision Description for Days to First Editorial Decision	25
Days to Accept	276
Days to Reject	46
Acceptance Rate Description for Acceptance Rate	46%
Rejection Rate Description for Rejection Rate	54%

JCIHE Publication Process

01 AUTHOR
- Submits manuscript via OJED using Template

02 TRIAGE BY EDITOR IN CHIEF
- Reviews manuscript
- Sends out for double blind Peer Review
- Accepts & forwards manuscript for Technical Review

03 TECHNICAL REVIEW BY ASSOCIATE EDITOR
- Reviews content organization, format & quality
- Author addresses Technical comments
- Manuscript is then forwarded to copy-editor

04 COPY MANAGEMENT
- Manuscript is copy-edited for grammar, style & format
- Author approves **Galley** for production

05 PRODUCTION LEAD
- Prepares Galley & issue for publication
- Online First

Authorship and Article Details

This section details authors' profiles who were published in *JCIHE* Issue 16, 2024. Figure 2 shows gender identification of authors. In 2024, 60% of authors were women (n=97) and 40% men (n=66). These numbers are similar to those from 2023. Table 7 and Figure 3 show the breakdown of author academic and professional positions. In 2024, the top positions were professor (n=29), associate professor (n=22), adjunct professor (n=20), and PhD student (n=20). Findings show that *JCIHE* authorship is diverse in professional affiliations. In comparison, in 2023, the top four positions were professor (n=32); PhD student (n=24); assistant professor (n=19), and lecturer (n=13). Graph 7 compares author institutional affiliation countries over time.

Figure 2: Authorship Gender Identifications

40%

60%

■ Female ■ Male
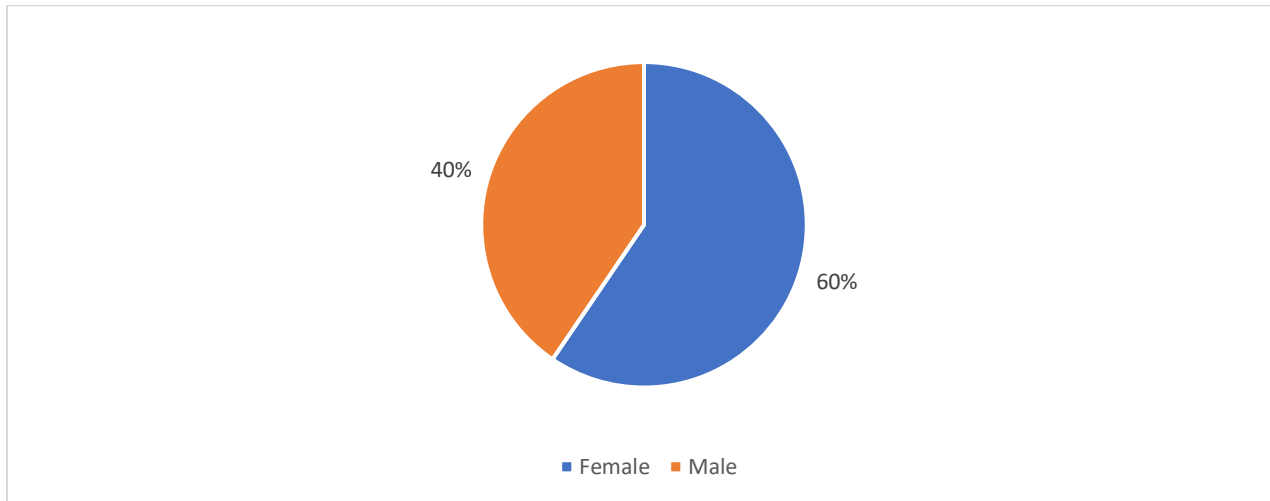
Author Academic and Professional Positions

Figure 3 shows that authors, at the time of publication, held various positions. The top three ranks of authors in 2024 were Professor 19% (n=29), PhD student 10% (n=20), and Associate Professor 15% (n=22). Due to the number of positions, Figure 3 consolidates non-academic positions.

Table 7: Author Rank at the Time of Publication 2024

Rank	Number	Rank	Number
Professor Emeritus	2	Director	6
		Manager	1
Assistant Professor	17	Coordinator	3
Associate Professor	22	Assessment Officer	1
Professor	29	Senior Research Associate	5
Adjunct Professor	20	Associate Director	2
Senior Lecturer	15	Post-Doctoral Fellow	4
Lecturer	15	Ph.D. Graduate	3
Associate Provost	1	Independent Scholar	2
Academic Vice-President	2	Ph.D. Student	20
Assessor to Ministry of Education	1	MA Student	2
Deputy President		Undergraduate Student	
CEO	1	Psychologist	1
Dean	1	Research Assistant	3
Adjunct Faculty		NGO Director	2

Figure 3: Positions of Authors at Time of Publication in 2024

Legend:
- Assistant Professor
- Associate Professor
- Professor
- Professor Emeritus
- Senior Lecturer
- Lecturer
- Senior Research Associate
- Director
- Assistant Director
- NGO Director
- Post-Doctoral Fellow
- Independent Scholar
- Ph.D. Graduate
- MA Thesis Candidate
- Ph.D. Candidate
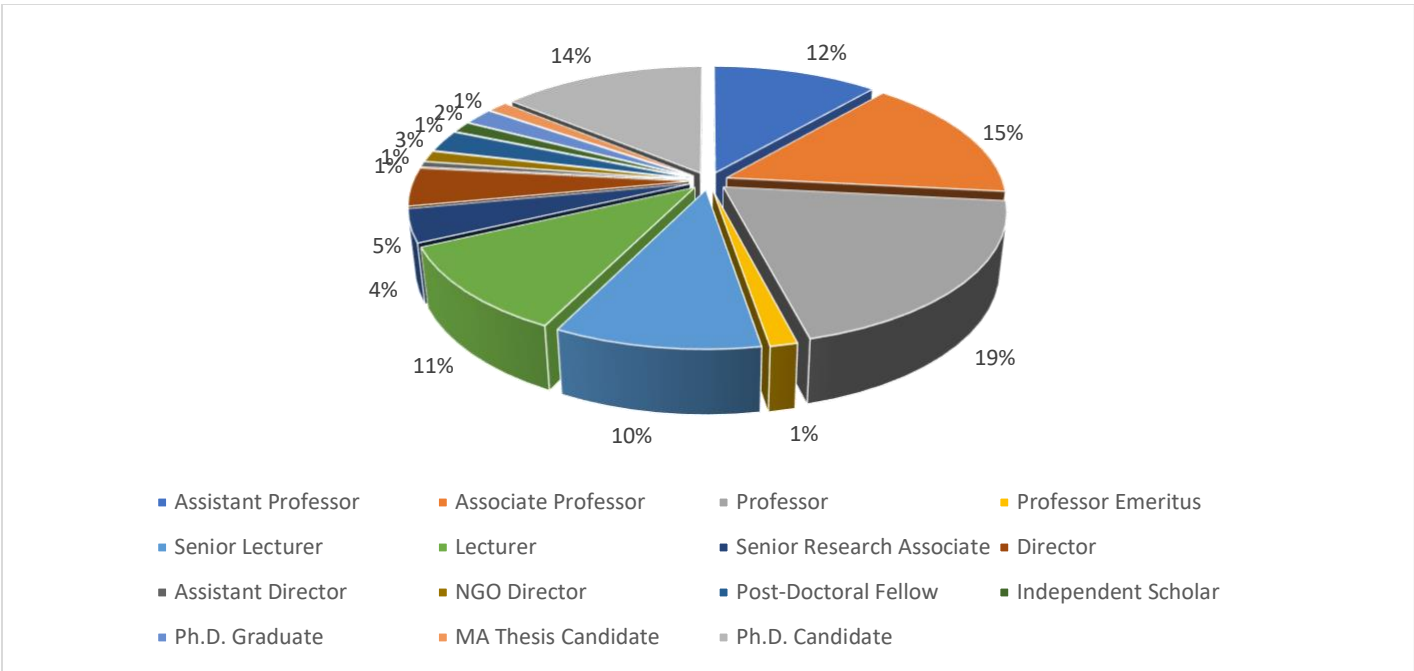
Author Institutional Affiliations by Continent and Country

Being a journal that is international in scope and purpose, *JCIHE* is pleased to share that in 2024, *JCIHE* continues to increase the publishing of authorship from around the world who write about comparative and international higher education. In 2024, there is a noted increase in representation of authorship from the Global South. In 2024, 36% of authors had institutional affiliations outside of Canada and the United States. Other noted geographical areas are Asia (19%), Europe (18%), and South America (12%). In total, authors represented 30 countries. Figure 4 shows institutional affiliations by countries and Figure 5 by continents/regions. Figure 6 shows countries with less than three articles, Figure 7 shows ones with over five articles. Finally, Figure 8 is a multi-year comparison of top country authorship from 2021–2024. This shows that there has been a notable increase of authors from United Kingdom, Japan, and Australia. These graphs show a great diversification of authorship with even representation from most regions of the world.

Figure 4: Author Institutional Affiliations by Country
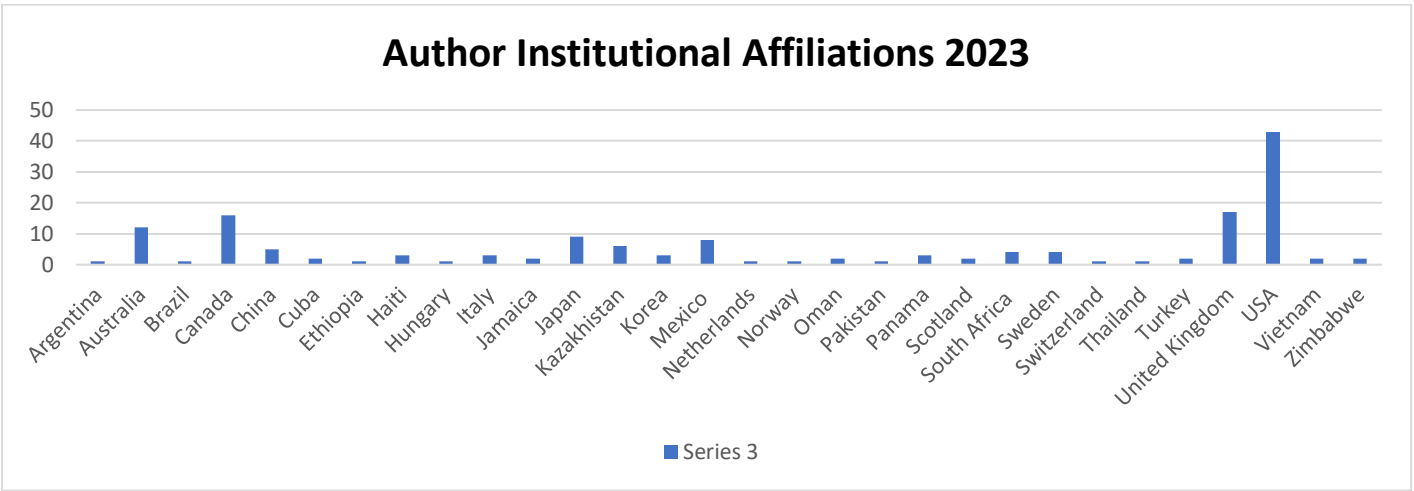
Figure 5: Author Institutional Affiliations by Continent/Region

15
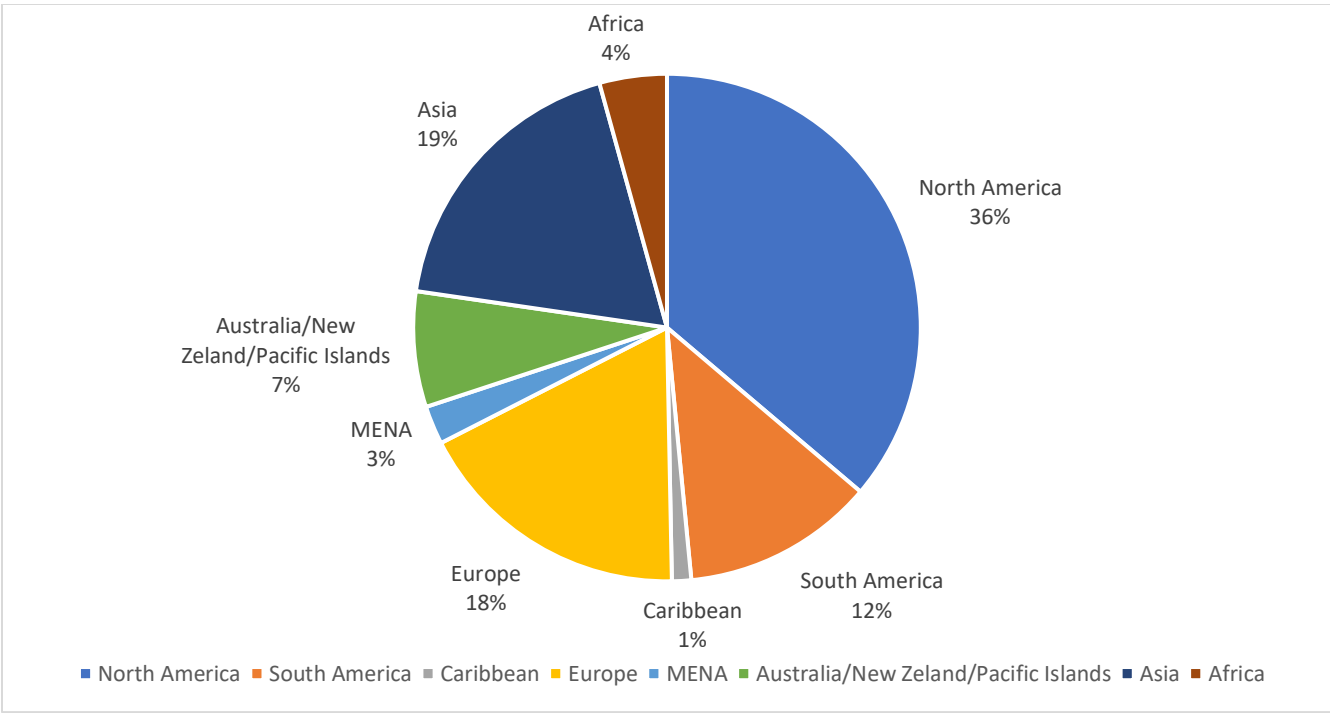
Figure 6: Authorship from Countries with Less Than Three Articles
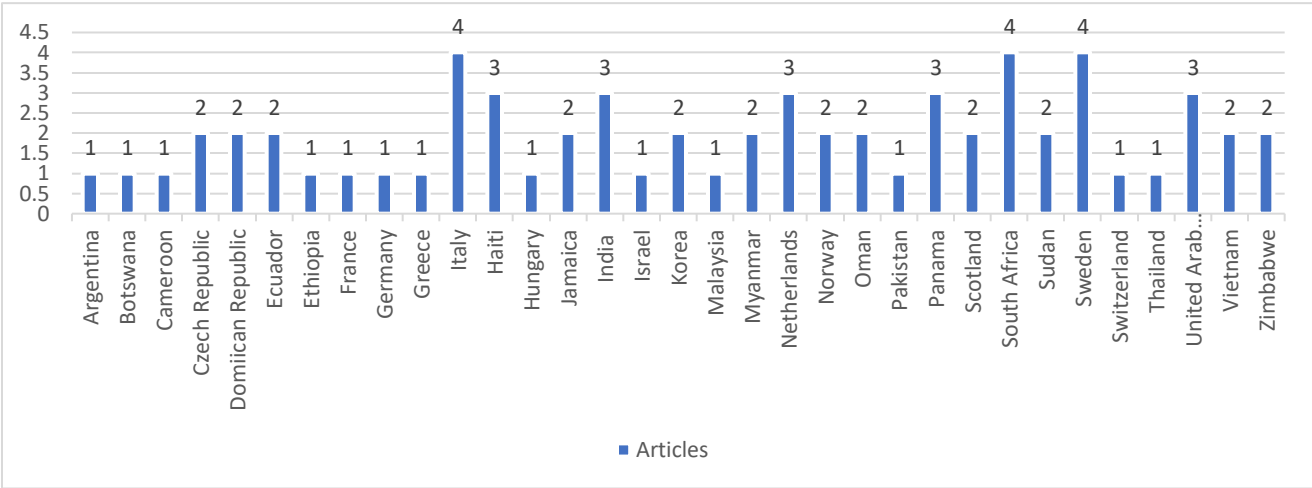
Figure 7: Authorship from Countries with Over Five Articles
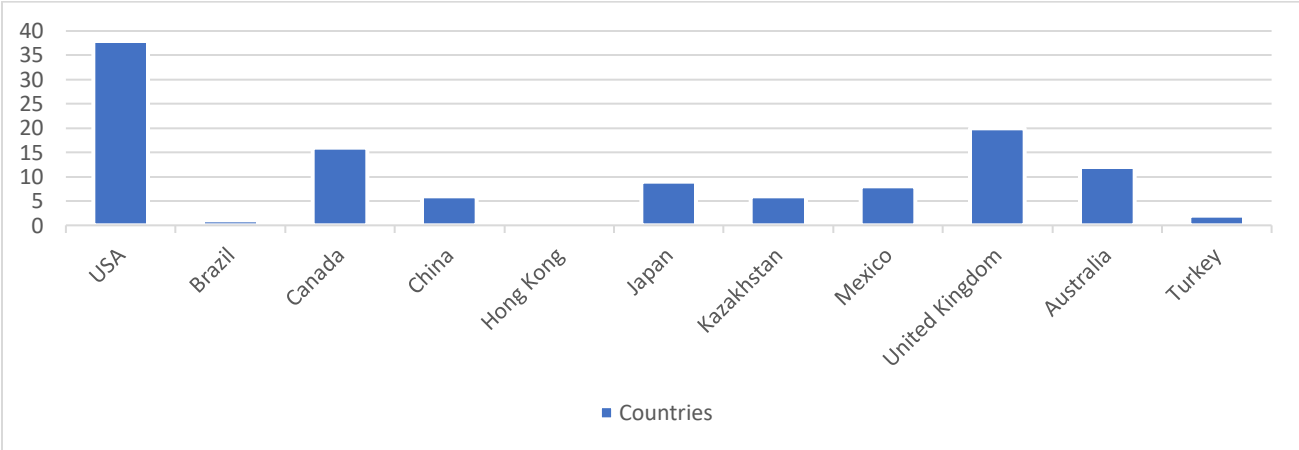
Figure 8: 2018–2024: Multi-Year Comparison of Author Institutional Affiliations by Country
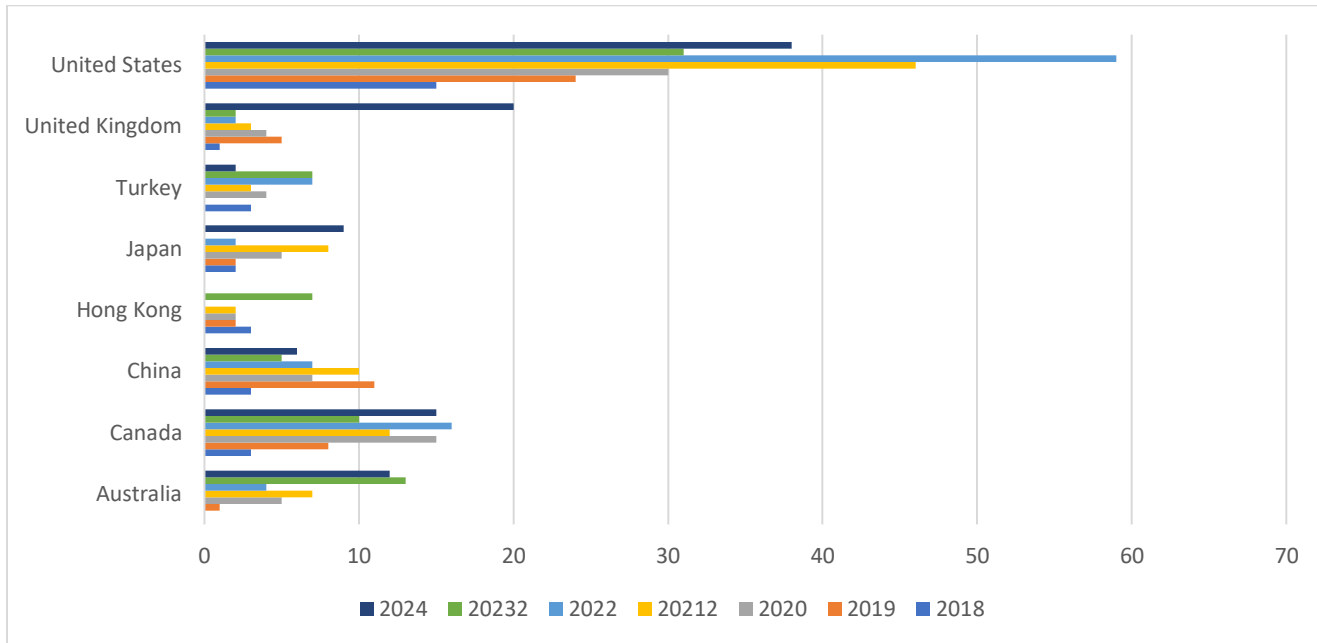
Regional and Thematic Focus of the Articles

While the institutional affiliation of *JCIHE* authors is diverse, the geographic and thematic focus from a significant number of the articles remains on the study of international students in the United States and in Canada. In 2024, there was growth in the diversity of articles in North America (30%), Europe (23%), Asia (20%), and South America & the Caribbean (13%). Figure 9 shows the thematic focus of the articles published in 2024 by countries and Figure 10 by continents. The theme of international students, especially in the United States and Canada, continues to be of interest to our authors and our readership. Three special issues had specific themes of Digitalization, Effect of the Russia-Ukraine Conflict on International Mobility and Internationalization in Post-Soviet Eurasia and Beyond, and of Internationalization of Curriculum: Conceptualizing Micro-Level Narratives in Thematic Constructs of Internalization.

Figure 9: Thematic Focus of Articles by Countries

17
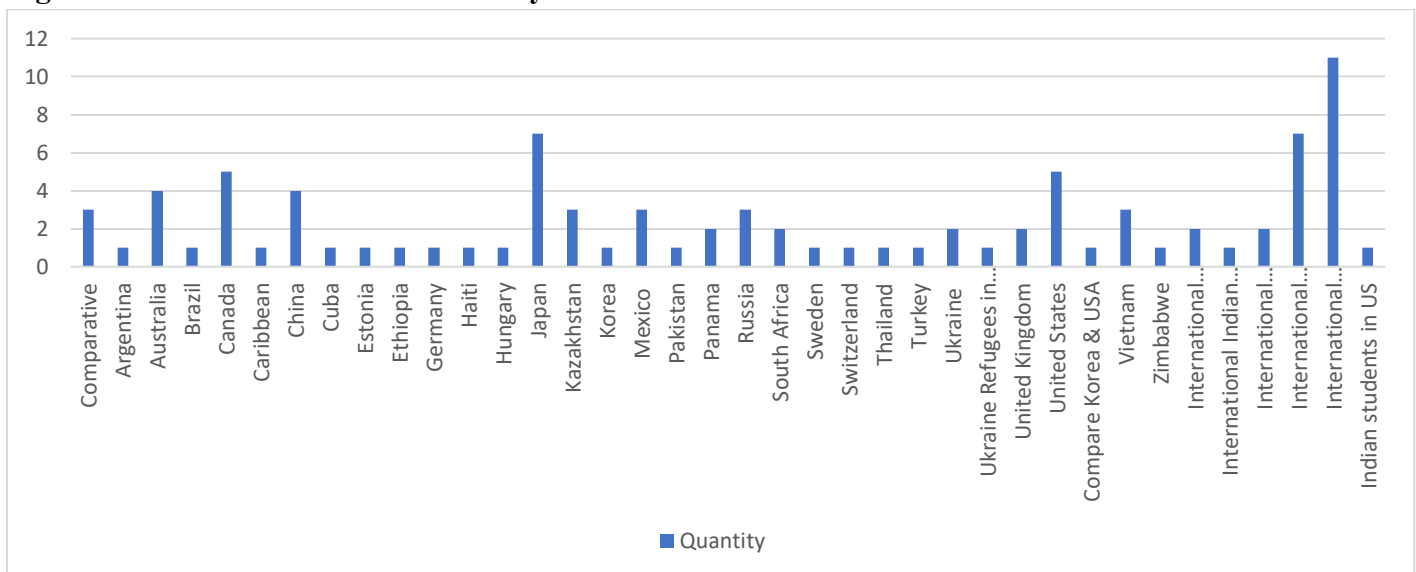
Figure 10: Thematic Focus of Articles by Continents/Regions

Legend: ■ Global South ■ Africa ■ Asia ■ Australia/New Zealand ■ Europe ■ MENA ■ South America & Caribbean ■ North America ■
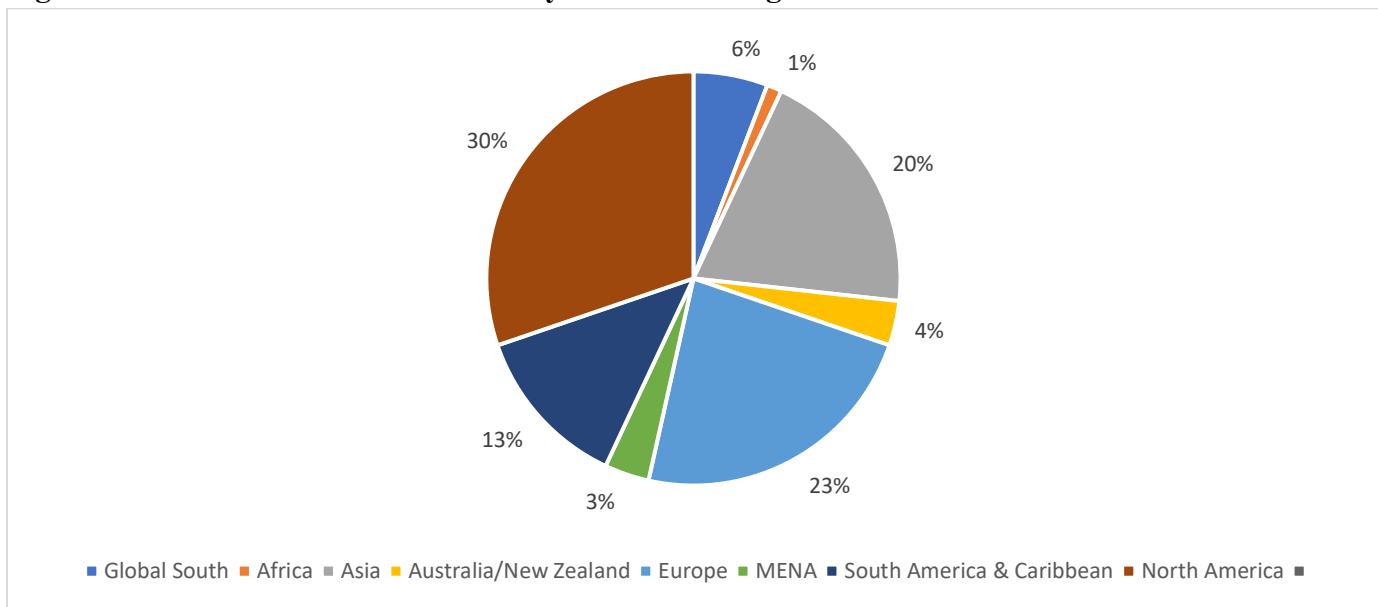
Article Methodologies and Keywords

Methodologies

In 2024, authors used a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies as shown in Table 8. Within the quantitative focused articles, the most used methods were online survey or questionnaire (n=30), statistical methods (n=9), mixed methods (8), and multiple regression analysis (n=8). Within the qualitative focused articles, the most used methods were interviews (n=31), essay (n=20), and document review/critical analysis (n=6). In all, about 40% of the articles are quantitative and 60% are qualitative.

Table 8: Methodologies Used

Quantitative Total	61	Qualitative Total	94
Survey / Questionnaire	30	Interviews (Structured)	31
Statistics	9	Essay	20
Mixed Methods	8	Document Review/Critical Analysis	6
Multiple Regression analysis	8	Content Analysis	5
ANOVA	2	Focus Group	5
Cross-sectional survey design	1	Document Discourse Analysis	4
Explanatory Sequential Mixed Method	1	Case study: single	3
Hierarchical multiple regression	1	Critical Qualitative Inquiry	3
Quantitative Systematic Review	1	Literature Review: Critical Analysis	3
		Autoethnography	2
		Ethnographic Interviews	2
		Open-Ended Survey	2
		Thematic Analysis	2
		Case study: Multiple & Comparative	1
		Grounded Research	1
		Research Ethics	1
		Social Media Discourse Analysis	1

Keywords in Articles

Keywords provide a picture of the trends in the research published in 2024. Table 9 shows keywords with 4 or more mentions and Table 10 shows all keywords found in articles in 2024. The theme of Digitalization (n=11) is the result of a special issue. The themes of Decolonialization (n=11) and International Students (n=9) represent current and upcoming topics for the field of international higher education. The listing of all of the keywords shows the range of topics explored in the articles in 2024.

Table 9: Keywords with 4 or more mentions

Keyword	Quantity	Keyword	Quantity
Higher Education	25	Internationalization	9
Decolonialization / Decolonality	12	International students	9
Digitalization	11	Japan	5
		Chinese International Students	4

Table 9: Quantity of All Keywords in 2024

Keyword	#	Keyword	#	Keyword	#
Academic Achievement	1	Bronfenbrenner Theory	1	Decolonialism	8
Academic Capitalism	1	Canada	2	Decolonization of IE	3
Academic Freedom	1	Canadian Universities	1	Degree-Mobile Students	1
Academic Integrity	1	Capital	1	Development	1
Academic Mobility	1	Career Development	1	Digital Era	1
Academic Shock	3	Caribbean Higher Education	1	Digital Divide	1
Academic Staff Engagement	1	Caste	1	Digital Tools	1
Academic Integrity Violations	1	Centrality	1	Digital Transformation	3
Access to Education	1	China	2	Digitalization	11
Acculturation Stress	2	Chinese International Students	4	Discrimination	1
Adjustment	1	Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL)	3	Distance Education	1
Administration/Staff	2	Coloniality	1	Diversity & Inclusion	1
Adult Learners	1	Commonwealth	1	Economic Development	1
Agency Theory	1	Community Colleges	1	Education 5.0	1
Agents	1	Comparative Studies	3	Education for Sustainable Development	1
Amitav Acharya	1	Conflict	2	Education in Emergencies	1
Andragogy	1	Continuing Prof. Development	1	Educational Reform	1
Anti-Asian Racism	1	Coordinator	1	Educational Developers	1
Arab International Students	1	Crisis Management	1	E-Learning	1
Asian International Students	1	Critical Internationalization	1	Emotion	2
Aspirations-Capabilities Framework	1	Critical Perspectives	1	Employment	1
Assessment	2	Critical Race Theory	1	Engagement	1
Assessment Framework	1	Critical Thinking	1	English Second Language	1
Asynchronous	1	Cross-Cultural Management	1	English Course Exchange	1
Australia	2	Cross-national	1	Equity	1
Belongingness	2	Cuba	1	Ethiopia	1
Big Data	1	Cultural capability	1	European Credit Transfer System (ECTS)	1
Blended Learning	1	Curricular Practical Training	1	European HE Area	1
Bologna Process	3	Decision Making	1	European Regionalization	2

Brazil	1	Decolonial Practices	1	European Union	1
Experiences	1	Information-Communication Technologies (ICT)	2	Leadership	1
Exiled Academics	1	Innovation	1	Learning Management	2
Faculty	1	Institutional Collaboration	1	Lifelong Learning	1
Funding of HE	1	Intercultural Sensitivity	1	Life Planning Model	1
Geopolitics	3	Intercultural Competence	2	Mental Stress	1
Germany	1	Intercultural Exchange	1	Mexico	2
Goal	1	Internal Migration	1	Micro-Level International	1
Global Competencies	1	International Experience	1	Migrant Students	1
Global Learning	1	International Exposure	1	Mobility	1
Globalization	1	International Education	1	Modernity	1
Global-South	1	International Mobility	3	MOOC	1
Governance	1	International MA Students	1	Multicultural Classroom	1
Government Policies	2	International Spouses	1	Multiculturalism	1
Graduation Outcomes	1	International Strategy	1	Multicultural Group Work	1
Group Dynamics	1	International Students	9	Narrative Inquiry	1
Guideline	1	International Student: Vancouver	3	Neoliberalism	1
Haitian Youth	1	International Undergrad	1	Norm Localization	1
Hawai'i	1	Internationalization	9	Open Online Courses	1
Higher Education	25	Internationalize Curriculum	2	Optional Practical Training	1
Higher Education Reform	1	Internationalize Disciplines	1	Organizational Management	1
Higher Education System	1	Internationalization of Higher Education (IHE)	3	Online/Blended Learning	1
Higher Educational Institution	2	Internationalization Policy	1	Pakistan	1
Higher Education Internationalization	1	Internationalized Classroom	1	Panama	1
Human Development	1	Investment	1	Pedagogy	1
Humanistic	1	Japan	5	Pedagogical Approach	1
Identity	2	Kazakhstan	3	Peer Advice	1
Indian International Students	1	Korean Higher Education	1	Perceptions	3
Indigeneity	1	Language in Education	1	Personal & Professional Development	1
Indigenous	1	Language Learning	1	Phenomenology	1
Industrialization	1	Language Proficiency	1	Plagiarism	1

Inequality	1	Large Language Models	1	Policy Travel	1
Institutional Autonomy	1	Leaders	1	Postgraduate Students	1
Post-Graduation Employment	1	Socio-economic Class	1	Turkish Academics	1
Post-Soviet	3	Social Justice	1	Ubuntu	1
Practice	1	Social Learning	1	Ukraine	2
Pre-service Teachers	2	Social Media Discourse Analysis	1	Ukrainian Universities	1
Proactive coping	1	Social Robots	1	Ukraine War	1
Power	1	Soft Power	1	United Kingdom	1
Power Paradigm	1	South Africa Schools	1	University Governance	1
Public & Private Universities	1	Specialized Software	1	University Internationalization	1
Quota System	1	Stakeholders of HE	1	Vietnam	1
Race	2	STEM Students	1	Vietnamese Public Universities	1
Race/Ethnicity	1	Student Affairs	1	Virtual Exchange	2
Racial Identity	1	Students of Color	1	Virtual Mobility	2
Racial Learning	1	Student Perceptions	1	Virtual Mentorship	1
Racial Perception	1	Student Services	1	Virtual Student Mobility	1
Racism	1	Student Support	2	War	2
Realism	1	Student Visas	1	War in Ukraine	2
Regional-National-local	1	Study Abroad	1	Whiteness	1
Rationales for Study Abroad	1	Study Away	1	Work-Integrated Learning (WIL)	1
Research Ethics	1	Study Mobility	1	Zimbabwe	1
Role Theory	1	Subjective well-being	1		
Russia	1	Support Services	1		
Russian Invasion Ukraine	1	Survey Design	1		
Russo-Ukraine War	2	Sustainable Development Goals	1		
Sanctions	1	Sustainable Tourism	1		
School Psychology	1	Systematic Literature Review	1		
Second Language	1	Systems of Support	1		
Small cultures	1	Teaching Assistants	1		
Socio-Cultural Adjustment	1	Teaching/Learning	1		

Social Engagement	1	Top Global University Project	1
Socio-economic background	1	Transnational Diaspora	1

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The *JCIHE* is the official journal of the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) Higher Education Special Interest Group (HESIG). *JCIHE* draws on the members of the HESIG of the Comparative and International Education Society and other international associations to diversify our board members and staff.

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I want to especially thank the Special Issue Editors whose insights provided unique perspectives of comparative and international higher education.

Hans Schuetz: Higher Education Reform in the Digital Age. Issue 2

Aliya Kuzhabekova: The effect of the Russia-Ukraine conflict on international mobility and

internationalization in post-Soviet Eurasia and beyond. Issue 3

Fakunle Omolabake & Fiona Hunter: Conceptualizing Micro-Level Narratives in Thematic Constructs of Internationalization. Issue 5

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A Case Study of Makerere University in Uganda

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

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Abstract

Higher education in sub-Saharan Africa plays a critical role in meeting local and regional challenges yet still reaches a very small subset of the population. This case study focuses on Makerere University, the flagship university of Uganda, which is striving to make a difference locally and globally. It has survived colonialism, dictatorships, and economic disaster and has become one of the leading universities in Africa. Using the conceptual framework of U.S. land-grant higher education, this study seeks to analyze Makerere across the land-grant domains, focusing on tensions, facilitators, and barriers. The study consisted of interviews representing a diversity of stakeholders, field observation, and numerous documents and articles. Six major themes emerged including Makerere's aspiration to be a research-led institution, the impact of neoliberalism, challenges in undergraduate education, the importance of reputation and saga, the role of the Ugandan government, and the continuing effects of colonialism. These findings are discussed in relationship to the land-grant domains, and conclusions are shared.

La formation universitaire en Afrique subsaharienne joue un rôle essentiel pour relever les défis locaux et régionaux, mais ne touche encore qu'un très petit sous-ensemble de la population. Cette étude de cas se concentre sur l'Université de Makerere, l'université phare de l'Ouganda, qui s'efforce de faire la différence localement et mondialement. Elle a survécu au colonialisme, aux dictatures et au désastre économique et est devenue l'une des principales universités d'Afrique. À l'aide du cadre conceptuel de Land Grant Higher Education aux États-Unis, cette étude cherche à analyser Makerere à travers des Land-Grant domaines, en se concentrant sur les tensions, les facilitateurs et les obstacles. L'étude a consisté en des entretiens représentant une diversité d'acteurs, des observations de terrain et de nombreux documents et articles. Six thèmes majeurs ont émergé, notamment l'aspiration de Makerere à être une institution axée sur la recherche, l'impact du néolibéralisme, les défis d'étude de premier cycle, l'importance de la réputation et de la saga, le rôle du gouvernement ougandais et les effets persistants du colonialisme. Ces résultats sont discutés en relation avec les Land-Grant domaines, et les conclusions sont partagées.

Keywords: international higher education, Makerere University, Morrill Act, Uganda, U.S. land-grant higher education

Introduction

This is a case study of Makerere University, the flagship university of Uganda and one of the leading universities in Africa, which has survived British colonialism, two brutal dictatorships, and severe government cutbacks leading to

economic crises. Like other major public universities, Makerere is a complex institution which faces challenges on many fronts. Makerere seeks to be relevant to local and regional issues yet is also intent on competing globally. Makerere emerged victorious from its chaotic past, but the consequences of colonialism, neoliberalism, and privatization remain.
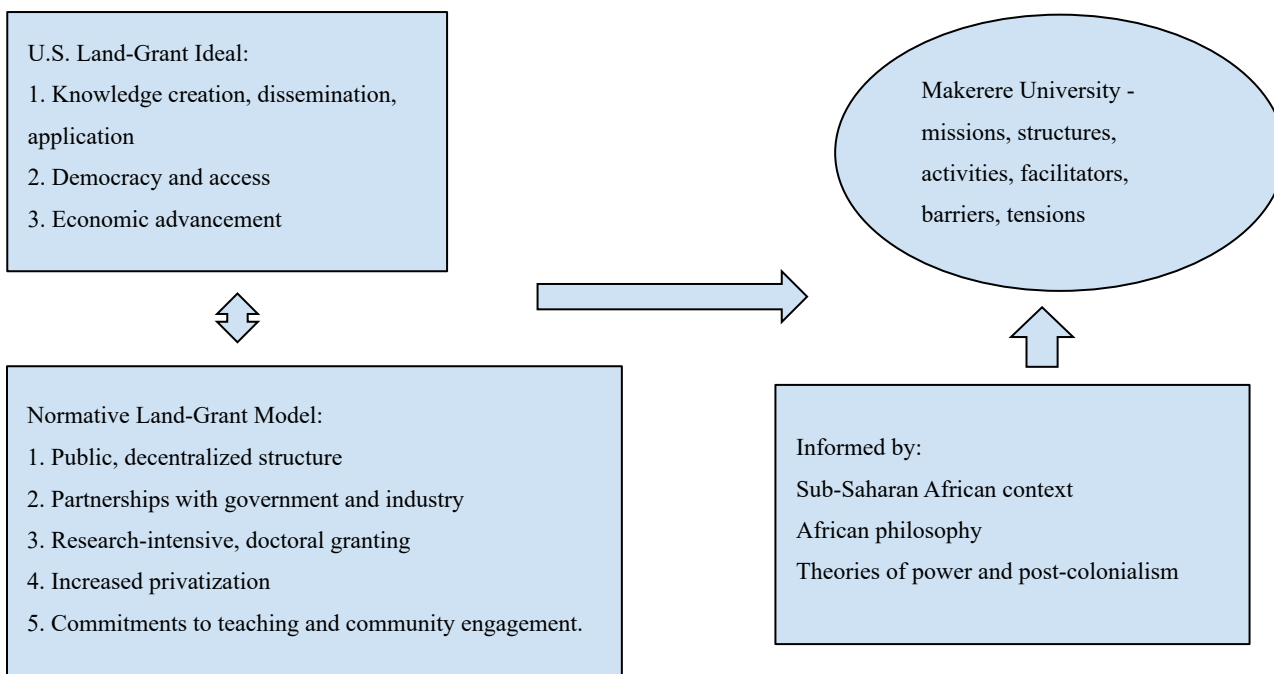
   To better understand Makerere University and to focus the study, the conceptual framework of the U.S. land-grant idea is used. The land-grant framework is relevant for the following reasons: 1) It represents public, research-oriented, flagship universities which face struggles similar to those encountered by Makerere University, such as balancing local and global priorities, compensating for decreases in state funding, and ensuring education for the public good; 2) Land-grant higher education emerged during the Civil War and has evolved through political, social class, and economic upheavals, similar to Makerere University's experience; and 3) Land-grant universities have a colonial past   as beneficiaries of Native American land, and Makerere University is still dealing with its colonial past.

   There is a risk in using a U.S. construct to help understand an African institution, particularly when colonialism is one of the very dangers highlighted in the study. However, to shy away from such a comparison also denies the impact of globalism on higher education and focuses on the differences instead of similarities between higher education in the U.S. and in sub-Saharan Africa. Hudzik and Simon (2012), in fact, discuss the world grant idea, encouraging us to expanding the Morrill Act beyond U.S. boundaries. As with any global comparison, though, care must be taken to understand the specific context of the institution.

   While there has been considerable scholarship on land-grant higher education and on higher education in sub-Saharan Africa, including Makerere University (see the literature review below for examples), there has been little research to show how these models might inform each other (Leys, 2018). As is evident in Figure 1, the framework is divided into: 1) land-grant ideals, emphasizing the values underlying the creation of the Morrill Act of 1862; 2) the normative model, focusing on the way in which the model has evolved over the past 160 years; and 3) other informing theories of the sub-Saharan African context, African philosophy, and colonialism. These conceptual framework domains provided a focus for the gathering of data, including the selection of stakeholders for interviews, the creation of the interview questions, the analysis of the data, and the final conclusions.

Figure 1

U.S. Land-Grant Conceptual Framework

U.S. Land-Grant Ideal:
1. Knowledge creation, dissemination, application
2. Democracy and access
3. Economic advancement

Makerere University - missions, structures, activities, facilitators, barriers, tensions

Normative Land-Grant Model:
1. Public, decentralized structure
2. Partnerships with government and industry
3. Research-intensive, doctoral granting
4. Increased privatization
5. Commitments to teaching and community engagement.

Informed by:
Sub-Saharan African context
African philosophy
Theories of power and post-colonialism

Research Questions

1. How do the mission, structures, and activities at Makerere University align or diverge across different domains of the land-grant framework?
2. What are the facilitators, barriers, and tensions that affect Makerere University engagement across different domains of the land-grant framework?

Literature Review

U.S. Land-Grant Higher Education

The Morrill Act, which was signed by Abraham Lincoln on July 2, 1862, gave 30,000 acres of federal land (or land scrip) per congressional representative to each U.S. state for the establishment of a college that would teach the "agricultural and mechanical arts" to the "industrial classes" in order to increase U.S. productivity. While this has been idealized as democratizing higher education and providing access to the rural population, Morrill's intent was economic, to compete with the more research-oriented European universities. This created tensions between vocational interests of farmers who wanted their sons to learn better farming techniques and the emphasis on science-based research which was to be the backbone of these land-grant colleges. Eventually, the vocational mission of the land-grant act was upheld by the Hatch Act of 1887, appropriating federal funds for agricultural experiment stations and the Smith-Lever Act of 1914, creating cooperative extension services at all land-grant colleges (Sorber, 2018).

Clark Kerr referred to land-grant institutions as having evolved into large, public "multiversities" (Furco & Kent, 2021; Marginson, 2016). Most are now major research institutions with a decentralized structure containing numerous departments, research programs, and degrees. Land grant universities now consist of the original universities designated by the 1862 Act, Historically Black Colleges and Universities designated by the 1890 Act, and tribal colleges designated by the 1994 Act (National Institute of Food and Agriculture, 2020).

Public universities, many of them land-grant universities, are responsible for 72% of doctoral degrees in science and engineering as well as 62% of U.S. academic research (Bound et al., 2019; Duderstadt, 2012). Additional legislation, such as the Bayh Dole Act of 1980, allowing universities to patent government-funded inventions, have encouraged partnerships with industry and contributed to the commercialization of research and academic capitalism (Berman, 2012; Slaughter and Rhoades, 2009). Economist Henry Etzkowitz refers to these partnerships as the "Triple Helix" of university-industry-government collaboration (Crow & Debars, 2012, p. 135). As federal and state funding have decreased, the privatization and commercialization of higher education have become even more acute (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2009; Sober, 2020). Even as land-grant institutions have taken on rigorous research agendas, they seek to maintain the commitment to teaching and community engagement. A hallmark of land-grant institutions continues to be Cooperative Extension Services (Gavazzi & Gee, 2018).

Land-grant institutions are only now recognizing their complicity in the tragic past of settler colonialism and the forceful removal of Native Americans from their land (Nash, 2019). The disturbing origins of U.S. land-grant higher education compel us to examine the impact of colonialism on institutions in sub-Saharan African countries, most of which have been independent for only 60 years. Thus, the inclusion of the sub-Saharan African context and the theories of colonialism in the conceptual framework is so critical.

Higher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa

Higher education was not homogenous across sub-Saharan Africa during the colonial era – universities evolved according to the British, French, or Lusophone systems depending on the colonizer. There were, however, the common realities of poverty, disease, colonial control, and lack of access and equality (Bekele & Ofoyuru, 2021). The purpose of higher education during the colonial era was to educate Africans to be better civil servants in the colonial government and to discourage African independent thinking. Higgs (2012) said that "colonialism in Africa provided the framework for the organized subjugation of the cultural, scientific and economic life of many on the African continent" (p. 1). The curriculum

of the colonizing country (particularly Britain or France) was taught, and little was done to incorporate indigenous knowledge or to increase access. Only the elite benefitted from higher education. Cloete and Maassen (2015) assert that at independence the primary purpose of universities transitioned from recruiting the social elites for the colonial governments to recruiting elites for the newly independent governments. They say that "In reality, nowhere on the continent is there a differentiated and massified system; there are only overcrowded elite systems" (p. 6).

The Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs) of the World Bank were particularly disastrous for higher education as they focused on the rate-of-return (ROR) on investments for loans. It was determined that primary education offered a higher return on investment than higher education, resulting in extreme reductions in spending for higher education in the 1980s (Cloete & Maassen, 2015; Collins, 2011; Darvas et al., 2017). However, in the mid-1990s, policymakers and World Bank economists began to see weaknesses in these ROR analyses and concluded that the benefits of higher education included the more nuanced and intangible benefits to society (World Bank, 2000). International recognition of the relevance of higher education in meeting societal challenges is still evolving. The United Nations Millennium Development Goals overlooked higher education altogether, emphasizing only primary education; the Sustainable Development Goals, which took over in 2015, fall short of acknowledging higher education's "rightful role" in reducing poverty but at least advocate "lifelong learning opportunities for all" (Teferra, 2020, p. 1)

Makerere University

Uganda Technical College was established in 1922 on Makerere Hill in Kampala, the largest city in Uganda. It soon changed to Makerere College, a vocational school focusing on medical, veterinary, engineering, agricultural and teacher training for the British East African colonies. It was considered an elite education as students received full scholarships and few were admitted. By 1935, there were only 400 graduates and "nearly all entered the civil service as clerks or medical assistants or became teachers in missionary schools" (Sicherman, 2005, p. 11). The 1950s and 1960s were considered the Glory Years as new infrastructure was built and "students were free to cultivate the life of the mind" (p. 40). Uganda gained independence from Britain on October 9, 1962, and in 1963, Makerere College merged with the Royal Technical College in Nairobi and the University College of Dar es Salaam to become the University of East Africa (Jacob et al, 2009). This lasted only until 1970 when the UEA was separated back into the independent universities of Makerere, Nairobi, and Dar es Salaam. Sicherman (2005) states that the UEA was "doomed by its foreign origins," especially the "very high level of American interest" (p. 72).

Idi Amin became president of Uganda in January 1971 after defeating Milton Obote in a coup. Amin launched his brutal dictatorship which would have a devastating effect on Uganda and on Makerere University. Meredith (2011) states that "Amin's rule had left Uganda ravaged, lawless, and bankrupt with a death toll put at 250,000 people (p. 238). Obote overthrew Amin in 1980, reclaiming power. He ruled with catastrophic brutality until 1985 when he was overthrown again. By then, Makerere University had lost most of its intellectual talent and donor support and was barely functioning (Sicherman, 2005). In 1986, Yowere Musevini became president, a position that he holds to this day. Kyangulanyi (as cited in Sicherman, 2005) described the era of 1986 to 1992 as one of "hardship and hope (p. 127). In addition to recovering from the devastation caused by the dictators, Uganda and Makerere University faced the World Bank's Structural Adjustment Policies of the 1980s, reducing government support of higher education.

Court (1999) describes the dramatic recovery of Makerere in his World Bank publication Financing Higher Education in Africa: Makerere, the Quiet Revolution: "In the past seven years, Makerere had moved from the brink of collapse to the point where it can become one of the preeminent intellectual and capacity building resources in Uganda and the wider region" (p. i). He describes the innovative ways in which Makerere compensated for lack of government support, such as decentralizing management, privately funding students, commercializing university service units, and adding demand-driven degrees (such as nursing and tourism). While Court describes "moving the cathedral" in glowing terms (p. 17), Mamdani (2007) warns against an all-encompassing move to neoliberalism. His book, Scholars in the Marketplace, is a scathing indictment against neoliberal reform, carefully documenting that such a shift changes the purpose of the university from one of public good to that of private good. He attributes the reforms of fee-paying students (privatization), financial

and administrative decentralization, and demand-driven courses (vocationalization) to a decrease in quality and a neoliberal, market focus.

Today Makerere University is the flagship university of Uganda, one of 36 universities, 10 of which are public and 26 private (these numbers vary slightly according to the source). Makerere was founded in 1922 and all the other universities were founded after 1987 except for the public Uganda Management Institute, founded in 1969 (Bisaso, 2017). Until 2000, the university was strictly controlled by the national government; however, the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act of 2021 gave universities more autonomy. Higher education in Uganda is supervised by the Ministry of Education and Sports and regulated by the National Council for Higher Education. The university is comprised of nine colleges and the School of Law. In 2015, Makerere enrolled 35,995 undergraduate students, 1,994 master's students, and 680 doctoral students (Cloete & Bunting, 2018, p. 239). Makerere fared better than the other Ugandan universities during the COVID pandemic because of continued government and donor support and the development of an online platform. However, the quality of learning and enrollment diminished (Nawangwe et al., 2021). As of 2022, total enrollment was about 35,000 (Civis, n.d.).

Methodology

The case study methodology was used as it enables the researcher to conduct an in-depth analysis of a specific case while maintaining a "holistic and real-world perspective" (Yin, 2018, p. 5). Flyvbjerg (2011) expounds on the value of a case study methodology as the cultivation of context-dependent knowledge, based on" the closeness of the case study to real-life situations and its multiple wealth of details" (p. 303).

The land-grant domains of the conceptual framework were used throughout the study's different phases. The domains informed the type of data to gather, particularly the interviewees needed, guided the design of interview questions and the analysis of the data, and provided a useful comparison for the final conclusions. Without this conceptual framework, the case study would have lacked essential parameters.

Data Gathering

Yin (2018) describes the many varied types of data which can be incorporated into a case study, including interviews, focus groups, documents, archival records, physical artifacts, and observation. This case study used the following sources of data:

- 22 semi-structured interviews with university stakeholders (current students, alumni, university administrators, faculty, staff, and NGO leaders) – most during a two-week field visit in April/May 2022.
- Official documents and legislation (Strategic Plan, Visitation Report, annual reports, USAID report, Makerere Act, Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act, and National Council for Higher Education report)
- University policies and records
- Course syllabi
- Twitter feeds (especially Vice Chancellor) and website articles
- News articles
- Video recordings of events
- Participation in events during field visit in April/May 2022.

Before beginning the data collection process, I underwent a rigorous ethical review process including West Virginia University's Institutional Review Board, Makerere University's School of Social Science Research Ethics Committee (MAKSSREC), and the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST). The process began in March 2021 and concluded in December 2021 with approval of the UNCST. It was complicated by COVID and by the need to interact with Ugandan offices from a distance.

Analysis

The data analysis process primarily followed strategies outlined by Saldaña (2021). Of the 30 first-cycle coding methods that he proposes, In-Vivo and Versus coding were the most useful. In-Vivo coding focuses on the words and phrases in the participant's own language (direct quotes), and Versus coding uses binary terms to describe relationships and phenomena (such as private vs. public students). While the NVivo software was helpful in analyzing Twitter feeds, I found manual coding on printed transcripts followed by analysis using Excel spreadsheets to be the most efficient and illuminating. Spreadsheets allowed me to list codes, categorize according to theme, and then to group these categories into "mega" categories or "categories of categories."

The collection of diverse types of data enabled the triangulation of data which Yin (2018) describes as "converging lines of inquiry" (p. 129). Creswell (2018) also emphasizes the importance of triangulation in ensuring the validity of qualitative research. Additionally, I verified some of the data with a couple follow-up interactions with study participants. Finally, it is important to acknowledge my own positionality in this research: I am a white American woman who had not been to Uganda prior to my field visit in April/May 2022. In the 1990s, I lived for five years in Cameroon and more recently have worked with many graduate students from sub-Saharan Africa, including Ugandan alumni of Makerere University. These relationships inspired me to pursue the study of higher education in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly Makerere University. I recognize, however, that others, particularly Ugandans, may be far better qualified to carry out this research. I look forward to their input.

Results

My findings can be divided into the following six major themes: 1) Research-led institution; 2) Neoliberalism and market influences; 3) Undergraduate education: 4) Reputation and saga; 5) Ugandan government; and 6) Colonialism.

Finding 1: Research-Led Institution

The first goal of Makerere's 2020-2030 Strategic Plan is to "transform Makerere into a research-led university, responding to national, regional and global development challenges, as well contributing to global knowledge generation" (Makerere University, n.d.). The way that Makerere leadership is carrying out this ambitious goal is through partnerships and collaboration with institutions both locally and abroad. The Vice Chancellor signed MOUs with institutions such as Karolinska Institute in Sweden, Gothenburg University in Sweden, University of Padovoa in Italy, Strathmore University in Kenya, Somali National University in Somalia, and University of Pretoria in South Africa. Some of the most significant partnerships are with large foundations including Rockefeller Foundation, Carnegie Foundation, USAID, Sida (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency), and the Norwegian government. Despite the importance of these partnerships, the Vice Chancellor admits the drawbacks saying, "When you're getting funds from these institutions, every institution puts up an advert, and they have their own conditions for the research."

To ensure that research benefits Ugandans, in 2019, the Ugandan government initiated the Research and Innovations Fund (RIF), committing 30 billion Ugandan shillings (UGX) (about 8 million U.S. dollars) per year for three years to Makerere research. The Vice Chancellor said that this has "drastically changed the research environment." This funding encourages cross-disciplinary projects across the university to help address some of the most pressing needs of Uganda.

The purpose of Makerere research is to create a better society. A few of the innovations which have been funded by the RIF include the first public human tissue and biobank in Uganda (College of Health Sciences), recovery of nutrients from pineapple waste (College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences), and the design of an improved cooking stove (College of Natural Sciences). The Resilient Africa Network, originally a USAID-funded network of 20 African universities with its secretariat at Makerere, is also committed to research and innovative solutions to development issues in the categories of health, agriculture, and gender-based violence. A few of these innovations were a malaria diagnostic kit, a pediatric nebulizer, a maize thresher, and a mobile phone platform to report gender-based violence. Similarly, the Regional Universities Forum (RUFORUM), is a partnership of 147 universities in 38 African countries with its secretariat at Makerere. RUFORUM is dedicated to research and innovations in the agricultural sector. One professor in the College of

Agricultural and Environmental Sciences has partnered with RUFORUM on different crop initiatives and laments that farmers aren't getting enough knowledge. He is familiar with land-grant extension services (in fact is an alumnus The Ohio State University, a U.S. land-grant institution) and would like to see a more systematic approach to extension at Makerere. At this point, he says community-based outreach is only "piecemeal."

Finally, the emphasis on research has a great impact on graduate education at Makerere. Makerere leadership and the Ugandan government see Makerere as best positioned among all Uganda's universities to focus on master's and doctoral education. Some scholars have called for eliminating the undergraduate population all together at Makerere in favor of graduate students, indicating that there are many other universities in Uganda prepared to teach undergraduates. Most, however, including the Vice-Chancellor, call for a shift to approximately 60% undergraduate (i.e., 15,000 students) and 40% graduate (i.e., 10,000 students). The 2016 Visitation report also included in its recommendations that "Makerere University should leverage her premier position in the higher education ecosystem to focus on graduate training and research…" (2017, p. 145).

Finding 2: Neoliberalism and Market Influences

David Court (1999) referred to Makerere's dramatic comeback after the years of Uganda's dictatorships as the "quiet revolution" when Makerere "moved from the brink of collapse" (i). Makerere achieved this through market-driven innovation: Admitting private, fee-paying students; contracting out university services; offering demand-driven courses, such as tourism and business administration; and moving to a more decentralized structure. Clark (2004) includes Makerere in his analyses of entrepreneurial universities because of the dramatic transformation. Mamdani (2007), however, views these neoliberal solutions as a direct threat to higher education for the public good and to the university's research agenda.

The Dean of East African Studies of Higher Education and Development described the problem as being not one of privatization but of unregulated privatization. He said, "The Deans would sit together in the committee chaired by the Vice-Chancellor and say, 'Okay, we are coming up with this and this and this. Can we have 300%? People are teaching extra hours in the night.' 'Yes, let's do it – we will give you the money.'" However, when the Universities and Other Tertiaries Act of 2001 passed (which among other things, made the President of Uganda a Visitor and not the Chancellor of the university) and the National Council for Higher Education was formed, better regulatory controls were put into place.

Despite the improvements with increased regulation, neoliberalism continues to negatively impact on students and faculty at Makerere. Most of the student body is now private (they pay tuition) and many have trouble finding the money. One student said "tuition is hard because not everyone is coming from the same background and same life. Some people can afford the tuition in one day, some people take years to afford the same tuition." Another student said, "The bad thing about the university is that they are not patient, especially with tuition." If students don't pay tuition, they are not allowed to sit for the end-of-semester exams. At this point, only STEM students, not social science students, are eligible for government loans. One history lecturer I interviewed sees neoliberalism as the biggest threat to the university, saying "neoliberalism guts public institutions and makes it difficult for there to be a space that scholars can speak without having to market their research."

Much of the discontent has been expressed through both student and faculty strikes. The Ugandan president as the Visitor, ordered a Visitation Committee in 2016 to investigate these "endemic strikes" (The Visitation Committee, 2017, p. 12). Faculty members interviewed, however, said that things have been better recently with the Ugandan government's increased support through the Research and Innovations Fund and commitment to faculty salary raises.

Finding 3: Undergraduate Education

Makerere University experiences significant challenges regarding undergraduate access, critical thinking, adequate resources, and job preparation. This falls at a time when undergraduate education seems to be devalued compared to graduate education. Rather than increasing access, the goal of the university leaders is to decrease undergraduate enrollment in order to focus on graduate students. Tuition is already a significant obstacle for many students. One undergraduate said that

Makerere "doesn't neglect anyone" but, when pressed, admitted that poor students from rural areas don't have the same opportunity as others. In addition, government loans are only open to STEM students.

One lecturer is particularly concerned about the lack of critical thinking. In fact, he and one of his colleagues co-authored a book on critical thinking which they make available to students. He said, "We have to find creative ways to generate critical thought when students feel overwhelmed and just want the answers for the exam." Some of the students he teaches take as many as ten classes at a time to receive their credential more quickly. Most of the final exams are worth 70% of the class, so there is little time to absorb the material; they just want answers. In an analysis of the learning objectives of six course syllabi, only three used verbs consistent with the upper levels of Bloom's Taxonomy (Analyze, Evaluate, and Create).

Inadequate infrastructure and a lack of resources and student support continue to be a challenge. A common complaint was that women make up 51% of the student body but only have three residence halls compared to the six for men. Some infrastructure needs are being met, though. In May 2022, Hon. Janet Museveni, the Minister of Education and Sports and Uganda's First Lady, laid the foundation stones for the new School of Law and the reconstruction of the Main Building, which burned in September 2020, as well as opening two new Central Teaching Facilities and the Dental Hospital. Faculty members provide most of the academic support for students as there are few services. In addition, students rely on small copy centers around campus for course resources rather than texts at the library or purchasing books. One lecturer said, "If we required students to buy a lot of books, we would have fewer students because they are on a very limited budget."

Finally, students have little hope of getting a job after graduation. The Assistant Commissioner said that there is a youth bulge in the country with 75-80% of the population below the age of 30. One of the lecturers said that 80% of Ugandan youth are unemployed. Many students are, therefore, entrepreneurial, looking to "side hustles" or the informal sector. One female student said, "Jobs are very scarce, so for me, I want to be self-employed. I want to sell clothes, shoes, until I get my own money." The university understands the challenge and is trying to facilitate internships for each student as well as incorporating "practicals" into each course to link the world of work with academics.

Finding 4: Reputation and Saga

Burton Clark (1972) discusses saga as a collective understanding of exploits and accomplishments which creates bonds inside and outside the organization. This organizational saga has protected and guided Makerere University throughout decades of upheaval. In 2022, Makerere marked its centenary with numerous Mak@100 celebrations including memorial public lectures, an Alumni Homecoming banquet on campus and other alumni events abroad, Twitter space events online, and a grand finale celebration with President Museveni as the honored guest. In each of these events, individuals important to the history of Makerere were honored, some of whom even gave their lives for the university. Stories were told which reaffirmed Makerere's ability to overcome tragedy and build a thriving institution. The Makerere University Anthem was sung at each event, emphasizing the refrain:

Makerere, Makerere, we build for the future, the great Makerere.
Great, great and mighty, the walls around thee.
Great, great and mighty,
The gates beside thee

At the Alumni Homecoming Dinner, the Chairperson of the University Council said, "If walls and vegetation could speak, countless stories would be told of friendships nurtured, dreams birthed, and destinies set on course."

Makerere University is known as a University of Excellence throughout Uganda. One student said, "So, when you are coming from Makerere University, there are certain things that are expected of you." Referring to his being admitted to the university, an alumnus said, "It's considered a very big opportunity for a Ugandan student to even appear on the admission's list." A faculty member from the School of Public Health said, "Even the person who has never gone to school

knows about Makerere. Makerere is the university that every parent and student desires to go to." The Assistant Commissioner for Higher Education and Training referred to Makerere as the "premier institution of higher learning in Uganda" and added that many government administrators and Members of Parliament are Makerere alumni.

Finding 5: Ugandan Government

The Ugandan government and Makerere University have a symbiotic relationship; they benefit from each other but must still navigate complex realities. Makerere needs the government for its financial survival and legitimacy, and the government depends on Makerere for human resource development and for research-led progress. Makerere, however, as an institution of higher education, must also be autonomous to ensure freedom of speech and expression. Before the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act of 2001, Makerere was essentially an extension of the government as the president of the country was also the university chancellor. Article 30 of the Act, however, now states that the president appoints the chancellor of each public university and retains the title of Visitor. The same Act established the National Council for Higher Education which brought more stability and accountability to higher education in Uganda.

The Visitation Committee report (2017) differentiates between the "state-control" model typical of the 1970s and 80s when the government dictated what universities did and the "state-supervision" model more typical of the 1990s with the turn to neoliberalism and privatization. Some feel that the state still exercises too much control. The Executive Director of the Centre for Constitutional Governance sees only a state of corruption and Makerere leadership as complicit in trying to appease the regime. She said that Makerere used to be "more vibrant in terms of public debates… nurturing students to express themselves and be outspoken." Now, though, she tells of debates cancelled at the last minute and a "police state" on campus. For the first five years, her organization was located on the Makerere campus, but she said the police presence became intolerable, so they moved elsewhere in Kampala.

Uganda is a democratic country with regular elections, but Yoweri Museveni has been president for 38 years and political opponents are severely restricted. Many feel the government is out of touch with the rest of the country. One of the undergraduates spoke of the privileged life of government ministers, saying "How are those ministers supposed to solve problems they don't face? They don't face muddy roads, they don't face the bad transport… when they get up, the money is there." Although people are free to criticize the government even on national television, the university is reluctant to criticize the hand that feeds them. President Museveni is the honored guest at events, and university leadership goes out of its way to express gratitude for recent government support particularly in research and infrastructure.

Finding 6: Colonialism

Uganda was officially under British control for 68 years, from 1894 to 1962. However, Uganda didn't magically rid itself of colonial influences at independence. The impact remains in all aspects of society including higher education. Professor Joy Kwesiga, current Vice-Chancellor at Kabale University in Uganda gave one of the Mak@100 Memorial Lectures. She recounted the history of Makerere including its "special relationship" with the University of London saying, "the major concern… was that this did not provide the independence required for the growth of an independent African University of the future." Curricular questions had to be vetted through London. Makerere had to live up to the British "Gold Standard" and became cut off from Uganda. When the university tried to "Africanize," there was a fear of lowering standards. A question to ponder then is if Makerere is a university "in" Africa or "of" Africa (Sicherman, 2005).

Colonialism is felt in the creation, dissemination, and application of knowledge. While Makerere benefits from its many international research partnerships, these partners often come with their own agendas, so the research is not necessarily relevant to the needs of Uganda. In addition, Makerere faculty must publish in Western peer-reviewed journals, in English, for their research to count towards promotion. As a result, there is little incentive to conduct or disseminate research in topics of indigenous knowledge. One senior lecturer also addressed the issues of needing to be relevant both to Uganda and the wider world for students who study abroad, saying "We cannot have a Ugandan university that just focuses on Uganda." A PhD student in computer science noted the risk of using foreign data to prototype solutions relevant to Uganda. He gave the example of a Uganda farmer purchasing sensors from a Chinese company to attach to the ears of his cows, so he could

use his smart phone to see which ones were sick. Unfortunately, these were calibrated using Chinese weather patterns so weren't accurate. When they were recalibrated using local data, the results were "amazing."

Finally, the World Bank Structural Adjustment Policies have been viewed as an extension of colonialism: Foreign powers, in this case, international banks, dictated the priorities of countries receiving loans. Professors expressed the detrimental impact of the SAPs in terms of privatization and neoliberalism, where the university was forced to look to private sources, largely abroad, for support since the government's hands were tied.

Discussion

This case study employed the U.S. land-grant higher education model as the conceptual framework, using the land-grant domains to guide data collection, the selection of stakeholders, creation of interview questions, and data analysis. The research questions focused on how Makerere University functions as a public university in Uganda across the different domains of the land-grant framework, both in the ideal and normative models.

Domains under Land-Grant Ideals

The U.S. land-grant ideals include the creation, dissemination, and application of knowledge; democracy and access; and economic advancement.

Johnson and Mbah (2021) conducted a study focusing on the role of Indigenous knowledge in African higher education, concluding that academics are often in the best position to "unsubjugate" knowledge through their proximity to communities. As evident in its Strategic Plan, discussions with leaders, and government funding, Makerere is intent on being a globally competitive research university. This ambition, however, carries the risk that knowledge becomes subjugated to outside interests and priorities and is no longer relevant to Uganda. When research must be published in Western journals (in English), when funding comes from abroad, when data for local innovations come from foreign sources, and when faculty themselves are educated abroad, there is little incentive to pursue Indigenous knowledge. In this scenario, colonialism continues to dominate. Fortunately, however, even while creating global partnerships, Makerere emphasizes innovations which solve local real-world problems, using, for example, the government-funded Research and Innovations Fund to address Ugandan challenges. There are also some on campus who would like to see a more systematic approach to community engagement and outreach, like land-grant extension services.

Trow (2007) discusses the democratization of higher education through increased access with his three stages of participation: Elite (under 15%), mass (15-50%), and universal (over 50%). Sub-Saharan African higher education is still in the elite stage with only 9% participation in tertiary education (as a percentage of the relevant age group). Uganda is at 5% tertiary participation (World Bank, 2024). Makerere's response to low participation rates seems somewhat paradoxical. On one hand, the university wants to be relevant to local communities and distance itself from colonial elitism; on the other hand, increasing access does not seem to be a priority as university leadership is in fact proposing to decrease undergraduate access in order to accommodate more graduate students.

According to Ugandan President Museveni, economic advancement is best achieved through scientific research and innovation. This is the motivation behind the Research and Innovation Fund as well as the government's commitment to offering loans to STEM students but not social science students. The government also depends on Makerere University for capacity development and training. Many government, business, and industry leaders are Makerere alumni, and during the country's decentralization efforts, Makerere provided training for leaders at the local levels. Unfortunately, however, the university is still struggling to align the university education with the labor needs of the country as unemployment among undergraduate alumni is a common complaint causing graduates to doubt job prospects.

Domains under Land-Grant Normative Model

The U.S. land-grant normative model includes the domains of a public, decentralized structure; partnerships with government and industry; research-intensive, doctoral granting; increased privatization; and commitments to teaching and community engagement.

Makerere University is a large, public "multiversity" as described by Clark Kerr (Marginson, 2016) with a decentralized structure composed of colleges and schools. Mamdani (2007) was critical of decentralization during recovery years of the 1990s as it led to privatization and a "gradual dismantling of the public university" (p. 35). He lamented the fact that individual faculties took advantage of their independence and created a market-oriented, demand-driven curriculum. Mamdani's book Scholars in the Marketplace was viewed as a warning which resulted in an increase in government support of the university. Nevertheless, neoliberalism, with its private (tuition-paying) students, research consultancies, and market-driven incentives is not going away. As the history lecturer described it, "neoliberalism guts public institutions." Bisaso (2013) studied the impact of academic capitalism on four science units at Makerere University, acknowledging that "academic units within institutions, which choose to ignore the market paradigm and stick to the traditional paradigm, find it difficult to attract external funding" (p. 47). However, an over-reliance on external funding through Western organizations threatens the mission of university for the public good, particularly the African public good.

Makerere depends on partnerships with both the government and industry to get necessary funding. This university-industry-government collaboration is referred to as the "Triple Helix" and is essential for university growth (Crow & Debars, 2012, p. 135). Carayannis et al. (2016) in their analysis of knowledge systems and innovation also discuss the Quadruple Helix, incorporating civil society, culture-based systems, and even democracy, as well as the Quintuple Helix, incorporating the natural environment. The computer science PhD student talked about Makerere innovation hubs (such as Innovation Village and Outbox), as places for collaboration with industry and across disciplines, recognizing the importance of engaging all types of stakeholders and skills. This type of innovation results in the application of knowledge and is used to solve local problems.

Makerere faculty admit that community outreach is not systematic enough, such as the Cooperative Extension Services at many U.S. land-grant universities. Community service activities are also not recognized toward faculty promotion. Despite a lack of systemization, however, outreach happens through research and innovation efforts designed to meet local challenges. In their analysis of university strategic plans in sub-Saharan Africa, Bekele and Ofoyuru (2021) concluded that universities are attempting to meet the needs of society but that "instead of having a third mission dedicated for community service, the academic core (teaching, learning and research) is conceived to embody societal goals" (p. 174). Indeed, the Makerere Strategic Plan incorporates community relevance into the goals of research, teaching, and learning.

Tensions, Facilitators, and Barriers

Sorber and Geiger (2014) use the phrase "welding of opposite views" to discuss the tensons in the land-grant ideal as the practical, vocational mission conflicted with the sciences and liberal arts. Likewise, several tensions emerge from Makerere data, as described here using Saldaña's (2021) versus coding.

Table 1

Makerere University Tensions

Privatization/Neoliberalism vs. University for public good	The introduction of privately sponsored students and demand-driven courses helped transform Makerere after devastating dictatorships. However, a culture of neoliberalism resulted, threatening the mission of public good. Mitigating influences are increased regulation and more support from the Ugandan government.

Research-led vs. Undergraduate	Makerere's ambition is to be a globally recognized research-led university. To accomplish this, the university needs to considerably increase the graduate student population and accordingly decrease the undergraduate population because of already stretched resources.
University in Africa vs. University of Africa	Sicherman (2005) questions if Makerere is a university in Africa or of Africa because of the continued colonial influences. Makerere depends on foreign support, enters into global agreements, and its faculty get degrees abroad and publish in Western journals. Yet, the university also engages in partnerships within Africa and pursues research and innovation projects which are relevant to local challenges.
Dependence on government vs. Academic autonomy	Makerere depends on the Ugandan government for financial support and legitimacy. Until 2001, the president of Uganda was also the university chancellor. However, Makerere must also maintain academic autonomy in order to practice freedom of thought and expression.

Facilitators and barriers to university engagement become more apparent with the analysis of tensions. Facilitators in one of the land-grant domains can be a barrier in another. The creation, dissemination, and application of knowledge are facilitated by global partnerships, government funding, innovation hubs, emphasis on STEM subjects, and an increase in the graduate student population. Global partnerships, however, are a barrier to Africanizing the university and pursuing Indigenous knowledge. Likewise, emphasizing STEM subjects and increasing the graduate student numbers are barriers to increasing undergraduate access. Increasing government support, while a facilitator to university functions in general, including research, teaching, and infrastructure, can be a barrier to academic freedom. As Makerere pushes forward as a research-led institution, care needs to be taken to mitigate the negative consequences of increased colonialism (from global partnerships and funding), increased neoliberalism (from privatization and outside funding), and decreased undergraduate emphasis. University leaders need to critically weigh these trade-offs between facilitators and barriers in their decision-making.

Conclusion

The U.S. land-grant ideals and normative model have provided a framework for studying Makerere University. Makerere, just like every university, faces tensions and trade-offs as resources are scarce and global and local contexts change. Just recently, West Virginia University (major land-grant university and my alma mater) cut major programs due to budget constraints, attracting widespread criticism (Petit, 2024; Svruluga & Anderson, 2023). The geographic context may be different, but many of the threats to higher education are the same. Makerere has overcome tremendous obstacles through its sense of saga, entrepreneurialism, and the deep commitment of its stakeholders. Through collaborative initiatives, Makerere is prioritizing research and creating innovations which are relevant to Uganda. There remain, however, the threats of colonialism, neoliberalism, and a controlling government. Makerere University needs to face these threats courageously as it builds for a future as a globally competitive yet also locally relevant institution in Uganda.

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Empirical Article

Manifestations of Transformative Learning:
A case study of a short-term study abroad program in Israel

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Abstract

Study abroad participants, including in short-term programs, often describe their time abroad as "transformative" and a period of intense personal growth. However, the contents of this transformation are often treated by administrators and students themselves as inscrutable, with the fact of having developed intercultural skills and "worldly" knowledge taken for granted. Using multiple data sources within an interpretive framework, this case study focuses on the manifestations of transformative learning to provide insights for international curriculum development. Using a qualitative approach, data was analyzed inductively and thematically. The findings point out that change emerged in the forms of (1) intercultural learning and sensitivity development, (2) learner expectations and behavior alteration, (3) ideological reconstruction or transition, and (4) academic and professional orientation conversion or refinement, suggesting that even short-term programs can lead to in-depth and broad transformation.

Les participants aux programmes d'études à l'étranger, y compris dans le cadre de programmes à court terme, qualifient souvent leur expérience de "transformatrice", concluant qu'il s'agit d'une expérience de développement personnel intense. Cependant, le contenu de cette transformation est souvent considéré comme insaisissable, aussi bien par les administrateurs que par les étudiants eux-mêmes, l'acquisition de compétences interculturelles et de connaissances du monde étant tenues pour acquises. En récoltant diverses sources de données au sein d'un cadre interprétatif, cette étude de cas se concentre sur les manifestations de l'apprentissage transformateur afin d'apporter des éclairages pour le développement des programmes internationaux de courte durée. En adoptant une approche qualitative, les données ont été analysées de manière inductive et thématique. Les résultats soulignent que le changement des étudiants s'est matérialisé à travers (1) un développement de l'apprentissage et de la sensibilité interculturels, (2) une modification des attentes et des comportements des apprenants, (3) une reconstruction ou une transition idéologique, et (4) une conversion ou le raffinement de leur orientation académique et professionnelle, suggérant ainsi que même les programmes internationaux à court terme peuvent conduire à une transformation non seulement en profondeur mais également en amplitude et envergure.

Introduction

Short-term study abroad (STSA) programs are popular and cost-effective, offering more students the chance to study abroad. These experiences are often advertised as life-changing experiences, and students often claim they underwent a deep transformation. This study examines transformative learning and addresses the need for a deeper understanding of

these experiences. Transformative learning is defined as "processes that result in significant and irreversible changes in the way a person experiences, conceptualizes and interacts with the world" (Hoggan, 2016a, p. 77). However, these students struggle with articulating and elaborating on what was life changing, how, and what was actually changed. Hence, students tend to summarize their whole sojourn in a few vague words, not demonstrating how life altering the change was to them, perhaps due to their lack of "expressive abilities" (Wong, 2015, p. 124), but also because of the lack of interest in their experience they notice from people once they return home, suggesting our understanding of experiences might also be relational.

STSA programs have been debated, with concerns about shallow experiences and program length, perhaps at times locking students in superficial understandings of the host country (Dwyer, 2004; Kehl & Morris, 2008; Tarrant & Lyons, 2011). Scholars have therefore critiqued the length, compared short and longer-term programs, arguing that the longer usually means the better (Coker et al., 2018). However, addressing the affordability argument (Pope, 2023), research shows that carefully designed short programs can lead to deep learning outcomes (Anderson et al., 2006; Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004; Mapp, 2012; Jones et al., 2023). Beyond considerations of length, researchers have been increasingly advocating that students get involved with host country locals in a variety of ways. These interactions include (collaborative) research, service learning, structured encounters with guest speakers or visits of offices, organizations, or factories, as high impact practices create room for change and intercultural development (Chiocca, 2021; Solís et al., 2015; Vande Berg & Paige, 2012), thus arguing that length is not proportional with learning outcomes. It is crucial to understand how students perceive and express the effects of their learning.

This article is part of a qualitative case study partially published in a previous paper (Chiocca, 2021) presenting a group of students who participated in a STSA in Israel and who experienced transformative learning from directed and diverse conversations with locals, hermeneutical reflections, emotional disequilibrium, intercultural competence development, and student engagement in a classroom culture. Drawing from the literature on transformative learning, this article is intended for study abroad professionals and stakeholders interested in upscaling the student experience during STSA.

Literature Review

Transformative Learning

Transformative Learning (TL), one of the leading theories in adult education, is defined as follows:

> …the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about the world; of reformulating these assumptions to permit a more inclusive, discriminating, permeable, and integrative perspective; and of making decisions or otherwise acting upon these new understandings (Mezirow, 1991, p.167).

This theory has been evolving but Mezirow's seminal work of identification of 10 TL phases remains widely used, including in research on international education. The 10 phases are listed in Table 1 below (Mezirow, 2009, p. 19).

Table 1

The 10 phases of Transformative Learning (Mezirow, 2009)

1. A disorienting dilemma
2. A self-examination
3. A critical assessment of assumptions
4. Recognition of a connection between one's discontent and the process of transformation
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and action
6. Planning a course of action
7. Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plan
8. Provisional trying of new roles

9. Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
10. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's perspective

Mezirow (2009) argues that TL is a "reconstructive theory" (p. 21) which "involves how to think critically about assumptions supporting one's perspectives and to develop critically reflective judgment in discourse regarding one's beliefs, values, feelings, and self–concepts" (p. 29). The goal, then, is the independence and autonomy of learners who learn to question and critique their frame of reference. In short, they transition from being passive to being active in their understanding of the world. However, this does not necessarily mean learners radically change their ideas, but rather not take them for granted anymore, thus resulting in a mindful and intentional "elaboration, confirmation, or creation of a scheme" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 108).

TL is now considered a metatheory (Hoggan, 2016a, 2016b), as Mezirow's theory has been critiqued for focusing primarily on epistemic changes. Hence, TL has been greatly expanded beyond Mezirow's original work which he himself modified. Hoggan (2016a) proposes to call "perspective transformation" Mezirow's theory mentioned above, and "transformative learning" a metatheory allowing a wider range of TL outcomes beyond epistemic dimensions (Hoggan, 2016a, 2016b).

Building on Mezirow's typology of learning outcomes (worldview, epistemology, ontology, and behavior), Hoggan (2016a), in his review of the literature of TL, which he defines as "processes that result in significant and irreversible changes in the way a person experiences, conceptualizes and interacts with the world" (p. 77), developed a typology and identified three criteria for transformation: depth, breadth, and permanence. His typology thus included Mezirow's categories (which he rearranged) and added two new categories: self, and capacity. Table 2 offers a summary of Hoggan's (2016a) typology of TL outcomes.

Table 2

Typology of TL Outcomes (Hoggan, 2016a, p. 70)

TL outcome	Specific change
Worldview	- Assumptions, beliefs, attitudes, expectations - Ways of interpreting experience - More comprehensive or complex worldview - New awareness / new understandings
Self	- Self-in-relation - Empowerment / responsibility - Identity / view of self - Self-knowledge - Personal narratives - Meaning / purpose - Personality change
Epistemology	- More discriminating - Utilizing extra-rational ways of knowing - More open
Ontology	- Affective experience of life - Ways of being - Attributes
Behavior	- Actions consistent with new perspective - Social action - Professional practices

	- Skills
Capacity	- Cognitive development
	- Consciousness
	- Spirituality

In this study, TL refers to a process, a set of pedagogical decisions, learning experiences and outcomes, and an awareness and manifestations of learning outcomes.

TL and Study Abroad

Research on TL's connection to international education spans diverse emphases. As Pang and colleagues (2023) note, most research on the topic tends to lean towards qualitative methods, privileging reports on lived experiences of participants, whereas quantitative studies document specific TL growth or connect TL with other theories.

Studies often concentrate on demonstrating in a binary way whether TL happened, treating TL as an outcome only, rather than conceiving it as a process, pedagogical tools and decisions, a learning experience, and as (a set of) outcomes. Pang et al. (2023) caution against bias in desiring positive impacts, leading to exuberant data analysis and inflated transformation identification. Research often prioritizes participant sentiments, neglecting specific changes. Qualitative studies aim to prove transformation, overshadowing its intensity and perceived student changes.

Beyond proving STSA program's transformative impact, scholars have tried to identify curricular aspects fostering TL (Walters et al., 2016). Effective transformation-promoting elements include critical reflection journaling (Perry et al., 2012) and service-learning (Walters et al., 2016), and some scholars have investigated reflection types (Savicki & Price, 2017, 2019, 2021). Assessing lasting change, Rowan-Kenyon and Niehaus (2011), in their study of STSA programs one year post STSA, found true transformation is tied to one's trajectory, thus evolving over time, suggesting it cannot be assessed immediately upon students' return. We are much more than simply the sum of our experiences, and the effects of our learning, as Dewey (1934) states, are long-lasting and intertwined in our paths. Building on Dewey's idea, Perry and colleagues (2012) emphasize how past experiences continuously shape our future actions. Experiences intertwine, complicating assessing TL's permanence, especially post STSA.

While transformation does take time to unfold, it is constantly reinvented through narratives (shared and individual), and where stability of change poses a challenge for assessment, some students still do get a sense of a certain change they experience. With time and room, some articulate how they changed, detailing causes, and illustrating transformations (Wong, 2015). However, the TL and STSA literature lacks research on specific STSA-induced transformation types.

As noted by Pang and colleagues (2023), most studies on TL and international education tend to rely on supplemental theories and concepts in conjunction with TL, suggesting strong connections between TL and various types of intercultural development constructs. Research has therefore identified that students who had studied abroad usually demonstrate, among others:
- Growth in cultural awareness and self-awareness (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004; Lumkes et al., 2012);
- Heightened intercultural competence (Behrnd & Porzelt, 2012; Niehaus et al., 2019; San & Htwe, 2023), including cultural intelligence (Wood & St. Peters, 2013), intercultural awareness, knowledge, and sensitivity (Anderson et al., 2006; Carlson & Widaman, 1988; Czerwionka et al., 2015; Jackson, 2008), and adaptability (Mapp, 2012);
- Widened global perspective or competence (Schenker, 2019; Whatley et al., 2021);
- Redefined and refined career plans and a higher interest in international careers (Norris & Gillespie, 2009).

These studies, while not always using TL terminology, suggest STSA fosters diverse transformative outcomes aligned with Hoggan's (2016a) typology, including worldview, assumptions, beliefs, attitudes, and epistemology, encouraging openness and reflectivity. TL also encompasses changes in one's sense of self, responsibility, and purpose, ontology, alongside behavioral alignments with one's new perspective.

This manuscript reports on a study I partially published (Chiocca, 2021). I argue that the participants did experience various degrees of TL, attributing their change to several pedagogical choices and experiences including 1) directed and diverse conversations with locals, but also to 2) hermeneutical reflections, 3) an emotional disequilibrium, 4) their intercultural competence development, and 5) their engagement in a classroom culture, which, all together, acted like a

gestalt. This present article completes the 2021 article to focus this time on the process of TL and its outcomes or manifestations of TL through a qualitative lens: depth, breadth, and permanence.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

This study builds on the literature by exploring perceived outcomes of a STSA and the student-perceived changes. Specifically, it examines participant meaning-making six to eight months after the STSA, and how students describe their change beyond the STSA context. This study is guided by the following research question:

In what ways, if any, do STSA participants perceive that they changed as a result of their STSA?

Methodology

This study used a qualitative case study design to "understand an issue or problem using the case as a specific illustration" (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). The bounded system is consistent with the approach employed in the first part of the study (Chiocca, 2021), which focused on students enrolled in a four-week summer course on cultural diversity at a university in Jerusalem. The course included responses to readings, field trips observations, conversations with locals, and written reflections. The course culminated in a research project on cultural diversity in Israel.

Data Collection and Analysis

I conducted two-hour-long semi-structured audio-recorded interviews with course participants (n=5) and from their instructor. I also collected:

- All materials distributed through the course;
- Student assignments;
- My ethnographic observations and field notes as a "researcher-participant" in the course (Spradley, 1980);
- 120 min semi-structured interviews (Creswell, 2007) about six to eight months after the end of the STSA;
- Other materials provided by the participants (i.e., pictures, timelines).

Participants

The table below outlines details of the participants.

Table 3

Demographic and Background Data of Study Participants

Pseudo.	Sex	Nationality	Age	Class	Major	Minor	Prior international experiences	Post SA
Alex	F	USA of Egyptian origin	20	Soph.	International affairs; religious studies after STSA	N/A	Several trips to visit family in Egypt; Western Europe and Singapore with father; vacation in Spain	STSA in Scotland (following semester)
Katherine	F	USA	21	Junior	Global Studies + Middle East Studies	N/A	Brazil with family summer 2016 (1st trip outside of US)	Traveled in Europe with father; Fall semester in Jordan

Hailey	F	Australia	21	Senior	Islamic Studies	Political Sc. + International relations	Various trips to Western Europe and North Africa	Graduate school in Australia
Sarah	F	USA	20	Junior	International Affairs	Arabic	High School STSA in Rwanda; interned in Uganda (2016, 1 mo.); trips with family to Western Europe, Canada, and Mexico	Returned to the US to continue undergraduate studies
Maria	F	Denmark	38	N/A	Bio-analysis / Theology	N/A	Volunteered in Venezuela (9 mo.) and India (3 mo.); worked and lived in Norway (2 years); traveled across Europe	Volunteered teaching Danish to migrants
Ehud	M	Israel/US	45	Instructor	-	-	-	-

I conducted two-hour-long semi-structured audio-recorded interviews and followed-up with questions via email of all students and of their instructor to triangulate data. I sent them the transcription and analysis for member-check to increase the validity and credibility of the findings (Creswell, 2007). The university IRB approved the research protocol, consent was obtained for all participants, and pseudonyms are used.

My field notes as a researcher-participant in the STSA program (but not as a study participant), taken during the sojourn, embedded descriptive and focused observations of surface-level behaviors and some specific features, and questions about patterns related to the experiences of the participants based on my own experience (Spradley, 1980), as well as short reflections on the pedagogy used in the course. Here is an excerpt from a note: *"July 22ⁿᵈ: Wish I had observed + talked more with locals every time I travel. Gene, inconfort ou honte (?) [discomfort or shame] of ignorance of how layers of history and pain make the current context complex? Like I'm rafting, waves and streams, splashes with every encounter, every text. All of it. A lifetime of study not enough to understand this place and evolving complexity - maybe anywhere else? Are [the students] feeling it too? [...] Discretely observed [Alex] from café during [Observation] #3 – seeking ados [teenagers] in groups to understand perspectives on feminism and self-actualization, relationships + sex. Some giggles. Discomfort with topic? She's been reading a lot. Should implement talking and not just observations with clear instructions + WHY in my own STSA course development when time happens."* [sic]).

Data Analysis

Interview data (interviews) were transcribed verbatim and, like the rest of the documents (papers, reflections, observations), underwent inductive, thematic analysis to extract patterns and meanings (Ezzy, 2002; Shank, 2002). In-vivo codes were assigned at the sentence or paragraph level, and compared, contrasted, aggregated, and arranged (Charmaz, 2006; Morse, 1994). Researcher triangulation was also used to improve trustworthiness to limit my own biases as a participant in the study abroad experiences (Creswell, 2007).

Findings

Participants reported changing during their study abroad and gaining awareness of change transcending the Israeli context. Field trips, meeting social actors, reflecting, undergoing emotional disequilibrium, developing cross-cultural competence, and staying engaged allowed students to renegotiate initial representations of locals in the face of the tensions within Israeli society and with neighbor countries.

In What Ways, if any, do STSA Participants Perceive that They Changed as a Result from Their Experience Abroad?

Students recounted various forms of change around the idea of gaining nuance and expanding, resulting from interactions with locals, the hermeneutical reflective nature of the course, emotional disequilibrium, cross-cultural competence development, and engagement in the classroom culture (see Chiocca, 2021). The changes were categorized into four themes:

- Transcending intercultural sensitivity development
- Learner expectations and behavior alteration
- Ideological reconstruction, transition, or complexification
- Academic and professional orientation conversion or refinement

While the mechanisms leading to change were consistent across participants (directed and diverse conversations; hermeneutical reflections; emotional disequilibrium; intercultural competence development; and student engagement in a classroom culture), not all participants were similarly or even equally affected. The time, intensity, and the contexts in which the changes emerged varied across participants, affecting the quality of the change, its depth, its breath, and perhaps its longevity.

Transcending Intercultural Sensitivity Development

Students demonstrated greater knowledge and understanding, more sensitivity during interactions, and increased conscious and deliberate adaptation of actions, suggesting gradual affective and behavioral changes. These evolutions were originally confined to the Israeli context, but some participants expressed that they had expanded their sensitivity to non-Israeli environments, as if this new sensitivity had moved from one area to expand to another. For example, participants actively looked for interactions with international students and migrant communities upon their return to their countries, suggesting breadth in their transformation. This finding demonstrates not only an affective change in self-perception and towards others, but also a change in behavior.

All participants attributed their increased interest in otherness to their STSA, making them want to deconstruct the meaning of "other." For example, Hailey explained that her experiences interacting with locals made her feel more comfortable with different people, transcending the context of the STSA, attesting of her perceived breadth of change, explaining she has been engaging with a variety of people and opinions since her return: "now [I'm] more confident in interacting with people who have different beliefs or opinions to mine, […] respecting, you know, their opinions, and their beliefs and their background."

Increased intercultural interaction confidence seems to be prompted by the amount and perceived quality of interactions. Students who had more interactions with locals perhaps enhanced interaction confidence and self-efficacy, which is consistent with the literature (Cubillos & Ilvento, 2012; Nguyen et al., 2018). Furthermore, students' efforts to understand locals during their time abroad indicate a shift in their worldview (Hoggan, 2016a), as measured by the BEVI scales, an instrument used to capture the depth of change in sociocultural openness (Wiley et al., 2021). To expand on this and on breadth of change, Katherine mentioned hoping to *"continue to practice the things that class […] made [her] aware of,"* which she perceived made her *"a better listener."* She noticed this improvement during a subsequent semester-long STSA in Jordan and upon her return to the United States. She reported:

> not trying to impose my own perspectives or allow my questions to get the information out of them that I'm looking for, but to just let them share with me what their perspective is of themselves, of their country, of their relationship to my country […].

Similarly, Alex described her STSA led her to change beyond the Israeli context, affecting her curiosity about other cultures, making her more interested in learning about her own cultures and being tolerant of, and comfortable around diverse opinions: "I love to interact with people that don't agree with the 'West' or my views. It really provides me with a nuanced idea of my own country and my own opinions." She perceived that the effect, transcending Israel, influenced her socialization since her return to the United States. She actively engaged with international students and opted to live with South American peers, clarifying that "When you engage in the international community, you don't want to leave[…]."

It seems like Alex's STSA in Israel was a turning point in her socialization. It is possible that the positive experience she associates with [host city], because of its "greater cultural distance" (Haredi-feminist/Arab), impacted her in a way that made her more accepting of certain types of otherness than culturally "closer" ones, perhaps making her more "culturally relative." Alex cited a controversy in her American university involving a racist photo posted on social media:

> I don't think that we should ostracize [the student who posted the photo] as a pariah of the community, I think this girl's ignorant […] we should educate her. I think we should welcome her back into the community after her education. [...] I am putting myself in her perspective right now […].

Learner Expectations and Behavior Alteration: Individual and Social Responsibility

All participants mentioned for example that their experiences in class made them reconsider teacher-student interactions and the role of educators. They all noted that they realized how instructors do not necessarily have to embody a finite knowledge. The other form of change as a student revolved around increased levels of criticality. All participants reported that they were more motivated and made efforts to educate themselves outside of class to confront sources—a new behavior, they noted, perhaps suggesting depth of change.

New Perspective on Teacher-Student Interactions

Sarah mentioned having new expectations of teacher-student interactions, and more systematically asking questions:

> My expectations for a teacher-student relationship changed a lot with Ehud's class because I think he encouraged us to ask a lot of questions (...). I guess [he] encouraged us a lot to feel like there doesn't have to be an answer.

Ehud himself explains that emotions have a central place in his course:

> one of the things that I do try to provide in this class is context to deal with these emotions. […] we talk about it, we try to understand it, we talk about it individually with some students, we talk about it as a group […]. It's not the kind of learning that students generally get to do.

Sarah's expectations of teacher-student interactions and participation were shared by all the other students who reported that their course experience "*widened [their] perception of a good teacher*": someone approachable, political while acknowledging biases, and modeling vulnerability thus affecting their class contributions.

A More Critical Epistemology

Participants reported they grew critical in diverse areas, becoming more analytical, engaged, and cautious with class readings and news. They displayed heightened criticality impacting their worldviews, mentioning exploring controversies from multiple perspectives, engaging with dissenting voices, and questioning their own views. For example, Hailey reported, six months after returning to Australia: "[I am] probably more critically aware than I was before. (…) [Now I] critically engage with given material that I might not have otherwise. It has also helped me to recognize the biases in Australian media and academic literature."

Similarly, Alex's search for various perspectives for her research project encouraged her to be increasingly active and critical. She mentioned that upon her return to the United States, her conference abstract on Haredi women self-actualization was accepted but she decided not to present, justifying *"I want to share it with people, but on my own terms and when I feel like it best reflects my goal: to accurately represent Haredi women."* Alex's decision suggests that beyond her individual responsibility to educate herself, she developed a sense of social responsibility to educate others, seemingly born in the agency she developed through conducting research. Social responsibility resonates with a commonly identified outcome of TL in the literature on STSA: gaining a sense of responsibility towards a larger circle.

The course research project was highly significant and had a positive impact on all participants. Alex's intention to present her findings on Haredi women self-actualization at a conference, followed by her decision to cancel the presentation, exemplified the concept of a public scholar, her growing sense of responsibility to share her knowledge with others. While most students developed a sense of urgency to educate themselves (Tarrant et al., 2015), Alex felt a social responsibility to educate both herself and others as well about underrepresented communities.

Returning to academia or pursuing a new STSA prompted participants to continue reflecting on their experiences. All participants, except Maria, resumed their studies after their STSA and found themselves thinking about their time abroad while in their classrooms. Alex noted that her courses in Scotland reminded her of the learning environment and inquiry freedom she experienced in Israel. Katherine had similar sentiments about her Middle East-focused courses on her American campus, constantly recalling her Israeli experiences.

Added Complexity Paving the Way for a (Nuanced) Ideological Reconstruction, Transition, or Complexification

Ideological shifts emerged from the data, specifically regarding Israel but transcending it at times. Some participants reported changes in their political views towards the Israeli government, its citizens, and conceptions of feminism. As the course instructor, Ehud, describes it, "you might believe something, but in Israel you have a meaningful experience with that thing and that changes, complicates, enriches, thickens your understanding of something."

Katherine acknowledged that interacting with locals of various perspectives broadened her understanding of the local conflict. Although her political stance did not shift, she observed that learning about both sides helped her get a more nuanced and informed understanding. She felt:

> open to various opinions that maybe I wouldn't have been otherwise […]. Being there and everything becoming, not clear in the sense that I understand, but clear in the sense that […] everything's entangled, made me understand, and not necessarily agree, but be willing to listen to various opinions.

Alex underwent significant changes in two areas. First, her views on Israel as a state and her preconceptions about Israelis and Jews transformed. Second, her learning about women's community expanded her perspective beyond Israel. These changes in her intercultural competence led her to question her previous assumptions, an ideological change she perceived to be an "*identity crisis*":

> I have become more sympathetic to a side that wasn't mine, which I even hate saying that I was on a side. (...) It was a little bit of an identity crisis because I had been subjected to so many pro-Palestinian ideologues before that.

Alex actively worked towards overcoming hasty generalizations and challenging her biases by engaging in meaningful interactions with individuals from various communities, leading her to deconstructing prior misconceptions:

> I was welcomed into a Jew's home [the instructor], I was given food, (...) material things by Jewish people. It's so trivial but debunks the whole 'Jews are cheap.' I know it sounds silly, but it carries over, right? It resonates with other stereotypes. (...) It's a small stereotype that's significant of the larger form of intolerance.

This quote, suggesting honesty and openness to uncomfortable thoughts and emotions, further indicates changes in one's sense of identity and self. Another salient instance of self-transformation, epistemological shift, and worldview change is evident in Alex reporting that conversations and interactions with ultra-orthodox women introduced her to diverse definitions of feminism and womanhood, prompting her to recognize that opinions she does not endorse "still have a seat at the table": "interacting with these women made me want to have that element of femininity that I did not have. I wanted to enhance my ability to feel feminine while being modest. I think my values changed personally […]."

Her instructor, Ehud, summarizes Alex's deep transformation: "there was growth in her understanding of what self-actualization means. […] she understands that there is a variety, and that one choice is not better or worse than the other necessarily." Exposure to diverse perspectives nurtures students' perspective consciousness (Hanvey, 1982) and peripheral vision (Stoddard & Cornwell, 2003), enhancing their global citizenship by actively exploring multiple viewpoints.

Academic and Professional Orientation Conversion or Refinement

STSA experiences had varying impacts on academic and professional orientations. Although not a complete shift in career plans, students became more critical of their career choices, explored new interests, and redefined professional expectations. For example, Maria volunteered to teach Danish to immigrants a few months after her STSA in Israel, a decision potentially influenced by her research on immigration laws and language policies. Interestingly, Maria seems to be the most active student to be explicitly socially involved to pursue social equity. It is challenging to directly attribute her social involvement and desire for societal change to the STSA, but her focus on newly arrived populations in Denmark may have been reinforced by her observations in Israel.

Alex's research project on Haredi women during her STSA increased her interest in religion, leading her to declare a dual major in religious studies upon her return. She expressed a desire to pursue graduate studies in philosophy and work on theology and interfaith dialogue for women. Alex credits her STSA for the change in her academic and professional orientation, stating *"now it's my goal in academia to create and foster an environment of interfaith dialogue so we don't have these problems anymore."*

> Israel changed my life.(...) I went in very confused about my major, I wasn't as interested in religion, and I came out wanting to provide a platform for women, regardless of their belief. Extreme, fundamental, liberal, I wanted to create a better vocal table for everyone, so we can discuss our beliefs in an environment that is inclusive, includes marginalized representations, has conflicting views. (...) I learned that conflict is good.

Alex emphasized that the impact of her STSA was of a rare intensity, a "*sublime experience*" that was positively transformative, but also uncomfortable and disconcerting:

> The overall experience of it was so groundbreaking to the formation of my academic and professional identity that I could never replicate the experience, but if I could, I don't think I would do it, because what I have right now is SO GREAT from it that I don't want to touch it. (...) I don't want to have another mind-boggling experience.

These quotes reflect enhanced self-awareness and increased comfort with challenging thoughts and emotions, indicating a deepening of self and ontological change. This aligns with the BEVI's measurement of depth of TL (Wiley et al., 2021). Katherine shared that her interest in journalism and the Middle East became more personal and reflective of her professional stance during her STSA. She "*became open to the possibility of interning or working in Israel*" rather than limiting herself to neighboring countries, while also questioning the relationship between her faith, the land, and her career orientation:

> it wasn't my place to be my gaining from an Israeli and Palestinian issue. (...) I'll never have a sense of ownership over that space and those places. Those events will never be mine, […]. I am Christian and some of those spaces are tied to my faith, and so that's one thing that's still very hard: what part of this is mine and what part of it do I have to respect as not being something for me to approach? I'm still trying to figure out... How much can I emotionally attach myself to the place without being disrespectful? How much can I claim it as part of my identity without being inappropriate? What sense of ownership do I have over that space as someone who's studying it versus someone who has heritage there?

The data indicates that participants experienced both depth and breadth of change during their STSA. Depth reflects a profound transformation on a specific issue or aspect of their perspective, possibly confined to the STSA and Israeli context or shaking them to their core. On the other hand, breadth demonstrates an extension and transcendence of the initial impact, going beyond the STSA and Israeli contexts and showing effects upon their return, once students are aware of how much they changed. Although depth and breadth are intertwined and challenging to differentiate, students tend to be more aware of the breadth of change once they confront the depth of their transformation in their environment post-STSA. Additionally, assessing the permanence of change only a few months after the STSA remains challenging, despite data collection at various points during the STSA and several months later.

Intercultural sensitivity, as outlined by Bennett (2013), is an ongoing process on a continuum with potential setbacks. Despite the absence of pre-post quantitative data in the present study, students maintained a connection to their STSA experiences through academic pursuits and subsequent STSA opportunities, exemplified by Alex (Scotland) and Katherine (Jordan). This observation aligns with Rowan-Kenyon and Niehaus (2011), emphasizing that sustained engagement fosters the further development of the experience's meaning, underlining the relational importance of understanding our experiences. Notably, participants' intercultural sensitivity continued evolving after returning home, possibly facilitated by strong connections within their STSA community. While all participants reported heightened intercultural sensitivity beyond the Israeli context, Alex and Katherine particularly insisted on the connection with the STSA curriculum and their change.

Contrary to the findings of Stone et al. (2017) and Nguyen et al. (2018) regarding the positive impact of prior international and intercultural experiences on TL, the present findings, despite a small sample size, challenge this idea. Participants with less experience seem to report not only a deeper, but also a broader transformation, while students with more experience experienced less intense and broad TL. Similarly, Nguyen et al. (2018), in their study comparing multi- and monocultural students, found that multicultural students, as they tend to start with a higher cultural intelligence than monocultural peers, appeared to benefit less quantitatively from STSA, yet qualitative data revealed unique benefits. Although participants in the present study (aside from Alex) identified as monocultural, they had all spent time outside of their home country, be it through traveling, internships, or volunteering abroad. Surprisingly, students with limited prior international exposure, specifically Alex, Katherine, and Hailey, reported a deeper and broader change in their holistic intercultural competence, especially in terms of immediate affective and behavioral changes toward respect and curiosity for other ways of being in the world.

A common temptation in research is to speculate about the correlation between prior international travel and higher intercultural competence resulting from subsequent STSA. While this study refrains from comparing pre- and post- STSA intercultural competence to predict higher competence, it suggests that students with limited short family-travel experience exhibit more radical change. Maria's extensive volunteer experiences might overshadow her Israel trip, possibly desensitizing her to milder intensity situations. Her delayed recognition of change may stem from everyday multicultural interactions in Denmark and volunteer stints in India and Venezuela, more intense experiences which could have disrupted her more than Israel, considered to be "*fairly similar to Denmark.*" On the other hand, Katherine, with only one international travel was a trip to Brazil before her STSA, reported a more intense transformation than students with broader international exposure, supporting McKeown's findings (2009) who argues that the effect of STSA seems to be stronger with students with little international exposure. The present study also seems to support Pedersen's point (2010) that intervention is significant for students who have never been abroad, but again, the temptation is great to try to categorize who benefits the most from STSA.

Building on the transformative impact of STSA experiences, students' encounters in the classroom not only shaped their sense of self as learners but also influenced the expectations of behavior they held for their peers and themselves. The classroom dynamics revealed a distinctive shift, where the emphasis on discussing unknowns, asking questions, and openly acknowledging ignorance surpassed the pursuit of impressing professors and peers. This shift aligns, to some extent, with the observations of Coker et al. (2018), who argued contribution to class discussion was particularly salient in semester-long study abroad. Within this context, students demonstrated a transformation not only in their self-perception but also in their behavior concerning the emotions they experienced in their classroom community. The shared vulnerability within the group chased away the pretense of possessing exhaustive knowledge. The alteration in the sense of self, particularly in relation to diversity and classroom community, stands out as a potential outcome in the TL literature, as noted by Sohn (2021). However, its connection to classroom communities and subsequent changes in student behavior remains underexplored in the STSA literature.

The reported heightened criticality shaping students' worldviews resonates with the depth of change associated with global resonance, sociocultural openness, and epistemological shift rooted in transcending basic determinism and complexifying explanations of the world, as outlined in the BEVI scales (Wiley et al., 2021). This profound epistemological change appears to be influenced by students' discussions with diverse people during their research projects, illustrating not only shifts in epistemic beliefs and autonomous engagement with various ways of learning, but also a heightened level of self-awareness, which echoes Wiley et al. (2021). Within the TL literature, changes in epistemology, or "habits of mind" (Mezirow, 2000) are commonly reported. Although Bongila's (2022) study does not refer to TL per se but rather to the

effects of Global Positioning Leadership pedagogy, their findings on students participating in STSA in Cuba and Brazil support similar changes in worldview thanks to the confrontation to contrasting knowledge during their sojourns and tensions between their previously help beliefs and new knowledge. In the context of the present study, participants exhibited more discriminating and autonomous views of explanations and information, reflecting a newfound ability to construct their opinions on various topics. This new critical epistemology was paired with new tangible behaviors such as feeling empowered to conduct research, challenge sources, and develop ideas, instead of merely echoing opinions from authoritative figures. This dual evolution suggests a depth and breadth in the transformation experienced by the students.

The students' transformation emerging in the findings appears to be at the convergence of epistemological, worldview, and self-aspects, according to Hoggan's typology (2016a), suggesting connections with what Wiley et al. (2021) identify as the meeting point of "self-awareness" and "meaning quest" on the BEVI scales. This meeting point reveals a profound sense of caring and responsibility for the disempowered, pointing to a depth of change. While previous studies on the outcomes of STSA have often centered around ecology and sustainability (Bell et al., 2014; Landon et al., 2017; McLaughlin et al., 2018), the findings presented here highlight a distinctive aspect: participants demonstrated a sense of empowerment and social responsibility (Hoggan, 2016a, 2016b) transcending their own communities and those encountered in Israel. This sense of responsibility might have started as that of a savior of the host community but then evolved into that of an educator of their own communities, recognizing the ongoing work that needs to be done on themselves and their peers.

Research on STSA and TL commonly indicates that questioning one's views and seeking understanding of others' perspectives (Coker et al., 2018) leads to increased knowledge and empathy. Engaging in non-transactional conversations with locals exposed students to differing and sometimes conflicting views, challenging stereotypes, and broadening their understanding of local and global politics. These experiences prompted an ideological shift and expansion of political views, as well as a deeper comprehension of feminism. Through reflective discussions and a supportive classroom environment, learners became more critical, inclusive, and empathetic, echoing Mezirow's (2009) change in meaning structure. However, it appears that the present TL outcomes in the present study transcended a mere change in these meaning structures. This change in worldview, becoming more complex and comprehensive, seems to be a direct outcome of TL.

The openness to uncomfortable thoughts and emotions indicates changes in one's sense of identity and self, a point echoed in MacCartney and Parsons' (2023) study emphasizing the centrality of emotions and vulnerability on student transformation in study abroad sojourns. This aspect is also salient in Jones' and colleagues (2023) study on pre-service teachers in Ethiopia, which explores the impact of students' emotions on their future selves, including future education goals.

Despite the positive effects of inquiry-based learning abroad, and the lack of documented research on students' engagement in research abroad, these aspects are often overlooked in the literature, including in reports like Open Doors. While Alex did not explicitly attribute her desire to pursue graduate education to inquiry-based learning, such a finding seems aligned with Hathaway and colleagues' argument (2002) that undergraduate research, whether abroad or not, can foster interest in pursuing advanced studies. Streitwieser's (2009) assertion that undergraduate research can profoundly explore the meaning of global citizenship through immersive study in another culture further emphasizes the importance of inquiry-based learning for developing research appreciation and students' intercultural growth. While formal research training may be more suited for students pursuing rigorous research, introductory research through STSA can significantly impact students' quest for understanding.

Although Müller's (2023) study suggests a decrease in the flow of motivation over time due to the lack of integration of STSA experiences with university curriculum, returning to an academic setting, especially with a focus on the STSA location, seemed to sustain the reflective cycle initiated in the STSA for the current participants. This phenomenon may help explain why all participants, except Maria, underwent more intense changes. Notably, Katherine and Alex, who maintained regular contact with their instructor, through emails and meetings during breaks, may have further facilitated their reflective process. Despite the absence of a structured post-STSA set of activities and reflections, the continuous contact and reflective cycle among these students align with the arguments from Vande Berg and colleagues (2007; 2009; 2012), Pedersen (2010), Almeida (2020), and Jackson (2015) advocating for ongoing support, including cultural mentoring, throughout the STSA cycle to foster intercultural development and potentially support long-term transformation.

Building on the transformative outcomes observed, as highlighted in the preceding paragraphs, it is frequent for students to plan to incorporate STSA influence into future career trajectories, even a few months upon their return, a trend noted by Müller (2023). While longer study abroad programs have been known to influence participants' academic and career plans (Geyer et al., 2017; Norris & Gillespie, 2009), limited literature exists on such effects specifically related to STSA programs. However, the data in this study reveals that several participants directly and explicitly reevaluated their

professional goals after their short sojourns, thereby contributing to the existing literature. These findings align with previous research on STSA and TL, where self-awareness gained during STSA can provide new perspectives on future possibilities (Vatalaro et al., 2015).

The increased respect for others and heightened intercultural sensitivity observed in the present study are intimately connected to the students' pursuit of justice and equity through social action, representing what Inglis (1997) considers to be the ultimate goal or outcome of TL. Social action is demonstrated through various behaviors resulting from other TL outcomes, indicating that changes in worldview, epistemology, and self, lead to a desire for action and influence behavior. These layers of change seem to be highlighting the interdependence of TL dimensions (Pang, 2023) and lend support to the idea that change stems from a gestalt of STSA and previous experiences (Chiocca, 2021). The interconnectedness of these dimensions further emphasizes the holistic impact of STSA programs on students, extending beyond personal development to encompass their career aspirations and their commitment to social change.

Implications and Conclusion

This article explores transformative learning in a STSA program, examining participants' descriptions of change, including depth, breadth, and near-term effects, six to eight months after their return. It contributes to the literature on STSA programs and their TL outcomes, employing a TL framework.

According to the findings, the participants perceived they all changed in four different areas:
- Intercultural sensitivity development
- Learner expectations and behavior alteration
- Ideological reconstruction or transition
- Academic and professional orientation conversion or refinement

Data was collected through students' papers, surveys, and in-depth interviews. As a researcher-participant, my field notes along with the rest of the data collected, were analyzed to triangulate timelines, field trip and assignment topics. Perspective transformation experiences and types of change were identified and compared across participants.

This study contributes to the literature by highlighting the broader impact of STSA programs. It reveals that even short programs as brief as four weeks can lead to deep and broad transformations. The observed changes varied between gradual shifts and sudden transformations, but they all interconnected and extended beyond the STSA context, both geographically and ideologically. Hoggan's (2016a) TL typology and constructs served as the analytical framework, while other concepts helped elucidate the specific types of changes students underwent. Increased knowledge about host communities was accompanied by transformations of self, fostering greater confidence and empowerment. These changes positively influenced emotions towards oneself and the host communities, prompting conscious adaptation of behavior in different host country contexts. Simultaneously, participants demonstrated unconscious behavioral changes, such as interacting differently with individuals holding differing views or engaging in social action transcending Israel. These unconscious behavioral changes enhanced intercultural sensitivity, resulting in a more nuanced and accepting approach to differing ideologies. Students also questioned their academic and career orientations or practices, either through a clear rupture with previous plans or through a smoother transition. The described changes were exemplified through stories from Israel but extended to contexts transcending the STSA program both in time and space.

To fully qualify as TL outcomes, evidence of "relative stability" is necessary, indicating that the changes are not temporary (Hoggan, 2016a, 2016b). As noted by Müller (2023), many studies on TL in studying abroad lack near and long-term data collection, making it important for future research to investigate the lasting effects of STSA programs by following students over an extended period.

It is challenging to attribute the outcomes of TL solely to the STSA or to the ongoing reflection throughout the experience and leading up to the interviews. TL outcomes, like any learning, are subject to individual narratives and reassessment (Dewey, 1934). However, the reported changes, or TL outcomes experienced by the participants, were profound and a had significant impact on the students, extending beyond their experiences abroad into various contexts, transcending Israel or academic environments.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Implications for TL and international education include the extent and lasting impact of TL are not solely determined by program length, but rather influenced by individual and program-specific factors.

Limited data suggests that students with limited meaningful international exposure are more likely to experience deep, broad, and long-lasting transformative learning outcomes, contrary to previous studies. To enhance this potential, global education offices should focus on recruiting such students for STSA programs and consider utilizing recent returnees with limited international travel as peer-mentors to engage with interested students. This approach can facilitate the development of an attainable vision of future-self, utilizing what Vygotsky (1978) refers to as the zone of proximal development.

Students can extend and solidify the impact of their STSA experience by pursuing related academic majors, volunteering with immigrants, participating in subsequent study abroad programs, maintaining contact with their instructor, or staying connected with their study abroad group. Institutions can support this process by creating systematic opportunities for students to re-engage with their learning and share the effects of their experience. This can be accomplished through post-STSA courses, conferences on student learning, or events that facilitate the sharing of their insights. Additionally, pairing domestic students with international or exchange students and providing local volunteer opportunities can further facilitate the sharing and application of their learning.

Educators should create disorienting dilemmas to challenge students' existing perspectives and promote critical thinking, to lead to an "elaboration, confirmation, or creation of a scheme" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 108). Exposing students to diverse perspectives while studying abroad or in education in general is crucial for fostering reflection and avoiding mindless learning and a focus on closed-ended answers. Reflective research projects are an effective strategy for this purpose. For example, in this study, a student's perception of ultra-orthodox communities as antithetical to feminism was challenged by exposing them to a self-described Haredi feminist. Faculty members should familiarize themselves with student views and create situations that appear paradoxical to those views.

In faculty-led programs, instructors who possess deep knowledge of the local context, beyond their specific content area, serve as effective mentors for encouraging student reflection on their positionality. However, an even more powerful approach to foster critical self-reflection and challenge biases is for faculty members to be approachable, open, and available outside the classroom. Engaging with students in a vulnerable manner and acknowledging that faculty members don't need to have all the answers, can have a significant impact.

When collecting data on TL and STSA, it is valuable to go beyond asking participants about their perceived intercultural competence development. Conducting interviews a few months after their return and prompting them to provide specific examples of how they have changed encourages deeper reflection. This approach helps unpack different forms of change and assesses whether the change is enduring or influenced by the euphoria of returning home and societal expectations of study abroad experiences.

The key takeaway is to consider how we can effectively prepare students for the changes they may experience while studying abroad.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has four main limitations: limited generalizability due to a small sample size. Second, self-reported data may be influenced by participant selectivity and social desirability bias. Third, recall bias could occur as participants' stories may focus on specific aspects, overlooking others due to "meanings are situated" (Ezzy, 2002, p. 81). However, the instructor's interview and participant stories aid understanding change in various contexts. Fourth, my involvement in the STSA program introduces potential bias, which was mitigated by bracketing, reflection, triangulation, and member-checks (Yin, 2017). The study's timeframe (about six to eight months post-STSA) restricts long-term change assessment, suggesting a need for later-stage data collection, especially with the ever-evolving situation in Israel. Future research could explore STSA program effects on subsequent study abroad experiences.

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Empirical Article

Perceptions and Measures to Improve Teaching Quality at a University in Urban Nigeria

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Abstract

This quantitative survey study investigated the perceptions and measures to improve teaching quality in the Department of Educational Management and Policy at a university in urban Nigeria. The study comprised a sample size of 103 respondents including 52 lecturers and 51 final-year students in the 2021/2022 academic year. The researcher-developed instrument entitled Teaching Quality Questionnaire (TQQ) was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by three experts in the field of educational research. The reliability index of the instrument was determined using the Cronbach alpha technique, and a reliability coefficient of 0.86 was obtained. Data collected were analyzed using mean ratings. Findings indicated high perceptions of the teaching quality of lecturers. However, major discrepancies between the perceptions of lecturers and students were discovered. In addition, the findings also identified measures to improve teaching quality in the institution, such as knowledge of subject content, effective feedback mechanisms, high student assessment, and a safe learning environment, among others. Based on the findings, recommendations include encouraging lecturers to engage in one-to-one interactions with students, providing staff development opportunities on effective classroom management, and organizing student engagement activities under the supervision of the department head.

Keywords: teaching quality, classroom management, student engagement, student/teacher relationship, educational management, educational policy

Introduction

Teaching can generally be defined as the art of conveying knowledge, skills, and information to students. Quality teaching is described by Sahat (2014) as teaching that produces desired outcomes such as students' acquisition of skills, knowledge, and understanding. To be described as quality, teaching must have an impact on learners. Some educational researchers have identified indicators of quality teaching, which include teacher qualification, teacher characteristics, teacher practices, and teacher effectiveness (Toropova et al., 2019). Teachers' qualifications include credentials, knowledge, and experience; teachers' characteristics cover attitude and class behavior, while teachers' practices include teaching

strategies and methodologies employed by the teacher (Goe & Stickler, 2008). The overall aim of these indicators is to achieve high student learning outcomes. Teachers have numerous roles, which include helping students understand the course content, providing extra help to students when needed, listening to their ideas, and answering their questions during and after instruction (Klusmann et al., 2016). There are many factors that contribute to the quality of teacher teaching for achieving high student learning outcomes, such as teacher qualification, characteristics, practices, and effectiveness.

In Nigeria, the Ministry of Education comprises 40 universities, while state governments maintain 44 universities; additionally, there are 69 private universities (Agbu, 2017). One of the goals of higher education in Nigeria is to contribute to national development through high-level manpower training which promotes valuable skills, aptitude, attitudes, knowledge, morals, values, and creative abilities (FGN, 2013). Moreover, the aim of all universities in Nigeria is to provide quality learning opportunities to students (FGN, 2013). Universities actively pursue this goal by employing qualified personnel, admitting hardworking students, encouraging research, and providing quality teaching and learning (Agbu, 2017). The Department of Educational Management and Policy (EMP) at the university under study in Nigeria offers 28 courses to students from the first year to the final year. The university will be referred to as "AP University" (pseudonym). Students also have the option to select additional education-related subjects as electives from 13 other departments. The reason behind this is to prepare students to develop expertise in specific teaching subjects for teaching practice purposes. In addition, it is important to expand the knowledge base of the department. The departmental courses aim to develop students' administrative knowledge and skills, preparing them to become effective and efficient educational leaders and managers.

Although there is a focus on improving quality in Nigerian universities, problems persist that can hinder quality teaching and outcomes. A major problem in Nigerian universities is the lack of quality educators. There are also concerns about the quality of doctoral dissertations and the research training that students receive (Agu & Odimegwu, 2014). According to a Nigerian Federal Ministry of Education (2018) report, there is a need to focus more on fairness and dealing with other social problems that impact higher education. The report also highlights other issues inhibiting the development of Nigerian universities including governance, infrastructure, curricula, disruptions to learning that are primarily caused by strikes, access and equity, and funding problems (Nigerian Federal Ministry of Education, 2018). Despite efforts to improve quality in Nigerian universities, persistent problems, including a lack of quality educators, continue to impede development. Addressing these challenges, such as governance, infrastructure, curricula, disruptions to learning, access and equity, and funding, are vital for sustainable development and improving learning outcomes in Nigerian higher education.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions of teaching quality among lecturers and students in the Department of Educational Management and Policy and to identify measures for enhancing their teaching effectiveness. There is a dearth of research that explores teaching quality from both the lecturer and student perspective in the higher education context in Nigeria. Hence, there is a need to contribute to the limited existing literature on teaching quality in Nigerian higher education. This study can be significant because it came at a time when the World University Ranking 2023 edition placed the "AP University" (pseudonym) among the top 1,501 universities in the world. This was seen as a significant improvement from its former rank of 2,988. It became necessary that the university focus on continuous improvement through effective teaching, learning, and research. Additionally, this study is aligned with the national goals of higher education in Nigeria, and thus it is critical to further examine lecturer and student perceptions of instruction in the Nigerian university context. It is against this backdrop that this study was carried out to investigate the perceptions of students and lecturers on teaching quality and to identify possible measures of improvement. Finally, the study's research questions focus on the perceptions of teaching quality and measures for improvement, shedding light on the views of both lecturers and students. By understanding these perceptions and identifying effective measures, the study aims to contribute to the ongoing improvement of instructional practices, leading to better learning outcomes and overall educational experiences. Specifically, the study explores the perceptions of teaching quality among lecturers and students during instructional delivery in the Department of Educational Management and Policy. The study also aims to identify measures

for improving the teaching quality of lecturers in the Department of Educational Management and Policy. The following research questions guided the study:

Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions of the teaching quality of lecturers in the Department of Educational Management and Policy?
2 .What are the measures for improving the teaching quality of lecturers in the Department of Educational Management and Policy?

Literature Review

Teaching quality has been discussed in various studies as a factor influencing student achievement (La Velle & Flores, 2018; Osakwe, 2014; Ruiz-Alfonso et al., 2020; Scherer et al., 2016; Skourdoumbis, 2017). Researchers have also characterized it as both the problem and solution to student performance (Baroutsis, 2016; Sahat, 2014). Teaching quality is defined by Henard and Leprince-Ringuet (2008) as teachers' attention to the class level they are teaching and their academic progress, the certainty of what the class requires for productive learning, understandable explanations, respect for students' opinions, and encouragement of students' independent thought during instructional delivery. Xhaferi (2017) posited that the knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and disposition a teacher brings into their profession could predict students' achievement. Teaching quality includes a wide range of dimensions and factors that contribute to positive educational outcomes and transform students from passive to active learners (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2005). Teaching quality is also connected to teachers' performance, knowledge, and creativity (Blanton et al., 2006). However, it is important to note that there is no universal or standard definition of teaching quality (Barnes & Cross, 2018) due to the complexity of teaching quality and the influence of multiple variables (Fenstermacher & Richardson, 2005). Despite the difficulty in precisely defining teaching quality, it has emerged as a global concern in education, necessitating further research and understanding of the outcomes of quality teaching (Lingard & Lewis, 2017).

A study conducted in the United States by Haskins and Loeb (2007) examined how to improve the quality of teaching and highlighted that good teachers can enhance student achievement. Furthermore, students who receive quality teaching over consecutive years demonstrate cumulative gains in achievement. Haskins and Loeb (2007) also proposed a five-part plan for improving teaching quality, which includes rethinking entry requirements, implementing strategies to identify effective teachers, promoting effective teachers, providing bonuses to teachers working with disadvantaged students, and linking professional development to teachers' work.

Additionally, research by Lee (2018) addressed an important issue related to teaching quality, namely its correlation with student performance and achievement. Lee (2018) argued that it is incorrect to solely attribute student performance to teaching quality, as there are other factors that may influence it. These factors play a significant role in how students acquire and apply what they have been taught. The researcher identified common features associated with teaching quality including classroom management, cognitive activation, student engagement, and student support. In conclusion, Lee's research underscores the complex nature of student performance and its connection to teaching quality, emphasizing that factors beyond instruction alone impact student success. The proceeding sections focus on classroom management and student engagement.

Classroom Management

Classroom management is an important issue in teaching and learning and a crucial part of teachers' success in creating a safe and effective learning environment for students' quality education (Nwankwo et al., 2019). It refers to the tactics adopted by teachers to ensure decorum in the classroom thus creating a conducive atmosphere for learning to take place during instruction (Asiyai, 2011). Additionally, classroom management helps to create an enabling environment for teaching and learning to run smoothly without disruption from students. Proper classroom management helps maintain students' focus during instructional delivery. It involves techniques such as a positive attitude, happy facial expressions,

encouraging statements, respectful and fair treatment of students, a well-lit classroom, understanding students' behavior; fostering productive teacher-student relationships; time consciousness, setting classroom expectations, proper class organization, preventing disruptive behavior in class, and many more (Crisis Prevention Institute, 2021). Effective classroom management starts with student compliance and orderliness since learning cannot happen when students disrupt other students and are inattentive (Glossary of Education Reform, 2014). It is one of the important criteria for assessing teaching effectiveness, and quality teaching is dependent on teachers' ability to manage and control classroom instruction (Asiyai, 2011). The ability to effectively manage the classroom is a major factor in evaluating teaching effectiveness and highlights the importance of instructional skills in fostering a learning environment that facilitates successful instructional delivery and student learning.

Student Engagement

Student engagement refers to the level of attention, curiosity, and interest students show during instructional delivery (Glossary of Education Reform, 2016). Learning improves when students are inquisitive, interested, or inspired. On the other hand, learning suffers when students are bored, dispassionate, or disengaged (Glossary of Education Reform, 2016). Student engagement is malleable, and teachers can design contexts and tasks that either encourage or discourage it (Parsons et al., 2014). It is also defined as the activities students participate in to achieve desired school outcomes (Stephens, 2020). In summary, student engagement plays a critical role in the learning process as it reflects the level of attention, curiosity, and interest demonstrated by students during lessons. When students are actively engaged in classes, their learning experiences are enriched, leading to improved outcomes.

There is a consensus among scholars that student engagement consists of affective engagement, behavior engagement, and cognitive engagement (Parsons et al., 2014). These three aspects of engagement have been observed by the researcher as a necessary component of effective teaching. Cognitive engagement involves students being mentally stimulated in the learning process. It is centered on their perseverance to know more and understand difficult concepts (Parsons et al., 2014). Teachers engage students cognitively by giving them complex tasks that will stimulate them to engage in a deeper mental investigation of the subject matter (Lipowsky et al., 2009). This enables them to reflect more and find solutions to problems. Thus, student engagement encompasses affective, behavioral, and cognitive dimensions, with cognitive engagement playing a vital role in effective teaching. By stimulating students' mental processes and encouraging their understanding of complex concepts, educators can foster a deeper level of learning.

Affective engagement deals with students' feelings toward the school; it also involves students' interest and curiosity around specific learning topics and tasks (Fredricks & McColskey, 2012). Finally, behavioral engagement includes students' active participation in tasks in school; attendance in classes, attention during instruction, and adherence to rules and regulations (Fredricks & McColskey, 2012). Active participation in class activities inspires students to be more engaged (Merho, 2022). Furthermore, student engagement can be fostered through the following practices:
- linking student's prior knowledge to content (Loughran, 2018)
- conceptual understanding of the content of instruction by teachers will make it easier for them to respond to students' difficulties in understanding concepts (Loughran, 2018)
- Nurturing student–student relations (Bailey & Lee, 2021) and teacher-student relationships (Lee, 2018; Lee & Bailey, 2016; McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015).

Close and supportive relationships between students and teachers are necessary for quality teaching to take place in schools. Students are more likely to feel closer to teachers who express an interest in their well-being and provide support for them when needed (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015). A positive teacher-student relationship promotes a positive attitude in students, increases one–on–one time with students, and helps teachers treat students fairly (Pino-James, 2015). In the student/teacher relationship, students learn from teachers while teachers observe how students respond to didactic methods, and together both successfully achieve academic goals (Merho, 2022).

Teachers can also create meaningful learning activities by connecting with students' previous knowledge and experiences, providing learning activities that are slightly beyond students' current level of competence, and helping students engage more by welcoming their ideas and opinions into the flow of the activity (Pino-James, 2015). Teachers could also introduce students to collaborative learning which is a powerful tool to activate students' cognitive faculties and problem-solving skills (Suruchi & Sunil, 2017). Effective teaching involves creating meaningful learning activities that connect with students' prior knowledge and experiences. By designing tasks that slightly challenge students' current level of competence and by actively welcoming their ideas and opinions, teachers can enhance student engagement and promote deeper learning.

Ofeimu and Kolawole (2017) conducted a study in Nigeria to find out the extent teacher qualification determines student academic performance. The result of the study indicated that the level of teacher qualification did not significantly influence the academic performance of secondary school students. This suggests that a teacher's effectiveness in the class does not depend on his or her qualifications; the findings also discourage the common belief by many school managers that the higher the degree the more productive the teacher will be. It also proves that there could be other factors responsible for student academic performance in the school apart from teacher quality.

The importance of student achievement has led scholars to develop practical ways of improving quality teaching and learning in institutions of learning. Some of these practices include:

- Teachers should have high expectations for their students.
- Teachers should explicitly explain knowledge and concepts to students.
- Teachers should have effective feedback mechanisms that will provide students with information about their performance and the areas they need to improve during instruction.
- Teachers should use data to identify students' learning needs.
- High student assessment should be paramount in the learning process.
- Effective classroom management will address disengagement and disruptive behaviors.
- Promoting a safe and supportive learning environment.
- Collaboration among teachers will lead to best practices (Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, 2020).

Methodology

The quantitative survey study aimed to explore the perceptions of students and lecturers on the teaching quality of lecturers during instructional delivery and to identify measures for improving teaching in the Department of Educational Management and Policy at the university under study. The population of the study consists of 174 respondents, which include 78 lecturers and 96 final-year students in the department based on available data in the Department of Educational Management and Policy. The reason for using final-year students for the study was because they have experienced first-hand the teaching skills and methodology of most lecturers in the department. It was believed that they would be in the best position to give information on their lecturers' teaching qualities.

A purposive sampling technique was used to select 51 students and 52 lecturers based on their availability at the time of the study. One questionnaire was used in this study, titled "Teaching Quality Questionnaire" (TQQ), to elicit responses from lecturers and students. The questionnaire has sections "A and B," which contain 26 items that obtained participant responses in the areas of classroom management practices, student engagement practices, and the possible ways of improving the teaching quality of lecturers in the department.

The test instrument was subjected to content and face validity by three experts in the faculty of Education, one from a department of education in the United States and two from the department under study. Questions were constructed based on similar teaching quality scales but were developed specifically for the Nigerian higher education context. To find the degree of internal consistency of the test items, Cronbach's alpha was used and a reliability coefficient of 0.86 was obtained.

One hundred and three copies of questionnaires were administered by the researcher and two research assistants and were retrieved and used for analysis. Responses (see Table 1) were based on a Likert-like scale of Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Disagreed (D), and Strongly Disagreed (SD). Data were analyzed using mean ratings and standard deviation. A criterion mean of 2.5 and above was used to accept an item, while below 2.5 was rejected. The left column includes the lecturers' responses, while the right column includes the students' responses.

Results

This section presents the results of the study. Table 1 provides the mean ratings and standard deviation scores on perceptions of the teaching quality of lecturers.

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of the teaching quality of lecturers in the Department of Educational Management and Policy?

Table 1

Mean Ratings and Standard Deviation Scores on Perceptions of Teaching Quality of Lecturers

S/N	ITEMS	Lecturers ($n = 52$)			Students ($n = 51$)		
		Mean	SD	Decision	Mean	SD	Decision
1	My class is usually well-organized	3.18	0.78	Agree	3.16	0.83	Agree
2	Lecturers are punctual to class	3.38	0.63	Agree	2.92	0.84	Agree
3	Lecturers use teaching time effectively	3.46	0.64	Agree	2.73	2.92	Agree
4	Lecturers control disruptive behavior effectively	3.15	0.54	Agree	3.33	0.77	Agree
5	Lecturers prohibit the use of cell phones during instructional delivery	3.38	0.63	Agree	3.45	0.78	Agree
6	Lecturers shun chorus answers	3.38	0.49	Agree	3.12	0.86	Agree
7	Lecturers ask for students' opinions during class discussions	3.23	0.43	Agree	3.02	0.62	Agree
8	Lectures are usually interesting	3.46	0.50	Agree	3.00	0.75	Agree
9	Students pay close attention during instructional delivery	3.15	0.36	Agree	3.39	0.60	Agree
10	Lecturers ask lots of questions during class instruction	2.85	0.54	Agree	3.10	0.61	Agree
11	Students are involved during class activities	3.46	0.50	Agree	3.27	0.80	Agree
12	Lecturers connect to students' previous knowledge during instructional delivery	3.23	0.43	Agree	2.92	0.84	Agree
13	Lecturers encourage students' collaboration during class activities	3.23	0.58	Agree	3.14	0.85	Agree
14	Lecturers motivate students to explain concepts in their own words	3.08	0.27	Agree	3.00	0.72	Agree
15	Lecturers assess students' understanding during instruction	3.00	0.56	Agree	2.88	0.79	Agree
16	Students stay after class to seek information on what has been taught	2.31	0.61	Disagree	2.10	0.78	Disagree
17	Students seek lecturers' counsel on their learning challenges	2.92	0.62	Agree	2.39	0.92	Disagree
18	Students interact with lecturers easily	2.46	0.50	Agree	2.31	0.84	Disagree
	Cluster Mean	**3.13**	**0.53**	**Agree**	**2.90**	**0.90**	**Agree**

As shown in Table 1, items 1–15 have mean scores above the cut-off mean of 2.50 for both lecturers and students and this indicates their agreement with the items as their perceptions of the teaching quality of lecturers. On the other hand, the mean ratings of both lecturers and students for item 16 fell below the acceptable mean score of 2.50, indicating their disagreement

with the item as part of the teaching quality of lecturers. The results further reveal that lecturers agreed with items 17 and 18 as part of their teaching quality, while students disagreed with the items.

The cluster standard deviation scores of 0.53 and 0.90 for lecturers and students, respectively, indicated that their responses in each item were close to the mean, implying that their responses were homogenous. The cluster mean of 3.13 and 2.90 for lecturers and students, respectively, are above the cut-off mean of 2.50, and this shows high perceptions of the teaching quality of lecturers in the Department of Educational Management and Policy.

Table 2 provides mean ratings and standard deviation scores on measures for improving the teaching quality of lectures.

Research Question 2: What are the measures for improving the teaching quality of lecturers in the Department of Educational Management and Policy?

Table 2

Mean Ratings and Standard Deviation Scores on Measures for Improving Teaching Quality of Lectures

S/N	ITEMS	Lecturers ($n = 52$)			Students ($n = 51$)		
		Mean	SD	Decision	Mean	SD	Decision
19	Lecturers should have high expectations from their students	2.77	0.43	Agree	2.96	0.82	Agree
20	Lecturers should have good subject content knowledge	3.62	0.49	Agree	3.59	0.50	Agree
21	Lecturers should develop effective feedback mechanisms	3.38	0.49	Agree	3.31	0.62	Agree
22	Lecturers should use data to note where students' learning needs are more	3.00	0.79	Agree	3.12	0.79	Agree
23	High student assessment should be paramount	3.31	0.47	Agree	3.35	0.74	Agree
24	Effective classroom management should be emphasized	3.54	0.50	Agree	3.16	0.81	Agree
25	A safe learning environment should be promoted	3.46	0.50	Agree	3.57	0.54	Agree
26	Collaboration among lecturers will produce best practices	3.38	0,49	Agree	3.10	1.01	Agree
	Cluster Mean	**3.31**	**0.52**	**Agree**	**3.27**	**0.73**	**Agree**

Table 2 revealed that the mean scores of lecturers and students for all items are higher than the criterion mean value of 2.50 and this indicates agreement with these items as the measures for improving the teaching quality of lecturers. The overall standard deviation scores of 0.52 and 0.73 for lecturers and students, respectively, indicated that there is homogeneity amongst their responses. The cluster mean of 3.31 and 3.27 for lecturers and students, respectively, which are above the cut-off mean of 2.50, indicated agreement in the need to implement measures to improve the teaching quality of lecturers in the department.

Discussion

Table 1 revealed the perceptions of lecturers and students on teaching quality in their departments, with mean scores of 3.13 and 2.90, respectively. This finding aligns with Asiyai (2011) who observed that effective classroom management ensures decorum in the classroom and creates a conducive atmosphere for learning to take place during instructional delivery. Further observation shows that students and lecturers rejected item 16 "Students stay back after classes to search out more information on what had been taught" These findings conflict with Lipowsky et al., (2009) who noted that teachers engage students cognitively by giving them complex tasks that will stimulate them to engage in a deeper mental investigation

after school to evaluate what they have learned and develop an independent solution. The effect of the 8-month strike in Nigerian universities could have induced negative perceptions from the students. It is possible that lecturers in the department were rushing to cover the scheme of work for the section and failed to give students complex tasks or assignments that demanded them to stay back after school to tackle them. Also, item 17, which is "students seek lecturers counsel on their learning challenges," was rejected by students but accepted by lecturers. This disagreement could be a result of the poor relationship existing between the students and the lecturers in the department, and the rejection of item 18, "students interact with lecturers easily," by students, again confirms the fact that students don't seek counsel from whom they hardly interact with. Constant interaction builds trust in relationships and gives the opportunity for effective communication and open-mindedness. The reason for the acceptance and high ratings for items 17 and 18 by lecturers alone could suggest that they were biased and decided to overrate themselves. The discrepancies observed between the perceptions of lecturers and students highlight areas for improvement in instructional approaches, communication channels, and the overall learning environment, ultimately emphasizing the need for continuous evaluation and enhancement of teaching practices.

Table 2 indicates that both lecturers and students agreed that all the items were measures for the improvement of teaching quality in the school with a cluster mean of 3.31 for lecturers and 3.27 for students. The findings are in tandem with Merho (2022) and the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (2020) which identified possible ways of improving lecturers teaching quality as high student expectations, explicit explanation during instruction, feedback mechanism, use of data, assessment, effective classroom management, safe learning environment, and teachers' collaboration. The ultimate purpose of all these indices is to increase learning and academic achievement in the department.

The findings shed light on the perceptions of lecturers and students regarding teaching quality in the department. While there were some areas of discrepancy such as the rejection of certain items by students, the consensus on measures for development highlights the need to address major factors such as classroom management, student engagement, teacher-student relationships, and collaborative efforts. These findings also underscore the need for continuous efforts to enhance teaching quality, considering its impact on creating a learning environment that centers on academic achievement.

Implications and Conclusion

The teaching quality of a school determines its standards and contributions to society. It comprises teacher effectiveness in classroom management and student engagement during instructional delivery. The study found that lecturers in the department exhibited teaching quality during instructional delivery. The implication of this finding is that students will only be part of the learning process when adequate measures are taken by lecturers to ensure that they stay engaged during teaching and learning. It is therefore needful that lecturers in the department take the art of teaching seriously and improve their teaching quality to increase the academic performance of students.

The findings highlight the importance of quality improvement initiatives in Nigerian higher education. Effective classroom management, such as organization and punctuality are important in the classroom. Additionally, lecturers and students indicated the importance of the value of student engagement practices as well as strengthening teacher-student relationships. The results also indicate the importance of incorporating feedback mechanisms more effectively in the classroom. In addition, collaboration among lecturers is important in fostering best practices in the classroom. Although this study focused on the Nigerian context, many issues pertaining to teaching quality in this study impact education systems around the world. The results can provide valuable insight into teaching quality in the higher education classroom; however, it is important to be cognizant of cultural differences when interpreting the results.

On a positive note, both lecturers and students agreed on several measures for improving teaching quality. These measures include setting high expectations for students, providing clear explanations, offering feedback, utilizing data effectively, managing the classroom well, fostering a safe learning environment, and promoting collaboration among teachers. These findings align with existing research and suggest practical strategies that can be implemented to enhance

teaching practices within the department. Considering these findings, it is necessary for the department to address the areas of disagreement and focus on implementing the identified improvement measures. By fostering positive teacher-student relationships, improving classroom management, and incorporating the suggested strategies, the department can create a conducive learning environment that promotes student engagement, learning, and overall academic success. These findings may also be beneficial to the national educational ministry, which is striving to improve educational outcomes. The results of this study may provide valuable insight to other higher education institutions in Nigeria and abroad.

The results of this study have provided valuable insight into quality teaching in this context under study. Although this study was only conducted in one department and at one university, the results can be beneficial in other educational settings. Department heads can consider the implications of the study and work on improving instructional delivery through professional development sessions, effective teaching evaluations, or mentoring. lecturers can also work on fostering better teacher-student relations and help them seek more guidance as needed. Furthermore, it may be beneficial to promote effective communication between lecturers and students and foster a more collaborative learning environment.

Although this study provided much-needed research on teaching quality in the higher education context in Nigeria, it is not without limitations. It is important to consider the impact of a relatively small sample size, a single departmental focus, and self-reporting bias. Participants, especially the lecturers, may have inflated their sense of teaching quality; alternatively, lecturers may have rated their teaching quality as low due to modesty or lack of confidence in teaching abilities. Additionally, participants may have varying views of what constitutes effective teaching.

Future research could include qualitative data or a mixed method approach. Utilizing interviews, focus groups, or open-ended survey data can provide much-needed insight into closed-ended responses. This approach allows for more nuanced insights and can complement the quantitative data obtained through closed-ended responses. It would also be valuable to obtain a larger sample and look at other departments or institutions of higher education in Nigeria. A longitudinal study of lecturer teaching quality could be beneficial to explore adaptations that may lead to positive teaching and learning outcomes. Finally, observer-based assessments may be valuable. Including observations of third parties who are not affiliated with the department can be beneficial. These observers can evaluate teaching practices, classroom dynamics, and student engagement using standardized assessment frameworks. This method adds an objective dimension to the evaluation process and can provide valuable feedback to lecturers.

In conclusion, the findings of this study reveal some interesting insights into the perceptions of teaching quality among lecturers and students. It seems that both groups have slightly different views, but overall, they agree that there is room for improvement. It is worth noting that while lecturers generally rated teaching quality higher than students, there were certain areas where they both had reservations. For instance, students didn't feel inclined to stay back after classes for further exploration, and they also seemed reluctant to seek counsel from their lecturers. This could be due to a lack of trust or a strained relationship between students and lecturers. It's important to recognize the significance of building positive connections with students, as studies have shown that a strong teacher-student relationship can have a positive impact on learning outcomes.

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The Effect of the Druze Education Reform in Israel and Druze Students' Achievements in Higher Education

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Abstract

This study investigates the educational achievements of the Druze community in Israel. It examines the role of the sectorial separation of Druze education, gathering insights from school principals, supervisors, and students about this structure. Through interviews with educational stakeholders, the research analyses the preparation processes for Druze students' academic pursuits and evaluates the impact of this educational segregation on their success in matriculation exams and higher education integration. The findings indicate that the historical educational separation has positively influenced Druze students' outcomes, with the Druze educational model yielding significantly better results than other Israeli school systems. Key to this success is strategic resource investment, innovative teaching methods, and a strong emphasis on academic excellence. This model presents a viable pathway for enhancing educational achievements among other minority groups both in Israel and globally.

Keywords: achievements, Druze society, exams, higher education, matriculation

Introduction

Ever since the State of Israel was established (1948), Druze education was part of the Arab school system. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a new outlook emerged among the Druze community, and many were concerned that the young generation would assimilate into Israeli society and leave the Druze faith and heritage, among other things due to the neglect of their roots (Ha'israeli, 2022). Therefore, a demand was made for a renewed emphasis on ethnic consciousness. To realize this goal, the leaders of the Druze community demanded that Druze education be separated from Arab education, forming a special study program for the Druze (Falah, 2000; Ha'israeli, 2022). The Israeli Ministry of Education and Culture was the first government ministry to implement the government's decision, separating Druze education from the Arab department of education and culture and establishing a unit for Druze education and culture, in charge of the pedagogic-

ethical aspects of education and development of curricula with special contents for Druze schools (Amer & Davidovitch, 2020). The independence of Druze education was manifested both in the establishment of this unit and in accentuating Druze uniqueness by building new curricula, writing textbooks, and adding unique contents for Druze schools (Amer & Davidovitch, 2020; Falah, 2000; Harb et al., 2022).

Within five years the unit established an independent education system with regard to pedagogy and curriculum, physical buildings, tools and study aides in the various educational and cultural domains (Abbas, 2004). The Druze school system assumed responsibility for producing graduates who could become integrated in Israeli society, love the homeland and feel a sense of belonging, be loyal to the state and a partner in its construction and defense, while remaining connected to Druze society. These aspirations are anchored in the overall goals of the Druze school system as of 1976 (Abbas, 2007; Ha'israeli, 2022; Peled, 1976). It can be seen that the Druze school system focuses both on shaping the identity of Druze youth, with the purpose of nurturing a connection to their heritage, and on cultivating loyalty to the State of Israel (Abbas, 2004; Ha'israeli, 2022).

The current study addresses the process of separating the Druze school system from Arab education and the effect of this separation on the changing eligibility rates for a matriculation certificate and number of academic students from the Druze community. This examination will be carried out from different perspectives: On one hand, that of the students – 11th-12th grade students at Druze schools and undergraduate Druze academic students, and on the other, that of the staff – Supervisors, school principals, and Druze trainee principals.

Literature Review

Autonomy in Education – The Druze in Israel

In 1957, the Israeli government recognized the Druze community as separate and independent and in 1962 the government approved the Druze Religious Courts Law. This recognition paved the way for separation and for emphasizing the uniqueness of the community among other local minorities (Amer & Davidovitch, 2020; Dana, 1998). Since establishment of the state (1948), the education system awarded educational autonomy to sectors that differed fundamentally from the Jewish secular sector, and first and foremost – Arab society. The right to influence educational contents is entwined with the right to preserve one's group identity (Ha'israeli, 2022). To preserve the unique features of their cultural identity, unique groups within society need recognition that will grant them an impact on the contents their children are taught (Rabin, 2002). This is a group right and not an individual right. Hence, the purpose is to generate an educational and cultural climate capable of preserving the cultural freedom of the minority group to choose its identities (Ha'israeli, 2022) and determine the values that guide its life and the education of the next generations (Rabin, 2002; Harb et al., 2022).

When examining to what degree a cultural minority indeed enjoys educational autonomy, it is necessary to distinguish between a demand for liberty and autonomy that imply lack of intervention by the state and a demand that the state recognize the minority's cultural-national uniqueness, encourage it, help it, and support it. The demand for educational self-management is an example of the demand that the state encourage and help preserve the minority's cultural uniqueness. In this context, Gavizon and Balfour (2005) argue that even if Arab society has a relative autonomy within the state school system, a large part of the educational decisions concerning the curriculum are reached by the "Jewish majority." Therefore, most of the autonomy of the Arab school system concerns the separation of schools, allowing children in the Arab minority to study in their own language (Ha'israeli, 2022).

The full control of the Jewish school system over the Arab school system to some degree compromises the ability of Arab society to determine its own educational aims and deprives it of their right to shape and direct the school system according to its collective interests (Savirski et al., 2020). At the same time, the high involvement of decision makers from the Jewish school system thwarts any significant involvement of Arab educators in the decision-making process – both regarding the allocation of public resources to the schools and regarding educational contents intended for Arab students (Ha'israeli, 2022; Saban, 2002; Savirski et al., 2020). Moreover, the separation of the Druze school system from the Arab

school system illustrates the structure of Israel's high school system, which maintains separate systems for the Arab, Druze, Haredi (ultra-orthodox), national religious, and secular Jews. The investigation into the effects of a separate school system on Druze students in higher education may, therefore, highlight issues related to sector-based education in multi-cultural societies and its effects on achievements in higher education.

The Circumstances that Paved the Way for Establishing The Unit For Druze Education

First it is necessary to understand the background to the reform. The issue of how much cultural freedom a minority should receive to choose its identities and determine the values underlying its life and its education of the next generations involves a fundamental debate. This is true regarding the ethno-national Arab-Palestinian indigenous minority in Israel and its right to enjoy educational self-management, i.e., educational autonomy (Rabin, 2002; Savirski et al., 2020). Relating specifically to the basic right of a national-indigenous minority to influence educational contents, Al-Haj (1996) notes that this is associated mainly with the debate on the right of the Arab sector, as a minority, to maintain educational autonomy. The issue touches upon the extent to which the Israel's Arab sector as a minority enjoys the right to influence the nature of its education (Ha'israeli, 2022).

Arab education in Israel is mostly managed by Jewish officials and decision makers. The authority of Arab municipalities and of Arab school principals is merely technical, while material decisions are reached in the Ministry of Education (Al-Haj, 1996; Savirski et al., 2020). The fact that Arabs have no impact on Hebrew-Jewish education is a given, but it is astonishing that they have only an infinitesimal part in managing their own educational matters. With regard to the curriculum, Jews control the Arab school system (Savirski et al., 2020). For many years, it was primarily Jews who occupied the committees that formulated the curricula and educational aims of Arab schools (Al-Haj, 1996; Savirski et al., 2020).

Some claim, mainly in Arab-Muslim society, that the comprehensive control of the Hebrew school system over the Arab school system prevents Arab society from any possibility of determining its own educational aims, deprives it of its right to shape and directs the school system according to its collective interests (Savirski et al., 2020). In addition, they contend that it thwarts any significant involvement of Arab-Palestinian educators in the decision-making process, both regarding the allocation of public resources to the schools and regarding educational contents intended for Arab students (Saban, 2002). This pervasive control likely extends into higher education as well, where the ability of Arab institutions and educators to influence academic policies and curricula could be similarly constrained.

Teaching in Arabic has remained the primary feature of the separate school system. However, the language utilized for teaching does not attest to the contents studied. For purposes of comparison, the considerable investment in teaching Hebrew in Jewish schools, regarding both motivation and study hours, derives from a worldview that perceives language as a primary component of the revival of Hebrew nationalism, reinforcing the national identity, and strengthening the national self-image, while teaching Arabic in Arab schools has been reduced to merely imparting language skills (Peled, 2006).

With regard to the Arab school system, it has been suggested more than once in the past that cultural and educational autonomy be granted through one of two courses. The first course is that of cultural autonomy, pertaining mainly to culture, education, religion, language, and media. Cultural autonomy is individually-based, applied to people who belong to a certain minority irrespective of their place of residence; thus, it is distinguished from territorial autonomy that applies to a certain territory and all those who live there (Samooha, 1999).

Since Arab citizens of Israel are territorially spread over different regions of the country (mainly in the Galilee, the Triangle, the Negev, and towns in the coastal plain), the relevant discourse for the Arab-Palestinian minority is one of non-territorial cultural autonomy (Klein, 1987; Amer & Davidovitch, 2020). This means cultural statutory autonomy (by law) and involves establishing an autonomous council elected by members of the minority. The other option is that of a more limited autonomy for the Arab-Palestinian minority, restricted to education, with no autonomous Arab council. Hence, it is evident that Arab-Muslim society is making all efforts to distinguish itself from the Israeli-Jewish school system (Ha'israeli, 2022). This option of segregation and culture was awarded to the Druze school system as early as 1976, and this cultural autonomy seems to have benefited the Druze community, as manifested in its achievements.

The Decision to Establish a Separate School System for the Druze

With the establishment of Israel, the Druze sector was identified by Israeli society with the Arab sector and one conspicuous result of this was the inclusion of Druze students within the Arab state school system. In the late 1970s, however, Druze leaders took action to separate from the Arab school system, forming a separate system, the Druze Unit of Education, that allowed them to add to the curriculum unique contents for their community, such as Druze heritage (State Archives, January 1, 1984 – June 30, 1985, p. 335). This decision to establish a separate school system for the Druze community was the product of the Shechterman Committee in the early 1970s that determined:

The committee contends that the State of Israel has not done enough to instill an Israeli-Druze consciousness, and only little educational and informational efforts have been made among Druze youth to promote an Israeli-Druze consciousness. This has caused damage to the state and to its   image. The fact that mandatory enlistment applies to the entire Druze community should have   urged the State of Israel to encourage intellectuals to develop the foundations of Israeli-Druze   consciousness as an ideological theoretical basis, providing Druze youth with a logical   explanation and mental and theoretical background for their full identification with the state and readiness to fight for it while simultaneously maintaining their uniqueness as Druze (Shechterman Committee Report, 1975, p. 2721). Furthermore, higher education institutions have a crucial role to play in this regard. They are uniquely positioned to deepen this consciousness through tailored academic programs and research initiatives that explore and reinforce Druze heritage and its integration within Israeli society. Notably this decision did not take into consideration the effects that such separation would have on Druze students' integration and achievements in higher education.

Establishment of The Unit for Druze and Circassian Education and Culture

To maintain treatment of the Druze sector, the Unit for Druze and Circassian Education and Culture was formed – an independent unit within the pedagogic secretariat that was in charge of the administrative and pedagogic aspects related to this school system and its unique needs (Amer & Davidovitch, 2020). The unit took care of a range of issues: Old schools were renovated and expanded and new ones founded; new study programs in the universities were developed to promote preservation of the heritage; new textbooks were written; the teaching force was enhanced and the proportion of certified teachers grew (Amer & Davidovitch, 2020). The separation of Druze education also affected the field of teacher training, and several teacher training colleges that catered to Druze students opened. In contrast, the teacher training programs in universities remained open to students from all sectors.

The new school system set itself a goal to generate among Druze students an Israeli-Druze consciousness and identity aimed at their identification with the state and its symbols, by emphasizing common elements between the Druze and the Jews and distancing the students from their Arab identity (Amer & Davidovitch, 2020). To implement this policy and achieve these goals, Arab teachers were replaced by Druze teachers, the existing study programs were converted into new ones, and a new subject called "Druze heritage" was introduced, aimed in practice at forming a new pro-Jewish and pro-Israeli Druze identity (State Archives, January 1, 1984 – June 30, 1985, p. 19).

The case of Druze society in Israel has attracted, on one hand, praise voiced by the Jewish population and establishing a Druze attitude and loyalty to the state, and on the other, suppressed claims by Druze representatives citing discriminatory treatment of the Druze by the authorities, incompatible with their loyalty to the state. This argument also reflects events within the school system in Druze towns. Special textbooks were written for learning the unique aspects and contents of the Druze heritage, hundreds of Druze teachers were trained, professional development programs were held for the teachers, many classrooms, sports halls, and libraries were built, vocational and technological education was increased, and steps were taken to increase the number of Druze in institutions of higher education, which was very low. This unit also dealt with education in the small Circassian community (State Archives, January 1, 1984 – June 30, 1985).

In 1990 the Druze and Circassian schools were integrated in the Haifa and northern districts, and the Unit for Education continued as the headquarters of the ministry's pedagogic secretariat in the Haifa District. The unit outlines policy, plans pedagogic actions, and takes care of all issues concerning education and culture in Druze and Circassian towns,

while coordinating and collaborating with the ministry's various units in the main offices and districts as well as with the local municipalities and educational institutions (State Archives, January 1, 1984 – June 30, 1985).

In 1991 an advisory committee was appointed on behalf of the government, to examine changes in the educational policy for Druze society. The committee's recommendations were intended to bring Druze education to the same level as the major educational stream. The committee indicated the need to grant Druze education the necessary resources for its advancement by adding technology, laboratories, and computers, as well as improving the physical conditions for learning and teaching. Another suggestion was to eliminate the position of the person in charge of Druze education in the Ministry of Education and place responsibility for the Druze school system with the district to which they belong (State Archives, January 1, 1984 – June 30, 1985). In 1984, following two government resolutions on closing the gaps between the resources allocated to Druze towns and to Jewish development towns, the Ministry of Education introduced a five-year plan to reduce educational and budgetary disparities and close the gap between the level of education in the Druze sector and that customary in the school system at large (State Archives, January 1, 1984 – June 30, 1985).

Since this separation, a constant rise is evident in the level of education in the Druze sector, manifested in the number of students and the eligibility rate for a matriculation certificate, both among the boys and mainly among the girls, which has been gradually growing over the years (Barakat, 2022; Halabi, 2017). The data speaks for themselves and show that the rate of those eligible for a matriculation certificate in the Druze sector is at present, in 2022, among the highest in the country – naturally higher than the Arab sector and the Bedouin sector – reaching about 89% (Ministry of Education website, no date).

The study examines the process that led to the separation of the Druze schools from the Arab education system, while presenting the new curricula introduced in the Druze schools in 1976 instead of those used at that time in the Arab schools. The study presents the mechanism established to implement all of this and we saw how the state used the Druze school system to strengthen the application of the mandatory military service law to the Druze in 1956, with the aim of promoting Druze education and creating a separation that would result in this (Harb et al., 2022). It is possible to prioritize the Druze over the rest of the Arab population. The study examined the circumstances and reasons that led to the separation of Druze education and presented the goals of establishing the Druze education unit, its methods of operation and how the state's goals correspond to the interests of the Druze, and in particular of the Druze students (Halabi, 2017).

The achievements of Druze society with regard to education in general and to the rate of those eligible for a matriculation certificate and the number of students in institutions of higher education in particular are extremely exceptional and impressive, especially the results of the matriculation exams (Amer & Davidovitch, 2020). The question is, What resources helped Druze students overcome the financial and budgetary constraints and achieve such high rates of eligibility for a matriculation certificate as a way of entering academia? Is the change in recent years a result of the separation of the Druze school system from the Arab system or of the sociocultural transformation within Druze society?

Following the literature review, the current study's point of departure is that eligibility for a matriculation certificate opens the door to academia and from there to high quality employment. Those who do not manage to pass the matriculation obstacle will not be able to enter academia because their school system did not train them for this, and as a result they will subsequently find it very hard to do well in life. The skills that the school system imparts to its graduates are those that will determine the chances of studying in institutions of higher education. Education is the basis for the equal opportunities to which every child in Israel is entitled. Hence proper, efficient, and effective preparation affects success in the matriculation exams and reaching academia. The better the preparation in high school, the greater the ability of students to acquire an academic education. In our opinion, efficient preparation might have a positive effect on students' sense of readiness and self-efficacy and on the integration of Druze high school students in academia, which does not offer special programs to Druze students, as well as their achievements. In addition to the separation of the Druze school system from the Arab school system, other factors that might affect the integration of Druze students in academic studies can also be indicated, such as cultural and social changes in Druze society in recent decades. Effective teacher training programs tailored for Druze

educators, principal leadership training that focuses on the unique challenges of Druze schools, and the development of culturally sensitive educational standards and assessments are essential. These measures can ensure that the educational environment is conducive to meeting the specific needs of Druze students, thereby enhancing their academic success and integration into higher education

The current study examines whether the separation of Druze education affected the achievements of Druze students in higher education. What do Druze school principals, supervisors, and trainee principals think about the results of the separation? And particularly – can the case of education in Israel's Druze sector serve as a model for success among other minorities in Israel and elsewhere?

Methodology

Research Questions The study examines the results of separating the Druze school system from the Arab Division of Education in the Ministry of Education from the perspective of nine (8 males and 1 female) Druze high school principals, supervisors, and trainee principals from the universities. Interviews were conducted with nine school principals, supervisors, and trainee principals. They were asked about the process of preparation for academia among Druze students and their views on the effect of education in the Druze sector on students' achievements, both in the matriculation exams and when joining academic studies. We will examine the following research questions:

1. Did the separation of the school system (the removal of the Druze school system from the Arab Division of Education in the Ministry of Education) affect the achievements of Druze students in the matriculation exams, and to what degree? This question will be tested by exploring the matriculation results in Druze high schools from 1976 to 2020.

2. What factors caused Druze students to achieve high rates of eligibility as perceived by the principals, supervisors, and trainee principals? This question will be tested by in-depth interviews with the research participants.

3. What is the view of Druze principals, supervisors, and trainee principals regarding the results of the separation, in light of the impressive rise in the rates of eligibility for a matriculation certificate and consequently the sharp rise in the number of Druze students in academia? This question will be tested through in-depth interviews with the research participants.

4. Do methods of preparation for higher education implemented in Druze high schools affect the attitudes and perceptions of 11th and 12th graders regarding readiness for academia, and to what extent? This question will be tested through the perception of students (high school and undergraduate students, by means of self-report questionnaires).

Research Tools The data were collected by means of two customary qualitative research tools: Interviews and documents (Sabar Ben-Yehoshua, 1990), where the triangulation of the two tools contributes to the internal validity of the findings (Yin, 1994). The researcher used a semi-structured open-ended interview with all the educators, since this method makes it possible to present materials and questions that were not anticipated in advance and to form a social procedure that centers on words (Ellen, 1984).

As stated, in the current study we used a flexible and powerful tool, the interview, that makes it possible to reflect the voice of the interviewees and understand the meaning they give to the subject studied (Rabionet, 2011). The interviewees were interviewed with a semi-structured interview (Qu & Dumay, 2011) to ensure that all the topics and questions relevant for the study would be expressed in the interview and that answers would be given to the questions posed by the study, granting meaning, analyses, and interpretations to the quantitative data collected in the quantitative part. Semi-structured in-depth interviews give interviewees the freedom to describe their thoughts and to emphasize the topics they perceive as important while allowing the researcher to respond, providing thorough attention and a sound focus on parts that require

clarification or more detail in order to receive as full a picture as possible of the fundamental topic studied (Horton et al., 2004). The semi-structured in-depth interviews began with an identical statement that clearly defined the research topic and focused the interview on it, while noting that the interview is voluntary and that the researcher is obligated to maintain the confidentiality of the interviewee's information and identity.

Data Analysis Every interview took 90 minutes in average. All the nine interviews were recorded and transcribed word for word. Data analysis in this study was carried out with a thematic analysis (Crowe et al., 2015) that allows identifying and analyzing themes in a qualitative database, such that it is possible to interpret different aspects of the subject studied (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In thematic analysis, an attempt is made to detect within the data explicit and implicit themes (Joffe & Yardley, 2004), with the aim of describing and understanding what people feel and think and how they behave in the context underlying the research topic (Guest et al., 2011).

The data were analyzed based on the six stages proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) for thematic analysis, while adapting them to the needs of the current study. The following are the data analysis stages in the current study:

1. Holistic reading of the initial interviews to detect the main ideas reflected in them.
2. Initial units of meaning that arose from the interviews were noted. The units of meaning reflected the major and most prominent themes that arose from the interviews (Ayalon & Sabar Ben-Yehoshua, 2010). This stage took a long time because it was carried out concurrently with continued conducting of the interviews. Each of the interviews was read in full and then encoded by initial units of meaning, at this stage without giving them titles or deciding on a certain order.
3. Gathering the units of meaning and dividing them into themes. The large amount of material required repeated examination of the many units of meaning that arose from the interviews, while dividing them into themes and examining the relations between them to reach a coherent structure that tells the story that arises from the interviews. This stage included initial mapping of the themes.
4. The structure formed was examined, while rereading all the units of meaning placed in each of the mapped parts. The purpose of the reading was to closely examine each of the themes as independent elements and as components of the full story. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest analyzing each theme separately in order to identify the "story" it tells and at the same time understanding how this story is integrated in the general "story" that the researcher wishes to tell by presenting the findings. This reading revealed a certain repetition and overlapping between different parts of the analysis map and a need to reduce and generate a more sparing and precise structure. Some of the themes found to be sparse were joined with others, while other themes were split into more precise and distinct ones.
5. The themes were given titles. At this stage, eight main themes were generated.
6. Writing the qualitative part of the findings chapter. The writing process required reexamination, in the wish to remain as close as possible to the interviewees' words. The writing involved weaving the results of the analysis with quotes from the texts, in order to provide the reader with a coherent and convincing story that encompasses the topic investigated (Clarke & Braun, 2013).

In the interview the following questions were presented to all the school principals, supervisors, and trainee principals:

1. What is your opinion on the level of Druze education relative to other sectors? Are you satisfied?
2. How is the Druze study program unique? In what way is it different? And in what way is it similar?
3. What do you think about the matriculation results in Druze high schools?
4. What factors caused Druze students to achieve high rates of eligibility?
5. What are the results of the separation in light of the impressive rise in the rate of eligibility for a matriculation certificate and consequently the sharp rise in the number of Druze academic students?
6. In your opinion, is the increase a result of the separation from the Arab education division in 1977?

7. Are students followed after graduating from high school?

8. In your opinion, does the school constitute an academic advocate for its students? How are students prepared for academia?

Results

Analysis of the interviews conducted with nine principals, supervisors, and trainee principals in the Druze sector generated eight main themes. According to the interviewees, these themes are interconnected and tell the full rich story of the development of Druze high school and academic education through their eyes. We shall present the main themes that arose as well as select quotes from the interviews that illustrate these themes. Each theme shall be presented concisely, followed by quotes and explanations on how these quotes illustrate the theme. Finally, each theme will be summarized in light of the quotes from the interviews.

Overall Satisfaction with Druze Students' Achievements, with an Emphasis on Matriculation Data

The testimonies of the interviewees (mentioned by their initials) indicate general agreement that the Druze education is on the rise and there is overall satisfaction with student achievements. For example, H. who was interviewed claims, "In recent years there is a considerable improvement in the level of education and in the achievements of Druze schools, of course both in absolute terms and compared to other sectors, particularly the Arab sector." A. emphasizes and adds, "The level of Druze education compared to other sectors is satisfactory and they lead in many areas, particularly in the rate of those eligible [for a matriculation certificate]." He continues:

> I am very satisfied with the situation because of the positive trend of the system. The high eligibility rates show that all students take the matriculation exam, no child is left behind, and all students earn a matriculation certificate that ensures entrance to academic studies and future employment.

V. thinks and argues:

> The current state is satisfactory. The considerable changes in society led to a change in education as well… The situation is constantly improving from an achievement orientation, but do the data indeed reflect the situation in academia and in institutions of higher education? I am speaking only about secondary education, in elementary education very good work is undoubtedly being done to instill values and education. This is happening in the preschools and the multiple informal education programs have also been beneficial. The results are very good, the Druze community is leading the pack.

Moreover, Z. believes that "Education in Druze villages is advancing, the level of Druze education tops the list of eligibility for a matriculation certificate and of achievements on the MEITZAV test." M. put an emphasis on the resources:

> The state of education in the Druze sector is good, regarding resources Druze education receives enough resources but these resources are not put to the best use, unlike the Jewish sector where there is knowledge of how to utilize the existing resources and how to obtain more. Compared to the Arab sector I think that we are not very different, but compared to the Bedouin sector the level of Druze education is higher. The matriculation results among Druze high school students are good, particularly regarding eligibility for a matriculation certificate, but the rate of students who earned high grades and averages should be stressed, as these will enable them to join academia in the fields of engineering and medicine. It is not enough to have a high rate of eligibility; more efforts should be made to improve the quality of the students' matriculation certificates.

N. elaborates even more regarding the general society aspect:

It is precisely in Druze towns that there has been an enormous improvement in the matriculation results. We are talking about high, impressive, very high achievements relative to schools from other sectors. As I see it, the main role of the schools is precisely to prepare students for life itself and not necessarily to reach good achievements in the matriculation certificate. Hence, I see that education should contribute to building society [particularly culture] and support as much as possible the facilitation of a good and proper social life, where this approach centers on building human beings. So good matriculation results are very important but it is necessary to take into account those who did not achieve the anticipated results and see how society treats them. This inquiry is important, both for the individual and for society.

P. describes what he thinks happened and even uses the word "revolution":

In the last decade Druze education has undergone a revolution, as it was previously at the bottom of the scale regarding achievements, after Arab education, and now we see that the level of Druze education equals Jewish education or even surpasses it on certain dimensions. The level of Druze education is leading in eligibility for a matriculation certificate and achievements in the MEITZAV test. In general, I am very satisfied, there are several issues that should be focused on, for instance the Druze placement system, giving the principal authority to choose the teachers. The matriculation results are very impressive, the eligibility rate is high, there is a considerable rising trend, but as I noted before it is necessary to place more emphasis on the quality of the matriculation, the excellence proportions, which can encourage [students to join] academia more than the eligibility rate, as sometimes the weight of the matriculation does not grant graduates the eligibility to join academia.

Additionally, I. claims we need to examine the quality, as he describes:

In my opinion, education in the Druze sector is constantly advancing, the eligibility rates for a matriculation certificate have been on the rise for a decade … the Druze sector seems to be leading in its eligibility rates, the question to be asked concerns the quality of the matriculation.

He also adds, "Very good results, the Druze sector tops all others, this is not evident in institutions of higher education." S. also speaks about awareness which will lead to integration:

In recent years we have witnessed a considerable rise among Druze students in Israel with regard to the proportion of those registering for academic studies and advanced degrees. This rise is a direct result of higher awareness of the necessity of this for becoming integrated in Israeli society on the necessary and even average level, while realizing the right to equal opportunity in senior roles compared to the Jewish sector.

All the interviewees in the current study emphasized the considerable rise in the success of the Druze school system, with an emphasis on student achievements in the matriculation exams. Moreover, the principals stressed their satisfaction and pride at these achievements. The principals see the efforts made by Druze society to facilitate these achievements, such as the many educational programs beginning from preschool.

Desire to Continue to Excel
One of the prominent themes that arose from the interviews was the principals' need to constantly continue detecting issues that need strengthening, make efforts, and reach improvements in these issues. This inclination of Druze principals is part of the explanation for the Druze school system's ability to reach good achievements. This is reflected in H. words: "We are in the right direction but there are still lots of things that should be enhanced and not only academic and achievement-oriented, such as teaching values, social involvement, and certainly improving the quality of the matriculation

results". A. also thinks that "There is room for improvement in the proportion of those excelling, particularly among the boys". V. adds:

> I am satisfied but I seek to improve and advance. Education in the Druze community is undergoing big changes, the teacher staff are acquiring an education and managing to improve the state of education. The many programs are leading to significant changes as well.

Z. places his emphasize on the areas of study and says:

> It is necessary to put more effort into the quality of the matriculation exams and the level of excellence. In addition, there is not much success in the psychometric exam in Druze schools. Therefore, the Druze community must put two matters at the forefront: A higher education in science and in the areas of high-tech and medicine, and economic advancement. For this purpose, it is necessary to educate to excel from a young age until higher education if this community indeed desires to become integrated in modern society.

Additionally, M. claims that we need to invest in order to gain:

> I am not satisfied enough with the state of education in the Druze sector, there is a lot to improve and upgrade. In my opinion, it is necessary to put more efforts into human capital, develop it optimally and focus on it and give the professional management and supervisors the mandate to choose the best teachers. It is necessary to support the teaching staff constantly, both pedagogically and organizationally, to allow teamwork and peer learning. Students' level in several subjects is low, for instance, the knowledge of Hebrew, which affects the rest of the subjects, particularly in high school.

P. claims that we need to increase awareness:

> I think that it is necessary to make more of an effort to advance the quality of the matriculation studies and the level of excellence. In my opinion, the common goal is the possibility of joining academic studies, becoming graduates who contribute to society and who will become influential figures able to advance Druze society in particular and Israeli society in general. I think that also increasing awareness among young people and the need for an academic certificate and its meaning contribute to increasing motivation and to the wish to reach eligibility.

I. calls for a change in the school's role: "Some things require change, such as the role of the school in preparing high school students for academia".

The interviewees indicate a strong urge and desire to continue investing resources in development and excellence. It is clear that they do not take the success of Druze students for granted, rather as necessitating constant efforts in order to maintain the clear advantage of the Druze sector in future years as well. At the same time, the principals emphasize the need to build new programs, choose high standard teaching staff, and invest in areas that are slightly weaker, such as teaching the Hebrew language.

Similarity and Uniqueness of the Druze Study Program

The principals related how the study contents of Druze students are very similar fundamentally to those of the general sector, aside from the cultural-religious uniqueness. This point is significant, as the standards to which Druze students are held resemble those of the general population. Hence, their achievements are even more conspicuous and they receive no concessions that might explain the high achievements of Druze students. H. points at the uniqueness of the special program:

The uniqueness of the Druze study program [is] its very existence as a sectorial study program, and particularly that some topics and subjects are universal or at least common and identical to all sectors, such as math, English, science, primary language, and Hebrew language, such that as I see it the unique areas are perhaps certain chapters in history and heritage … in the other subjects there is no difference and in my opinion there is no need for any difference. The laws of mathematics and English grammar and/or the primary language and the Hebrew language will not change between sectors.

On the other hand, M. expresses a different opinion:

There is nothing unique in the Druze study program aside from building a program in the Arabic and Hebrew language, where the coordinating supervisors determine the emphases and choose special texts appropriate for Druze society. The Druze study program differs from that of the other sectors in the subjects of Arabic language, Hebrew language, and Druze heritage, but it is similar in the other subjects, particularly math, English, and science.

Some principals mentioned the cultural diversity in the Druze study program, where this diversity is supported mainly by the contents of Druze heritage, history, and language. This is reflected in A. words: "There are unique study programs in areas of heritage, history, Hebrew language, Arabic language … the student is exposed to the unique culture, values, which increases the sense of belonging to the community, to society, and to the state". V. elaborates in detail:

There are study programs in the subjects of Druze heritage, Arabic literature, field training, and knowledge of the land, to shape the identity and enhance the civic sense of Druze adolescents. Analysis of the study programs and of the teaching methods may help construct an educational model that will assist in adapting the contents to the underlying goals of the programs. The research findings show that the study contents and their methods of instruction have a significant part in establishing the personal identity and enhancing the civic sense of local Druze adolescents. Study contents that include messages enhancing the identity and civics, side by side with educational activities adapted to the students, educational projects, teachers who impart to their students tools and skills – all these allow adolescents to shape their identity and enhance their sense of civics and belonging.

In addition, Z. states that:

The Druze study program is intended to construct a Druze identity. There is no doubt that studies of "Druze heritage" have not helped members of the community acquire a higher education or become familiar with the specifics of the faith and its foundations, which should have been taught by clerics with a higher education and knowledge of the Druze faith rather than by teachers whose training in Druze heritage was provided through courses or mail-order books.

N. thinks that "Most of the program is comprised of heritage studies. The students' connection to the historical and spiritual tradition of the Druze community is important. The gist of this program involves constructing a Druze identity". P. adds, "The study program in the Druze sector is characterized by uniqueness in the subject of Druze heritage, while the other subjects are more universal and parallel to any study program in the different sectors." Furthermore, I. argues:

Druze heritage, Druze identity, history for the Druze, it seems that a process of identity constructing existed and still exists. The premise underlying my outlook is that study programs and their method of instruction can help shape identity and influence the enhancement of adolescents' civic sense. The questions deriving from this are: Do the study programs in these subjects contribute to establishing an Israeli-Druze identity? And how is this manifested? Also, the study program in field training and knowledge of the land includes preparing youth for

military service and the domain of social education.

S. points out that:

> The Druze study program emphasizes the existence of the Druze as a distinct community, separate from Arab society. This is manifested, for example, in teaching Druze heritage (in light of the fact that the Druze faith is secret) in order to instill the Druze entity and identity, through texts selected from Arabic literature that are unlikely to enhance Arab identity and Arab nationality, distinguishable from those in the Arab study program, devoting a large number of hours in the curriculum to Hebrew lessons, including Bible lessons, and strengthening the status of Arabic as an official written and spoken language. These differences may train graduates for life in Israel.

In the context of the uniqueness of the Druze educational program, the principals are divided. Some emphasize elements common to the program and to educational contents imparted to students in the general population. These principals contend that it is precisely due to the similar contents that it is possible to measure the high achievements of the Druze population versus the general population.

The Contribution of the Teaching Staff as an Important Element in the Achievements of Druze Students

The principals were asked about the main reasons and factors that could explain the high achievements of Druze students. One of the major factors emphasized by the principals was the teaching staff and the high quality educational teams. H. describes in his own words the importance of the staff's quality: "The quality of the teachers and the declining age of the teaching staff at the schools. Also, the quality of the principals selected in recent years." A. believes, "The factors that contribute to students' achievements are primarily follow-up by the supervisors, setting goals and aims on the student level, follow-up and consistency of the principals and teaching staff." M. expresses his feelings regarding the staff's contribution:

> From my point of view, the achievement of high eligibility rates was facilitated by a good management team, good utilization of resources, investment in human capital in the high schools, building adapted school programs by officials within the schools, professional support in the core subjects (languages, math, and sciences) by the professional guidance and supervision system.

An elaboration gives N in his opinion:

> In my opinion, the change in the teacher's status. Absorbing many new fresh and motivated teachers with new ideas for implementation. The turnover among the teaching staff led to teaching how to compete (perhaps)? Encouraging higher education among the students. Changing the image of the graduate as one who must advance, and develop. All these are direct reasons for the increased eligibility, in my opinion.

P. gives examples of the main contributors according to his experience: "The main contributors are measurable work programs with clear goals, aims, and vision; Also, the quality of the general and subject-matter supervisors, the quality of the principals and teachers, generated the desired change." S. put an emphasis on investment in the teaching force in schools:

> The matriculation eligibility rates among Druze students are increasing, a cause for praise and pride. This increase has two main reasons in my opinion: The first is higher awareness of the significance of matriculation grades as a determining criterion for admission to universities and to certain academic disciplines and the strong wish to receive the opportunity to study valued subjects. The second is the considerable competition among those

in charge of the school system, whether supervisors, school principals, teachers, or parents, which has a direct effect on the students.

The principals indicate that the investment in good teaching staff from the Druze sector is one of the most important causes of the success of Druze students. Among others, good teaching staff manages to encourage the desire for education among students, encourages excellence, and provides students with sources of support throughout their studies.

Liberal-Modern Trends as an Important Factor Affecting the Achievements of Druze Students

Another significant social change in the last decade involves a certain decline in conservative views in the sector and a rise in the level of modernist and liberal views. These processes have allowed primarily Druze women to study outside the home, acquire an education and a profession, and constitute an important source of subsistence for the household. H. describes it well when he says: "Openness and social and cultural development among the community, leading to double the number of girls in academia." Z. indicates that gender as a part of social changes has a significant impact:

> Druze women have advanced in the sphere of higher education, more than have Druze men. Nevertheless, the disparity between the sexes with regard to education might have many negative consequences for the structure of the family unit, hence the need to encourage the entire population to acquire a higher education and excellence in education and then we can contend together with the rest of the country's inhabitants who receive high quality excellent education, so much so that they have become scientists, researchers, and lecturers at institutions of higher education as well as high-tech and industry entrepreneurs, and if all citizens do not have the same opportunity to acquire excellent education we will be unable to generate explorers, scientists, and high-tech workers irrespective of religion, nationality, race, and sex, rather the test is one of education.

Moreover, I. focus on the cultural changes and their influence:

> The influential factors are sociocultural factors. The Druze community has changed considerably over the past two decades, where the sociocultural change has transformed the girls into a studying and working force. Prior to 2000 only a minority of Druze women studied, compared to the last two decades, and following the social change more and more Druze young women are acquiring a higher education. Society allows this now and even encourages it, while in the early 1990s and in the 1980s and of course earlier this was not socially acceptable …

The principals indicate that the social changes in the Druze sector aroused mainly liberal winds that encouraged many women to join the sphere of higher education and the labor force. In this way, it became socially acceptable and more and more women embarked on a course of studies, generating an overall rise in education rates in the Druze sector.

Issues of Identity as an Important Factor Underlying Druze Students' Achievements

One of the significant aspects that arose in the interviews as explaining the desire of the Druze to excel and invest in education is the issue of identity. The principals emphasized that the unique Druze identity causes Druze society in general and the young in particular to invest in education in order to distinguish themselves from the general Arab sector. V. says it clearly:

> The influencing factors are social factors, the issue of the affiliation and identification of the Arab minority in Israel arouses public attention, usually in times of crisis. Under the title "the Arab minority" a distinct place should be accorded to the Druze community that conducts itself differently than the Arab minority at least in a major aspect of Israeli society – members of the Druze community serve in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and study in a school system that is separate from the Arab school system. At the same time, their way of life is perceived

as similar to that of the Arab minority. This raises at times the issue of the citizenship, identity, and identification of Druze residents of Israel whose study programs are determined by the Ministry of Education and adapted for Druze society.

V. argues, "The separation did not cause the current change, the separation was intended to separate the Druze from other Arabs." V. isn't satisfied with the situation. too:

> I'm not happy with the attribution of the advances made to the separation. The separation of Druze education from Arab education in Israel began in 1974, there was nothing that contributed to Druze education. On the contrary, to begin with there were several very problematic points that demanded change: 1. The poor quality of teachers at Druze schools, which were mainly appointed in an unsuitable way and particularly in elementary schools, at an age that is the most important for shaping children toward junior high and high school; 2. The content of the study material was not compatible with that in Jewish schools in Israel, and particularly the emphasis on the Hebrew language; 3. The content of the books determined by the principal at the school stemmed mainly from personal motives of the school and the teachers usually had no impact, aside from agreeing with the principal on the books he chose, even if they were inappropriate for the study track; many books bought were not subjected to any supervision by educators; 4. The attitude of the Ministry of Education to Druze schools was as a last priority and the supervision was based on motives of compensations and friendship between the supervisor and the schools, the municipality, and the person in charge of Druze and Circassian education; 5. Efforts made in favor of Hebrew language as studied in academia did not exist in Druze schools at all; most of the students had a poor command of Arabic and Hebrew and spoke a mix of both, which did not help them become truly familiar with the language for purposes of studying, which is why the rate of those eligible for a matriculation certificate among the Druze was among the lowest in Israel; 6. The math textbooks were in Arabic and there was no scholastic continuity between elementary and junior high school, which made it hard for the children to do well in the most important subject in the entire curriculum; 7. There were no programs and solutions in Druze schools for integrating students in disciplines they like and want.
>
> The general idea of the separation was that when the students would be capable of understanding the language of the local people and state this would be the general solution to the success of Druze children and if the study programs would be changed the successes would be considerable and that the main requirement is a good teacher staff and not because they are someone's relatives or supporters of the mayor or the principal.

Additionally, N. disconnects the link between the separations and the Druze's educational achievements:

> The high eligibility rates are not a direct result of the separation. If we look for instance at Arab society, the proportional number of academics is high although they studied in a very traditional and inflexible setting and study program. In my opinion the quality of teaching, the students' family background, are the two main elements that have a big effect on the student and his results/aspirations for the future.

Then again, some of the principals did stress the significance of separating the school system in the 1970s as creating a different trend in Druze education than in Arab education and allowing it to reach a higher level. A. adds, "The separation of Druze education from Arab education beginning from 1977 led to stressing the uniqueness and building a unique work apparatus and a strategic program for the sector, including resource distribution." M. describes:

> In my opinion the separation of the Druze sector from the other sectors had the effect that the professional guidance and supervision system in Druze education focused on Druze schools. If we had remained part of the Arab sector, for instance, Druze schools would not have received the current focus and efforts. In addition, the supervisors

of Druze education knew how to obtain resources and budgets that could advance Druze education, although more can be obtained.

According to P.'s opinion, the separation is more social:

> I think that the separation provided more of a focus on social life, adapting necessary contents for members of the community, and emphasized unique needs of society. The separation also provided precise mappings that made it possible to follow members of the Druze community. The focus and the setting of short- and long-term goals for the Druze school system had an impact.

In addition, I. share his thoughts:

> The separation may have had an effect with regard to budgets and new contents, primarily building a Druze identity that would be loyal to Israeli society, but the change in results came not from there but rather from the sociocultural as well as the economic change.

S. elaborates further:

> Before reaching academic studies, Druze education is separated in the schools from Arab education in Israel, with regard to the study program. This separation is intentional, in order to distinguish Druze society which seems itself as a society worthy of a different official attitude and entitled to services equal to those of Jews in Israel, since this community is an ally whose sons serve in the IDF. In my opinion, Israel aimed to segregate the Druze from the Arabs through education and the study program, as the Arab study program enhances the national identity of Arab Muslims and stresses the national and political conflict between Arabs and Jews. This study program does not suit young people who will be enlisting in the IDF after graduating in order to defend Israel and its political and national principles.

This indicates that some of the principals indeed see the separation from the Arab school system as a means that accelerated the development of the Druze school system in the direction of increasing students' achievements and grades. In contrast, other principals expressed sharp reservations concerning the impact of the separation on students' achievements and said that the separation was a way of "reeducating" the Druze population by the Israeli government rather than helping Druze students succeed.

The School as an Academic Advocates
One of the factors that might explain the continuous improvement in the achievements of Druze students is the follow-up of student achievements in higher education as well. Thus, based on the rationale that the school prepares the students for an academic future. Hence, the principals were asked how they follow the continued development of the students at the conclusion of their mandatory years of schooling and also what they think about the school's role in preparing students for academia. All the principals stressed that the school should be an academic advocate that prepares students for academia and that resources should be invested in this. H. Illuminates this topic:

> There is a process of follow-up, as there should be, on the school level, on the level of the town, and certainly on the sectorial level, because it is important for this information to be available so that we can use it to reach conclusions and insights for the future… the school is an academic advocate but still on a low level. I think that more resources should be invested in this in order to make academia more accessible to everyone. The preparation of students for academia is through academic direction of high school students, particularly 11th and

12th graders, with the help of organizations and non-profits, of course in coordination and according to the policy of the ministry. I think that the local authorities and the parents are less involved in this issue and that is a pity.

Moreover, A. illustrates:

A program for career education is operated as of early education, including preparation for academia. At present, preparation for academia is provided as part of the "Career education 3-30" program, namely from early education until after military service. Including parent guidance, training teachers for innovativeness and entrepreneurship, and more…

In addition, V. believes that "The top place of the Druze in the [national] school system isn't sufficiently evident in institutions of higher education, the results slightly distort reality, the topic should definitely be studied in order to understand what is behind the numbers."

M. believes that school isn't an academic advocate:

There is no follow-up after the conclusion of 12th grade, particularly by elements related to the Ministry of Education, and as a result a large part of the young people receive no professional guidance and do not manage to become integrated in academia or in the labor force. The young men who enlist in the army receive guidance only after their discharge. Therefore, at present the schools are not academic advocates, high schoolers receive little guidance for academia and are exposed to academic disciplines only to a limited degree in fairs or seminars, and they do not receive suitable training that would allow them to become well integrated in academia.

I do not have much information about the courses taken in schools, junior high or high schools, regarding preparation for academia. High schoolers mostly make an effort to succeed on the psychometric exam and the matriculation exams but this does not constitute real preparation for academia because there is need for individual guidance for academia as regards choosing a discipline that will suit the needs of the labor market, because we see many academic graduates who are not employed for lack of advance guidance and they chose their study discipline for all kinds of reasons. In addition, the high school students do not receive enough information on the nature of teaching and learning in academia, which differs considerably from that at school, and this affects new students who change their major or drop out of academic studies.

On the other hand, N. claims that:

The attitude to academia at present is different, it is a top priority, there is professional guidance and I assume that there are designated visits, encounters with students, lecturers, and others from lots of universities and institutions of higher education in order to encourage students to register at these institutions after high school. In addition to workshops, classes, lectures, and others.

P. argues differently:

The schools are undoubtedly the gate to academia and influential agents and consulting strategists of all students. But it is notable that they are considered an important and central element in addition to the graduate, to which we can add the home and society. All these can be very influential factors in the student's decision-making and can be a supportive and advancing factor for academic studies. On the high school level the graduates and the proportion of academics are monitored and on the level of the Druze division of education all graduates are monitored and there is even a program called 3-30 that aims to support Druze graduates from age 3 to 30 in order to raise the proportion of academics, facilitate integration in key professions, and particularly to increase the

proportion of male academics as there is a disparity between boys and girls in academia.

Another aspect is being explained in I. words:

It should have been by now but it is not. The purpose of the school as perceived by the principals is at present, in my opinion, to constantly improve the rates of eligibility for a matriculation certificate without seeing the next stage. Success is not measured by the number of students but rather by the number of those eligible, and this is an important insight. Action must be taken to include this issue in the success measures of high school principals.

A wide and detailed description is given by S. who feels optimistic about the present programs:

In some Druze municipalities there are joint exposure programs of the high schools and colleges/universities in Israel, but this exposure is still insufficient and on a limited basis. As a result, many parents from the community send their children to high schools in Jewish towns. A large part of these receive an opportunity to take joint courses with the Technion, for instance, or other universities, while still in high school. Preparation is provided, first of all, by helping students find the field that suits their abilities and character for future studies while still in high school. This is done together with the multi-disciplinary staff at the school, which includes school counselors, homeroom teachers, and psychologists.

As indicated by the principals, although everyone sees the importance of preparing students for higher education at the high schools, there is at present insufficient investment of resources and development of programs in this direction.

Table 1

Summary of Themes

Theme	Details	Selected quote
Overall satisfaction with the achievements of Druze students, with an emphasis on matriculation data	All the principals interviewed for the study emphasized the considerable rise in the success of the Druze school system, with an emphasis on student achievements in the matriculation exams. Moreover, the principals stressed their satisfaction and pride at these achievements.	"The level of Druze education compared to other sectors is satisfactory and they are leading in many areas, particularly in the rate of those eligible [for a matriculation certificate]. I am very satisfied with the situation because of the positive direction of the system."
Desire to continue excelling	The interviewees indicate a strong urge and desire to continue investing resources in development and excellence. It is clear that they do not take the success of Druze students for granted, rather as necessitating constant efforts in order to maintain the clear advantage of the Druze sector in future years as well.	"I am satisfied but I seek to improve and advance. Education in the Druze community is undergoing big changes, the teacher staff are acquiring an education and managing to improve the state of education. The many programs are leading to significant changes as well".
Similarity and uniqueness of the Druze study program	Some emphasize precisely common elements of the program and of the educational contents imparted to students in the general population. These principals contend that it is precisely due to the similar contents that it is possible	"The study program in the Druze sector is characterized by uniqueness in the subject of Druze heritage, while the other subjects are more universal and the equivalent of any study program in the different sectors".

Theme	Details	Selected quote
	to measure the high achievements of the Druze population versus the general population.	
The contribution of the teaching staff as an important element in the achievements of Druze students	The investment in good teaching staff from the Druze sector is one of the most important causes underlying the success of Druze students. Among others, good teaching staff manage to encourage a desire for education among students, encourage excellence, and provide students with sources of support throughout their studies.	"From my point of view, the achievement of high eligibility rates was facilitated by a good management team, good utilization of resources, investment in human capital in the high schools".
Liberal-modern trends as an important factor affecting the achievements of Druze students	The principals stressed that the success of the Druze school system is based to a large extent on sociocultural changes that occurred in the last decade.	"A drop in the desire to join the security forces in the future led to a cognitive change among our youth, manifested in the need to acquire academic studies and a profession outside jobs in the security forces".
The connection between separating the Druze school system from the Arab Division of Education and the achievements of Druze students	Some of the principals indeed see the separation from the Arab school system as a means that accelerated the development of the Druze school system in the direction of increasing students' achievements and grades. In contrast, other principals expressed sharp reservations concerning the impact of the separation on students' achievements and said that the separation was a way of "reeducating" the Druze population by the Israeli government rather than helping Druze students succeed.	In my opinion, the separation did not cause the current change, the separation was intended to separate the Druze from other Arabs".
The school as an academic advocate	Although everyone sees the importance of preparing students for higher education in the high schools, there is at present insufficient investment of resources and development of programs in this direction.	"The top place of the Druze in the school system is not sufficiently evident in institutions of higher education, the results slightly distort reality".

Discussion

To gain a wider perspective on the impact of the separation of the Druze education system from the Arab education, school principals, supervisors, and trainee principals in the Druze sector were interviewed. These interviews raised several main themes. This part will list the themes and propose explanations for the presence of these views among the interviewees (Amer & Davidovitch, 2020; Harb et al., 2022).

First, the majority stressed that they are satisfied with the achievements of students in the Druze sector, with an emphasis on matriculation data. The interviewees emphasized the considerable rise in the success of the Druze school system, stressing students' achievements in the matriculation exams. Furthermore, the principals emphasized their satisfaction and pride at these achievements. The principals see how Druze society is investing in education in a way that facilitates these achievements, for example by multiple educational programs from the preschool stage. Principals' views emphasize the continuous and consistent education in Druze society, which begins at a very early age, necessitating efforts in many dimensions until seeing the products in high school and subsequently. Hence, principals suggest that it is necessary

to plan significant educational actions on the level of contents, supervision, and educational tools in order to encourage students to excel in the lower grades as well. The majority of Druze high school graduates who pursue a higher education choose to focus on education and therefore attend teacher training colleges or education programs in universities all over Israel.

These findings are compatible with previous studies showing that the leadership of principals in schools has a significant contribution to student achievements. The principals in this study are all graduates of Israel's higher education system and understand both the aims of the separate Druze high school system to preserve Druze culture, and the pluralistic nature of Israel's higher education, which promotes co-existence. Therefore, they are uniquely positioned to give their students tools that are effective in integrating into and succeeding in higher education. Manz and Sims (1991) found that a leading-shaping educator manages to influence students to apply themselves to their studies and agree to give more to the school and to their peers than they are required, based on their belief in the goals. Hence, such principals will strive for change while stressing the uniqueness of each student and will convey to students the message and feeling that they trust the students' inner motivation and thus allow them more freedom of choice and a greater range of action. Such principals manage to influence their students to apply themselves to their studies from an inner desire rather than in expectation of reward. They cause the students to recognize the value of their achievements and the achievements as positive rewards in and of themselves, as part of their personal growth and development. The students will agree to give more to the school and to their peers than they are required, based on their belief in the goals of the school. These findings were repeated in studies in the field of leadership (Pearce et al., 2013). These studies show that two components underlie the perceived image of the principal: the professional component and the personality component, which occupies a prominent part among all researchers. The professional component relates to how the formal role is practiced, while the personality component relates to a combination of personal traits that the students consider part of the professional personality of a good educator, particularly regarding the ability to treat students with an attitude of respect and humaneness, in a wide sense. Training of educators in higher education should address both components.

The interviewees also indicate that one of the strengths of the Druze school system is its religious-cultural uniqueness. It is clear that the interviewees are proud of their cultural autonomy and they enrich the study contents significantly with heritage aspects that enhance Druze students' identity and their sense of belonging and pride in the sector. Then again, the principals emphasize that most of the professional and pedagogic contents are shared by the state school system. This is a very important point because it stresses that Druze students have the same scholastic point of origin as their Jewish, Arab, and Christian peers. This only serves to highlight the high achievements of the Druze and it seems that they receive no compensations that might explain the high achievements of Druze students.

One of the important research questions concerns the reasons for Druze students' higher achievements in the matriculation exams compared to their Jewish peers. The current study raises several important reasons. First of all, the principals do not take the high achievements for granted. Specifically, a significant theme attested to by all principals is encouraging the desire to excel. In the principals' opinion this desire must be shared by the principals themselves, the educational teams, and the students. The principals stressed their need to continue detecting weak points, making efforts to improve them. This inclination of principals in the sector is part of the explanation for the ability of the Druze school system to reach very good achievements. The principals emphasized the need to make an effort to urge students constantly and consistently, while not taking students' current achievements for granted. Namely, the fundamental approach of the principals in the current study is that in order for Druze students to maintain their high achievements over time it is necessary to preserve the programs, teaching methods, and efforts of the educational teams. Indeed, the principals are very attentive and make a big effort to construct new programs, choose high quality teaching staff, and invest in areas that are slightly weaker, such as teaching Hebrew.

In addition, the principals also stressed the efforts made on behalf of the educational teams and noted the contribution of the teaching force as an important factor in the achievements of Druze students. The principals see great

significance in choosing good teachers and subsequently in their further training, because these trainings contribute significantly to the achievements of Druze students. Among others, a good teaching force manages to encourage the desire for education among the students, encourages excellence, and provides students with sources of support throughout their years of studies.

Another explanation mentioned by principals in the attempt to understand the exceptional achievements of Druze students is the flourishing of liberal-modern trends. In the last decade there has been a certain decline in conservative views among the Druze sector and a rise in the level of modernist and liberal views. These processes have allowed primarily Druze women to study outside the home, acquire an education and a profession, and constitute an important source of subsistence for the household. This led to a rise in the significance of education as an important element in the mobility of Druze families and in the ability to improve their economic situation. Subsequently, this message filtered down to the students from their parents and seems to have also led to a rise in their motivation to apply themselves to their studies. The principals' testimonies are compatible with previous studies conducted in Druze society, which showed the continued existence of cultural barriers that make it hard for women to acquire an education or work, first and foremost patriarchal patterns (Dwairy & Jagelman, 2020; Ha'israeli, 2022).

In addition to the traditional prohibitions that prevent women from studying with men, being outside the home or outside the village without a male escort, there are also other traditional social barriers: Many parents believe that studies are not essential for girls as they will marry in any case and remain at home, all the more so in the case of higher education that requires significant financial costs. Nonetheless, in recent years modernization trends are evident, the financial need for an additional salary in the household, and the Compulsory Education Law (Dwairy & Jagelman, 2020). All these have gradually changed the attitude of Druze society to educated and working women and have led to the growing significance attributed to education in Druze society.

In addition, thanks to the shaping of a unique Druze identity the principals emphasize that Druze students make an effort to reach achievements and attain an education with the aim of distinguishing themselves from the overall Arab sector. Namely, the scholastic success of the students is perceived by the principals as a means of generating a positive unique identity compared to young non-Druze Arabs. Hence, belonging to a separate Druze school system increases the motivation of Druze students and their sense of belonging to the Israeli collective.

One of the main questions in this study concerns the contribution of separating the Druze school system from the Arab Division of Education to the achievements of Druze students. The principals indicate that in contrast to the initial hypothesis of this study, a large part of the principals do not see the separation of the Druze school system from the Arab Division of Education as a major factor explaining the achievements of Druze students. These principals advocated internal explanations, citing active actions taken by leaders of the Druze sector to encourage education among young Druze. This, in place of an external explanation such as the separation of the school system, which depends primarily on the decision of the Israeli establishment. In this context, certain principals even expressed a sense of grievance at the separation, emphasizing that it served as a tool for "reeducating" the Druze population by the Israeli government, rather than being aimed at helping the success of the Druze students.

Another significant topic that arose in the study concerns the wide perspective of the principals with regard to the students' education. Namely, the principals do not see the education of young people as "ending" in high school, rather they see one of the school's roles as an important academic advocate. Preparation for academic studies should be manifested both in the professional-pedagogic sphere and in the social-emotional sphere. At the same time, the principals stressed that since their "mandate" is limited to high school they invest their resources (money, teaching staff, study methods) in the school and do not have the resources to invest in building preparatory programs for academia. Thus, the principals expressed a desire to develop programs that would help students acquire skills of knowledge and tools for entering academia.

Contribution of the Current Study

The current study has an important contribution to the Israeli school system in general and to the Druze school system in particular. The development and consolidation of the Druze school system as a distinct body within the Israeli Ministry of Education, which began in 1976, has yet to be studied and explored with regard to its long-term results. The study is the first to examine the issue of the separation of the Druze school system and its impact on the achievements of students in this sector. The research findings indicate that the outstanding achievements of students in the Druze school system (particularly in the high school) indeed distinguish them from their peers in the general, Arab, and ultra-Orthodox school system. Their high school achievements pave the way to greater success in the higher education system, and opens doors for them to pursue a higher education in many high-demand fields but also significantly influence their prospects in teacher training programs. The research findings emphasize that these achievements can be explained mainly in light of the significant investment of leaders of the school system, beginning with the supervisors, through the principals, and ending with the teachers and teaching teams.

The research findings indicate a disparity between the high achievements of high school students and their sense of academic preparedness for university studies. Therefore, the conclusions of the current study stress the need to develop intervention programs for the Druze sector that will improve students' preparedness for entering academia from a scholastic and social perspective, as well as in aspects of adjustment to the academic institutions. In addition, the disparity between the achievements of high school students and those of Druze students in academia accentuates their lack of academic preparedness for higher education. Therefore, The appropriateness of the matriculation exams held at the end of high school should be examined and especially how they can really prepare for success (and maybe even predict) in academia. The conclusions of the present study emphasize the need to better adapt the contents of the matriculation exams (and the preparations for them) to the students' subsequent academic requirements.

In summary, in seems that the Druze model presents a successful educational model that invests in resources, teaching methodologies, study discipline, and encouraging students to excel. All these lead to significantly higher achievements of Druze students compared to their peers in Israel's other school systems. Therefore, the other school systems would do well to embrace the positive features of the Druze system, including increasing supervision of the learning processes.

In addition, from a perspective of social solidarity, an outline consisting of a uniform state school system for all students in Israeli society should be considered. Such an outline would allow very wide common grounds, while making room for the social, cultural, and religious uniqueness of the different streams. The more education will provide a response for the general abilities that students must acquire in order to succeed in the employment world of the 21st century, as well as for the uniqueness of every identity component in Israeli society, the more such education will develop students with pride in their identity but also unity and collaboration.

In conclusion, the findings of the current study should serve as actionable recommendations for decision makers in the state education system, for decision makers in the Druze education system as well as for practitioners. Quality assurance of new academic programs will be examined through students' perception; New research implications for the faculty and for the administrators seeking to constantly, will improve the quality of their programs Moreover, the study may serve as a theoretical foundation and significant background for future studies aimed at planning education in Israel in general and in the Druze community in particular.

Contribution of the Current Study

The current study is the first of its kind in that it examined the Druze education system in a thorough, in-depth and broad manner. At the same time, the study's conclusions should be treated with caution, based on the following limitations. First, due to difficulty in reaching large samples, the samples for the present study were done in the form of a convenience sample. Therefore, the samples of students, students, and principals are not representative of the entire research population. Follow-up studies should expand on these samples and examine the questions of the current study by reaching larger and

more representative samples. Second, the qualitative information as reported by the managers is a result of their subjective worldview. In addition, the interpretation of qualitative information may be somewhat biased because it relies on preconceived assumptions of the researcher.

Moreover, the current study emphasizes the differentiation of the Druze education system from the Arab education system. It should be emphasized that the claim that achievements have indeed improved thanks to the separation has received support one way or the other. On the one hand, the interviewees in the current study did not mention separation as the main precipitating factor for high achievements in the Druze sector compared to the Arab education system. On the other hand, the autonomy in content and independent management of the Druze education system is indeed uniquely characteristic of the Druze education system and less so of the Arab education system. Thus, follow-up studies should continue to examine the common denominator as well as the differences between the two education systems. The more thorough and profound this characterization is, the more policy leaders will be able to take advantage of each education system and improve the other.

Finally, at the beginning of the study, the intention was to compare the achievements of the Druze education system with the achievements of the Christian population. This is because these populations are similar in size, with Christians serving as a kind of comparison group with the Druze population. At the same time, no separate data were found on the Christian population by itself, but as part of the general Arab population.

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Graduate Students and the U.S. China Initiative

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Abstract

The 2018 China Initiative systematically targeted international Chinese scholars as possible spies for China. Previous research has demonstrated ways that the China Initiative engaged in racial profiling, resulting in scholars of Chinese descent feeling unwelcomed in U.S. higher education institutions and insecure in their engagement as researchers. Graduate students were not exempt. Using descriptive analyses and proportion tests, this study explores the nuanced ways that Chinese graduate students felt discriminated against and racially profiled in comparison to their non-Chinese peers during the height of the U.S. China Initiative. Framed by neo-racism, this research also assesses how those experiences impacted students' future educational mobility plans. Chinese graduate students feel more targeted than their non-Chinese peers and they express an interest in leaving the United States due to these negative perceptions. As international Chinese enrollments in the United States are declining, our study seeks to identify the factors that may contribute to this trend.

Keywords: Chinese students, discrimination, geopolitics, international student mobility

Introduction

The China Initiative, established under the Trump Administration in 2018, had a chilling effect throughout the scientific research community. Although racially profiling Asian people existed long before the COVID-19 pandemic or Trump's admittance into the Oval Office (Hvistendahl, 2020; Kim, 2021; Ruiz et al., 2021), the China Initiative expanded federal investigations into Chinese nationals and their affiliated organizations (U.S. Department of Justice, 2020), resulting in over 162 cases (MIT Technology Review, 2021; Pelham & Sun, 2022). Of these, the Department of Justice (DOJ) brought forth 12 cases involving fraud and economic espionage within higher education. Notwithstanding the concerning fact that "significantly more than 12 research integrity cases" were listed on the DOJ's prosecutions list before records were deleted (Guo et al., 2021, para. 17), the integrity and transparency of the China Initiative have been and continue to be criticized.

The opaque investigatory processes paired with President Trump's antagonistic language toward China fostered "a climate of fear among Asian Americans" (Lucas, 2022, para. 1) and trepidation within the scientific community (Lee & Li,

2021, Lin & Sun, 2021; Mervis, 2023; Xi et al., 2023). Following several concerning reports (Lee & Li, 2021; MIT Technology Review, 2021) and petitions to end the China Initiative (Winds of Freedom, 2021), Assistant Attorney General Matthew Olsen announced that the China Initiative would be terminated, stating:

> While I remain focused on the evolving, significant threat that the government of China poses, I have concluded that this initiative is not the right approach…by grouping cases under the China Initiative rubric, we helped give rise to a harmful perception that the department applies a lower standard to investigate and prosecute criminal conduct related to that country or that we in some way view people with racial, ethnic or familial ties to China differently (U.S. Department of Justice, 2022, para. 46).

While the 2018 China Initiative policy formally ended under the Biden administration, the "anti-Asian scrutiny has only intensified" (Gilbert, 2023, para. 1) and racial profiling continues to permeate academic research. In the Summer of 2024, the U.S. House of Representatives voted to reinstate the China Initiative under a new provision called the Protect America's Innovation and Economic Security from CCP Act, which would similarly target scholars with perceived strategic connections to the Chinese Government (McKenzie, 2024). This decision followed the death of Dr. Jane Wu, a leading neuroscientist at Northwestern University who was previously targeted for her connections to China and completed suicide in July 2024. According to her colleague, Dr. Xiao-Fan Wang, a Cancer researcher at Duke University, the China Initiative "killed her career" (para. 12) and "denying her the right to do research was like taking away the most important thing in her life" (as cited in Xin, 2024, para. 13). Although the outcome of the recent legislative bill is unknown during the writing of this article, the negative effects of the 2018 China Initiative are still felt today.

Broadly defined, racial discrimination occurs when individuals receive unfair treatment due to personal characteristics associated with their race (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, n.d.). Racial profiling occurs when the political and legal apparatus targets individuals based on racial discrimination (ACLU, 2005). Within the context of the China Initiative, Chinese students and scholars faced racial discrimination and racial profiling instigated by U.S. federal government policies and practices. Within this paradigm, Chinese graduate students were caught in the crosshairs of political strife. On the one hand, the success of U.S. scientific output relies on collaboration with Chinese scholars (Haupt & Lee, 2021), while on the other hand, Chinese scholars have been systematically targeted by niche, albeit powerful, political discourse that accuses them of economic espionage. Chinese students are not exempt from this narrative (Redden, 2018). The purpose of this research paper is to 1) examine Chinese graduate students' experiences with discrimination and 2) review their mobility plans in comparison to their non-Chinese counterparts following controversial policies stemming from the 2018 China Initiative and extending into the post-Trump presidency.

Literature Review

Scientific research is fundamentally borderless and necessitates open collaboration as well as the free exchange of ideas. This is often at odds with U.S. protectionist strategies. The Department of Justice is quick to assume that U.S. scientists who engage with Chinese researchers export information to benefit the Chinese government, regardless of the nature of the collaboration. While the academy, by and large, supports collaboration, the DOJ "does not understand the ethos of science" (Schaefer, 2023, p. 9) and thus makes inaccurate assumptions about U.S. scientific conduct. Sharing information with support staff, including graduate students, is vital for the success of many research projects and programmatic interventions. To avoid being targeted by the U.S. government, many U.S.-American researchers have considered suspending or terminating their collaborative projects with Chinese affiliates (Lee & Li, 2023), while other scientists, specifically those of Chinese ethnic heritage, have avoided applying for U.S. federal grants (Lin & Sun, 2021; Xi et al., 2023). As Chinese scholars pursue research with collaborators in less hostile nations (Silver, 2020), graduate students' opportunities have been impacted.

Over the years, the body of literature highlighting the consequences of the China Initiative has grown extensively. Research by Lee and Li (2021) and supported by the Committee of 100, a U.S.-based non-profit organization promoting

Chinese American leadership and civic engagement, briefly discussed the impact that the China Initiative and its concurrent U.S. policies have had on international Chinese graduate students. For example, in their study, one Chinese graduate student pursuing biochemistry noted the research field felt isolating due to increased fear around engaging with Chinese scientists. In another example, a Chinese graduate student studying Geological and Earth Sciences reported feeling unsafe conducting their research despite the fact that the data was public information (Lee & Li, 2021). While these findings provide insight into the graduate student experience, this was not the primary study focus, and the authors encouraged additional empirical research into these effects. Expanding upon this whitepaper, the authors' subsequent research (Lee & Li, 2023) assessed the sociological and geopolitical effects of the China Initiative and argued that U.S. educational policy has made it increasingly difficult for Chinese students to enter the United States and pursue higher education. For example, Proclamation 10043 suspends entry into the United States for Chinese graduate students whose focus may support the Chinese government's military strategy (Proclamation 10043, 2020), and student visa restrictions have been imposed on Chinese graduate students pursuing research in sensitive disciplines, such as aviation and robotics (Mervis, 2018), reducing the duration from five years to one year. The negative outcomes these policies espouse, such as reduced student enrollment (Redden, 2019), were well documented among U.S. news media outlets.

Supporting the authors' past findings, other research teams have sought to further examine the effects of the China Initiative. In one such study, an online survey featuring responses from 1,304 U.S. researchers of Chinese heritage found that respondents frequently felt unwelcomed, targeted, and unsafe to conduct their research in the United States. Respectively, "65% are worried about collaborations with China, and a remarkable 86% perceive that it is harder to recruit top international students now compared to 5 years ago" (Xie et al., 2023, p. 3). These findings substantiate an earlier institutional survey conducted by Lin & Sun (2021), which also warned against "brain drain" within U.S. scientific research and highlighted that 31% of faculty witnessed a decline in student and postdoc enrollment who turned down their U.S.-based opportunities due to its unwelcoming environment. Brain drain poses a risk to higher education research and international collaboration. Rather than embracing the benefits that accompany the knowledge and experiences that international students and postdocs bring to U.S. higher education, the United States suffers loss when these scholars instead pursue educational opportunities in more welcoming environments.

It is common for Chinese graduate students to gravitate to ethnically Chinese faculty when selecting an advisor and research collaborator (Borjas et al., 2018). However, if newly awarded PhD recipients pursue professional positions and academic appointments outside of the United States, and those who stay resist research engagements with Chinese affiliates (Xie et al., 2023), then Chinese graduate students could face diminished learning, research, and mentorship opportunities. Stated another way, Chinese graduate students may have limited choices when selecting a research advisor if the faculty they would prefer to work with are migrating outside the United States or are unwilling to collaborate with Chinese scholars. To this end, some Chinese faculty have reduced their laboratories and halted taking on new advisees out of concern they will not be able to support their graduate students (Mervis, 2023).

Although previous research illustrates the negative sociological effects of the China Initiative, the paucity of empirical evidence regarding international and domestic Chinese graduate students' 1) direct experiences with racial discrimination influenced by the China Initiative and 2) mobility plans pertaining to higher education enrollment, highlights the need to explore these challenges. To our knowledge, this research is the first attempt to investigate and document these experiences and educational mobility decisions in tandem.

Asian Discrimination

It is common for international students to experience discrimination on campuses, particularly for those transitioning to the United States from non-Western cultural contexts (Lee, 2010). Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) students are more likely to experience racial discrimination than ethnically European students (Chen et al., 2014), and the variable experiences between Asian students who were raised in the United States versus Asian students raised abroad, including international Chinese students, are prominent. For example, the latter population experiences "lower

levels of perceived discrimination and higher racial color blindness," which can largely be attributed to a narrow understanding of U.S. systemic racism and the limited opportunities to feel its effects in comparison to their U.S.-based counterparts (Wang et al. 2019, p. 27). Chinese graduate students, who come from ethnically homogenous backgrounds, often feel that racism is a distant problem that affects other societies and populations until they transition to the United States (Wang, 2010). Upon facing a loss of privilege along ethno-racial identity lines, many find they are racially profiled along one of two categorizations: as a model minority or as a nefarious spy (Chen & Wen, 2021). The model minority myth pressures students into behavioral compliance with stereotypical notions that partly safeguard them from being targeted by the U.S. federal government.

Briefly, the model minority myth is a harmful social construct imposed on Asian students, which classifies this population by their high achievement (Poon et al., 2016), predilection for math and science (Cheran & Monin, 2005), and cultural context that emphasizes grit and perseverance (Yoo et al., 2010), among other sweeping generalizations. These assumptions extend to Chinese graduate students, who are often labeled under this social group within academia. Facing prejudice, Chinese graduate students may experience increased pressure to perform to elevated and untenable levels to uphold this stereotype (Wang, 2010). Simply stated, the inaccurate and misleading nature of the model minority myth is damaging to Asian students (Yoo et al., 2010), including those of Chinese ethnic heritage.

Many positive, albeit damaging, characteristics outlined in the model minority myth are also leveraged in the U.S. political discourse. As reported by Elizabeth Redden (2018), during his first presidential term, Trump claimed that the majority of Chinese students living and studying in the United States were spies for China. He later explained his intention to address current immigration policies and allow the top international students to retain residency in the United States for up to five years. Trump's characterization of Chinese students, paired with his proposed *dangling-the-carrot* immigration policies, is a prime example of how some U.S. political leaders have exacerbated racial profiling and forced students to overcome additional social hurdles. In the Trump multiverse, international Chinese students were profiled as adversaries to U.S. interests unless they embraced the model minority myth and rose as "top performers," demonstrating a level of goodness and worth to U.S. interests (Chen & Wen, 2021). This construct frames the model minority myth as both a social and political pressure that is necessary to endure in order to stay in the United States.

Such language and policies enacted over the last five years have resulted in negative consequences for international Chinese students. Racial profiling, exemplified through the Trump lexicon, is a tool for the United States government to target Chinese students and faculty under the guise of U.S. national security when, in reality, it is "warranted to preserve the U.S. imaginary of a safe, White-European country…[where] immigration is still allowed and even encouraged, but only for a certain kind of immigrant – those who resemble the dominant race and culture" (Lee, 2020, p. 3). White students, even those who are international, generally feel more comfortable, welcomed, and supported in their higher education environments as opposed to students whose cultural backgrounds are less valued in U.S. society (Lee & Rice, 2007). Chinese students in particular have faced challenges due to negative stereotyping, accelerated by COVID-19 (Chen & Wen, 2021; Koo et al., 2021) and aggravated by the China Initiative (Chen & Wen, 2021; Lee & Li, 2023).

A recent survey found that over the last 30 years, rising tensions between the United States and China have contributed to an increase in the number of incidents of anti-Asian xenophobia and perceived discrimination (U.S.–China Education Trust, 2023). As the China Initiative overlapped with the COVID-19 outbreak, much of the literature on Chinese students' experiences with discrimination focused on the latter. In some instances, international Chinese students were profiled as "backward and contagious…[and] a threat to public wellbeing" (Chen & Wen, 2021, p. 85). Other incidents included threats of violence, verbal assaults, and demands to return home (Koo et al., 2023). Chinese students are facing discrimination on U.S. college campuses, and there appears to be an increase in incidents over the last few years.

Mobilization

Within higher education, international student mobility refers to students' transition from one country to another to pursue college or university enrollment within a host country for which they are not citizens (OECD, 2023). A variety of

factors influence international students' decisions to study in the U.S. and their mobility plans upon graduation. Although positive sociological factors, such as personal development, educational attainment, and career preparation, encourage Chinese students to enroll in U.S. institutions (Bartlett et al., 2018; Chao et al., 2017; Wang, 2021), social, familial, economic, and career-based factors support student decisions to either stay in the host country or return to their home country following their time abroad (Mok et al., 2022; Zweig, 1997). In both of these contexts, the literature on international student mobility decisions resulting from political factors remains underexplored.

Mobility into the United States

Chinese students were the largest population of international students in the United States (IIE, 2022a) until the 2023/2024 academic year, in which India surpassed China as the top sender of international students to the U.S. (IIE, 2024). The COVID-19 pandemic was the most direct cause of declining Chinese student enrollments at the time (Baker, 2020); however, this was not independent of the intertwined geopolitical tensions between the U.S. and China that existed before the pandemic (Guiake & Felix, 2023). Political activities such as "rising anti-Asian racism [and] rocky U.S.–China relations" (Chen, 2023, para. 6), exemplified by Proclamation 10043 and visa duration reductions, imposed myriad challenges for Chinese international students to enter the United States and pursue their education in U.S.-based higher education institutions.

According to Holland et al. (2020), when Proclamation 10043 was first enacted, it had the potential to affect between 3,000 and 5,000 Chinese graduate students who were under U.S. suspicion of supporting the Chinese military. While the China Initiative was dismantled (Lucas, 2022) and President Biden demonstrated less verbal antagonism towards China than President Trump, the political structures enacted by the latter president continued to impact Chinese student mobility plans relevant to entering the United States and pursuing an advanced degree in a range of academic disciplines. Under the Biden administration, Chinese student mobility into the United States continued to be scrutinized. For example, in the summer of 2021, as Chinese students were preparing to secure their visas, 500 individuals were denied entry into the United States (Normile, 2021; Yu, 2021). In response, a group of 2,500 Chinese student activists facing similar visa issues assembled to address the "arbitrary and discriminatory policy" barring their access to the U.S. education system (Normile, 2021, para. 4). The number of nonimmigrant student visas issued to people from the People's Republic of China declined from 105,775 in FY2019 to 61,894 in FY2022 (U.S. Department of State, n.d.), reflecting a 41.48% decrease.

Many Chinese students remain motivated to pursue their education in the United States. However, U.S. policies, such as Proclamation 10043, reflect at their core an arms race between the United States and China. Chinese students are the casualties of such geopolitical antics (Anderson, 2021). As we emerge from the pandemic, the United States has looked to other countries, including India, to increase its international student enrollment (IIE, 2022b). Chinese students are a vital population within U.S. academia, and we will have to wait to see whether the United States implements more attractive and inclusive educational policies to recover from lost enrollment over the last three years or if the trend to make it increasingly difficult to pursue mobility prevails.

Mobility Plans After Graduation

Resoundingly, scientists facing discrimination intend to leave the United States (Lee & Li, 2021; Lin & Sun, 2021; Xi et al., 2023). However, the literature on whether Chinese students and recent graduates feel the same is an area for additional inquiry. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic or the China Initiative, research on international student mobility has focused on movement from home country to host country and vice-versa that often neglected other conceptions, such as feeling a sense of belonging in multiple places or feeling nowhere to be home. Student mobility plans are driven in part by a need to establish place. This process may be disrupted by negative experiences, including discrimination or loss of culture, motivating individuals to move back to their home (ancestral) country (Wu & Wilkes, 2017). In the wake of increased discrimination and anti-Asian hate, to what extent are Chinese graduate students feeling this urge to migrate to more welcoming environments?

Historically, there have been a host of political factors that impact student mobility decisions. In a recent survey, 359 participants, reflecting 58.2% of the total number of participants, indicated that cultural challenges were a factor driving their mobility decisions. Furthermore, 153 participants, reflecting 24.8% of the total number of participants, indicated that their motivation to move was based on racial challenges (Gesing & Glass, 2019). Generally, mobility decisions are not separate from the social and political contexts of students' home and host countries.

As U.S.–China geopolitical tensions escalated, Li (2023) found that Chinese international students who intended to stay in the U.S. after graduation encountered many obstacles. These challenges included a delayed optional practical training (OPT) application process, diminished prospects for securing a U.S. work visa, and a reluctance among employers to hire them. Although most students persevered through these challenges and adhered to their original plans of staying in the U.S., the author cautioned that Chinese students' resilience might not endure if U.S.–China geopolitical tension persists. In addition, considering that more than half of the participants in Li's study were undergraduate students, it is likely that graduate students could be more affected by political circumstances, given U.S. federal scrutiny into their research and connections to China.

Research conducted by Wang (2021) looked at the push-pull factors, as well as reverse push-pull factors, that influenced both undergraduate and graduate Chinese students' mobility plans. Broadly defined, push-pull factors are the various attributes, interventions, and activities that encourage migration out of one country and into another, or vice versa. The findings suggested that the political factors that determine student mobility are dependent upon U.S. and Chinese travel regulations, geopolitical tension, and considerations for safety and security. Furthermore, coming out of the pandemic, rising gun violence, increased prestige of Chinese universities, and less hostile immigration policies in other countries have motivated students to look outside the United States (Chen, 2023). Again, because the political factors affecting Chinese student mobility overlap with the United States' management of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is increasingly difficult to parse through the root causes, warranting additional research into the specific political factors that drive student mobility decisions amidst the China Initiative sociopolitical landscape.

Conceptual Framework

Neo-racism, which "refers to discrimination against particular populations on the basis of culture between ethnic groups" (Lee, 2021, p.12), is the principal theoretical framework guiding this study. Conceptually, neo-racism highlights the social hierarchy of culture and national identity framed through a Western lens, which extends beyond racial identity. This manifests in how individuals, families, groups, and communities navigate U.S. social constructs, which benefit those who assimilate into the dominant culture above those who do not. Students from Western countries are placed higher along the cultural hierarchy above students from non-Western countries (Hou, 2023; Lee & Rice, 2007), and international Chinese students generally fall within this latter category.

As "neo-racism justifies discrimination on the basis of cultural difference or national origin rather than by physical characteristics alone" (Lee, 2006, p. 4), we suggest that ethnically Chinese students who were raised in China and transition to the U.S. as international students have different experiences with discrimination than ethnically Chinese students who were raised in Western countries. These differences, underpinned by neo-racist political and social pressures, are at the heart of our analysis toward determining how international Chinese graduate students contextualize their experiences in U.S. higher education institutions.

Data & Methodology

To examine Chinese graduate students' experiences and mobility plans as opposed to their non-Chinese counterparts, we drew the data from a larger national survey carried out between May and July 2021 among scientists in 83 prominent U.S. universities (Lee & Li, 2023), following the University of Arizona's research ethics approval. Designed to uncover the impact of the China Initiative and FBI investigations on the scientific community, the survey encompassed questions addressing participants' experiences and perspectives related to collaborations with China, racial profiling, and mobility plans concerning China. For this study, we specifically focused on the questions related to sentiments of racial profiling and mobility plans.

With a particular emphasis on graduate students, this study focused on a subset of the participants from the larger project. The original sample consisted of 1,949 scientists in STEM fields, among which 1,448 reported their roles as graduate students, postdocs, faculty members, or others. This study included 544 graduate students who reported their ethnicity, reflecting 37.6% of the larger sample. Table 1 shows the number of participants by ethnicity and citizenship. Since Chinese scientists were purposefully oversampled in the survey (Lee & Li, 2023), half (49.3%) of the graduate students self-identified as Chinese. A majority (86.2%) of the Chinese graduate students were foreign citizens.

Table 1

Graduate Student Participant Demographics

Ethnicity	Citizenship	Number of Participants
Chinese	Foreign citizen	231
	U.S. citizen	36
	Did not identify citizenship	1
Non-Chinese	Foreign citizen	69
	U.S. citizen	207
Total		544

We used descriptive analyses and proportion tests to examine the differences between Chinese and non-Chinese graduate students, as well as between Chinese students with and without U.S. citizenship, in their sentiments of racial profiling and intentions of leaving the U.S. due to the China Initiative and/or the FBI investigations. Specifically, our analysis involved summarizing the results by using percentages. For example, we examined the percentages of both Chinese and non-Chinese graduate students considering leaving the U.S. in response to the China Initiative or FBI investigations. We used proportion tests to determine the statistical significance of the differences in these percentages between Chinese and non-Chinese graduate students. Additionally, we employed structural equation modeling (SEM) to explore the mediating effect of racial profiling on graduate students' mobility plans. The SEM comprised three variables: being Chinese, feeling racially profiled, and considering leaving the U.S. due to the China Initiative and/or the FBI investigations. While being Chinese and considering leaving the U.S. due to the China Initiative and/or the FBI investigations were directly observed through respective survey questions, feeling racially profiled was a latent variable. We adopted the composite variable of feeling racially profiled from Lee & Li's (2023) study. This variable indicates that a participant reported at least one of the four items related to racial profiling. These four items are (a) feeling racially profiled by the U.S. government, (b) feeling considerable fear and/or anxiety of being surveilled by the U.S. government, (c) having experienced difficulty obtaining funding for a research project in the U.S. as a result of race/nationality/country of origin, and (d) having experienced professional challenges (i.e., promotion, professional recognition) as a result of race/nationality/country of origin. The composite variable of feeling racially profiled was validated through a confirmatory factor analysis (Lee & Li, 2023).

Results

Chinese graduate students, regardless of their citizenship, were more likely to feel racially profiled than their non-Chinese counterparts. Among Chinese students, 48.7% felt considerable fear and/or anxiety of being surveilled by the U.S. government, 40.7% felt being racially profiled by the U.S. government, 34.8% had experienced professional challenges (i.e., promotion, professional recognition) as a result of race/nationality/country of origin and 29.1% had experienced difficulty obtaining funding for a research project in the U.S. as a result of race/nationality/country of origin. The percentages were only 13.8% ($z = 74.14$, $p < 0.001$), 10.7% (62.0%, $p < 0.001$), 17.6% ($z = 15.09$, $p < 0.001$), and 14.4% ($z = 12.05$, $p < 0.05$), respectively, for non-Chinese graduate students. Using the composite variable of feeling racially

profiled, the results for Chinese and non-Chinese graduate students differed significantly. Approximately two-thirds (68.1%) of the Chinese students reported at least one of those four issues, while approximately one-third (34.6%, $z = 41.3$, $p < 0.001$) of the non-Chinese students did so.

When further breaking down the data by citizenship, racial profiling was a particularly concerning issue among Chinese international graduate students as opposed to Chinese American students. More than half (53.3%) of the Chinese students with foreign citizenship felt considerable fear and/or anxiety of being surveilled by the U.S. government, while only 16.7% of the Chinese American students reported having such fear and/or anxiety ($z = 15.46$, $p < 0.001$). The discrepancy between foreign and U.S. citizens was also salient, although not statistically significant, in their perceptions of racial profiling by the U.S. government (42.9% vs. 25.0%, $z = 3.43$, $p = 0.06$) and experiences of having difficulty obtaining funding for a research project in the U.S. as a result of race/nationality/country of origin (33.1% vs. 6.9%). In terms of experiences of professional challenges as a result of race/nationality/country of origin, there was no significant difference between Chinese students with foreign and U.S. citizenship (35.4% vs. 32.3%, $z = 0.02$, $p = 0.89$). Overall, there was a significant difference between these two groups by using the composite racial profiling variable (72.8% vs. 41.4%, $z = 9.69$, $p < 0.05$).

Among foreign citizens, 39.1% of Chinese graduate students considered leaving the U.S. due to the China Initiative and FBI investigations, while only 5.8% of non-Chinese graduate students reported so. The SEM results revealed that racial profiling was an essential factor that resulted in graduate students' changing mobility plans (Figure 1). Being Chinese did not have a significant direct effect on considering leaving the U.S. due to the China Initiative and/or FBI investigations ($b = 1.13$, $p = 0.474$). However, confirming the descriptive analysis, Chinese graduate students were significantly more likely to feel racially profiled ($b = 0.45$, $p < 0.05$). Additionally, feeling racially profiled significantly led to considering leaving the U.S. ($b = 0.58$, $p < 0.001$). This result suggests that one's Chinese ethnic identity itself did not necessarily lead graduate students to consider leaving the U.S. under the political circumstances of the China Initiative and/or FBI investigations unless they felt that they were being racially profiled.

Figure 1

SEM Direct Effect Results on Considering Leaving the U.S.
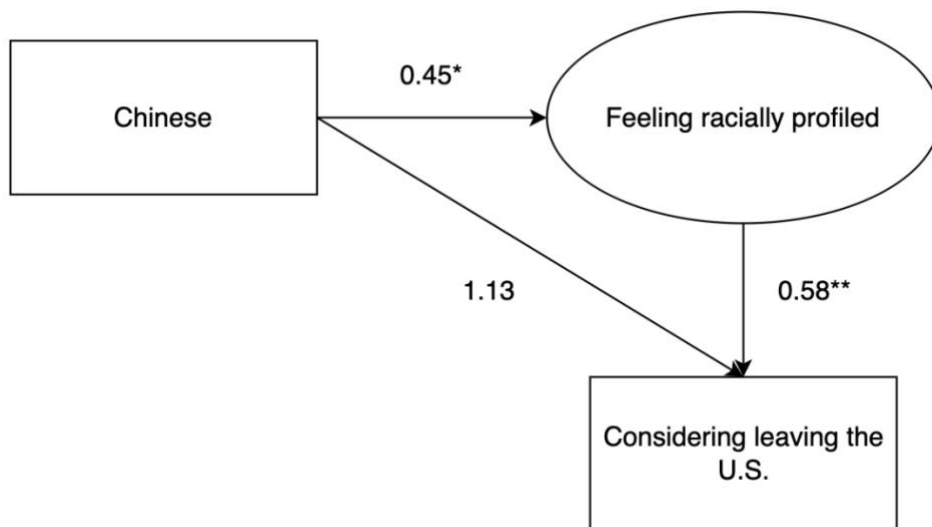
Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.001$

Proportion test was not conducted because assumptions were not met.

Discussion

The results of this study are concerning. However, neither the methodology of our analysis nor the results of our findings equip us to suggest direct causation between policies such as the 2018 China Initiative and adverse social interactions, including discrimination. However, during the peak of the China Initiative between 2018 and 2021, Chinese graduate students living in the United States felt more targeted by the U.S. government and more racially profiled at their institutions in comparison to their peers of non-Chinese heritage. Additionally, the differences between U.S.-American Chinese students and international Chinese students further delineated these variable experiences, suggesting that the neo-racist political discourse targeted the latter population more pointedly. Our research suggests that racialized policies enacted by the U.S. federal government, such as visa restrictions, limited work opportunities, and FBI investigations, influenced Chinese graduate student mobility patterns. While the relationship between Chinese identity, feeling racially profiled, and considering leaving the United States yielded a positive result, we encourage additional qualitative research to further explore the root cause that led to negative student perceptions and motivations to leave the U.S.

Exploring how policies such as the China Initiative directly contributed to feelings of discrimination may lead to more inclusive policy interventions in the future. Additionally, because the China Initiative coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, the need to further understand students' feelings of discrimination and future mobility plans is necessary. While our research notes that international Chinese graduate students felt discriminated against in comparison to non-Chinese peer groups, our research does not delve into the nuanced activities that led students to feel racially profiled. Furthermore, we were unable to fully disaggregate the negative experiences that resulted from U.S. targetization related to the China Initiative versus the COVID-19 pandemic. Addressing this limitation, a future narrative inquiry that captures student experiences would help to contextualize racial profiling. For example, exploring the specific circumstances and activities that make international Chinese graduate students feel that they are under U.S. government surveillance would add additional depth to the current literature.

Regarding mobility, international Chinese graduate students expressed an interest in leaving the United States due to feelings of being targeted by the U.S. government, which did not exist to the same degree for international non-Chinese graduate students. Furthermore, while feeling racially profiled was a motivating factor for disclosing an interest in leaving the U.S., ethnic identity in and of itself was not a contributing factor. Our research speaks to how feelings of discrimination are linked to students' self-identified interest in leaving the United States.

The findings from our study suggest that Chinese international students considered leaving the United States under conditions in which they felt racially profiled. Given the state of the current social-political landscape, paired with recent enrollment trends, the data suggest that these conditions have been met, motivating international Chinese graduate students to move elsewhere. However, the myriad reasons why students pursue education at home or abroad necessitate further inquiry into student mobility motivations and enrollment patterns in response to political influences.

Chinese students represent an important population within U.S. higher education. As discrimination against Chinese graduate students persists, the U.S. is likely to lose its Science and Engineering (S&E) workforce from China, which would have a negative impact on its economy and innovation. As such, colleges and universities must be aware of these trends and create appropriate support structures to meet student needs. To this end, we recommend that higher education institutions consider ways to combat the negative effects of discrimination. Increased positive social interaction to buffer against the negative effects of discrimination (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Sun et al., 2021; Trice, 2004;) is one such strategy, although additional research into this area is necessary. In the interim, assessing current enrollment patterns and exploring the root cause for feelings of discrimination may help inform institutional practices to recruit and retain qualified international Chinese graduate students to U.S. higher education institutions.

Conclusion

The 2018 China Initiative unduly targeted Chinese scholars, including Chinese graduate students. The empirical literature shows that international students have consistently faced discrimination in higher education, which was exacerbated by U.S. policies such as Proclamation 10043 and newly instated visa restrictions. Furthermore, while the United States remains a top destination for Chinese graduate students, U.S. policies that limit migration impact students' ability to migrate to the United States for their education. Our research shows that international Chinese students, on the whole, felt racially profiled by the U.S. government. These experiences were more common for ethnically Chinese students than for non-ethnically Chinese students, and the differences between international and domestic Chinese students were also prominent. Broadly speaking, racially targeting students impacted student motivations to stay in their U.S. postgraduate program.

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To All the Nations of the World: A Postcolonial Analysis of Protestant Christian-oriented Study Abroad Programs

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Abstract

This study uses a basic qualitative design to explore faith-integrated study abroad programming at Protestant Christian-affiliated institutions in the United States, with a particular focus on comparing programs in Majority and Minority worlds. Guided by postcolonial theory, and informed by critical lenses of globalization, we analyze curricular content found on the webpages of four US higher education institutions. Study abroad trips are compared across four vectors: how Protestant Christianity is integrated into the programs; how programs are described; the activities undertaken; and the images used to promote them. Results reveal stark and pervasive differences in how programs are depicted, depending on their location in the Majority or Minority world, that reinforce negative stereotypes and colonial/imperial narratives regarding the Majority world, contrasted with the Minority world. These results have important implications for both individuals who work directly with study abroad and to leaders more generally at Protestant-affiliated institutions.

Introduction

The Institute of International Education (IIE)'s annual Open Doors report serves as a reminder each year that U.S. students who participate in study abroad are racially/ethnically homogenous compared to the general U.S. postsecondary student population. For example, in 2017-18, 70% of study abroad participants were white compared to 56% of total enrollments at U.S. institutions (IIE, 2019; U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Study abroad professionals and researchers consistently propose diversification of destination choices (that is, the expansion of programs to locations outside of Europe) as one solution to this problem of unequal participation (e.g., Esmieu et al., 2016; McClure et al., 2010; Whatley, 2017). This logic suggests that if students are presented with a more diverse array of location options for international learning, then a more diverse student population will participate.

In actuality, no evidence suggests that such programs contribute to racial/ethnic diversification in study abroad. Instead, calls for diversification in destination choices ignore the potential for negative consequences that these new,

'diverse' programs hold for both host communities and student learning experiences. That is, these programs have the potential to impact host communities negatively and to reinforce students' preconceived notions about 'non-traditional' study abroad locations, all while not achieving their purported goals (Ficarra, 2017). As an example of the former, well-intentioned service-learning implemented in host communities may have unintended consequences that disrupt traditional approaches to health or childcare that have worked for centuries. The fact that service-learning opportunities are provided through study abroad programs in some parts of the world and not others may send the wrong message about the kinds of support and resources needed in certain communities. Indeed, postcolonial critiques of internationalization activities at US institutions highlight ongoing colonial domination at the hands of imperial and neoliberal ideologies (Mok, 2007; Tikly, 2004; Rizvi, 2007; Stein, 2021b; Stein, 2022). These challenges may be particularly evident in faith-integrated study abroad programs at religious higher education institutions in the United States, given the colonial legacy of western Christianity (Jules et al., 2021; Majeke, 1952). For much of colonial history, education and religion have been inseparable in that Christian missionaries selected the content, curriculum, and language of instruction at educational institutions, decisions that were made based on a "divine mission of salvation" regarding non-Christian societies in various parts of the world (Jules et al., 2021, p. 44). Thus, colonial underpinnings that remain present at faith-based U.S. institutions of higher education, particularly those that speak to the institution's relationship with the world at large, whether explicit or implicit, may lead to aspects of faith-integrated study abroad programs at these institutions that negatively impact both host communities and student learning.

For the purposes of this study, the term study abroad refers to outbound education abroad programs completed for academic credit from a higher education institution. Notably, this definition does not include programs branded as noncurricular "mission trips." Using data derived from study abroad program webpages, this study applies a basic qualitative design to explore faith-integrated study abroad programming at Protestant Christian-affiliated institutions in the United States. Its purpose is to understand how these programs are portrayed differently according to destination location and, through these portrayals, programs' potential for adverse impacts on both local communities and student learning. This work is particularly important considering recent research findings suggesting that Protestant Christian-affiliated institutions in the United States report higher study abroad participation rates compared to Catholic and non-religiously affiliated institutions (Whatley & Stich, 2021). Our findings have important implications for future critical research that examines U.S. study abroad programming and for practitioners who design and implement study abroad curriculum.

International education data indicate a preponderance of study abroad programs in European locations (IIE, 2019) and prior research has demonstrated a tendency toward representation that promotes a binary presentation of European and non-European cultures (Ficarra, 2017). In this study, we find a similar binary representation among the study abroad programs featured in our research. While recognizing that a binary representation of the world of any type is problematic, as it inherently glosses over important cultural differences among diverse communities and experiences that exist throughout the world (Bhabha, 2012), we maintain a binary representation here because it reflects our data. However, we adopt terms referring to Majority and Minority worlds (Alam, 2008) rather than European and non-European locations or other terminological options because we find that these terms more accurately reflect the patterns we observed in our data. The Majority world refers to areas of the world that are home to much of the world's population, that historically have been subject to colonization, and that are often economically poorer compared to the Minority world. The Minority world, in contrast, is home to a minority of the world's population numerically, often represents colonizers rather than the colonized, and tends to include areas that are more economically prosperous (George Mwangi, 2017).

While the Minority world certainly includes many countries in Europe along with the United States, it also includes countries such as Australia and New Zealand. Similarly, while the Majority world includes mostly non-European locations, it can also include European countries such as Romania. Other terminological options, such as Global North/Global South or European/non-European also don't pattern as well with our findings than does Majority/Minority. A term like 'European' would apply equally to Spain and Romania, even though these two locations exhibited very different patterns in our data, with Romania patterning more similarly to locations outside Europe. Couched within the more nuanced concepts of Majority

and Minority Worlds, this study extends comparisons among locations within a subset of study abroad programs: those that have explicit Protestant Christian faith integration. Specifically, we address the following research questions:

1. How is faith integrated into study abroad programming at Protestant Christian-affiliated institutions in the U.S.?
2. How do study abroad websites describe these faith-integrated study abroad programs?
3. According to website content, what activities are undertaken on faith-integrated study abroad programs at these institutions?
4. How are images used to portray faith-integrated study abroad programs?

Our first research question aimed to establish how faith was integrated into study abroad programming at Protestant Christian-affiliated institutions. As detailed below, the institutions included in this study represent a range of Protestant denominational affiliations and theological traditions—from liberal to conservative. However, each of the institutions included have made clear and explicit choices to forefront their religious affiliation: in their overall mission; their study abroad offerings; and throughout their curriculum. Most private colleges and universities in the United States have or had a religious affiliation (Benne, 2001), but in our initial search for institutions to include in this study, the phenomenon of faith-integrated study abroad appeared most apparent at those that retain that affiliation and that have a strong religiously focused institutional identity. Without a clear understanding of how faith manifested in programs at Protestant Christian-affiliated institutions, it was more difficult to explore destination-specific differences, the focus of our other research questions. These questions address specific aspects of how Minority and Majority destinations are depicted in faith-based study abroad program materials, namely program descriptions, activities, and the images used to promote these programs.

Literature Review

U.S. Study Abroad Programming

In general, academic literature focusing on education abroad takes a positive perspective of this educational activity and focuses attention on areas such as ways to increase study abroad participation (e.g., Netz et al., 2020) or improve education abroad programming (e.g., Davis & Knight, 2021). While education abroad can certainly be a positive experience for many students, this literature ignores potential negative aspects of education abroad programming. Although the body of literature that critically examines U.S. education abroad programming is small, this work provides important context for our study. In a significant contribution to this line of inquiry, Zemach-Bersin (2009) cites problematic rhetoric with which institutions promote study abroad programs, shaping students' perceptions of study abroad even before they begin international experiences. Findings in this study suggest that students' pre-departure attitudes are overwhelmingly in accordance with a commercial narrative of study abroad. This narrative portrays study abroad as providing students with a needed break away from campus, a break to which they are entitled. This narrative also promotes study abroad as existing primarily for students' own personal advancement, a trait that Zemach-Bersin attributes to a "reckless employment of global citizenship rhetoric" (p. 315) on the part of institutions in study abroad promotional materials. Ficarra (2017) presents a similar finding regarding institutional study abroad webpage content.

Additional work in this line of inquiry has focused on how study abroad destinations are portrayed in institution-produced materials. For example, Caton and Santos (2009) explored photographs and images used in promotional materials of one especially popular education abroad program provider. The authors found that these images tend to portray non-western people and cultures as backwards and primitive. These images also depict non-westerners as reliant on western study abroad participants to experience modern advancement, perhaps most notably in technology (e.g., digital photography). Such portrayals are, of course, problematic, and present prospective study abroad participants with notions about non-western people and cultures that are inaccurate. Ficarra (2017) examined study abroad portfolios of three institutions of higher education providing insight into the content or function of study abroad programs by geographic area. The scholar found that service-learning programs are heavily concentrated in Africa and Latin America - an overwhelming 80% of study abroad programs in Africa were classified as *service learning* in this study; sending a message to students that

people in these regions need their help. In contrast, other regions of the world are dominated by programs in business (Asia and the Middle East) and internship opportunities (Asia and the Pacific). Study abroad programs in Europe, the region with the most programs, are the most varied in terms of content and function. However, Ficarra (2017) found that service-learning programs are almost non-existent in Europe.

Like Caton and Santos (2009) and Ficarra (2017), the current study examines materials that institutions produce to promote and share information about study abroad programming. In this study, we consider an additional nuance in study abroad program design namely an explicit integration of Protestant Christian faith.

International Missions

In addition to utilizing postcolonial works in theorizing about faith-integrated study abroad, we were also in conversation with literature on the colonial legacy of Christian missionary activity, given the faith-focus of our research questions. While the particulars are certainly complex, Christian missionary activity and religious conversion were "both vital and a consistent element in the colonial encounter," first for European powers, and later for the United States (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1986, p. 2). Missionary activity is often the focus of critical inquiry because of its importance in establishing and shaping postcolonial normativity through social institutions. Examples have been noted regarding education (Mackenzie, 1993), family life and rites of passage (Sagner, 2001), and health care (Rubinstein & Lane, 1990), among others. The legacy of Christian missionaries is varied. In the best cases, missionaries were educators, humanitarians, philanthropists, and even anticolonial activists (Porter, 1997), whose presence was nonetheless "concomitant with the imposition of foreign rule" (Mackenzie, 1993, p. 45). In other cases, missionaries have been seen as cultural conquistadores (Majeke, 1952). Missionaries are ascribed this role for their efforts on two fronts. First, for "the subtle colonization […] of indigenous modes of perception and practice" that "laid the ground for its integration into the industrial capitalist world" (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1986, p. 2); and second, for having played a critical role in supplying theological and moral justifications for colonial domination, capitalist exploitation, and cultural erasure (Maldonado-Torres, 2014; Said, 1993). Contemporarily, the constructions of non-Western countries in a Christian missionary discourse perpetuate a deficit narrative and a supremacist imperative (Conroy-Krutz, 2015).

Since the 1980s, the word 'mission' in the Protestant Christian context has also been used to refer to short-term mission trips (STMs). Designed by STM agencies or churches themselves, these international trips include service, evangelism, or other faith-oriented activity and last anywhere from one week to several months (Howell & Dorr, 2007). Nearly 1.5 million people, largely high school and university students, participate in STMs each year (Nagel, 2021), while only about 350,000 participate in for-credit, university study abroad programs (IIE, 2019). STMs, consequently, constitute a significant portion of the outbound international exchange industry.

Nagel (2021) explains that STMs rely on the same liberal-cosmopolitan language used by secular global education programs to emphasize intercultural immersion and transformative experiences. While they sometimes mirror traditional mission objectives to 'save' non-believers and instill Christian values, contemporary STMs are more likely to emphasize leaving one's 'comfort zone,' self-transformation, leadership, relationship-building between participants, and faith-development (Nagel, 2021; Freidus & Caro, 2018; Howell & Dorr, 2007). While STMs often revolve around service learning, these projects fail to enact effective change; instead, service is posed as an opportunity for participants to 'grow in faith' (Nagel, 2021). Additionally, STM discourse emphasizes an encounter with not only foreign environments, but more specifically, sites highlighting global poverty. Therefore, STMs actively extend Protestant missionary legacy of colonial exploitation by intentionally using Majority world contexts for Minority-world participant gain. STMs constitute a new form of social institution for maintaining Minority-world supremacy through Christian, colonial normativity. Thus, contemporary Protestant Christian faith-integrated study abroad resides at the intersection of faith-centered outbound programming and international education.

While this study does not consider STMs a form of study abroad, it is quite evident from the presentation of these programs to potential participants that contemporary Protestant Christian faith-integrated study abroad has the potential to operate as an extension of the centuries-old global evangelistic project of western Christianity. Many of the faith-integrated

study abroad trips explored in the current study share the goals of broader mission work and STMs, partner with longstanding resident missionaries, or explicitly contextualize themselves within evangelistic traditions. These trips are only a small part of contemporary missionary efforts for U.S. Protestant Christians but represent the intersection of international missionary activity with formal international higher education practices. It is useful then to locate these trips within a broader historical and cultural context of international missionary and STM activity. Protestant-Christian affiliated colleges and universities, which extend their religious mission into study abroad, have been understudied as part of the postcolonial discourse, a lacuna that this study addresses.

Conceptual Framework

Conceptually, this study draws from recent work that takes a critical look at the rationales, functions, and curriculum of international education. Stein (2021a) defines this line of inquiry as "an area of study that problematizes the overwhelmingly positive and depoliticized approaches to international higher education" (p. 1). That is, while international education is often depicted as inherently good, it has great potential for negative consequences, especially for individuals and communities located outside the Minority world (Buckner & Stein, 2020). In recent work, Stein (2021b) argues that higher education institutions in general operate within an "organizing imagery" that perpetuates "implicit horizons of justice, hope, futurity, and change" (p. 388). Like Stein, we challenge these stated rationales for higher education and instead highlight a specific instance of colonial violence that demonstrates how "higher education is both rooted in and contributes to the reproduction of a fundamentally harmful and unsustainable system" (p. 388). Notably, the particular instance of colonial violence explored in this study, the design and implementation of Protestant Christian-focused study abroad programs in the Majority world, harms not only local populations, who are subjected to epistemic and spiritual erasure, but also the primarily Minority-world students who participate.

The critiques of international education that Stein and colleagues leverage draw substantially from postcolonial theory, which highlights implications of past and current western expansion, especially through neoliberal policies and practices. Crossley and Tikly (2004) acknowledge the colonial structures that many existing education systems impose, highlighting that such systems continue to suffer from "hegemony of western forms of knowledge/power and of the spread of western, and particularly North American, consumer culture" (pp. 149-150). Although neoliberal economic practices may be the most obvious way in which higher education institutions perpetuate colonial systems from the Minority world, "the effects of modern colonialism [are] also not confined to the mere economy, but spill over to all the aspects of colonial life, including culture, language, religion, caste, gender, and education, etc." (Jules et al., 2021). As Anuar et al. (2021) indicate, a postcolonial approach identifies both a "continuous exercise of decoupling from the experience of colonialism over time" while simultaneously recognizing that "globalization has ushered in more subtle forms of colonialism" (p. 109). The study abroad programs represented in our research are decoupled from traditional notions of colonialism in that they do not explicitly seek domination over the areas of the world where they operate. At the same time, our results suggest that these programs represent a more subtle approach to the perpetuation of colonial power dynamics and resulting violence.

Evidence of Majority world colonial practices may be especially prominent in study abroad, given its elitist and exclusionary history (Hoffa, 2007). Prior work highlights neoliberal elements in study abroad marketing (e.g., Zemach-Bersin, 2009) and messages communicated through these materials to students about the world beyond U.S. borders (e.g., Ficarra, 2017). Caton and Santos (2009) show how study abroad promotional materials produce a binary representation of program destinations, wherein western locations are described as modern and advanced while non-western locations are portrayed as traditional, backwards, and exotic.

Religion is an especially prominent way that (post)colonial knowledge and power structures perpetuate (Jules et al., 2021). As Elbourne (2003) summarizes: "The missionary movement was an early exemplar of a transnational global movement, while the intellectual claims of missionaries to universality paralleled the modernist claims of a globalizing colonialism." (p. 436). For this reason, our study focuses especially on study abroad programs at Protestant Christian-affiliated U.S. higher education institutions and, within this category, programs that have explicit faith integration. Our choice to focus on faith-integrated study abroad trips, many of which are advertised as international missions, draws from

Roberts' (2012) observation that "Christian missions have often combined with and contributed to European colonization" (p. 273). This study expands on scholarship documenting the impact of colonial expansion through western religious and educational institutions and explores how a faith-centered focus might influence the already problematic representations of some study abroad host countries.

Methodology

We used a basic qualitative research design to understand the phenomena of faith-integrated study abroad programs, using Qualitative Content Analysis for data analysis. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) note the strength of qualitative design in studies that are centered on process, meaning, and understanding. Though representing four institutions, the data we incorporate were selectively drawn to meet specific criteria (described below), thus falling short of the 'bounded system' that is present in case studies (Simons, 2009). Instead, this study uses basic qualitative design to explore a strictly defined but non-exhaustive set of data at each institution to focus on the *how* in this theory-guided exploration of phenomena (Yin, 2017). This study aims to understand how the portrayal of faith-integrated study abroad host countries has the potential to adversely impact both host communities and the learning outcomes of participating students. Basic qualitative research design helps to understand and interpret these representations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Data

Our data consist of study abroad program curricula in the form of webpage content from four Protestant Christian-affiliated institutions of higher education—depicted pseudonymously as Communion University, Worship University, Mission College, and Friendship University. We selected these institutions in part because of the explicit mention of Protestant Christianity and a global vision in their institutional mission statements (see examples from these statements in Table 1). Our conceptual framework—and previous literature utilizing similar frameworks—helped us bound both the institutions and the data selected, as detailed below. Following the theory, we focused on elements like institutional mission and faith integration to contextualize programs, and types of activities and depictions of host countries in the program materials as a site of colonial discourse. As a precursor to an in-depth analysis, we reviewed the study abroad offerings of over 100 Christian-affiliated institutions. The final sample aimed to maximize variation among cases, including institutions representing a variety of sizes, U.S. locations, and, importantly, Christian orientations. Also, several of the trips presented by these institutions are offered through broader Christian institutional consortia, extending the transferability of conclusions from this study. For those familiar with Christian-affiliated higher education in the U.S., there is a notable omission here of catholic institutions. That is not because Catholic institutions do not offer study abroad—many are prolific in their offerings—however, our survey of programs broadly revealed that the nature of faith-integration in the study abroad at Catholic institutions was distinct. No single Catholic institution offered the same range of possible faith-integrated trips or positioned the faith-integration of study abroad so explicitly in their public-facing materials. Table 1 provides general information about the characteristics of the institutions included in our sample, including religious affiliation, size, and U.S. geographic region.

Table 1

Example Quotes Connecting International Education to Religious Mission and Sample Characteristics

Example	Affiliation	Size	Location
Communion U.			

The mission statement states that "each of our faculty and staff are devoted to discipleship in classrooms and residence halls, on the turf, and around the world", calling on university students, faculty, and staff to be both "world-engaging" and "Christ-centered" defined this further by saying that "Our Christian faith should permeate all learning – leading to a consistent life of worship, servant leadership, stewardship, and world outreach."	Methodist Episcopal at founding, currently described as nondenominational evangelical Christian	Less than 2,500	Rural-Midwest
Friendship U.			
On numerous webpages, Friendship U. touted their status as "national leader in study abroad," along with the claim that more than half of undergraduate students "participate in an international experience." More broadly, Friendship identified local and global engagement as the fourth component of its mission and went on to claim that "since its founding, [Friendship] has encouraged its students to seek ways to make their faith relevant in the world."	Quaker affiliation at founding, currently described as Christ-centered	Less than 3,000	Suburban-West Coast
Mission College			
In their mission statement, Mission College "strives to graduate men and women distinguished by intellectual maturity and Christian character committed to lives of service and prepared for leadership worldwide." Elsewhere, text on the webpage stresses "Christian faith frames all aspects of the experience […] We want students to think deeply and holistically about how their faith informs their influence in society."	Baptist affiliation at founding, currently described as broadly evangelical	Less than 2,000	Urban-New England
Worship U.			
Worship U.'s institutional mission stated that "Integral to its commitment to God and to the church is Worship's commitment to society. Whereas that society in the mid 1800s was limited to [Southwest state], today [Worship's] sphere of influence is indeed the world." Moreover, "[Worship U.] strives to develop responsible citizens, educated leaders, dedicated scholars and skilled professionals who are sensitive to the needs of a pluralistic society. To those ends, Worship provides expanded opportunities for civic education and for church and community service at home and abroad."	Formerly affiliated with Southern Baptist Convention	Greater than 10,000	Urban-Southeast

Note. All quotes in this table were taken directly from institutions' mission statements on their webpages, current as of the 2019-20 academic year.

For each institution, we focused our analysis on webpage content relating to study abroad programs with an explicit faith-integration in their descriptions (all webpages corresponded to the 2019-20 academic year, before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020). These faith-integrated study abroad programs included clear and explicit religious content and/or a proselytizing or service focus. In most cases, the faith-integration was described in detail on the program's webpage and was a key or defining programmatic feature (see Table 2). In all cases, programs were *study abroad* programs, meaning that students earned academic credit through participation.

Analysis

Our analysis consisted of a two-stage review of webpage content. The first stage involved the identification of institutions to construct our sample, wherein we reviewed webpages from many religion-affiliated institutions. This review informed the grounded framework for types of faith-integration represented in Table 2 and established a baseline for our sample selection. In the second stage, we conducted a Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) of the faith-integrated study abroad program webpages belonging to the four institutions we selected, following Schreier (2012). We used an iterative open-coding approach, beginning with a code list informed by postcolonial theoretical constructs, our research questions, and the first phase review. We then added codes that arose during the coding process (Miles & Huberman, 1994). QCA was particularly helpful in pinpointing the most relevant data among long and detailed study abroad pages. We first collaborated to segment and prioritize webpage content and code each segment according to our research questions (Mayring, 2000). That is, each segment was assigned a broad code corresponding to the study abroad program's location (Majority or Minority world) and the type of content it contained (image, program description, or activity). Next, within each of these broader codes, we coded each segment's specific content inductively. For example, an image may have received a code such as 'landscape' while an activity may have been coded as 'museum visit.' We first worked independently to code the content of two institutions' webpages each, then, to ensure inter-rater reliability, we came back together to cross-check code assignments and identify emerging themes. We then each revisited our respective webpages to apply the revised common coding scheme and to collapse existing codes into larger categories (Schreier, 2012).

Positionality

This study's first author researches the intersection of Christianity and higher education curriculum, primarily in the United States. While the first author has not participated in study abroad, he did participate in extracurricular faith-integrated international travel as an undergraduate through Christian campus ministry (Jamaica, Israel, and Bulgaria). Regarding personal religious identity, he was raised as a Fundamentalist Protestant Christian and currently identifies with the affirming/reconciling wing of the Methodist tradition. The second author of this study specializes in research on international education, especially study abroad, and as a student participated in study abroad programs in both Minority world (France and Spain) and Majority world (Morocco) locations. However, she did not attend a religiously focused institution as an undergraduate, and as a consequence, none of these programs had a specific religious focus like the programs depicted in this study. Regarding religion, she grew up in a Catholic household, but no longer practices a specific religion. The third author researches non-dominant pedagogical approaches to undergraduate study abroad and draws on her own study abroad experiences in Italy, Greece, Turkey, New Zealand, China, and Japan (none of which involved faith-integration). While she identifies as a religious 'None,' she earned her BA in Religious Studies from a Quaker-affiliated college and a Master of Theological Studies from an ecumenical divinity school.

Results

Faith Integration

Our first research question focused on how faith was integrated into study abroad programs at Protestant Christian-affiliated institutions. Our results pointed to four broad categories of faith integration: Christian-informed/shaped environment; Evangelism/proselytization; Faith-motivated service; and Personal spiritual development for study abroad participants. Table 2 provides examples of webpage content that speak to each of these four categories.

Table 2

Faith-Integration Categories with Example Quotes and by Location

Faith-integration Category	Example Quotes	Minority World	Majority World
Christian-informed/shaped environment abroad	"Students are encouraged to *engage with local churches and fellowships to experience diverse expressions of Christianity* and consider God's work in the broader world. Students return from this trip with deeper insights and understanding of their own faith, calling, and communities" (Communion U.).	28	27

	"Hosted at Tokyo Christian University is a one-semester program, offered in the fall semester, that gives students the opportunity to study in Japan *at a Christian University"* (Friendship U.).		
Evangelism/Proselytization	"International and local projects are designed so you can *use your gifts and talents to share your faith*. During these trips, you can share your faith through business development, children's ministry, construction work, teaching English, family ministry and *evangelism*" (Communion U.). "Through *ministry on the streets* and educational programs at a community center, WMF strives for a transformed society in which the poor are *redeemed* and empowered" (Friendship U.).	7	10
Faith-motivated service	"Students are also encouraged to take part in a *work-based professional internship or a community and volunteer service learning practicum*. A wide range of opportunities are available with educational charities, youth agencies, and faith-based organizations" (Worship U.).	5	48

Table 2 (continued)

	"The beauty of studying abroad in Chile, coupled with the opportunities to serve together with local believers, makes this a great place to live your mission" (Friendship U.).		
Personal spiritual development for participants	"The program *fosters Christian spiritual formation* alongside academic courses and cross-cultural experience and seeks to provide a context for mutual transformation" (Friendship U.). "The […] Irish Studies Programme creates an *opportunity for students to deepen their cultural and spiritual awareness* by experiencing the history and culture of Ireland" (Mission College).	10	11

This first category, Christian-informed/shaped environment, involved the integration of U.S. students into a faith community in the abroad environment, often a local church or other faith-focused institution in the host community. This integration was often described as providing students with a perspective of Christianity as a global phenomenon (see the first example of this category in Table 2). The second category, evangelism/proselytization, positioned students as bringing their faith to the host community, often construing host communities as in need of redemption or saving (see the second example of this category of faith integration in Table 2). Faith-motivated service, the third category, also positioned students as making positive contributions to the host community. In this case, emphasis was less on the spirituality of individuals belonging to the host community and more on the spirituality of students themselves. That is, students' own Christian faith was positioned as the motivating force behind providing a particular service to the host community. For example, in the first example of this category in Table 2, students are invited to take part in "a wide range of opportunities are available with educational charities, youth agencies, and faith-based organizations." Finally, the fourth category, personal and spiritual development for participants, again focused attention on students themselves, highlighting how the study abroad environment could shape their spiritual growth as Christians. Examples of this category can be found in the bottom row of Table 2.

These four categories of faith integration were distributed differently among Minority and Majority world destinations (see Table 2). Specifically, both evangelism and faith-motivated service were mentioned more frequently for Majority world destinations compared to Minority world destinations. The other two faith integration categories, Christian-informed/shaped environment, and students' personal spiritual development were roughly equally represented in both location groups.

Program Description

General descriptions of study abroad programs in Majority and Minority world destinations differed greatly (RQ2), particularly with respect to two categories: descriptions of the courses offered and the descriptors used for host institutions and countries.

The top panel of Table 3 summarizes code frequencies for the kinds of courses that students could take in Majority and Minority world destinations. As this table suggests, Minority world programs offered a great variety of courses, exhibiting no clear pattern in what courses students could take abroad. These courses ranged in topics, covering the intersection of Christian faith and the environment and politics, as well as global missions. In contrast, course offerings in Majority world locations most often related to local religious beliefs, global missions, or some type of service (e.g., health, social work, peace studies, etc.). Indeed, topics such as health studies and social work were largely absent from course offerings in Minority world destinations.

The bottom panel of Table 3 summarizes code frequencies for general descriptors used to characterize programs in Majority and Minority world locations. Minority world host institutions were more likely to be described in terms of *academic prestige*. Additionally, descriptions of programs in these countries were overwhelmingly more likely to highlight the host country's culture. Table 3 provides some typical examples of these descriptions. For example, the study abroad webpage for Friendship University described a program location in Italy (a Minority world destination) as follows: "You can't take two steps in Rome without running into a historical statue, building, ruin, or landmark creating a unique environment for studying topics related to Christian life and history." In contrast, study abroad programs in Majority world locations were discussed in terms of *quality control, safety,* and *stability.* The quote from Mission College provided in Table 3 is an example of this kind of description. Here, in describing Rwanda, the webpage states "Because it [Rwanda] is a poor country but one of the safest and most stable parts of the African continent, it represents an attractive place to test development impact." Majority world countries were also nine times more likely to be described as poor, developing, belonging to the third-world, or having poverty.

Table 3

Study Abroad Program Description Codes by Location and Examples

Minority World		Majority World	
Code	N	Code	N
Course Offerings			
Bible credit	1	"Religion"	11
Environmental Stewardship	2		
Global Missions	7	Global Missions	8
Leadership Skills	3	God and Nature	1
Other Topics w/ Christian Focus	8	Health Studies	1
Peace Studies	5	Peace Studies	2
Religion and Politics	3	Ministry	3
Religious doctrine	2	Social Work	3
Science and Faith	1		
Theology	6		
General Descriptors			
Academic Rigor/Prestige	5	Academic Rigor/Prestige	1
Quality control of program	2	Quality Control of Program	3
		Safe/Stable	2
Conflict	2	Conflict	6
Culture	25	Culture	20
		Develop Empathy and Social Sensitivity	3
Diversity in host country	1	Diversity in host country	12
		Explore NGO Careers	4

Full-Immersion	6	Full-immersion	9
Poor/Developing/Poverty	1	Poor/Developing/Poverty	9
		Strategic Importance	1
Transportation	4	Transportation	3
Examples			
"Our hope is that through this experience, you will be able to connect your talents to new ways to serve those in need around you! And all while you are exploring a place rich with history and beautiful sites – you will not want to miss this opportunity!" (Worship U.)		"The [program] is offered […] for those desiring to serve in developing third-world countries. Students live and learn in a simulated third-world village. Emphasis is on technical skill learning in agriculture (animals and horticulture), appropriate technology, cross-cultural communication and community development, nutrition and food preparation, and primary health care. Students receive three hours of credit for this program, which takes place at the [program] Institute in Lake Wales, Florida." (Communion U.)	
"You can't take two steps in Rome without running into a historical statue, building, ruin, or landmark creating a unique environment for studying topics related to Christian life and history. Whether you are interested in art, architecture, theatre, or meeting new people, Rome is a great city to live your mission, to learn about your faith and grow as you serve a community." (Friendship U.)		"Rwanda represents an ideal location for development experts to engage. Because it is a poor country, but one of the safest and most stable parts of the African continent, it represents an attractive place to test development impact. The last two decades have shown remarkable progress in Rwanda, and many of the most promising efforts are already being replicated in other developing countries. There is perhaps no more accessible and hopeful location to study the effects of a variety of development initiatives all in one place." (Mission College)	

Program Activities

Regarding program activities (RQ3), our results indicated a wider variety of activities offered in Majority world compared to Minority world locations. Table 4 illustrates the numerical counts of selected codes and provides some examples of trip activities from our data set. Clear and pervasive differences emerged between the activities included in trips based on their location. While tourism was common in both categories, as shown in Table 4, it was more common among Minority world destinations. Frequently, activities in Majority world locations had a relationship to service. In fact, there were three times as many mentions of general service for Majority world study abroad programs. Beyond that, among Minority world programs the only mention of specific service was with respect to refugees from the Majority world. Among Majority world programs, the service opportunities were numerous and included involvement in health care, community development/outreach, teaching/tutoring, and working with children. In contrast, many activities in Minority world countries related to tourism and local travel. For example, a Mission University trip to Europe—excerpted in Table 4—emphasized opportunities for weekend travel, while a Communion University trip to Uganda (a Majority world country) described work to address "major issues like illiteracy, hunger, malnutrition, unemployment, HIV/AIDS, child mortality, and injustice in a local Ugandan community."

Religious activities, devotional and evangelistic, were both more common in Majority world locations. While some Minority world trip activities included references to *diverse Christianity* and *local churches*, Majority world trips were more likely to reference *local missionaries*. Evangelism activities were limited on Minority world trips and included in only a very few. By contrast, Majority world trips offered a wide variety of evangelism activities—as seen in Table 4—and were common across these trips. The only more common activity in Majority world destinations were related to service. In Minority world countries, more common activities were related to travel and tourism; however, at the programs included in this study, there were no activities relating to working with children. This latter finding contrasts with findings for the Majority world, where working with children was referenced more than any other single activity. The examples cited in Table 4 notably refer to child mortality (Uganda: Communion U.) and underserved children (Japan: Worship U.).

Table 4

Study Abroad Program Activities Codes by Location and Examples

Minority World		Majority World	
Code	N	Code	N
Activities			
With Host Country Faculty/Mentors	3	Blessing Others	11
Addressing Others' Spiritual/Physical Needs	1	Business Consulting	
Changing A Nation	1	Changing A Nation	8
Post-Program Travel	6	Church Attendance	1
Educational Travel	13	Educational Travel	1

Table 4 (continued)

Minority World		Majority World	
		End Poverty	2
Engagement With A Diverse Christianity	5	Environmental Stewardship	3
General Service	4	General Service	3
		Health-Related	
Open To Adult Learners	1	Students Providing Medical Care	
Moral Apathy	1	Hunger/Malnutrition	8
		Illiteracy	1
		Injustice	1
		Local Churches	5
Engagement With Local Churches	2	Medical Assistance	12
		Mock Third-World Village In Florida	1
		Technical Skills	1
		Orphanage	7
		Prison	1
		Professional Development For Local Students	3
Service-Focused Training	5	Service Learning	6
Sharing Faith	1	Sharing/Strengthening Faith	6
		Social Work	1
Singing	2	Spiritual Development Of Others	7
		Spiritual Development Of Self	7
		Sports	7
		Studying/Learning	6
		Teaching/Tutoring	10
Tourism	18	Tourism	13
		Working With Animals	1
Unemployment	1	Working With Children	20
		Discipline And Encourage Children	1
		Working With Low SES Populations	8
		Working With Missionaries	2
		Working With Needy Students	2
Working With Refugees	1	Working With Refugees	3
Examples			

"The program offers a variety of opportunities for travel including trips to Auckland, New Zealand (the country's capital), the Catlins (Cathedral lakes and wildlife observing), the North Otago Region and Lake Tekapo." (Friendship U.)

"Over the semester, students visit four countries in four months: Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Russia. This means unique destinations with opportunities for learning more deeply firsthand. With everything [Mission College] teaches about being travel savvy, students will be able to travel around Europe independently on the weekends." (Mission College)

"Community Development: The Uganda team will be strategically addressing major issues, like illiteracy, hunger, malnutrition, unemployment, HIV/AIDS, child mortality, and injustice in a local Ugandan community." (Communion U.)

"What will we be doing?: We will be volunteering along side [sic] Japanese College [sic] students to provide meals to underserved children and youth, and help develop English skills!" (Worship U.)

Minority World		Majority World	
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Changing A Nation	1	Changing A Nation	8
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General Service	4	General Service	3
		Health-Related	
Open To Adult Learners	1	Students Providing Medical Care	
Moral Apathy	1	Hunger/Malnutrition	8
		Illiteracy	1
		Injustice	1
		Local Churches	5
Engagement With Local Churches	2	Medical Assistance	12
		Mock Third-World Village In Florida	1
		Technical Skills	1
		Orphanage	7
		Prison	1
		Professional Development For Local Students	3
Service-Focused Training	5	Service Learning	6
Sharing Faith	1	Sharing/Strengthening Faith	6
		Social Work	1
Singing	2	Spiritual Development Of Others	7
		Spiritual Development Of Self	7
		Sports	7
		Studying/Learning	6
		Teaching/Tutoring	10
Tourism	18	Tourism	13
		Working With Animals	1

Unemployment	1	Working With Children	20
		Discipline And Encourage Children	1
		Working With Low SES Populations	8
		Working With Missionaries	2
		Working With Needy Students	2
Working With Refugees	1	Working With Refugees	3

Examples

"The program offers a variety of opportunities for travel including trips to Auckland, New Zealand (the country's capital), the Catlins (Cathedral lakes and wildlife observing), the North Otago Region and Lake Tekapo." (Friendship U.)	"Community Development: The Uganda team will be strategically addressing major issues, like illiteracy, hunger, malnutrition, unemployment, HIV/AIDS, child mortality, and injustice in a local Ugandan community." (Communion U.)
"Over the semester, students visit four countries in four months: Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Russia. This means unique destinations with opportunities for learning more deeply firsthand. With everything [Mission College] teaches about being travel savvy, students will be able to travel around Europe independently on the weekends." (Mission College)	"What will we be doing?: We will be volunteering along side [sic] Japanese College [sic] students to provide meals to underserved children and youth, and help develop English skills!" (Worship U.)

Program Images

Finally, our analysis revealed systematic differences in the images that were used to promote study abroad programming in the two location categories (RQ4). The codes presented in Table 5 and example images presented in Table 6 demonstrate these differences. In Majority world countries, U.S. students frequently appeared in photos, engaging in recognizable service activities relating to medical or teaching contexts. Like the patterns discussed relative to activities, photos of local children were also prominent. The first two images in Table 6 are representative of the many examples of depicting white students with and among children of color. In contrast, photos on webpages corresponding to Minority world destinations consisted primarily of city- or landscapes. Landscape images were common overall, but much more common in Minority world locations. When landscape images appeared on Majority world trip pages, they often focused on natural features or wildlife. The example in Table 6 from Friendship University demonstrates this common pattern. While maps appeared on trips from both groups, they were much more common in Majority world locations. Although an exploration into why these differences were observed between Majority and Minority world locations is beyond the scope of this study, we posit that this observation potentially suggests that students interested in study abroad need help in knowing where some of these locations are. Images including students themselves were much more common on Majority world trip pages. Common examples featured students participating in recognizable trip activities with citizens of host countries.

Table 5

Study Abroad Images Codes and Number of Times Represented by Location

Minority World		Majority World	
Church/Cathedral	9	Animals	4
		Classroom	11
		Community Service	4
Landscape or Cityscape	34	Landscape or Cityscape	20
		Local Adult	5
		Local Children	29

Map	3	Map	24
		Medical	13
		Sports	1
Students	17	Students	48

Table 6

Selected Image Examples

Destination	Example	Institution
Majority world		Friendship U.
		Worship U.
Minority world		Friendship U.
		Communion U.

Discussion

This study draws attention to an understudied phenomenon in international higher education: faith-integrated study abroad. It highlights actions at a certain subset of religiously focused institutions that have the potential to be incredibly harmful, especially to host communities, but also to student learning outcomes. Our findings reveal clear differences in how Protestant Christian-integrated study abroad program webpages portray Majority and Minority world host countries and communities. These patterns across locations, like those seen in study abroad literature more broadly (e.g., Ficarra, 2017) reinforce negative stereotypes and colonial/imperial narratives, thus potentially harming the learning that institutions intend for students to experience through these programs. While Minority world locations were depicted as prestigious sites for cultural and spiritual development, webpage material repeatedly characterized Majority world destinations as morally, spiritually, and intellectually deficient and in need of help. The religious component of these study abroad programs adds several additional layers of complication to the postcolonial tendencies already observed in many non-religious study abroad programs (Caton & Santos, 2009; Ficarra, 2017; Zemach-Bersin, 2009). In addition to this pervasive deficit framing of

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Majority world host countries, the webpages also often fail to acknowledge the presence of local Christians, and if they mention local non-Christians, it is often in the context of proselytization. In the aggregate, these web page descriptions present Majority world countries as un-Christian or lacking an existing Christian community or tradition. Put differently, students are often charged with bringing religion to these communities, which are depicted on study abroad webpages as not having any religious tradition of their own. Beyond being factually inaccurate, such presentations are both offensive to and dismissive towards the diverse Christian faith practices that exist around the world that are not presently dependent on U.S. missionary support (Conroy-Krutz, 2015) and hostile towards the adherents of other religions, no religion, or indigenous worldviews.

Another potential implication of the 'augmented postcolonialism' present in these faith-integrated study abroad programs is that they expand existing missionary networks, broadening the reach of culturally imperializing religious practices (Said, 1993). Indeed, many faith-integrated study abroad programs explicitly reference the idea of cultural impact in their descriptions, with references to 'change a nation' (Uganda: Worship U.), 'transformation' (Thailand: Friendship U.), and 'development' (Rwanda: Mission College) of Majority world hosts. While service efforts can be admirable in and of themselves, such consistent patterns in depictions of host countries represent symbolic and discursive violence. These patterns suggest a real potential for a negative impact of these programs on host communities. When local partners are pervasively portrayed as inferior, it seems unlikely that they are made equal partners in the work of building and maintaining study abroad programming, or that their concerns or needs are being prioritized in these arrangements. At the same time, these depictions are providing students with, at best, an inaccurate depiction of what these communities are like, thus detrimentally impacting student learning outcomes and leaving the potential for life-long misconceptions of the Majority world. These framings perpetuate colonial perceptions before students even depart on their international experiences. One of the more shocking examples we uncovered in our analysis was the billing of a mission-focused trip to a mock third-world village in Florida as study abroad, where actors portray host citizens so that students can practice 'cross-cultural interactions' for the purpose of religious proselytization. Our work underscores the urgent need for continued dialogue between critical international education researchers, advocates, and practitioners on how best to responsibly design, advertise, and administer study abroad programming, including faith-integrated programs. Our findings serve as a call to action to reimagine religious-focused study abroad programs in a more morally responsible way.

Implications and Conclusion

Our study has clear implications for practice, which apply both to individuals that work directly with study abroad programs and to leaders more generally at Protestant-affiliated institutions. Individuals involved in faith-integrated study abroad programs must address the colonial history of Christianity and acknowledge the differential impact that faith-integrated international activity may have on host countries depending on their geographic location. Students must be engaged in conversations about the legacy of the colonial and postcolonial encounter and be exposed especially to local stories and perspectives about this past. In particular, the tendency to omit established Christian communities and practices in Majority world destinations must be addressed. Even if significant sectarian differences exist between local traditions and the affiliation of the U.S. institution, such intra-Christian encounters are important to students' understandings of their place within a global religious movement—one which contains its own traditions to refute western-centrism. While we would also like to see these same frameworks extended to other religions and the non-religious, greater literacy within the Christian tradition seems both more feasible and more in alignment with these institutions' stated missions. Moreover, students must be given the tools and opportunities to critically reflect on their own role in perpetuating colonial legacies – whether through their perspectives as individuals belonging to a particular faith tradition or specifically as study abroad students participating in a Protestant Christian faith-integrated program. While religious outreach is an imperative in certain religious traditions, such outreach may be best left as a separate activity from credit-bearing study abroad. If such activities are merged, individuals who design these programs must be aware of their potential to inadvertently perpetuate colonial legacies through epistemic and discursive violence in certain host communities, particularly those in Majority world destinations.

Beyond individual program design, it is the responsibility of institutional leaders to consider how their program descriptions and offerings, in the aggregate, can affect both students and citizens of study abroad host countries. At each of the institutions in our sample, and across the United States, colleges and universities have taken up international goals and missions. The leaders of these efforts at Protestant Christian-affiliated institutions should continue to reflect carefully on how their religious mission is shaping their international footprint and impact. The findings of this study indicate that, in

some individual cases and in the aggregate, faith-integrated study abroad trips often present international partner countries and communities as morally and intellectually deficient. These perceptions are likely to make a lasting impression on students and shape how they and the broader institution interact across international borders.

Limitations

This study is not without its limitations. First, this study is limited to transferable findings among Protestant-Christian affiliated institutions with a strong focus on integrating their religious identities into their curriculum. These findings do not extend to Christian affiliated institutions Robert Benne (2001) referred to as "accidentally pluralistic," those for whom their affiliations are mostly historical or are subsumed under broader research or educational goals (p. 56). Nor— as discussed above—are these findings transferable to Catholic institutions or those affiliated with other minority Christian denominations or non-Christian religiously affiliated institutions. All those sectors are ripe for future research. A second limitation of this study is that we analyzed webpage content rather than directly observing study abroad participation experiences or conducting interviews with members of the local communities where these programs take place. For this reason, this study speaks more to how institutions present their study abroad programs rather than to what happens on these programs. Future research is needed to reach a better understanding of the congruency – or lack thereof – between what institutions say they do on their webpages and what happens on these programs. A final limitation of this study is that while we would like to speak to the program outcomes of Christian-integrated study abroad programs for students (e.g., Do students return from study abroad with a particular – perhaps erroneous–- perspective of their host community?) and for host communities (e.g., How does the predominance of service-oriented faith-based study abroad programs in Majority world locations impact local communities?), we are only able to extrapolate the impacts. Future work could further demonstrate the impacts of these differences through more empirical research.

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Empirical Article

The Impact of Short-Term Study Abroad (STSA) Program on Intercultural Competence of Students at a Frontier/Rural Campus

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This article was not written with the assistance of any Artificial Intelligence

Abstract

This study evaluated the effectiveness of short-term study abroad programs on a frontier/rural campus, particularly in the light of promotion of internationalization efforts by educational institutions in the U.S. It measured students' intercultural competence and cultural adaptability before and after participating in a short-term study abroad program. A short instrument was used to collect data regarding knowledge, attitude, and skills (subscales) in the context of interacting (living) in another culture. Sixty-three students from various disciplines participated in the study. Significant changes were seen in all three subscales as well as in the total score. The greatest change was seen within the subscale 'knowledge' indicating the largest gains for students' increased awareness of cross-cultural competence and complexities. Additionally, qualitative data collected from students corroborated the above findings. This information may be used to further develop sustainable study abroad programs in promotion of internationalization efforts by higher education institutions.

Keywords: Internationalization; short-term study abroad programs; intercultural competence; frontier/rural campus; university students

Introduction

This study investigated if knowledge, attitude, and skills as it pertains to intercultural competence improved for students at a rural campus after participating in a short-term study abroad program. A shared belief has emerged throughout multiple fields of literature that when students study in a country outside their country of origin, it leads to positive results. The increase in globalization has brought about the need for students from different backgrounds and different fields of study to enroll in study abroad programs (Schartner, 2015). Study abroad programs are likely to continue to increase as they are often seen as a way of marketing a student's education. However, not all students can afford to dedicate a whole year to an exhausting experience abroad. While the number of studies abroad programs has grown over the years, these programs

have changed considerably, with some programs offering alternatives that may range from one-week long to a month-long program. According to Gaia (2015), faculty led study abroad programs, which are 3 weeks or less are more practical and can help to increase student understanding of other cultures and their own identity.

Niendorf and Alberts (2017) describe classes of STSA programs being between 1 and 8 weeks long. Gonsalvez (2013) adds that almost all institutions describe short-term programs as no longer than a semester or a quarter but can range from a week-long program over spring break to longer periods of up to 8 weeks. Gonsalvez (2013), also notes that most short-term programs include home stays and visits to multiple sites and service experiences. STSA programs have seen an increase in popularity among most universities as there is much more willingness from students to take part in programs that do not require an entire academic year (Donnelly-Smith, 2009).

Study abroad programs not only encourage learning but also increase students' appreciation for diversity and problems that are related to different cultures and increases the students' ability to communicate with individuals from diverse cultures (Kuhn, 2008). Various authors agree that study abroad programs also enhance the interaction between faculty in institutions of higher learning and individuals from different cultural backgrounds (Biraimah & Jotia, 2013; Goode, 2007). Additionally, these study abroad programs are able to incorporate high impact learning practices (HIPs) into their structure to facilitate applied learning, project-based learning, and cultural learning among students (Luxton et al., 2022). The authors in their study of students in a mid-west university on a study abroad program found HIP incorporated study abroad programs shaped student learning outcomes, including increased cultural awareness (Luxton et al., 2022). Additionally, Doerr (2022) emphasizes the rigor of these study abroad programs by including specific focus, immersion with connection to wider structural arrangements, theoretical engagement, and academic vocabulary. Few studies on the impact of STSA programs at rural universities also have shown to be effective in increasing intercultural competencies of students and sustainability of such programs with structural support from rural community colleges (Gow-Hogge, 2020; Lieberman, 2019). Therefore, the current study explored if knowledge, attitude, and skills related to intercultural competence improved for students at a rural campus after participating in a short-term study abroad program.

Literature Review

Intercultural Competence

Deardorff (2006a) defines intercultural competence as "the ability to effectively and appropriately communicate in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes" (p.248). Deardorff (2006a) brought together top intercultural scholars and academic administrators from the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom to establish what constitutes intercultural competence. From this study, she established that the definition of intercultural competence continues to evolve over time and definitions need to be reassessed on an ongoing basis (Deardorff, 2006a). She also explains that intercultural competence is a multidimensional concept that involves more than one component, so internationalization strategies need to address the development of these components (world knowledge, language proficiency, cultural empathy, approval of foreign people, and international practice) in different ways. The consensus between the gathered scholars was that study abroad programs and campus interactions are some of the most efficient methods in addressing intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006a).

According to Gleditsch and others (2016), some of the common terms used for intercultural competence are "multiculturalism, cross-cultural adaptation, intercultural sensitivity, cultural intelligence, international communication, transcultural communication, global competence, cross-cultural awareness, and global citizenship"(p.105). Clarke et al. (2009) defined intercultural proficiency as "the awareness, skills, and attitudes/beliefs that enable people to work well with, respond effectively to, and be supportive of people in cross-cultural settings" (p. 174). 'Cross-cultural sensitivity' is described as an individual's response to individuals from other cultures, which changes over time due to personal experiences (Anderson et al., 2006). Others have also defined 'intercultural competence' as "a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction in a variety of cultural contexts"

(Bennett, 2008, p. 97). Several studies indicate increased in overall intercultural competence after completion of a study abroad program among students, and in the areas of knowledge (Gaia, 2015), attitudes (Inglis et al., 2000; Paris et al., 2014) and skills (Nyunt et al., 2022). Additionally, these programs have also contributed to increase in cultural knowledge (Niehaus & Nyunt, 2022), self-awareness, for example, related to personal world views, global mindset related to learning about other cultures and relationship interest related making effort to maintaining relationship with people from other cultures (Nguyen, 2017), intercultural development of students through self-analyzing of own cultural identity (Sobkowiak, 2019), and global citizenship identities of students (Kishino & Takahashi, 2019).

Nguyen (2017) in her study of effectiveness of STSA programs on students' overall intercultural competency and the connections between those measured areas and programmatic content with data from fifty-five students across eight different short-term programs at three institutions in Texas found that students gained overall intercultural competency. Student changes were particularly seen in three areas of competencies (self-awareness, global mindset, and relationship interest --degree of effort someone was willing to put into maintaining relationships with people from other cultures). Chieffo and Griffith (2004) conducted a study that compared 1,509 students who had completed a short-term study abroad program with 847 students who had not. Major differences were found when it came to intercultural mindfulness, individual growth and development, practical knowledge, and communication and language skills, with the study abroad students scoring higher in all categories. In another study involving 16 Master of Social Work (MSW) students during a two-week program to Italy, Gilin and Young (2009) found that there was increased awareness of connection between social policies and practices, new ideas for practice, deepened empathy and respect for other cultural groups, and an expansion and consolidation of their professional identity.

Vandermaas-Peeler and others (2018) measured the experiences of 60 students with a Child Development and Diversity program (CDD). Within the program, students from Elon University in the United States traveled to Denmark, Istanbul, Helsinki, and Warsaw to gain a well-rounded experience of childhood and education by visiting community organizations and schools. Students were also required to take a practicum course to further reflect upon their experiences in different cultural contexts. Qualitative responses demonstrated that during study students developed knowledge about themselves and others in multiple contexts, made meanings of their observations, and established healthy relationships with host communities (Vandermaas-Peeler et al., 2018). More recently, in a qualitative case study investigation of experiences of five STSA participants in Israel, Chiocca (2021) found participants in their written reflections exhibited a pattern of progression, beginning with cognitive change (knowledge and understanding), moving to affective change (sensitivity and attitudes), and finally adjusting their interpersonal behavior while adapting to cultural differences. The above reviewed literature appears to show that students from different disciplines and geographical areas gained some level of positive cultural experience, including intercultural competence within study abroad programs, including STSA programs.

Short-term Study Abroad Programs

Several studies in the past decade have highlighted various positive outcomes/benefits of STSA programs. For example, Bano and Xia (2020) in their study of Chinese undergraduates who participated in STSA program in public health at an American university stressed on the importance of cross-cultural competencies and their development as global professionals. Though the students did not see any behavioral changes in them, but they reflected on their development of global professional identity by utilizing the opportunity to learn spoken English and about the American healthcare system and the differences between the two countries regarding policies and practices (Bano & Xia, 2020). Similarly, other studies have emphasized on the popularity of STSA programs as they contribute to the development of global perspective of the participants (Whatley et al., 2020), gaining global leadership mindset (Bongila, 2022), and growth in intercultural sensitivity of participants (Engle & Engle, 2003). STSA programs are also popular with students because of their affordability, non-interference with course work for graduation and course credit towards major or interruption from work (Donnelly-Smith, 2009; Interis et al., 2018).

Brenner (2016) have also found students having excellent educational experience, benefited from friendships and bonds across borders while learning another language through experiential learning which they thought was more impactful compared to traditional academic learning. Most importantly, the study abroad experience allowed them to reflect on themselves and their lives in their country of origin to gain deeper awareness of themselves lending to the value of transformative capability of STSA programs (Brenner, 2016). Students were able to learn about the host culture through everyday habits, attitudes, and lifestyle along with sensemaking which was gradual from simple everyday behaviors to complex thinking and understanding of another culture, for example, understanding social justice issues and equity in the field of public health (Bano et al., 2022).

Rural Community Colleges and STSA Programs

Furthermore, data from studies conducted at rural community colleges also support positive outcomes of STSA programs. Researchers using both quantitative and qualitative methods indicate students participating in STSA programs were able to focus on similarities rather than differences in cultures and witnessed personal growth in appreciating diversity (Wood & Raby, 2022a & b). If not all, community colleges are increasingly making efforts to provide education abroad to a diverse group of students, including underrepresented minorities, lower income, and non-traditional students. Some even make crucial policy changes to welcome students on a study abroad programs by reducing barriers including relaxing GPA requirements, participation regardless of discipline, and offering these programs multiple times in a year (Whatley & Raby, 2021).

Additional Information on STSA Programs

There has been some criticism of STSA programs as well, for example they are not long enough to see changes in attitudes related to cultural competence for students (Medina-Lopez-Portillo, 2004), and do not have enough time to experience meaningful changes (Engle & Engle, 2003). Interestingly, others have disagreed with the above. In contrast, faculty leading these programs have shared that they have more control over the content of the program and are able to model for the students how to continually process what they are learning (Donnelly-Smith, 2009). Whereas in longer programs, students sometimes do not utilize their time well academically and choose to, for example, travel for fun with their own cohort (Donnelly-Smith, 2009).

Study Abroad Data

According to the Open Doors Annual Data 2024 (2024), in the 2022/23 academic year, 280,716 U.S students studied abroad, which is an increase of 49% from the prior year indicating an upward growth after the COVID-19 pandemic. The Frontier University where data were collected follows this current trend (S. Robinson, personal communication, December 6, 2024). The university plans on expanding participation, and there appears to be a new-found emphasis on cultural exposure for the sake of a better equipped workforce.

Study abroad programs help future leaders obtain international experiences so that they can put a global perspective into their chosen professions (Institute of International Education, 2019). The programs go beyond exposure to other cultures and can help those who graduate find job placements in an evolving, global workforce. A report from the Association of International Educators reported nearly 40% of major companies in the United States surveyed missed international business opportunities due to a lack of employees that were culturally competent (U.S. Department of State, 2020). While the focus of this study is not on international business, it is important to note that the current American workforce is missing out on multiple opportunities based solely on a lack of exposure to other cultures.

For Mountain West, Frontier University with approximately 13,000 students, having a study abroad program is very beneficial to diversifying student experiences. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (2024, most of the state is classified as a Level 1 Frontier and Remote (FAR) area, defined by living 60 minutes or more from an urban center of 50,000 or more people (Cromartie et al., 2013). Therefore, as per Level 1 FAR definition, the percentage of [state] as frontier

population is 61% and the state is top on the list among other states (Wakefield, 2012). The university touts itself in providing not only financial support but administrative support as well to faculty leading study abroad programs. The university saw both a record high of 502 students participating in these programs and an increase in number of STSA programs (34) in 2018-2019. After the pandemic, the numbers are now on an upward trend since the past year (351 students in 2021-2022; 24 & 27 STSA programs in 2022 and 2023 respectively). Additionally, the vast majority of the students that study abroad does so through short-term faculty-led programs. It averages from 70-89% at the university. These percentages are higher than national data on study abroad programs where STSA programs were most popular, especially during summer (40%) in 2020/21 (Open Doors, 2023).

By studying abroad, students could learn about a foreign nation and experience the culture of a different region, which most of the time is in stark contrast in terms of difference and diversity. Studying abroad in this institution of higher learning is seen as a chance for personal growth, a chance to develop leadership skills, and a chance to develop a broader worldview. Few studies with rural universities also have emphasized the effectiveness of study abroad programs in improving intercultural competences (Gow-Hogge, 2020). All these components help to provide wide-ranging exposure to students who are more than likely from a much smaller university in a rural, frontier state.

The authors believe traveling outside the country has many benefits; even casual tourism may increase someone's cultural competence. Therefore, the research question was: Does knowledge, attitude, and skills as it pertains to intercultural competence improve for students at a rural campus after participating in a short-term study abroad program? The significance of the study included assessment of intercultural competence of students on a frontier/rural campus. The study results aim to inform development of sustainable study abroad programs that continue to provide students an opportunity to develop new perspectives and a worldview.

Theoretical Framework

Intercultural competence framework was developed to understand international education and how to interact effectively with those from different cultures (Deardorff, 2006b). The framework consists of knowledge, attitude, and skills. Knowledge is related to understanding other world views and therefore understanding the world from others' perspectives. Attitudes are related to openness, curiosity, respect and value others. Finally, skills include attainment and processing of knowledge through observation, listening, interpreting, analyzing and relating (Deardorff, 2006b, p. 4). There are several desired internal outcomes (e.g., adaptability and flexibility related to communication styles and behaviors,ethnorelative view and empathy) and external outcomes (e.g., behaving and communicating effectively and appropriately (based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes) to achieve one's goals to some extent (Deardorff, 2006b, p. 5). The above framework aligns with Fantini's (2007) instrument on intercultural instrument with the same three categories, knowledge, attitude, and skills.

Methodology

Design A mixed-method design was used to collect data. Participants completed a pre-test before the start of the program, and a post-test after the completion of a STSA program. The questionnaires had questions with a Likert-type rating scale and an additional open-ended question on the post-test. The quantitative questionnaire was used to measure intercultural competence (knowledge, attitude. and skills) on a scale to determine if students felt they were at a higher level than at the beginning of the program. Additionally, participants answered open-ended questions. Triangulation of data sources corroborates between two or more sources of data and interpretations as suggested by the research methodology literature (Rubin & Babbie, 2017, p. 451). Informed consent was gathered from all participants before conducting the study, and students were informed that there were no benefits to participating and no consequences for refusal to participate except that their participation will contribute to the knowledge base of understanding the impact of short-term study abroad programs and effective programming.

Data Collection Data were collected over three years from 63 students and 8 faculty-led short-term study abroad programs (2–3 weeks in Europe, Asia and Central America) using a pretest posttest design. Disciplines included engineering, nursing, religious studies, English, Chinese language, and social work. Data was collected using a questionnaire on intercultural competence before and after the completion of the trips.

Participants Participants were purposively chosen as they were part of a class/course/program on campus. They were enrolled in a study abroad program on campus and were reached through their instructor to take part in the research study. They were recruited through emails to instructors of study abroad programs. There were eight different study abroad classes representing different majors, and 63 participants completed the pretest and posttest questionnaire. The data were gathered anonymously, as only a letter assignment was given to each participant within the measured instrument testing to compare the pretest and posttest questionnaires.

Participant ages ranged from 18 years to forty and greater with 50% of them belonging to the age group between 18 and 21 years. 50% of the participants were females, 40% males and rest of the 10% did not specify their gender. Their education level varied from being a freshman to graduate level of education. Please see Appendix A (Table 1) for detailed demographic information of the participants.

Measures For this study, Byram's (1997) three factors model of intercultural competence was considered as aligning with Fantini's (2007) instrument on intercultural model with three categories including knowledge, attitude and skills. Knowledge refers to knowing oneself and others through social interaction. It entails knowing social groups and their practices, both in one's one culture and in the other culture. Attitude in this paper refers to the ability to update oneself and embrace "curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own" (Byram, 1997, p. 91, as cited in Sinicrope et al., 2007). Finally, skills include the skills of discovery and interaction that allows the individual to acquire "new knowledge of culture and cultural practices," including the ability to use existing knowledge, attitudes, and skills in cross-cultural interactions (Byram, 1997, as cited in Sinicrope et al., 2007, p. 6). The short instrument that was used measures skills, awareness, knowledge, and attitude as it pertains to intercultural competence (Fantini, 2007). The Fantini scale has 43 questions on a Likert scale within the categories of skills, awareness, knowledge, and attitude. The authors used a revised scale adapted from Fantini to measure knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The questionnaire was condensed down to 14 Likert scale questions (0= not at all, 1= extremely low, 2= low, 3= average, 4= high, 5= extremely high). Knowledge and skill subscales had a possible total score of 25 each, and attitude had a possible score of 20.

Within the adapted scale, paired t-tests and Cronbach's alpha were used to determine statistical significance and internal consistency. T-tests are used as a measurement tool between compared means to find a value to determine statistical significance. Within the realm of social sciences, having a p-score read as $p \leq .05$ deems the score statistically significant (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). Paired t-tests were used within the study, as this type of test is most appropriate in two samples that are paired in a certain way (Skaik, 2015). In this case, the pairs consisted of before and after measurements (pretest and posttest) of the same group of students. Cronbach's alpha was used to measure correlations between similar items. It is used to measure the similarities between attributes to determine if a scale used within a study accurately assesses reliability. As defined within statistical analysis, Cronbach's alpha score of 0.70 to 0.80 is regarded as satisfactory (Bland & Altman, 1997). Standard deviation was also calculated, which is a statistic that portrays dispersed values around the mean score (Rubin & Babbie, 2017).

Open-Ended Questions All participants answered an open-ended question involving their experiences while studying abroad. They answered questions on how their experience changed their perspective about how they viewed the world. They also answered a series of questions involving helpful learning tools and knowledge gained (for example, guided tours, visits to historical and significant places (such as, relating to the genesis of social welfare), the textbooks,

journals/reflection paper, the visit forms, interaction with your fellow classmates, discussion in class, teachers, guest speakers, or anything else).

Results

Quantitative Findings

Paired sample t-tests were used to assess statistical change within the revised Fantini scale. Significant changes were seen on all three subscales (knowledge, attitudes, and skills) as well as the total score (Table 2). All post tests mean scores showed that improvements were made within all measurements of intercultural competence in the revised scale. The greatest change within the subscales was seen in knowledge, where the posttest mean score varied 5.71 from the pretest score. The large increase in knowledge scores indicates that the largest gains for students included knowledge of participant behaviors compared to host behaviors, and increased awareness of cultural components and complexities. Standard deviation was measured as smaller within the posttests, indicating that the smaller variance from the mean score was a result of consistently higher scores of intercultural competences.

Also shown within the analysis was the statistical significance that was present for all three subscales and total scores. Within knowledge, attitude, and total scores, the calculated p value through paired t-test was p= .000. Under the subscale of skills, the calculated p value was p= .003 (see Table 2). ANOVA analysis conducted to determine Cronbach's alpha found that all subscales and total scores were above satisfactory (>0.70). Cronbach's alpha for each subscale found knowledge at .798, attitude at .787, skills at .884, and total scores at .890. There were no significant differences between individual variables measured within students (previous study abroad travel, previous travel outside the United States, and previously lived outside of the United States), indicating that levels of competence rose for all classes of students due to most recent study abroad exposure.

Table 2

Paired Sample t-Test Results

Subscale	N	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	Mean	SD (Pretest)	SD (Posttest)	*t*
Knowledge	63	15.86	21.57	5.71	4.28	2.71	-9.79*
Attitude	63	17.48	18.79	-1.31	2.28	1.59	-4.13*
Skills	63	21.71	22.83	-1.12	2.92	2.68	-2.86**
Total Score	63	55.05	63.19	-8.14	7.58	5.84	-7.59*

Note. Exploring and Assessing Intercultural Competence Scale
*p= .000. **p= .003.

Qualitative Findings

Qualitative data constituted answers to open-ended questions. Since the data was relatively small-scale, the data were collated and was read a few times for initial coding, especially that was relevant and helped in answering the research question (Brooks & King, 2014). Using template analysis method, priori themes were identified particularly those significant to the research question. Later these themes defined the final template that was applied to the entire qualitative data (Brooks & King, 2014). The final template encompassed three major themes discussed throughout the article (knowledge, attitude, and skills). It is important to note that students in all the courses answered a single open-ended question involving how study abroad has changed personal perspectives and worldviews. Only one class answered three questions involving helpful tools for learning abroad, and the impact on personal knowledge regarding social welfare. And one other class answered six questions involving helpful tools for learning, personal experiences, shifts in perspective, comfortability around different cultures, and responsibility as a global citizen.

Knowledge

Many participants stated that study abroad programs helped in obtaining knowledge about cultural history, behaviors, and similarities/differences between nations. One participant stated, "Going on this trip really opened my mind on my perspective of culture…Overall, it was one of the best experiences of my life." Within responses involving knowledge, students also explained how the most helpful tools for learning within different study abroad programs are class readings, peer discussion, and tours within diverse communities. One participant explained that study abroad has contributed to a wide range of knowledge on social welfare compared to taking a course on campus. Many participants also voiced that a better understanding of diverse history and cultural awareness was a result of study abroad classes. For example, one student participant shared:

> In general, I believe this course has impacted my knowledge regarding social welfare very greatly. I didn't know about any other countries social welfare policies, and I believe now having a point of reference will be super helpful in further work and in being able to understand history and why politics are the way they are today.

Similarly, another participant reflecting on London's East End's history of immigration and its recent hip reputation within the context of current social welfare systems shared, "Learning about the monarchy changed my perspective about how I view government in the modern world. Physically seeing the dynamics between the East end and the city of London really opened my eyes to the distribution of wealth." In-line with quantitative responses, students reported gaining knowledge and awareness of behavioral patterns and factors that shape their understanding of diverse cultures.

Attitude

Most responses involving attitudes of participants included changing worldviews, learning from host cultures, and gaining outsider perspective from other cultures. One participant stated, "I learned that it is important to view culture as both modern and past, through different lenses." Participants also reported adapting to different cultures and perspectives while studying abroad. There were also multiple responses involving personal identity and being more willing to learn about different religious ideologies. One participant stated, "I'm gaining a better understanding of my identity as an American-something I never thought much about." Participants also reported being more willing to become immersed in a different culture during their program and attempting to gain a better understanding of others. As was seen in the Likert scale responses, study abroad participants displayed a greater willingness to learn and understand differences between their culture and host cultures. One participant shared:

> The one thing that changed my perspective about how I viewed the world was being able to see a different view of healthcare. It was great to see how advanced we are in the United States, but also to see the negative effects of western medicine on our society. This includes showing how much our society is based on medication and not prevention methods.

Similarly, others shared their changed perspectives:

> One thing that changed my perspective about how I view the world included learning more about different cultures and religions. Prior to this trip, I felt very isolated in the U.S from different cultures and religions. I didn't know anyone with a different culture/religion and therefore I didn't understand and was unable to relate to them. Having the opportunity to emerge myself in the new beliefs helped me grow as a person and professional. I am less ethnocentric, and I am now able to personally relate and identify with other cultures and religions besides my own. I have new ideas for future policy implementation and believe this experience has helped me become a better advocate for minority populations within the U.S.

> I would say the biggest change in my values and beliefs would have been after visiting the Mosque. Our guide/speaker really helped me take a different perspective on the Islamic Faith. I think people tend to fear things they don't understand, and he really helped change that.

Skills

Most participants described gaining higher levels of acceptance and flexibility in different nations, cultural humility, and integration into host cultures. One participant stated, "Seeing all different nationalities coalesced in one city made me realize the possibility of integration in society." Monitoring personal behaviors was also seen in responses, as one participant explained that they have become more aware of managing internal bias towards different cultures. For example, one of the participants shared, "Biases haven't changed necessarily, but I'm more aware of where they are and how they show up." Participants also showed flexibility in differing ideologies and cultural interactions. Multiple participants explained how their study abroad experiences have led them to become more comfortable about members of different cultures. One participant stated, "I am very comfortable with people who are culturally different. This trip has provided an environment that has so many different cultures at one time." Another participant explained that their perspective on the world has changed, and that different countries and people should be celebrated. Participants showed a willingness to be flexible in their interactions with members of other cultures and adjusted/monitored behavior for the sake of meaningful interaction. One participant demonstrating flexibility said:

I think this program/trip increased my cultural humility. When I was I Honduras, it was eye-opening to hear from a physician who had lived in Africa for many years. She talked about how it's best to come to a developing country with the view that I am not coming to help, but first to learn and build relationship with the host culture. This opened my eyes to international health, and what our role as people coming into a foreign country needs to be.

Another participant exhibiting capacity to understand cultural-specific information shared:

I think if anything, it really opened my eyes to the diversity of the world has to offer. We spend out days in Acidemia learning about diversity; it's pros and cons, how to deal with it, but it's whole level when you get the chance to experience it firsthand. By being able to experience this I feel like I will be better prepared in my professional career when forced with issues about diversity and different cultures.

Discussion

The study used survey data from a diverse range of students attending a rural/frontier state. Students who participated in STSA programs were a variety of declared college majors at different education levels. The study examined pre-test and post-test responses and determined that students within these STSA programs showed gains in knowledge, attitude, and skills in line with measured intercultural competence. Gains were shown for all courses even with a diverse background of prior travel, prior study abroad participation, and prior experiences of living abroad.

Knowledge

In line with quantitative responses, students reported gaining knowledge and awareness of behavioral patterns and factors that shape diverse cultures. Student participants showed improvement in discussing and contrasting their behaviors in their own culture with those in host culture, referring to important historical and socio-political factors that shaped their own culture and that of visiting country's culture, besides an understanding of interactional behaviors common among the host country in social and professional areas (e.g., family roles, teamwork, problem solving, etc.). The first step to master intercultural competence is to gain practical knowledge about other cultures (Gaia, 2015). Study abroad participants displayed high levels of willingness to learn from host cultures, were flexible within their interactions with different cultures, and were able to adjust/monitor behaviors for the sake of meaningful interaction.

Qualitative responses from participants showed that students felt study abroad programs helped them gain knowledge about other cultures. This might aid them in future interactions in an evolving global environment. This is in line with prior research that explains that students in study abroad programs gain a better understanding of development and education in a changing global market (Trygged & Eriksson, 2012). Higher self-rate scores in three categories (knowledge,

attitude, and skills) were also seen within responses from participants. Greenfield et al. (2012) found similar results when measuring study abroad participants and explained that higher scores were due to interactions and proximity to residents from a different cultural background. Students in the study also showed a willingness to adapt to other cultures when studying abroad. Mapp's study (2012) found similar results, as students in STSA programs reported more flexibility/openness in interacting with other cultures in post-test results. It is also noteworthy to mention that our results are very similar to previous studies on exploration of effects of STSA programs on intercultural competence of students, particularly in the light of promotion of internationalization efforts by educational institutions in the US (Brenner, 2016; Chieffo & Griffith, 2004; Mapp, 2012; Schartner, 2015; Vandermaas-Peeler et al., 2018).

STSA courses are usually intensive and, if prepared comprehensively well, particularly during the preparatory phase, are successful. After recruitment into the program, students in the current study participated in a number of pre-departure meetings where they were not only introduced to the course, readings, and expectations, but were given plenty of information about the history and culture of the visiting country.

Moreover, some of the courses were taught through cultural immersion in ethnic neighborhoods, site visits, classroom exchanges, and seminars. The goal is to promote cross-cultural learning for students who will visit various sites including historical landmarks related to the course or topical knowledge. The students received the opportunity, for example, to explore neighborhoods with rich historical roots and cultural immersion by living with host families. STSA faculty-led courses allow students to increase their awareness of diverse cultures (Wood & Raby, 2022a) that form the integral multiethnic tapestry of the area and challenge them to move beyond their own ethnocentric perspectives. This is necessary for them to perform in an increasingly globalized society, and it will further contribute to their own transformation as global citizens with a broader worldview.

Attitude

Students in the study showed improvement in learning from their hosts, for example, about their culture; dealing with their emotions and frustrations with the host culture (in addition to the pleasures it offered); trying to understand differences in the behaviors, values, attitudes, and styles of host members (e.g. homes stays, guides, other members, etc.), and; in suspending judgment and appreciating the complexities of communicating and interacting interculturally. Students' pre-existing attitude, besides the length of stay and degree of immersion in the host country have an effect on participant's attitudes about the host country (Kauffman, as cited in Inglis et al., 2000). The courses should be designed so that the students also learn about the historical roots, which might clarify their subject-related professions, for example social work as a profession. As mentioned earlier, the courses included in the current study were taught through cultural immersion in ethnic neighborhoods, site visits, classroom exchanges, seminars, and guest presentations. Cross-cultural learning was promoted by students visiting various sites including historical landmarks related to their profession. For example, in one of the trips related to historical development of social work, students in the course visited Toynbee Hall, a working settlement house, which is located in the East End of London (Authors, 2014). This neighborhood has a rich history as it has been home to many immigrant groups who came in search of economic opportunities and has also been a witness to social reforms in the mid-18th century that culminated information of unions and workers associations. STSA trips such as these, allowed students to increase their awareness of diverse cultures that form the integral multiethnic tapestry of the area and challenge them to move beyond their own ethnocentric perspectives which is necessary for their profession who have to perform in an increasingly globalized society.

Additionally, students were provided with downtime over the weekends that allowed them to explore the place independently or in groups. Students visited local attractions and markets, theater, food festivals, and traveled to nearby towns where they freely interacted with the locals. Some of the programs include homestays, which provides additional cultural experience. Homestays provide day-to-day life experiences in a foreign country and depending on the involvement of both parties, the experience could be a holistic one where a student could have a hands-on experience of living life and interacting with the locals. Some of the host families have been inviting students into their house for years so they provide

an encouraging and welcoming experience that aids students in the cultural immersion process. While pre-trip preparations contribute to the development of attitudes, perceptions and knowledge about the host country, the combination of the above-mentioned activities, including homestays subsequently helps in expansion of this knowledge and could also change their pre-formed attitudes.

According to Paris et al. (2014), a study abroad program's outcomes can be better assessed by comparing students' attitudes and expected outcomes before and after the trip. As per the confirmation/disconfirmation methodological paradigm related to consumer satisfaction and dissatisfaction, attitudes can vary from prior to a study abroad trip and after. Students develop attitudes and expectations regarding the trip and after the trip and they compare their expected experiences with their actual experiences. A discrepancy in attitudes and expectations can either be positive (when the actual experiences fall below the anticipated expectations) or negative (when the actual experiences exceed the anticipated expectations) (Woodfuff et al., 1983, as cited in, Paris, et al., 2014). As per the results, there was a positive outcome related to differences in attitudes before and after the study abroad trip for all student participants. For example, one of the student participants indicated his/her view of different cultures: "I am very comfortable with people who are culturally different. This trip has provided an environment that has so many different cultures at one time." Students shared their willingness to learn about cultural differences through cultural immersion while studying abroad.

Nyaupane (2008) states that change in attitude related to visiting a host country could depend on various factors, including social distancing (similarities between cultures or groups), prior expectations, and experiences during the trip. Social distance within the context of the current study will be the difference between cultures of the visiting country and that of the student participants. As per Social distance theory, host members are more receptive and tolerant of people who are from similar cultures as theirs (Thyne, et al., 2006). In contrast, a study conducted of Americans visiting Europe by Martin et al., (1995), found that the participants were displeased with their trip to England as they shared similar culture and language and therefore their expectations were no different compared to the US. This is the stark opposite of student participants in the current study, particularly those on trips to England. Students in the current study showed positive changes in their attitudes while and after completing the study abroad program. For example, they demonstrated flexibility when interacting with people from the host culture and various social situations in the host culture, monitored their behavior and its impact on their hosts and employed appropriate strategies for adapting to their own culture after returning home.

Studies including both long-term stay and short-term stay abroad (Carlson & Widaman, 1988; Litvin, 2003) examined the effects of study abroad programs on attitudes and perceptions of students towards host countries and other cultures. The results reveal an increase in cross-cultural interests and a more positive attitude towards the host countries. The results therefore indicated the efficacy of study abroad programs in general, including STSA programs in not only increased international mindfulness, but also encourages the refinement of attitudes for better international understanding and interacting interculturally. This was true for the students in the current study where qualitative responses involved willingness to learn about cultural differences through cultural immersion, besides showing improvements in attitudes at the posttest.

Skills

Improvements were found at posttest in the areas: demonstrate flexibility when interacting with persons from the host culture; show flexibility when interacting with persons from the host culture; able to monitor behavior and its impact on one's learning, growth and particularly on my hosts, and use appropriate strategies for adapting to their own culture after returning home. Students shared about learning cultural humility. They talked about acceptance and flexibility in different nations, integration into host cultures, and consciously trying not to put judgment on anyone and therefore improvement in helpful cross-cultural interaction (Nyunt et al., 2022).

Wear (2008) has proposed a more cultural humility approach as opposed to a competency-based approach to culture and diversity in medical education. She believed that it was important to move beyond skills and knowledge and to cultivate 'cultural humility', which is, "…a simultaneous and ongoing process of humble reflection on how one's knowledge is

always partial, incomplete, and inevitably biased" (p. 626). Humility is: (a) ability to acknowledge one's mistakes, gaps in knowledge, and limitations, and (b) open to new ideas and advice that could be contradictory (Tangney, 2000). In the context of global engagement, it is therefore important that both students and faculty continue to engage in an ongoing process of self-analysis, critique, and assessment of their own cultural background to not only understand how it affects their thought process and practice but also respect other cultures (Hockett et al., 2013). 'Cultural humility was evident when one of the students shared:

> I think this program/trip increased my cultural humility. When I was I Honduras, it was eye-opening to hear from a physician who had lived in Africa for many years. She talked about how it's best to come to a developing country with the views that I am not coming to help, but first to learn and build relationship with the host culture. This opened my eyes to international health, and what our role as people coming into a foreign country needs to be.

When asked to share one or anything about the study abroad program that changed their perspective about how they viewed the world after the trip, another student added, "Increased cultural humility, I consciously try to not put judgement on anyone." Overall, a well-designed study abroad irrespective of its length should connect with course-related learning outcomes, sensibly designed culturally engagement activities, and recruit students who would benefit the most from these travels besides academic rigor (Bain & Yaklin, 2019; Doerr, 2022).

Participants emphasized academic rigor as well that formed strong foundation for them to enhance their knowledge and develop attitude and skills that facilitated growth of their intercultural competence. Students shared:

> The lecture and readings have been great in helping me make academic connections while having a cultural experience. I've really enjoyed the walking tours because it gets us out of the classroom, yet I still learn a lot. Discussion is always valuable to help me process and to hear different perspectives. Self-guided tours have also been great because we can go at put own pace.

> The most helpful thing to me was most certainly the relationships between class lectures/readings and activities, relationships and conversations made with fellow classmates, and the hands-on experiences we're done. Walking tours have proven to be the least impactful/helpful on the trip this far.

Another participant corroborated the above:

> I believe many modes of learning have helped further facilitate my learning in this course. For one, I found it very helpful that class lectures and readings related so much to our activities. This gave us a very good foundation to work from. I thought the group that we came with was very helpful. We all came in with so many diverse views/opinions, but this really seemed to help strengthen discussions and relationships formed especially enjoyed our trip to the workhouse.

Even though this current study did not explore the long-term effects of these short-term study abroad programs, research (Jon & Fry, 2021; Vanden Berg & Schwander, 2019) indicate these trips help develop global citizenship identity in its students, and many chose to involve in global engagement, including civic engagement, philanthropic activities, and social entrepreneurship and voluntary simplicity activities for the common good.

Limitations

A limitation of the current study is that data was not collected to measure in-state and out-of-state participation. Without knowing participant data about in-state residents, it can only be reported that those who participated reside in a frontier state. Programs with and without a service component were also not measured, along with information about students who lived with and without host families. Measuring levels of intercultural competence in relation to a service component and those who lived with host families is beneficial information to be followed-up and reported on. It is also important to note is that 84% of all participants had previously traveled outside of US, which is a possible indication that higher levels of intercultural competency could be expected from this group of students. Additionally, most students were females and white, therefore the study results may not be generalizable to a broader university student population even on

a rural/frontier campus. Post tests were collected immediately after in most of the cases and therefore it cannot be stated with confidence the changes or improvements that were seen at posttest in relationship to knowledge, skills and attitudes among the participants will be sustained over time. Follow-up observations using a longitudinal study could help us understand the long-term effects of short-term study abroad trips.

Implications and Conclusion

The significance of the proposed study included assessment of intercultural competence of students on a rural campus. The results are in tandem with the growing body of literature on exploration of effects of STSA programs on intercultural competence of students, particularly in the light of promotion of internationalization efforts by educational institutions in the US. The study also collected information about the experiences of the students that might be used to develop sustainable study abroad programs that continue to provide students with an opportunity to develop new perspectives and a worldview. There is an immensely demonstrated need for short-term study abroad courses. Based on the results and analysis of information gathered from this study, these courses will help students broaden their perspective of world problems from a global perspective and their role as professionals in understanding and addressing these issues.

To enhance student's learning and knowledge, faculty can utilize the pre-departure sessions for not just as information sessions, but provide structured lectures that connects to the course, assign book readings including written by authors from the host country, encourage students to educate themselves with current political views of host country, watch movies, documentaries, and listen to podcasts to understand how views on important issues are different or similar to their own country. Faculty can set up panels consisting of returned study abroad students to share their experiences and create opportunities for students to meet international students from the host country at their institution to exchange thoughts or even practice the host country language.

Attitude is interacting and communicating with host culture and learning from the host culture, displaying interest, and understanding the similarities and differences between cultures, and most importantly, adapting by changing behaviors and reflecting on the impact of your interactions and consequences of your decisions and choices (Fantini, 2007). Therefore, attitude can be cultivated by moving beyond being a tourist and establishing meaningful relationships. This can be done by encouraging students to engage with the local community, attend neighborhood/social events (e.g., festivals and farmer's markets), explore the neighborhood (e.g., eateries and pubs) with the help of locals, take public transport, visit historical and cultural sites and museums, get outdoors in parks, take advantage of popular walking tours in the city, most importantly, capture reflections of your experiences in journals and/or make short vlogs (either as part of assignments for the course and/or personal diaries).

Acquiring skills involves using culturally specific information, adjusting behaviors, and appropriate strategies to improve interactions with the host culture, learning the host language, and adapting to it. It also involves showing flexibility when interacting with people from the host culture (Fantini, 2007). Opportunities like opting for homestays, conducting a service-learning project, volunteering at a local agency or doing an internship, participating in a pal program or joining a student group from a local university, class exchanges, or listening to local guest presenters (e.g., representatives of local social service agencies or social workers) would immensely help students to gain skills that can be useful cross-culturally.

Furthermore, faculty teaching STSA courses can also aid students' experiences through cultural mentoring. According to Paige and Goode (2009), cultural mentoring is defined as "the role of international professionals in facilitating the development of intercultural competence among their students" (p. 333). Cultural mentoring includes "engaging learners in ongoing discourse about their experiences, helping them better understand the intercultural nature of those encounters, and providing them with feedback relevant to their level of intercultural development" (Paige & Vande Berg, 2012, p. 53). Paige and Goode (2009) have suggested behaviors under "cultural mentoring", and they include faculty members address intercultural competence by asking student's expectations from the study abroad, discuss student's culture and their cultural assumptions with them, guide them regarding how to explore the host culture, aide them with reflections on any cultural

differences and navigating cultural issues in the host culture while trying to understand their level of intercultural sensitivity (as cited in Niehaus et al., 2018).

Implications for the Frontier/Rural University

Current study's findings have important implications for not just the students at this frontier/rural university but for the faculty who lead the STSA programs and the university as well. Students, for example, in the areas of social work, agriculture, health, business and technology can gain global skills through exchanges while studying abroad. Students at rural institutions also offer unique perspectives and therefore when exposed to global cultures can greatly enhance their knowledge and attitudes and ultimately their worldview. STSA programs have also opens doors for students to other STSA programs, forging friendships and travelling back to meet them, travelling to new countries to either teach English or learn a language especially those who never travelled internationally before.

STSA programs/courses are an excellent supplement for students from various disciplines, particularly the health and helping professions (e.g., social work and nursing) and other service-related fields to understand their roles in the broader international arena contributing towards promoting social justice, strengthening their commitment to basic human rights. These courses are also conduits to exploration of future international travels, international volunteering and service opportunities, and higher education and employment opportunities for the students. This is particularly important for students on a frontier/rural campus, who can start at one place and go anywhere, as the slogan goes for the 'Global Engagement Office' on the frontier campus.

Our results are in alignment with the goals of the university's Global Engagement office where data collection took place. Shelley Jewell, Director of the Global Engagement office at the frontier university, believes that one of the main benefits of study abroad programs is that students can gain a new lens of cultural understanding through the process (S. Jewell, personal communication, September 26, 2019). The three objectives that education abroad is focused on emphasizing at the frontier university are academic (knowledge), professional (skills), and intercultural competency (Education Abroad Learning Objectives, 2019). While these three categories have shown some promise within the current study, the growth of these factors needs to be measured longitudinally to understand long-term program impact.

According to data collected from the frontier university Global Engagement office, a disproportionate number of out-of-state students (41%) participate in study abroad programs (Education Abroad Enrollment Report, 2019). Of all students that participate in these programs, nearly 70% of enrollers take part in STSA (Education Abroad Enrollment Report, 2019). The reason for students taking part in STSA is clear, due to the cost and commitment of the students. Another area to be explored is why more in-state students do not participate in these programs. In future, measuring the impact of these programs on students born in rural/frontier states is truly uncharted, and increasing the engagement of in-state students in study abroad programs will help in understanding the growth of intercultural competence within these populations.

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Study Abroad Demographic Information

Table 1.

Participants' Demographic Characteristics (N=63)

Categories	Previous Study Abroad Participation (N=10)	Previous Travel Outside USA (N=53)	Lived Outside USA
Participant Age			
18-21	50.0	45.28	20.0
22-25	30.0	33.96	20.0
26-30	0.0	1.88	20.0
31-35	0.0	3.77	20.0
36-40	10.0	3.77	20.0
40+	0.0	7.54	0.0
Age N/A	10.0	3.77	0.0
Participant Gender			
Male	40.0	24.53	20.0
Female	50.0	71.70	80.0
Gender N/A	10.0	3.77	0.0
Education Level			
Freshman	0.0	0.0	0.0
Sophomore	0.0	0.0	0.0
Junior	60.0	24.53	0.0
Senior	20.0	56.60	80.0
Graduate	10.0	15.09	20.0
Education N/A	10.0	3.77	0.0

It Was Mainly My Own Choice: Examining the Decision-Making Process of Chinese Undergraduates and Their Parents on Study in the United States

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Abstract

Background: Previous studies probing parent–child dynamics in decision-making situations are limited by their survey-based approach, and thus cannot identify factors beyond the choices available in the survey instrument or more deeply interrogate the process inherent in parent–child interactions. Methods: Using interview data from 50 Chinese international undergraduates at a large public U.S. university, this study investigated the family communication processes underlying the decision of studying abroad. Results: The results showed that decision-making processes were guided by (1) who initialized the idea and (2) whether the other party (either the child or their parents) supported the idea initially. Different processes induced six profiles and five different levels of students' autonomy during the decision-making process. This study contributes to our understanding of Chinese international students' interpersonal processes within their families before embarking on their journey to study aboard and aims to enhance the intercultural understanding of Chinese international students to inform institutional policies that better support student adjustment.

Keywords: Chinese international students, decision-making autonomy, family communication process, higher education, studying outside of China

Introduction

One out of every three international students studying at U.S. universities holds a Chinese passport (Institute of International Education, 2018). Social media reports and the existing literature on Chinese international students have

focused predominantly on challenges in their adaptation, which induces an incomplete understanding of their experiences and a stereotypical image of them as struggling, dependent, and passive (Abelmann & Kang, 2014; Ryan & Louie, 2007). Also, largely resulting from the collectivist cultural orientation and emphasis on the Confucian concept of "filial piety" (a virtue of respect and obedience to parents and elders) in Chinese families (Ho, 1986), Chinese youth are commonly

characterized as compliant and obedient (Ho, 1994). These stereotypes were often based on traditional notions of Chinese society and culture (Clark & Gieve, 2006). China has undergone significant economic and social changes in the last few decades, inducing changes in family relations and child developmental outcomes (Way et al., 2013).

To fully understand the realities of international students, we need to examine how socioeconomic and cultural contexts, alongside experiences before enrollment, shape their adjustment and subsequent success—a topic seldom examined in existing studies (Yoshikawa et al., 2016). This study examines the notion of autonomy among Chinese international students by exploring their decision-making processes with parents regarding abroad study. This decision-making process can also reveal their prior experiences and motivation for studying abroad, which is shown to be associated with students' adaptation after arrival in U.S. universities (Yang et al., 2018).

Literature Review

Social Changes in Contemporary Chinese Society

The transition toward a market economy, increased economic prosperity, and cultural changes have influenced Chinese family dynamics and children's development (Way et al., 2013). The theory of social change and human development posits that changing socioeconomic-cultural contexts influence cultural values and social environments and thereby shape human development and adjustment (Greenfield, 2009). The Chinese economic reform, which started in the late 1970s, has induced rapid economic growth and new social and economic structures. From 1990 to 2017, the GDP per capita grew from under $1,000 USD (in purchasing power parity) to $17,000 (World Bank, 2018). Given that socioecological contexts change over time, new demands that necessitate developing persons to acquire corresponding social and cognitive skills may appear (Silbereisen, 2000). Traditional child-rearing values and practices described as more controlling and authoritarian disagree with the goal of raising a well-functioning child in contemporary Chinese society (Chen & Li, 2012). The theory of social change and human development suggests that both parents and the younger generation construct dynamic responses to the sociocultural changes, which makes individual developmental trajectories more adapted to the environment (Greenfield, 2009). As socioeconomic contexts change toward a more industrialized direction, cultural values likely shift in a more individualistic direction, and trajectories of child development will likely move toward more independence in social behavior (Greenfield, 2009). Chen and Chen (2010) highlighted a notable shift in parenting attitudes and values in China. For example, Shanghai parents scored elevated levels of warmth and support for their child's autonomy and lower levels of power assertion from 1998 to 2002. Studies on contemporary Chinese families have suggested that instead of stressing relatedness, dependence, and obedience in child socialization, Chinese parents greatly emphasize independence and autonomy (Liu et al., 2005; Way et al., 2013). Nevertheless, the rapidly shifting economic and social context has also created parental struggles and ambivalences over how to best raise children. Societal values following Confucian ideals continue to influence the parent–child relationship, as characterized by "filial piety." Chinese parents report anxiety and difficulties choosing successful child-rearing strategies between coexisting yet contradictory parenting ideologies, such as wishing children to be obedient but self-reliant (Fong, 2007). This provides an important new context for understanding the autonomy development of the new generation of children growing up in China today.

Shifting parenting goals and practices around parental control and the fostering of children's autonomy in the rapidly changing Chinese society provide an important context for understanding the experiences of Chinese international students. With rapid economic transformation, a new middle class has emerged with an appetite and ability for consumption, including pursuing higher education opportunities abroad (Zhang, 2010). It is usually from these affluent, upper-middle class households that many Chinese international undergraduates emerge (Louie & Qin, 2019; Yan, 2017). Hence, this study explores autonomy development among students from these new middle-class Chinese families by examining students' decision-making processes for studying abroad.

Decision-Making Process About Studying Abroad

Decision-making about studying abroad is a dynamic process over time. In the international student college choice

literature, the push–pull model has been most commonly used. Based on this model, factors influencing college choice for international students include socioeconomic forces in the home country that "push" them out (e.g., lack of educational opportunities) and factors in the host country that "pull" them abroad (e.g., academic quality) (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). However, scholars have posited that the model fails to consider college choice as a process (Kim et al., 2018). In comparison, the three-stage framework developed by Hossler and Gallagher (1987) describes the college choice process proceeding through predisposition, search, and choice stages that occur over an extended period of time. In deciding which college to attend, different decisions are made by international students, which begin with whether they want to continue their education abroad (*predisposition*) (Kim et al., 2018). Once students decide to study abroad, they need to gather information about where they want to continue their education, possibly including the destination country and choices of schools (*search*). Finally, they determine which specific school(s) they will go to (*choice*). Informed by this three-stage framework, this study considers decision-making about studying abroad as a dynamic process over time, rather than the static results from a limited number of contributing factors proposed by the push–pull model. Specifically, we focused on predisposition and search for destination countries because Chinese students often hire agents to help them with the application process, including choosing schools (Bodycott, 2009).

From the methodology perspective, studies exploring parental relations in decision-making situations have predominantly adopted a survey-based approach. Studies usually assessed family decision-making with a questionnaire developed by Dornbusch et al. (1990), which asks participants to indicate who was the primary decision-maker in various types of decisions (Bell, et al., 2014). However, the survey-based approach cannot identify factors beyond the choices available in the survey instrument or more deeply interrogate the communication *process* inherent in parent–child interactions. Also, in studies of Chinese international students, more specifically, we have a limited understanding of the interpersonal parent–child processes through which Chinese international students made the decision to study abroad. Decision making is a dynamic process whereby parents and children co-construct meaning and decisions in their interactions (Bell et al., 2014). A closer examination of family processes, such as roles played by individual family members during the processes, is also informed by changes in family dynamics caused by socioeconomic changes in contemporary Chinese society (Bodycott & Lai, 2012). To address this methodological gap, this study used qualitative interviews to investigate the decision-making processes about studying abroad among first-year Chinese international students attending a large public university in the United States.

In Chinese society, parents are essentially involved in decision-making in the family. In Chinese families, education is highly imperative and is considered a family matter and decision (Huang & Gove, 2012). Educational attainment has historically been the main vehicle for upward mobility through high-stake examinations, such as the modern-day *gaokao* (College Entrance Examination)*,* with their roots in the imperial examination *keju* system. With so much on the line, families deeply value education and seek extra opportunities for their children to get ahead (Zhao, 2014). Children's high academic achievement is a matter of pride for the whole family (Lui & Rollock, 2013). Not surprisingly, parents are intimately involved in education-related decision-making processes, such as studying abroad. In the current study, followed by the three-stage framework (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987), we used qualitative interviews to investigate the decision-making about studying abroad as a dynamic process over time for Chinese international students and their parents.

Autonomy in Decision-Making Process

While *autonomy*, from the individualistic cultural perspective, entails independence in decision-making without external influence, it is operationalized more as the extent to which one's motives for acting are self-endorsed following the collectivistic culture aspect (Chen et al., 2013). We consider both *independence* and *self-endorsement* as components of autonomy in this study. Autonomy as independence allows us to examine Chinese adolescents' pursuit of independence and expression of individualistic attributes. However, the orientation of autonomy as independence is of limited value in collectivistic cultures because it conflicts with the cultural norms of interdependence and connectedness (Markus & Kitayama, 2003). Chinese youth perceive autonomy more as a relating form whereby they voluntarily take their parents' advice and expectations into account (Chen et al., 2013). Autonomy as self-endorsement facilitates our investigation of how Chinese adolescents handle difficult situations in interacting with important others possessing divergent values and goals

and maintain motivation to act within collectivistic cultures, where harmony in relationships and interdependence are emphasized (Yeh & Yang, 2006). Specifically, for the decision to study abroad in the United States, transnational education cannot happen without parental financial support for many Chinese international students (Chao et al., 2017), which necessitates gaining parental approval. Considering that its implementation requires parental agreement, support, and commitment, synergizing these two perspectives of autonomy is imperative for examining decision about studying abroad.

How much autonomy Chinese international students are granted by their parents and to what degree they personally embrace the choice during the decision-making process about studying abroad is important to investigate, since the notion of autonomy in the decision has been found to have ongoing influences on their life satisfaction and adaptation. Some scholars (Bodycott & Lai, 2012), for example, found that dissatisfaction among mainland Chinese students with their family decision-making about cross-border study contributed to high levels of anxiety after their arrival at universities in Hong Kong. Self-determined international students are less likely to experience culture shock and more likely to be satisfied with their lives and have successful adaptation in the United States (Yang et al., 2018). In this study, we investigated how students felt and exercised autonomy in decision making about studying abroad among Chinese international students by examining parent–child interpersonal processes inducing this decision. This study examines the notion of autonomy among Chinese international students by exploring how they make decisions namely their decision-making processes with parents regarding abroad study.

Methods

Research Questions This study used in-depth interview data collected from first-year Chinese international students studying at a large public U.S. university to investigate two primary research questions. First, what was the decision-making process about studying abroad like for Chinese international students and their parents? Second, how much autonomy did students exercise in this process?

Participants This study's data were drawn from the first wave of a large mixed-method, longitudinal study on the academic and psychological adaptation of Chinese international undergraduates studying at a large public Midwestern university. The university was ranked as one of the top ten U.S. universities regarding international student enrollment in the school year when the data were collected. For this academic year, the university admitted over 1,000 first-year Chinese students, comprising 80% of all international first-year students enrolled. This study explored the experiences of 51 first-year Chinese students through semi-structured, in-depth interviews focusing on their family and educational backgrounds before arrival and their adaptation after coming to the United States. We excluded one student who immigrated to the United States during high school, which resulted in 50 students in our current interview sample, of which 28 (56%) were female students. Table 1 (see Appendix A) shows the demographic information of the participants ($n = 50$; see the last row). Over two third of our participants identified themselves as single children in the family. Most participants came from small cities (compared to major metropolises, e.g., Beijing, Shanghai). In our study, studying abroad included both studying abroad during high school years and for college. Over a third reported that they graduated from a U.S. high school and had experiences studying in the United States before college. Most of the students' parents worked in middle or high SES positions such as company owners, government officials, or accountants. Therefore, our participants tended to come from upper middle-class families in China.

Procedure The interview data was collected from fall 2014 to spring 2015. Using snowball sampling, participants were recruited through emails, personal networks, and WeChat (a Chinese social media app) groups. To reduce the bias of the snowball sampling, we diversified the participant recruitment in terms of gender, majors, and academic adjustment. Students were required to be from Mainland China, at least 18 years old, and enrolled full time to be eligible for the interviews. Face-to-face interviews were conducted by a team of Chinese-English bilingual researchers trained in qualitative interviews. Before the interviews began, the participants were first informed of the research project's purpose and then asked to read through and sign a consent form (see the Informed Consent in the Appendix). Each interview lasted from one

to two hours. All interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese to remove language barrier concerns and allow students to express themselves fully in their native language. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed in Chinese verbatim. In this study, all the names used were pseudonyms.

Interview Data Analysis We primarily focused on participants' responses to interview questions relevant to when and how they decided to study abroad and their reasons and perceptions of parents' rational/attitudes for studying abroad. The Interview Protocol is included in the Appendix and the interview questions informing this study are bolded. Multiple Chinese-English bilingual researchers coded the interview data independently, and discussions were held regularly to ensure consistency among the coders. Qualitative data analysis was conducted based on a grounded theory approach. First, we conducted open coding on three interviews (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), exploring an integration of inductive data-driven alongside a deductive theory-driven approaches based on a preliminary scanning of the interviews. Based on the coding team's discussion, an initial coding scheme was developed. The remaining 47 interviews were then independently coded, and new codes were added to the initial coding scheme. Next, after initial coding, "axial coding" was conducted during which similar codes were grouped into conceptual categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Finally, we conducted "selective coding" in which one concept was chosen to be the core concept, and a story line was developed around it (LaRossa, 2005). After coding, all the representative interview quotes were translated separately by two Chinese–English bilingual researchers, and translations were checked by another two researchers who are native English speakers to ensure accuracy.

Findings

Figure 1 (see Appendix B) reveals six profiles of decision-making processes about studying abroad and five different levels of students' autonomy. Based on our interviews, family processes behind the decision to study abroad were guided by two key factors: (1) who initiated the idea of studying abroad and (2) whether the other party (either the child or the parents) supported the idea (Figure 1). More specifically, the family decision-making process usually includes three stages: first, initiation of the idea, either by the student, parents, or by both; second, agreement or disagreement from the other party on the initial idea in the predisposition phase and relevant details and ensuing discussions in the search phase; and finally, some consensus reached by both sides on studying abroad and the important details (e.g., where and when to study). Since this study focused on parent–child interactions, we addressed parents as a unit (i.e., not each parent individually). If at least one parent initialized the idea, we identified parents as the initiator. For students as initiators, if one parent was supportive but the other one was not ($n = 3$, 6%), we characterized it as discouraging parents since parents as a unit create resistance for the decision-making. Of note, one-third of students in our sample ($n = 17$) went to U.S. high schools, and the decision was made regarding going abroad for high school. Table 1 (see Appendix A) shows the participants' demographic information in each of the six profiles (see the Groups 1 – 6 rows).

Autonomy was defined from the combined perspectives (i.e., independence and self-endorsement) as the extent to which the students solely decide and the degree to which the students internalize their decisions' motives. We characterized students with the highest level of autonomy when they initiated the idea and persisted regardless of whether parents initially disapproved (Group 1) or not (Group 2). Students who did not initiate the idea and left important decisions all to their parents were placed in the lowest level of autonomy group (Group 6). In the following section, the five profiles are presented in the order of decreasing autonomy.

Students as Initiators (Groups 1 and 2)

In profiles 1 and 2 ($n = 21$, 42%), the student was the initiators of the idea for studying abroad. After the student initiated the idea, the family communication process diverged in two directions depending on the parents' initial attitudes, including not supportive (Group 1) or supportive (Group 2), about the student's idea of studying abroad. The two profiles revealed the Chinese students' highest level of autonomy in the decision-making process of studying abroad.

Group 1: Student initiators with discouraging parents

For the first group of students ($n = 5$, 10%), they initiated the idea of studying abroad with parental disapproval. Students' initiation of the idea was often inspired by their surrounding environments, including being in a class where many

classmates planned to go abroad (e.g., Mei, female). The idea of studying abroad was also inspired by their exposure to foreign cultures. Ting (female, who went to U.S. high school) commented that she had been thinking about studying abroad since her study tour to England in middle school. Students' interest in studying abroad was also indirectly influenced by other experiences, such as exposure to different cultures in English classes and interactions with foreign teachers (Ting).

Despite the students' initiation of the idea of going abroad, the responses from the parents in these cases were either hesitation or disagreement. Students reported that parental hesitation or disagreement could be attributed to one or more of the following reasons: their parents' unwillingness to send their only child far away, parental concern about potential negative stereotypes of students who chose to study abroad (i.e., they were not good students in China), or about their children's future after graduating from a university outside China. Some parents expressed unwillingness that they dreaded sending their only child abroad (Ting). Some parents may hold negative stereotypes of studying abroad, "thinking that sending children abroad is an option for those rich families whose children underperformed in school" (Mei). Besides, parents' perception that "it is hard to find a good job after studying abroad" is another reason why some parents dissuaded students from going abroad (Yi, female).

Despite parental hesitation or disagreement, students in this profile persisted and convinced their parents through different strategies, including patience, assertiveness, and persuading parents with information that changed their minds about studying abroad. Yi (female) talked about the process in her family:

> In the first year of high school, I really wanted to study abroad and should have started preparation in the second year, but my parents refused. So, I did not take any action until the College Entrance Examination. … I took it (the College Entrance Examination). However, after the exam, I just left it alone, not choosing any (Chinese) universities to apply for. I pushed myself very hard. … The only thing I wanted was to study abroad, and I believed that I could get accepted by a good (U.S.) university.

Compared to Yi, Mei was more aggressive by leaving her parents with little choice but supporting her: "Once I made up my mind to go abroad, I started to prepare for it on my own. But my parents refused, and we argued sometimes. … Then I refused to study hard at school. … Maybe after I dropped out of school, my parents would realize that they could not change my mind. … So (they) began to support me at that time, though we still argued frequently." Students in this profile held diverse intrinsic or identified motivations to study abroad, including showing interest in the culture, broadening their horizons, attending a university of higher ranking, envisaging a better education, and having a more colorful college life.

Group 2: Student initiators with supportive parents

In the second profile, students initiated the idea of studying abroad, and parents supported them at the predisposition stage, although there might be disagreements in the search stage about specific details that were eventually resolved (*n* = 16, 32%). In this profile, parents supported the student's general ideas about studying abroad. For Tuan (female), "Concerning studying abroad, I made the decision, while they (my parents) just said that they supported me." However, for some of the families, they disagreed on specific details, including the time or the host country for studying abroad. For example, Xiao (female) wanted to go abroad and attend the international department (at high school) after junior high, while her father disapproved of it. "He thought I should take the College Entrance Examination, attend college in China, and then go abroad for graduate school" (Xiao). The controversy on details can be also about the host country. Jun (male, who went to a U.S. high school) did not initially reach an agreement on the host country with his parents:

> The question was which particular country I should go to. At first, I considered Japan since I learned Japanese. Later, my mother worried that it was dangerous to be in Japan due to the frequent earthquakes. Then, my dad mentioned that he would like me to go to the United Kingdom. However, given the difficulty international students face in finding internships and jobs to stay in the United Kingdom, we decided (for me) to come to the United States, where I could have more opportunities.

Choosing a study abroad destination from different options involves considering with parents the current risks (e.g., earthquakes) and future opportunities (e.g., internships).

Parental support may be motivated by different factors in different families. For some families in this profile,

parental support for students' idea of studying abroad may be a continuation of a common pattern of the lack of parental involvement in their children's education and important life decisions. For example, Han (male) shared that his parents did not intervene in anything related to his study, including any of his decisions about studying abroad. When asked whether this was out of respect for him, he gave a positive response. Similarly, Yan (female), who since middle school had lived and studied away from her parents and self-cared herself since childhood, shared her parents' response to her decision about studying abroad: "(Their response) was not so different from the time when I went to another city for middle school. The only difference was that I was younger (at that time). Although now I am further (away from home), I am older."

This second profile had the highest proportion of Chinese international students among all the six profiles. For these students, they found that their parents were readily supportive, though sometimes mixed with some indifference—of their general idea to study outside of China, yet had some questions or disagreement around time, country, or institution, but their questions or disagreement was eventually resolved through communication. The two profiles (i.e., Groups 1 and 2) revealed the Chinese students' highest level of autonomy in the decision-making process because they initiated the idea of studying abroad and acted upon their personal willingness and motivation, possibly integrated with parents' different opinions.

Students and Parents Together as Initiators (Group 3)

Group 3: Mutual agreement

In the third profile, students reported that they and their parents initiated the idea of studying abroad together ($n = 5$, 10%). Cases were categorized into this profile based on participants' *reports,* rather than observations of the initiation. For example, Kun (male) said, "I attended an information session organized by an agent with my parents, and we suddenly had the idea of going abroad. Afterwards, we discussed for some time and then made up our mind to have me study abroad." In this exchange, it seems as though students and their parent's ideas about studying abroad were articulated around the same time, indicating co-initiation and mutual agreement.

Parents as Initiators (Groups 4–6)

Following these examples of student initiation, in profiles 4 through 6, parents or one of the parents was the initiators of the idea for studying abroad, comprising nearly half of our participants ($n = 24$, 48%)—slightly exceeding the proportion of students as initiators above. After the parent initiated the idea, the family communication process diverged in three directions depending on the student's initial attitudes, including supportive (Group 4), not supportive (Group 5), or indifferent (Group 6), about the parents' idea of studying abroad.

Group 4: Parent initiators with supportive students

In the fourth profile, at least one of the parents initiated the idea of studying abroad, and the student agreed at the predisposition stage, though they disagreed on relevant details in the search stage, but ultimately, they reached an agreement ($n = 12$, 24%). "My parents gave me the suggestion to go abroad. After some consideration, I thought this plan was feasible." (Bo, male). Although parents were the idea initiators, they usually presented the idea (sometimes with their reasons), consulted with the student for their opinions, or left the student to decide finally. Huan (male) talked about his decision-making process about studying abroad:

> One day, my parents asked me whether I wanted to study abroad. He (my dad) said that if I take the College Entrance Examination, I can get a grade good enough to get into a key university, but it is still a question whether I can get into one. He gave me three days to consider, and he told me that I should take it seriously because I had prepared for it (the College Entrance Examination) for so many years.

As Huan's parents proposed their suggestion about studying abroad and left the final decision for him to make, they not only provided explanations for it but also presented the importance of careful consideration for him.

For some of the families, after the students agreed with the idea initiated by parents at the predisposition stage, there were some disagreements in the search stage around the timing for studying abroad and the destination country. Jia (female, who went to a U.S. high school) agreed with her parents on their suggestions about studying abroad but had her own thoughts about the timing: "Personally speaking, I was originally planning to go abroad for graduate school after undergraduate or

go abroad in my junior or senior year. However, it is also good to do it (studying abroad) early." This experience was echoed by Jie (female, who went to a U.S. high school). When asked why the United States was chosen, Jie answered, "To be honest, I wanted to go to the United Kingdom back then. However, maybe it was because many of my dad's friends' kids were in the United States, and the atmosphere in the United States was more open. I heard that the United Kingdom is restrictive in contrast, so the United States should be a better choice." In all these cases, although the parents were the idea initiators, they usually presented the idea but left the student to make the final decision. Students in this group exhibited a relatively lower level (compared to Groups 1, 2, and 3) but still a high level of autonomy in the decision-making since they internalized the motives for the idea of studying abroad initiated by their parents.

Group 5: Parent initiators with opposing students

In the fifth profile, parents initiated the idea of studying abroad, while the student refused at first, but finally changed his/her mind after more extensive consideration ($n = 6$, 12%). In this profile, students were not *forced* by their parents, but they *voluntarily* changed their minds. Their experiences of being exposed to foreign cultures and people were one of the top incentives that motivated the students to give their parents' idea deeper consideration. "My mother first got the idea of letting me go abroad, but it was not yet on my radar then. … I traveled to the United States on a tour organized by New Oriental [a leading Chinese for-profit international education agency]. I had a good impression of the United States since then and thought I would like to have a try living there, so I decided to go" (Ying, female).

Another top incentive that motivated the students to internalize parents' idea of studying abroad is competitive situations and stress encountered at schools in China. Ying shared:

> I wanted to get into a Chinese university, but later, the pressure was too high. There is only one chance to take the College Entrance Examination, and if you fail, then that is not good. In addition, afterwards, I went to the main campus (of my high school), where every student has much higher grades than me. … Then I think, "Why not study abroad?", because any U.S. university I can get in will outperform any Chinese university (I can get in).

Unlike Ying, Jing (female, who went to a U.S. high school) was making decisions about enrolling in international curricula in Chinese high schools (perceived as a transition to college abroad) when in middle school and about high school abroad when in high school. However, similarly, Jing initially refused her mom's idea of studying abroad in middle school: "I had excellent academic achievement in middle school, so studying abroad [during high school] may not be so useful for me to get accepted into a key university in China." However, Jing changed her mind afterwards. She attended a high school which was the top in her city. Since "it was difficult to catch up (with the class)," she changed her mind and decided to go abroad. Here, we can see that the decision process to go abroad for students seemed to be inclusive of opportunities to get to know other choices beyond universities in China and tension with experiences related to their high school learning. Eventually, they did come around and embrace the idea to study abroad. This group of students changed their minds and internalized the motivations for studying abroad so that it became congruent with other personal values, which indicates lower levels of autonomy in decision-making than previous groups.

Group 6: Parent initiators with indifferent students

Within the sixth profile, the decision about studying abroad was made by one or both of the parents ($n = 6$, 12%). In these cases, the students' parents raised the idea, whereas the students just took in the suggestion without much consideration. We found that in these examples in which children followed the suggestions of their parents, students did not want to let their parents down or were obedient to their parents. "He (my dad) made the final decision about sending me abroad. To be frank, I do not even know if I really wanted to go abroad. … To be honest, my life plan was just to follow whatever my father designed for me" (Xuan, female). For some students, the idea of going abroad sparked anxiety about their adjustment abroad. Shen (male, who went to a U.S. high school) commented: "I was afraid at the beginning. Because I was aware of the limitations in my English ability, I knew that I was sure to experience difficulties in communication if I were to go abroad. … Personally, because I had a strong tendency to follow my parents' suggestions, I decided to go abroad. I am pretty laid back without high expectations for myself." Finally, he conceded and agreed to travel abroad for his studies because he was used to following his parents' suggestions.

Interestingly, in this category, some parents allowed their children to choose what they wanted, but most students

lacked their own ideas and simply left the decision to their parents. For instance, Xi (female) mentioned:

> My parents always say that it is alright for you to just be yourself and do whatever you like whenever you like. I once seriously considered dropping out of school here (in the United States) and returning to China to resume high school and get into college (in China). However, it was an option (studying abroad) that my parents provided, and I was not really against it. Thus, I figured I would follow this path (that my parents paved for me) until I discovered what I wanted to do, and then I would go for it.

Even as Xi recounted this decision, it seemed like she was still grappling with whether the decision was right for her. Like Xi, some students in this case were not apprehensive about their own thoughts and plans when parents initiated the idea and simply followed parents' arrangement for their own life. In this category, students presented the lowest level of autonomy in family interpersonal processes underlying their studying abroad decisions. Their behavior reflected partial internalization or no internalization at all of the parents' decisions.

Discussion

In social media and scholarly literature, most depictions of Chinese international students center on the struggles they face, often depicting them as dependent and passive (Abelmann & Kang, 2014; Ryan & Louie, 2007). Our findings suggest that we need a better understanding of this population of young migrants emerging from the growing Chinese middle class. In this study, we focused on Chinese international students' autonomy in their decision-making processes about studying abroad. Autonomy in studying abroad decision-making predicts students' psychosocial adjustment at U.S. universities (Bodycott & Lai, 2012; Yang et al., 2018). Most of our participants demonstrated clear agency and autonomy in their decision-making processes about studying abroad, and various levels of autonomy among our participants were highlighted. Furthermore, the qualitative findings elaborated on various family interpersonal processes underlying the decision, which enhances our understanding of how socioeconomic-cultural contexts and previous experiences may contribute to their decision-making.

Decision-Making Process About Studying Abroad

Our study extends the existing literature by highlighting family interpersonal processes behind the decision-making about studying abroad. Existing research about study abroad decision-making has predominantly used quantitative methods to illustrate the types of decision-making without considering decision-making as a process that involves lengthy consideration, discussions, and arguments in the predisposition and search stages. In this study, we found six profiles of family interpersonal processes and correspondingly five levels of students' autonomy, depending on who initialized the idea of studying abroad and whether the other party (either the child or the parents) supported the idea initially. The first two profiles comprise Chinese students who were the initiator of the idea of studying abroad, the third profile refers to students who initiated the idea jointly with parents, and in the last three profiles, parents were the idea initiator. While previous studies have found two types of students—those who are the initiators and those whose parents are the initiators of the study-abroad idea (Bodycott & Lai, 2012)—our study demonstrates that decision-making about studying abroad for Chinese students is more nuanced than who initiated the plan. Instead, it continues with how the other party (either the child or the parents) perceives the idea, which makes the processes more complicated and difficult to describe using only static categories. Participants' experiences demonstrated that decision-making about studying abroad is a dynamic family process during which discussions and arguments occur, and ideas may change over time between students and parents. This study proposes a flowchart (see Figure 1, Appendix B) to represent the dynamic decision-making process.

Autonomy in Decision-Making Process

In this study, most of the students fell into the second, third, and fourth profiles (in Figure 1, Appendix B), which indicates that while for most of our participants the decision about studying abroad was jointly made with parents, they, on average, displayed a high level of autonomy in the processes. The finding disagrees with that of Bodycott and Lai (2012) that most of the students felt obligated or reluctant to accept the decision about cross-border study and were not satisfied

with the procedure or the results of decision-making. The different finding is probably due to the different samples of the two studies: Bodycott and Lai's study participants are students who went to study in Hong Kong back in early 2010. This interview finding is confirmed by our survey results generated from the larger sample. The decision about studying abroad for most of the students in the larger sample was mainly their own choices, though parents were involved in the decision-making process (125 out of 195, 64%). Chinese adolescents still feel autonomous despite the direct involvement of their parents in the decision-making process (Rudy et al., 2007). The collectivistic culture orientation emphasizes harmony in relationships and interdependence, and it differs from the Western culture, where independence is highly valued. Autonomy that facilitates adolescent adjustment in Chinese society needs to be understood from a combined perspective: as the extent to which one's motives for engaging in the action are self-endorsed, and the degree to which the decision is made independently from parental influence (Chen et al., 2013). The combined orientation of autonomy facilitates our investigation of Chinese students regulating difficult situations in interacting with parents while establishing a separate sense of self from their parents (Yeh & Yang, 2006).

Further, our study illustrates different levels of autonomy displayed by our participants, ranging from actively pursuing studying abroad to being quite indifferent toward parental suggestions of studying abroad. In the first profile, participants used various strategies to persuade their parents, who initially refused their idea of studying abroad. Relatedly, 21.4% of all the participants in the larger survey reported that it was their own choice to study abroad. Although the majority of our participants demonstrated high levels of autonomy in family interpersonal processes related to studying abroad, some Chinese international students reported low levels of autonomy in this process. These students did not see the importance of studying abroad and followed the direction suggested by their parents. Research on Chinese adolescents shows that when there is little endorsement of parental decisions, compliance can become a psychological burden, and can induce negative psychological wellbeing (Chen et al., 2013). For international students, a lack of personal motivation for studying abroad may persist and induce maladaptation in the new environment. Compared to peers who demonstrated agency and autonomy in their decision-making processes, students who simply followed the path their parents specified for them tended to be less motivated and do worse in U.S. colleges (Bodycott & Lai, 2012; Yang et al., 2018). In future research, it will be helpful to have longitudinal data to investigate how lack of motivation may affect adaptation and development.

This study also contributed to our limited understanding of Chinese middle-class child-rearing attitudes in contemporary China. For most students in our sample, parents granted students a high level of autonomy and respected their opinions in the family decision-making processes about studying abroad, which probably differs from traditional Chinese child-rearing attitudes. In the process, most of the parents cared about students' opinions and left the final decision-making to their children, even in cases when parents were the idea initiators, indicating that Chinese parents in these families took their children's opinions seriously and encouraged their children to think independently. Moreover, even in the sixth profile, where students totally depend on parents' decisions, some parents allowed their children to choose what they wanted. In contemporary Chinese families, to thrive in educational and vocational opportunities in competitive, market-oriented modern China, children are encouraged and socialized by their parents to freely express their opinions or decisions and engage in initiative-taking behaviors, especially in urban families (Chen & Li, 2012; Lin et al., 2015).

Beyond the scope of this study, our findings indicate the importance of gender dynamics. Male students are more likely to be the idea initiator than female students. As seen in Table 1 (see Appendix A), proportionally, there are more male students (10 out of 22, 45%) than females (11 out of 28, 39%) in Group 1 and 2 (student as initiator) and more female students (15 out of 28, 54%) than males (9 out of 22, 41%) in Group 4 to 6 (parents as initiator). The gender role expectation that Chinese boys are socialized to play a more active role in making family decisions than Chinese girls (Ho, 1981) may explain this gender difference. In addition, Fuligni's (1998) study found that Chinese American adolescent girls had an expectation for autonomy at a later age than boys. It may explain why female students in the current study were more dependent on their parents for the decision making on studying abroad compared to male students of the same age. Future study should explore more deeply the role of gender in these processes.

Conclusion and Implications

We acknowledge that our study is not without limitations. First, this study was based on students' retrospective

descriptions, and we did not have data from their parents. The incorporation of parents' narratives into future studies may be instrumental for understanding the decision-making processes and parents' child-rearing attitudes toward Chinese international students. Second, we are constrained by the small sample size of students from rural places, possibly due to the population of interest. The majority of Chinese international students come from urban areas. Research has shown that Chinese children from urban/urbanized places display more willingness to challenge parents' authority and more sociable-assertive behaviors than their rural counterparts (Chen & Li, 2012; Zhang & Fuligni, 2006). Future research can benefit from including students from rural places to cross-validate the current findings. Third, our findings did not distinguish decision-making processes of studying abroad for high school versus college due to limited sample size for students who went to U.S. high schools and failure to design relevant interview questions. Autonomy in studying-abroad decision-making and family interpersonal processes can be differentiated from the experiences of Chinese international students at a younger age who chose to study in U.S. high schools. A further recommendation would be to examine the differences between students who study abroad for high school and for college in the United States.

Despite the limitations, this study contributed to our understanding of this most recent wave of Chinese international students and revealed their autonomy in decision-making about studying abroad in the family context. Our findings revealed that most of our participants demonstrated clear agency and autonomy in their decision-making processes about studying abroad. Also, surprisingly, many of our participants reflected on the independence dimension within autonomy through behaviors such as making individual decisions and self-caring regarding study and life. Stereotypes about Chinese students being passive and dependent can be detrimental to both Chinese international students and U.S. universities. For Chinese students, these stereotypes and perceptions can induce invisible biases against them from faculty, staff, and other students (Huang & Cowden, 2009). The stereotypes may also deprive U.S. universities of the opportunity to discover Chinese students' voices and promote cultural diversity on campus. It would be helpful for institutions, including faculty, staff, and domestic students, to provide an inclusive environment for international students by dispelling stereotypes about them and adopting a less ethnocentric viewpoint (Heng, 2018).

Our findings on different levels of autonomy also highlight the necessity of considering Chinese international students' current adaptation concerning interpersonal processes within their family before migration. We recommend more programs and interventions aimed at drawing on students' sense of autonomy by encouraging them to build agency in changing themselves and the environment. It is helpful for the U.S. institutions to support Chinese international students' autonomy development based on their various needs, rather than assuming they are a homogeneous group with identical challenges. School counselors or advisors can also get to know students' autonomy in decision-making about studying abroad to understand their perspectives and identify challenges and vulnerabilities to help build a healthier sense of purpose during their studying abroad journey.

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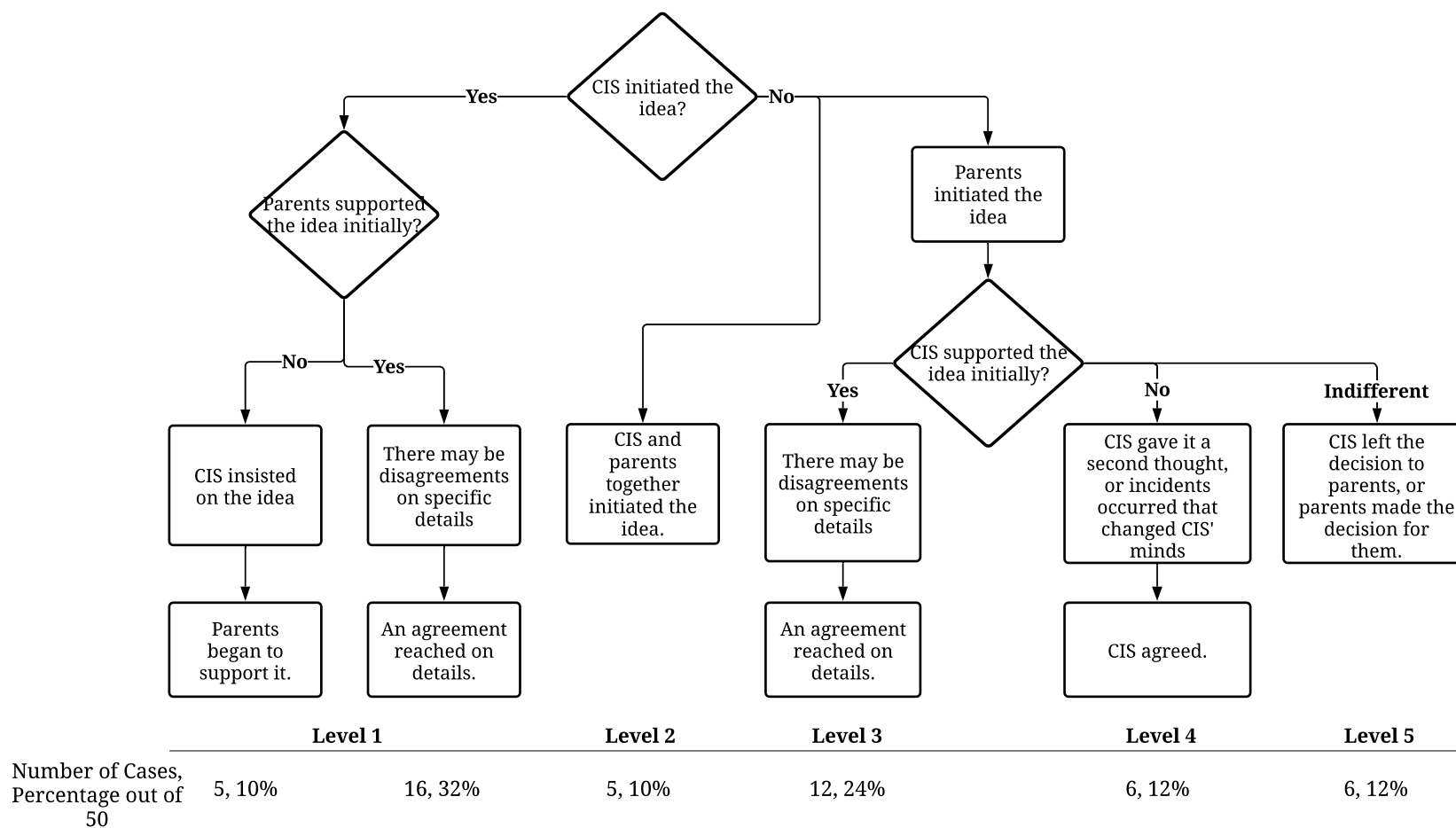**Table 1**

Demographic Information of Participants (N = 50)

Group	Gender				Single child in family[1]				Hometown[2]				Attended U.S. high school			
	Male		Female		Yes		No		Major metropolises		Small cities		Yes		No	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Group 1	1	20.0	4	80.0	4	100.0	0	0.0	1	20.0	4	80.0	1	20.0	4	80.0
Group 2	9	56.2	7	43.8	10	66.7	5	33.3	2	13.3	13	86.7	6	37.5	10	62.5
Group 3	3	33.3	2	66.7	3	75.0	1	25.0	0	0.0	4	100.0	1	20.0	4	80.0
Group 4	5	41.7	7	58.3	7	63.6	4	36.4	3	30.0	7	70.0	4	33.3	8	66.7
Group 5	2	33.3	4	66.7	2	40.0	3	60.0	0	0.0	5	100.0	3	50.0	3	50.0
Group 6	2	33.3	4	66.7	5	83.3	1	16.7	2	33.3	4	66.7	2	33.3	4	66.7
Total	22	44.0	28	56.0	31	68.9	14	31.1	8	17.8	37	82.2	17	34.0	33	66.0

Note. *N*s vary due to missing data. [1] Five participants had missing information on a single child in family. [2] Five participants had missing information on hometown.

Figure 1

Flowchart About Studying Abroad Decision-Making Processes (with six profiles and five autonomy levels from high to low)

	Level 1		Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
Number of Cases, Percentage out of 50	5, 10%	16, 32%	5, 10%	12, 24%	6, 12%	6, 12%

Note. CIS = Chinese international students. Diamonds represent options. Rectangles represent activities.

Appendix C
Interview Protocol

A. Educational Background in China and Coming to this University
1. Can you tell me something about your experiences in China before coming to this university? Where did you grow up in China?
2. Can you tell me something about your schooling experiences in China? Did you attend a lot of Buxiban?
3. Where did you attend high school? Did you participate in the National Exam in China? Did you attend the International Seciton of your High school to focus on TOEFL and SAT preparation?
4. Why did you come to the US for schooling? Was it your idea or your parents' idea?
5. When did you first know that you would be going to universities abroad? How did it change your schooling experiences in China?
6. How many universities did you apply to? Did you use an agent? Why did you choose to come to this university?
7. Was it hard to get into this university? What did you need to do?
8. Was this your first time studying in the U.S.? [if no, where were you? And for how long?]

B. Family Background and Parents
9. Can you tell me something about your family background? What do your parents do?
10. Tell me something about your parents. What kinds of parents are they?
11. What do you like most about your mom? What do you wish you could change, if you could, about your mom?
12. What do you like most about your dad? What do you wish you could change, if you could, about your dad?
13. Did you grow up with your parents or were other relatives involved in your upbringing? If so who?
14. Do you feel a lot of pressure from parents or family to be a certain way as an only child?
15. How involved were your parents in your school? What are ways they are involved in your school? Did you have a nanny or bao mu?
16. How was your relationship with your parents? Were they very busy at work? If you had any trouble, would you talk to your parents?
17. What were your parents' expectations for your schooling in China? After you graduate from college, what are your parents' expectations for you?
18. Are you an only child? How does that influence your experiences growing up?
19. Do you have contact with your parents now? How often do you contact your parents? Through QQ or Wechat video? What do you talk about with your parents?
20. Do you find it easy to talk to your parents about problems you may have? Do you talk to them about problems you experience here?
21. Do you miss your parents? Have your relationship change with your parents now that you are here?

C. Adjusting to life at this University
22. I'm very interested in the experiences of Chinese international students at this university. Can you tell me something about your own experiences attending school here? How did the last semester go? How is this semester going?
23. Are things different from your expectations here at this university? How?
24. What helped you adjust to life here? What were the hardest things in the first semester? How did you overcome these challenges?
25. What do you like most? What do you like least about your life here?
26. What's the major you chose when you first came to this university? What was your major last semester? Are you changing majors this semester? Why?
27. How did you do academically and socially in the first semester?
28. What are the biggest differences between going to school in the US and China?
29. At this university, there are Chinese students whose family is very wealthy and students whose family is not very wealthy. Which group do you belong to?
30. Do money and family financial situation influence your experiences at the university? If so, how? [Academic? Social?]
31. What is it like to live in this community in East Lansing? Do you like it? Is it different from your expectations?
32. Are Chinese students treated well here in the community? Can you give some examples?

33. What have you learned about working with American professors? Are they different from Chinese professors or teachers? What are similarities and what are differences?
34. Do you attend activities organized by the university? Why [not]?
35. Are you a member of any student groups (either Chinese or non-Chinese)?
36. Are grades important for you? Why?
37. What are some things you learned in you're here that will be benefit your future?

D. Peers, Parents and Social Support
38. What are some main areas of support you have had? What's the most important support you have in your life here?
39. Are most of your friends from the U.S., China or other regions?
40. What do you do with your friends?
41. How are things going in your residence hall? What are things you really like and what are things that you don't like as much about your dorm?
42. How are things between you and your roommate? Do you know each other before? How has it been sharing a dorm together with him/her?
43. How is the dining hall? What do you think of American food? Do you eat outside a lot?
44. What are your American classmates like? Do you interact with them a lot?
45. Is it important for you to interact with American students? Why (not)?
46. Some students mention that it's hard to become friends with American students. What are your experiences? Why do think is it this way?
47. How do you think most Chinese students perceive American students?
48. How do you think most American students perceive Chinese students?
49. Did you date in high school? Are you dating now? If so, has dating changed your social life in terms of interactions with your friends?
50. What advise you have for someone who is coming to study here?

E. Mental health

51. Sometimes students feel depressed or anxious in their first year. Have you had any o these feelings in your first year? Why? How do you deal with these feelings?
52. Have you experienced discrimination in any way? How do you make sense of these experiences if any?
53. When you have problems, who do you talk to?

F. Future Goals
54. What goals do you have for the future?
55. Who is your model? Anyone you would like to be like?
56. What are your passions or things you are really interested in these days?

G. Institutional Support
57. What do you think of this university's support of international students?
58. Are you aware of resources or offices that can support international students at this university?
59. Do you use these resources? Why (not)?
60. What other ways of support do you think school should have?

Informed Consent

Hello! You have been invited to take part in a longitudinal research study on Chinese international students at this university.

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview every spring during your study at this university. The purpose of the interview will be to gather general information about your experiences being a Chinese international student at this university and your thoughts on how well the university supports international students. This information will help us understand the experiences of Chinese international students and tailor institutional support to better meet their needs so that they can thrive here at this university.

The interview will last about one hour. It will be audio-recorded upon your consent. There are no known risks associated with your participation in the interview beyond those of everyday life where you express your thoughts and feelings about your experiences adapting to life here at this university. You will receive $20 for your time and participation in the interview each time.

Your confidentiality will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. Your responses will be kept strictly confidential with the following exception: the researcher is required by law to report to the appropriate authorities, suspicion of harm to yourself, to children, or to others. Data will be kept in files on computers that are password-protected in the lead researcher's office. All identifiable information will be removed and stored in a separate file. The data will be kept for five years after the project closes. Participation is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty. You also have the right to skip or not answer any questions you prefer not to answer. Your participation or withdraw will not affect the services you may receive at the university or any other affiliate organizations.

If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Human Research Protection Program.

If you have concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury (i.e., physical, psychological, social, financial, or otherwise), please contact the researcher.

By signing below, you are indicating that you are at least 18 years old and that you have made a decision to participate in the study and understand the information above.

Agreement to Participate

I voluntarily agree to participate by completing the interview

_____

Participant's Signature   Date

Participant's Name: _____

I agree to allow audiotaping of the interview. Yes _____No_____

Initials _____

International Higher Education: A Discussion on the College Experience for International Students Who Identify as LGBT+ and Development of an Interview Tool

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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 short paper examines the category of international students who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or any additional sexual identity that falls within the spectrum (LBGT+) in higher education. As the number of international students increases, the likelihood that more of them could be open about sexual identity in more liberal environments, such as college campuses, the unique needs of this intersectionality must be addressed as its own category. This paper examines the implications of what conducting interviews can mean for further study on international students who identify as LGBT+. Furthermore, this paper addresses study implementation to improve the field of study for this sexual identity category of students in higher education. Finally, we offer guidance on how colleges and universities can provide support to international LGBT+ students.

Keywords: international students, intersectionality, LBGT, queer theory

Introduction

This paper examines the category of international students who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or any additional sexual identity that falls within the spectrum (LBGT+) in higher education. For this paper, international students are defined as students whose country of origin is outside of the United States (US), and who are pursuing a post-secondary degree at a US institution of higher education.

As the number of international students increases on US campuses, the likelihood that more students could be open about sexual identity in more liberal environments, such as college campuses, means the unique needs of this intersectionality must be addressed as its own category. Although the US can seem to be conservative, many college

campuses provide opportunities for students to explore who they are in a safer environment. International students who self-identify as LGBT+, can develop either a bicultural identity or a dual socialization identity and colleges must work to provide necessary accommodations for such students. This will foster a positive climate that helps students integrate on campus.

Literature Review

International Students

Increased globalization has been accompanied by increased international student admissions that support students' interactions through accessible learning alternatives. With continuously rising college tuition, universities are using international recruitment strategies to broaden international learning and cultural exchange on campuses. International recruitment works to expose universities' domestic students to a variety of peoples and cultures, allowing them to learn from and work with individuals that they may not have otherwise encountered. The importance of intercultural experience has gained much traction in US higher education, but it can also give rise to particular challenges for international students. Depending on the composition of the group, power imbalances can arise within intergroup dynamics, particularly with minority groups (Smith, 2016). As the numbers of international students increase on campuses across the US, universities and colleges must work to provide necessary accommodations for these students to integrate and foster a positive campus climate.

Transition and integration for international students in higher education is important for the US. Annually, these students contribute billions of dollars to the economy (Adewale et al., 2018). Additionally, an increase in international graduate students shows an increasing trend in patent applications, further boosting the overall economy (Hegarty, 2014). Hegarty (2014) also identified how these individuals often face cultural, language, and adaptability barriers. Bai (2016) identified these individual and group stressors as the phenomena known as acculturative stress. Occurring when individuals come into constant contact with a culture different enough from their own that causes a reduction in the individual's social, physical, and psychological health, Bai (2016) reported that up to 25 percent of international students experience this. The campus climate towards international students plays a big part in this as there are required systems to support international students in their transition to host universities. Additional supports such as counseling, student groups, and international student groups work to decrease feelings of alienation for incoming students as they transition to unfamiliar environments.

Even with successful assimilation into American higher education, the end of their stay in the US can present issues for international students. Students who acclimate well and adjust to their new college life become part of a community but can feel increasing stress and anxiety as they prepare to depart from this newly formed identity. This self-identity crisis can be exacerbated by returning to a home country where the culture is different from the one they have embraced in the host country. Preparation for re-entry and readjustment can cause psychological and mental health issues for individuals. Further complications arise for international students who develop and embrace identities that are stigmatized identities in their home country (Matic & Russell, 2020). University psychological and counseling services must prepare students for re-acculturation shock at the end of their studies. Some students choose to study in more liberal countries because of the freedom afforded in those places. In preparation to return home at the end of their studies, some international students are going to need access to health services to learn how to appropriately process these feelings they have not experienced before.

Intersectionality

Leaving your home to study abroad can be a challenging experience for many students as it may be their first time leaving their home country for any significant period. When transitioning to new cultures, international students may develop a bicultural outlook where they identify with two separate cultures: their own and the one they assimilate into (Harper et al., 2011). They may keep these two identities separate, which can cause the re-acculturation shock that some students experience as they prepare to return to their home country. By embracing a separate new identity of who they are in a host country, students must learn how to readjust to their home culture, sometimes against their desire to do so.

International students may instead develop identities based on the concept of dual socialization. They have two separate cultural identities in this context, but some shared values or norms for the coexistence of two overlapping cultures (Harper et al., 2011). For international students whose culture is more similar to the host country, dual socialization can be more manageable than for a student whose culture is more different.

Both identity experiences can be acutely felt by those international students who study abroad and begin to connect an identity within the LGBT+ community. Some students occasionally choose to study abroad in a country that embraces more liberal views, allowing them opportunities to embrace their own identity. Many college campuses in the US provide opportunities for students to explore their identities in a less threatening environment, which for international students can develop either a bicultural identity or a dual socialization identity. The first option can likely happen for those students who come from countries that actively oppose and punish members of the LGBT+ community. Re-acculturation can be especially hard for these students as they may develop anxieties and fears of punishment upon their return to their home country. Dual socialization can occur for those LGBT+ international students who come from countries that have more open opinions on LGBT+ issues, but this does not necessarily mean that they will have it easier as they may still face stigma from friends and family upon their return home.

International students who identify as LGBT+ can also face a double barrier as part of their experience studying abroad. Individuals can feel isolated due to the intersectional nature of their sexual identities and their cultural background or identity (Nguyen et al., 2017). Students from a culture where their sexual identity is not accepted could become isolated from peers from their home country, while in turn facing potential barriers as an international student and not fitting in with other LGBT+ individuals on campus. Even if an international student desires to embrace a bicultural or dual socialization type of identity, discrimination and potential isolation can leave these students to feel unwelcome and unwanted. Campus services need to create a system that helps international LGBT+ students overcome these circumstances.

Additionally, Streitwieser's (2019) research discusses categorizing international students into themes of mobility pathways for enlightenment, opportunity, or survival. Although the last group of students in that work is attributed to those who are refugees, it can be used to discuss students who are LGBT+ international students. Life threatening policies in foreign countries, such as recent anti-LGBTQ+ laws in Uganda (HRC Foundation, 2023), could be a reason that students in this space may be studying abroad.

Departure from a host university where a student has developed an identity as both international and LGBT+ can cause extreme distress for the student. This can occur when they plan to return to a host country where their identity is illegal, and they could face severe consequences such as corporal punishment or death, as is the case in Saudi Arabia (Human Rights Watch, 2023). The journey to self-acceptance may have also led to the development of mental health issues that need to be addressed, and the student may view returning home as undesirable if there is a stigma about mental health in the home culture (Oba & Pope, 2013).

Acquiring a wealth of bicultural knowledge and preference for the host country can also cause distress for the international student. While embracing an LGBT+ identity may liberate the student, suppressing who they are upon returning home to family and friends who do not hold accepting views can also result in psychological distress (Matic & Russell, 2020). Options such as returning home to an unfavorable environment for an international LGBT+ student can lead to mental and academic struggles. When this outcome seems to be the only choice, students in this category may become distracted from finishing their degrees or work more vigorously to find alternative options to avoid returning home.

Queer Theory

While the concept of queer has existed since the 1970s, it was not until Teres de Lauretis organized the first queer theory conference in 1990 that it was officially named (Jagose, 2009). Historically, "queer" was used disparagingly to refer to anyone who deviated from the majority, denoting the person being abnormal or sick. (Halperin, 2003, p. 339). Queer was often used as a derogatory term to refer to sexual minorities who deviated from heteronormative expectations (McDonald, 2015). As a way to subvert this negative connotation, de Lauretis wanted to utilize the name "queer theory" in a manner that celebrated queerness and liberated individuals from having to conform to those heteronormative standards (de Lauretis,

1991). She also used this name as a way to challenge the previously accepted dichotomous thinking of "ordinary" versus "deviant" when discussing sexual orientation (Jagose, 2009, p. 2). Queer theory is grounded in three main principles: the deconstruction and naming of heteronormativity and cisgenderism, the expectations surrounding the performance of sexuality and gender, and the liminality of transitional phases (Abes & Kasch, 2011; Butler, 1986, 2015; Nicolazzo, 2016).

Michel Foucault and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick have contributed a greater understanding that heteronormativity and homophobia have been driving forces to make heterosexuality the norm by emphasizing the interplay of sexuality with identity and knowledge (Sumara & Davis, 1999). Since the 17th century, sexuality became a form of power that the majority culture wielded to control and induce shame. When you keep people ashamed of their sexuality, it becomes easier to control their thoughts and beliefs (Foucault, 1972, 1990). Queer theory challenges these assumptions of normality (Abes, 2008). Instead of categorizing people into labels such as lesbian, gay, and bisexual, queer theory demonstrates that sexual orientations are not set in the dichotomous realm of straight or gay. Instead, individuals can have multiple identities that also might be fluid (Britzman, 1997).

Nevertheless, as discussed later in the literature review, this also causes some issues between gay and lesbian scholars and those utilizing queer theory. Queer theory looks at who is oppressed by the social norms or sexual orientation and gender identity, social constructs of gender identity and sexual orientation, and performance of gender identity and sexual orientation (Butler, 1991). As stated so eloquently in Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (Butler, 1986; de Beauvoir, 1949, p. 267).

There is a significant amount of variety present in the LGBT+ community, and by consolidating these varying identities into one term, individuals reinforce the binary and the privileges experienced by those who identify as heterosexual (Abes & Kasch, 2011). Although those who identify as non-heterosexual can identify and be placed in their own unique subgroups, for the sake of this paper, they will be categorized as one group indicated by the initialism LGBT+. The plus is intended to be inclusive of all gender identities and sexualities that may not be directly mentioned in the writing.

Furthermore, as part of queer theory, actions that challenge the binary system impose performative actions on studying sexual influences and gender identity. This concept argues that individuals' actions do not necessarily reflect their specific identity but that the actions themselves create individuality (Abes & Kasch, 2011). Judith Butler's work demonstrates the hierarchical nature of binary systems imposed by heteronormativity through intentional actions against norms, such as drag; individuals' identities are realized and constructed through their performative actions rather than actions influenced by identity (Butler, 1993). On the other hand, performative actions related to gender or sexuality can appear straightforward but confusing to others; these expressions, whether traditional, drag, or other forms of clothing or art, are influenced by gender identity and conceptualized through self-discovery from birth.

Lastly, a third category of queer theory is liminality. This category focuses on individual transition or the flux of identity from stages of stability while considering heteronormativity and performative actions. Abes and Kasch (2011) highlight that the view of stages does not associate heterosexuality with non-heterosexuality spaces. Instead, the space of gender and sexuality identities is diverse and, therefore, does not fall within the binary system. An example is identifying individuals as non-binary or their preference for pronouns such as they/them instead of the traditional he/she terms. Regardless of physical presentation, queer theory supports an understanding of the identity of individuals within the LGBT+ community. This theory is not intended only for gender and sexuality influences but includes a broad approach to studies impacting learning abroad for decision outcomes. It also takes an interdisciplinary approach to see how environmental factors affect an individual's perceived identity and development. As such, this paper seeks to support further discussions on the implications required for reasonings beyond the actions taken by international students and the development of their identity during their study abroad experiences.

International Students Who Identify as LGBT+

Much of the academic literature concerning the intersecting topic of international students who identify as LGBT+ are privatized by corporations who charge exorbitant prices for short term access to such resources. Much of the information

readily available centers around theses and dissertations. More open-access research is needed to support the work centered around LGBT+ international students.

Valosik (2015) concisely addresses international students' LGBT+ support identity by discussing the double barrier concept and suggesting how educators can approach the topic respectfully and meaningfully. Creating safe spaces for these students is crucial for these students to feel they are a part of their campus environments. Valosik (2015) also addresses the challenges that international LGBT+ students can face upon graduation and the need for administration and faculty to be aware of this difficult time of departure. Literature like this can provide a solid base for which others might also develop research questions related to an interest in learning more about the international LGBT+ community on college campuses.

Research Method

Using a qualitative approach, interview questions were developed based on previous literature in this area of study as they helped to focus ideas for international students, or former international students. For example, Corkum's (2015) research on this subject found that most of his study participants had a desire to get an education abroad due to their differences in gender identity or expression from their cultural norms. Participants sought opportunities to view their specific identities, backgrounds from their country of origin, their sex, sexual identity, and gender identities, and how they perceive and develop their identities when they are living and studying in their host country. Though this is true of many participants in this study, such a thing cannot necessarily be attributed to all LGBT+ international students who study abroad as queer theory shows that gender/sexual identity is liminal and can change after arriving in a host country.

Patrick (2014) and Wall (2016) each addressed the specific need for host universities to provide institutional support to students who are international and identify as LGBT+. Not only are these students likely facing acculturation shock, but they may also encounter discrimination aimed at one or both parts of their unique identity. Therefore, colleges and universities must be prepared to handle the increasing number of international students and the possibility of non-heteronormative identities expressed by these students.

Discussion of Pilot Study

Having developed a questionnaire based on the work of Corkum (2015) and Pattinson (2010), this tool is intended to provide useful information related to the intersectionality of international students in the US who identify as LGBT+. It was tested on two participants that fit into the defined scope of intended interviewees. When testing, the questionnaire was sent via email so that respondents could fill it out at their own leisure with no defined response time. Though not under Institutional Review Board protocol, consent was collected from both participants as part of their participation. Results were emailed back to the lead author for analysis.

Responses were short and directly answered the questions without expanding much on details. After reviewing a transcript and analysis done by Constance Ellwood (2006), this could change how future interviews are conducted on the topic. Though there is safety behind a computer screen, having a direct interview would allow for probing questions to get more details from respondents. The interview conducted by Ellwood (2006) showed how international students may use language barriers to avoid talking about topics that make them uncomfortable, especially those considered taboo in their home environment. A live interview would allow for the interviewer to gather more information that could be used to analyze this growing field of research.

Therefore, the questionnaire designed for this study provided insight into the intersectionality of being an international student and having an LGBT+ identity. It addressed the multiple identities that these participants hold and provided an interesting look at how initial respondents allow these identities to interact and how they create boundaries between them when they feel it is necessary. This tool might be beneficial in addressing why some students might be studying abroad as mentioned in the Streitwieser (2019) study. As lawmakers in countries outside of the US are passing laws criminalizing LGBT+ identities, this will likely become a significant area of discussion in international student education.

International LGBT+ students also face layered discrimination through racism caused by being from a different country and because of the prevailing heteronormativity in society (Nguyen et al., 2017). Students in this position who have come out or plan to explore their sexuality may not desire to return to their home country for fear of being met with homophobia or being put in danger in the communities that they grew up in. Though the possibility of homophobia in the university setting and American society is something these students may encounter, having this separation from home could allow them to feel more comfortable exploring this avenue.

Gathering information on the topic can be facilitated by conducting a study with the designed tool either through electronic communication or through live interviews. More time must be allotted to conduct interviews to do this latter option effectively. Greater outreach will also need to be implemented. Listservs of international students enrolled on campuses can help to disseminate an invitation to participate in the study. Additionally, the questionnaire can be sent to interested responding students in preparation for a live interview. This would allow them to formulate their thoughts around each question so that if there is a language barrier, this can be overcome. Live interviews will also benefit the study as interviewers can ask for explanations or more details about the questions. Further studies such as this can be useful in creating and providing a campus climate that addresses the unique intersection of being an international student and identifying as LGBT+. In doing this, researchers might consider phenomenological or case study methodologies. Finally, it would be beneficial to reach out and interview campus LGBTQ Centers to find out what institutional supports are being provided to these students.

Conclusion

Providing a positive campus climate for international students who identify as LGBT+ is more critical now than ever, considering some of the country's current political leadership actively opposes both individual identification categories. Students planning to travel to this country for higher education may seek out opportunities elsewhere that are more accepting of their true selves. Moreover, with more students studying internationally than ever before, the number of individuals who openly identify as LGBT+ will continue to grow. Therefore, campuses need infrastructure and support plans to assist these students who fall into this growing demographic. Identity development for LGBT+ individuals can be challenging, especially when cultural identity from one's home country conflicts with their true self. Colleges and universities can play a crucial role in helping facilitate this transition by ensuring these students know what resources are available to them and how to locate them if they are needed. In addition to administrative support, culturally responsive teaching can contribute to the sense of belonging for international students who identify as LGBT+. Educators must recognize the diverse identities, languages, and cultures that students bring to their classrooms, as these factors shape the learning environment (Heitner & Jennings, 2016).

Furthermore, student-led organizations can provide significant support to international LGBT+ students. Conferences such as the Tabla Conference held at the University of California, Riverside can be instrumental in facilitating connections between international students of similar ethnicities and backgrounds who also identify as LGBT+, preventing them from feeling invisible while reconciling their past background with their true selves (Olson, 2014). As a recommendation, colleges and universities can foster a positive campus climate by being intentionally aware of students' backgrounds and identities and providing opportunities for them to connect with like-minded individuals. International students who identify as LGBT+ are vital members of any campus community, and it is crucial that colleges and universities actively pursue inclusive opportunities and support students through accessible resources.

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Appendix A

Interview and Consent Form

Higher Education: International Students Who Identify as LGBT+
Consent to Participate

You are being asked to consent to participate in research, conducted by _____, to investigate backgrounds, reasons, and perceptions of students who study internationally and identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or other non-heteronormative sexuality (LGBT+). The purpose of this is to gather information to compare/contrast and even add to the small amount of literature on this important and often overlooked portion of the student body in higher education.

You are being asked to complete a questionnaire that will help to provide illumination on the subject of international students who identify as LGBT+. There will be identifying questions asked that will help to provide background information and context for the research. Your name will not be included in the research paper itself, but instead a pseudonym will be used so that your identity will be protected. Some of the questions will ask for very personal information about yourself and your experiences. If any of these questions cause discomfort, you may skip them. It is important that you fill out as much as possible of the questionnaire, as more information can help to draw more appropriate conclusions. Again, your name will not be used in the actual report, so your identity will be protected.

By completing this survey, you are agreeing to participate in the research. Your responses will be used to expand upon the literature of international students who identify as LGBT+. At no point will your real name be used and instead a pseudonym will be employed to keep your identity private.

You will not receive any compensation for participating in this research.

If you have questions about the research, please contact _____ at (123) 456-7890 or by email at john.doe@johndoe.org. When you are finished filling out the questionnaire, please email it to the aforementioned email. Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary.

By typing your full name and the date, you acknowledge your informed consent of participation in this study. This is the only place your name will appear and will not be used in the research.
Name:
Date:

Appendix B

Survey

Questionnaire
Higher Education: International Students Who Identify as LGBT+

When filling out the questionnaire, if the question is not specifically asking yes or no, please provide details and/or explanations. The more information you can provide is greatly appreciated. Any stories and/or anecdotes are also appreciated!

Background Information
1. What is your age?
2. What is your gender?
3. How would you describe your sexuality at this time? Has it changed over time?
4. Please describe your ethnic background.
5. Which country do you consider "home"?
6. What is your current status in the United States (citizen/permanent resident/student visa/other)?
7. How long have you been in the United States?
8. If you are currently a college/university student, please indicate the following:
   a. Institution type (research/baccalaureate/community college/etc.)
   b. Program of study
   c. Year of study
9. If you are a college/university graduate, please indicate the following:
   a. Institution type(s) (research/baccalaureate/community college/etc.)
   b. Program(s) of study
   c. Year(s) of study
10. To what degree are you open (or "out") about your sexuality?
11. With whom are you open with about your sexuality (friends/family/coworkers/etc.)
12. Does/did your campus(es) offer LGBT+ resources?

Study Abroad Experience
13. Why did you choose to study abroad at the institution of your choice?
   a. Did being LGBT+ play any role in this decision?
14. How would you describe your sexuality before coming to the United States? Is it different from how you would describe it now?
15. Thinking about your social life and sense of belonging at your college/university, what is it like to be an LGBT+ international student there?
16. Are there any positive memories you would like to share?
17. Are there any particular challenges you have faced and how did you respond to them?
18. Do you connect with other international students? LGBT+ students? Both? Neither? Some other group of people?
19. Does your sexuality cause any kind of conflict with other parts of your identity?
20. Has your experience as an LGBT+ individual been positive or negative overall during your study abroad experience? How?

Home Country
21. Are there any laws or restrictions on individuals who identify as anything but heterosexual in your home country?
22. Were there any specific challenges you faced your sexuality in your home country? Are there any challenges you face with it now?
23. Does having a sexuality other than being heterosexual make it difficult to build relationships with your peers/professors/coworkers? Does it make it difficult to connect with other international students, especially those from your home country?
24. Does your sexuality play any role in desires and/or stresses about returning to your home country when the study abroad finishes?

Additional Information
   If you would like to provide any additional information that you felt was not asked about through the questionnaire, please use this space to do so.

Questions adapted or taken from:

Corkum, T. (2015). *Where is queer? migration experiences of sexual minority international students in Toronto* (Unpublished master's thesis). University of Toronto. Retrieved July 5, 2020, fromhttps://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/70274/3/Corkum_Trevor_W_201511_MA_thesis.pdf

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Empirical Article

Hidden Struggles: Increasing International Graduate Students' Sense of Belonging

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Abstract

Although international graduate students make valuable contributions to American society, they often encounter significant difficulties. Further research is crucial to help universities better understand and accommodate international graduate students. We initiated a mixed-method participatory action research cycle, starting with a needs assessment that utilized social constructivist and culturally relevant teaching approaches. Our goal is to contribute to international higher education by examining the experiences of international graduate students at a Midwestern University, including their sense of belonging and the factors that promote their success. Our findings reveal that their challenges include language barriers, unfamiliar U.S. social norms, academic expectations, and legal obstacles; international graduate students benefit from a supportive university community with culturally aware professors and peers, which foster a sense of belonging.

Keywords: international graduate students, sense of belonging

Introduction

International students enhance the United States (U.S.) in myriad ways, from scientific advancement to cultural contributions and athletic accomplishments. They stimulate the economy, positively affecting the labor market. Over 415,000 jobs exist to support international students (Raimondo, 2021), and they contributed $44.7 billion to the U.S. economy in 2018 alone (Institute of International Education [IIE], 2019). In 2022, 1,362,157 active international students enrolled in U.S. universities (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement [ICE], 2022), and they accounted for 4.7 % of the total U.S. higher education population in 2022 (IIE, 2023).

This demographic includes international graduate students (IGS) who bring their unique career and academic experiences from abroad. However, research indicates that IGS encounter various challenges (Skromanis et al., 2018; Johnson et al., 2018), which affect their sense of belonging and success in U.S. universities. Studies are needed to explore

whether universities are meeting IGS' needs and how IGS find a sense of belonging as they navigate the transition from their home countries to the U.S.

Through a participatory action research framework (PAR), our research team assessed the needs of IGS while working toward a better understanding of how IGS find a sense of belonging in U.S. higher education. The ultimate purpose of this research is to encourage reflection and improve the services and support for IGS at a large urban Midwestern University (MWU).

Purpose

Learning is insufficient without action, and we aimed to enact social justice through a PAR framework. By partnering with IGS and engaging stakeholders who work with IGS, we sought to learn more about current systems of support that may increase the sense of belonging and reflect on improvements to the IGS experience at every stage of their MWU journey. As a first step, we defined the current and specific needs of IGS through surveys, interviews, and focus group interviews and explored ways to meet their needs better. The research examines what would mediate an enhanced sense of belonging at MWU for IGS. The following questions guided the research: What are the experiences of IGS as they transition from their home countries to MWU? How do they find a sense of belonging? What support will ensure IGS' success and give them a sense of belonging?

Context

At MWU, institutional support is available for this population, including International Student and Scholar Services, dedicated student clubs (such as the IGS Organization – which only serves international graduate students), and community cultural organizations (such as local temples and churches). However, it became clear to the research team that IGS at MWU experience challenges, and their experiences are consistent with the international student experience described in the existing literature. Anecdotal evidence and earlier studies (Skromanis et al., 2018; Johnson et al., 2018; O'Meara et al., 2017) have confirmed the need for further research and actions to improve institutional support for IGS. To meet the IGS' demands and help them overcome the challenges, and to understand their unique experiences, this study, through a PAR framework, examines how IGS experience a sense of belonging or lack thereof.

Literature Review

Despite varying degrees of institutional support, research suggests that IGS experience challenges, unlike their domestic counterparts, including but not limited to adjusting to language barriers, differences in academic systems, cultural conflicts, racial discrimination, social isolation, and emotional concerns (Skromanis et al., 2018; Johnson et al., 2018). These stressors can potentially inhibit an international graduate student's "sense of belonging" (O'Meara et al., 2017, p. 1). The above stressors can negatively affect their mental and physical wellbeing and create barriers to academic success in U.S. institutions of higher learning, thus limiting their potential future global and domestic economic contributions (Hyun et al., 2007; O'Meara et al., 2017). Previous research elucidates that many universities are not providing the international student population with sufficient support and necessary resources to overcome the challenges to thrive (Hyun et al., 2007; Skromanis et al., 2018).

Glass (2018) focuses on the international student's sense of belonging and points out that an international student's identity and sense of self may be called into question when asked by domestic peers and university staff, "Where are you from?" often meaning "why are you here?" (Glass, 2018, p. 27). This recurring question, in turn, can affect the creation and maintenance of meaningful relationships and the development of social capital. It is a fine line that international students walk in wishing to keep their home cultures while also seeking acceptance within U.S. campus life. In discussing belonging and power, Glass (2018) examines how neo-racism discrimination based upon cultural differences can negatively affect an

international student's sense of belonging. Similarly, Aggarwal and Ciftci (2020) examine the experience of South Asian international students and the impact that colorblind racial ideology and "racism-related stress" (p. 2265) has on their sense of belonging.

Another important consideration when examining the experiences of IGS in higher education is the need for more support provided by trained faculty, staff, and administration. Guo (2016) sees advisors as crucial to supporting international students who must navigate an entirely new educational system while learning to speak a new language and adjusting to new customs. Guo (2016) writes that, as a result, international students may experience feelings of insecurity, frustration, or defeat. It is crucial that academic advisors are aware of issues facing international students and are trained appropriately to support IGS and mitigate the unique challenges they face. Similarly, Johnson et al. (2018) advocated for the need to "develop programs to meet the psychological and cultural adjustment concerns of international students...." after finding that international students were experiencing difficulties "adjusting to language barriers, different academic systems, cultural conflicts, racial discrimination, social isolation, and emotional concerns" (p.1866).

The acculturative stress (Aggarwal & Ciftci, 2020) prevalent among international students can manifest through a diminished sense of belonging, language barriers, culture shock, financial issues, blatant or covert discrimination, and myriad other obstacles. These complications produce real consequences that can negatively affect an international student's academic career, self-esteem, and mental and physical health. Often, international students shoulder these challenges themselves without the support of university faculty (Aggarwal & Ciftci, 2020; Glass, 2018; Guo, 2016; Johnson et al., 2018; Yao, 2016).

The literature review found limited PAR studies on IGS "belonging." Two previous relevant research on belonging in an educational context employing participatory action research reveal both benefits and limitations. Researchers elevate and honor the voices of student participants in identifying the core problem, divulging their lived experiences, and partnering on recommendations to address entrenched, disenfranchising institutional practices; however, studies acknowledge that fostering agency in student participants does not necessarily broaden their spheres of influence to create change in educational institutions that are largely bureaucratic and slow to alter hegemonic practices (Johnson, 2016; Stack & Wang, 2018).

Although most of the literature reviewed concerned international students as one demographic, we see IGS as a distinct part of that population showing similar characteristics and bringing their own specific assets and needs, which could include additional academic and work experience and familial duties. The literature demonstrates a pattern of IGS challenges that hinder their overall sense of belonging while enrolled at U.S. universities. IGS in higher education is an often-overlooked segment that requires more comprehensive support. To view their needs as identical to those of domestic graduate students is problematic because of their specific circumstances. The current study attempts to contribute to the gaps in this literature, focusing on IGS.

Theoretical Framework

This participatory action research study is guided by aspects from the theories of social constructivism (Davis et al., 2017) and culturally responsive teaching (CRT) (Gay, 2018) to explore issues affecting IGS' experiences at MWU. Social constructivism, as it applies to an educational context, posits that learning is socially mediated: "Students learn primarily through interactions with their peers, teachers, and parents, whereas teachers stimulate and facilitate conversation through harnessing the natural flow of conversation in the classroom" (Davis et al., 2017, p. 67). Successful teaching and learning practices, therefore, depend upon interactions between professors and students. The instructor's role is crucial in nurturing students' sense of belonging in the classroom and ultimate mastery of academic and social skills.

CRT (Gay, 2018) provides a lens through which to address inequities in the classroom. CRT acknowledges the precarious nature of the "racial and ethnic climate in the United States and the world [as] more ominous" with "increased

vulnerability of minoritized racial and ethnic groups endanger[ing] the attainment of educational equity for victimized groups" (Gay, 2018, p. xi). The moral imperative of CRT exists in its central paradigmatic shift away from a deficit view to a difference as an asset model in addressing the unique needs of an increasingly diverse student population (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 62). The forming of the research questions for the current study, the selection of research design and methods, and the data collection, analysis, and interpretation are guided by this conceptual framework.

Methodology

Through a PAR model with a mixed-method explanatory sequential design, our research team situated this study in the PAR cycle at the needs assessment stage (see Figures 1 and 2). We assessed the needs of IGS while working toward a better understanding of how these students find a sense of belonging in the U.S. With recommendations from the needs assessment, the future steps of the PAR cycle will consist of developing interventions, implementing, and evaluating the interventions, and monitoring IGS input, and continuous improvement.

The intent of a PAR design is "to involve participants in all phases of the design of the study, and to […] bring change in the community" (Creswell, 2014, p. 66). We sought answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences of international graduate students as they transition from their home countries to MWU?
2. How do they find a sense of belonging?
3. What support will ensure international graduate students' success and give them a sense of belonging?

As the overarching concept, participatory action frameworks "involve participants in the research, bringing about change to address inequities and helping underrepresented groups and populations" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 68). PAR is research conducted with people and 'for' people, not 'on' people (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019). PAR honors the lived experiences of IGS, who, despite increased globalization prior to the Coronavirus pandemic, faced both the threat and the implementation of restrictive visa policies during the Trump administration (Schnell, 2020). The study involved IGS, faculty, and MWU staff as participants and partners.

Figure 1

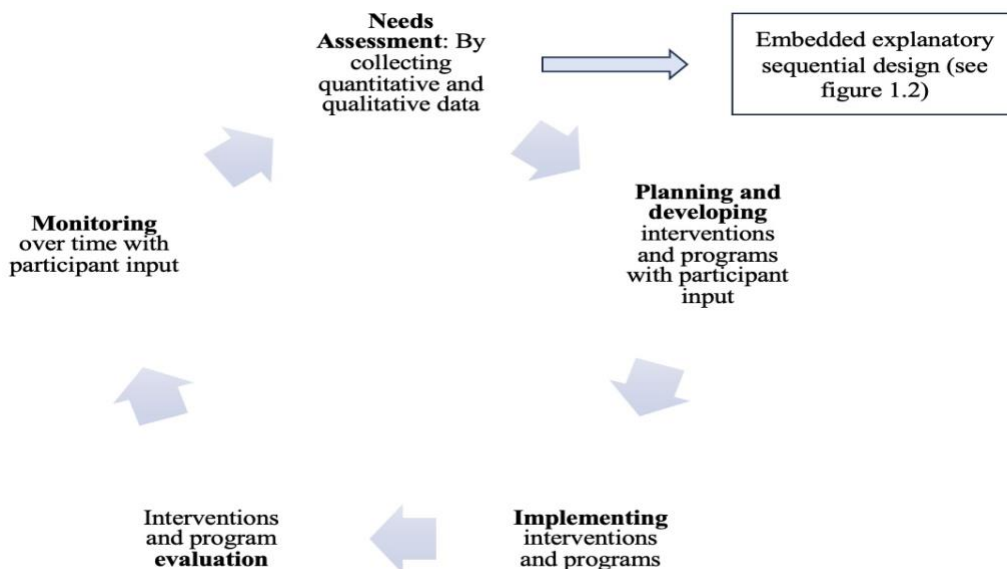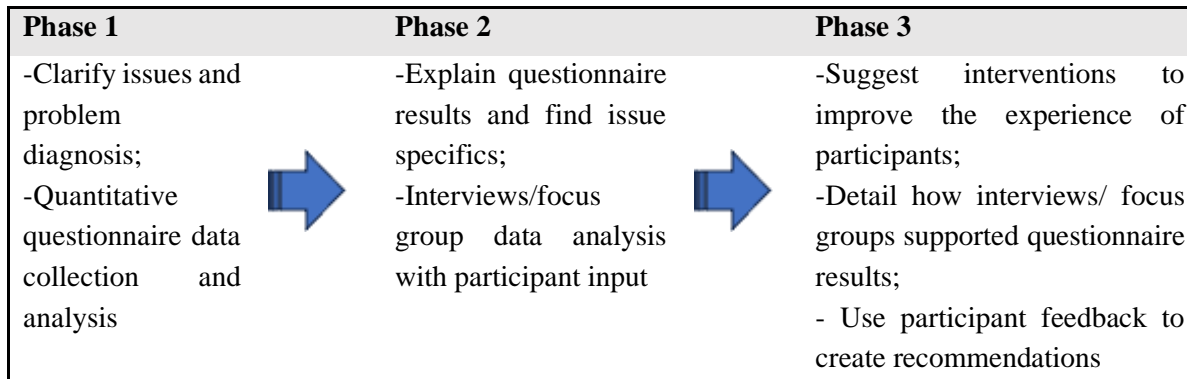*PAR Framework with Embedded Explanatory Sequential Design*

Figure 2

Explanatory Sequential Design

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
-Clarify issues and problem diagnosis; -Quantitative questionnaire data collection and analysis	-Explain questionnaire results and find issue specifics; -Interviews/focus group data analysis with participant input	-Suggest interventions to improve the experience of participants; -Detail how interviews/ focus groups supported questionnaire results; - Use participant feedback to create recommendations

The explanatory sequential design meant that methods were integrated with the transition from quantitative to qualitative strands, as results from the first strand "helped to form the follow-up questions" (Creswell, 2014, p. 54) in the second strand. In the first phase, an initial questionnaire was administered through Qualtrics for IGS to assess their sense of belonging within the university and satisfaction level with institutional support. In the second phase, we gained in-depth knowledge through interviews and focus groups with the participants about their experiences. In the third phase, we generated recommendations about improving institutional support. These recommendations would then form the basis for the following stages of study in the iteration of a PAR cycle (see Figures 1 and 2).

Due to the state mandated COVID protocols during the data collection phase, the focus groups/interviews took place online. Although face-to-face interactions are conducive to building relational trust with participants, the team found that collecting data online also led to relational trust with participants. Zoom allows voices, tones, and emotions in conversations to come through and recorded written activities on Google Jamboard allowed the same. The team also practiced CRT in data collection, kept an appreciative open mind, checked their personal biases, and analyzed the data with empathy and cultural understanding.

Participants

Prior to identifying participants, we conducted a Stakeholder Rainbow Analysis (SRA), a PAR tool to determine "who needs to be involved in deliberations, decision making or actions to achieve project goals" (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019, p. 247). From the results of the SRA, we identified university personnel (instructors, advisers, administrators, and office staff) and IGS who are highly "influential" and highly "affected" as the key stakeholders in this study. The SRA template that was used is in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Rainbow Stakeholder Analysis Template
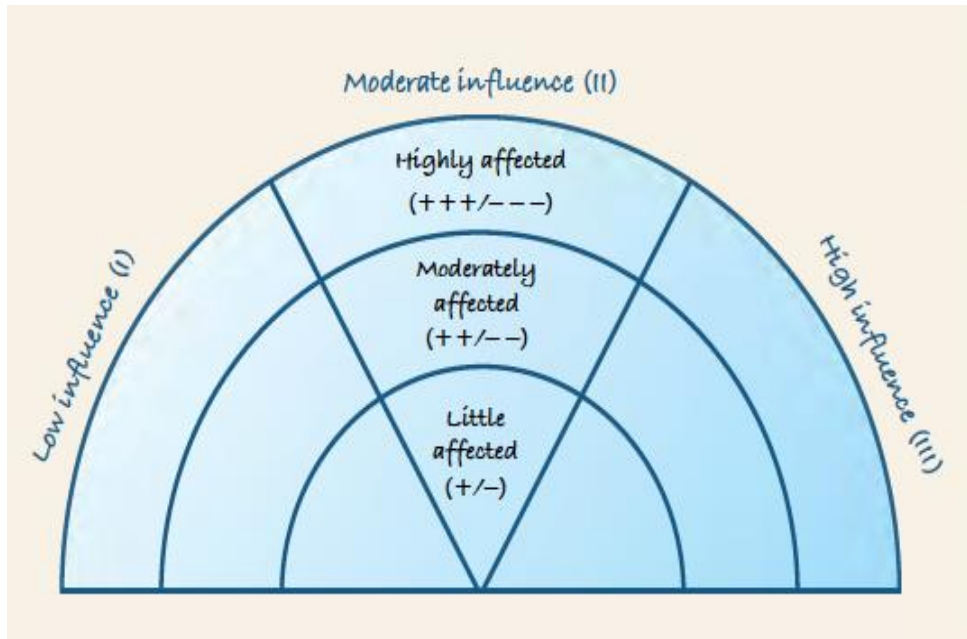
(Chevalier & Buckles, 2019, p. 75)

To gain a preliminary understanding of the IGS experience at MWU, we designed a six-question instrument on a 5-point Likert scale, the Needs-Assessment Questionnaire (see the statements below).

S1. The University's International Student and Scholars Services provide adequate resources and comprehensive support for IGS.

S2. The University provides a welcoming and inclusive environment for IGS.

S3. The University provides IGS with sufficient opportunities for research and collaborative work with faculty and peers.

S4. The University offers meaningful extracurricular activities and dedicated events geared to IGS.

S5. As an IGS, navigating the campus culture and forging meaningful connections with other graduate students and faculty at the University can be a challenge.

S6. I feel included and supported by the University community.

The questionnaire was given to IGS recruited through Facebook and WhatsApp groups for the IGS organization. We also used word of mouth via text, email, and in-person chats with our IGS peers. To be considered for the study, participants met the following criteria: international students enrolled at MWU in a graduate program during the 2020-2021 school year. Since "respondents volunteered to be included in the study or were recommended by others [it represented] a non-random sample with snowballing" (Creswell, 2014, p. 90). We included those individuals with knowledge and experience of the phenomena and asked them to recommend others who might also be able to provide insight.

There were ten respondents for the initial questionnaire; all were IGS ranging from eighteen to forty-five years old and hailing from Africa, Asia, and Europe. Some have lived in the U.S. for a decade, and others only a matter of months. Those students willing to continue the study following the questionnaire (n=3) were recruited to take part in a focus group. The participant sampling for focus groups and interviews was purposeful as we wanted a "sample of participants who [could] best help us understand" (Creswell, 2014, p.88) the issues related to the IGS experience and be able to create

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recommendations that could increase their sense of belonging. Since the study's goal was primarily a needs assessment distributed to develop recommendations, we also included MWU university personnel participants who were contacted directly via email; we used a snowball approach. The interviews and focus groups were semi-structured, with questions guided by the results of the questionnaire. The PAR technique of Free Listing/Pile Sorting was employed to encourage and lead participants in discussion and brainstorming in the focus groups. Free listing "invites people to generate a list of elements in the domain," which needs to be "combined with pile sorting to organize ideas into fewer categories [as] focus for group discussion" (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019, p. 115).

Data Analysis

Descriptive analysis was performed on the questionnaire data. The results helped the research team develop individual and focus group interview guides. Later, the results of the focus groups and interviews were transcribed and thematically coded by each researcher and used to answer the research questions. Inter-rater reliability was then used to develop the consistent themes of the qualitative data (based on a greater than 60 % agreement rate).

Following the PAR framework, the themes were shared with the participants to confirm, edit, or expand upon ideas from their original input. While the student participants actively confirmed the researcher's perceived themes, faculty and staff did not provide fulsome feedback (but did affirm the research team's perspectives). The themes confirmed the quantitative data collected with the questionnaire, demonstrating the importance of data triangulation. Both data sets were integrated to assess how MWU could better serve its IGS population and develop recommendations for the institution.

Positionality and Validity

Current international and domestic graduate students and faculty and staff involved in this study have had experience as international students or allies working with international students. Further, the research team included one current IGS, one former IGS, one former international faculty member, and two domestic students. The team brings insider views and has been aware of potential biases in their experience that may affect the study. Several measures were taken to guarantee the credibility and trustworthiness of the results. First, the team members reflected at each step through debriefing, self-checking on potential biases, discussing their interpretations, and conducting inter-rater reliability. Secondly, the PAR approach also allowed the team to involve university personnel and students as participants, to listen to them, and to receive their feedback through member checking, which is a "technique for exploring the credibility of results [in which] results are returned to participants to check for accuracy and resonance with their experiences" (Birt et al., 2016, p. 1802). The team sought an ethical balance given our insider/outsider positionality with current IGS as participants; the team was well-positioned to lead the research with caution, hope, and empathy.

Results

In this section, we will first discuss the results from the six-statement Needs-Assessment Questionnaire and then the qualitative data from the interviews and focus groups.

Ten students completed the questionnaire in the 2021-2022 academic year. The results provided a snapshot of how IGS perceived the culture of MWU. Each response item on the Likert scale was given a value, with 1 being "strongly agree" and 5 being "strongly disagree." The results from a few sample questions are below. S2's results indicate that 60% of the respondents strongly agreed that the institution provides a welcoming and inclusive environment for IGS. The results of S4 show that 50% of participants agreed that the University offers meaningful extracurricular activities and dedicated events geared to IGS. The final statement demonstrates that 40% of the participants strongly agreed that there is a level of inclusion and support for IGS.

The data, however, could have been more positive. 50% of respondents strongly agreed that it could be challenging navigating the campus culture and forging meaningful connections with other graduate students (S5), and 30% of respondents somewhat disagreed with the statement "I feel included and supported by the MWU community" (S6).

As noted in **Table 1** below, on average, respondents felt supported by the culture at MWU (1.89 for S1 and 1.60 for S2). They felt it was possible to make meaningful connections with other community members (2.1 for S3). The data generated from the questionnaire provided us with a basis for probing deeper to explore how MWU's culture responds to the needs of IGS for S4 (2.40), S5 (1.60), and S6 (2.30), respectively.

Table 1

Results of Questionnaire (Strongly agree 1, Strongly disagree 5)

Statements (S) 1-6	Average Score	Standard Deviation	Strongly and Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree and Strongly Disagree
S1. Adequate resources and comprehensive support	1.89	0.92	60%	0%
S2. A welcoming and inclusive environment	1.60	0.84	80%	0%
S3. Opportunity to collaborate on research with faculty and peers	2.1	1.26	60%	20%
S4. Meaningful extracurricular activities/events	2.40	0.84	60%	10%
S5. It is hard to navigate campus culture and forge connections	1.60	0.69	90%	0%
S6. Inclusive and supportive university community	2.30	1.33	60%	30%

Interview and Focus Group

The data analyzed below stemmed from student and personnel perspectives during the verbal and written discussions, including activities completed on Google Jamboard. Themes emerged from those conversations, all guided by the overarching research questions (RQs).

RQ1. What are the experiences of IGS as they transition from their home countries to MWU?

While IGS, who took part in the focus group, acknowledged the welcoming and supportive environment at the University, they identified hindrances that affect their sense of belonging and touched on broader challenges that come with moving to a new country. Cultural incongruity was demonstrated in language barriers, American paradigms of friendship building, and differences in societal norms. One student used the following metaphor: "We walk on the left, but here you walk on the right side." Students agreed, "With American friends, it is hard to build deep relationships" and "Tension is always there whether they accept you or not." In discussing cultural differences, one person noted, "I find a lot of 'don'ts' [sic] in this society such that sometimes you don't even know what to do." Those feelings occur outside of the school setting, with one student recounting an experience trying to encourage voter turnout and being harassed by a stranger saying, "You are not a citizen, no right to vote and calling other people to vote." The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the sense of social

isolation as students noted fewer opportunities for connection. Faculty also noted that "the pandemic made it so much worse." The pandemic may have made pre-existing legal and visa policy restrictions trickier for some. Participants spoke of institutionalized barriers: "Not direct discrimination, but visa limitation is a hurdle." One professor gave a lengthy account of issues experienced by a post-doctoral student who had been "hired full time, [but] had to resign" because of legal and University policy challenges.

Finally, advising issues were raised in terms of academic and career support. One student stated, "I wish at the beginning someone told me that I should not take political science because of my visa status." When moving to the U.S., the student did not realize she would not have the same work or paid internship opportunities as domestic peers. Adjusting to new norms around academic integrity and classroom participation led to some confusion. For one student, "At home, knowledge is communal. Here, you need to cite everything. Here, I cannot say anything myself. I am required to cite someone." Another participant shared, "I think in the U.S., students are taught to speak up, while abroad, you don't really challenge authority." That said, speaking up does not necessarily translate into diversity of thought. A student pointed out, "The education system is so good and learner-centered, though sometimes the class environment does not allow open positive critiquing. Some people feel offended if you try to challenge them, and yet it is from challenging that learning takes place." The discussion touched on philosophical and classroom norm differences, which this student's insightful comment captured about the speed of discourse: "You guys are so quick and good at conversation, and interjecting or jumping into conversation in class is hard. By the time I am ready to speak, it is over. I am so slow."

Personnel also pointed out ongoing issues as students adjust to new academic expectations, particularly classroom participation and academic integrity. In the absence of training for IGS, inadvertent academic infractions can occur. A personnel participant suggested that instead, "(W)e can look at it from (a) restorative justice, rather than zero-tolerance policy on academic integrity."

RQ2. How do international students find a sense of belonging?

When directly asked during the focus group whether they felt a sense of belonging, one student loudly replied, "The answer is yes. That is why I am still around." During the faculty and staff focus group, participants indicated that they perceive belonging stemming from social networks with cohort peers and professors and included the importance of mentoring relationships with faculty, the department cohort, and other international students. Students emphasized that belonging could stem from culture/lifestyle, openness, adaptation, having their own space, and work and hobbies both within and outside school.

Student participants mostly perceive the university campus environment and structures as welcoming and supportive. They cited accommodating professors, supportive peers within their cohorts, and a lack of discrimination within the University. One student stated that in "a class setting, automatically you cannot fail to meet people who embrace you. You feel at home." With consideration for the University, one participant acknowledged that it "is very welcoming and the environment makes you feel at home." Another confirmed that "I feel comfortable in the system."

In terms of support from professors, students, and personnel discussed ways faculty can provide social and academic aid. One student described a "parental" relationship with professors, while another replied, "I think professors being described as 'parental' is subjective. Some go beyond, but not all." This highlighted the tension between different individual experiences and served as a reminder that generalizations should not be made in this type of qualitative study.

In the personnel focus group and interviews, participants highlighted shared life experiences to develop interpersonal connections between professors and students, which they believed fostered belonging. One international faculty member indicated the importance of creating social settings for including international students: "So I usually invite students …over to our home for Thanksgiving… for them to have some traditional American Thanksgiving meal because my husband is American." They also indicated that there can be a shared understanding between international faculty and students from similar backgrounds: "We develop a very close relationship, and because we share the same Asian

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background." Four of the personnel described their own experience as international students, which enhanced their sense of empathy for IGS.

Students discussed the importance of developing interpersonal connections with their peers regarding social belonging. The cohort model helped foster a sense of belonging as students moved through the program with familiar faces. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic affected student sense of belonging. "From that beginning for me, there was a sense of belonging that I am building a community, which was, of course, interrupted by Covid." Student participants also spoke of the importance of affinity groups in developing social bonds like relationships with other international students. One participant described their social life in their previous institution: "I had good belonging in college. Many international students as friends." Commenting on their current experience at MWU: "Pretty early on, I started making foreign friends again. I think there is some sort of attraction to that."

RQ3. What support will ensure IGS's success and give them a sense of belonging?

Students and personnel shared feedback about critical support areas for IGS at MWU. Both students and personnel spoke of the need for more training for faculty and staff to be more culturally responsive to IGS, including overcoming a deficiency orientation or conflating all international student groups as one. One participant noted: "People assume IGS don't know a lot of things, but that is not true." As an example of stereotyping, one student shared their experience of having "two undergraduate degrees in English already but was put in the same basket as Chinese students who are still learning English." It was interesting that one student responded, "I think I have also had the experience of people setting higher expectations for international students because they perceive Americans as not as hard-working."

Students and personnel spoke of the difficulties adjusting to new academic integrity standards. One participant explicitly stated that academic integrity training should be provided for all IGS. "The question here is about ownership of knowledge. The emphasis in this society is that of citing other people all the time, even when dealing with common sayings. The contradiction is that people are encouraged to be creative, but when you bring out a new concept in the name of creativity, you are asked to cite it." From the personnel perspective, one participant noted, "For the support [training], I never got anything related to that [supporting international students]."

Personnel also discussed the importance of resources like The Writing Center, but the support needed to be more nuanced. "Usually, students expect the Writing Center to edit your papers, but the Writing Center has a philosophy that they do not give you grammar correction." In some cases, students may need more assistance with academic writing, with or without additional English language support. However, the current services offered by the University need to be improved.

Staffing issues at the University were discussed as a hindrance for IGS. More dedicated personnel to support this demographic could be beneficial. For instance, Career Center staff who are familiar with their visas/legal limitations; academic advisers who are trained to build awareness about challenges that exist for pursuing certain degrees/fields here as a non-citizen; and consistent, supportive staff in the International Student and Scholar Service Office (where there had been considerable turnover in the 2021-2022 academic year). Of note, this was an area where personnel spoke highly of the institutional support system, while students had more concerns and suggestions.

Finally, social support was raised in numerous ways as an essential determinant of a sense of belonging and an area for improvement. Peer mentorship was raised as an essential strategy that the University could organize and promote. One faculty member shared, "So, the mentor-mentee system I've found very helpful, and to make some friends, and in those cases, they may share the same experiences living in a different country." One student participant also spoke about the University's role in setting social belonging. "I think the University has not yet played enough role in setting systems to support massive co-curricular events or interclass competitions… All these play a vital role in bringing together students."

Although supporting affinity groups like network-building between IGS is crucial, the lack of deeper friendships with American students emerged in discussions. To facilitate an enhanced sense of belonging within MWU and the broader U.S. context, the University could build bridges to facilitate domestic and international student connections. As one

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personnel participant described, "There were two kinds of, in my purview, networking groups at play. So, the internal departmental community and the greater connection with graduate students across the University via the graduate school." The University can enhance networking across the campus.

Discussion

When filtered through the lens of social constructivism and CRT, the study's results show robust peer-to-peer support from cohort members but missed opportunities for fostering a greater sense of belonging for the (IGS) population. Support gaps exist on the classroom instructor and programmatic systems levels. In terms of the need for more formalized, intentionally embedded benchmarks for measuring the success of the IGS transition from home countries to enrollment in MWU, the data reveal the necessity for administrative implementation of embedded, scaffolded structures to support their differentiated needs. Previous studies noted similar findings about the experiences of international students (Glass, 2018; Skromanis et al., 2018) and IGS specifically (Hyun et al., 2007).

In keeping with the tenets of PAR (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019), the IGS and the administrators with responsibilities for IGS were best positioned to identify through their lived experiences the ways the University succeeds in or falls short of fulfilling its promise to address and improve IGS' sense of belonging. PAR "promotes pluralism and creativity in discovering the world and improving it" (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019, p. 3). As such, the participatory method served the research team and the overarching research framework for conducting the interviews, focus groups, and subsequent data analysis. PAR invites research participants to envision "novel ways of assessing and addressing issues."

As far as the data reveals, participants fulfilled that promise of speaking truth to systems and structures that currently diminish or enhance their sense of belonging (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019, p. 3). The research team recognizes that the limited use of PAR tools during the interviews and focus groups was caused by COVID-19 restrictions for in-person meetings. COVID-19 also limited face-to-face interactions to Zoom meetings, which worked well, but face-to-face interactions could become more conducive to relationship building.

Social constructivism argues that "social worlds develop out of individuals' interactions with their culture and society" (Lynch, 2022, para.1). Applied to an educational context, the ability of IGS to access academic classroom discourse and subsequently embed themselves with classroom culture creates the conditions for a greater sense of belonging or increased isolation. Comments from focus group participants demonstrate a barrier to full inclusion in the socially mediated classroom environment, as a participant shared his frustration in being an English language learner and interjecting in class discussions with native speakers of English. Social constructivism posits that every classroom discussion presents an opportunity for the emergence of greater connection or the potential for rejection (Lynch, 2022). Participants' comments evince challenges to full inclusion and belonging brought on by language barriers and differences in academic expectations between their native educational experiences and the American university context. One good example is the student's comments on the nature of knowledge and whether it belongs to the community or individual. Without the full and active participation of the learner, the social constructivist model asserts that the circumstances for robust classroom discourse and enhanced learning are lost (Lynch, 2022).

CRT promotes the possibility of enhancing classroom instruction by employing "multiethnic cultural frames of reference" (Gay, 2018, p. xxvvii) to improve the "academic, social, psychological, emotional" experiences of diverse student populations (Gay, 2018, p. xxi). Drawing upon IGS' funds of knowledge, CRT invites professors to shift their deficit view toward an asset model that acknowledges the strengths IGS contribute to the classroom. Comments from personnel and IGS participants demonstrate that classroom instruction often fails to play to students' ways of knowing and engaging in academic work. When a student with two degrees in English was recommended to take English language training, it shows a need for more comprehensive training for university administration and professors in culturally responsive best practices. Another participant stated, "Surely international students have some experiences that would integrate the learning process,

though sometimes the systems' perception is like these students are unable to fit the standards." Data from the transcribed interviews and focus groups indicate the need to implement CRT practices across MWU. As multiple participants mentioned, sometimes the language barrier is not about fluency in English but rather U.S. approaches to communication. This confirmed the need for a university to consider cultural transitions as they support incoming IGS (Johnson et al., 2018). Professional development for staff and professors is critical to realizing this goal.

A PAR Force Field Analysis (F&FA) (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019) summarizes the study succinctly and indicates the existing forces at MWU that are for (contributing to) change (sense of belonging) and forces against (hindering) IGS' sense of belonging. Through the F&FA (see **Table 2** below), the team generated constructive - "changes needed" (recommendations) for MWU to increase IGS' sense of belonging. Forces supporting IGS's sense of belonging include a supportive university environment, advisers, professors, and peers with cultural awareness, and infrastructures for networking in research, career, and life across the campus. Hindrances may include cultural incongruities, social isolation, and a lack of culturally responsive advising, instruction, and connections. Thus, specific changes may include professional development (P.D.) on leading, teaching, and serving for the success of IGS and funds to sustain supporting services and extracurricular activities.

Table 2

Force Field Analysis

Forces FOR Changes	Changes Needed	Forces AGAINST Changes
-Welcoming and supportive University -Interpersonal relationships with peers -Social networking with professors -Instructors' support and empathy in the academic context -CRT* competent support: e.g., writing center, student services, advising -Cohort model program -Consistent support staff and administration at student-supporting offices -Extracurricular activities across campus	-Professional development (P.D.) on global awareness and culturally responsive teaching and/or advising for administration, staff, faculty, and students; and P.D. for leading, teaching, and serving for success. -Funds to sustain and staff student service offices and centers. -Resources to support extracurricular activities, networking, and formalized mentorship programs targeting international graduate students.	-Cultural incongruities, e.g., language barriers -Difficulty developing domestic friendships -Social isolation (COVID-19 exacerbated it) -Advisers: lack of training for IGS -Less CRT competent instructors and services -Lack of extracurricular activities across the campus -High turnover of staff for student services
* CRT: culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2018).		

Implications and Conclusion

Several recommendations for university administrators, faculty, and staff stemmed from the study. To begin with, "expand on what international students can do" by paying more attention to international students and their needs, including the provision of career resources focused on IGS (who may already have years of experience in other countries), post-graduate resources, including academic research mentoring, mental health and healthcare support, and enhanced

organizational supports through the International Student and Scholar Services and networks at universities. Students, staff, and faculty consistently highlighted the importance of social support. It is crucial that the University takes heed and fosters more opportunities (primarily in-person) for domestic and international students to meet, as well as chances for IGS to develop their affinity communities with faculty who were their allies. These bonds were mentioned as a source of strength.

As a segment of the university student body, IGS should be treated in culturally responsive ways for their success on the U.S. campus. Through this study, the team advocates for IGS by inviting MWU to create a more supportive infrastructure. As such, here is a list of succinct recommendations stemming from the study:

- Additional university provided P.D. for faculty and staff on CRT with an understanding of international backgrounds.
- Targeted supports like expanded services at the Writing Center and Career Center.
- Maintain sustainable staff members for the service sectors for international students.
- More onboarding training for IGS, such as academic integrity, technology use, and ways to seek out leadership roles.
- University-mediated social supports, network-building like peer mentorship, research mentorship, and planned social activities.
- University leadership recognizes and acknowledges ways to make the programs more accessible in the post-pandemic era.

While MWU makes genuine efforts to supply adequate support for its IGS, there is room for improvement and for a more supportive infrastructure within the University that fosters more global and cultural awareness. We hope that such a comprehensive, supportive infrastructure would provide the framework necessary to empower IGS to advocate for themselves and gain a strong sense of belonging, which is crucial for success in the university setting.

There are also limitations to this study. Despite snowball sampling, the response rate from the IGS for the questionnaire was lower than expected. The study began in the middle of the pandemic, restricting the team from meeting in person with potential participants regularly for PAR sessions. Also, the focus groups were smaller than the six-person minimum recommended by Padgett (2017). The high turnover of staff serving international students at MWU during the pandemic also hindered the continued involvement of specialized staff participants in the study. Nevertheless, we found the data from this PAR study rich and informative, allowing us to make recommendations for promising actions to support IGS at MWU based on the preliminary results.

Higher education institutions understand the benefits of bringing international talent to their universities and the U.S. (Aggarwal & Ciftci, 2020; Redden, 2022). It should then be a priority to have inclusive policies and foster a campus culture that nurtures and supports this segment of students. Universities that boast social justice as one of their central tenants should fulfill their obligations to all students by supplying comprehensive support no matter their citizenship or national origins.

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Culture Difference: Perceptions of Student Engagement of Chinese International Graduate Students at a Canadian University

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Abstract

This article provides the perspectives of Chinese international graduate students about student engagement while attending a university in Canada. The prominent Western perception of student engagement in Canadian universities emphasizes student-oriented and active-participation to hopefully enhance student academic success and better social engagement. However, this Western perspective fails to recognize the broader perceptions of student engagement from a global perspective. The Confucian perspective of student engagement highlights teacher-oriented and deep-thinking engagement through academic achievement and exam-oriented activities. This study found that the student and staff participants have varied perceptions of student engagement based on their prior experiences and cultural backgrounds. However, these different ways of perceiving student engagement are not well acknowledged in Canadian higher education. Chinese international graduate students need to understand the different perceptions of student engagement between Western and Confucian cultures, and they need to enhance their student engagement based on their experiences and cultural backgrounds.

Introduction

Internationalization of higher education institutions represents a significant shift from national and local frames to a cross-national global scale (Buckner, 2017). Impacted by the internationalization of higher education, English-speaking education exporting countries have been actively engaged in recruiting international students on a large scale. According to Government of Canada (2019), international students in Canada spent an estimated $21.6 billion on tuition, accommodations, and other expenses in 2018. A total of 721,205 international students at all levels studied in Canada in 2018, which is the largest number ever. The diversification of culture and population in Canada has made Canada attractive to Chinese international students for pursuing high-quality education (Xiang, 2017). The 2019– 2024 Canada's International Education Strategy (Government of Canada, 2019) aims to make Canada welcoming diverse communities and diversify the countries from which international students come to Canada, as well as their fields, levels, and location of study within Canada.

With the landscape of internationalization, the number of Chinese international students pursuing their graduate study has rapidly increased each year globally (Calder et al., 2016; Li, 2017; Xiang, 2017). Chen (2007) reported Chinese students choose Canadian universities for many reasons, including high-quality programs, affordability, and the perception of Canada as safe and peaceful. The percentage of Chinese international students increased by 886% from 2000 to 2015 and

represented one quarter of Canada's international student population in 2018 (Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE), 2019).

In Canadian universities, international student enrolments increased by 11,196 from 2015–2016 to 2016–2017. This was led by higher numbers of international students from both China and India. In 2017, the largest number of international students in Canadian university programs was from China (CBIE, 2019).

This rapid growth of Chinese international students in Canada warrants the examination of their experiences in Canadian schooling and their engagement matters to Canadian post-secondary education. Thus, it is important to raise the awareness among professors, student affairs staff, and student services of the Chinese international students' perspectives towards their engagement in university graduate schools including such issues as how they understand student engagement and what challenges they have been facing. This acknowledgment will empower those students' experiences in Canada and initiate support from Canadian institutions and policy practices.

Literature Review

The dominant approach of perceiving the notion of student engagement characterizes this notion as a way of engagement impacted by Western cultural norms. According to Grabke (2013), strong student engagement can be defined, created, and improved by better student academic success and better social engagement experiences. Classroom engagement is a motivated behavior, referring to the interests of students in classroom learning including participation in group activities and class discussions (Liu et al., 2016). Social engagement practice consists of social involvement and a sense of community belonging (Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2010) that makes people feel connected and engaged. Scheurs and Dumbraveanu (2014) highlighted the importance of social engagement, student voice, and active involvement in and out of the classroom in Canadian education.

Social engagement plays a significant role in student engagement in North America. According to Grabke (2013), strong student engagement can be defined, created, and improved by better student academic success and better social engagement experiences. Willms, Friesen, and Milton (2009) also indicated three measures of student engagement: social, academic, and intellectual. They argued that social engagement includes the quantity of school clubs that students participate in and the sense of belonging students feel regarding their relations to their peers and schools. Social engagement consists of social involvement and a sense of community belonging (Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2010) that makes people feel connected and engaged.

However, the perception of student engagement in China, strongly affected by Chinese educational values, highlights the significance of academic engagement. According to Ryan (2010), there are essential differences between Western and Confucian academic values towards academic engagement. According to traditional Confucian academic values, academic engagement requires students to follow the master and respect the teachers on teaching and learning (Chung, 2021; Zhao & McDougall, 2008). This academic engagement reflects a strong hierarchical teacher-student relationship (Li, 2017). Teachers provide lecture-based communication, indicating that teachers have absolute authority; students receive this knowledge and avoid challenging teachers' authority. Student engagement, from a Chinese lens, requires students to follow the master and respect the teachers to engage in and out of the classroom, reflecting a strong hierarchical teacher-student relationship (Chung, 2021). This engagement reflects that Chinese students are encouraged to replicate the lecture of instructors instead of presenting their own understanding in academic assignments (Jin, 2017).
Those different interpretations of perceiving student engagement are reflected in different academic and social values illustrated in Canada and China. Some existing research showed the experiences of Chinese international students in Canadian post-secondary education, indicating a new understanding of student engagement based on those students' encounters. Toward Chinese international student experiences, Xiao (2020) reported impacted by the dominant White culture and Canadian multiculturalism, Chinese international students face challenges towards cultural differences (Tsai, 2017; Wang, 2009; Xiang, 2017).

During the transitioning period, some international postgraduate students engaging at English universities including Canada still experienced depression, loneliness, anxiety, and stress due to cultural differences between their home country and Canada (Brown & Holloway, 2008). These cultural differences, including different languages and cultural perspectives, made them feel challenged and uncomfortable to orally and mentally engage in the schools and society in Canada. Even in a multicultural society, different cultural experiences were still not represented equally, and some of their cultural identities were still not represented because the Anglo western dominance of being and doing is still deeply preferred within Canadian multiculturalism.

Tsai (2017) pointed out an educational paradox of Chinese learners on student engagement. Intriguingly, those students, regarded as passive and shallow learners, learning by "reliance upon rote memorization were, in fact, are not only good but even deep and possibly superior learners" (Tsai, 2017, p. 49). The essential differences regarding Western and Confucian academic values as shown in Figure 1 indicate a Western positive and Eastern passive relationship towards engagement (Ryan, 2010).

Figure 1

Differences in Western and Confucian Academic Values

Western	Confucian
• Deep learners	• Surface or rote learners
• Independent learners	• dependence on the teacher
• Critical thinking	• "Follow the master"
• Student-centered learning	• Respect for the teacher
• Adversarial stance	• Harmony
• Argumentative learners	• Passive learners
• Achievement of the individual	• Achievement of the group
• Constructing new knowledge	• Respect for historical text

Figure 1. Western versus Confucian academic values (Ryan, 2010, p. 43)

Mukminin and McMahon (2013) stated that lack of confidence leads students to be afraid of engaging in class discussions. Acting as obstacles to asking questions of others and comprehending lectures, some Chinese students have been facing language barriers because of lacking confidence to speak the language in and out of the classroom because they feel they are not fluent enough in English. "The feelings of lack of confidence and experience made it difficult to actively engage in delivering their academic assignments due to their cultural influences and limited English ability" (Mukminin & McMahon, 2013, p. 8).

Overall, student engagement is perceived as positively involved in and out of the classroom in Western schooling while the perception of student engagement in China focuses on the compliance engagement of following teachers in academic settings highlighted by Chinese educational values. The Western perspective fails to recognize the broader social and cultural inclusivity and diversities of student engagement. Specifically, Chinese international graduate students in Canada, who are situated within the Chinese and Canadian educational systems and deeply impacted by Chinese values and culture, have been stereotyped as less engaged in and out of the classroom in Canada schooling (Chung, 2021; Xiang, 2017). As

described by Xiao (2020), Chinese students' silent behavior in class as a concern of wasting others' time or as a way to show respect are regarded as lack of engagement or as a concern in the class.

Lai (2016) stated that while Asian culture encouraged learners to observe what is going on in class first and then show what they do, this does not mean that Asian learners lack critical thinking skills or the willingness to engage. These misunderstandings based on cultural difference and language barriers such as Asian learners' lack of critical thinking skills have been impacting how the engagement of Chinese international students is perceived.

Framing the engagement integration of Chinese international students into Canadian graduate programs, those Chinese international students' perceptions of student engagement and their needs for better student experience need to be examined. With the cross-cultural understanding of Chinese and Canadian education and values, this study particularly explored the cultural challenges faced by Chinese international students as they engage in Canadian higher education. Given the magnitude of current global challenges facing Chinese international student engagement, the research questions the Western ways of understanding Chinese student engagement and how student engagement is perceived by Canadian university students and staff in Canadian higher education. The results of this study can help Western institutions become aware of the features of Chinese international student engagement in Canadian higher education and a broader understanding of student engagement. Thus, those institutions can have a more inclusive academic environment and offer better community support to Chinese international students in order to assist their engagement based on a better understanding of their cultural experiences in and out of the classroom.

Methodology

Although the international undergraduate student experience has been studied extensively, there is little research about Chinese students' engagement in Canadian graduate schools. This study generated a better understanding about Chinese graduate students' engaging experience in their graduate life that relates to the particular context of Western schools. Based on the qualitative data examining the lived experiences of these students, the present study tries to generate a better understanding about Chinese graduate students' engaging experience impacted by cultural differences in the particular context of Canadian schools.

The study examines both in-classroom and out-of-classroom experiences of Chinese international graduate students with regard to cultural differences. A case study approach was used to provide insight into the perspectives of current Canadian graduate schools in terms of equity and inclusive education policy enactment, and into the perspectives of students, teachers, and university administrative professionals in university communities. This can help enhance the engagement of prospective Chinese international students in Canadian graduate schools. The interviews in this case study were designed to explore the level of Chinese international graduate students' engagement in a Canadian graduate school based on interviewees' own perceptions and experiences.

According to Gelling (2015), qualitative research is appropriate for an exploratory study to examine the experiences of a particular group of students who share their own experience in their own words. Qualitative research helps investigators understand social and cultural experiences, learning and practicing experiences, as well as the factors that impact these experiences. This qualitative study has adopted a case study approach of providing "tools for researchers to study complex phenomena within their contexts" (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p.544). Throughout the phenomenon under the investigation, the case study was selected as the research method. According to Creswell (2013), case study research involves studying a case within "a real life, contemporary context settings" (p. 99), and exploring research questions illustrated by "how" and "why."

The interviews in this case study were designed to explore the level of Chinese international graduate students' engagement in Canadian graduate schools based on interviewees' own perceptions and experiences toward cultural differences. Chinese international graduate students, the staff in their departments, and central university staff were asked to share their stories and experiences of their perceptions of student engagement in a Canadian university. A convenience sample of twelve interviewees, including six students, three student service staff from three various graduate faculties, and

three central university staff in an urban university were selected because of their convenient accessibility and proximity in this study. The reason for interviewing participants from various faculties and departments was to increase the diversity of opinions based on students' experiences in different faculties and departments, especially since different disciplines offer different programs and activities.

The interviews in this study took place at an urban university in Canada. This site was selected because it has the largest number of Chinese international graduate students in Canada. To ensure that the participants could effectively help to explore Chinese graduate students' engagement in Canada and the socio-cultural factors that affect their participation, the participants were selected through the following strategies.

1. The participants of this study were ethnic Chinese who were born and grew up in Mainland China before they began their studies in Canada. Chinese students who were born and received their education in Canada were excluded from the study.

2. The participants of this study have earned a post-secondary degree in Mainland China before they began their studies in Canada. Additionally, those who had any form of relationship with the investigator were excluded.

3. When they began their graduate study in Canada, the participants had not studied in Western graduate schools before and must have had no previous learning and practicing experience in Canada, North America, or other English-speaking countries. This recruitment criterion is important, because international students including Chinese English as a Second Language students may change their engagement styles after exposure to Western culture and education system (Smith & Smith, 1999).

The recruitment process started by placing posters strategically around campus and by sending emails to Chinese international graduate students and staff. The emails of participation confirmation were sent to six interested students and six staff through their e-mail addresses provided. Eventually, the participants were recruited through e-mail responses.

For the sake of confidentiality and to protect the identities of the participants, pseudonyms are used. The names of the female-identified, male-identified, and queer-identified international student participants will be substituted with IF1, IF2, IF3, IF4, IM1, IQ1, while the female-identified and male-identified student service staff participants will be described as SF1, SF2, SM1, SM2, SM3, SM4. For student participants, IF1 is a profession-based Master's parent student with social science background from Education, and IQ1 is a research-based Ph.D. student with social science background from Education; IF2 and IM1 are profession-based master's students with science background from Engineering; IF3 is a profession-based Master's student with business background; and IF4 is a research-based Ph.D. student with business background. For student service staff participants, SF1 is from Business; SF2 is from the graduate school; SM1 is from Education; SM2 is from Engineering; SM3 is from the International Student Center; and SM4 is from the student life services (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Participant Breakdown

Participants	Student/Staff	Program/Background	Research-based/Profession-based	Identity
IF1	Student	Education	Profession-based, Master's degree	Chinese; Female-identified; Parent Student
IQ1	Student	Education	Research-based, Ph.D.	Chinese; Queer-identified
IF2	Student	Engineering	Profession-based, MEng	Chinese; Female-identified
IM1	Student	Engineering	Profession-based, MEng	Chinese; Male-identified
IF3	Student	Business	Profession-based, MBA	Chinese; Female-identified
IF4	Student	Business	Research-based, Ph.D.	Chinese; Female-identified
SF1	Staff	Business		Non-Chinese; Female-identified
SF2	Staff	Graduate Studies		Non-Chinese; Female-identified
SM1	Staff	Education		Chinese Canadian; Male-identified
SM2	Staff	Engineering		Non-Chinese; Male-identified
SM3	Staff	International Student Center		Non-Chinese; Male-identified
SM4	Staff	Student Life Center		Non-Chinese; Male-identified

In terms of the language adopted in the interview, all of the student participants were informed that they could speak either in Mandarin or English to answer the questions. All of the students choose to share their experience in English.

The interview of staff participants was in English because they were all English speakers. The one-on-one interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the participants and each interview took approximately one hour.

In terms of the data collecting, Gelling (2015) stated that, although interviews are time-consuming in terms of scheduling, conducting, and analysis, they could provide rich data associated with individual's experiences and relevant knowledge of the phenomena. Each interview in this study started with some basic questions such as basic participant information and their course and activities, and then they were asked to answer some questions regarding their perceptions and experiences towards student engagement in a Canadian graduate school. Finally, those participants were asked to share their own experiences and stories and then provide some suggestions for enhancing their student engagement regarding their experience.

Ethical approval to undertake this study was given by the university's Research Ethics Board. Accordingly, the participants were informed of their rights to voluntary participation. The selected participants were informed of their rights including the fact that they could withdraw from the research at any time during the process, and also have the right to ask any questions with regards to the research.

Results

Cultural Difference in the Classroom

All of the student interviewees stated that how different cultures impact student engagement in the classroom. Their perceptions of student engagement in Chinese and Canadian education are different. With regard to Chinese education, the dominant relationship between teachers and students, teachers' motivations, and parents' expectations are highlighted in those participants' experiences and perceptions.

According to Chinese culture, the importance of study in Chinese education is deeply rooted in most Chinese students' minds. In general, IQ1 believed that, in Chinese education, study is the primary focus for most students and there is not a lot of student engagement outside of the classrooms. Similarly, IF2 shared her perspective that, before beginning their university career, the Chinese students' engagement is guided by studying hard and getting good grades. It is the only thing that students care about. In university, student engagement depends on the goals of the student, especially what they want to do in the future.

The dominant relationship between teachers and students is highlighted in a Chinese classroom due to Chinese traditional hierarchical culture. IF3 strongly believed the cultural differences matter, noting:

> Even when I was taking my undergraduate degree in China, in our classroom, we do not really speak very often. Usually, teachers give us the knowledge and we just write down the notes. So that is how we did in China. Here, we are still using that kind of way of learning to study our courses but putting it in a Canadian context. You will find that "Oh, professors valued class participation such a lot and even put credits on this aspect". So it is a new thing for us.

IF3 highlighted how different cultures have impacted their perception of student engagement in different ways. Similarly, IF1 stated that, in the Chinese value system, students always respect teachers as authorities, do not question their teachers and professors, and do not take initiative to answer questions. Also, as IF4 mentioned:

> From my perception of engagement in the primary school, I do not think there is any engagement. I think it is because China is very hierarchical where the school, the professor, or a teacher asks you what to do. I did not interact with my classmates a lot or with the teachers. You do not really talk about your experience. You can only do whatever they ask you to do.

For those current Chinese international grad students, IF4 explained:

> [I]t is culture background where we are located. When you think of grad students, they were definitely over twenty years old, right? That means that they are getting their education maybe in the 1990s. At that time, I feel like the Chinese culture is still a little bit conservative, not very encouraging for you to speak up. I think that is where most of the grad students that I know are now. We have a similar value that you listen to and respect your professors.

IF4 describes how Chinese graduate students perceive student engagement as teacher-oriented in a hierarchical educational system. One of the staff participants shared his perceptions of the teacher-oriented experience of Chinese international students:

> [In] China, lecturing or teaching [is] usually in one way, and they are expected to kind of listen. This is what they told me. I do not know if it is true or not. They also said that when students are expected to challenge and ask questions and engage in classroom, which was new for them. So that is something that they have to adjust to. So that is something that they probably found a challenge initially.

In terms of engaging in the classroom in China, IF1 opined that the parents' expectations need to be taken into consideration. The other two important factors are the teachers' motivation and the learners' self-regulation. Engagement is a physical requirement or duty but it does not mean the learners feel engaged in building knowledge.

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Compared to Chinese education, all of the student participants believed that there are many different ways of perceiving student engagement in Canadian education. We need to hear the voice of international students and empower their experience based on their needs and freedom in Canadian education. As IF1 mentioned:

> I think students here are much more not open-minded but at least open mouth. I mean they know how to engage and they feel authorized to participate the class and feel free to share their ideas no matter right or wrong. However, I do not think all answers that they give could be regarded as open-minded or excellent, but we can choose whatever we need.

IF1 stated how these students in Canada make their voice heard and empower their own experiences through their engagement. Similarly, IQ1 shared his opinion of in-classroom engagement, believing that, in Canada, there is definitely more freedom in terms of what a student can say in class and can connect with other people who are open-minded. IF4 opined that the Canadian educational system encourages students to have their voices on student classroom engagement. She held the opinion that at least the classrooms really encourage students to participate and at least there is a lot of acknowledge and encouragement for you to do community activities. Acknowledgement and encouragement of those international student experiences can play an important role to improve their engagement.

Two student participants shared some other perspectives of their engagement in Canadian classroom based on the differences between Chinese and Canadian education and culture. IF3 shared her experience of student engagement in a different culture:

> I would say my behaviors are actually the same, no matter in China or in Canada…. But obviously, people here are more outgoing…. So I feel in terms of the perception of student engagement, I am less engaged in the Canadian context compared to the Chinese context. But I am pretty sure that how I did was exactly the same thing.

IF4 also noted that students may engage in the classroom based on their different culture. She explained that her personality and Chinese cultural background led her to feel uncomfortable to engage by asking questions or interrupting in seminars because she is afraid to speak, especially where there is a speaker and many people. In China, interrupting can be regarded as disrespect; in Canada, it can be seen as engaging in the conversation.

Comparing cultural differences in China and Canada, IF1 held a positive opinion about the challenges associated with her classroom engagement in Canadian graduate life. As she said:

> In my cohort, I am the only international student and the only student from China, which means I had no one to talk with after class in my familiar mother tongue. Even worse, I do experience some cultural shock or cultural differences at the beginning, but up to I adapted the situation, I found it is OK to make mistakes.

Similarly, IF4 believed cultural differences have changed the way that she engages in classroom.

> As I said, because of my personality, but also because of my background. I was always scared to speak, especially do seminars where there is a speaker and a lot of people. I do not know about the culture here, but they interrupt speakers during their talk. So as soon as you have questions, you just interrupt…. That really makes me very uncomfortable, but I think now I am getting used to it. I feel I have to do it myself. I think that really changed me.

Cultural Difference out of the Classroom

Five of the six student participants highlighted how different cultures impact student engagement out of the classroom. Those five participants shared the common opinion that cultural differences influence their engagement out of the classroom, but two student participants thought that it negatively affects and three that it positively affects. For example, IM1 opined that the culture differences meant that he did not know how to behave in front of his foreign friends because he was worried about the lack of some special skills and not having the same cultural background to engage in the communities. IQ1 shared his perspectives as an international student toward out-of-classroom engagement, highlighting the new cultural unfamiliarity because of cultural differences negatively impacting his engagement in the community:

> [Y]ou come here and feel everything is new. You are not familiar with a lot of things. So fear and anxiety like the emotional mental health factors do influence how I engage. A lot of things that I do not know, and a lot of ways of

doing things I do not know. So sometimes I will hear people complain about racism and they are asked about where they are from. That is a racist question but I always think I am not the only person to feel this way. I have talked a lot of people who are also new immigrants. So one thing they think about it that I am not from here. So what if you are not from here but you are still here?

IQ1's experience of student engagement has been negatively impacted by his cultural identity and new cultural unfamiliarity. Similarly, one staff participant (SM2) gave his perspective on cultural unfamiliarity that may lead those students to be hesitant to try different things. He suggested that, if there were events specifically catering to Chinese students then maybe that might be more appealing to them. He noted:

> Let us say a yoga event, and that maybe too general for them who may be too shy, but if there was a yoga event hosted by a Chinese club, maybe they are more willing to attend that because they might be more familiar with people who might speak the same language or may be of the same culture. Eventually, once you get familiar there, maybe you become more adventurous to go outside instead of just going to the specifically Chinese hosted events. They can go to do other things.

However, the different understanding of new cultural unfamiliarity can have a different impact on Chinese international graduate students perceiving student engagement in a positive way as strengthening their engaging experience. IF1 held a different opinion viewing cultural difference.

> I found the problem in and out of the classroom is the same. Because we had to, in term of these challenges, recognize these differences. We have the different cultural ideology, but it does not mean we are in fearing to the western ideology. We can take the positive attitude to see through the challenges to take every chance to learn. Taking challenges as the opportunities can help us to grow. Also, we can take part in those community programs because people are really nice and would like to share.

Similarly, IF2 believed the cultural challenge is not really a big problem for her because she thinks from diverse perspectives, and she always can understand people's different behaviors. IF4 shared her own experience that, at the beginning, she was somewhat afraid to talk to her advisors about things other than her research but now she's better because she knows them better and feels less guarded.

Discussion

All student interviewees mentioned that cultural differences play a crucial role in classroom engagement. They believed that there are many different ways of perceiving student engagement in Canadian education, but students interpreted student engagement perceptions based on their experience of engaging in Canadian graduate schools. Different perceptions of student engagement and student's voice based on their cultural multiple identities have been highlighted in Canadian education in this study. For example, how to rethink, engage, and take advantage of those cultural differences based on their cultural identities can be positive experiences of Chinese international graduate students in Canadian higher education. This finding supports the studies of Grabke (2013) and Scheurs and Dumbraveanu (2014), highlighting the importance of social engagement, student voice, and active involvement in and out of the classroom in Canadian education.

In previous studies, the Western educational values reflect better student engagement as positive interactions (Grabke, 2013; Jin, 2017), while Chinese culture embodies student engagement as passive interactions (Tsai, 2017; Xiang, 2017). Those Chinese international students whose different interactions can be misunderstood as passive engagement and whose silent engagement may not be well acknowledged in the western schooling. Depending on their programs and development in Canadian schools, some Chinese students need to push themselves to be positively engaged in classroom discussion and actively engaged in this study. However, Chinese education, to some extent, encourages students to be silent and follow the teachers, which leaves them feeling uncomfortable, lacking confidence to offer their opinions, and being afraid and shamed of making mistakes in Canadian classrooms.

In this study, their teacher-oriented ways and other different ways of understanding student engagement have been challenged and not well recognized in the student-oriented and active-participating environment in Western contexts. Moreover, this is coherent with the statement's Chinese international students' engagement are misunderstood as ways of lower and passive engagement (Grabke, 2013; Tsai, 2017; Xiang, 2017; Xiao, 2020).

In this study, the stories of some Chinese international student participants indicated that they or their Chinese peers might be more silent and lack confidence in a new and unfamiliar culture. In this way, those students may need time for their transition to the Canadian ways of engagement. It is consistent with the finding of Mukminin and McMahon (2013) showing that Asian students usually are humbler and quieter in and out of the classroom. In previous studies, the Western behavioral dimensions highlighting student participation in school and extra-curricular activities and the shift from teacher-centered to student-centered environment may cause the maladaptation among Chinese international graduate students who are deeply impacted by the Chinese traditional lecture-oriented approach when they study in Canadian universities (Xiao, 2020; Zhao, 2018).

Although it is common for Western behavioral dimensions to highlight student engagement in the classroom and in the extra-curricular activities, the perceptions of student engagement need to be broader. Chinese international graduate students' peception of engagement is more teacher-oriented while the Western perception of engagement is more verbal and student-oriented. Those different perceptions should be learned by students and their commuties. In this way, Chinese international graduate students can determine a more suitable form of engaging in their schools in Canada to gain better student experience based on their differentiated needs and the support of their communities. Western institutions need to build their awareness of the features of Chinese international student engagement in Canadian graduate schools and a broader understanding of student engagement socially and culturally. Those institutions need to have a more inclusive academic and social-cultural environment and offer better faculty, staff, peer, and community support to Chinese international students' better learning and practicing experiences in and out of the classroom.

Conclusion

This study examined how student engagement is perceived in Canadian and Chinese cultural contexts and educational system due o cultural differences. It explored how Chinese international graduate students' engagement has been less acknowledged by Canadian higher education. Regarding the level of Chinese international graduate students' engagement in this study's Canadian university, this study explored how Chinese international graduate students peceive student engagement and how the Western culture defines student engagement. Their perceptions should be learned by students and their communities. First, this study advocates for a more inclusive lens of perceiving student engagement. Given the focus of this research on the Chinese international student engagement in Canadian graduate schools, Chinese international graduate students' different cultural experiences have been highlighted in terms of better understanding those students' experiences in Canadian higher education. Impacted by Confucian culture and Chinese educational values, student engagement in and out of the classroom in the Chinese context reflects the significance of academic achievement, the dominant teacher-student relationship, the high expectations of Chinese parents, and the exam-oriented motivation of students (Tsai, 2017).

Second, throughout questioning these dominant perceptions of student engagement, this study indicated the perception of student engagement now presents a Western ideological understanding on student engagement, which is more student-oriented and values oral engagement in the classroom and visual engagement out of the classroom. However, Chinese international graduate students perceive student engagement as being more teacher-oriented in academic engagement in and out of the classroom. These different cultural perceptions of student engagement should be acknowledged, and these differences and similarities should be learned by students and their peers, faculty members, university staff, institutional leaders, and communities. This study shows how Western perspectives on student engagement

can impact Chinese international graduate students' experience. Thus, how to create a more inclusive environment for non-western students including those international students will begin to make a change.

The importance of supporting international students based on their cultural-ignored needs and sense of belonging in their transitioning period is shown in this study. Institutions in Canadian higher education need to establish learning and practicing system and create a respectful environment in and out of the classroom to effectively meet international students' needs to address the inherent tension that is set up for those students to fail. Students, their faculty, university staff, and communities need to be aware of and acknowledge different perceptions of student engagement to better support educational experiences of Chinese international graduate students in Canadian higher education. The results of this study can help the faculty, university staff, institutional leaders, and communities in the Western universities become better aware of the features of Chinese international student engagement in Canadian graduate schools and a broader perception of student engagement. With the outbreak of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) across the globe at the beginning of 2020, online learning has resulted in big challenges for international education worldwide. Canadian higher education can offer a more inclusive academic and social-cultural environment and offer better peer, faculty, staff, and community support to Chinese international students' better learning and practicing experiences in and out of the classroom in the post COVID-19 era.

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