

The Journal of International Students (JIS), an academic, interdisciplinary, and peer-reviewed publication (Print ISSN 2162-3104 & Online ISSN 2166-3750), publishes scholarly peer reviewed articles on international students in tertiary education, secondary education, and other educational settings that make significant contributions to research, policy, and practice in the internationalization of higher education.

OJED
OPEN JOURNALS IN EDUCATION

Krishna Bista, Executive Editor
Morgan State University, USA

Chris R. Glass, Editor-in-Chief
Old Dominion University, USA

EDUCATION/INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

STARSCHOLARS
NETWORK

STAR Scholars Network titles are also available as e-books.

ISBN 9798562629883



9 798562 629883

JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

2020 Volume 10, Issue 4

Bista/Glass

JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS



2020 VOL. 10, NO. 4

Access this journal online at ojed.org/jis

Krishna Bista, *Executive Editor*
Morgan State University, USA

Chris R. Glass, *Editor-In-Chief*
Old Dominion University, USA

Vol. 10/No. 4 November 2020

**JOURNAL OF
INTERNATIONAL
STUDENTS**

A Quarterly Publication on International Education

Access this journal online at: <http://ojed.org/jis>

Copyright © 2020 by *Journal of International Students*

All rights reserved. This journal is a STAR Scholars Network publication.

Print ISSN 2162-3104

Online ISSN 2166-3750

Disclaimer

Facts and opinions published in *Journal of International Students* (JIS) express solely the opinions of the respective authors. Authors are responsible for their citing of sources and the accuracy of their references and bibliographies. The editors cannot be held responsible for any lacks or possible violations of third parties' rights.

Special Issue on
Reflection and Reflective Thinking (2020)

Special Issue Co-Editors:

Georgina Barton, University of Southern Queensland, Australia
Mary Ryan, Macquarie University, Australia

Special Issue | *Bahasa Indonesia* on
International Students and COVID-19 (2020)

Special Issue Co-Editors:

Handoyo Puji Widodo, King Abdulaziz University, Saudi Arabia
Sandi Ferdiansyah, Institut Agama Islam Negeri, Indonesia and
Lara Fridani, Universitas Negeri Jakarta, Indonesia

Special Issue | *Chinese* on
International Students in China (2020)

Special Issue Co-Editors: *Mei Tian and Genshu Lu*
Xi'an Jiaotong University, China

Special Issue on
**Fostering Successful Integration and Engagement Between
Domestic and International Students (2018)**

Special Issue Co-Editors: *CindyAnn Rose-Redwood and Reuben Rose-Redwood, University of Victoria, Canada*

Special Issue on
**The Role of Student Affairs in International Student Transition and
Success (2017)**

Special Issue Co-Editors:

Christina W Yao, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, US
Chrystal A. George Mwangi, University of Massachusetts Amherst, US

Special Issue on
International Student Success (2016)

Special Issue Editor: *Rahul Choudaha, DrEducation, United States*



Routledge Studies in Global Student Mobility Series

This Routledge Series offers a scholarly forum for original and innovative research to understand the issues and challenges as well as share the best practices related to international student mobility in K-12 and beyond, education abroad, and exchange programs globally that creates a professional network of researchers and practitioners.

<https://www.routledge.com/posts/15842>

Series Editors

Dr. Chris R. Glass & Dr. Krishna Bista,

For questions and submission, email at crglass@odu.edu

Forthcoming Titles

Inequalities in Study Abroad and Student Mobility: Challenges and Practices

Student Mobilities and the Global South

International Student Employability from the Global South

Social Mobility in Higher Education

International Students in Community Colleges

International Student Support and Engagement

International Faculty in Institutions of Higher Education

International Students in the Middle East: Comparative Critical Perspectives

Emerson is a campus without borders.

Emerson
COLLEGE

We believe producing inspired work requires a global perspective, which is why the Emerson experience isn't limited to one city or even one country. As a global hub of arts and communication in higher education, we strive to provide our students, faculty, and staff with opportunities to connect and collaborate across countries and cultures. From our Global Pathways Programs to our castle in the Netherlands and beyond, we offer more than opportunities for students to study abroad—we provide access to enriching cultural experiences that will guide you on the path to becoming a global citizen.



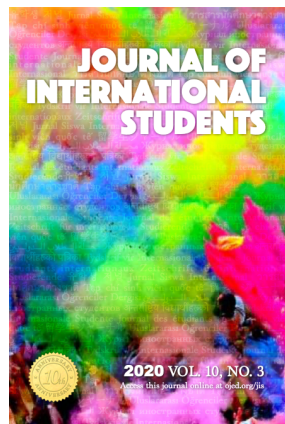
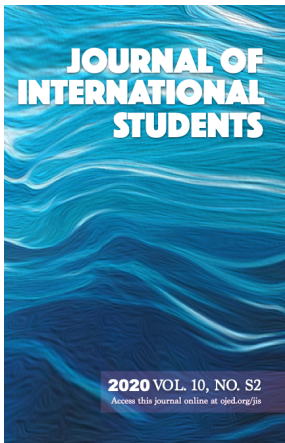
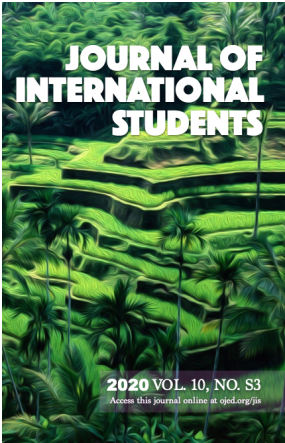
Our newest global degree programs:

- **Global BA in Business of Creative Enterprises: Australia**
Our accelerated Global BA in Business of Creative Enterprises (BCE) is powered by a rich management-focused curriculum; immerses students in the life of companies and organizations across two continents through intensive internship programs; and spans venues in **Sydney, Boston, and Los Angeles**.
- **Global BFA in Film Art**
Our intercontinental joint Global BFA in Film Art spans venues in **Paris, the Netherlands, and Boston**. In this one-of-a-kind degree program, students will not only study visual and media arts in the City of Light itself, but will also receive a foundation in the liberal arts and French language.

Learn more at emerson.edu/global.



SPECIAL COLLECTIONS »





Reviews

"This book is a valuable addition to our understanding of the relationship between inequalities and international education – both at home and abroad. Besides offering insights from cases around the Western world, all chapters also offer useful implications for daily practice."

Christof Van Mol, Assistant Professor, Tilburg University, Netherlands

"*Inequalities in Study Abroad and Student Mobility* presents a remarkable set of voices that, taken together, provide a deep, critical, and valuable analysis of some of the most pressing issues for international higher education."

Gerardo L. Blanco, Associate Professor, Boston College, USA

"The COVID-19 crisis made the risk of growing inequalities in higher education even more visible. *Inequalities in Study Abroad and Student Mobility* is a must-read book addressing the topic of inequalities in internationalization and study abroad in a holistic manner.

Giorgio Marinoni, Manager, International Association of Universities, France

"An impressive and important collection. The editors have assembled twelve strong contributions that not only lay out the challenges inherent in study abroad access in an unbalanced and vulnerable world, but offer well-reasoned prescriptions for greater equity, effectiveness, and sustainable positive impact.

James E. Callaghan, Assistant Vice-President, Georgia College & State University, USA

OJED

OPEN JOURNALS IN EDUCATION

High-quality, peer-reviewed academic journals based at leading universities worldwide.



California State University
Northridge



STATE ARKANSAS STATE
UNIVERSITY

MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

AIRC
American
International
Recruitment Council



Open Journals in Education (OJED) publishes high quality peer reviewed, open access journals based at research universities. OJED uses the Open Journal System (OJS) platform, where readers can browse by subject, drill down to journal level to find the aims, scope, and editorial board for each individual title, as well as search back issues. OJED journals are required to be indexed in major academic databases to ensure quality and maximize article discoverability and citation. Journals follow best practices on publication ethics outlined in the [COPE Code of Conduct](#). Journals work to ensure timely decisions after initial submission, as well as prompt publication online if a manuscript is accepted for publication. OJED journals benefit from the editorial, production, and marketing expertise of our team of volunteers.

Explore our OJED Journals at www.ojed.org



For more information, visit <https://starscholars.org/>

Indexing

ISSN: 2162-3104 Print/ ISSN: 2166-3750 Online

2020 Volume 10, Number 4

© *Journal of International Students*

<http://ojed.org/jis>



All articles published in the *Journal of International Students* are indexed and listed in major databases and sources:

SUBJECT: EDUCATION – HIGHER

DEWEY # 378

- | | | | |
|--|----------|---|--|
| | | Multiple Vendors | |
| CEDROM SNI | | | ○ Freely Accessible Social Science Journals, 2011- |
| ○ Eureka.cc, 01/01/2017- | ProQuest | | |
| ○ Europresse.com, 01/01/2017- | | ○ Education Collection, 10/01/2011- | |
| Directory of Open Access Journals | | ○ Education Database, 10/01/2011- | |
| ○ Directory of Open Access Journals, 2011- | | ○ Education Database (Alumni Edition), 10/01/2011- | |
| EBSCOhost | | ○ ProQuest Central, 10/01/2011- | |
| ○ Education Source, 03/01/2012- | | ○ ProQuest Central - UK Customers, 10/01/2011- | |
| Gale | | ○ ProQuest Central (Alumni Edition), 10/01/2011- | |
| ○ Academic OneFile, 09/01/2011- | | ○ ProQuest Central (Corporate), 10/01/2011- | |
| ○ Contemporary Women's Issues, 09/01/2011- | | ○ ProQuest Central (US Academic Subscription), 10/01/2011- | |
| ○ Educator's Reference Complete, 09/01/2011- | | ○ ProQuest Central China, 10/01/2011- | |
| ○ Expanded Academic ASAP, 09/01/2011- | | ○ ProQuest Central Essentials, 10/01/2011- | |
| ○ InfoTrac Custom, 09/01/2011- | | ○ ProQuest Central Korea, 10/01/2011- | |
| | | ○ ProQuest Central Student, 10/01/2011- | |
| | | ○ ProQuest Research Library, 10/01/2011- | |
| | | ○ ProQuest Research Library (Corporate), 10/01/2011- | |
| | | ○ ProQuest Social Sciences Premium Collection, 10/01/2011- | |
| | | ○ ProQuest Social Sciences Premium Collection - UK Customers, 10/01/2011- | |
| | | ○ Research Library (Alumni Edition), 10/01/2011- | |
| | | ○ Research Library China, 10/01/2011- | |
| | | ○ Research Library Prep, 10/01/2011- | |
| | | ○ Social Science Premium Collection, 10/01/2011- | |
| | | ○ Clarivate Analytics | |
| | | ○ Web of Science | |
| | | ○ Emerging Sciences Citation Index | |
| | | ○ Higher Education Abstracts | |



Source: Ulrichsweb Global Serials Directory



You may access the print and/or digital copies of the *Journal of International Students* from **586** [libraries](#) worldwide.

The Journal of International Students (Print ISSN 2162-3104 & Online ISSN 2166-3750) is a member of the STAR Scholars Network Open Journals in Education (OJED), a OJS 3 platform for *high-quality, peer-reviewed* academic journals in education.

JIS is a Gold Open Access journal and indexed in major academic databases to maximize article discoverability and citation. JIS follows best practices on publication ethics outlined in the COPE Code of Conduct. Editors work to ensure timely decisions after initial submission, as well as prompt publication online if a manuscript is accepted for publication.

Upon publication articles are immediately and freely available to the public. The final version of articles can immediately be posted to an institutional repository or to the author's own website as long as the article includes a link back to the original article posted on OJED.

None of the OJED journals charge fees to individual authors thanks to the generous support of our institutional sponsors.

For further information

Editorial Office

Journal of International Students

URL: <http://ojed.org/jis>

E-mail: contact@jistudents.org

Editorial Team

ISSN: 2162-3104 Print/ ISSN: 2166-3750 Online

2020 Volume 10, Number 4

© *Journal of International Students*

<http://ojed.org/jis>

OJED
OPEN JOURNALS IN EDUCATION

Founder/Executive Editor

Krishna Bista, Morgan State University, USA

Editor-in-Chief

Chris R. Glass, Old Dominion University, USA

Senior Copy Editor

Joy Bancroft, Emporia State University, USA

Managing Editor

Laura Soulsby, Old Dominion University, USA

Production Editor

Natalie Cruz, Old Dominion University, USA

Book Review Editor

Lisa Unangst, Boston College, USA

Editorial Assistants

Shasha Cui, University of Rochester, USA

Muhammad Sharif Uddin, Morgan State University, USA

EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD (2019-2022)

- Dr. Darla Deardorff, Research Fellow, *Duke University, USA*
- Dr. Margaret Kettle, Associate Professor, *Queensland U. of Technology, Australia*
- Dr. David Di Maria, Associate VP for International Education, *UMBC, USA*
- Dr. Aneta Hayes, Director of Programs (UG and MA), *Keele University, UK*
- Dr. Rahul Choudaha, Principal Researcher, *DrEducation, USA*
- Dr. Catherine Gomes, Associate Professor, *RMIT University, Australia*
- Dr. Rajika Bhandari, *Senior Advisor, Institute of International Education, USA*
- Dr. Helen Forbes-Mewett, Deputy Director, *MMIC Monash University, Australia*
- Dr. Nigel Harwood, Reader in Applied Linguistics, *University of Sheffield, UK*
- Dr. Anthony Ogden, Associate VP for Global Engagement, *U. of Wyoming, USA*
- Dr. Bojana Petric, Head of Dept. of ALC, *Birkbeck University of London, UK*
- Dr. Megan M. Siczek, Director of EAP, *The George Washington University, USA*
- Dr. Lily Lei Ye, Associate Professor, *Beijing Institute of Fashion Tech, China*
- Dr. Ly Tran, Associate Professor, *Deakin University, Australia*
- Dr. Lydia Andrade, Professor, *University of the Incarnate Word, USA*
- Dr. Stuart Tannock, Senior Lecturer, *University College London, UK*
- Dr. Lien Pham, *Lecturer, University of Technology Sydney, Australia*
- Dr. Janet Ilieva, Founder/Director, *Education Insight, UK*

- Dr. Yingyi Ma, Associate Professor, *Syracuse University, USA*
- Dr. Nicolai Netz, *German Center for Higher Education Research and Science Studies (DZHW), Germany*

Associate Editors (2019-2021)

- Dr. Nelson Brunsting, *Wake Forest University, USA*
- Dr. Kun Dai, *Peking University, China*
- Dr. Helen Forbes-Mewett, *Monash University, Australia*
- Dr. Hugo Garcia, *Texas Tech University, USA*
- Dr. Anesa Hosein, *University of Surrey, UK*
- Dr. Mingsheng Li, *Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand*
- Dr. Stephanie Kim, *Georgetown University, US*
- Dr. Yingyi Ma, Associate Professor, *Syracuse University, USA*
- Dr. Charles Mathies, *University of Jyväskylä, Finland*
- Dr. Mohammad Nurunnabi, *Prince Sultan University, Saudi Arabia*
- Dr. CindyAnn Rose-Redwood, *University of Victoria, Canada*
- Dr. Reuben Rose-Redwood, *University of Victoria, Canada*
- Dr. Christina Yao, *University of South Carolina, US*
- Dr. Yi-Leaf Zhang, *The University of Texas at Arlington, US*
- Dr. Helene Syed Zwick, *ESLSCA University, Egypt*

Assistant Editors (2019-2021)

- Dr. Sam Adeyemo, *University of Pretoria, South Africa*
- Dr. Jasper Kun-Ting Hsieh, *The University of New South Wales, Australia*
- Dr. Kayla Johnson, *University of Cincinnati, US*
- Dr. Katie Koo, *Texas A&M University – Commerce, US*
- Dr. Masha Krsmanovic, *University of Central Florida, US*
- Dr. Shu-Wen Lan, *National Pingtung U. of Science and Technology, Taiwan*
- Dr. Jiangnan Li, *Durham University, United Kingdom*
- Dr. Xi Lin, *East Carolina University, US*
- Dr. Fatma Mizikaci, *Ankara University, Turkey*
- Dr. Hiep Hung Pham, *Phu Xuan University, Viet Nam*
- Dr. Wonsun Ryu, *The University of Texas at Austin, US*
- Dr. ZW Taylor, *The University of Texas at Austin, US*
- Dr. Tiffany Viggiano, *University of Alaska, US*
- Dr. Melissa Whatley, *North Carolina State University, US*

Copy Editors (2019-2021)

- Kim Cossey, *Old Dominion University*
- Barry Fass-Holmes, *University California San Diego*
- Allison Fulford, *Dalhousie University*
- Minghui Hou, *Old Dominion University*
- Tala Karkar, *Texas Tech University*
- Keenan Manning, *Hong Kong Polytechnic University*
- Adesola Ogundimu, *John Hopkins University*

- Melania Pantelich, *Federation University*
- Vianna Renaud, *Bournemouth University*
- Nicholas Santavicca, *University of Massachusetts Dartmouth*
- Dorota Silber-Furman, *Tennessee Tech University*
- Carine Ullom, *Ottawa University*
- Lisa Unangst, *Boston College*
- Linda Tsevi, *University of Ghana*
- Caroline Wekullo, *University of Ottawa*
- Jing Xiaoli, *Purdue University*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

10TH ANNIVERSARY ESSAYS

1. Neo-racism and the Criminalization of China
Jenny J. Lee..... **i-vi**
2. International Student Agency in the Face of a Global Health Crisis
Megan Siczek..... **vii-ix**
3. Celebrating the Last 10 Years of Community College Internationalization
Rosalind Latiner Raby..... **x-ix**
4. (Re)Learning to Live Together in 2020
Darla K. Deardorff..... **xv-xviii**

RESEARCH ARTICLES

5. Examining the Role of Theory in Qualitative Research: A Literature Review of Studies on Chinese International Students in Higher Education
Tang Tang Heng..... **798-816**
6. Proactive Personality and Cross-Cultural Adjustment: The Mediating Role of Adjustment Self-Efficacy
Jing Hua, Guilin Zhang, Charles Coco, Teng Zhao, Ning Hou..... **817-835**
7. An Ethnography of Taiwanese International Students' Identity Movements
Habitus Modification and Improvisation
Jasper Kun-Ting Hsieh..... **836-852**
8. Phenomenological Study of Lived Experiences of International Students in Turkey
Ali Çağatay Kılınç, Kürşat Arslan, Mustafa Polat..... **853-871**
9. Cross-Cultural Digital Information-Seeking Experiences: The Case of Saudi Arabian Female International Students
Haifa Binsahl, Shanton Chang, Rachele Bosua..... **872-891**

10. Seeking to Understand the Impact of Collaboration on Intercultural Communication Apprehension
Laura Jacobi..... 892-911
11. The Impact of Intercultural Exchange on Secondary School Exchange Students and Their Host Families
Manca Sustarsic..... 912-933
12. Outside the Classroom: The Language of English and its Impact on International Student Mental Wellbeing in Australia
Catherine Gomes..... 934-953
13. “I Was New and I was Afraid”: The Acculturation Strategies Adopted by International First-Year Undergraduate Students in the United States
Masha Krsmanovic 954-975
14. International Saudi Arabia Students’ Level of Preparedness: Identifying Factors and Maximizing Study Abroad Experience Using a Mixed-Methods Approach
Janina Brutt-Griffler, Mohammad Nurunnabi, Sumi Kim..... 976-1004
15. Challenges Facing Mexican Students in the United Kingdom: Implications for Adaptation During the Early Stage
Elizabeth Margarita Hernández López..... 1005-1022
16. Why Japanese? Why not Japanese? A Case Study of Chinese International Students Studying Japanese at American Universities
Jun Xu..... 1023-1039
17. Object in View: Understanding International Students’ Participation in Group Work
John Straker..... 1040-1063
18. Chinese Students’ Experiences Transitioning from an Intensive English Program to a U.S. University
Jill Fox1064-1086
19. Insights into Saudi Female International Students: Transition Experiences
Alia K. Arafah1087-1102

RESEARCH IN BRIEF

20. Ethics Acculturation of International Counseling Students
Dan Li, Yang Ai..... 1103-1109

BOOK REVIEWS

21. Student and Graduate Mobility in Armenia
Natalie I. Cruz..... 1110-1113

22. Teaching for Excellence and Equity: Analyzing Teacher Characteristics, Behaviors, and Student Outcomes with TIMSS
Muhammad Younas, Uzma Noor..... **1114-1116**
23. Manual for Developing Intercultural Competencies: Story Circles
Jean Baptiste Diatta..... **1117-1119**

Neo-Racism and the Criminalization of China

Jenny J. Lee
University of Arizona, USA

Earlier this year, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) elevated “hate-fueled violence” to a top national security priority, putting racist violence on the same threat level as terrorist groups such as ISIS (Allam, 2020). In other words, there are just as many serious challenges to safety inside the United States as outside its national borders. And much of this danger is racially motivated. Among the leading targets are immigrants or those who appear as immigrants. For example, the United States experienced a surge of random attacks against those of Asian descent earlier this year, as they were wrongfully blamed for spreading COVID-19 (Wang, 2020).

As for U.S. higher education, international students have been both threatened and viewed as threats. Especially since 9/11, they have been under the presumption of being an endangerment to the safety of Americans. This remains evident today, not just in current federal procedures, such as the Student Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) but also in current political rhetoric and selective immigration policies. One clear example is the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) rule months ago that international students would be deported if their universities go online (Castiello-Gutiérrez & Li, 2020). In their appeal in the Harvard and MIT lawsuit (President and Fellows, 2020), DHS explicitly stated to the courts that international students would otherwise be a threat to “national safety.”

In response, we witnessed a massive public outcry across educational, governmental, and commercial sectors in support of internationals and arguing for the wealth of benefits they bring. And, while DHS rescinded that rule soon after, there has remained numerous, more selective targeting toward a certain type of international: those from China. The general public has less opposed this anti-China neo-racist focus.

NEO-RACISM

What is neo-racism? This is a new racism that is not based on the color of one’s skin alone but includes stereotypes about cultures in a globalizing world (Balibar, 1992;

Lee & Rice, 2007). It is also based on a hierarchy of cultural preferences, as not all internationals are unwelcomed. The commonly used term xenophobia does not capture ways that Chinese students are targeted over those coming from Canada, Australia, or Western Europe. What is also distinctive about neo-racism, unlike old-fashioned racism or even blanket xenophobia, is a national ordering, used to justify the filtering and differential treatment of immigrants. Ultimately, neo-racism is rooted in White supremacy (Stein & de Andreotti, 2016; Suspitsyna & Shalka, 2019).

Also, neo-racism is rationalized differently. To provide some brief context, the term was originally conceptualized by the sociologist Etienne Balibar (1992). He had observed France's long mistreatment against those of Arab and North African descent. The justification was that these groups posed direct threats to what it meant to be French. The rationale was to protect a so-called "French way of life" by maintaining cultural boundaries. These same unchecked assumptions are used to promote restrictive immigration and mistreatment in the United States today. Discrimination then appears defensible by those who marginalize such groups. Their rationale is based on cultural difference or national origin rather than by race alone. This disarms the fight against racism by appealing to assumed "natural" tendencies to preserve the culture of the dominant group, i.e., White Europeans.

Neo-racism can also be observed in academia. International students have reported experiences of verbal assaults, false accusations, sexual harassment, and even physical violence (Lee, 2017; Lee et al., 2017; Lee & Rice, 2007). But these experiences are not uniformly experienced across all internationals. In the case of the United States, neo-racism is targeted toward those from Asia, Latin America, and Africa, in ways that are not experienced by those from the Western world.

Neo-racism can be evidenced across a range of higher education sectors. For instance, many U.S. universities benefit from the athletic prestige that international athletes offer. In one study, Thomas Opio and I (2011) demonstrated the neo-racist experiences of African student athletes who were tapped and recruited for their athletic prowess but felt unsupported when it came to their academic goals. In some cases, they were steered toward majors that would be of little relevance back home. They also experienced negative stereotyping from domestics, including African Americans, about their homelands.

Neo-racism underlies the scientific enterprise as well. In another study, Brendan Cantwell and I (2010) identified ways that Asian postdocs are systematically channeled to unsecure, short-term contracts while White nationals are groomed toward faculty positions. Faculty reported them as being good at "technical" work and managing labs but lacking the theoretical depth to become true scholars. We observed a similar pattern among international graduate students with some indicating they served as cheap labor, funded to work on their supervisors' projects that were unrelated to their professional ambitions (Cantwell et al., 2018). These graduate students reported feeling exploited yet helpless to challenge their faculty advisors. The broader patterns we observed exemplify ways that Asia maintains the United States' dominant role in science as temporary laborers but are excluded as fellow members of a shared society, with equal rights, protections, and entitlements. These are just some of the ways that neo-racism operates.

It is also important to be clear that cultural discrimination is not a U.S.-phenomenon only. Based on my research in South Korea and South Africa, there is a similar scapegoating against so-called foreigners based on negative stereotypes. In some cases, they can occur along similar racial lines, which I refer to as neo-nationalism. In the case of South Korea (Lee et al., 2017), neo-nationalism was against those from China; whereas in South Africa, students from Zimbabwe and Nigeria were particularly affected (Lee, 2017).

CRIMINALIZATION OF CHINA

Neo-racist stereotypes have also long been used to maintain illusions of national security in which certain groups pose a “danger.” In the United States, neo-racism was keenly observed post-9/11 in the mistreatment of Middle Eastern people. More recently, we observed the widespread Muslims bans that are still in effect for particular countries, and now the criminalization of China. Lately, as demonstrated by the White House and federal agencies over and over again, there is the negative stereotyping of China, particularly as criminal. Such examples over the past 2 years are as follows:

- Sweeping political rhetoric of Chinese researchers and graduate students as spies
- Visa limits for Chinese graduate students in high-tech fields to 1–5 years
- Visa exclusions for those with ties to the Chinese Community Party and Chinese military
- FBI–University protocols to monitor Chinese scientists and scholars (Lee & Haupt, 2020a, 2020b)

In response, there have been mounting calls from major organizations and university leaders that the federal government is engaging in racial profiling. Presidents of leading research universities (MIT, UC Berkeley, Stanford) and major associations have also openly denounced such discrimination based on one’s nation of origin and affirmed their commitment to their institution’s and academia’s international community (e.g., MIT News Office, 2019; Shao, 2019).

Neo-racism suggests that discrimination is not criminal but actually warranted to preserve the U.S. imaginary of a safe, White-European country. This means immigration is still allowed and even encouraged, but only for a certain kind of immigrant—those who resemble the dominant race and culture. This attitude was most clearly evidenced when Trump referred to Haiti, El Salvador, and all of Africa as “shithole countries” while expressing we should have more migrants from places like Norway (Aizenman, 2018).

But what about our national security? Isn’t racial profiling justified? Suspicions about immigrants and the hostile treatment of them as scapegoats, especially in times of economic downturn and crises, is unfortunately very common and very global. Among the recent political rhetoric is the anthropomorphizing of China as a person (Lewis, 2020). According to Margaret Lewis (2020), a negative stereotype is being

built and reinforced that stigmatizes anyone who has any quality of being “like-China” (Zhang, 2020, para 5). In Lewis’ paper, she observed how the Department of Justice, including the FBI, depicts China as taking on a personified form, meaning that “China can steal” or “China can cheat” (Zhang, 2020, para 6). She goes on to argue that China itself, as an entire country, is not a perpetrator; rather, it is individuals. In effect, criminalizing China stigmatizes people who are seen as possessing a shared characteristic of “China-ness” (Lewis, 2020, p. 24). This typecast applies to Chinese Americans as well as Asian Americans. As mentioned earlier, this was manifested in random attacks for unwarranted blame for COVID-19. There also have been several high-profile cases of Chinese scientists being wrongfully accused of spying, and although these charges were dropped or the scientists were exonerated, such attempts led to “devastating effects” on the individuals’ careers as well as the broader Chinese American scientific community (Committee of 100, 2019).

Neo-racism also occurs against Chinese students and within classrooms. Last year, we witnessed numerous U.S. universities making the news for faculty discriminating against Chinese students. A major research university in the East Coast made headlines when a professor was faulted for violating Chinese students’ civil rights with sweeping claims, such as, “All Chinese students cheated their way into [the] United States” with threatened expulsion and deportation (Redden, 2019b). Faculty were similarly reported to have discriminated against Chinese students at numerous other U.S. universities (Redden 2019a, 2019b). In several of these cases, the accused professor resigned or was suspended from their respective position upon further investigation. Experts who have studied international students and faculty indicate such discriminatory incidents are not isolated events, but rather such “othering” is quite pervasive across U.S. higher education (Redden, 2019a; Suspitsyna & Shalka 2019).

While national security should not be completely abandoned, the neo-racist criminalization of China actually undermines the United States. We must consider what are all the costs to internationalization. We are already expecting a major decline this year in university international enrollments and a consequent hit to the local economy. We should also consider academic freedom and humanitarian protection. There is even a cost to public health. In a recent paper, John Haupt and I (2020b) wrote about how the national securitization of COVID-19 has become a national over a humanitarian pursuit because the virus is politically framed as an existential danger coming from outside domestic borders, for which China is blamed. Examples are calling SARS-Co-V2 the “China Virus” or “Wuhan virus.” We have also written about ways our ability to address the global pandemic are hindered when the government limits international engagement with China.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, considering the risks to public health, personal freedoms, and rights, I and my collaborators argue that neo-racism undermines the United States’ role as a global leader in higher education. With the rise of national protectionism, universities are and must remain international. Knowledge is fundamentally borderless, and yet higher education is being bordered by neo-racism. Neo-racist barriers to international

migration, collaboration, and exchange limit higher education as well as our universities. Neo-racism limits our freedoms, limits our rights, and now limits our ability to respond to COVID-19 effectively. Neo-racist barriers must be called out and addressed.

REFERENCES

- Aizenman, N. (2018, January 12). *Trump wishes we had more immigrants from Norway. Turns out we once did.* National Public Radio. <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2018/01/12/577673191/trump-wishes-we-had-more-immigrants-from-norway-turns-out-we-once-did>
- Allam, H. (2020, February 10). *FBI announces that racist violence is now equal priority to foreign terrorism.* National Public Radio. <https://www.npr.org/2020/02/10/804616715/fbi-announces-that-racist-violence-is-now-equal-priority-to-foreign-terrorism>
- Balibar, E. (1992). Is there a 'neo-racism'? In E. Balibar & I. Wallerstein (Eds.), *Race, nation, class: Ambiguous identities* (pp.17–28). Verso.
- Cantwell, B., & Lee, J. J. (2010). Unseen workers in the academic factory: Perceptions of neo-racism among international postdocs in the US and UK. *Harvard Education Review, 80*(4), 490–517.
- Cantwell, B., Lee, J. J., & Mlambo, Y. (2018). International graduate student labor as mergers and acquisitions. *International Student Journal, 8*(4), 1483–1498.
- Castiello-Gutiérrez, S., & Li, X. (2020). We are more than your paycheck. *Journal of International Students, 10*(3), i-iv. <https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v10i3.2676>
- Committee of 100. (2019). *Committee of 100 condemns chinese american racial profiling* [Press Release]. https://www.committee100.org/press_release/committee-of-100-condemns-chineseamerican-racial-profiling-2/.
- Lee, J. J. (2017). Neo-nationalism in higher education: Case of South Africa. *Studies in Higher Education, 42*(5), 869–886.
- Lee J. J., & Haupt, J. P. (2020a). Winners and losers in U.S.-China scientific research collaborations. *Higher Education, 80*, 57–74.
- Lee, J. J., & Haupt, J. P. (2020b). Scientific collaboration on COVID-19 amidst geopolitical tensions between the US and China. *Research Square*. <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-37599/v1>
- Lee, J. J., Jon, J. E., & Byun, K. (2017). Neo-Racism and neo-nationalism within Asia: The experiences of international students in South Korea. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 21*(2), 136–155.
- Lee, J. J., & Opio, T. (2011). Coming to America: Challenges and difficulties faced by African international student athletes. *Sport, Education and Society, 16*(5), 629–644.
- Lee, J., & Rice, C. (2007). Welcome to America? International student perceptions of discrimination. *Higher Education, 53*(3), 381–409.
- Lewis, M. (2020). Criminalizing China. *Journal of Criminology Law and Criminology, 111*(1). <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3600580>

- MIT News Office. (2019). *Letter to the MIT community: Immigration is a kind of oxygen*. Retrieved from <http://news.mit.edu/2019/letter-community-immigration-is-oxygen-0625>
- President and Fellows of Harvard & Massachusetts Institute of Technology vs U.S. Department of Homeland Security (2020). Civil Action No. 20-cv-11283-ADB. United States District Court District of Massachusetts. https://www.courtlistener.com/recap/gov.uscourts.mad.223165/gov.uscourts.mad.223165.92.0_4.pdf
- Redden, E. (2019a, February 5). *Not an isolated incident*. Inside Higher Ed. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/02/05/weighing-duke-case-experts-discuss-discrimination-against-international-students-and>.
- Redden, E. (2019b, March 21). *Tensions over international students*. Inside Higher Ed. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/03/21/maryland-professor-resigns-after-allegedly-making-discriminatory-comments-about>.
- Shao, E. (2019). *President and provost release a statement reaffirming support for international community at Stanford*. Stanford Daily. <https://www.stanforddaily.com/2019/03/08/president-and-provost-release-a-statement-reaffirming-support-for-international-community-at-stanford/>
- Stein, S., & de Andreotti, V. O. (2016). Cash, competition, or charity: International students and the global imaginary. *Higher Education*, 72(2), 225–239.
- Suspitsyna, T., & Shalka, T. R. (2019). The Chinese international student as a (post) colonial other: An analysis of cultural representations of a US media discourse. *The Review of Higher Education*, 42(5), 287–308.
- Wang, C. (2020, April 14) Let's stop the scapegoating during a global pandemic. *American Civil Liberties Union*. <https://www.aclu.org/news/racial-justice/lets-stop-the-scapegoating-during-a-global-pandemic/>
- Zhang, J. (2020, August). *Interview with Professor Margaret Lewis on China initiative*. US-China Perception Monitor. <https://uscnpm.org/2020/07/27/interview-with-professor-margaret-lewis-on-china-initiative/>
-

JENNY J. LEE, PhD, is a professor at the Center for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Arizona. Professor Lee's research examines how policies, geopolitics, and social forces shape inequities in higher education, in the US and abroad. Her forthcoming edited book, "U.S. Power in International Higher Education," to be published by Rutgers University Press, will be released mid-2021. Email: jennylee@arizona.edu

International Student Agency in the Face of a Global Health Crisis

Megan Siczek

The George Washington University, USA

Much of the literature on international students in U.S. higher education—as well as the perception of many within our institutional communities—focuses on the challenges these globally mobile students may experience. Challenges related to acculturation, English language proficiency, academic adjustment, and cross-cultural interactions are prevalent in research (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). However, research has also demonstrated international students’ ability to succeed academically in spite of some of these challenges as a result of their motivation, effort, and persistence (Andrade, 2006). This maps with my own research finding that international students negotiate their socioacademic experiences in the mainstream U.S. college curriculum with self-awareness and a sense of agency that allows them to shape their own learning experiences (Siczek, 2018).

This is the story of how a group of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) students at a private university in Washington, DC, demonstrated resilience and agency in the face of a global health pandemic.

In spring 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic began to affect the United States, these students were enrolled in my on-campus undergraduate course called “Oral Academic Communication for International Students.” The main content of the course draws on students’ global experiences and linguistic assets while preparing them to meet the communicative expectations of the U.S. undergraduate curriculum. It is usually a highly interactive and productive class that covers a variety of oral academic genres, with students gaining authority and voice as the semester progresses.

We were halfway through the semester when students at our university were told that they were expected to go home for spring break and await an announcement about whether they should return to campus. Of course, going home was not an easy option for a group of students from Austria, China, Germany, Pakistan, South Korea, and Taiwan. As the end of spring break neared, students were told that the rest of the

semester would be taught online. International students could head home or petition the university for continued accommodation on campus. Students and their families were forced to make quick decisions, balancing the competing priorities of health and academics. By the final weeks of the semester, only three students in my class remained in the United States: One was in her third campus housing location in less than a month; one had moved to a local hotel, where she would stay to finish the semester; and one moved into a rented room in an AirBnB house in the suburbs of Washington, DC. The rest of my students endured long journeys to their home countries, often spending weeks in hotel- or facility-based quarantine before being allowed to return to their family homes. Throughout this disruption, online learning continued.

How did students manage the course despite this disruption and dislocation? They showed up; they engaged; they connected with and cared for one another; they learned. I was amazed and inspired by their response. The students who could join synchronous sessions online during our usual class time, entering the “room” fully prepared and contributing actively to class activities and discussions. Those who could not join watched recorded versions of each class session and posted multimodal alternate assignments in which they engaged with the learning material as well as the ideas their classmates had discussed during the synchronous class.

While we were online during the second half of the semester, students virtually facilitated discussions on self-selected TED Talks covering global and cross-cultural themes, designed and shared internationally oriented infographics that applied best practices for visual communication, practiced vocal techniques for oral presentations, and designed and delivered individual presentations proposing an initiative to advance internationalization on campus. These persuasive presentations were grounded in scholarly literature on the internationalization of higher education and situated in the local context of the university and its needs. Students proposed initiatives such as an international research hub on campus, the enhancement of the university’s foreign language requirement to promote global competence, a new curricular requirement focusing on global diversity and inclusion, a peer-pairing program for domestic and international students, and even a global health crisis headquarters so that the university could address pandemics like COVID-19 with a higher level of preparedness and coordination. Their presentations were uniquely informed by the global perspectives they had developed based on their own transnational migration experiences and were delivered with remarkable professionalism despite conditions being far different from the intended classroom-based presentation.

During our 6 weeks of online learning, my contact with students was high, and I had a new window into their lives outside of the classroom and the extent to which they invested in their educations. I was witness to the resilience these students displayed as they negotiated this unsettling global crisis. I posit that these international students were primed to adapt—and even thrive—during this global crisis because they themselves had crossed cultural, linguistic, geographical, and even epistemological boundaries to pursue higher education in the United States. Thus, my call to action as I wrap up this 10th anniversary essay for the *Journal of International Students* is that we continue to engage in qualitative inquiry into the lived experience

of globally mobile students in our institutional settings, targeting research that illuminates their global interconnectedness and the agency they display as they navigate new and uncertain socioacademic terrain.

REFERENCES

- Andrade, M. S. (2006). International students in English-speaking universities: Adjustment factors. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 5(2), 131–154.
- Siczek, M. (2018). *International students in first-year writing classes: A journey through socioacademic space*. University of Michigan Press.
- Smith, R. A., & Khawaja, N. G. (2011). A review of the acculturation experiences of international students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35(6), 699–713.

MEGAN SICZEK, PhD, is an Associate Professor of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) at the George Washington University in Washington, DC. Her research interests include second language writing, English as a global language, and the internationalization of higher education. She is the author of a number of articles and book chapters about global education initiatives and second language writing, as well as the book *International Students in First-Year Writing: A Journey through Socio-Academic Space*. Email: msiczek@gwu.edu

Celebrating the Last 10 Years of Community College Internationalization

Rosalind Latiner Raby
California State University, Northridge, USA

In the United States, about 36% of all community colleges offer international student programs, of which, about 13% also offer education abroad programs (Malveaux & Raby, 2019). Documentation on community college international education has existed since the 1950s. Advocacy for community college international education is also not new and is found in numerous American Association of Community Colleges publications, association reports, and addresses given by multiple generations of community college leaders who view internationalization as an important way to serve the community college missions of open access, to support gainful employment goals, and to support student success initiatives (American Association of Community Colleges, 2018; Boggs & Irwin, 2007; Gleazer, 1975). In celebration of the *Journal of International Students* 10th year anniversary, this essay outlines the advances made in community college mobility programs over the past decade. Mobility here refers to both inbound (international student programs) and outbound (education abroad programs).

Community colleges play a critical role in training adults to gain skills needed for participation in a global economy where required job skills change rapidly. This global economy is a context in which international and cross-cultural skills are in high demand. This demand is being addressed by community colleges adding international learning in their academic and in career training curricula and programs. It is also addressed by fostering access to international programs and activities for all students. In 1996, Raby and Tarrow discussed how “with the current recession, the fate of international education is in jeopardy” (p. 20). In 2012, another recession became the backdrop against severe budget cuts that severely impacted periphery programs such as international education (Raby, 2012). Today, the economic context of COVID will once again redefine the number of students who can afford to travel, the ease of travel, and how much infrastructure support will be given by institutions to support international programs. Yet, in learning from the past, it is evident that

...when the global economy stabilized so did internationalization efforts. Even more importantly is that after each crisis period, a new generation of individuals emerged as international advocates and who continually seek to implement changes in the college. Herein lays the promise of the future. (Raby, 2019, p. 16)

The promise of the future rests on research previously conducted on community college internationalization as this research embeds advocacy and best practices so that patterns that work do not need to be reinvented. The community college mission does not have a singular focus as it was designed to serve multiple purposes. Internationalization is one of these missions (Ayers, 2015; Gleazer, 1975; Raby, 2019). This works in harmony with a local mandate to prepare graduates to gain local jobs, even those jobs that are located outside the geographic boundary of the college (Ayers, 2015). Internationalization is included in missions (Whatley & Raby, 2020) and in strategic planning policies (Copeland, 2016).

Open access is a guiding principle that allows enrollment opportunities for all who want to learn. Open access supports current equity agendas. However, equity in international education while encouraging wide-spread enrollment also has limitations. For international students, there are minimum qualifications, including international testing scores and English language proficiencies. Other limitations occur when international students are labeled as a privileged group, which skews the services that they receive (Viggiano et al., 2017). For education abroad, minimum qualifications include grade point average requirements, code of conduct, financial ability, and deficit narratives that stereotype non-traditional students (Whatley & Raby, 2020).

Today, there are dedicated offices and dedicated mid- and senior-level leadership positions that oversee internationalization. This includes partnerships with senior administration (Brennen & Dellow, 2013), with academic departments and campus services (Smith, 2019), and with campus assessment practices (Wood, 2019). There are also known areas for augmentation of support services. For international students, this includes office policies (Lau et al., 2019), student advising practices (Zhang, 2016), addressing marginalization resulting from prejudice and discrimination (Hansen et al., 2018), and understanding the heterogeneity of international students (Bennani, 2018). For education abroad, this includes creative financing (Giammarella, 2012), addressing deficit student labels (Raby, 2019; Robertson, 2019; Whatley, 2019), re-examining entry requirements, including planning time (Amani & Kim, 2017), and understanding when curriculum limits and when it expands free time (McKee, 2019).

Decreased state and federal funding for community colleges complicates the financing of international education offices and accentuates marketing to increase the number of students who enroll in programs, which in turn, directly impacts the larger college budget. Research explains why the college needs to recruit international students (Bohman, 2014), why students want to study in community colleges (Zhang & Hagedorn, 2013), and why myths can negatively impact student success (Budd et al., 2016; Viggiano et al., 2018).

Research also shows that international programs positively influence student success that lead to increased persistence, transfer, and completion. This is true for students who study abroad (Raby et al., 2014; Whatley, 2019) and for international students (Benneni, 2018; Slantcheva-Durst & Knaggs, 2017) whose high academic aspirations help them to overcoming personal challenges (Friedman, 2018).

Since the 1980s, national associations, practitioners, and researchers used advocacy and research to develop and implement best practices. As a result, community college student mobility programs expanded in number and in scope. Today, it is common for colleges to include “international” or “global” in their mission, vision, and annual priorities. There is an increase in full-time dedicated positions for those leading international education, increased access for students to participate in various international programs, expanded use of technologies that further broaden access, and collaborations that extend beyond the campus. Most importantly, students choose to attend community colleges to better themselves, and they make sound decisions to engage in college programs to expand their knowledge, which includes international mobility programs.

In the post-COVID period, it is likely that severe state funding challenges, lower overall and international student enrollments, and high turnover of senior administrators will once again challenge community college international education. I propose that the significant research about community college internationalization has taught five points that will be important drivers in moving international education forward. First, advocacy needs to reinforce that local is not the opposite of global and that international education is indeed one of the community colleges’ missions as it encapsulates an academic shift that promotes international literacy as a critical employability and educational skill. Second, avoid haphazard implementation of services that reinforce hegemonic patterns in which some students are given access to life-altering experiences while others are denied those experiences. Third, eliminate student stereotypes that feed into a negative narrative. Fourth, use caution when designating students as a desirable source of revenue. Finally, understand that the limits of student success are connected to a lack of supportive institutional practices rather than to a lack of student interest. Above all, “Change is a choice needed to be made by visionary leaders who must prioritize and then lead these reform efforts that are sustainable and not impacted by the shifting of time and institutional circumstances (Raby, 2019, p. 17).

REFERENCES

- Amani, M., & Kim, M. M. (2017). Study abroad participation at community colleges: Students’ decision and influential factors. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 41(10), 1–15. doi:10.1080/10668926.2017.1352544
- American Association of Community Colleges. (2018). *AACC competencies for community college leaders*. https://www.aacc.nche.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/AACC-2018-Competencies_111618_5.1.pdf
- Ayers, D. F. (2015). Credentialing structures, pedagogies, practices, and curriculum goals: Trajectories of change in community college mission statements. *Community College Review*, 43, 191–214. doi:10.1177/0091552115569847

- Bennani, W. C. (2018). *Contributors to the successful transfer of international community college students* [Unpublished dissertation]. San Francisco State University, California.
- Boggs, G. R., & Irwin, J. (2007). What every community college leader needs to know: Building leadership for international education. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 138, 25–30.
- Bohman, E. (2014). Attracting the world: Institutional initiatives' effects on international students' decision to enroll. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 38(8), 710–720. doi:10.1080/10668926.2014.897081
- Brennan, M., & Dellow, D. A. (2013). International students as a resource for achieving comprehensive internationalization. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 161, 27–37.
- Budd, D., Serban, A., Van Hook, D. G., & Raby, R. L. (2016). Addressing myths about international students. In R. L. Raby & E. J. Valeau (Eds.), *International education at community colleges* (pp. 215–222). Palgrave MacMillan.
- Copeland, J. M. (2016). *Community colleges' internationalization: Development of an assessment instrument* [Unpublished dissertation]. Barry University, Florida.
- Friedman, J. Z. (2018). A horse of a different color? Re-examining international students at community colleges in the U.S. and Canada. In R. L. Raby & E. J. Valeau (Eds.), *Handbook on comparative issues of community colleges and global counterparts*. Springer.
- Giammarella, M. (2012). Using student fees to support education abroad. In S. E. Sutin, D. Derrico, R. L. Raby, & E. J. Valeau (Eds.), *Increasing effectiveness of the community college financial model: A global perspective for the global economy*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gleazer, E. J., Jr. (1975, March 24). Memorandum to community college presidents. *American Association of Community and Junior Colleges Newsletter*.
- Hansen, H. R., Shneyderman, Y., McNamara, G. S., & Grace, L. (2018). Acculturative stress and native and U.S. culture immersion of international students at a community college. *Journal of International Students*, 8(1), 215–232. <https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v8i1.161>
- Lau, J., Garza, T., & Garcia, H. (2019). International students in community colleges: On-campus services used and its effect on sense of belonging. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 43(2), 109–121.
- Malveaux, G. F., & Raby, R. L. (2019). *Study abroad opportunities for community college students and strategies for global learning*. IGI-Global.
- McKee, A.-M. (2019). A case study exploring ways to increase access to education abroad for career and technical students with limited availability. In G. F. Malvaeux & R.L. Raby (Eds.), *Study abroad opportunities for community college students and strategies for global learning* (pp. 242–255). IGI-Global.
- Raby, R. L. (2012). Re-imagining international education at community colleges. *Audem: International Journal of Higher Education and Democracy*, 3, 81–99.
- Raby, R. L. (2019). Changing the conversation: Measures that contribute to community college education abroad success. In G. F. Malveaux & R. L. Raby (Eds.), *Study abroad opportunities for community college students and strategies for global learning* (pp. 1–22). IGI-Global.

- Raby, R. L., & Tarrow, N. (Eds.). (1996). *Dimensions of the community college: International and inter/multicultural perspectives*. Garland Publishers.
- Raby, R. L., Rhodes, G. M., & Biscarra, A. (2014). Community college study abroad: Implications for student success. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 38(2–3), 174–183.
- Robertson, J. (2019). The outreach triad for successful study abroad programs: Students, faculty, and the local community. In G. F. Malveaux & R. L. Raby (Eds.), *Study abroad opportunities for community college students and strategies for global learning* (pp. 107–120). IGI-Global.
- Slantcheva-Durst, S., & Knaggs, C. (2017). Community college international students and their campus involvement. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 43(2), 81–93. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2017.1416316>
- Smith, C. (2019). Institutionalizing international education and embedding education abroad into the campus community. In G. F. Malveaux & R. L. Raby (Eds.), *Study abroad opportunities for community college students and strategies for global learning* (pp. 172–184). IGI-Global.
- Viggiano, T., López Damián, A. I., Morales Vázquez, E., & Levin, J. S. (2018). The others: Equitable access, international students, and the community college. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 22(1), 71–85.
- Whatley, M. (2019). Clearing the hurdle: The relationship between institution-level factors and community college study abroad. In G. Malveaux & R. L. Raby (Eds.), *Study abroad opportunities for community college students and strategies for global learning* (pp. 90–106). IGI Global Publishers.
- Whatley, M., & Raby, R. L. (2020). Understanding inclusion in community college education abroad: An investigation of policies and practices. *Frontiers*, 32(1), 80–103.
- Wood, D. (2019). Study abroad outcomes assessment: A community college case study. In G. F. Malveaux & R. L. Raby (Eds.), *Study abroad opportunities for community college students and strategies for global learning* (pp. 90–107). IGI-Global.
- Zhang, Y. (2016). An overlooked population in community college: International students' (in)validation experiences with academic advising. *Community College Review*, 44(2), 153–170. doi:10.1177/0091552116633293
- Zhang, Y., & Hagedorn, L.S. (2013). Chinese education agent views of American community colleges. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice* 38(8), 721–732. doi:10.1080/10668926.2014.897082.

ROSALIND LATINER RABY, PhD, is a Senior Lecturer in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Department at California State University, Northridge. Her major research interests lie in the area of community college international students, community college education abroad, international publishing trends, and higher education research. Email: rabyrl@aol.com

(Re)Learning to Live Together in 2020

Darla K. Deardorff
Duke University, USA

We must learn to live together as brothers, or perish together as fools.
– *Martin Luther King Jr.*

Ten years ago, the world was quite a different place with the devastation of a 7.0 magnitude earthquake in Haiti, the exuberance of the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver, the release of the first iPad, the launch of Instagram, and the beginning of Arab Spring. Fast forward to 2020 and not only is it the 10th anniversary of the *Journal of International Students*, but the world is facing unprecedented times with a global pandemic that has illustrated the interconnectedness of humankind like never before. We have all been reminded of the power of human connection as we experience isolation, confinement, social distancing, and even fear. We have witnessed powerful images of front-line workers giving their all, and neighbors in cities and towns across the world connecting from balconies and through windowpanes. These images have reminded us how much our lives depend on those around us, and how important it is that we renew our efforts in learning how to live together.

These challenging months have been an opportunity for us to reflect upon what matters most, what bonds us all together, and what it means to be a good neighbor. For international educators, 2020 has not only challenged us but also provided opportunities to re-think and re-imagine international education in a troubled 21st century. For international students, 2020 has not only wreaked havoc on study plans but some have faced challenging situations of increased xenophobia and discrimination in their host countries.

Many questions have been raised through all of this and many are yet to come given the uncertainty we continue to face. One key question I keep returning to is this: What does it mean to live together, especially now? We, as international educators, have tried to address this question through our efforts in advancing global learning, intercultural competence and global citizenship. Yet, even then,

these efforts have been primarily directed toward domestic students with less intentionality in including international students in such efforts. The pandemic has illuminated some of what may be missing in these efforts to date. For example, it is natural as educators that we focus on knowledge, learning, teaching, activities, and experiences. Within the literature on intercultural and global competence, definitions focus on knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Increasingly, there is research about social-emotional learning, emotional intelligence, and discussion around empathy. Yet, it seems like empathy may not be enough, emotional intelligence may not be enough, and intercultural competence and global citizenship may not be enough. What seems to be missing in all of this, is perhaps how we view others and how we view ourselves in relation to others. It illuminates the theme of connection, which has been demonstrated so powerfully over this last year. What if we viewed ourselves through the lens of “we” given our interconnectedness? What if we viewed others through the lens of neighbor, both our local and global neighbors? This could shift our way of thinking about global citizenship and make it more real.

Neighborliness is a term not often found in current Western literature and yet this value dates back to the earliest days of humanity. Ancient literature discusses the importance of loving one’s neighbor – both Confucius and Jesus said “Love thy neighbor as thyself” with religions noting the importance – and even centrality – of loving one’s neighbor. This is not just the purview of religion. In the 17th century, famous Enlightenment philosopher John Locke (1977) stated, “to love our neighbors as ourselves is such a truth for regulating human society, that by that alone one might determine all cases in social morality.” How do we behave toward our neighbors - locally and globally? What does it mean to be a “good neighbor?” Even more than that, how might the world be different if humans actually practiced loving their neighbors (and enemies) and putting others’ needs as equal to their own? This “loving one’s neighbor” goes far beyond greeting card sentiment. It is hard and sometimes even dangerous work, when such love means standing up for what’s right, sacrificing for others’ good, and even risking one’s life, as in the case of healthcare workers today. As Martin Luther King Jr (1963) observed, “The true neighbor will risk his position, his prestige and even his life for the welfare of others.” Company CEOs and business leaders also see that love works. Joel Manby (2012), as a CEO, writes about seven timeless principles connected to this transformational way to lead: through patience, kindness, trust, unselfishness, truth, forgiveness, and dedication. The challenge for international educators is to explore how these principles of loving one’s neighbor translate into programs and practices.

And what might this look like within international education? To answer that question, we can draw from the humanistic value of *ubuntu*, originating from South Africa, which sees humanity as bound together. Desmond Tutu (n.d.) explains this term in the following way:

Ubuntu speaks particularly about the fact that you can’t exist as a human being in isolation. It speaks about our interconnectedness. You can’t be human all by yourself, and when you have this quality – ubuntu- you are known for your generosity. We think of ourselves far too frequently as

just individuals, separated from one another, whereas you are connected and what you do affects the whole world. When you do well, it spreads out; it is for the whole of humanity.

Other cultures have similar concepts such as *kizuna* (Japanese), *siratulrahim* (Malay), *alli kawsay*, *nandereko* and *buen vivir* (Andean). This concept goes a step further to a deeper identity of an interconnected human being living within community. This becomes a paradigm shift from “me” to “we,” a shift that has been emphasized during the pandemic. It becomes imperative that we move beyond an “us” versus “them” mindset to seeing the common humanity of all. As international educators, how can we reframe our work to more of a “we” approach that emphasizes community – or even as Martin Luther King Jr, said “the beloved community?”

Desmond Tutu’s granddaughter Mungi Ngomane (2020) writes about living everyday ubuntu in community by implementing several actions: see yourself in others, choose to see the wider perspective, put yourself in the shoes of others, believe in the good of everyone, embrace our diversity, seek out ways to connect, remember the power of forgiveness, and acknowledge reality. Many of these actions already exist in much of the work of international educators who can be even more intentional about addressing these actions through internationalization efforts that focus more explicitly on our shared humanity. Let’s embrace this opportunity to rethink and reimagine what it means to truly care for each other and this planet we share, through building deeper relationships as local and global neighbors and through living in authentic community as we re-commit to learning to live together.

Love and compassion are necessities, not luxuries.
Without them, humanity cannot survive. – Dalai Lama

REFERENCES

- King, Jr. M. L. (1963). *Strength to love*. Harper & Row.
- Locke, J. (1977). *The Locke reader: Selections from the works of John Locke*. Cambridge University Press.
- Manby, J. (2012). *Love works: Seven timeless principles for effective leaders*. Zondervan.
- Ngomane, M. (2020). *Everyday ubuntu: Living better together, the African way*. Harper.
- Tutu, D. (n.d.). *Ubuntu*. Tutu Foundation UK.
<http://www.tutufoundationuk.org/ubuntu/>

DARLA K. DEARDORFF, EdD, is a research scholar with the Social Science Research Institute at Duke University, and the executive director of the Association of International Education Administrators. She is an internationally recognized expert on intercultural competence, global leadership, and international education

assessment. With 8 books and 60+ articles, her most recent book entitled *Manual for Developing Intercultural Competencies: Story Circles* (Routledge/UNESCO, 2020-open access) highlights a new tool, Story Circles, that is being used worldwide in the development of intercultural competencies to bridge divides and build community. Email: d.deardorff@duke.edu; www.iccglobal.org

Examining the Role of Theory in Qualitative Research: A Literature Review of Studies on Chinese International Students in Higher Education

Tang T. Heng

National Institute of Education-Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

ABSTRACT

Scholars argue that higher education and international student research suffer from a lack of theoretical engagement, which is epistemologically limiting. This is troubling as theory frames research design and findings and pluralizes our understanding of a phenomenon. Given the large number of Chinese international students worldwide (and related research), this article uses them as an analytic example to understand the role of theories in shaping qualitative research designs, focuses, and findings. I reviewed 43 qualitative research articles on Chinese international students' experiences. Twenty-eight percent of the articles were found to lack theoretical engagement. When used, theories clustered around acculturation and sociocultural perspectives. Sixty percent of the articles foregrounded student challenges, as opposed to student agency or changes (40%). I discuss the consequences of a lack of theoretical engagement or diversity on how we understand and support international students, and conclude by urging scholars to increase, diversify, and generate theories as well as embrace cross-institutional and cross-disciplinary collaborations on research on international students.

Keywords: Chinese, higher education, international students, literature review, student mobility, theoretical framework

INTRODUCTION

International students play an important role in the internationalization of higher education. Internationalization has been defined as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery

of post-secondary education” (Knight, 2004, p. 11). Valued for the economic, cultural, and globalizing benefits they bring, international students are heavily recruited by higher education institutions as an expedient way to internationalize (Guo & Guo, 2017). Given this connection, research on international students and internationalization has been rapidly gaining ground over the past two decades (Bedenlier et al., 2018; Tight, 2018). The recurrence of “students” as a theme in internationalization research since 2007 (Bedenlier et al., 2018), for instance, highlights the centrality of international students in internationalization research. However, scholars have observed that the field of higher education, as with research on international students, is either deeply atheoretical or theoretically narrow, crippling the field’s maturity and influence (Abdullah et al., 2014; Marginson et al., 2010; Ryan, 2011; Tight, 2004). In response to these observations, I conducted a literature review to examine in-depth the role theory plays in relation to research design and focus. I used qualitative research on Chinese international students’ experiences as an analytic case, as this student population forms the largest source of international students worldwide, and there is a burgeoning body of associated research that I could leverage. Consequently, I argue for more engagement, explication, and diversification of theory in qualitative research on international students in higher education.

To set the context for this article, I begin by first defining theory, theoretical framework, and paradigm, as well as elaborating on the role of theory in research. Thereafter, I discuss empirical research examining the role of theory in higher education and international student research, before explaining why Chinese international students are adopted as an analytic case.

Role of Theory in Research

Maxwell (2005) defined theory in qualitative research as “a set of concepts and the proposed relationships among these, a structure that is intended to represent or model something about the world” (p. 42). This systematic structure of concepts to explain or predict a particular phenomenon guides researchers in thinking about the phenomenon studied and choice of methodologies (Merriam, 2002). Researchers beginning a study may hold a “tentative theory” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 33) grounded in personal experiences or concepts from academic literature of the phenomena of investigation. From a tentative theory, a coherent assembly of relevant literature, concepts, and theories, woven in with assumptions, expectations, and beliefs, forms a theoretical framework. This framework drives a study through its justification, definition of research questions, selection of methods, identification of validity threats, and interpretation of findings (Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 2002). Apart from framing research studies, understanding of phenomena or hypothesizing the validity of theories, theories can also be generated from empirical research. Grounded theory, for instance, is a popular methodology for generating theory through constant comparison and testing of emergent theories with data (Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

A theoretical framework is not to be confused with a literature review as the latter is a synthesis of major themes in the literature, lacking ideas that impart rigor into how problems, methods, and validity are to be understood (Rocco & Plakhotnik,

2009). While some have used the terms theoretical and conceptual frameworks interchangeably, Rocco and Plakhotnik (2009) differentiated them by arguing that the former draws from specific theories with a goal toward its investigation, whereas the latter draws from a network of concepts relevant to the study's goals while in search of an emergent theory. For the purpose of this article, however, I use these terms interchangeably as the focus is on a broad interpretation of theory and its role in qualitative research.

Intimately related to a theoretical or conceptual framework is the paradigm within which a study is situated. A paradigm, or interpretive framework, is a complex interplay of a "researcher's epistemological, ontological, and methodological premises" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 22). Indeed, this article is premised upon Denzin and Lincoln's (2005) argument that theoretical perspectives drive research goals, questions, methods, and findings, and are linked to a researcher's paradigm, which is in turn shaped by his or her personal history, sociocultural environment, and any other external influences. Embedded within a paradigm are assumptions around how and what we know, as well as the nature of being, and these assumptions are tied to fundamental beliefs and value systems (Kuhn, 1970).

By extension, educational research is value laden as it is influenced by a researcher's sense of what is useful or important. In turn, values influence how we construct, implement, and interpret our research (Lather, 1992; Pillow, 2003; Smith, 1983). Some values and beliefs are implicit and taken for granted, while others are explicit and contentious. Positionality statements included in qualitative research, for instance, foreground this nonneutral nature of knowledge development when researchers question how their identity shaped awareness, interpretations, and evaluations of the research approach or phenomenon investigated (Caelli et al., 2003). In the domain of social science research where the study of human society and relationships is "inseparably connected to our minds with all the attendant subjectivity, emotions, and values" (Smith, 1983, p. 5), I contend that absolute objectivity is elusive. Scholars have also cautioned that narrow adoption of paradigms in research can limit or skew understandings (Bodycott & Lai, 2012; Marginson et al., 2010; Stein, 2017). Thus, I assume that a diversity of paradigms and positionalities in research are to be valued as they allow us to access multiple perspectives around the phenomena being researched. A pluralist stance acknowledges that we need to live with complexity and uncertainty, and that there are diverse forms of knowledge and ways of knowing that are situated within specific contexts (Andreotti et al., 2011). In short, these assumptions around the subjectivity of research and importance of diverse paradigms frame this article as I approach my literature review from a qualitative, interpretative, and pluralist stance.

Theory in Higher Education and International Student Research

Bedenlier et al. (2018) observed that market and institutional perspectives tend to dominate research on internationalization before 2007. Scholars have impressed on the need to diversify theoretical paradigms around internationalization beyond a market-based model, and suggested new paradigms—such as governance and regulation (Ramia et al., 2013), human security (Marginson et al., 2010),

transculturalism (Ryan, 2011), and decolonization (Stein, 2017)—to embrace. Changing patterns of student mobility, influenced by economic, political, technological, and institutional developments, likewise necessitate constant updating of theoretical paradigms. To illustrate, amidst increasing regional movements within higher education, Lee et al. (2017) observed that prevailing theoretical models of neo-racism and discrimination analyzing the treatment of ethnic minority international students from less developed, non-Western countries studying in more developed Western countries are insufficient in explaining the discrimination faced by Chinese international students in South Korea because of overlapping racial phenotype and cultural values. Instead, Lee et al. developed a newer theoretical paradigm—neo-nationalism—as it better explains discrimination around international students studying within similar geographic or economic development zones. Thus, the continuous evolution of international students’ mobility and experiences in higher education spells a need to diversify and update theoretical paradigms.

Yet, scholars argue that a large amount of research in higher education can be construed as “atheoretical”—i.e., “without explicit description, review or re-examination or modification of theories/ concepts/ models/ paradigms in guiding the research or review concerned” (Abdullah et al., 2014, p. 244). Out of 406 articles reviewed from prominent higher education journals in 2000, Tight (2004) found that 58% of them were atheoretical, 16% showed some evidence of theory engagement, while 26% were explicit in theory engagement. Theory, when discussed, tended to be shallow, with minimal deep engagement or debates. In particular, research on themes like student experience in higher education, tended to exhibit the least theoretical engagement. Ryan’s (2011) observation that research around teaching and learning for international students “lacks a conceptual framework to underpin and transform research and practice” (p. 638) echoes Tight’s (2004) findings. Abdullah et al. (2014) found similar results: 66% out of the 497 journal articles on international students they reviewed over the past 30 years were classified as atheoretical. They attributed the atheoretical nature of research on international students to different reasons: First, higher education institutions view international students as being on the periphery and tend to see them as problems; consequently, this restricts their engagement and understanding of international students through different lenses. Next, the commodification of higher education results in a top-down or transactional approach that prevents more holistic and bottom-up ways of understanding international students. Relatedly, Tight (2004) observed that one plausible reason for the atheoretical nature of higher education research is an unbalanced privileging of evidence-based practice—in examining what works best, less emphasis is consequently directed to theory.

The lack of theoretical engagement in research of international students is troubling. Studies lacking engagement in theory may run into study-related issues like loss of focus (Rocco & Plakhotnik, 2009). Field-related issues may include the omission of diverse perspectives (Stein, 2017), perpetuation of implicit bias (Heng, 2019), delay of a field’s maturity (Kuhn, 1970), or restriction of findings to the local, rather than global (Abdullah et al., 2014). As such, one aim of this article is to update Tight (2004) and Abdullah et al.’s (2014) work by investigating the state of existing qualitative research on the experiences of Chinese international students in higher

education institutions through a review of literature. This scope is motivated by a desire to explore deeper descriptive details related to the use of theory in research to complement Tight (2004) and Abdullah et al.'s (2014) findings, as their studies tended to be high-level and synoptic. Another aim of this article is to provide an overview of the research landscape on Chinese international students' experiences, understand how theory has been used in this body of work, and explore its consequent implications. To this end, I conducted a literature review on Chinese international students in higher education.

Research on Chinese International Students

Chinese international students are used as an analytic example in this study as they constitute the largest proportion of international students worldwide and are the top source of international students in both traditional (e.g., Australia, the United Kingdom) and nontraditional destinations (e.g., Korea, Malaysia; UNESCO Institute for Statistics [UIS], 2019). Perspectives of Chinese international students are not always positive as evident by the press's negative reports (Abelmann & Kang, 2014) and research's frequent portrayal of them as a "challenge" (Henze & Zhu, 2012, p. 91). The body of work around Chinese international students has bloomed to the extent that in an analysis of two decades of literature on internationalization in the *Journal of Studies in International Education*, "China" emerged as one of three name-like concepts (the others being "United States" and "Europe"; Bedenlier et al., 2018). Thus, this literature offers fertile ground for close analysis of how theory is engaged in international student research. Through a review of the literature on Chinese international students, I analyze how theory has been used and how it affects research design and focus.

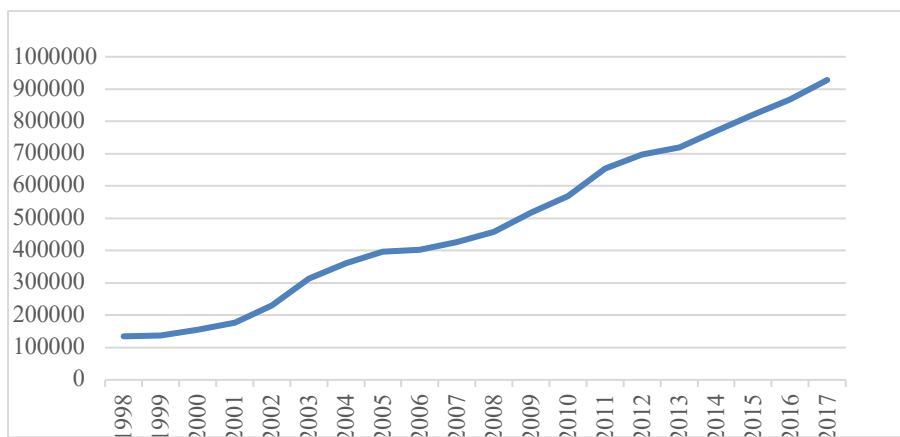
RESEARCH APPROACH AND ANALYTIC FRAMEWORK

As Abdullah et al.'s (2014) research follows from Tight's (2004) and focuses squarely on international students, I took reference predominantly from the former's research approach and analytic framework. Abdullah et al. utilized 15 of Tight's higher education journals and included the *Journal of Studies in International Education (JSIE)*. *JSIE* was included as it yielded a large number of articles, is established internationally in the field of international and higher education, and has a higher impact factor. A total of 16 higher education journals were searched and are listed in Table 1. I searched for research articles that involved more than 50% Chinese international students as participants to ensure findings are reflective of the dominant group. I also searched for articles focused on understanding Chinese international students' experiences (e.g., academic, emotional, language, social experiences, coping strategies) as Abdullah et al.'s (2014) research found that such a focus constituted more than half of international student research. Search keywords included, but were not limited to, "China," "Chinese," "international students," "experience" and "satisf*" (e.g., satisfaction). The search period was restricted to 2005 and 2017. As evident in Figure 1, the acceleration in outbound Chinese students occurred after 2002; given the time lag associated with the research and publication

process, I included articles from 2005 onward. At the time of writing this article, 2017 was the final year of inclusion as there was no outbound mobility data from China after 2017 (UIS, 2019). I only included articles that utilized qualitative research approaches and review of literature (as with Abdullah et al.), and excluded causal and co-relational research, as such research may approach theory differently. Further, the predominance of qualitative over quantitative research on international students justified this decision (Abdullah et al., 2014).

Table 1: Higher Education Journals Reviewed

<u>Name of journal</u>	<u>Number of articles</u>
<i>Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education</i>	1
<i>Higher Education</i>	4
<i>Higher Education Management and Policy</i>	0
<i>Higher Education Policy</i>	0
<i>Higher Education Quarterly</i>	3
<i>Higher Education Research & Development</i>	5
<i>Innovative Higher Education</i>	0
<i>Journal of College Student Development</i>	4
<i>Journal of Higher Education</i>	0
<i>Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management</i>	2
<i>Journal of Studies in International Education</i>	10
<i>Research in Higher Education</i>	0
<i>Review of Higher Education</i>	0
<i>Studies in Higher Education</i>	4
<i>Teaching in Higher Education</i>	9
<i>Tertiary Education and Management</i>	1
<u>Total</u>	<u>43</u>



Note. Data from *International Student Mobility in Tertiary Education*, by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2019 (<http://data.uis.unesco.org/#>). In the public domain

Figure 1: Outbound Tertiary Students from China (1998–2017)

The search yielded 43 articles in total (see Appendix A). Subsequently, I analyzed these articles using Abdullah et al.’s (2014) indicators. These included: general patterns (herein renamed “publication trends”), location, theoretical perspective, degree of theoretical explicitness, target agent (renamed “participants”), core issue (renamed “research focus”), and method/ologies (Table 2). Given that most of these indicators are fairly self-explanatory and can be inferred from the findings below, I will not elaborate on each. Degree of theoretical explicitness deserves further mention: Using Tight’s (2004) guidelines, where theories, paradigms, models, or positionality were overtly stated or a theory was generated, they were classified as “explicit.” Where they could be inferred, they were classified as “some,” and where there was scant reference or no theory generated, classified as “implicit.” Under “research focus,” I further broke down my analysis by focus and whether problems participants faced were explained (omitted in Abdullah et al.’s research) as I wanted to explore the theory–research focus nexus. Given that one conceptual premise of this article is the intimate relationship between theoretical perspectives and research design and findings, such an analysis offered me the platform to deepen this discussion, which was underexplored in Abdullah et al.’s and Tight’s work as they focused on more macro analyses. I omitted analysis on some of Abdullah et al.’s indicators: For example, “author details” was omitted as many authors had transferred across institutions rendering credible analysis untenable, and “intercultural review”—whether present or absent—was omitted as I subsumed it under theoretical perspective. Unlike Abdullah et al., it was not a critical part of my conceptual framing.

Table 2: Analysis of Journal Articles Around Chinese International Students' Experiences

Type of analysis	<i>n</i>	%
Total number of articles	43	
Publication period		
2010 and before	14	33
Post 2010	29	67
Theoretical explicitness		
Explicit	17	39
Some evidence	14	33
Implicit	12	28
Method/ologies		
Interviews	36	84
Survey/questionnaires	17	39
Artefacts/document analysis	6	14
Focus group	6	14
Journals/reflections	2	5
Review of literature	1	2
Observations	1	2
Dataset	0	0
Location		
UK	11	26
Australia	7	16
USA	7	16
New Zealand	5	12
Canada	4	9
Multiple locations	3	7
Singapore	2	5
Belgium	1	2
Denmark	1	2
Hong Kong / Macau	1	2
South Korea	1	2
Participants		
Undergraduates	8	19
Graduates (master's and doctoral)	20	47
Across all levels	11	25
Not stated	4	9

RESULTS

Findings clustered around three main categories: frequency and research design, theoretical engagement, as well as theory and research focus.

Frequency and Research Design

Publication Frequency

Since 2005, there has been growing research around Chinese international students, as evident in the trend line in Figure 2, with an average of 2.3 articles published per year from 2005 to 2010, rising to 4.1 articles per year after 2010. The year 2010 is used as a divider as it is close to the midpoint of 2005-2017. Thirty-three percent of the articles were published on or before 2010, with publications more than doubling (67%) post 2010 (Table 2). This trend mapped against the increase of Chinese international students worldwide, illuminating growing interest among researchers in this population.

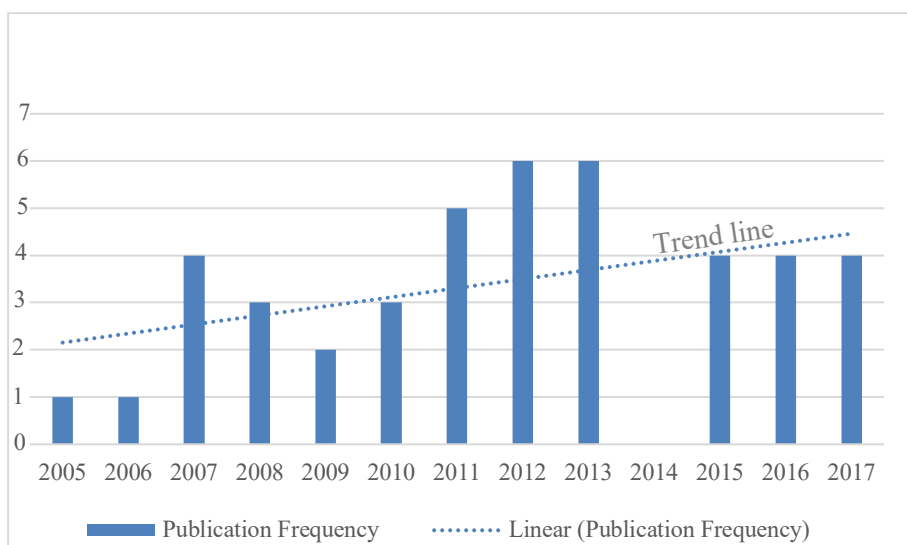


Figure 2: Number of Articles on Chinese International Students, 2005–2017

Methodologies

The most popular data collection method was interviews (84%), followed by survey/questionnaires (39%; data in survey/questionnaires are used for descriptive, not causal/correlational, purposes), and focus group (14%; Table 2). Rarely were observations (2%) and journals/reflections (5%) used. Qualitative researchers predominantly relied on self-reported data (interviews, surveys, focus groups),

privileging the role of the participant and rarely embedding themselves in participants' natural contexts to observe the world through participants' eyes.

Participants Involved

Existing studies tended to involve graduate students (47%) more than undergraduates (19%), with 25% of the studies involving both levels (Table 2), pointing to comparatively fewer studies understanding undergraduates. Graduate students include both master's and doctoral students.

Location of Study

The country where most studies was located is the United Kingdom (26%), followed by Australia (16%) and the United States (16%), Canada (9%), and New Zealand (12%; Table 2). More studies were located in traditional destinations (e.g., the United Kingdom, Australia, the United States, New Zealand, Canada) than nontraditional ones like South Korea (2%) and Hong Kong or Macau (2%). Two thirds of the studies in nontraditional locations were done in recent years, reflecting the increasing regional movements of international students.

Theoretical Engagement

Theoretical Explicitness

Twenty-eight percent of all articles did not explicitly state the theory used or generated, 33% provided some evidence, while 39% was theoretically explicit (Table 3).

Theories Used in Articles

Thirty-three articles incorporated theories from different paradigms (see Table 3). Theories around sociocultural perspectives or how the sociocultural environment influences human development (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978) were most popular, with 13 out of 33 (39%) articles using them. In particular, those relating to Chinese international students' learning vis-à-vis an analysis of their Confucian-heritage-culture were commonly used (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Watkins & Biggs, 1996). Theories around acculturation, by scholars like Berry (1997) and Ward et al. (2001), suggesting that changes within the cultural and social environments trigger modifications in how and how well individuals respond to the environments psychologically, were almost as popular (33%). Identity theories—theories related to one's formation of self or sense of self within a group—were also used (15%) and spread across aspects as wide as graduate school socialization (Golde, 1998), neo-nationalism and neo-racism (Gingrich, 2006; Lee et al., 2017), and space or education as identity construction (Kostogriz & Peeler, 2007; Moore, 2004). Internationalization theories, exploring how institutions incorporate a global or intercultural dimension into their mission and programs, were used (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Leask, 2005), albeit not commonly (12%).

Table 3: Summary of Commonly Used Theories

Theories	Theorists	No.
Theories related to sociocultural perspectives		
Cultures of learning	Cortazzi & Jin (1996), Durkin (2008)	6
Chinese learner / student approaches to learning	Watkins & Biggs (1996), Marton & Säljö (1976)	4
Sociocultural theory of learning	Lave & Wenger (1991), Vygotsky (1978)	3
Theories related to acculturation		
Acculturation	García (2001), Berry (1997), Kim (2001), Ward et al. (2001)	11
Theories related to identity		
Neo-nationalism / neo-racism	Lee (2017), Gingrich (2006)	1
Social identity theory	Tajfel (1978)	1
Graduate school socialisation	Golde, 1998	1
Education and space as identity construction	Moore (2004), Kostogriz & Peeler (2007)	1
Wholeness	Halliburton (1997)	1
Theories related to internationalization and quality		
Internationalization	Altbach & Knight (2007)	2
Curriculum internationalization	Leask (2005)	1
Quality management	Garvin (1987)	1
Total		33

Note. No. = Number of articles using theory

It is evident through this examination of the types of theories most commonly explicated that there is a keen focus on acculturation and sociocultural approaches to understanding Chinese international students' experiences. Simply put, acculturation theories can be categorized into two main types: psychological or group acculturation. Psychological acculturation studies individuals' mental health as they transit into the host or dominant cultural group (Berry, 1997; Ward et al., 2001). How well individuals cope depends on factors like age, personality, education, and cultural distance (e.g., language, religion). Group acculturation studies the changes in the culture of the minority group when in contact with a dominant or host culture. Strategies and outcomes of group acculturation are typically interpreted as how an individual fuses one's own culture with a host/dominant culture and exists along a continuum from assimilation or integration to marginalization or separation,

suggesting acculturation is not essential for survival. Acculturation theories privilege the understanding of individuals' or groups' mental health and cultural identity with comparatively less emphasis on understanding the details of how an environment shapes human development and behavior. Conversely, sociocultural approaches tend to highlight the environmental milieu and how human development is dialectically related to sociocultural contexts. Simultaneously, an examination of the process of enculturation—or acquisition of one's culture for survival—is prioritized. Rooted in both anthropology and psychology, sociocultural theories see human development as a social process (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978). By extension, learning is a process of cultural production. For instance, Chinese students expect a good teacher to have deep knowledge, while Chinese teachers expect a good student to be hardworking. These expectations align with Confucian values—like respect for elderly and emphasis on hierarchy and hard work—that undergird the Chinese culture (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996). Thus, sociocultural theories privilege understanding both the environment and social processes together with human development.

Theory and Research Focus Nexus

Most articles (60%) focused primarily on problems or challenges Chinese international students faced in universities outside China (Table 4). Of these, 26 articles focused primarily on problems or challenges, and only 38% of the authors attempted to provide extended explanations for why international students faced those problems or challenges.

Table 4: Analysis of Articles

Type of analysis	Frequency	%
Focus		
Problems/Challenges	26 out of 43	60%
Changes/Agency	17 out of 43	40%
Problem explained		
Yes	10 out of 26	38%
No	16 out of 26	62%
Studies on changes/agency		
2010 and before	7 out of 17	41%
Post 2010	10 out of 17	59%

Compared to articles focused primarily on problems or challenges, fewer (40%) examined changes in Chinese international students by acknowledging their agentic potential—i.e., illustrating the active ways by which they respond to their environment and adapt their beliefs, values, or actions. Of these, 59% were published after 2010, suggesting a movement toward a more fluid way of representing Chinese international students' experiences over the past decade.

Different types of theories appeared associated with different research foci. Of the 11 articles that used acculturation theories, eight focused solely on problems

Chinese international students faced, while three incorporated perspectives around international students' agency. On the other hand, of the 13 that used sociocultural-related theories, four focused solely on problems, while nine incorporated findings around international students' agency. Sociocultural theories, with their focus on the dialectical relationship between humans and the environment, appeared to predispose researchers to more empathetic or asset-based ways of understanding their participants, hence the attention on international students' agency. Alternatively, one could argue that researchers who privilege sociocultural ways of seeing choose such theories to frame their research. This finding around the relationship between theories used and research foci illustrates how theories frame research questions and focus, just as research questions and focus lend themselves to particular ways of looking at the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 2002).

DISCUSSION

I urge that as researchers, we weigh and explicate the place of theory in our work, and, in cases where theory is not made explicit, be candid about the limitations of our research. Indeed, this review of literature is limited in these ways: First, the review of studies around Chinese international students is nonexhaustive and a search in discipline-specific journals may yield research with different theoretical engagement. Hence, findings from this study may not be transferable outside the higher education context within which this literature review is situated. Second, the review is scoped around Chinese international students' research, and caution will be needed in considering its relevance to other international students. Third, this literature review is limited to qualitative studies. While the expansion of the literature review to comprise all international students and the inclusion of quantitative research would have deepened this discussion, space limit in a journal article and resource constraints render this a separate project. Finally, the article is premised on the assumption that absolute objectivity is elusive in qualitative research. Yet, to achieve theoretical pluralism, I acknowledge that there may be ways of approaching research through other lenses that reflect, arguably, absolute objectivity; this affords an area for future exploration by scholars.

Notwithstanding the abovementioned limitations, this literature review found interesting patterns in current research on Chinese international students' experiences. Twenty-eight percent of the articles on Chinese international students' experiences were atheoretical in nature, suggesting a departure from Tight's (2004) and Abdullah et al.'s (2014) findings that 58% and 66% of articles they reviewed, respectively, were atheoretical. Thirty-nine percent of articles in this study saw explicit use of theories, presenting an increase from Tight's 26% (no data available from Abdullah et al.'s study). These patterns of departure could be due to, among other reasons, different interpretations of theoretical explicitness, the incorporation of more recent research that sees growing theoretical awareness, or a keener appreciation of theory among researchers working on Chinese international students. After all, Tight's (2004) research only examined articles in the year 2000, and the field might have developed rapidly since.

Yet, that only 39% of articles around Chinese international students explicitly used theories to frame their studies or engaged in extended discussion around theories and theory generation warrants concern about the continued limited role theory plays. The limited role of theory can also affect research design. For instance, undergraduates and graduates were often examined as a group, revealing assumptions that their experiences are interchangeable. However, scholars have proven otherwise, citing differing maturity, motivations, and length of study between the two groups (Heggins & Jackson, 2003). Likewise, given that theory was rarely generated, it is unclear how insights from such research can move beyond its contextual boundaries. Related questions to ask around this include: How should we interpret findings of Chinese international students bounded by a single location of study? What assumptions are we making when most studies around Chinese international students reside in a single location and comparative cases are rare? Further, why does the highest percent of studies reside in the United Kingdom (26%) and not the United States (16%), even though cumulative total Chinese student population between 2005 and 2017 in the United Kingdom was only one-third (693,351) that in the United States (2,017,124; UIS, 2019)? One could argue that perhaps it is because, in relative terms, international students comprise a higher percent of total student population in the United Kingdom (2017–2018: 19.6% in the United Kingdom compared to 5.5% in the United States; Institute for International Education, 2018; Universities UK International, 2019), making them more keenly felt and, thus, researched in the United Kingdom than the United States. On the other hand, one could also question if this might reflect something about U.K. versus U.S. scholars' assumptions of and interests in Chinese international students. Other questions around the limited role of theory worth considering are: To what extent might the low use of journals and reflections in research (4%) reflect our attitudes that Chinese international students are a group to be researched on and not researched with (Heng, 2018)? How might the incorporation of different research paradigms or theoretical framework, e.g., participatory research or feminist lens, affect research design and, eventually, perspectives about international students?

Research around Chinese international students' experiences tended to focus on students' problems or challenges (60%), rather than the changes or agency (40%) they exhibit. That articles around problems or challenges outnumbered those around changes or agency points to the concerns and narratives the higher education research community is engaged in. There appears to be a predominance of "complaints and troubles talk" (Haugh, 2016)—focusing on struggles and problems of Chinese international students mirroring scholars' observations (Abdullah et al., 2014; Ryan, 2011). Further, 62% of the articles focused on problems did not explain or adequately contextualize why these problems exist, echoing Zhang-Wu's (2018) observation about flawed understanding of Chinese international students when limited contextualization takes place. The lack of explicit articulation of theory and researcher's assumptions or paradigms, as well as the low level of engagement in theorizing is disquieting, as it hides and legitimizes researchers' bias. As I had raised in my research (Heng, 2019), without explicating their theoretical assumptions, researchers' use of surface learning approaches to explain second year Chinese international students' drop in academic performance ends up painting a poor view

of Chinese international students' learning. In contrast, my research found that Chinese international students placed less emphasis on academics in their second year as they had other priorities (e.g., extracurriculars, job searching). Omitting explicit references to theory and relying on "tentative theories" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 33) is risky as research may perpetuate an impression that Chinese international students are inherently problematic and needy. Likewise, ignoring changes and agency in international students may ossify our deficit perspectives of them. These findings support scholars' observations that international students are poorly understood and higher education institutions culpable (Abdullah et al., 2014; Marginson et al., 2010; Ryan, 2011).

Downplaying assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theoretical frameworks may heighten bias in research and findings, just as unbalanced use of particular theories may tilt findings and omit alternative perspectives. As illustrated above, acculturation theories tend to focus on struggles Chinese international students face. To begin, acculturation theories assume implicitly that adaptation is ideal. The outcomes of the minority group (international students) are seen through the lens of the majority group and problematized when the former fails to adapt. In contrast, sociocultural theories tend to assume the relativity of cultural norms and surface how and why students are different and unveil findings around student agency. These findings foreground the impact of theories on narratives, particularly when certain theories dominate, and generate further questions: What might be the repercussion of a domination of acculturation theories in Chinese international student research where international students' adaptation success is held to the standards of the destination context? What are the implications around how we understand and support Chinese international students in light of such assumptions? Should international students be held to the standards of the destination contexts and bear all the responsibility of adjustment? I further illustrate the implications of theoretical framing on findings using Zhao and Bourne's (2011) research as an example. They combined Kim's (2001) acculturation model with Jin and Cortazzi's (1993) cultural synergy model to create a two-way intercultural learning and adaptation model that framed their investigation of both Chinese students' and British lecturers' adaptations to each other. In adopting such a theoretical framing, the assumptions are that both students and lecturers need to adapt to each other, yielding findings around the adaptation processes of both lecturers and students, and, consequently, implications around how both need to be supported in the internationalization process. Given the intimate relationship between theoretical framing, research design, and findings, I further question: How might the incorporation of different research paradigms or theoretical frameworks—e.g., participatory research or a feminist lens—affect research design and, eventually, perspectives about international students?

To be clear, I am neither arguing that some theories are better than others, nor presuming that the insights around Chinese international students' research is transferrable to all international students. Rather, I ask the questions: What are the repercussions of using different types of theories and not explicitly articulating or generating theories in studies on international students? As a nascent but growing subfield, in what directions might we support the growth of future Chinese (or other) international student research? Extending previous scholars' findings (Abdullah et

al., 2014; Andreotti et al., 2011; Marginson et al., 2010; Ryan, 2011; Stein, 2017; Tight, 2018), I urge the research community to consider how might we engage more explicitly and meaningfully with theories in research and expand theoretical pluralism. As Alford (1998) averred,

Being aware of how your theoretical and empirical choices fall into one or another paradigm of inquiry does not help answer your substantive theoretical and empirical questions, but it may sensitize you to a wider range of choices, regardless of the content of the research question.... help you reformulate your research questions, self-consciously locating them within foreground or background paradigms of inquiry. (p. 52)

Pluralizing theoretical frames can afford us diverse ways of knowing, guarding against narrow views. Perhaps one way of moving beyond “generic qualitative research studies” (Caelli et al., 2003, p.1) that add limited insights to collective knowledge because of repeating analyses and contextual limitation (Abdullah, 2014; Tight, 2018) is to consider more theoretical engagement and diversification. Increased collaborations across institutions and countries, as well as leveraging cross-disciplinary teams might likewise elevate research and help (Chinese) international student research mature.

Acknowledgment

I would like to thank Candace Chow, Gaby Ramia, and anonymous reviewers for their reading and suggestions for improvement. Much gratitude is extended to Lynn Song for her rigorous research support in this study.

REFERENCES

- Abdullah, D., Abd Aziz, M. I., & Mohd Ibrahim, A. L. (2014). A “research” into international student-related research: (Re)visualising our stand? *Higher Education*, 67(3), 235–253. doi:10.1007/s10734-013-9647-3
- Abelmann, N., & Kang, J. (2014). A fraught exchange? U.S. media on Chinese international undergraduates and the American university. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 18(4), 382–397.
- Alford, R. R. (1998). *The craft of inquiry: Theories, methods, evidence*. Oxford University Press.
- Altbach, P. G., & Knight, J. (2007). The internationalization of higher education: Motivations and realities. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 11(3–4), 290–305.
- Andreotti, V., Ahenakew, C., & Cooper, G. (2011). Epistemological pluralism: Ethical and pedagogical challenges in higher education. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, 7(1), 40–50.
- Bedenlier, S., Kondakci, Y., & Zawacki-Richter, O. (2018). Two decades of research into the internationalization of higher education: Major themes in the journal of studies in international education (1997–2016). *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 22(2), 108–135.

- Berry, J. W. (1997). Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation. *Applied Psychology*, 46(1), 5–34.
- Bodycott, P., & Lai, A. (2012). The influence and implications of Chinese culture in the decision to undertake cross-border higher education. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 16(3), 252–270.
- Caelli, K., Ray, L., & Mill, J. (2003). ‘Clear as mud’: Toward greater clarity in generic qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 2(2), 1–13.
- Cortazzi, M., & Jin, L. (1996). Cultures of learning: Language classrooms in China. In E. H. Coleman (Ed.), *Society and the language classroom* (pp. 169–206). Cambridge University Press.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 1–32). SAGE.
- Durkin, K. (2008). The middle way: East Asian master’s students’ perceptions of critical argumentation in UK universities. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 12(1), 38–55.
- García, E. E. (2001). *Understanding and meeting the challenge of student cultural diversity*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Garvin, D. (1987). Competing on the eight dimensions of quality. *Harvard Business Review*, 1987, 101–109.
- Gingrich, A. (2006). Nation, status and gender in trouble? Exploring some contexts and characteristics of neo-nationalism in Western Europe. *Neo-nationalism in Europe and beyond: Perspectives from social anthropology* (pp. 29–49). Berghahn.
- Golde, C. M. (1998). Beginning graduate school: Explaining first-year doctoral attrition. *New Directions for Higher Education*, 101, 55–64.
- Guo, Y., & Guo, S. (2017). Internationalization of Canadian higher education: discrepancies between policies and international student experiences. *Studies in Higher Education*, 42(5), 851–868.
- Halliburton, D. (1997). John Dewey: A voice that still speaks to us. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 29(1), 24–29.
- Haugh, M. (2016). Complaints and troubles talk about the English language skills of international students in Australian universities. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 35(4), 727–740.
- Heggins, W. J., III, & Jackson, J. F. L. (2003). Understanding the collegiate experience for Asian international students at a midwestern research university. *College Student Journal*, 37(3), 379–391.
- Heng, T. T. (2018). Chinese international students’ advice to incoming Chinese first year students: Involving students in conversations with them, not about them. *Journal of College Student Development*, 59(2), 231–237.
- Heng, T. T. (2019). Understanding the heterogeneity of international students’ experiences: A case study of Chinese international students in U.S. universities. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 23(5), 607–623.
- Henze, J., & Zhu, J. (2012). Current research on Chinese students studying abroad. *Research in Comparative and International Education*, 7(1), 90–104. doi:10.2304/rcie.2012.7.1.90

- Institute for International Education. (2018). *Open Doors 2018 Fact Sheets*. Retrieved November 1, 2018, from <https://www.iie.org/en/Research-and-Insights/Open-Doors/Fact-Sheets-and-Infographics/Infographics>
- Jin, L., & Cortazzi, M. (1993). Cultural orientation and academic language use. In D. Graddol, L. Thompson, & M. Byram (Eds.), *Language and culture* (pp. 84–97). Multilingual Matters.
- Kim, Y. Y. (2001). *Becoming intercultural: An integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation*. SAGE.
- Knight, J. (2004). Internationalization remodeled: Definition, approaches, and rationales. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 8(1), 5–31.
- Kostogriz, A., & Peeler, E. (2007). Professional identity and pedagogical space: Negotiating difference in teacher workplaces. *Teaching Education*, 18(2), 107–122.
- Kuhn, T. S. (1970). *The structure of scientific revolutions* (2nd ed.). University of Chicago Press.
- Lather, P. (1992). Critical frames in educational research: Feminist and post-structural perspectives. *Theory into Practice*, 31(2), 87–99.
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge University Press.
- Leask, B. (2005). Internationalisation of the curriculum. In K. Carroll & J. Ryan (Eds.), *Teaching international students: Improving learning for all* (pp. 119–129). Routledge.
- Lee, J., Jon, J.-E., & Byun, K. (2017). Neo-racism and neo-nationalism within East Asia: The experiences of international students in South Korea. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 21(2), 136–155. doi:10.1177/1028315316669903
- Marginson, S., Nyland, C., Sawir, E., & Forbes-Mewett, H. (2010). *International student security*. Cambridge University Press.
- Marton, F., & Säljö, R. (1976). On qualitative differences in learning: I—Outcome and process. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 46(1), 4–11.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2005). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach*. SAGE.
- Merriam, S. B. (2002). *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis*. Jossey-Bass.
- Moore, R. (2004). *Education and society: Issues and explanations in the sociology of education*. Polity.
- Pillow, W. (2003). Confession, catharsis, or cure? Rethinking the uses of reflexivity as methodological power in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 16(2), 175–196.
- Ramia, G., Marginson, S., & Sawir, E. (2013). *Regulating international students' wellbeing*. Policy Press.
- Rocco, T. S., & Plakhotnik, M. S. (2009). Literature reviews, conceptual frameworks, and theoretical frameworks: Terms, functions, and distinctions. *Human Resource Development Review*, 8(1), 120–130.
- Ryan, J. (2011). Teaching and learning for international students: Towards a transcultural approach. *Teachers and Teaching*, 17(6), 631–648.

- Smith, J. K. (1983). Quantitative versus qualitative research: An attempt to clarify the issue. *Educational Researcher*, 12(3), 6–13.
- Stein, S. (2017). The persistent challenges of addressing epistemic dominance in higher education: Considering the case of curriculum internationalization. *Comparative Education Review*, 61(S1), S25–S50.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1994). Grounded theory methodology: An overview. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 273–285). SAGE.
- Tajfel, H. (1978). Social categorization, social identity, and social comparison. In H. Tajfel (Ed.), *Differentiation between social groups: Studies in the social psychology of group relations* (pp. 61–76). Academic Press.
- Tight, M. (2004). Research into higher education: An a-theoretical community of practice? *Higher Education Research & Development*, 23(4), 395–411.
- Tight, M. (2018). Higher education journals: Their characteristics and contribution. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 37(3), 607–619.
- UNESCO Institute for Statistics. (2019). *International student mobility in tertiary education*. Retrieved January 10, 2019 from <http://data.uis.unesco.org/#>
- Universities UK International. (2019). *International facts and figures 2019*. <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/International/Documents/2019/International%20facts%20and%20figures%20slides.pdf>
- Vygotsky, L. (1978). Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes. In M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner, & E. Souberman (Eds.), *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes* (pp. 19–105). Harvard University Press.
- Ward, C. A., Bochner, S., & Furnham, A. (2001). *The psychology of culture shock*. Routledge.
- Watkins, D. A., & Biggs, J. B. (1996). *The Chinese learner: cultural, psychological, and contextual influences*. Comparative Education Research Centre, University of Hong Kong.
- Zhang-Wu, Q. (2018). Chinese international students' experiences in American higher education institutes: A critical review of the literature. *Journal of International Students*, 8(2), 1173–1197.
- Zhao, T., & Bourne, J. (2011). Intercultural adaptation—It is a two-way process: Examples from a British MBA programme. In J. L & C. M (Eds.), *Researching Chinese learners: Skills, perceptions, and intercultural adaptations* (pp. 250–273). Palgrave MacMillan.

TANG T. HENG, EdD, is an Assistant Professor in the Policy, Curriculum, and Leadership Academic Group at National Institute of Education-Nanyang Technological University. Her major research interests lie in the area of international students, international and comparative education, educational borrowing/transfer, and diversity in education. Email: tangtang.heng@nie.edu.sg

© *Journal of International Students*
Volume 10, Issue 4 (2020), pp. 817-835
ISSN: 2162-3104 (Print), 2166-3750 (Online)
Doi: 10.32674/jis.v10i4.1274
ojed.org/jis

Proactive Personality and Cross-Cultural Adjustment: The Mediating Role of Adjustment Self-Efficacy

Jing Hua
Guilin Zhang
Charles Coco
Troy University, USA

Teng Zhao
Auburn University, USA

Ning Hou
St. Cloud State University, USA

ABSTRACT

Combining proactive literature, the social learning/cognitive theory, and cross-cultural adjustment literature, we examined the sojourners' experience from a positive perspective. Using a three-wave prospective design and a sample of 135 international students, we found that proactive personality was positively related to adjustment self-efficacy, which in turn positively related to academic and social adjustment. Meanwhile, adjustment self-efficacy mediated the link between proactive personality and adjustment. Implications, limitations, and future research are discussed.

Keywords: adjustment self-efficacy, cross-cultural adjustment, proactive personality

With the increase of globalization, interactions among people across nations increase as well. People who transfer from one country to another temporarily are referred to as sojourners, such as missionaries, international students, and expatriates (Church, 1982). In the past few decades, the number of sojourners has grown significantly. Taking international students enrolled in colleges and universities located in the

United States as an example, the number of these students has increased steadily each year since 1979 (Institute of International Education [IIE], 2018). Consequently, the total number of enrolled international students in the United States recently reached 1,094,792 (IIE, 2018). Many scholars have noticed this substantial increase and have conducted research on sojourners' cross-cultural adjustment (Berry, 2005; Gelfand et al., 2017; Maertz et al., 2016; Molinsky, 2013; Takeuchi et al., 2019; Zimmermann & Neyer, 2013). Research has shown that sojourner adjustment links to a list of key outcome variables (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). For example, Zhu et al. (2016) found that sojourner's adjustment trajectory predicts their Month 9 career instrumentality and job promotion 1.5 years further.

Regardless of this promising progress, there is still some room to develop in the cross-cultural adjustment literature. For example, scholars mainly view sojourners' adjustment from a stress perspective (D. A. Harrison et al., 2004; Takeuchi, 2010). Per this viewpoint, living abroad is a stressful experience and sojourners have to handle so many stressors accompanying this relocation journey, such as separating from their home and family, learning and using a new language, interacting with people from diverse cultural backgrounds, and meeting the performance expectations of the local organization (Hua et al., 2018). Poor adjustment among sojourners results in ineffective performance, psychological despair, financial cost to the organization, and early turnover (McNulty & Brewster, 2017; Takeuchi et al., 2005; Van Vianen et al., 2004).

There is a call in this literature to develop more studies using new perspectives to underline the sojourner's adjustment process (Takeuchi, 2010). This call to develop more studies concurs with the recent trend in psychology and organizational behavior literature. That is, researchers should focus more on the positive traits, capacities, and emotions of human beings, which is valuable to the individual and organization as a whole (Fredrickson, 2001; Luthans, 2002; Spreitzer et al., 2005). Some scholars have answered this call by studying the cross-cultural adjustment from a positive perspective. For instance, Ren et al. (2014) found that sojourners, instead of reacting to stressors, could take the proactive tactics (i.e., information seeking, relationship building, and positive framing) to shape their experiences overseas. Following this line of research, we adopt a positive perspective and examine the role of a positive personality trait—proactive personality—in cross-cultural adjustment.

Adjusting successfully in a novel country is not a chance process; sojourners' traits and characteristics are strongly associated with their experience abroad (Hua et al., 2018; Shaffer et al., 2006; Shu et al., 2017). Scholars have found that broad personality constructs, such as the Big Five personality dimensions (i.e., extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness) and more specific traits, such as cultural intelligence and goal orientation, all have unique contributions to sojourner adjustment outcomes (Caligiuri, 2000; Chao et al., 2017; Gong & Fan, 2006; Earley & Ang, 2003). Prior cross-cultural literature has mentioned the importance of being proactive when relocating abroad (Cao et al., 2013; Chen et al., 2010; Ward & Fischer, 2008); however, few studies have tested the trait of a proactive personality in the cross-cultural field (Hua et al., 2019; Ren et al., 2014).

Proactive personality refers to “a stable disposition to take personal initiative in a broad range of activities and situations” (Seibert et al., 2001, p. 847). Much research

has been done to exhibit the effectiveness of proactive personality in predicting career success (Seibert et al., 1999), newcomers' performance (Li et al., 2011), team engagement, and voice behavior (Lam et al., 2018). Proactive personality is perhaps the most relevant and needed trait of sojourners. Facing the challenges of being uprooted, sojourners should not stay in their comfort zone waiting for good things to come to them, but rather take the initiative to stretch themselves, while reaching out to seek support and resources from locals for better adjustment (Hua et al., 2019). Proactive personality captures the individual variance in taking actions to make things happen rather than watch things happen (Parker et al., 2010). Thus, we take the initiative to underline the role of proactive personality on sojourners' cross-cultural adjustment in this study.

The other call in the cross-cultural field is to specify the mediating effect of personality traits on adjustment outcomes (Gong & Fan, 2006; Hua et al., 2018). The mediating mechanism helps us better understand how personality traits work on outcome variables. There is a consensus among scholars that proactive personality may influence outcomes through proximal cognitive-motivational constructs, such as self-efficacy (Brown et al., 2006; Parker et al., 2010; Parker et al., 2006).

Self-efficacy, a key concept deeply rooted in the social learning/cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997), refers to a "belief in one's capability to mobilize the cognitive resources, motivation, and courses of action needed to meet task demands" (Wood & Bandura, 1989, p. 408). Some scholars define self-efficacy as a stable trait (e.g., Earley & Lituchy, 1991; Judge et al., 2000). Following this definition, in the cross-cultural literature, for example, Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. (2005) found that self-efficacy works as an individual factor predicting sojourner cross-cultural adjustment. Some scholars define self-efficacy as a domain-specific construct (Schaubroeck & Merritt, 1997; Schaubroeck et al., 2001), which is changeable over time. Domain-specific self-efficacy refers to "individuals' beliefs and confidence that they have the ability to perform the general functions demanded by the situation" (Perrewe & Spector, 2002). Following this definition, in the cross-cultural literature, for example, Fan (2004) found that Realistic Orientation Programs for new Employee Stress (ROPES) could boost international students' adjustment self-efficacy. Fan and Wanous (2008) developed ROPES in helping sojourners' organizational and cultural adjustment. It is a cross-cultural training program developed to make sojourners aware of entry stressors in the host country and equip them with various coping strategies to handle the stressors. Compared with participants in traditional orientation programs, participants in ROPES reported lower pre-entry expectations, less stress, and higher levels of adjustment over time (Fan & Wanous, 2008).

In this current study, we focus on the adjustment self-efficacy, which targets directly to the sojourners' belief and confidence that they can perform well in the host country. Specifically, using a three-wave lagged sample, we hypothesize that proactive personality should link to increased adjustment self-efficacy, which links to better cross-cultural adjustment. Meanwhile, adjustment self-efficacy should mediate the relationship between proactive personality and cross-cultural adjustment. We present our model in Figure 1.

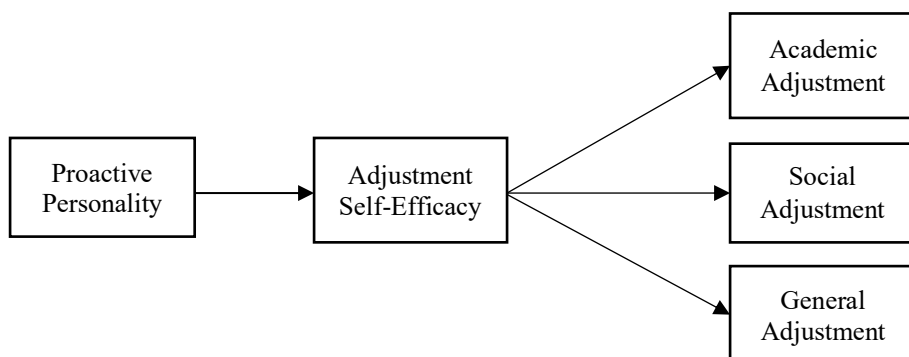


Figure 1: Proposed Model for the Relationships Among Proactive Personality, Adjustment Self-efficacy, and Cross-cultural Adjustment

This study makes two contributions to the cross-cultural domain. First, in contrast with a traditional stressor–stress paradigm (D. A. Harrison et al., 2004), we view the adjustment process from a positive perspective; hence, are able to underscore the self-starting nature of sojourners. Instead of reacting to demands in the new cultural environment, sojourners could actively acquire knowledge, help, and resources to strengthen themselves in these areas. It is also necessary for sojourners to take the initiative to connect to the new environment for a better outcome. By including proactive personality into cross-cultural adjustment literature, we are able to answer the question of which positive personality trait could predict better adjustment. Second, combining proactive literature, the social learning/cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997) and cross-cultural adjustment literature, we answer the call to explore the mediation mechanism of how distal personality trait relates to outcomes. Using a three-wave prospective design (i.e., proactive personality at Time 1, adjustment self-efficacy at Time 2, and cross-cultural adjustment at Time 3), we are able to examine the mediating role of adjustment self-efficacy between proactive personality and adjustment outcomes.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Proactive Personality and Cross-Cultural Adjustment

Traditional theories emphasize the environmental influence on individuals and assume that individuals can only passively react to their existing conditions; however, an increasing number of scholars have noticed that individuals can shape their experience and influence the environment as well (Ren et al., 2014). Bateman and Crant (1993) coined the term “proactive personality” to capture the individuals’ dispositional difference in initiating positive change in their environment and/or themselves regardless of the environmental restrictions. Bateman and Crant (1993) also created the proactive personality scale, and empirically distinguished the concept

of proactive personality from other personality concepts, such as the Big Five personality, locus of control, need for achievement, need for dominance, personal achievements, and transformational leadership. Subsequently, a stream of research has been done to exhibit the effectiveness of proactive personality. For example, based on the interactionist perspective (Griffin et al., 2000; Jones, 1983; Reichers, 1987), which views newcomers as proactive agents as opposed to passive reactors to the new surroundings, Li et al. (2011) empirically examined the interactive relationship between proactive personality and organization socialization efforts on newcomer behaviors. Specifically, they found that supervisor and coworker developmental feedback worked jointly with newcomer proactive personality on newcomer task performance and helping behaviors.

Despite these findings, proactive personality lacks testing in the cross-cultural adjustment context, and it is a relevant construct in this domain. Sojourners face both organizational and cultural socialization simultaneously (Fan & Wanous, 2008). The outcome of sojourners' socialization is cross-cultural adjustment, which refers to psychological comfort with every aspect of a new country (Black et al., 1991). The cross-cultural adjustment could be further classified into three dimensions: work/academic, social, and general adjustment (Black & Stephens, 1989). Work adjustment refers to the psychological comfort with a new job, work standards, and expectations; social adjustment refers to the psychological comfort with social interactions and communication with host country citizens; and general adjustment refers to the psychological comfort with various aspects of the novel environment, such as food, weather, and transportation (Black, 1988).

The majority of cross-cultural adjustment research views sojourners' adjustment as a demanding process during which sojourners react stressfully to the challenges emerging from the new circumstance (D. A. Harrison et al., 2004). More recently, scholars have started to use a new perspective to view sojourners' adjustment (Hua et al., 2019; Takeuchi, 2010). For instance, adopting a positive perspective by viewing sojourners as proactive agents, Ren and her colleagues (2014) found that sojourners could take the initiative to seek information, build new ties, and frame the environment in positive ways to have successful adjustment abroad. Even though Ren et al. (2014) did not include and test the role of proactive personality in their model, they listed it as a future research direction. Therefore, this current study tries to answer the question of whether proactive personality contributes to sojourners' adjustment.

Proactive personality is a relatively stable personal concept characterized by being self-initiated, change-oriented, and future-oriented (Frese & Fay, 2001). People with high proactive personality tend to look for new ways to make constructive changes, identify opportunities, and take initiatives to make things happen (Crant, 2000). In contrast, people low in proactive personality tend to be passive followers, unable to identify opportunities around them, and reluctant to challenge the status quo (Crant, 2000). Consequently, sojourners with high proactive personality would actively do something in the new environment to adjust successfully. For example, proactive sojourners would find various opportunities to learn and practice English. They may ask around for help when having questions or confusion in their work and daily lives. These sojourners may also take the initiative to build new connections so that they can get access to the resources and support needed for better adjustment. In

contrast, people with low proactive personality may not make the effort to reach out and connect with others, so they have slower language development, know fewer people, and have fewer resources and support in the local community—none of which is beneficial to their adjustment abroad. Thus, we expect a positive relationship between proactive personality and the three dimensions of cross-cultural adjustment.

Proactive Personality and Adjustment Self-Efficacy

According to Bandura (1977), performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal are the four major sources of self-efficacy. Following Bandura's (1977) model, we argue that proactive personality could boost adjustment self-efficacy via each of the four sources. Proactive individuals tend to set a high goal beyond the external requirement for the purpose of personal development and work persistently toward their goals regardless of barriers (Frese & Fay, 2001). Hence, proactive sojourners seize the opportunity to develop themselves, and even though they may face obstacles in the new cultural environment, they consistently work to make progress. Based on social learning theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986), all these experiences provide sojourners with valuable lessons to learn and reflect which connect to increased adjustment self-efficacy.

Further, proactive individuals are likely to build strong social networks, which are beneficial to their job performance (Thompson, 2005). Thus, proactive sojourners may have strong connections with local people compared with others (Ren et al., 2014). Those sojourners with strong connections may have more chances to learn from others' experience and find out how to live in the new culture. They may also get encouragement and emotional comfort from local nationals so that they may realize that international experience is not that fearful, and they could handle it successfully (Farh et al., 2010). Above all, proactive sojourners would have increased confidence in their ability to function well in a new culture. Thus, we hypothesized the following:

Hypothesis 1: Proactive personality will positively relate to adjustment self-efficacy.

Adjustment Self-Efficacy and Cross-Cultural Adjustment

In the cross-cultural literature, scholars tend to treat self-efficacy as a generally stable personal factor predicting adjustment outcomes (Black et al., 1991; Shaffer et al., 1999). Nevertheless, the positive relationship between self-efficacy and cross-cultural adjustment has been well established (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; J. K. Harrison et al., 1996). There are also some scholars treating self-efficacy as a domain-specific construct. For instance, Gong and Fan (2006) found that academic self-efficacy is positively related to sojourners' academic adjustment, and social self-efficacy is positively related to sojourners' social adjustment. With increased self-efficacy, sojourners have reduced stress and increased psychological comfort (Hou et al., 2018). In this study, we focus specifically on adjustment self-efficacy and argue that with strong adjustment self-efficacy, sojourners continue trying to adjust even when facing setbacks in the foreign country. On the contrary, sojourners with low

adjustment self-efficacy give up easily when getting negative feedback or facing obstacles abroad, which produces poor adjustment. Accordingly, we hypothesized the following:

Hypothesis 2: Adjustment self-efficacy will positively relate to (a) academic adjustment, (b) social adjustment, and (c) general adjustment.

The Mediating Role of Adjustment Self-Efficacy

According to social cognitive theory, self-efficacy is a fundamental motivational construct that regulates the cognitive processes of human beings (Bandura, 1986). Frese and Fay (2001) proposed that people are motivated to be proactive when they have a sense of control over their actions. The sense of control over one's action is referred to as self-efficacy, meaning people have the belief that they can take actions effectively (Bandura, 1997). With this belief, people tend to eventually carry out tasks more successfully (Brown et al., 2006). Parker and his colleagues (2010) proposed a proactive motivation model, which displays that distal individual antecedents, such as proactive personality, influence the proactive motivational states, such as self-efficacy, and generate changes in oneself and/or the work environment for a different future. Empirically, Parker et al. (2006) found that proactive personality is significantly related to proactive work behavior through role breadth self-efficacy. Brown and his colleagues (2006) hypothesized and found that peoples' proactive personality is positively related to their job search self-efficacy, which in turn is related to job search success. Job search efficacy mediated the relationship between proactive personality and job search success. Therefore, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 3: Adjustment self-efficacy will mediate the relationship between proactive personality and (a) academic adjustment, (b) social adjustment, and (c) general adjustment.

METHOD

Sample and Procedure

Participants were new international students enrolled at a large public university in the Southeastern region of the United States. We collected data after approval from the university's Institutional Review Board, distributing three self-report surveys over one year. We invited students to participate in this study and complete the Time 1 survey (pencil and paper) during the new international student orientation session. In the Time 1 survey, there was one question asking for participants' contact information (i.e., email address) so that we could send follow-up surveys. Six months later, students who had completed the Time 1 survey received an email with a survey link and were invited to complete the Time 2 online survey. After another 6 months, students who had completed the Time 1 and Time 2 surveys received an email with a survey link and were invited to complete the Time 3 online survey. The email address was used to match the responses of participants. It took 20 minutes, 10 minutes, and

5 minutes for participants to complete the Time 1 survey, Time 2 survey, and Time 3 surveys, respectively.

The 1-year period was long enough to capture the students' cross-cultural adjustment process. Each participant received a small gift (\$5 in value) for completing the Time 1 survey, \$5 for completing the Time 2 survey, and \$10 for completing the Time 3 survey.

One hundred and thirty-five participants completed the Time 1 survey, which measured demographic information and proactive personality. In the Time 1 sample, 71 participants (53%) were male, and the average age was 24 years old ($SD = 3$). More than half of the students (63%) were from China, 15% were from India, and the remaining students were from 18 other countries, such as South Korea, Turkey, and Nepal. Approximately 66% had no previous international experience at all, 13% had fewer than 6 months previous international experience, 7% have 6–12 months of previous international experience, and 13% have more than 1 year of previous international experience.

Of those who completed the Time 1 survey, 81 participants (60%) completed the Time 2 survey measuring adjustment self-efficacy. Of those who completed both Time 1 and Time 2 survey, 69 participants (88%) completed the Time 3 survey measuring three dimensions of cross-cultural adjustment. Since several participants had missing data for some items in the survey, we conducted the Little's missing completely at random (MCAR) test (Little, 1988). The results showed that data were missing completely at random (MCAR): $\chi^2(194) = 198.57, p = .40$. Therefore, full information maximum likelihood estimation was used in Mplus 7.4 (Muthén & Muthén, 2015) to handle missing data in the mediation model—that is, to estimate the model under a missing data theory using all available data. To examine the extent of nonresponse bias, we conducted a series of variance analyses using a dummy-coded variable (1 = participants who only completed the Time 1 survey, 2 = participants who completed the Time 1 and Time 2 surveys, but did not complete the Time 3 survey, and 3 = participants who completed all three surveys). The tests results showed that the three groups did not significantly differ in gender ($\chi^2[2] = 3.82, p = .15$), age ($F[2, 130] = 0.26, p = .77$), previous international experience ($F[2, 131] = 0.49, p = .61$), or proactive personality ($F[2, 132] = 0.85, p = .43$).

Measures

Proactive Personality

We used a 10-item proactive personality scale (Bateman & Crant, 1993) to measure proactive personality. Sample items were “I am constantly on the lookout for new ways to improve my life” and “No matter what the odds, if I believe in something I will make it happen.” Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*). The Cronbach's alpha reliability was .79 in the current study.

Adjustment Self-Efficacy

We used the five-item measure developed by Fan (2004). Sample items were “I do not think I will have any problems making a good adjustment here” and “My past experiences and accomplishments help me to feel confident that I will be able to do well here.” Items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*). Cronbach’s alpha reliability was .86.

Cross-Cultural Adjustment

We used the cross-cultural adjustment measure created by Black and Stephens (1989) and modified by Gong and Fan (2006) to measure sojourners’ adjustment. Sample items were “How well adjusted are you to working with American classmates?” (academic adjustment), “How well adjusted are you to the weather here?” (general adjustment), and “How well adjusted are you to the interpersonal relationships with Americans?” (social adjustment). Items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *not well adjusted*; 7 = *very well adjusted*). The Cronbach’s alpha reliabilities were .92, .83, and .92 for academic, general, and social adjustment, respectively.

Control Variables

We controlled for gender, age, and previous international experience as prior literature has shown that these variables may have potential effects on adjustment outcome variables (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005).

RESULTS

We present the descriptive statistics of all variables in Table 1. As shown, proactive personality was positively correlated with adjustment self-efficacy ($r = .40, p < .01$). In addition, adjustment self-efficacy was positively correlated with academic and social adjustment ($r = .29$ and $.28$, respectively, $ps < .05$). Gender was not significantly correlated with any other variables in the model and was not included in the following analysis.

Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations, and Alpha Reliabilities

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Gender ^a (Time 1)	0.53	0.50								
Age (Time 1)	24.06	2.78	.00							
Previous international experience (Time 1)	1.94	1.49	-.06	.28**						
Proactive personality (Time 1)	3.63	0.43	-.03	.08	.19*	.79				
Adjustment self-efficacy (Time 2)	5.74	0.74	.12	.09	.16	.40**	.86			

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Academic adjustment (Time 3)	5.56	0.95	.04	.04	-.09	-.06	.29*	.92		
Social adjustment (Time 3)	4.77	1.20	.02	.04	-.02	-.02	.28*	.64**	.92	
General adjustment (Time 3)	4.90	1.25	-.04	-.03	-.05	-.21	.13	.53**	.43**	0.83

Note. Numbers on the diagonal of the correlation matrix are alpha coefficients. T1 = Month 1; T2 = Month 6; T3 = Month 12. *0 = female; 1 = male. **p* < .05, ***p* < .01.

We used Mplus 7.4 (Muthén & Muthén, 2015) to test the hypothesized mediation model. We ran path analysis due to the low ratio of sample size to the number of parameters (Carlson & Kacmar, 2000; Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010). The mediation model fit was reasonably good: $\chi^2(9) = 8.48, p = .49, CFI = 1.00, TLI = 1.01, RMSEA = .00$ with 95% CI [.00, .12], SRMR = .07. We presented the standardized regression weights in Fig. 2. As shown in Fig. 2, proactive personality positively related to adjustment self-efficacy ($\beta = .41, p < .01$), supporting Hypothesis 1. Adjustment self-efficacy positively related to academic adjustment ($\beta = .28, p < .05$) and social adjustment ($\beta = .28, p < .05$), provide support for Hypotheses 2a and 2b. However, adjustment self-efficacy was not significantly related to general adjustment ($\beta = .12, p = .40$). Therefore, Hypothesis 2c was not supported.

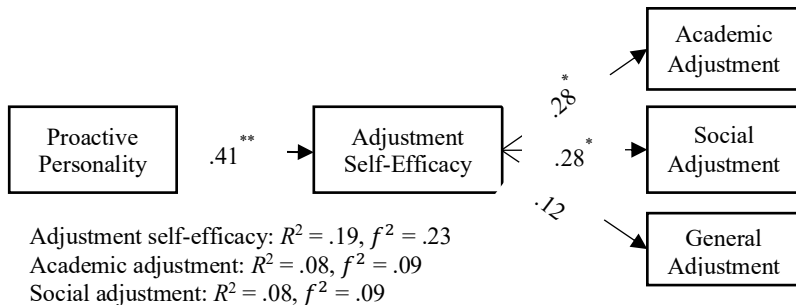


Figure 2: Mediation Model with Regression Weights

Note. Controlling for age and previous international experience. Standardized coefficients are reported. **p* < .05. ***p* < .01. The effect size f^2 for multiple regressions are calculated (Cohen, 1988). An f^2 of .02 to be a small effect, .15 a medium effect, and .35 a large effect (Cohen, 1988).

To test the mediation effect (Hypotheses 3a–3c), we used a bootstrapping approach in Mplus 7.4 (Muthén & Muthén, 2015), and with 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals (CIs) obtained using 5,000 bootstrap samples (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). The results showed that adjustment self-efficacy mediated the relationship between proactive personality and academic adjustment (.11, 95% CI [.02, .23]) and social adjustment (.11, 95% CI [.02, .24]), supporting Hypotheses 3a

and 3b. However, adjustment self-efficacy did not mediate the relationship between individual adaptability and general adjustment (.05, 95% CI [-.06, .18]). As such, Hypothesis 3c was not supported.

We also tested an alternative, partial mediation model, in which we added three direct links between proactive personality and cross-cultural adjustment. The partial mediation model was not significantly different from the original, full mediation model: $\Delta\chi^2(3) = 5.74, p = .13$. The coefficient pattern was the same as the original model. Therefore, we retained the hypothesized full mediation model as the final model.

DISCUSSION

Based on social learning/cognitive theory, this study proposed and tested a framework to explain how proactive personality works on cross-cultural adjustment. Using the three-wave prospective design, we found that proactive personality (Time 1) positively related to adjustment self-efficacy (Time 2), which in turn positively related to academic and social adjustment (Time 3). Furthermore, adjustment self-efficacy (Time 2) fully mediated the relationship between proactive personality (Time 1) and academic and social adjustment (Time 3).

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the cross-cultural adjustment literature in several ways. First, we viewed the sojourners' experience from a positive perspective. Prior research in this area has mainly adopted a stress perspective to view the adjustment experience—that is, sojourners face many stressors and have to react to one another (Takeuchi, 2010). By adopting a positive perspective, we are able to underline that sojourners can shape their experience abroad and increase their well-being. The process of cross-cultural adjustment could be positive and beneficial to sojourners. This study suggests that positive perspective may offer some valuable insights into cross-cultural adjustment. This is consistent with the current trend in psychology and organizational behavior to focus more on positive psychology (Fredrickson, 2001; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Meanwhile, we established the relevance of a positive trait—proactive personality—in the cross-cultural adjustment area. To adjust well, sojourners should possess the quality of taking initiative. Proactive sojourners think and behave differently from those who do not, therefore having a significant difference in adjustment outcomes. This study showed that sojourners should not wait to be told what to do but actively shape themselves and/or the environment to have a better outcome. By including and empirically testing proactive personality, we answered the call by Ren and her colleagues (2014) to examine the role of proactive personality in cross-cultural adjustment. Our findings suggested that proactive personality should be considered as a relevant predictor in cross-cultural literature.

Furthermore, deeply rooted in the social learning/cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997), we found that adjustment self-efficacy works as a mediator between proactive personality and cross-cultural adjustment. Sojourners with high

proactive personality tend to focus on the long-term goal and do not give up easily regardless of the situation. High proactive individuals have steeper learning curves and stronger tendencies to develop themselves persistently (Frese & Fay, 2001). All the negative and positive experiences may help these high proactive sojourners increase their self-efficacy and thereby have a better life in the new culture. This finding is consistent with Parker et al. (2010) that individuals' proactivity may influence their motivation states and consequently different outcomes. By including adjustment self-efficacy as a mediator, we are able to explain how proactive personality works on cross-cultural adjustment. One interesting finding was that adjustment self-efficacy was not significantly related to general adjustment. The possible explanation is that items in adjustment self-efficacy tapped into academic and social domains, not the general domain.

Managerial Implications

Practically, our findings suggest that proactive personality is critical to individual success abroad. To adjust well, sojourners should have the trait of proactive personality. Therefore, when selecting people for an overseas task, having proactive personality may be included as a part of the screening test. Alternatively, training that targets to increase an individual's proactive personality should be provided. In addition, adjustment self-efficacy is vital to a sojourner's adjustment. Therefore, it is helpful to build up a sojourner's self-efficacy for better adjustment. This is crucial, as good adjustment is beneficial to a sojourner's career (Zhu et al., 2016), the sojourner's family, home country organization, and local community as a whole (Takeuchi, 2010).

Our results provide important implications for higher educational professionals, such as school administrators and professors. Studying abroad can be a stressful experience for international students and they need support and directions from educational professionals. Since the educational professionals interact with students mostly on a daily basis, they have great potential to influence international students. The international students who lack proactive personality are by nature less capable of adjusting to the culture. Therefore, it would be very helpful if educational professionals could encourage them to be more active. With encouragement, international students may be more willing to take initiative, which benefits their adjustment self-efficacy. Based on our study, adjustment self-efficacy is positively related to international students' academic and social adjustment. Having self-efficacy allows these international students to adjust well not only in their academic study domain, but also in their social life domain.

Study Limitations and Future Research Directions

Regardless of the contributions, several study limitations should be kept in mind when interpreting our findings. First, we did not measure proactive behaviors in this study. It would be very interesting to include both proactive personality and proactive behavior in the model to examine the relationship between the two (Ren et al., 2014). Second, we do not measure the sources of efficacy. Therefore, it is hard to know

which source having proactive personality relates most to or which source has the most impact on a sojourner's efficacy. It may be beneficial to include sources of efficacy in future research. Third, given the current student sample, our findings may not generalize to other sojourner groups, such as expatriates. Nevertheless, both international students and expatriates need to learn and use a new language, meet work expectations, and plug into the new community (Gong & Fan, 2006). Thus, future studies may replicate our study using different samples. Fourth, we do not measure all variables at each time point, neglecting the stability effects (effects of past levels on the outcomes) in model estimation. Consequently, future studies may measure all the variables at each time point and test the predictive role of proactive personality more rigorously. Lastly, the effect sizes of adjustment self-efficacy on academic and social adjustment were small ($f^2 = .09$). The small effect sizes might be due to the longitudinal design in the current study. Specifically, the effects of adjustment self-efficacy on academic and social adjustment may decline over time. Therefore, future longitudinal research with shorter time intervals can be conducted, revealing the differences in effect size coefficients underlying these relationships. Furthermore, other potential mediators, which might have larger magnitudes of impacts on adjustment outcomes, should be considered in future study. For example, specifying mediating mechanisms could increase our understanding of how proactive personality works in cross-cultural adjustment.

CONCLUSION

From a positive perspective, this study tested the predictive role of proactive personality on cross-cultural adjustment. Combining proactive personality literature, social learning/cognitive theory, and cross-cultural literature, we found the mediation mechanism to explain how proactive personality works on adjustment. Living abroad could be a positive experience for sojourners, especially proactive ones, to build up their adjustment self-efficacy and thereby improve their life in a foreign country.

REFERENCES

- Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review*, 84(2), 191–215. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.84.2.191>
- Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action*. Prentice-Hall.
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy*. Freeman.
- Bateman, T. S., & Crant, J. M. (1993). The proactive component of organizational behavior: A measure and correlates. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 14(2), 103–118. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.4030140202>
- Berry, J. W. (2005). Acculturation: Living successfully in two cultures. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 29(6), 697–712. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2005.07.013>
- Bhaskar-Shrinivas, P., Harrison, D. A., Shaffer, M. A., & Luk, D. M. (2005). Input-based and time-based models of international adjustment: Meta-analytic

- evidence and theoretical extensions. *Academy of Management Journal*, 48(2), 257–28. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2005.16928400>
- Black, J. S. (1988). Work role transition: A study of American expatriate managers in Japan. *Journal of International Business*, 19(2), 277–294. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.jibs.8490383>
- Black, J. S., Mendenhall, M., & Oddou, G. (1991). Toward a comprehensive model of international adjustment: An integration of multiple theoretical perspectives. *Academy of Management Review*, 16(2), 291–317. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1991.4278938>
- Black, J. S., & Stephens, G. K. (1989). The influence of the spouse on American expatriate adjustment and intent to stay in Pacific Rim overseas assignments. *Journal of Management*, 15(4), 529–544. <https://doi.org/10.1177/014920638901500403>
- Brown, D. J., Cober, R. T., Kane, K., Levy, P. E., & Shalhoop, J. (2006). Proactive personality and the successful job search: A field investigation with college graduates. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 91(3), 717–726. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.91.3.717>
- Caligiuri, P. M. (2000). The Big Five personality characteristics as predictors of expatriate's desire to terminate the assignment and supervisor-rated performance. *Personnel Psychology*, 53(1), 67–88. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.2000.tb00194.x>
- Cao, L., Hirschi, A., & Deller, J. (2013). The positive effects of a protean career attitude for self-initiated expatriates. *Career Development International*, 18(1), 56–77. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13620431311305953>
- Carlson, D. S., & Kacmar, K. M. (2000). Work-family conflict in the organization: Do life role values make a difference? *Journal of Management*, 26(5), 1031–1054. <https://doi.org/10.1177/014920630002600502>
- Chao, M. M., Takeuchi, R., & Farh, J. L. (2017). Enhancing cultural intelligence: The role of implicit culture beliefs and adjustment. *Personnel Psychology*, 70(1), 257–292. <https://doi.org/10.1111/peps.12142>
- Chen, G., Kirkman, B. L., Kim, K., Farh, C. I. C., & Tangirala, S. (2010). When does cross-cultural motivation enhance expatriate effectiveness? A multilevel investigation of the moderating roles of subsidiary support and cultural distance. *Academy of Management Journal*, 53(5), 1110–1130. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2010.54533217>
- Church, A. T. (1982). Sojourner adjustment. *Psychological Bulletin*, 91(3), 540–572. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.91.3.540>
- Crant, J. M. (2000). Proactive behavior in organizations. *Journal of Management*, 26(3), 435–462. <https://doi.org/10.1177/014920630002600304>
- Earley, P. C., & Ang, S. (2003). *Cultural intelligence: Individual interactions across cultures*. Stanford University Press.
- Earley, P. C., & Lituchy, T. R. (1991). Delineating goal and efficacy effects: A test of three models. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 76(1), 81–98. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.76.1.81>
- Fan, J. (2004). *New orientation program for Asian international graduate students: a field experiment* [Doctoral dissertation]. The Ohio State University.

- Fan, J., & Wanous, J. P. (2008). Organizational and cultural entry: A new type of orientation program for multiple boundary crossings. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 93*(6), 1390–1411. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0012828>
- Farh, C. I. C., Bartol, K. M., Shapiro, D. L., & Shin, J. (2010). Networking abroad: A process model of how expatriates form support ties to facilitate adjustment. *Academy of Management Review, 35*(3), 434–454. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.35.3.zok434>
- Fredrickson, B. L. (2001). The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. *American Psychologist, 56*(3), 218–226. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.56.3.218>
- Frese, M., & Fay, D. (2001). Personal initiative: An active performance concept for work in the 21st century. In B. M. Staw & R. I. Sutton (Eds.), *Research in organizational behavior* (Vol. 23, pp. 133–187). Elsevier Science.
- Gelfand, M. J., Aycan, Z., Erez, M., & Leung, K. (2017). Cross-cultural industrial organizational psychology and organizational behavior: A hundred year journey. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 102*(3), 514–529. <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000186>
- Gong, Y., & Fan, J. (2006). Longitudinal examination of the role of goal orientation in cross-cultural adjustment. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 91*(1), 176–184. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.91.1.176>
- Griffin, A. E. C., Colella, A., & Goparaju, S. (2000). Newcomer and organizational socialization tactics: an interactionist perspective. *Human Resource Management Review, 10*(4), 453–474. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1053-4822\(00\)00036-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1053-4822(00)00036-X)
- Harrison, D. A., Shaffer, M. A., & Bhaskar-Shrinivas, P. (2004). Going places: Roads more and less traveled in research on expatriate experiences. In J. J. Martocchio (Ed.), *Research in personnel and human resources management* (Vol. 22, pp. 199–247). JAI Press.
- Harrison, J. K., Chadwick, M., & Scales, M. (1996). The relationship between cross-cultural adjustment and the personality variables of self-efficacy and self-monitoring. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 20*(2), 167–188. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767\(95\)00039-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767(95)00039-9)
- Hou, N., Fan, J., Tan, J. A., Hua, J., & Valdez, G. (2018). Cross-cultural training effectiveness: Does when the training is delivered matter? *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 65*, 17–29. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2018.03.007>
- Hua, J., Fan, J., Walker, A., Hou, N., Zheng, L., & Debode, J. (2018). Examinations of the role of individual adaptability in cross-cultural adjustment. *Journal of Career Assessment, 27*(3), 490–509. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1069072718765193>
- Hua, J., Zheng, L., Zhang, G., & Fan, J. (2019). Proactive personality and cross-cultural adjustment: A moderated mediation model. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 72*, 36–44. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2019.06.003>
- Institute of International Education. (2018). *International students enrollment*. <https://www.iie.org/Research-and-Insights/Open-Doors/Data/International-Students/Enrollment>

- Jones, G. (1983). Psychological orientation and the process of organizational socialization: An interactionist perspective. *Academy of Management Review*, 8(3), 464–474. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1983.4284600>
- Judge, T. A., Bono, J. E., & Locke, E. A. (2000). Personality and job satisfaction: The mediating role of job characteristics. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 85(2), 237–249. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.85.2.237>
- Lam, W., Lee, C., Taylor, M. S., & Zhao, H. H. (2018). Does proactive personality matter in leadership transitions? Effects of proactive personality on new leader identification and responses to new leaders and their change agendas. *Academy of Management Journal*, 61(1), 245–263. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2014.0503>
- Li, N., Harris, B., Boswell, W. R., & Xie, Z. (2011). The role of organizational insiders' developmental feedback and proactive personality on newcomers' performance: An interactionist perspective. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 96(6), 1317–1327. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0024029>
- Little, R. J. A. (1988). A test of missing completely at random for multivariate data with missing values. *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, 83(404), 1198–1202.
- Luthans, F. (2002). Positive organizational behavior: Developing and managing psychological strengths. *Academy of Management Perspective*, 16(1), 57–72. <https://doi.org/10.5465/ame.2002.6640181>
- Maertz, C. P., Jr., Takeuchi, R., & Chen, J. (2016). An episodic framework of outgroup interaction processing: Integration and re-direction for the expatriate adjustment research. *Psychological Bulletin*, 142(6), 623–654. <https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000032>
- McNulty, Y., & Brewster, C. (2017). Theorizing the meaning(s) of expatriate': establishing boundary conditions for business expatriates. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 28(1), 27–61. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2016.1243567>
- Molinsky, A. (2013). The psychological processes of cultural retooling. *Academy of Management Journal*, 56(3), 683–710. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2010.0492>
- Muthén, L., & Muthén, B. (2015). Mplus (Version 7.0) [Computer software].
- Parker, S. K., Bindl, U. K., & Strauss, K. (2010). Making things happen: A model of proactive motivation. *Journal of Management*, 36(4), 827–856. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206310363732>
- Parker, S. K., Williams, H. M., & Turner, N. (2006). Modeling the antecedents of proactive behavior at work. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 91(3), 636–652. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.91.3.636>
- Perrewé, P. L., & Spector, P. E. (2002). Personality research in the organizational sciences. *Research in Personnel and Human Resources Management*, 21, 1–63. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-7301\(02\)21001-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-7301(02)21001-4)
- Preacher, K. J., & Hayes, A. F. (2004). SPSS and SAS procedures for estimating indirect effects in simple mediation models. *Behavior Research Methods, Instruments, & Computers*, 36(4), 717–731. <https://doi.org/10.3758/BF03206553>

- Reichers, A. E. (1987). An interactionist perspective on newcomer socialization rates. *Academy of Management Review*, 12(2), 278–287. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1987.4307838>
- Ren, H., Shaffer, M. A., Harrison, D. A., Fu, C., & Fodchuk, K. (2014). Reactive adjustment or proactive embedding? Multistudy, multiwave evidence for dual pathways to expatriate retention. *Personnel Psychology*, 67(1), 203–239. <https://doi.org/10.1111/peps.12034>
- Schaubroeck, J., Jones, J. R., & Xie, J. L. (2001). Individual differences in utilizing control to cope with job demands: Effects on susceptibility to infectious disease. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 86(2), 265–278. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.86.2.265>
- Schaubroeck, J., & Merritt, D. E. (1997). Divergent effects of job control on coping with work stressors: the key role of self-efficacy. *Academy of Management Journal*, 40(3), 738–754. <https://doi.org/10.5465/257061>
- Seibert, S. E., Crant, J. M., & Kraimer, M. L. (1999). Proactive personality and career success. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 84(3), 416–427. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.86.2.265>
- Seibert, S. E., Kraimer, M. L., & Crant, J. M. (2001). What do proactive people do? A longitudinal model linking proactive personality and career success. *Personnel Psychology*, 54(4), 845–874. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.2001.tb00234.x>
- Seligman, M. E., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). *Positive psychology: An introduction* (Vol. 55, No. 1, p. 5). American Psychological Association.
- Shaffer, M. A., Harrison, D. A., & Gilley, K. M. (1999). Dimensions, determinants, and differences in the expatriate adjustment process. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 30(3), 557–581. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.jibs.8490083>
- Shaffer, M. A., Harrison, D. A., Gregersen, H., Black, J. S., & Ferzandi, L. A. (2006). You can take it with you: Individual differences and expatriate effectiveness. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 91(1), 109–125. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.91.1.109>
- Shu, F., McAbee, S. T., & Ayman, R. (2017). The HEXACO personality traits, cultural intelligence, and international student adjustment. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 106(1), 21–25. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2016.10.024>
- Spreitzer, G., Sutcliffe, K., Dutton, J., Sonenshein, S., & Grant, A. M. (2005). A socially embedded model of thriving at work. *Organizational Science*, 16(5), 537–549. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1050.0153>
- Takeuchi, R. (2010). A critical review of expatriate adjustment research through a multiple stakeholder view: Progress, emerging trends, and prospects. *Journal of Management*, 36(4), 1040–1064. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206309349308>
- Takeuchi, R., Li, Y., & Wang, M. (2019). Expatriates' performance profiles: Examining the effects of work experiences on the longitudinal change patterns. *Journal of Management*, 45(2), 451–475. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206317741195>

- Takeuchi, R., Tesluk, P. E., Yun, S. & Lepak, D. (2005). An integrative view of international experience. *Academy of Management Journal*, 48(1), 85–100. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2005.15993143>
- Tharenou, P., & Caulfield, N. (2010). Will I stay or will I go? Explaining repatriation by self-initiated expatriates. *Academy of Management Journal*, 53(5), 1009–1028. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2010.54533183>
- Thompson, J. A. (2005). Proactive personality and job performance: A social capital perspective. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 90(5), 1011–1017. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.90.5.1011>
- Van Vianen, A. E., De Perter, I. E., Kristorf-Brown, A. L., & Johnson, E. C. (2004). Fitting in: Surface- and deep-level cultural differences and expatriates' adjustment. *Academy of Management Journal*, 47(5), 697–709. <https://doi.org/10.5465/20159612>
- Ward, C., & Fischer, R. (2008). Personality cultural intelligence and cross-cultural adaptation: A test of the mediation hypothesis. In S. Ang & L. Van Dyne (Eds.), *Handbook of cultural intelligence* (pp. 159–176). ME Sharpe.
- Wood, R., & Bandura, A. (1989). Social cognitive theory of organizational management. *Academy of Management Review*, 14, 361–384. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1989.4279067>
- Zhu, J., Wanberg, C. R., Harrison, D. A., & Diehn, E. W. (2016). Ups and downs of the expatriate experience? Understanding work adjustment trajectories and career outcomes. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 101(4), 549–568. <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000073>
- Zimmermann, J., & Neyer, F. J. (2013). Do we become a different person when hitting the road? Personality development of sojourners. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 105(3), 515–530. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0033019>
-

JING HUA, PhD, is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Management and HR at Troy University. Her major research interests lie in the area of cross-cultural adjustment and positive psychology. Email: jhua@troy.edu

GUILIN ZHANG, PhD, is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Management and HR at Troy University. Her major research interests lie in the area of leadership, organizational justice, and employee proactivity. Email: gzhang@troy.edu

CHARLES COCO, DBA, is a lecturer in the Department of Management and Human Resource MGT in the Sorrell College of Business at Troy University. His major research interests are in the areas of emotional intelligence, organizational behavior, leadership, and management. Email: ccoco@troy.edu

TENG ZHAO is a doctoral student in the Department of Psychological Sciences at Auburn University. Her major research interests lie in the area of newcomer orientation and socialization, faking in personnel selection, cross-cultural adjustment, and training. Email: tzz0037@auburn.edu

NING HOU, PhD, is an Associate Professor in the Department of Management and Entrepreneurship at St. Cloud State University. Her major research interests lie in the area of newcomer socialization and orientation and dyadic data analysis. Email: nhou@stcloudstate.edu

© *Journal of International Students*
Volume 10, Issue 4 (2020), pp. 836-852
ISSN: 2162-3104 (Print), 2166-3750 (Online)
Doi: 10.32674/jis.v10i4.1065
ojed.org/jis

An Ethnography of Taiwanese International Students' Identity Movements: Habitus Modification and Improvisation

Jasper Kun-Ting Hsieh
The University of New South Wales, Australia

ABSTRACT

Many studies focus on Chinese-speaking international students' adaptation issues inside and outside educational settings in the West. A strong emphasis has been placed on identifying Chinese-speaking international students' problems and solving them through educational programs, pedagogies, and curricula. This emphasis potentially categorizes these students as a cohort that, in particular, have issues learning and living in Western societies, a categorization that ignores identity as complex and context-dependent. Drawing on a Bourdieuan poststructuralist perspective, this 18-month-long study documented the experiences of nine Taiwanese international students at different Australian universities before, during, and after their 1-year postgraduate education in Australia. This study compared their experiences and highlighted the complexity of identity movements. The findings present habitus modification and habitus improvisation, two notions developed from a Bourdieuan perspective. In conclusion, this study encourages reassessment of the standard notions of adaptation and prompts further exploration of how international students use their overseas experiences in the home context.

Keywords: adaptation, habitus, identity, international students, movement

INTRODUCTION

Much of research on Chinese-speaking international students has focused on the stereotypes that Western students hold against these students or the intervention programs that can help international students adapt to the West and Western higher education (Hendrickson, 2018; Matera et al., 2018; Ruble & Zhang, 2013; Smith &

Khawaja, 2011). Such research has concluded that interventions allow Chinese-speaking international students to reach and stay in a status of adaptation. However, there has been little research into how the sociopolitical context influences an individual's adaptation, a research direction suggested by Ward (2013). She indicated that future research on an individual's identity adaptation should seek to understand how individuals perceive and articulate themselves in the processes of adaptation and under what conditions the adaptation fails to be adaptive. The context thus becomes the focal point in understanding the complex process of adapting to multiple identities.

Studies on Chinese-speaking international students focus on the several identities that these students create and modify as appropriate to successfully adapt to the context abroad and home. Their role as non-native English-speaking students (NNSs) is one of the predominant identities that educational researchers focus on, in particular, identifying and addressing the learning issues of NNSs in Western higher education. The main causes of their learning and acculturation problems are attributed to the Chinese-speaking international students' culture of origin and nonnative English. For example, the influence of the Confucius heritage culture has been pointed out as the reason for the these students' passive and memorization-based learning style (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Yu, 1984). Chinese-speaking international students are likely to be perceived as uncreative, uncritical, and rigid learners by the West. This study argues that it is natural for Chinese-speaking international students to have problems integrating with the English-speaking higher education system due to cultural and language barriers. However, this viewpoint has not been widely explored.

Other recent studies have concentrated on homecoming Chinese-speaking international students, mostly documenting the positive progress that these students felt they have made in terms of their English and intercultural communication skills (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015; Hao & Welch, 2012; Xuan, 2014). From these studies on Chinese-speaking international students' adaptation and the pattern of their identity development, they have implicitly encouraged the conclusion that these students, despite the learning difficulties encountered, will eventually lead to positive personal and professional developments after graduation.

While this study acknowledges that identity research should not give up on patterning Chinese-speaking international students' adaptation and the facilitation of adaptation, the paradigm shown from previous studies might have ignored the complexity of context-dependent, cross-border identity development. Chinese-speaking international students' individual differences, such as family backgrounds and personal overseas experiences, and the use of their experiences in identity development, were not considered. It potentially risks treating the data from Chinese-speaking international students as a collective entity and ignores the complexity within this group.

Going beyond the focus of recent studies, this study concluded that, based on their overseas experiences, Taiwanese international students have different definitions for what it means to be a good English speaker. Drawing on a poststructuralist Bourdieuan theoretical framework, this study investigates how Taiwanese Chinese-speaking international students attending Australian universities

worked on, and adapted to, different identities across contexts and over time. Universities, particularly those in Australia, can improve their policies by being more culturally inclusive of Chinese-speaking international students by taking into consideration the complexity of how these students' identities work.

English-Speaker Identity Shaped by Context

The Role of Standard English in the Cross Straits

As the English language has been identified as one of the key factors influencing Chinese-speaking international students' experiences in overseas education, this study begins by understanding English education in the Cross Straits (China and Taiwan). Specifically, it focuses on the role of standard English and the meaning of becoming a good English speaker in this region.

Due to the spread of English as a lingua franca, the many varieties of English that characterize diverse learners' first languages and cultures have received significant attention from English teacher educators, teachers, and learners in different educational contexts in the past decade (French, 2005; Hino, 2012). Attempts have been made to include varieties of English into English as a second language curricula and teaching materials to create an awareness that English is not monolithic and to equip learners with communicative competence, helping them to effectively communicate in a variety of situations in the globalized world (Bieswanger, 2008; Sung, 2016). Regardless of these attempts, the varieties of English other than native ones are not yet well-perceived or recognized by English teachers and learners. The increasing importance of "different Englishes," particularly those other than British and American English, appears to be still only marginally reflected in English as a second language curricula and teaching materials (Bieswanger, 2008). The majority of English teachers and learners in nonnative English-speaking countries still show unquestioning submission to "native speaker norms" (Buckingham, 2014). Indeed, native speaker fallacy is clearly prominent in the Cross Straits, where the acquisition of standard English, perceived as British and American English in the Cross Straits (He & Zhang, 2010; Lai, 2008), is still perceived to be the ultimate goal of English teaching and learning by the teachers and students (Cheng, 2013; Chien, 2014).

Despite being the largest Chinese-speaking society in Asia, learning standard English has officially become a compulsory education in the Cross Straits. To achieve high standard English literacy, English education in the Cross Straits tends to separate English and Chinese in English language education based on teaching schedules, subjects, or instructors. In addition, English monolingual textbooks are used, and European-looking native English speakers are hired in the English education system. This suggests a strong desire for acquiring native and standard English, even though English has always remained as a subject at schools, rather than a tool in life.

Identity Studies

Identity studies on Chinese-speaking international students for the past 15 years have placed much emphasis on identifying and solving their learning issues. Their culture of origin and nonnative English-speaking (NNS) identity have been proposed to be the causes for their mismatch in the native English-speaking West and its educational context. Because of their NNS backgrounds, Chinese-speaking international students have been portrayed as students who lack intercultural competence and Westernized epistemology in educational settings (Angelova & Riazantseva, 1996; Cadman, 1997). They are more likely to experience discrimination, language frustration, and sociocultural isolation due to their ethnicity and NNS identity (Lowinger et al., 2014; Yan & Berliner, 2011). Their shorter length of stay in the host countries, lower English proficiency, and fewer cultural contacts with locals are believed to be the major reasons for their lower level of adaptation (Lun et al., 2010; Paton, 2005). Furthermore, the level of Chinese-speaking international students' English proficiency is proven to be the deciding factor for their nonadaptation in the West. In view of this factor, recent studies on these students have focused on solving these students' language problems through pedagogical, curricular, and administrative support both inside and outside classrooms. For example, teachers in the West are recommended to use more activities that prompt greater intergroup conversations between Chinese-speaking international students and local students (Glass & Westmont, 2014).

Previous identity research on Chinese-speaking international students has shown these students have been treated as one entity (Koehne, 2005) with several predictable "problems" that Western academic institutions must deal with. What is currently known in the discourse about Chinese-speaking international students tells us that inner and personal identities are influenced by external contexts. Several studies also underline the importance of investigating the multiple identities that Chinese-speaking international students need to undertake to adapt to the West (e.g., Gomes et al., 2014; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015; Koehne, 2005). However, this knowledge will always remain incomplete without investigating how these students internalize overseas experiences and rework multiple identities in the home and abroad contexts and over time. The internalization of study abroad experiences and the identity transformations undergone will shine more light on why particular contexts make some Chinese-speaking international students adaptive and some nonadaptive.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To capture the fluidity of Chinese-speaking international students' identity movements, this study focuses on contexts and time points. This study covers several critical moments when the Taiwanese participants experienced identity negotiations, identity struggles, the internalization of overseas experiences, and identity reconstruction at different stages of their overseas education. A poststructuralist approach unveils more areas to explore regarding how each student deals with multiple identities in different contexts. Therefore, it brings more student-centered varieties of identity movements, rather than a linear process of identity formation.

The Bourdieuan thinking toolkit, consisting of field, habitus, and capital, is the theoretical framework that this study adopted for analysis. This toolkit allows the flexibility of investigating how Chinese-speaking international students' identities move in different social spaces and at different time points. It is important to note that Chinese-speaking international students' identity adaptation cannot be understood without taking all these three notions into consideration. There are three key concepts that we will discuss.

Cultural Capital

For Bourdieu (1986), there are three types of capital: economic, cultural, and social capital, each of which can be transferred, inherited, or accumulated. Economic capital refers to the objective forms of monetary assets, such as money and property. Cultural capital, the main type of capital that this study focuses on, refers to an individual's educational background. In the context of this study, receiving their higher education overseas is a type of cultural capital. Social capital refers to one's ability to network with others. In the pursuit of cultural capital, people will inevitably experience identity changes (Moore, 2008). This interrelationship sheds light on Chinese-speaking international students' identity movements before and after completing their Western education.

Habitus and Hysteresis Moments

Habitus is how Bourdieu framed identity. It is defined as people's subjectivity, which is always in the process of reconstruction and internalization under people's awareness (Bourdieu, 1990; Lawler, 2014). Hysteresis moments, meaning a lag of time when a person's old habitus cannot catch up with a new context (Bourdieu, 1977), are the critical moments that this study examines to understand the formation of Chinese-speaking international students' habitus in Taiwan, internalized, embodied, and used for understanding themselves and the world. During hysteresis moments, this study concentrates on how Chinese-speaking international students modify their old habitus for adaptation to the West.

The idea of adaptation is divided into two notions in this study: habitus modification and habitus improvisation. The former means the new meanings of new identities are internalized by Chinese-speaking international students as a result of the conflict between the participants' new experiences in Australia and their old assumptions. The latter indicates that overseas experiences are deliberately used to improvise advantageous identities in the home context. Anchoring these two notions around Bhabha's "third space" (Bhabha, 1994), the Chinese-speaking international students in this study are considered as those with habitus mobility. Through overseas education, Chinese-speaking international students are exposed to both Eastern and Western cultures, which creates this third place where the members see both opportunities and challenges. For outsiders, completing their education overseas means overcoming and adapting to the West. For Chinese-speaking international students, they are both insiders of the East and outsiders of the West, i.e., they have "outsider within" status (Ingram & Abrahams, 2015, p. 153).

Field Integration and Doxa

Bourdieu's (1998) notion of "field" needs to incorporate habitus in order to understand the relational philosophy between a person's internalized habitus and the context in which they act. Field is a dynamic environment where its members compete for membership and higher positions (Moore, 2008) with various forms of capital. Every field has its unique ideologies, which Bourdieu (1977) described as "doxa," a naturalization of arbitrariness. These doxa are shared and valued by its members. Chinese-speaking international students are aware of the competition and doxa that they will need to face upon the completion of overseas study. It is inevitable that they will be embroiled in field competition where newly graduated Chinese-speaking international students may struggle to become members of their fields (Bourdieu, 1993).

METHOD

To capture international students' identity movements in different contexts, it requires a set of methodology with longitudinal data collection to examine "the impact of variables on international students' adaptation over time (Smith & Khawaja, 2011, p. 710). The methodology also needs to incorporate researchers' reflexivity to enhance the trustworthiness of empirical evidence, which "engage(s) with participants and enrich(es) the quality of the research" (Jootun et al., 2009, p. 46). These are the methodological gaps that need to be addressed.

Participants

We recruited participants through placing advertisements on the websites of a number of Taiwanese student associations in Australian universities. The selection criteria aimed to achieve as much balance as possible in terms of the participants' gender, study major, and English proficiency. This study followed the participants' 1-year master's programs by coursework to capture the identity movements throughout their overseas study. This study uses four participants' quotes to explain findings due to the word limit for this publication. Nine Taiwanese international students consented to participate in this 18-month study—five female and four male students in their 20s, majoring in different fields. They were all Sydney-based and categorized as English-competent users according to their IELTS academic results (scored Band 7 in overall performance). Their English-learning background and motivation for overseas education met the study criteria as described in the literature review—that is, students from the Cross Straits who aimed for high competency in standard English and were in pursuit of both fluent English and overseas higher education for a more promising future back home.

Research Question, Data Collection, and Analysis

The research question is: How did the participants' identity move throughout their overseas education in Australia? To answer this question, this study is designed as an ethnographic study with both data from interviews and observations. The data

collection included several rounds of semistructured, audiorecorded interviews before, during and after their overseas study. The interviews were conducted in Mandarin in a one-on-one and face-to-face setting in order to provide the Chinese-speaking international students with the most comfortable way to describe their feelings (Wierzbicka, 1999). The contents were transcribed and translated by a qualified translator. In order to enhance the breadth and depth of data, and the acknowledgment that people's experiences can sometimes be difficult to reveal and describe with language (Polkinghorne, 2005), it is necessary to also spend time engaging, observing, and documenting the lives of the participants outside classrooms. Hence, data collection in this study also involved four quarterly visits to the participants' personal social activities and their residences to capture the fluidity of the participants' Australian experiences, and how these experiences might influence the participants' perception of self and others. The focus of the engagement will be on the participants' unspoken data (Tedlock, 1991), such as their interactions with non-Taiwanese residents in Australia. This study also recorded my reflexivity when engaging with the participants. The purpose was to achieve the validity of data by bringing in the verisimilitude of these lived experiences (Ellis et al., 2011).

The semistructured interview data collected at different stages of this study used thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis is both exploratory and inductive. As I found some prominent patterns and interesting discrepancies in the data, I conducted a deeper search of a suitable theoretical framework to interpret the "keyness" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82) of these patterns and discrepancies in answering the research question. The analysis of data, which includes both field notes and interview transcripts, started with grouping the data into categories of positive feelings about self, negative feelings about self, and interactions between participants and significant others (e.g., Australian classmates or fellow Taiwanese students), inside and outside the classroom setting. I then organized categorized data for review thematically by what occurred, who was involved, and the outcomes, to identify the associations and patterns in relation to the research question (Ritchie et al., 2014).

Researcher's Positionality

To add credibility to this study, it is necessary to include how my positionality, namely my "values and views may influence findings" (Jootun et al., 2009, p. 42). Positionality is defined as the researcher's gender, social status, and educational and cultural backgrounds that function as the "marker of relational positions" (Maher & Tetreault, 1993, p. 118). Although my educational and cultural backgrounds are similar to the participants, our financial status differs and the difference may influence my analysis of the collected data. Most participants are from upper middle-class families in Taiwanese society. For example, Participant A's family runs a real estate business in both Taiwan and China, and Participant B's family owns several hotels in Taiwan. They both grew up in Taipei City, where they were entitled to adequate educational resources. Therefore, their more privileged background meant that they did not need to work for money and were taught by native English-speaking teachers in diverse private, institutionalized and tailored English language programs from childhood.

In contrast, my lower middle-class family background brought me a different English learning experience in Taiwan. Coming from a family where life was always hand-to-mouth, I needed to study hard to receive institutionalized English education. Furthermore, I worked part time to support myself as well as my family once I reached high school. This financial discrepancy between the participants and I did elicit feelings of frustration and jealousy after some interviews and engagements with the participants.

I took my positionality into account during data collection and interpretation. Although I did not reveal how I had felt to them, I did document my feelings about the participants' responses in my field notes. Both the spoken data of interviews and unspoken data of my reflection in the field notes were included and utilized in the construction of subsequent interviews and engagements. This inductive establishment of interview topics and engagement foci was to "seek further clarification of any ambiguity that occurred" (Jootun et al., 2009, p. 44). Despite our different family backgrounds, the participants and I shared similar study experiences, as I had also been a Taiwanese international student in Australia. However, my positionality occasionally conflicted with the participants' feelings and judgments regarding studying in Australia. I documented all the spoken and unspoken data as well as my agreements and disagreements, creating a multi-voiced narration, which provides more "factual evidence" (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 282) to "tell it as it is" (Jootun et al., 2009, p. 44) to the readers.

RESULTS

The participants used habitus modification and habitus manipulation as two ways of reworking their identities due to the evolving relationship between habitus and field when they went across Australian and Taiwanese contexts.

Habitus Modification

The Taiwanese job market is a field characterized by conflicting power dynamics between homecoming students and locally educated Taiwanese. The capital these participants gained from Australian universities and the habitus developed from the English-speaking West are highly regarded in the home context. However, such power relations are not linear. As Maton (2008) reminded us, it is the relation between an individual's habitus and the circumstances they face that decides who is in the higher power position. To further understand the discursive changes throughout the participants' overseas experience, this study concentrates on the habitus modification when Participants A and B were at critical moments, or "third space" moments (Bhabha, 1994, p. 53) of interpreting their changes before and after Australia. The data explains how they challenged doxa with newly acquired overseas experiences. They modified their habitus with the goal of becoming a more native-like English user through engaging with native speakers only. This misconception was internalized into their habitus from their English education in Taiwan, where native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) are considered the true owners and teachers of English. It wasn't until their arrival in Australia that they found their years of learning

English from NESTs in Taiwan and their competent IELTS results did not reflect their actual English competency in Australian academic or social life. During their first hysteresis, their old habitus couldn't match the field they were in, which was exemplified by their experiences of feeling "left out" at an early stage of their study when they tried to understand the lecturers, and when they couldn't participate in conversations with other Australian classmates.

I feel more stressful when I speak English to native speakers because I simply cannot speak English as fast as they can. I once had a discussion with three other (English) native speakers. I couldn't cut in because they spoke so fast and one (person) spoke after another. I felt like I was left out. —Participant A (June 15, 2014)

Like my lecturer: when she is talking to me, I can totally understand what she means. However, sometimes I feel like she slows down or is making her English easier for us (non-native English speakers) to understand. There was a time when a native English-speaking student posted a question to my lecturer in front of everyone. Maybe it was because of that student's accent, but I couldn't quite understand what s/he was asking. However, my lecturer responded to the question right away. And then they started a sort of conversation in class. That was the experience in which I felt that I couldn't actually understand native speakers when they were really being native speakers, speaking in English. —Participant B (April 30, 2014)¹

However, they did not resist habitus modification. Instead, they internalized and embraced the frustration of being a linguistic and cultural outsider in the Australian English-speaking world, even after a decade's worth of English learning. Facing difficulties blending in with local Australian students, their alternative was to turn to other non-Chinese, NNSs. They found confidence and comfort when they spoke in English to other international students. This experience reshaped who they thought they could become in their identity as an NNS. For example, Participant A made the following comparison.

[...] Before studying in Australia, the first picture of English native speakers that came to my mind would be a white person, and he/she can only speak English. [...] For many Taiwanese, as long as the person is white, we will assume that that person must be an English native speaker, or at least fluent in English. (October 28, 2014)

The doxa influenced these two participants to think that they could become a native-like English user through learning native English from NESTs. This doxa and Taiwan's social space forced them to learn native English. In another sense, the English varieties spoken by other NNSs were considered wrong. The doxa they

¹ The interview was conducted in Mandarin and later translated to English. In Mandarin, the pronouns of he and she are neutral and pronounced as "ta." When the participant did not specify the gender of the classmate, I have used s/he.

brought from Taiwan's context was challenged by the robust friendships with other international students and the expansion of their non-Chinese-speaking social network. They were exposed to many "non-standard" English varieties—the wrong English, as they had been told. Through daily interactions, these participants realized and internalized the idea that being a "functional" English user with limited and nonnative English language would be more practical than pursuing an unattainable "native-like" English level. By using English as a lingua franca with other international students for 1 year, their initial definition of a good and fluent English user evolved. For example, Participant A commented:

A really good English user can describe his/her thoughts in detail with his/her limited English. [...] For me, it's all about if the user can clearly express his/her ideas with whatever English he/she has. So, if he/she can do it, I will call that person a fluent English user. Fluency is not about speed. Instead, it's about how effectively you can deliver your ideas in English. — Participant A (October 28, 2014)

This realization was associated with the participants' acknowledgement that improvement in their English could not solely be measured by the results of institutionalized English tests; rather, the true functionality of their limited English had to be measured in an actual real-life English-speaking context. In the excerpt, Participant A's new definition of a good English user has nothing to do with the nativeness of language as many other Taiwanese students would have defined it before coming to Australia. After engaging with other non-Chinese, NNSs for 1 year, Participant A emphasized how far an individual can communicate with other non-Chinese speakers with their "limited" English. The realization and acceptance of limitations in terms of improving their English was vital for their doxa, but also challenging because they had moved to understanding how vastly different people from around the world speak and use English in communication. This was one of the third space moments where these participants internalized the identity of being a "limited" NNS and started to question the doxa.

Habitus Improvisation

Bourdieu (2000/1997, p. 151) used "feel for the game" to describe those social agents whose ability to master field rules correlated with being creative in identity construction. The identity "cracks" (Arber, 2000, p. 60) between being Taiwanese international students in Australia and homecoming students from Australia create a third space that encourages these homecoming students to deliberately improvise desirable identities. This deliberateness enhances doxa and field stratification.

Participants C and D linked their economic capital to easy admission to Australian universities and had thus erroneously assumed that studying in Australia would be as easy as admission. They considered Australian higher education to be a purchasable commodity. When they found the mismatch between reality and their own imagination, the difficulty of performing their current identity was revealed as in following example given by Participant C.

[...] I feel tired. Why should learning be so tiring here? [...] I don't like it here. I cannot adapt to the culture here. It's boring here and people are distant. You know, they (Australians) are pretty hard to become friends with. [...] (I chose Australia) simply because the study duration only lasts for one year. Most of the Taiwanese people I know in Australia are here only for getting the degrees. No one is interested in their culture or English. I once attended a catch-up activity hosted by TSA (Taiwanese Student Association). We (Participant C and other Taiwanese students) all feel like it's pretty easy for us to be accepted by their best universities as long as we have money. —Participant C (May 5, 2014)

Participant C generalized their difficulties as if a majority of Taiwanese students were also having similar issues. Whatever they perceived about Australians inside their classrooms would be erroneously generalized as if Australians and Australian education in general fit with their descriptions. Like Participant C, many expected that their Australian universities would use the same teaching style (one-way teaching) they had experienced in Taiwan. The values of engaging with other students inside and outside classrooms were neglected or misinterpreted.

Participant C's opinion on Australian teaching, Australian students, and their Australian university was based on the presupposition that their economic capital would automatically be exchanged into the amount of cultural capital they were lacking. While Bourdieu's idea of the linkage between economic capital and cultural capital (overseas higher education in this case) is true (Dillon, 2014), the process of obtaining the cultural capital (credentials and English language) is more about spending time and also a commitment. While it was true that these participants' economic power would enable them to obtain master's degrees from Australian universities, the ability to conduct cross-cultural communication and the acquisition of professional knowledge requires time, immersion, and commitment.

These participants' identity movements took place again after graduation. The data uncovered an interesting contrast between people who found that they were free from rules and those who deliberately used Australian experiences to improvise Westernized identities that they needed, but had never existed. History taught them that homecoming students from the West are highly regarded in Taiwan. As the deliberateness of habitus improvisation is manifested when returning to Taiwan, it is foreseeable that the newly forged identities will enhance social stratification. Two participants used the same expressions "have drunk Western ink" (have studied in the West) to describe their predictable position after graduation. "It's a universal fact in Taiwan that people who have drunk Western ink will be better, especially in English. [...] I know this is a stereotype" (Participant C, Oct 31, 2014). "They would think my English must be fluent because I've drunk Western ink before" (Participant D, December 20, 2014).

When I asked about their strengths compared to Taiwanese at home, they both used the expression of "have drunk Western ink." Their use of this expression indicates their deliberateness in perpetuating the stereotypes of their status as even more misleading. In these participants' hysteresis, I learned that they were disappointed by not being able to improve their English to a native speaker's level

because Australia was not as they had imagined, i.e., being full of English native speakers on and off campus. Through their hysteresis, they clearly saw the wide gap between Taiwanese people's imaginations of the West and reality. This realization became their niche in reshaping an advantageous identity that the Taiwanese job market is generally expecting. The following excerpt explains how Participant C was planning to shape their own discourse and make their identity more believable.

I won't even tell people that my English is "fluent" because deep in my heart I know I have just made small progress. [...] I also believe my experiences of interacting with English speakers will become one of my indispensable advantages. I know they might not be much, but it's like my English progress—I am the only one who knows the secret. —Participant C (October 31, 2014)

This excerpt from the interview reveals that Participant C was fully aware that the norm of being recognized as a fluent and cross-cultural speaker of English in Taiwan's society has been long-established. However, the essence of this norm remains unspecified, and hence they can play with it.

DISCUSSION

This section is dedicated to the implications of using habitus modification and habitus improvisation in the studies of Chinese-speaking international students. The use of Bourdieuan habitus destabilizes the research patterns that we've seen for the past decades. By focusing on the relations between Chinese-speaking international students' habitus, capital, and field, the findings identified two habitus movements. This invites us to rethink the idea of "adaptation" used in previous studies on international students. To understand these students' overseas experiences and the use of these experiences, it is imperative to dive into the relational structure between changing habitus, the use of symbolic capital, and the occupation of field.

Being Adaptive Abroad, but Nonadaptive at Home

Habitus modification took place when Chinese-speaking international students encountered an identity crisis where their Taiwanese cultural capital couldn't be proportionally transferred to the Australian field structure. The participants started to question the ideas of becoming fluent in English by studying abroad, which was the doxa they had carried from Taiwan. In their hysteresis moments, they experienced multiple identity crises. As Bourdieu (1977) indicated that crisis is necessary for social agents to question doxa, these participants' modified habitus resulted from embracing their anxiety when they occupied two spaces—being an outsider in Australia and an insider in Taiwan (Maton, 2008).

The anxiety for occupying this outsider within status (Ingram & Abrahams, 2015) is heuristic. Participants A and B started to question some of the doxa they inherited from their home context, such as becoming fluent English speakers by studying abroad and NESTs' teaching being more authoritative than NNESTs. The impetus behind these participants' habitus modification and doxa challenge was the

identification of a mismatch between their newly developed idea of what it means to be an English speaker from Taiwan. They internalized the idea that they could only be considered successful when they could speak English natively. Gradually, it became “the representation of truth” (Bochner, 2012, p. 540). Their habitus was infused with a new layer of meaning. Bourdieu (1977) reminded us that social agents’ habitus is continuously being structured. These participants were, in fact, under the influence of another doxa, exerted from Australian higher education. Compared to before, they felt more comfortable with who they were, what they believed in, and what they were doing as Taiwanese English speakers.

Being Nonadaptive Abroad, but Adaptive at Home

Habitus improvisation is one of the observed strategies that some homecoming Chinese-speaking international students employ to maintain their monopoly and exclude other people (Bourdieu, 1993). There has been an implicit practice in which non-homecoming students are reduced to less English-speaking and internationalized than homecoming Chinese-speaking international students. Homecoming Chinese-speaking international students bring home a symbolic violence under which cultural capital holders are recognized and authorized to exert power to decide the truth (Bourdieu, 2013). This study supports what Moore (2008, p. 101) observed—that is, symbolic violence is “purely arbitrary.” What this study argues further is that the logic and values brought back home by homecoming Chinese-speaking international students, whether they are close to the true Australianese or not, have become the norms that are influencing other prospective Chinese-speaking international students.

From Participants C and D, it appeared that the norms surrounding who can be recognized as a fluent English user are established by introducing more ambiguity. Taiwan’s society, as they described themselves, holds the universal belief that those returning from the West can speak good English. It is the stereotype and “erroneousness” that returnees impose on other Taiwanese. In other words, the field doxa could be deliberately pushed out of the field and then upon nonfield members in order to expand the believability of their discourse. This is why Bourdieu (1977) never rules out the possibility that people’s habitus could be calculative, and we, as social agents, are actually unconscious about the norms and rules that we have accepted for so long.

CONCLUSION

Following a Bourdieuan theoretical framework, this study provided a process-focused identity study to encourage studies on Chinese-speaking international students to rethink the notion of adaptation. The participants’ identity movements were followed for 18 months across both Taiwanese and Australian contexts. By attaching importance to the hysteresis moments where the participants struggled to adapt to new identities, habitus modification and habitus improvisation were the phenomena discovered in their constantly evolving cross-border identity movements. Some participants with modified habitus developed resistance to the old field ideologies, leading to difficulties in rejoining the Taiwanese society. On the other

hand, the homecoming students that deliberately improvised their identities based on the home context's stereotypes, had a smooth reintegration with the home field. This study argues that existing doxa and hierarchy are thus strengthened, preventing other homecoming students with modified habitus from taking up advantageous positions.

From the findings, this study also drew two very different boundaries on what it means to be English-speaking for the participants. Previous studies (e.g., Gill, 2007; Hendrickson, 2018; Smith & Khawaja, 2011) tended to treat international students' adaptation as a status that can be reached through purposefully designed modules or by completing overseas education. This determinist research direction risks losing the dynamics generated by the relations between capital, habitus, and field. This study has identified the importance of understanding how much overseas studying experiences might differ and how these capitalizable experiences could contribute to different identities in cross-border contexts. While much focus has been placed on the design of programs that facilitate so-called "adaptation," such as enhancing integration with local students, the future research direction that this study wishes to open up is to investigate how Chinese-speaking international students, or international students in general, balance adaptation and nonadaptation abroad and at home. I expect that this future research direction will contribute to deep conversations over a number of significant topics, such as the nonadaptation that Western universities' adaptation programs might have caused after international students return home, or the readaptation programs that Western universities might be able to provide before international students return home.

While studies on international students are often focused on identifying the best strategies for students' adaptation, it is also of utmost importance to acknowledge that the ability to be comfortable, adaptive, and nonadaptive in different contexts should be one of the attributes that international students need to acquire. A major limitation of this study is in the diversity of the participants. Because of the limits in time and capability, this study was not able to track students from different cultural backgrounds. If future research could address this limitation, the findings are expected to be more insightful, especially in the studies on international students after completing higher education overseas.

REFERENCES

- Angelova, M., & Riazantseva, A. (1996). "If you don't tell me, how can I know?" A case study of four international students learning to write the U.S. way. *Written Communication, 16*(4), 491–525.
- Arber, R. (2000). Defining positioning within politics of difference: Negotiating spaces 'in between.' *Race Ethnicity and Education, 3*(1), 45–63. doi:10.1080/713693012
- Bhabha, H. (1994). *The location of culture*. Routledge.
- Bieswanger, M. (2008). Varieties of English in current English language teaching. *Stellenbosch Papers in Linguistics, 38*, 27–47. doi:10.5774/38-0-21
- Bochner, A. P. (2012). Between obligation and inspiration: Choosing qualitative inquiry. *Qualitative Inquiry, 18*(7), 535–543. doi:10.1177/1077800412450152

- Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of the theory of practice* (R. Nice, Trans.). Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. E. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory of research for the Sociology of Education* (pp. 241–258). Greenwood.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The logic of practice*. Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1993). *Sociology in question* (R. Nice, Trans.). SAGE.
- Bourdieu, P. (1998). *Practical reason*. Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (2000). *Pascalian meditations*. Polity Press. (Original work published 1997)
- Bourdieu, P. (2013). Symbolic capital and social classes. *Journal of Classical Sociology*, 13(2), 292–302.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77–101. doi:10.1191/1478088706qp063oa
- Buckingham, L. (2014). Attitudes to English teachers' accents in the Gulf. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 24(1), 50–73. doi:10.1111/ijal.12058
- Cadman, K. (1997). Thesis writing for international students: A question of identity? *English for Specific Purposes*, 16(1), 3–14. doi:10.1016/S0889-4906(96)00029-4
- Cheng, C. (2013). Reflections of college English majors' cultural perceptions on learning English in Taiwan. *English Language Teaching*, 6(1), 79–91. doi:10.5539/elt.v6n1p79
- Chien, S. (2014). Varieties of English: Taiwanese attitudes and perceptions. *Newcastle and Northumbria Working Papers in Linguistics*, 20, 1–12.
- Cortazzi, M., & Jin, L. X. (1996). English teaching and learning in China. *Language Teaching*, 29, 61–80. doi:10.1017/S0261444800008351
- Dillon, M. (2014). *Introduction to sociological theory: Theorists, concepts and their applicability to the twenty-first century* (2nd ed.). Wiley Blackwell.
- Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, A. P. (2011). Autoethnography: An overview. *Historical Social Research*, 36(4), 273–290.
- French, G. (2005). The cline of errors in the writing of Japanese university students. *World Englishes*, 24(3), 371–382. doi:10.1111/j.0083-2919.2005.00418.x
- Gill, S. (2007). Overseas students' intercultural adaptation as intercultural learning: A transformative framework. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 37(2), 167–183. doi:10.1080/03057920601165512
- Glass, C. R., & Westmont, C. M. (2014). Comparative effects of belongingness on the academic success and cross-cultural interactions of domestic and international students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 38, 106–119. doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2013.04.004
- Gomes, C., Berry, M., Alzougool, B., & Chang, S. (2014). Home away from home: International students and their identity-based social networks in Australia. *Journal of International Students*, 4(1), 2–15.
- Gu, Q., & Schweisfurth, M. (2015). Transnational connections, competences and identities: Experiences of Chinese international students after their return 'home.' *British Educational Research Journal*, 47(6), 947–970. doi:10.1002/berj.3175

- Hao, J., & Welch, A. (2012). A tale of sea turtles: Job-seeking experiences of hai gui (high-skilled returnees) in China. *Higher Education Policy*, 25, 243–260. doi:10.1057/hep.2012.4
- He, D., & Zhang, Q. (2010). Native speaker norms and China English: From the perspective of learners and teachers in China. *TESOL Quarterly*, 44(4), 769–789.
- Hendrickson, B. (2018). Intercultural connectors: Explaining the influence of extra-curricular activities and tutor programs on international student friendship network development. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 63, 1–16. doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2017.11.002
- Hino, N. (2012). Endonormative models of EIL for the expanding circle. In A. Matsuda (Ed.), *Principles and practices of teaching English as an international language* (pp. 28–42). Multilingual Matters.
- Ingram, N., & Abrahams, J. (2015). Stepping outside of oneself: How a cleft-habitus can lead to greater reflexivity through occupying ‘the third space.’ In J. Thatcher, N. Ingram, C. Burke, & J. Abrahams (Eds.), *Bourdieu: The next generation* (pp. 140–191). Routledge.
- Jootun, D., McGhee, G., & Marland, G. R. (2009). Reflexivity: Promoting rigour in qualitative research. *Nursing Standard*, 23(23), 42–46.
- Koehne, N. (2005). (Re)construction: Ways international students talk about their identity. *Australian Journal of Education*, 49(1), 104–119. doi:10.1177/000494410504900107
- Lai, H. Y. (2008). English as an international language? Taiwanese university teachers’ dilemma and struggle... *English Today* 24(3), 39–45.
- Lawler, S. (2014). *Identity: Sociological perspectives* (2nd ed.). Polity Press.
- Lowinger, R. J., He, Z., Lin, M., & Chang, M. (2014). The impact of academic self-efficacy, acculturation difficulties, and language abilities on procrastination behavior in Chinese international students. *College Student Journal*, 48(1), 141–152.
- Lun, V. M.-C., Fischer, R., & Ward, C. (2010). Exploring cultural differences in critical thinking: Is it about my thinking style or the language I speak? *Learning and Individual Differences*, 20, 604–616. doi:10.1016/j.lindif.2010.07.001
- Maher, F. A., & Tetreault, M. K. (1993). Frames of positionality: Constructing meaningful dialogues about gender and race. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 66(3), 118–126. doi:10.2307/3317515
- Matera, C., Imai, T., & Pinzi, S. (2018). Do you think like me? Perceived concordance concerning contact and culture maintenance on international students’ intentions for contact with the host-society. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 63, 27–37. doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2017.11.004
- Maton, K. (2008). Habitus. In M. Grenfell (Ed.), *Pierre Bourdieu: Key concepts* (pp. 49–65). Acumen.
- Moore, R. (2008). Capital. In M. Grenfell (Ed.), *Pierre Bourdieu: Key concepts* (pp. 101–117). Acumen.
- Paton, M. (2005). Is critical analysis foreign to Chinese students? In E. Manalo & G. Wong-Toi (Eds.), *Communication skills in university education: The international dimension* (pp. 1–11). Pearson Education New Zealand.

- Polkinghorne, D. E. (2005). Language and meaning: Data collection in qualitative research. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 52*(2), 137–145. doi:10.1037/0022-0167.52.2.137
- Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., Nicholls, C., & Ormston, R. (Eds.). (2014). *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers* (2nd ed.). SAGE.
- Ruble, R. A., & Zhang, Y. B. (2013). Stereotypes of Chinese international students held by Americans. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 37*(2), 202–211. doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2012.12.004
- Smith, R. A., & Khawaja, N. G. (2011). A review of the acculturation experiences of international students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 35*, 699–713. doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2011.08.004
- Sung, C. C. M. (2016). Exposure to multiple accents of English in the English language teaching classroom: From second language learners' perspectives. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching, 10*(3), 190–205. doi:10.1080/17501229.2014.936869
- Tedlock, B. (1991). From participant observation to the observation of participation: The emergence of narrative ethnography. *Journal of Anthropological Research, 47*(1), 69–94. doi:10.1086/jar.47.1.3630581
- Ward, C. (2013). Probing identity, integration and adaptation: Big questions, little answers. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 37*, 391–404. doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2013.04.001
- Wierzbicka, A. (1999). *Emotions across language and cultures: Diversity and universals*. Cambridge University Press.
- Xuan, P. T. T. (2014). Speaking out or keeping silent: International students' identity as legitimate speakers and teachers of English. *TESOL in Context, 24*(1), 7–27.
- Yan, K., & Berliner, D. C. (2011). Chinese international students in the United States: Demographic trends, motivations, acculturation features and adjustment challenges. *Asia Pacific Education Review, 12*(2), 173–184. doi:10.1007/s12564-010-9117-x
- Yu, C. C. (1984). Cultural principles underlying English teaching in China. *Language Learning and Communication, 3*, 29–40.

JASPER KUN-TING HSIEH, PhD, is an educational researcher in the area of International Education, the Sociology of Education and TESOL. Email: rosshsieh@gmail.com

Studying Abroad: A Phenomenological Study of Lived Experiences of International Students in Turkey

Ali Çağatay Kılınç
Kürşat Arslan
Mustafa Polat
Karabuk University, Turkey

ABSTRACT

Internationalization trends in higher education have become a significantly accentuated issue, and student mobility is considered one of the core components. This study focuses on investigating the lived experiences of international students at a state university in Turkey using a qualitative research method and phenomenological design. The research data were collected through semi-structured interviews in order to reveal the participants' experiences and their overall insight into studying abroad. Ten international students from various countries participated in the current study. The findings provide a rich description of the lived experiences of international students and their perceptions of studying abroad. Results of the data analysis yielded two major themes entitled "Perceptions of being an international student: What does it mean? What have they experienced?" and "The assistance and challenges they have been through during their study."

Keywords: higher education, internationalization, international students, phenomenological study, studying abroad

INTRODUCTION

For several decades, the overall globalization process has been forcing higher education institutions to transform themselves to accommodate the needs of the new era. In this respect, the internationalization of higher education institutions has

become a significantly accentuated issue within the context of higher education literature (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Childress, 2009; Morosini et al., 2017). Internationalization of higher education, considered as a multidimensional term, is defined by Arum and Van de Water (1992) as several activities, programs, and services that include international studies, international educational exchange, and technical cooperation. A process-oriented definition, which focuses on a different aspect of the term, proposed by Knight (2008), refers to an integration process of an institution's teaching, research, and service functions into international and intercultural dimensions. There are several ways to support internationalization in higher education institutions, including facilitating activities such as studying abroad, encouraging cross-border student and staff mobility, adopting international curriculum, setting up new branch campuses, making international agreements, and building networks at the institutional level (Knight, 2004; Teichler, 2010).

Among these methods of internationalization, student mobility has a key role in this process because mobility programs offer opportunities to broaden one's horizons and increase one's cross-cultural skills (Marshall, 2014). Mobility programs facilitate the development of necessary skills and experiences that most international organizations expect (Di Pietro, 2014). These exchange programs provide participants opportunities of short- or long-term stay in different countries. However, these programs also bring some negativities, encountered in different fields, especially in economic, sociocultural, and administrative dimensions of education systems of countries (De Wit, 2011). People who attend mobility programs often feel marginalized, isolated, and lonely and face racial tensions (Knight, 2011). In addition, they often experience culture shock, which includes stressful experiences such as adapting in a new environment, seeking for accommodation, struggling with the language and the educational setting of host countries, and experiencing homesickness (Jones & Brown, 2007; Sigalas, 2010). In this regard, it is vital to identify the problem areas encountered in this process to eliminate the negative experiences in the internationalization of higher education and to develop future education policies (Knight, 2012).

Student Mobility in Turkey

Turkey strongly supports student mobility among neighboring countries, resulting from bilateral agreements with Turkic republics such as Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus where the majority speaks a Turkic language and are a neighboring country. Turkey welcomes a great number of international students especially from countries such as Iraq and Syria where inner turmoil and civil war have been ongoing for almost a decade. According to the research done by the European Association for International Students and Study Portals (2017), Turkey offers the largest number of English medium undergraduate programs, with 545 across the country. Plus, Turkey is considered at the top in the list of countries with respect to affordability for international students (StudyEU, 2017).

Among all student exchange programs, European Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students, which is a part of Erasmus Plus (Erasmus+)

exchange program, is one of the most popular, successful, and common ways of student mobility all over the world (European Commission, 2015; Ferencz, 2011). Taking the importance of the program into consideration in terms of cross-border mobility activities, as the biggest and most efficient mobility program, Erasmus+ constitutes the largest dimension of the internationalization process of higher education institutions in Europe.

Erasmus+ is one of the popular methods of student mobility in Turkey. Much of the literature on student mobility in Turkey focuses on participants in the Erasmus+ program. The studies have found that students encountered several problems before and during the mobility such as the late arrival of documents from the host universities, the lack of sufficient foreign language competence (Yucelsin Tas, 2013), limited opportunities for accommodation and transportation, and other cultural and economic barriers (Çepni et al., 2018). Research has revealed that despite the various problems, mobility students have benefited much from Erasmus process by improving mostly their lingual and cultural skills (Aslan & Jacobs, 2014; Çepni et al., 2018). Local scholars have also placed a specific emphasis on instructional dimension of the process and evidenced that Turkish instructors are often challenged in improving writing and reading skills of mobility students.

In addition to Erasmus+, Turkey offers additional student mobility opportunities. First of them is the Mevlana Exchange Program, which targets the exchange of higher education students and academics between the Turkish higher education institutions and higher education institutions of other countries. It's quite different from Erasmus+ and other exchange programs in the world because Mevlana includes not only some specific countries or regions but also almost all higher education institutions in the world (Council of Higher Education [CHE], 2019). Türkiye Scholarships, which is another method of student mobility in Turkey, aim to attract distinguished students from international countries by providing a full-time degree and short-term programs at outstanding Turkish universities. (Türkiye Scholarships, 2019). Moreover, with the regulation of 42457 dated July 16, 2014, the Turkish Council of Higher Education allows higher education institutions to make bilateral agreements with the international institutions in terms of student mobility (CHE, 2014).

The current study mainly focuses on examining the lived experiences of international students at a Turkish university that hosts one of the largest number of international students ($N = 7,450$) using a qualitative research method and phenomenological design. The study is guided by two research questions: *How do international students perceive studying abroad in Turkey?* and *What do international students experience during their study?* The findings from the study will offer data for both decision and policy-makers in terms of detecting the potential challenges, understanding student perceptions of studying abroad, providing better conditions for international students, and facilitating their adaptation to social and academic life in Turkey.

METHOD

This study was designed within the perspective of a phenomenological study based on qualitative research design. A phenomenological study identifies the meaning of the lived experience of individuals related to a particular phenomenon and then builds a compound description of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). It also pursues responses to research questions in a descriptive aspect through interviews or observation of those closest to the phenomenon (Davison, 2013). Correspondingly, the study focuses on the experiences of international students within the context of studying in a Turkish higher education institution based on their opinions about being a student in a foreign country, various experiences gained during their study and the contribution of those to their life, problems encountered both at school and in their social lives, possible solutions they have come up with for addressing issues, and in general, their insight on studying abroad.

Study Group

We used criterion and maximum variation sampling techniques under the purposeful sampling method to identify potential participants (Creswell, 2013). As a criterion, only international students who had spent at least 6 months in a Turkish higher education institution located in the north of Turkey were included. We thought that including a variety of participants from different origins could lead us to deeper and comprehensive aspects of the phenomenon. Therefore, we contacted International Relations Office of the university to obtain the full list of international students, including some demographics such as age, gender, country, department and duration of the mobility. The list showed that majority of students were studying in School of Foreign Languages at the time of this study. Then, we contacted some of these students, with the help of second and third authors of the present study who were employed as instructors in School of Foreign Languages, asked them to participate in our interview voluntarily. We also payed attention to select the participants across various countries in accordance with the maximum variation sampling strategy. As can be seen in Table 1, 10 international students (four females and six males) from 10 different countries participated in the research.

Table 1: Participants' Demographics

Participant	Age	Gender	Country	Department	Duration of the mobility
P1	19	F	Kazakhstan	English Language & Literature	6 mo
P2	26	F	India	Business Administration	6 mo
P3	22	M	Chad	Mechanical Engineering	7 mo
P4	21	F	Malaysia	Theology	6 mo

Participant	Age	Gender	Country	Department	Duration of the mobility
P5	21	M	Azerbaijan	International Relations	4 yr
P6	24	F	Turkmenistan	English Language & Literature	2 yr
P7	28	M	Pakistan	Physics	6 mo
P8	20	M	Lithuania	Automotive Engineering	6 mo
P9	23	M	Syria	Automotive Engineering	2 yr
P10	22	M	Somalia	Biomedical Engineering	6 mo

Instrumentation

We collected the research data through a semi-structured interview form with seven questions and several sub-questions mainly about participants' experiences and their overall insight into studying abroad. We asked sub-questions based on the answers of participants in order to reveal their insight and to have in-depth knowledge of the related phenomena (Glesne, 2012). The interview form was composed of two main parts. In the first part of the form, we asked demographic questions about the participants' age, gender, country, study period, and the departments they study in, while in the second part there were seven questions, such as "How do you feel yourself as an undergraduate in a foreign country?" and "What do you think you have learned as an undergraduate from the experiences you gained here?" In the first phase, the form was presented to English language experts, and through their feedback, we made revisions. In order to check its intelligibility, we also presented the form to three international students who did not participate in the study and made further revisions.

Data Collection

The main purpose of a phenomenological interview is to identify the meaning of a phenomenon that several individuals share (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Through a comprehensive dialogue with the participants, we aimed to elicit their accounts and their own sense of reality (Koch, 1995). Based on Creswell's (2013) ethical principles in qualitative research, first, we applied to the Institutional Review Board with an explanatory note about the purpose of the study and participants needed for the research to get an approval. After we received permission to start our study, we recruited participants. Prior to their participation, we informed them about the purpose of the research, and they signed a consent form before the interview process. The interviews, conducted in a confidential and quiet room, with refreshments, took place between November and December 2018. Gray (2004) outlined that planning of the environment is an important consideration toward establishing rapport and gaining the respondent's confidence in the first few seconds of an interview. Each of

the interviews took approximately 30–45 min and were recorded and transcribed after getting permission from each participant.

Data Analysis

We analyzed the transcribed data for themes using a content analysis technique. In the first phase of the analysis process, we sent the transcribed interview data to the participant for review in order to ensure the credibility of the study. We then analyzed all transcriptions according to Creswell's (2013) qualitative data analysis steps: coding the data, classifying themes, organizing codes and themes, and defining and interpreting findings. First, we read the data through several times to grasp a general sense of information. Next, we categorized and labeled each piece of data with a term. We then identified common aspects from each term to render into a major theme and classified the main themes. Finally, we analyzed all data separately using codes regarding the themes to turn them into a manageable data set.

Credibility, Transferability, and Confirmability

We used prolonged engagement and member checking to assure credibility in the study. In order to ensure the transferability, we used thick description, criterion, and maximum variation sampling methods in the study. Additionally, we sent the research data with a code list to a professor who studies higher education and has experience in qualitative research. The professor examined the research data in terms of inquiry audit regarding reliability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Moreover, as Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Urquhart (2013) highlighted, we went back to data to make certain that saturation was based on the widest possible range of data until no new codes occurred in the data. In the context of confirmability, the intercoder reliability value was calculated as .90 by using Miles and Huberman's (1994) formula [$\text{Agreement on data} / (\text{Agreement on data} + \text{Disagreement on data}) \times 100$]. Finally, we provided findings with direct quotations from participants coded as P1–P10. Based on these reviews, we found the research data as a whole to be consistent and reliable.

RESULTS

The findings provide a rich description of the lived experiences of international students regarding their perceptions of studying abroad. Results of the data analysis yielded two major themes entitled "Perceptions of being an international student: What does it mean? What have they experienced?" and "The assistance and challenges they have been through during their study." Several factors affecting both major themes emerged under each.

Perceptions of Being an International Student: What Does It Mean? What Have They Experienced?

In the narrations of the participants, we saw various types of associations between their understanding of being an international student and their personal life

experiences. These associations revealed the traces of their perceptions of living in a different country and the factors affecting their perceptions. Therefore, the first theme emerged from the data is participants' common perceptions of being an international student in a different country and their experiences. The first theme led us to consider several factors that had some direct effects on their lived experiences, such as their host country's culture and people, cross-cultural simulation, cultural adaptability, cultural awareness, self-dependence, self-approbation, career opportunities, and the importance of friendship. All these factors multidimensionally shaped students' perceptions and experiences.

Among all the other factors, striking narrations on the host country's culture and people were the outstanding ones. Participants spoke extensively about how they perceived the host country's culture and people. This perception was mostly related to the hospitality of the host country. Hospitality created a positive perception of the host country's culture and people.

From the first day in Turkey, I met only sympathetic and kind people who helped us. People are very kind and always very helpful and hospitable.
—P7

I found that Turkish people are more than friendly and helpful towards foreigners, which helped a lot during my time here. —P2

Some participants went beyond having a general positive perception of the host country's culture and people by expressing more elaborate feelings about how they thought of the host country.

People here are very friendly, and they treat us as brothers and sisters and that is my true feeling. —P9

I feel like I'm in my own country. —P4

The culture here is so great and people are very respectful. I don't feel like a foreigner here. I am a Black person from Africa, but people here are mostly White, they don't make us feel uncomfortable, they love us, and I even feel advantageous because of my skin color here. —P4

We observed that cross-cultural simulation was another emerging factor explicitly highlighted by some participants, especially those from Turkic and Islamic countries. They pointed out that they came across a lot of similarities between their home country and the host country's culture.

Since my religion is almost the same as the one here, I haven't faced any kind of issues related to religion, so I haven't felt any pressure. —P6

Turkey is like a native country for me, like holidays, religion and I feel at home. —P1

I could see there is almost nothing different between my country and Turkey in terms of many things. —P5

Hence, it is possible to say that these similarities between their own culture and the host country's had a positive impact on their easy adaptation to a new culture. In this sense, these similarities directly affected their perception of being an international student.

In the narrations of participants, cultural adaptability was also a strikingly mentioned factor directly affecting what international students experienced during their stay.

It is exciting to study in a foreign country but at the same time, you need to learn about how things work, the local people, safety etc. Learned how to adapt to a place where you have nil understanding of the local language, so I know I could improve my adaptability skills to a new environment. —P2

Adapting to a new culture was surprisingly not an issue for most of the participants. Several ones mentioned a desire to experience new things and how they enjoyed being able to experience cultural differences and adapting themselves to new surroundings and so forth.

I feel thrilled, I think meeting new people, trying to make new friends who can help me in life and learning about a new culture, they are amazing experiences. —P4

I love cultural differences, so I don't mind some small ones. Learning new things about a new culture is so amusing and interesting for me. —P8

Another factor influencing the perceptions and experiences of international students was the cultural awareness they gained. The data showed that some participants experienced various types of cultural awareness on different levels during their time in the host country.

I learned the differences of their culture from my own, and even a bit of their language—we showed each other our traditional foods and wore our traditional clothes, shared stories about weddings and celebrations in our countries, so it was an amazing experience and more than what I had hoped for. —P4

For me, it's learning something new in a different way and different languages. A good chance to communicate with other people and see new places. —P3

Some participants stated that they became aware of differences and learned from their experiences. Additionally, some mentioned that they were amazed to discover new, inspiring, and surprising things both from Turkish and other international students coming from different parts of the world. It is possible to say that cultural awareness plays a big part in shaping international students' perceptions of both host and other nations.

Every day I see, try, and learn something new for me not only from my Turkish friends but also the others from different countries all over the world. It makes me so enthusiastic about the world and cultures. —P4

Furthermore, a few of the participants also spoke explicitly about how they valued understanding different cultural values with an emphasis on the cultural diversity within the host country. They were pleased to have an experience of multicultural learning environment broadening their horizons.

I met many nationalities and learned various interesting traditions and customs of different nationalities. It broadens my mind. —P1

I learned a lot and how to be tolerant to other people from different countries. I also learned to be more respectful. —P10

In the narrations of participants, self-dependence emerged as another important factor. Almost all participants mentioned the desire to be an autonomous individual who could achieve things solitarily in a different country.

I learned to be more self-dependent to solve my problems on my own. The experiences I gained here made me more confident and fearless and taught me some basic survival skills in a foreign country. —P2

Now I am much more confident to deal with everything in a foreign country and I know how to survive. I feel stronger now. —P6

I trust myself as an independent person to overcome so many problems in a foreign country. —P9

Likewise, self-approration became another factor when several participants talked about their feelings of achievement and how they were content with what they achieved. Personal satisfaction is an important element shaping student's perceptions of mobility programs. The idea of being considered successful might be a factor underneath the self-approration. Most participants mentioned that they were satisfied and proud of being selected for the mobility program and having a chance to study abroad.

Being a student in a foreign country feels good, especially when you are one of the few students selected from your home university. I always wanted to study abroad; this is a golden opportunity for me as a student. Making my parents proud by performing well here at the University. —P2

Proud of myself to achieve such a thing, to have such an opportunity to study here. —P9

Studying abroad is a great experience and I feel very lucky and excited to have this kind of chance after all that hard work. —P7

Career opportunity also emerged as an extensively emphasized factor. Studying abroad was perceived as a career opportunity and a chance to improve their living standards by almost all participants. Their perception was mostly related to having better facilities and infrastructure.

When I compare Turkey to Azerbaijan in terms of economy, education facilities, and technology they have, I can clearly say that Turkey is more

developed in every term than my country so studying here means a more prestigious diploma and better job opportunities for me. —P5

It is a good experience to write down on my CV. —P8

I hope studying abroad will create more chance to find new job opportunities. This is a unique experience to add on my CV maybe some people will choose me just because I have this extra on my CV. —P2

The importance of friendship also emerged as an effective factor in the lived experiences of international students. Participants perceived strong friendship ties as a supportive and motivating factor that made them feel cheerful, protected, and comfortable.

Turkish friends and other international students I learned that meeting new people and socializing with friends open new doors for your life and you don't feel alone or stranger in a different country. —P4

Some participants specifically stated that the support they received from their friends was paramount importance for them. In addition to that, a few perceived friendships as a usual part of social life and they also enjoyed the experience.

My friends support me when I have any kind of problem, so all these factors make me feel free, happy and special. —P9

By the way, if I face any problems or if I need any help, I know I have friends and lecturers are ready to solve them, so I feel relaxed and safe. —P10

The Assistance and Challenges They Have Been Through During Their Study

The second theme that emerged from the data is the assistance and challenges participants had during their time in the host country. There were five factors clustered under this theme including language barriers and language learning challenges, emotional challenges, financial challenges, formal procedural challenges and assistance, and educational assistance.

Because language is one of the main components for communication and social interaction, language barriers was explicitly pointed out as the biggest challenge for most of the participants. Some participants expressed their frustration both for limited social interaction and not being able to understand some academic courses conducted in the host country's language.

I was a bit worried initially because I do not speak the language at all. As mentioned, the biggest challenge is communication, we keep having trouble understanding instructions and lectures in class. —P4

The only problem here is the language problem not many people can speak English that's why I sometimes find it difficult to communicate with some people. —P1

Language is the main problem here. It would have been better if I had more interaction with the local students, but the problem is almost no one speaks English so, there is a limited interaction. —P2

Similarly, for several participants, along with the language barrier issue, another challenge was learning the host country's language. Some of the participants did not find the efficiency of language courses and academics satisfactory as they mentioned the courses weren't beneficial even for the basic level of language learning.

My teachers do not know any basic knowledge of English and they try to teach us Turkish but it's impossible to teach a new language without using English especially for beginners. —P7

Also, some of the teachers teaching Turkish cannot even speak English, so they are teaching us Turkish using Turkish, which we don't understand. It is eventually not really helpful. I do not hope that the lessons will make me fluent, but at least capable of making daily conversation. Therefore, I think it would be better if the Turkish lessons have a clear syllabus on what should be taught every week—to avoid repetition, and the teachers are those who can at least speak basic English. —P4

In the narrations of participants, emotional challenges didn't emerge as one of the major challenges, but a subtle one. Only a few of them spoke about their feelings of being alone in a different country that turned into difficulty especially at the initial part of their experience of living away from their usual social environment.

In the beginning, I was missing my hometown and my friends because I haven't lived in a foreign country before but sometimes, I feel homesick and lonely. —P6

But I have a sense of loss because I am far away from my family and relatives. —P9

In other words, the intersection between language barriers and feeling alone in a different surrounding is evident. It is possible to say that international students' emotional challenges appear especially at the initial stage of their adaptation. This crucial period might become an unbearable situation that may result in quitting the mobility program.

When I came here, it was the first time to be away from my family and country. So, at first, I felt a bit homesick even thought about going back. —P5

In the first days in Turkey, I was so stressful and depressed because I couldn't communicate successfully. I couldn't understand the people or express myself clearly. —P8

Among all the factors affecting the second theme of the study, financial challenges became visible when participants, particularly from developing countries

or countries with less national income than the host country, pointed out the difficulties they went through to pay for their own expenses.

The biggest problem that I experienced is financial issues because when I compare the expenses for utilities and rent, I find it very difficult to live here because prices are so high, and I have a very limited budget to live on. —P6

Here you can only find buses, taxis, and minibuses to travel in the city and the fees for transportation should be cheaper. Hospitals are good but medical expenses are higher here. To buy medicine you must pay a great amount of money. —P2

In fact, I want to start with the financial problems I have. When I first came here, I didn't have a lot of money because of the never-ending war in my country make most people very poor. My family sent me here to study, but I know they don't have enough money to support me here, so I must work to earn enough, I think it is more important than my academic life. —P9

Interestingly, for several participants, on the other hand, financial issues were not even a problem. The ones from European countries or those with sufficient scholarships stated that they received enough money to cover all their expenses including social activities and travel fees. Thus, they indicated that they had no financial challenges and even expressed their satisfaction with the scholarship funded by the mobility program. Accordingly, the absence of any financial challenges placed the students from the developed countries in a position separate from the developing ones. Because most of the European countries have better economic conditions, students from those countries might consider mobility programs as a way to experience new things without even thinking about financial issues.

The scholarship is enough, so I don't have any financial problems even I save some money to travel around Turkey. —P8

Actually, I don't have any problems. Turkish scholarship is enough for me. Meals provided at the school cafeteria are not expensive for us. —P10

The scholarship is more than enough, and it covers all my expenses here for now I have not faced any financial problems yet. —P7

Formal procedural challenges and the need for assistance was another factor stated by several participants. Along with the assistance they received from the formal authorities including the mobility program officials, they also mentioned the institutional support provided by the host university.

The people in Erasmus office are very helpful. They organize almost everything; I can easily get information about anything. They even arrange my dorm and help me with some of the official documents. —P8

The people who are responsible from international students are very helpful. —P6

I believe people are doing their best to astonish and satisfy foreign students. They work hard to make everything convenient for us. —P4

It was clear from the narrations some were content with the assistance they received starting from the initial stages of their study. This assistance seemed to be important for their adaptation to their new schools.

Everything is managed by the administration, and us foreign students do not have to manage everything by ourselves. I found that the administration in Rectory is incredibly efficient and fast, and none of our questions or enquiries go unanswered. —P4

However, only one participant found it difficult to cope with some formal procedural documentation work and expressed the difficulty as a challenge causing some boredom and annoyance.

It takes up a lot of process and exhausting work, namely filling forms, applying for residency permits, adding subjects into our learning protocols, taking up classes and examinations etc. —P7

Educational assistance and available resources emerged as another distinctive factor, as participants spoke extensively about the satisfactory support they received from the academic staff and how they appreciated the educational system the host institution provided.

Our teachers here are all helpful people and school is very modern, it has the latest technology, tools. It provides free internet connection and there is a huge library to study. —P3

The facilities are very good. Technology you use here like smart boards and projectors are better than we have in my country. Infrastructure is much better here. —P2

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study offers a further exploration of the lived experiences of international students regarding their perceptions of studying abroad, particularly those of students studying abroad in Turkey. Although there is a considerable amount of research on international students and internationalization of higher education institutions, not many researchers have examined the basic reasons that constitute students' perceptions toward living in a foreign land as an international student and the experiences they have during their study.

The findings of the study revealed views that the host country's culture and people play a crucial role in enabling students to integrate both socially and culturally into their new surroundings. No matter what their gender, religion, cultural backgrounds, or ethnic origins, most of the participants explicitly stated that they had positive perceptions toward the host culture and people. Previous research (particularly on international students in the United States) has pointed out that more interaction with host country nationals led to better cultural adjustment and a better

social experience (Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002; Hendrickson et al., 2011). Considering the research and this study's findings, a welcoming culture and the hospitality of the host country's people affect the way international students adapt into a new social surrounding, despite any previous opinions of the host country. Intensive interaction with the host culture and people takes on a significant and facilitating role in this adaptation process rather than a challenging one (Ward & Kennedy, 1993; Zimmerman, 1995). A related outcome of this conclusion is that the cultural diversity, friendship, and interaction with nationals on host campuses provides a positive, supportive, and motivating environment for students to blend easily in social and cultural surroundings, which helps them develop better interaction and communication skills. Historical, sociocultural, religious, and linguistic bonds and similarities that international students, especially from Turkic and Islamic countries, find within the host culture play an efficacious role in this process. Within the related literature, there is much evidence about the facilitator role of the interaction patterns in this sociocultural adaptation process (Coles & Swami, 2012). Additionally, international diversity and friendship on host campuses function as a pivotal element providing international students with better intercultural communication skills and appreciation of diverse cultural differences (Williams, 2005; Yang, 2016). The integration level increases as international students experience resemblance in terms of co-national relationships (Redmond & Bunyi, 1993; Ward & Searle, 1991). Within the related literature, there is much evidence about the facilitator role of the interaction patterns mentioned above in this sociocultural adaptation process (Coles & Swami, 2012). Additionally, international diversity and friendship on host campuses function as a pivotal element providing international students with better intercultural communication skills and appreciation of diverse cultural differences (Williams, 2005; Yang, 2016). In addition, through mobility programs, international students utilize an opportunity not only to enhance cross-cultural skills but also to broaden their horizons with regard to gaining more cultural awareness (Marshall, 2014). Furthermore, previous research has also revealed that appreciating cultural differences helps international students improve cross-cultural interactions (Rockstuhl et al., 2010).

Living and studying in a different country means that international students must manage almost everything by themselves. Sometimes this experience could be distressing but most of the time encouraging. From the first day on, they must arrange their financial budgets and cope with some frivolous challenges, which may be their first time handling such things. In relation to this fact, the study findings indicated that international students not only notice the value of being a self-dependent individual but also foster their confidence and discover their hidden abilities to survive in a different surrounding. During this period, they also draw lessons from their experiences and increase in maturity. Therefore, it could be considered as a unique experience giving them the opportunity to find their potential regarding self-approbation and limits, to reinforce their confidence in a foreign land. The current study findings on this certain issue of self-dependence and self-approbation reverberate with some research in the related literature. Some previous research has stated that studying abroad could be considered as a self-development and self-

realization process through which students experience a variety of new things and discover their potential (Wu et al., 2015).

As globalization forces corporations toward enlarging international competition, the need for more cross-culturally skilled workforce rises. Thus, studying abroad provides favorable conditions to acquire those necessary skills (Kehm, 2005). Findings of the current study regarding career development also reflected that most of the participants considered studying abroad as a key to more prestigious and well-paid jobs that could lead to a better future. These findings support research stating that mobility programs could equip students with essential skills desired by international corporations (Di Pietro, 2014). Hence, it could be concluded that studying abroad serves as a supplier of the competent workforce both for host and international organizations.

As international students seek for higher education in a foreign land, they encounter many obstacles ranging from social, cultural, financial, and emotional issues to language difficulties (Jones & Brown, 2007; Sigalas, 2010). While their transitional phase can be quite challenging, it might also be a motivator as they use assistance provided by host institutions and utilize their own strategies to overcome these challenges. The findings of the current study revealed that language barriers, along with limited interaction both socially and academically, were the biggest challenges participants faced. They explicitly stated difficulties in communicating with host nationals and their professors due to language barriers that resulted in low academic performance and limited, stressful interactions with both. As they indicated, the language competency problem mostly stemmed from their professors who, lacking English language competency, tended to conduct classes in their native tongue. This forced students to learn not only survival level of the host language but also academic level language. The current study findings resonate with previous research outcomes regarding language barriers leading to limited interaction and stress for international students (Camiciottoli, 2010; Riggio, 2010). Host institutions should provide international students both with more linguistically competent professors and better educational assistance for language issues so that students can integrate and interact better in their academic and social life.

The current study findings also illustrated that some international students encountered emotional challenges including feeling lonely, homesick, and isolated. They experienced these challenges especially at the initial stages of their arrival. Thus, not only were they struggling to adapt to the host country, but also to adjusting emotionally. The study findings are consistent with previous research that a new environment outside of their home country could cause some emotional stressors (Knight, 2011; Sawir et al., 2007). Namely, it is critical to assist international students at the early stages of their arrival and to eliminate language obstacles causing emotional stress and weak academic performance. In this study's findings, financial challenges didn't emerge as a major indicator that directly affected most of the participants. Many of them expressed that the scholarships funded by the mobility programs were enough to cover all their general living and academic expenses. In this regard, if enough funding is provided, financial issues would not have a negative impact on their integration nor on their emotional adjustment process.

Apart from the challenges, educational and institutional assistance that international students received during their study had a significant impact on satisfaction level through positive experiences of international students. Thus, appropriate services, including academic mentoring, the infrastructure of facilities, financial aid, and social activities for international students, are essential to help students have positive experiences and achieve their academic goals. In this regard, the findings show similarity with previous research emphasizing the significance of both educational and institutional support to contribute to the satisfaction of international students (Carr et al., 1999; Lee & Wesche, 2000). That is to say, host institutions should be fulfilling places where resources and support are adequate for international students' needs. To sum up, the findings of the study form integrity with the related literature regarding the internationalization of higher education institutions and support the necessity of understanding the experiences and perceptions of international students and how these play a critical role in their adaptation process to living and studying in another country.

Since this study only centered on a certain group of international students at a specific higher education institution, the findings should be carefully interpreted. Therefore, making a generalization of the findings beyond the group of international students is limited. Future studies should consider exploring international students' experiences in-depth by looking at other variables of the phenomena.

REFERENCES

- Altbach, P. G., & Knight, J. (2007). The internationalization of higher education: Motivations and realities. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 11*(3–4), 290–305.
- Arum, S., & Van de Water, J. (1992). The need for a definition of international education in US universities. In C. B. Klasek (Ed.), *Bridges to the future: Strategies for internationalizing higher education* (pp. 191–203). Association of International Education Administrators.
- Aslan, B., & Jacobs, D. B. (2014). Erasmus student mobility: Some good practices according to views of Ankara University exchange students. *Journal of Education and Future, 5*, 57–72.
- Camicciottoli, B. B. (2010). Meeting the challenges of European student mobility: Preparing Italian Erasmus students for business lectures in English. *English for Specific Purposes, 29*(4), 268–280.
- Carr, S. C., McKay, D., & Rugimbana R. (1999). Managing Australia's aid- and self-funded international students. *International Journal of Education Management, 13*(4), 167–172.
- Çepni, O., Aydın, F., & Kılınc, A. Ç. (2018). The problems that students participating in erasmus programme encountered and their solutions: A phenomenological study. *Journal of Higher Education and Science, 8*(3), 436–450.
- Childress, L. K. (2009). Internationalization plans for higher education institutions. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 13*(1), 289–309.
- Coles, R., & Swami, V. (2012). The sociocultural adjustment trajectory of international university students and the role of university structures: A

- qualitative investigation. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 11, 87–100.
- Council of Higher Education. (2014). *Bilateral agreements*. <https://uluslararasi.yok.gov.tr/Documents/sss/%C4%B0%C5%9EB%C4%B0RL%C4%B0KLER%C4%B0%20YEN%C4%B0%20GENEL%20KURUL%20KARARI.pdf>
- Council of Higher Education. (2019). *Mevlana Exchange program*. https://mevlana.yok.gov.tr/Documents/Anasayfa/Mevlana-Kitapcik-Yeni_08.06.2015_%C4%B0statistiksiz.pdf
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. SAGE.
- Davison, T. L. (2013). The effect of the recession of 2007–2009 in the community bank environment. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 4(14), 34–41.
- De Wit, H. (2011). *Trends, issues and challenges in internationalisation of higher education*. Centre for Applied Research on Economics and Management, Hogeschool van Amsterdam.
- Di Pietro, G. (2014). University study abroad and graduates' employability. *IZA World of Labor*, 109, 1–10.
- European Association for International Students and Study Portals (2017). *English-taught bachelor's programmes: Internationalising European higher education*. European Association for International Education.
- European Commission. (2015). *Erasmus—Facts, figures and trends* http://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/education/library/statistics/erasmus-plus-facts-figures_en.pdf
- Ferencz, I. (2011). Credit mobility in EU programmes Erasmus and Leonardo Da Vinci." In U. Teichler, I. Ferencz, & B. Wächter (Eds.), *Mapping mobility in higher education in Europe. Volume I: Overview and trends* (pp. 89–113). Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst.
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Aldine
- Glesne, C. (2012). Nitel araştırmaya giriş [Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction]. (A. Ersoy & P. Yalçinoğlu, Trans. Ed.) Ankara: Anı Yayıncılık.
- Gray, D. E. (2004). *Doing research in the real world*. London: Sage.
- Hechanova-Alampay, R., Beehr, T. A., Christiansen, N. D., & Van Horn, R. K. (2002). Adjustment and strain among domestic and international student sojourners: A longitudinal study. *School Psychology International*, 23(4), 458–474.
- Hendrickson, B., Rosen, D., & Aune, R. K. (2011). An analysis of friendship networks, social connectedness, homesickness, and satisfaction levels of international students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35(3), 281–295.
- Jones, E., & Brown, S. (2007). *Internationalising higher education*. Routledge.
- Kehm, B. M. (2005). Developing doctoral degrees and qualifications in Europe. Good practice and issues of concern. *Beiträge zur Hochschulforschung*, 27(1), 10–33.

- Knight, J. (2004). Internationalization remodelled: Definition, approaches, and rationales. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 8(1), 5–31.
- Knight, J. (2008). Internationalization: A decade of changes and challenges. *International Higher Education*, 50, 6–7.
- Knight, J. (2011). Five myths about internationalisation. *International Focus*, 67, 1–2.
- Knight, J. (2012). Student mobility and internationalization: Trends and tribulations. *Research in Comparative and International Education*, 7(1), 20–33.
- Koch, T. (1995). Interpretive approaches in nursing research: The influence of Husserl and Heidegger. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 21, 827–836.
- Lee, K., & Wesche, M. (2000). Korean students' adaptation to post-secondary studies in Canada: A case study. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 56, 637–689.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G.B. (1999). *Designing qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: SAGE.
- Marshall, J. (2014). *Introduction to comparative and international education*. SAGE.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *An expanded sourcebook: Qualitative data analysis* (Second edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Morosini, M., Corte, M., & Guilherme, A. (2017). Internationalization of higher education: A perspective from the great south. *Creative Education*, 8(1), 95–113.
- Redmond, M., & Bunyi, M. J. (1993). The relationship of intercultural communication competence with stress and the handling of stress as reported by international students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 17(2), 235–254.
- Riggio, R. E. (2010). Before emotional intelligence: Research on nonverbal, emotional, and social Competences. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, 3(2), 178–182.
- Rockstuhl, T., Hong, Y. Y., Ng, K. Y., Ang, S., & Chiu, C. Y. (2010). The culturally intelligent brain: From detecting to bridging cultural differences. *NeuroLeadership Institute*, 3, 22–36.
- Sawir, E., Marginson, S., Deumert, A., Nyland, C., & Ramia, G. (2007). Loneliness and international students: An Australian study. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 12, 148–180.
- Sigalas, E. (2010). The role of personal benefits in public support for the EU: Learning from the Erasmus students. *West European Politics*, 33(6), 1341–1361.
- StudyEU. (2017). *Country ranking 2017 for international students*. <https://www.study.eu/article/the-study-eu-country-ranking-2017-for-international-students>
- Teichler, U. (2010). Internationalising higher education: Debates and changes in Europe. In D. Mattheou (Ed.), *Changing educational landscapes. educational policies, schooling systems and higher education—A comparative perspective* (pp. 263–283). Springer.
- Türkiye Scholarships. (2019). *Türkiye scholarships*. Retrieved March 30, 2019 from <https://www.turkiyeburslari.gov.tr/?aspxerrorpath=/tr/s-s-s/>

- Urquhart, C. (2013). *Grounded theory for qualitative research: A practical guide*. SAGE.
- Ward, C., & Kennedy, A. (1993). Psychological and socio-cultural adjustment during cross-cultural transitions: A comparison of secondary students overseas and at home." *International Journal of Psychology*, 28, 129–147.
- Ward, C., & Searle, W. (1991). The impact of value discrepancies and cultural identity on psychological and socio-cultural adjustment of sojourners. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 15, 209–224.
- Williams, T. R. (2005). Exploring the impact of study abroad on students' intercultural communication skills: Adaptability and sensitivity. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 9(4), 356-371.
- Wu, H. Garza, E., & Guzman, N. (2015). International student's challenge and adjustment to college. *Education Research International*, 2015, Article 202753. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1155/2015/202753>
- Yang, P. (2016). Intercultural communication between East and West: Implications for students on study abroad programs to China. In D. M. Velliaris & D. Coleman-George (Eds.), *Handbook of research on study abroad programs and outbound mobility* (pp. 755-777). Hershey, PA: IGI Global.
- Yucelsin Tas, Y. T. (2013). Problems of the Erasmus programme and their solutions. *Turkish Studies*, 8(10), 763–770.
- Zimmerman, S. (1995). Perceptions of intercultural communication competence and international student adaptation to an American campus. *Communication Education*, 44, 321–335.
-

ALI ÇAĞATAY KILINÇ, PhD, is an associate professor in the Department of Educational Sciences at Karabuk University, Turkey. He received his PhD from the Department of Educational Sciences, Division of Educational Administration, Gazi University, Ankara, Turkey in 2013. His research focus is on educational leadership, school improvement, teacher learning and practices, and internationalization of higher education. Email: cagataykilinc@karabuk.edu.tr

KÜRŞAT ARSLAN, MA, is a lecturer in the School of Foreign Languages at Karabuk University. Currently he is a PhD student in the department of Educational Administration at Gazi University. He has a particular research interest in educational administration, organizational leadership, higher education studies and internationalization of higher education. Email: kursatarслан@karabuk.edu.tr

MUSTAFA POLAT, PhD, is an assistant professor in the School of Foreign Language at Karabuk University. He received his PhD from the Department of Educational Sciences, Division of Curriculum and Instruction, Anadolu University, Eskişehir, Turkey in 2019. His research interests lie in curriculum, instruction, foreign language teaching, language anxieties, effective learning, and internationalization of higher education. Email: mustafapolat@karabuk.edu.tr

Cross-Cultural Digital Information-Seeking Experiences: The Case of Saudi Arabian Female International Students

Haifa Binsahl
Shanton Chang
The University of Melbourne, Australia

Rachelle Bosua
Open University, The Netherlands

ABSTRACT

The number of Saudi female international students (SFISs) pursuing higher degrees in Western countries has increased dramatically. Many are faced with unusual challenges, especially acting without a male's permission, interacting with males, and using an open, free Internet. This article proposes that SFISs experience a "digital shift" whereby their cultural, educational, and digital backgrounds impact their information-seeking behavior in Australia. The study used a qualitative interpretivist methodology, interviewing a diverse group of SFISs studying in Australia, to better understand this impact on their everyday information needs and use of information sources. Findings indicate that SFISs' imperfect online search skills, exacerbated by English language deficiency, increase their challenges. Recommendations for supporting SFISs are offered for institutions and service providers.

Keywords: digital shift, information-seeking behavior, Saudi female international students

INTRODUCTION

This article aims to add to the limited body of literature on Saudi Arabian female international students' (SFISs') information-seeking behavior (ISB). In 2014–2015,

over 157,000 Saudi students studied abroad in 46 countries (UNESCO, 2014). By 2019, Australia was ranked third most preferred destination, with over 6,200 Saudi students enrolled in Australian universities (Australian DFAT, 2000). The multicultural society and excellent educational system were main reasons SFISs chose Australia over other Western countries (Alqarni, 2011).

Despite the growth in Saudi international students, existing literature on SFISs is scant compared to studies on Saudi male students. Researchers suggest several reasons (Binsahl et al., 2015). First, Saudi women have traditionally been discouraged from studying abroad: They should be “fully committed to [their] family and home” (Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015). Second, international scholarships have only been available to women for the past 10 years through the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP). Third, Saudi females cannot travel overseas without a male guardian, so although a scholarship is available, a woman cannot receive this if her guardian is unable or unwilling to accompany her. Finally, Saudi Arabia’s highly gender-segregated culture makes it difficult for male researchers to conduct studies on Saudi female students, who Al-Kahtani et al. (2006, p. 241) termed the “hard-to-reach population.”

Existing studies on SFISs mainly focus on academic and social adjustments (Alhazmi & Nyland, 2011, 2013; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015; Sandekian et al., 2015). However, to date, no research has examined the impact of this transition on their online ISB and social media use. Studies on ISBs of other international students and recent research on international students’ cross-cultural challenges have found that many students display ineffective ISBs leading to an inability to fulfil their information needs (Chang & Gomes, 2017; Sin & Kim, 2013; Sin et al., 2011). Hence, researchers have called for more studies on how international students access information during their stay in a host country.

Considering these gaps in ISB research, this article explores the question: How does the transition to Australia impact SFISs’ ISB? This article concentrates on both online and offline information seeking and is motivated by two key aspects. First, the principal researcher is an SFIS and has a deep and intimate understanding of the culture, social values, and language of participants. This facilitated her full engagement with the research context and the development of a deeper association with research participants, as proposed by all guides to qualitative research (for example, Denzin & Lincoln, 2017; Hamid, 2013). Second, the increasing numbers of SFISs pursuing overseas studies requires a more profound understanding of these students’ needs and the support structures they might require.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Saudi Females and Cultural Norms

All international students face a wide range of ISB challenges resulting from cultural, language, and educational transitions (Hughes, 2013; Liao et al., 2007; Mehra & Bilal, 2007; Sin & Kim, 2013), which become manifest in their ISB while they are in a host country. For SFISs, these challenges are compounded by the large cultural, educational, and digital differences between Saudi Arabia and Australia.

As well as undertaking a geographical transition from one country to another, SFISs encounter a cultural transition (Alanazy, 2013; Alhazmi & Nyland, 2011, 2013; Alqefari, 2015; Alruwaili, 2017; Altamimi, 2014; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015; Sandekian et al., 2015). Most challenges are attributed to SFISs' cultural background, since Saudi Arabia is a strictly conservative country whose religious and cultural norms are unique in the world.

In Saudi Arabia, Islam and Saudi cultural norms shape people's identity, attitudes, practices, behaviors, and ways of living (Al-Munajjed, 1997). The cultural and the religious influences are hard to distinguish; the Saudi version of Islam has many elements absent in other Islamic nations, suggesting a cultural rather than a religious tradition (Al-Qahtani, 2015). However, although this form of Islam is the state's religion and often strictly policed, many Saudis dispute these ultra-conservative rules and adopt a more liberal, moderate version of Islam (Al-Qahtani, 2015), particularly in the Western regions bordering the Red Sea, where Mecca (Makkah) and Medina (Madinah) are located. The North and Central regions, including Riyadh (the capital) are more conservative. However, none of the regions are totally homogeneous, and families differ on the liberal-conservative continuum everywhere.

Saudi women are expected to avoid talking to unrelated males. To ensure that male-female interactions are kept to a minimum, a gender segregation policy is strictly enforced (Alhazmi & Nyland, 2013) "to avoid the occurrence of adultery and prevent other men from encroaching on the male honour of the family" (Al-Munajjed, 1997, p. 34). In addition, women are not expected to discuss sensitive issues like politics or sex topics (Al-Zahrani, 2010), except with close friends or family, preferably using offline channels when sharing. Interaction between males and females beyond the immediate family is seen as an "erosion" of a family's reputation (Oshan, 2007), which has more serious consequences for women than for men (Almakrami, 2015). Women are protected from other men by a *mahram* (a closely related male guardian—husband, father, brother, or even son). The mahram's permission is needed for nearly all activities. Importantly for this study, women leaving Saudi Arabia must be accompanied by their mahram (Al-Kahtani et al., 2006; Hall, 2013; Human Rights Watch, 2016; Raghaven, 2017). This means they need a close male relative who has the time and inclination to leave his home and workplace for several years.

The Gender Gap

The *Global Gender Gap Report*, published annually by the World Economic Forum, is 'a compass to track progress on relative gaps between women and men on health, education, economy and politics' (WEF, 2020, p.4). Findings are reached by integrating statistics from international organisations and surveys. Saudi Arabia is ranked 146th out of 153 countries, compared with Australia's rank of 44th. This seems surprising, since the report shows that Saudi's education rating is 0.983 (1.00 is equity), and health and survival in Saudi Arabia is almost the same as in Australia (0.963 and 0.971 respectively). The high education rating is due to major policy changes in girls' and women's education over the past decade and to the introduction

of KASP, available to female students since 2005. However, the ratings for gender equity in the categories Political Empowerment (Saudi Arabia: 0.077; Australia: 0.231) and Economic Participation and Opportunity (Saudi Arabia is close to the bottom with 0.375, versus Australia's 0.722) show why Saudi Arabia ranks so low. For example, only since 2013 have women had seats on advisory councils (Fox News 2013), and since 2015 been granted the right to vote in municipal elections and run as candidates (*Freedom House*, 2016).

A Collectivist Culture

The results of the 2017 *Global Gender Gap Report* can be matched against Hofstede's (1991) cultural dimensions theory, which distinguishes between what Hofstede calls "collectivist" and "individualist" cultures as measured by the indices of his model.

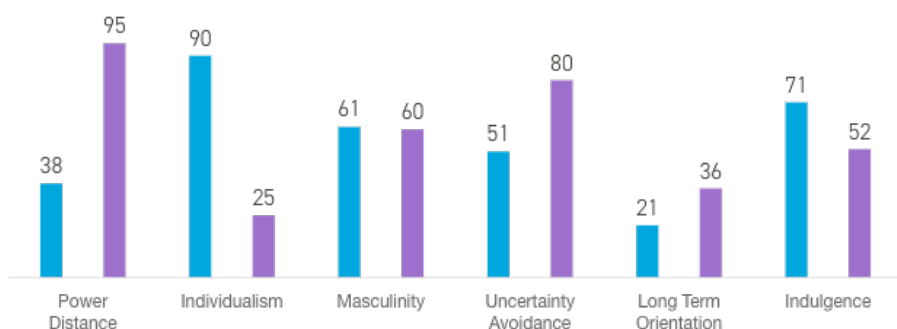


Figure 1: Comparison of Cultural Markers Between Saudi Arabia and Australia

The difference in power distance scores shows the hierarchical nature of Saudi's culture. Al-Saif (2013) noted that despite the changes in educational policy, universities and courses open to women were severely limited. Alwedini's (2016) and Alsuwaida's (2016) more recent research confirm that little change has occurred since Al-Saif's (2013) conclusions. Moreover, Saudi pedagogy relies on teacher-centered teaching, requiring students to memorize textbooks and recall the text in class and for examinations (Hamdan, 2005). Students arriving in Australia find they must conduct their own research and contribute ideas in seminars and tutorials (Gray et al., 2010) while in close proximity to male students. Thus, SFISs are further challenged by an unfamiliar individualistic learning and lifestyle culture (Shepherd & Rane, 2012).

Saudi Females and the Digital Experience

SFISs experience another unique transitional challenge: a major change to their internet use, a "digital shift" (Binsahl et al., 2015). Internet access in Saudi Arabia

became available some years later than in Western countries, indeed later than in other Gulf nations (Al-Kahtani et al., 2006). Given the free and open nature of the Internet (Vie, 2008), thousands of sites have been censored (400,000 by 2004; Albugami & Ahmed, 2016) to “protect the values and culture espoused by Muslims” (Albugami & Ahmed, 2016, p. 25) and generally prevent access to “undesirable” material (Al-Saggaf & Begg, 2004), including posts related to religion (especially non-Islamic), human rights, pornography, drugs, Western media, and “content related to Israel and the Jews” (Danielewicz-Betz, 2013, p. 218). Even medical sites with content related to private body parts are illegal. Attempting to access any “forbidden” site generates an automatic warning (Figure 2).

Dear User, عزيزي المستخدم,

Sorry, the requested page is unavailable. عفوًا، الموقع المطلوب غير متاح.

If you believe the requested page should not be blocked please [click here.](#) إن كنت ترى أن هذه الصفحة ينبغي أن لا تُحجب تفضل بالضغط هنا.

For more information about internet service in Saudi Arabia, please click here: www.internet.gov.sa لمزيد من المعلومات عن خدمة الإنترنت في المملكة العربية السعودية، يمكنك زيارة الموقع التالي: www.internet.gov.sa

Figure 2: Automatic Arabic Warning Page on “Forbidden” Sites

Additionally, in contrast to Western students (Jones & Madden, 2002; Lenhart et al., 2001), online educational facilities are not in general use in Saudi Arabia schools, despite massive government funding and encouragement (Harden & Al Beayez, 2012). Albugami and Ahmed (2016) expressed their concern that Saudi Arabian schools “still [lagged] behind those countries that lead the world in education, particularly concerning ICT” (p. 37), and a year later that “Saudi schools are technically, politically and culturally unprepared for a ‘change paradigm’” (Albugami & Ahmed, 2016, p. 27).

Thus Saudi students new to Australia are plunged, unprepared and floundering, into the flood of online information produced by educational institutions (Alzougool et al., 2013; Binsahl & Chang, 2012; Binsahl et al., 2015; Gray et al., 2010). As members of a collectivist culture, Saudis rely on close family and friends for decision-making and information. Unfortunately, Australian educators assume that Saudi students are as able as other international students to use the Internet. As well, social media sites present a problem for conservative Saudi internationals (Al-Saggaf et al., 2008), since the open nature of social media sites means that any message can be

passed rapidly, soon reaching millions. In Saudi Arabia, some social media sites are blocked from time to time, and those that remain open have limitations (Jamjoom, 2013). As recently as 2017, content on the popular medium Snapchat was blocked (Sika, 2017), and although the ban on other sites (especially Skype and WhatsApp) has been lifted, these are monitored and censored (Reuters, 2017).

International Students' Information-Seeking Challenges

Considering these unique cultural norms, we assumed that the transition to Australia, known for its advanced, free and open digital environment, would strongly affect the way SFISs seek information. Recently, there has been considerable literature covering the various cultural, social, educational, and information-seeking challenges that international students face in their transition to a new environment (e.g., Alhazmi & Nyland, 2011, 2013; Chang & Gomes, 2017; Neri & Ville, 2008; Sin, 2015; Sin & Kim, 2013; Sin et al., 2011). Prior to and following their arrival in a host country, international students encounter a wide range of information needs: academic, such as university or course information, and non-academic information (termed "everyday life information seeking" [ELIS] by Savolainen, 1995) on shopping, finance, accommodation, health, legal information, and so on. Indeed, failure to fulfill ELIS information needs can sometimes generate more cross-cultural adaptation challenges than difficulties with academic information seeking (Alzougool et al., 2013; Sin & Kim, 2013).

To help international students, Australian educational and government institutions have established offline and online information portals, such as the Study Melbourne website set up by the Council of Australian Governments (2010). In addition, librarians, health and accommodation providers, counseling services, and other service providers have explored the potential of social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter to reach out to new international students (Alzougool et al., 2013; Chang & Gomes, 2017).

However, despite these platforms, studies indicate that international students do not use them when seeking information (Alzougool et al., 2013; Chang & Gomes, 2017). The ineffective use of these information sources is attributed to educators not understanding how international students seek and use information (Alzougool et al., 2013; Chang et al., 2012). More investigation is needed to examine how international students seek and access knowledge, and specifically the ISBs of SFISs, so that service providers can more appropriately engage students, and help them adjust to new environments.

METHOD

Research Design

The aim of this study was to improve understanding of SFISs' information needs and how they seek knowledge in an unfamiliar culture. We employed interpretative qualitative research design to allow what Jankowski and Wester (1991, p. 52) called an "empathetic understanding of the meaning that people give to their actions."

Following Creswell (2007), we chose one-on-one unstructured and semistructured interviews as the optimum method to better understand SFISs’ perceptions and intentional behaviors as they negotiated new methods and sources of information and knowledge.

To minimize bias, we followed the advice and precepts of six scholars. We adopted interpretivism and qualitative methodology following Kant’s (2014) recommendations. We performed detailed interviews and consultations with participants to ensure correct data collection, within the research limitations, following Dharamsi and Charles (2011) and Miles and Huberman (1994) respectively. We presented a conference paper, conducted seminars, and discussed with colleagues for invaluable feedback and external validation (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). By following the above advice, we have achieved credibility and trustworthiness, reduce bias, and provided reliability and validity (Peräkylä; 2016; Yin, 2015).

We chose one-on-one semi-structured interviews as the optimum method (Creswell, 2007) to better understand SFISs’ perceptions and intentional behaviors as they negotiated new methods and sources of information and knowledge. The principal author’s familiarity with the SFIS phenomenon under observation was an advantage when recruiting and interviewing the participants.

Participants

From June to December 2015 (following ethics approval), we used personal contacts, social media, the Melbourne Saudi Women’s Club, and snowballing to recruit 13 SFISs from Melbourne universities and language centers. All had been living in Australia for less than a year at the time of the study (Table 1).

Table 1: Participants’ Demographic Information (N = 13)

Code	Age	Marital status	Saudi Arabia region	English (self-rated)	Funding	Discipline	Study level
P1	26	M, C	Hijaz	Avg	KASP	Social studies	ELICOS*
P2	30	S	Hijaz	Avg	KASP	Business	ELICOS
P3	28	M, NC	South	Good	KASP	Arts	ELICOS
P4	28	M, C	Hijaz	Very good	KASP	Information security	ELICOS
P5	25	S	North	Avg	KASP	Computer science	Postgrad
P6	37	M, C	Hijaz	Avg	University	Business	ELICOS
P7	24	M, C	Hijaz	Good	KASP	Computer science	Postgrad
P8	30	M, C	Najd	Avg	KASP	Computer science	ELICOS
P9	34	M, C	Najd	Good	University	Information systems	Postgrad

P10	30	S	Hijaz	Very good	Workplace	Health	Postgrad
P11	21	S	Hijaz	Very good	Self-funded	Psychology	Undergrad
P12	31	M, C	North	Good	KASP	Media	Undergrad
P13	27	S	North	Avg	University	Physiotherapy	ELICOS

Note. Marital status: M = married, NC = no children, C = children, S = single. Study level: ELICOS = English Language Intensive Course for Overseas Students for students who do not have the requisite IELTS [International English Language Testing System] scores for university entry.

Marital status is important: Married SFISs need information related to husbands and children, while single SFISs might need information related to male guardians (e.g., brother or father). Region is also important, since (as in many countries) residents from different regions display regional differences (Al-Qahtani, 2015; Alqefari, 2015; Oshan, 2007), which may impact individuals' ISB. English levels are also likely to lead to different information-seeking activities.

Data Analysis

Each participant signed a consent form and read the Plain Language Statement. Most interviews were conducted in Arabic and lasted approximately 60 minutes. We asked participants about their information needs, key information sources and information seeking activities, and how their transition to Australia impacted their ISB. Other questions emerging during the discussion were used to clarify or add additional information. We audio-recorded interviews, transcribed them verbatim, and returned to the interviewees to check their answers. We analyzed transcriptions and coded them manually using content analysis (Creswell, 2007) to reveal and classify themes from the open-ended responses.

We used Corbin and Strauss's (2008) process to classify responses into three main themes: academic needs, information needs related to accompanying family members, and cultural adjustments.

RESULTS

First, when asked why they were studying abroad, P5 summed up the most common response: "The main goal...is just to get a degree and return to Saudi to help in my country's development."

Theme 1: Information Needs Related to Academic Study

Three interviewees (P4, P6, and P10) sought academic information before coming to Australia. Once in Australia, all participants identified important study information, divided into two subthemes.

Subtheme 1: Information Related to Course Completion

Twelve students sought course-related information on their arrival in Australia (and continued throughout the year). Ten students said the most important was finding information on improving their English and completing their assignments:

Since I started my English course, I searched and still search for information on improving my fluency: vital if I am to finish ELICOS and start University. —P1

SFISs preferred social networks (close friends by word-of-mouth, or via Melbourne Saudi Club's Twitter account). Google and YouTube were the most trusted online information sources for general and course-specific academic information, especially when seeking information to improve their English:

Whenever I need advice on how to accomplish an assignment or improve my English skills, I just send my questions to Saudi students on Twitter. They speak my own language so it's the best to help improve my English. Or I search YouTube. —P5

When asked about Australian sources, 90% reported they accessed their institution's websites only to check timetables, class locations, and assignment submissions. None used them for information about any other services. The main obstacles to using Australian sources were (a) limited English competency (77%), (b) unaware of the institution's online and offline services (69%), and (c) the availability of Arabic sources (55%).

Two participants (P3 and P8) reported infrequent visits to their institutional libraries to borrow books for their IELTS assessment. P3 preferred the IELTS exercises in books; they were "more efficient than those online." But P5 disagreed:

I prefer...online because [Saudis] don't like reading books, unlike Australians who read extensively. I've never used the library and don't know how to look for or borrow books. Google is my favorite.

SFISs who professed advanced English levels (P3, P4, P10, and P11) preferred face-to-face interactions. Interestingly, P4, P10, and P11 were the only ones who found accessing daily information (ELIS) more difficult than academic information:

For academic information I prefer face-to-face [with an expert], or email when I can't find an expert on campus...Everyday information is more difficult to find: it's difficult to trust people's answers—I keep searching until I'm confident I have the right answer. Google and social media are the most convenient sources. —P10

Apart from the above three, participants said that finding academic information was "more challenging" than finding ELIS. The majority identified their limited English as an obstacle in gathering academic information, whether online and personal:

Finding academic information is hard. For everyday information I can simply Google or ask friends in Arabic, but for academic information, you need good English—mine is average. —P1

Seven participants attributed their limited search skills to the Saudi educational system:

Unlike Saudi where all academic materials are given to us by our teacher, here I have to depend on myself and do a lot of searching for everything, from class timetables to assignment structures. —P5

Subtheme 2: Information on Administrative, Scholarship, and Finance Matters

Administrative Concerns. All participants reported that concerns about getting university offers were due to their limited English skills and the recent Ministry of Higher Education policy change preventing scholarship students from applying through educational agents. P6 commented:

Our SACM [Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission] informed us that Saudi Arabian students who want to be issued a financial guarantee can't get it if they apply to Australian universities through an agent. This new policy makes it harder especially with limited English. I think our embassy needs to revisit their policy.

Scholarship Concerns. Five participants reported different scholarship inquiries. The major concern of P2, P6, and P8 was information related to scholarship extension—they were unable to finish their ELICOS course as detailed in their scholarship offer. P9 sought information on obtaining a financial guarantee, a precondition to finalizing study confirmation. P11 needed to apply for transferring from being a self-funded to a KASP-sponsored student.

For scholarship information, the most cited sources were friends, the Mubtaath forum (a Saudi website aiming to help new students), and emailing or calling their embassy's supervisors. They said SACM did not fully answer the questions, and used a "one size fits all" approach. They only accessed the SACM website to check the progress of their applications on Safeer (Saudi website to enable Saudi international students to submit applications, etc., and to receive scholarship bursaries).

Education-Related Financial Concerns. Recently arrived SFISs must create an online scholarship account on Safeer. All participants said that the first information they sought was about opening their Safeer accounts. This was challenging: First, living in hostels, they had limited internet access and costs were high; second, they needed good English. Saudi Club Twitter was useful:

First thing I did after arriving in Australia was getting a SIM card that had Internet. Then...I had to get a bank account to register my file at SACM...Saudi Club Twitter was very helpful. —P9

Theme 2: Information Needs Related to Accompanying Family Members

Subtheme 1: Information Related to a Mahram

The second most needed information was information related to their mahram (husband, father, or brother—P4, P5, and P6) or their children (P1, P4, P6, P7, P8, and P9).

When I got the scholarship, I didn't pick a university for myself, I picked a university for [my husband] ... [so he could] get a good job when we returned. It was very important to me that he did better than me, as he sacrificed his time to come here as my companion... I used the Mubtaath forum to get information for this. —P6

Despite many online and offline information searches, P4 could not find an answer to her inquiry about her husband's study and visa status:

[These] were the hardest to get answers for...SACM didn't answer at all. I surfed the Australian immigration website but couldn't find any concrete answers—everyone gave their answers based on their own experience, which differed from mine.

Asked how they applied for their student visas prior to arrival, participants with good English applied for visas without help, but the other nine relied on either their husbands or educational agents. Regardless of English levels, participants described visa information as “sensitive,” and “challenging” due to difficulty in finding a trustworthy, easy-to-understand source. Many did not know that the immigration multilingual service provides over-the-phone interpreters:

With my low-level English, it was difficult to check the Australian immigration website. I didn't know where I could ask. But eventually I found I could go to the immigration building and ask for an interpreter. —P5

Subtheme 2: Information Related to Children

This was cited as a major concern for mothers both before and after their arrival. Finding childcare was very difficult: long waiting lists and high fees (childcare services were not funded by the Saudi government). For information, SFISs used both online (Google, the Mubtaath forum, Instagram, and Melbourne Saudi Club) and offline sources (friends, visits to childcare centers). P8 realized too late that relying on Arabic sources was unsafe:

I looked online for childcare...before traveling to Australia, and found a carer for my six-month old son. We didn't know that places should be certified. I discovered the carer had been hitting him—I couldn't do anything because she was uncertified.

P4, P6, P8, and P12, who had school-aged children, cited difficulties finding Arabic schools so that their children could retain their Islamic identity and be at a suitable level in Arabic and Quran on return to Saudi Arabia.

Theme 3: Cultural Adjustments

Interviewees expressed several information-seeking concerns while adjusting to Australia's individualistic, mixed-gender, and digital environments. In Saudi Arabia, males conduct many tasks including money matters, transportation, and finding information. In Australia, SFIS were forced to take the lead:

As a female in Saudi Arabia, anything I needed was a duty to be fulfilled by my family. In Australia the situation is different, as everyone here has to rely on herself. —P1

Once I had a problem with my academic progress.... so the ELICOS coordinator called me in for a meeting. I went accompanied by my husband, who talked on my behalf, as we are used to. The coordinator kept telling me that here I have to speak for myself, and not to bring my husband with me again. —P8

Men from gender-mixed environments are used to communicating with women, but [for Saudis] males and females being face-to-face is very challenging...in Saudi culture when a Saudi woman talks with a strange Saudi man he may think that she is forward and wants to have a relationship with him. —P6

Looking for accommodation, P6 felt lost and depressed upon arrival:

The Australian rental system is very challenging: we didn't know that we should go online to find available properties then arrange inspection times...It is completely different in Saudi.

Some teachers assumed high digital literacy levels:

When I started my English course I had to initiate by sending an email...I didn't know how to do it. —P12

Even P4, P5, P7, and P9, who had an IT background and originally described themselves as "expert and confident in using technology," were challenged when seeking information through Australian sources. P5's information technology background was "inadequate":

Even though I know about tricky technical stuff such as programming languages, when it comes to searching English sources it's challenging...I spend ages translating content into Arabic. [I search] Australian sources last, after an Arabic search, or asking friends.

DISCUSSION

We assumed that the collectivist culture of Saudi Arabia would impact SFISs' ISB in that they would prefer to seek word-of-mouth information from Saudis before accessing online sources. The study confirmed this statement: For information, participants preferred turning to Saudi students who had been living in Australia for some time, rather than referring to official Arabic (SACM) and English (university) online sources that were specifically designed for these students in mind. As a result, many were unaware of the many areas of help available.

SFISs with family members faced specific information difficulties. Most married women relied on friends for information about childcare and schools for children, and study offers and visas for mahrams. Six of the seven SFIS mothers said that finding childcare was a priority, but unfortunately it was really challenging because of long waiting lists and associated costs. They were also concerned about their children's Islamic identity, which drove them to search for information about Islamic or gender-segregated schools. These findings are in contrast to previous studies, mainly on Chinese international students (e.g., Gu et al., 2010) whose concerns are predominantly financial.

We confirmed the findings of Alzougool et al. (2013) and Chang and Gomes (2017): SFISs tend to rely more on Saudi Arabian social media and social networks than on Australian sources. Participants' reasons for not using Australian sources included low English level, ignorance of offline and online services provided by Australian providers (including an interpreter), and the convenience and availability of familiar Arabic sources. Chang and Gomes (2017, p. 311) argued: "If students are able to find the information they are looking for in 'home sources,' they are likely to be satisfied with that despite any perceived risk of relevance or reliability." This "satisficing behavior" is confirmed by P8 who discovered, too late, that the information on childcare she had obtained from an Arabic source was completely unreliable.

Finally, transitioning to the gender-mixed Australian environment challenged SFISs' tendency to avoid seeking help in the presence of males, especially Saudi males. These interactions had three particular features. First, married and older SFISs were less likely to talk to Saudi males than single and younger SFISs. Second, most SFISs from Hijazi families reported fewer concerns about talking to Saudi males than those from more conservative families mainly from the Northern area (cf. Alqefari, 2015; Al-Saggaf, 2016). Third, all emphasized that conversations with men should be restricted to academic and general questions, and only take place in the classroom; this restricted SFISs' face-to-face information-seeking activities and immediate access to information from external sources.

CONCLUSION

Although many studies have been conducted in the past to examine the ISB of international students, practically all are limited to Asian students. Results of our study confirm that their findings cannot be generalized to students from a completely different culture. The purpose of this study was to better understand the ISB of SFISs

while in Australia, because they form a culturally and digitally unique group. Although the sample of the study was small, the study came up with interesting findings that add significantly to knowledge about how SFIS seek information. Below are the conclusions of the study.

- The transition to a country like Australia, with a cultural environment almost completely incompatible with their own, has been identified as challenging SFISs' ISB.
- SFISs find a digital environment that affects their adaptation as they face ISB challenges.
- Overall, the major challenges are due to Saudi Arabia's collectivist culture, its constricting views on women, and the students' unfamiliarity with the innovative information resources common in Australia.
- To overcome the cultural and digital challenges, SFISs rely, often unsatisfactorily, on Saudi Arabia's digital and traditional information sources.

Recommendations

The authors suggest:

- Provide "pre-travel orientation sessions" designed by Saudi decision-makers to prepare new SFISs for their cultural transition.
- Design Australian ELICOS programs to improve SFISs' digital literacy and online search skills.
- Where possible, separate newly arrived Saudi Arabian females from males when forming study groups, until females get used to mixed-gender classes.
- Institutions should create understandable online and offline promotions of services (e.g., interpreters, finding accommodation).
- Academic staff should bear in mind that SFISs are shy to seek help due to different cultural norms, language deficiencies, or the presence of Saudi males.

Limitations

Despite rich data resulting from this study, the research has some limitations:

- The study sample of 13 was small. However, in exploratory studies, a small number of participants is common (several studies published in JIS have fewer than fifteen participants).
- The data were not intended to be tested through statistical procedures for measuring significant differences in the study variables.

- The study focused on Saudi females studying in Australia; findings may not be applicable to SFISs in other countries or generalized to other contexts.
- The study was conducted with first-year SFISs; the authors did not explore any SFIS ISB changes in further years or upon returning home.

Future Research

Future research could address the limitations:

- Perform studies with larger samples, using statistical sampling principles collecting quantitative data.
- Include international female students from other conservative countries (e.g., other Arab countries or Pakistan) or include Saudi females in universities across the world.
- Investigate the perspectives of interested parties (e.g., husbands, SACM, or ELICOS staff).
- Explore any changes SFIS may experience in their ISB in a longitudinal study over longer periods of time in a host country followed by their return to Saudi Arabia.
- Include international Saudi male students to explore whether gender differences impact study outcomes.

REFERENCES

- Alanazy, M. (2013). *Participation in online and face-to-face discussions: perceptions of female Saudi students in the United States* [Unpublish doctoral dissertation]. University of Northern Colorado, Greeley.
- Albugami, S., & Ahmed, V. (2016, January 24). *Effects of culture and religion on the use of ICT in the Saudi education system* [Presentation]. *Institute of Research Engineers and Scientists 25th International Conference*, Istanbul, Turkey.
- Alhazmi, A., & Nyland, B. (2011). Saudi international students in Australia and intercultural engagement: A study of transitioning from a gender segregated culture to a mixed gender environment. In *Proceedings of the ISANA International Education Association Inc.* (pp. 1-11). http://isana.proceedings.com.au/docs/2010/doctoral_paper_%20alhazmi.pdf
- Alhazmi, A., & Nyland, B. (2013). The Saudi Arabian international student experience: From a gender-segregated society to studying in a mixed-gender environment. *Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 43(3), 346–365.
- Al-Kahtani, N. K. M., Ryan, J. J. C. H., & Jefferson, T. I. (2006). How Saudi female faculty perceive internet technology usage and potential. *Information, Knowledge, Systems Management*, 5(4), 227–243.

- Almakrami, H. (2015). *Online self-disclosure across cultures: A study of Facebook use in Saudi Arabia and Australia* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Queensland University of Technology, Australia.
- Al-Munajjed, M. (1997). *Women in Saudi Arabia today*. St. Martin's Press.
- Al-Qahtani, M. (2015). *Fluid cultures and identifications: The intercultural communication experiences of Saudi international students in the UK* [Doctoral dissertation] Durham University, United Kingdom.
- Alqarni, I. (2011). *Middle East students studying in Australia: The Saudi Arabian students' example*. Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission. <https://www.scribd.com/document/249730968/Middle-East-students-Study-in-Australia>.
- Alqefari, S. (2015). Difficulties of Saudi Arabian female students studying English abroad. *Arab World English Journal*, 6(4), 231–244. http://www.academia.edu/20062582/Difficulties_of_Saudi_Arabian_Female_Students_Studying_English_Abroad
- Alruwaili, T. O. (2017). *Self-identity and community through social media: The experience of Saudi female international college students in the United States* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Northern Colorado, USA.
- Al-Saggaf, Y. (2016). An exploratory study of attitudes towards privacy in social media and the threat of blackmail: The views of a group of Saudi women. *The Electronic Journal of Information Systems in Developing Countries (EJISDC)*, 75(7), 1–16.
- Al-Saggaf, Y., & Begg, M. M. (2004). Online communities versus offline communities in the Arab/Muslim world. *Journal of Information, Communication and Ethics in Society*, 2(1), 41–54.
- Al-Saggaf, Y., Himma, K. E., & Kharabsheh, R. (2008). Political online communities in Saudi Arabia: The major players. *Journal of Information, Communication and Ethics in Society*, 6(2), 127–140.
- Al-Saif, M. (2013, February 4). *Gender segregation in higher education*. Arab News. www.arabnews.com/gender-segregation-higher-education
- Alsuwaida, N. (2016). Women's education in Saudi Arabia. *Journal of International Education Research* 12(4), 111–118.
- Altamimi, A. M. (2014). *Challenges experienced by Saudi female students transitioning through Canadian pre-academic ESL* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Mount Saint Vincent University, Canada.
- Alwedini, J. (2016). *Gender and subject choice in higher education in Saudi Arabia* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of York, United Kingdom.
- Al-Zahrani, A. (2010). *Women's sexual health care in Saudi Arabia: A focused ethnographic study* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Sheffield, United Kingdom.
- Alzougool, B., Chang, S., Gomes, C. & Berry, M. (2013). Finding their way around: International students' use of information sources. *Journal of Advanced Management Science*, 1(1), 43–49. doi:10.12720/joams.1.1.43-49.
- Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. (2020). *Saudi Arabia country brief*. Retrieved October 8, 2020, from <http://dfat.gov.au/geo/saudi-arabia/pages/saudi-arabia-country-brief.aspx>

- Binsahl, H., & Chang, S. (2012). *International Saudi female students in Australia and social networking sites: What are the motivations and barriers to communication* [Paper presentation]. *23rd International Student Advisers Network of Australia's International Academy Association (ISANA) Conference*, Auckland, New Zealand.
- Binsahl, H., Chang, S., & Bosua, R. (2015). Exploring the factors that impact on Saudi female international students' use of social technologies as an information source. *PACIS 2015 Proceedings*. Article 201.
- Chang, S., & Gomes, C. (2017). Digital journeys: A perspective on understanding the digital experiences of international students. *Journal of International Students*, 7(2), 347–366.
- Chang, S., Alzougool, B., Berry, M., Gomes, C., Smith, S. & Reeders, D. (2012). International students in the digital age: Do you know where your students go to for information? *Proceedings of the Australian International Education Conference 2012*, 1–11.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (3th ed.). SAGE.
- Council of Australian Governments. (2010). *International students strategy for Australia 2010–2014*. <http://apo.org.au/system/files/23118/apo-nid23118-25546.pdf>
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). SAGE.
- Danielewicz-Betz, A. (2013). Cyberspace othering and marginalization in the context of Saudi Arabian culture: A socio-pragmatic perspective. *Lodz Papers in Pragmatics*, 9(2), 275–299.
- Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (2017). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed.). SAGE.
- Dharamsi, S., & Charles, G. (2011). Ethnography: Traditional and criticalist conceptions of a qualitative research method. *Canadian Family Physician*, 57(3), 378–379.
- Fox News. (2013). *Saudi king grants women seats on advisory council for first time*. <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2013/01/11/saudi-king-grants-women-seats-on-advisory-council-for-1st-time.html?test=latestnews#ixzz2HhcBjotw>
- Freedom House. (2016). *Freedom in the world: Saudi Arabia. Annual Reports*. <https://www.refworld.org/publisher/FREEHOU.html>
- Gray, K., Chang, S., & Kennedy, G. (2010). Use of social web technologies by international and domestic undergraduate students: Implications for internationalising learning and teaching in Australian universities. *Technology, Pedagogy and Education*, 19 (1), 31–46. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14759390903579208>
- Gu, Q., Schweisfurth, M., & Day, C. (2010). Learning and growing in a “foreign” context: Intercultural experiences of international students. *A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 40(1), 7–23.
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 105–117). SAGE.

- Hall, T. R. (2013). *Saudi male perceptions of study in the United States: An analysis of King Abdullah Scholarship Program participants* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green.
- Hamdan, A. (2005). Women and education in Saudi Arabia: Challenges and achievements. *International Education Journal*, 6(1), 42-64.
- Hamid, S. (2013). *The use of online social networking (OSN) for higher education* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Melbourne, Australia.
- Harden, G., & Al Beayeyz, A. (2012). A comparative analysis of social networking site use in two distinct cultures: Evaluating the IT-culture conflict. *Global Media Journal*. <http://www.globalmediajournal.com/open-access/a-comparative-analysis-of-social-networking-site-use-in-two-distinct-cultures-evaluating-the-iculture-conflict.php?aid=35900>
- Hofstede, G. (1991). *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind*. McGraw-Hill.
- Hofstede Insights. (2020). *Compare countries*. Retrieved Oct 8, 2020. (<https://www.hofstede-insights.com/product/compare-countries/>). In the public domain.
- Hughes, H. (2013). International students using online information resources to learn: Complex experience and learning needs. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 7(1), 126-146.
- Human Rights Watch. (2016). *Boxed in: Women and Saudi Arabia's male guardianship system*. www.hrw.org/report/2016/07/16/boxed/women-and-saudi-arabias-male-guardianship-system
- Jamjoom, M. (2013). *Saudi Arabia may block Skype, Viber, WhatsApp, others*. CNN. <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/03/31/world/meast/saudi-arabia-may-block-apps>
- Jankowski, N. W., & Wester, F. (1991). The qualitative tradition in social science inquiry: Contributions to mass communication research. In K.B. Jensen & N. W. Jankowski (Eds), *A handbook of qualitative methodologies for mass communication research*. Routledge.
- Jones, S., & Madden, M. (2002). *The internet goes to college: How students are living in the future with today's technology*. Pew Internet and American Life Project. <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED472669.pdf>
- Kant, S. (2014). The distinction and relationship between ontology and epistemology: Does it matter? *Politikon: IAPSS Political Science Journal*, 24(3), 68-85.
- Lefdahl-Davis, E. M., & Perrone-McGovern, K. M. (2015). The cultural adjustment of Saudi women international students: A qualitative examination. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 46(3), 1-29. doi:10.1177/0022022114566680
- Lenhart, A., Simon, M., & Graziano, M. (2001). *The internet and education: Findings of the PEW internet and American life project*. Pew Research Center. <http://www.pewinternet.org/2001/09/01/the-internet-and-education/>
- Liao, Y., Finn, M., & Lu, J. (2007). Information-seeking behavior of international graduate students vs. American graduate students: A user study at Virginia Tech 2005. *College & Research Libraries*, 68(1), 5-25.
- Mehra, B., & Bilal, D. (2007). International students' perceptions of their information seeking strategies. In *Proceedings of the Annual Conference of CAIS/Actes du Congrès Annuel de l'ACSI*. doi:10.29173/cais233

- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. SAGE.
- Neri, F., & Ville, S. (2008). Social capital renewal and the academic performance of international students in Australia. *The Journal of Socio-Economics*, 37(4), 1515–1538.
- Oshan, M. (2007). *Saudi women and the internet: Gender and culture issues* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Loughborough University, United Kingdom. <https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/2134/7906>
- Peräkylä A. (2016). Validity in qualitative research. In D. Silverman (Ed.). *Qualitative research* (4th ed., pp. 413–428). SAGE.
- Raghavan, S. (2017, May 12). *Saudi women need permission from male guardians for life choices. Will new reforms help end this?* The Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/05/12/saudi-women-need-permission-from-male-guardians-for-life-choices-will-new-reforms-help-end-this/?utm_term=.5cc059527af1
- Reuters. (2017, September 21). *Saudi lifting ban on Skype, Whatsapp calls, but will monitor them*. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-telecoms-ban/saudi-lifting-ban-on-skype-whatsapp-calls-but-will-monitor-them-idUSKCN1BW12L>
- Sandekian, R. E., Weddington, M., Birnbaum, M., & Keen, J. K. (2015). A narrative inquiry into academic experiences of female Saudi graduate students at a comprehensive doctoral university. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 19(4), 360–378. doi:10.1177/1028315315574100
- Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission to the United States. (2010). *Advancement of Saudi women*. http://www.sacm.org/ArabicSACM/pdf/women_front_web.pdf
- Savolainen, R. (1995). Everyday life information seeking: Approaching information seeking in the context of “way of life.” *Library & Information Science Research*, 17(3), 259–294.
- Shepherd, G., & Rane, H. (2012). Experiencing Australia: Arab students’ perspectives and perceptions informing enhancement strategies. In *Proceedings of the ISANA International Education Conference*. <http://isana.proceedings.com.au/docs/2012/isana2012Final00024.pdf>
- Sika, H. (2017). *Censorship, social media and Saudi Arabia* [Video]. Al Jazeera. www.aljazeera.com/programmes/insidestory/2017/09/censorship-social-media-saudi-arabia-170919212901082.html
- Sin, S. C. J. (2015). Demographic differences in international students’ information source uses and everyday information seeking challenges. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 41, 466–474.
- Sin, S. C. J., & Kim, K. S. (2013). International students’ everyday life information seeking: The informational value of social networking sites. *Library & Information Science Research*, 35(2), 107–116. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.lisr.2012.11.006>
- Sin, S. C. J., Kim, K. S., Yang, J., Park, J. A., & Laugheed, Z. T. (2011). International students' acculturation information seeking: Personality, information needs and uses. *Proceedings of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 48(1), 1–4.

- UNESCO. (2014). *Global flow of tertiary-level students*.
<http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Pages/international-student-flow-viz.aspx>
- University World News. (2009, September). *Global: What defines an international student?*
<http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20090917182725104>
- Vie, S. (2008). Digital divide 2.0: “Generation M” and online social networking sites in the composition classroom. *Computers and Composition*, 25(1), 9–23.
- WEF. (2020). Global gender gap report.
http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf/
- Yin, R. (2015). *Qualitative research from start to finish* (2nd ed.). Guilford.
-

HAIFA BINSAHL, PhD, was awarded her doctorate in July 2018 from the University of Melbourne, Australia. She is a Saudi female student sponsored by the King Abdullah Bin Abdul-Aziz Scholarship Program. Her major interests are computing and information systems, information-seeking behavior, and cross-cultural issues. Email: haifa.binshal@gmail.com

SHANTON CHANG, PhD, is Associate Professor in the School of Computing and Information Systems, University of Melbourne. His interests include health information seeking behavior, international education, technology in education, IT security, and organizational culture. Email: shanton.chang@unimelb.edu.au

RACHELLE BOSUA, PhD, is a researcher and writer at the Faculty of Management, Science, and Technology at the Open University of the Netherlands. Interests include knowledge management, sharing, and strategy, and social media and networks. Email: rachelle.bosua@ou.nl

Seeking to Understand the Impact of Collaboration on Intercultural Communication Apprehension

Laura Jacobi
Minnesota State University, United States

ABSTRACT

To assess the impact of collaboration on intercultural communication apprehension (ICA), this mixed methods study compared ICA levels of 41 domestic and international undergraduates who participated in collaborative activities with 79 students in a control group. International student participants came from a variety of countries, while the majority of domestic students were White. A Mann-Whitney U test was used to determine if there were differences in Personal Report of Intercultural Communication Apprehension scores across time between the experimental and control groups. The co-instructors of the collaborative group were also interviewed. Quantitative results indicate no significant differences in ICA levels due to the collaboration. Interview data reveal the potential for collaboration to reduce ICA and for in-group bias and lack of motivation to act as barriers in reducing ICA.

Keywords: anxiety management theory, collaboration, intercultural communication apprehension, international students

INTRODUCTION

Most educators would agree that it is prudent to equip graduating college students with strategies to communicate effectively across cultures, especially considering that these students are entering a globalized workplace and are often nervous about intercultural communication (Campbell, 2016). This is particularly important in light of research suggesting that intercultural communication apprehension (ICA), the anxiety associated with real or anticipated communication with different cultural groups (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997, p. 148), impedes cultural understanding and

adaptation (Chen, 2010; Neuliep, 2012; Shuya, 2007; Swagler & Ellis, 2003) and is associated with a reduced willingness to communicate (Lin & Rancer, 2003), ethnocentrism (Toale & McCroskey, 2001), and perceptions of White racial superiority (Bahk & Jandt, 2003). For example, Neuliep (2012) found that ethnocentrism and ICA caused individuals to avoid interaction with others from a different culture due to high levels of anxiety. Without interaction, there is no opportunity to reduce uncertainty, and anxiety levels remain high. Therefore, ethnocentrism and ICA act as “superficial causes” that inhibit uncertainty and anxiety management in initial interactions (Gudykunst, 2005, p. 291), which supports Gudykunst’s (2005) anxiety and uncertainty management theory (AUM).

A basic premise of AUM is that individuals experience greater uncertainty when communicating with strangers, especially strangers from different cultural groups (Gudykunst, 2005; Gudykunst & Shapiro, 1996). Subsequent research confirms that those in intercultural situations are likely to feel more anxious than those in intracultural situations (Duronto, et al., 2005; Gudykunst & Nishida, 2001). Communication in intercultural situations can be stressful and even threatening (Kassing, 1997; Samochowiec & Florack, 2010); therefore, many domestic students avoid encounters with international students (Campbell, 2016; Neuliep, 2012), even when there is a large international student population on the campus (Leask, 2009; Todd & Nesdale, 1997; Ward, et al., 2009). Such avoidance is especially problematic for international students for whom sense of belonging is increased (Garcia, et al., 2019) and acculturative stress minimized with connections to the host country and higher levels of social support from host nationals (Sullivan & Kashubeck-West, 2015). Since domestic students tend to avoid contact with international students and contact is necessary to help all students (domestic and international) to reduce anxiety and gain competence with intercultural communication, the challenge for educators is to find ways to help students reduce their levels of ICA.

Based on their research, Fall et al. (2013) suggested that it is the responsibility of educators to identify techniques to help reduce students’ ICA and enhance intercultural competency. Some evidence indicates that exposure to diverse others increases competence, and that the more immersive the exposure, the more effective the communicator (Arasaratnam, 2006; Chen, 2010; Gibson & Zhong, 2005). Such enhanced competency may be the result of reduced levels of ICA. In other words, as suggested by AUM, exposure to diverse others provides the opportunity to build familiarity and to practice communicating, thereby reducing anxiety levels. Reduced levels of ICA are also associated with increased levels of willingness to communicate (Chen, 2010; Lin & Rancer, 2003; Neuliep, 2012). Therefore, one potential solution is to provide collaborative opportunities in a safe space between students of different cultures. However, the impact of such collaborative opportunities upon ICA should first be explored empirically.

Universities with large international student populations provide the opportunity to explore the impact of collaboration upon ICA; however, very little research explores the relationship between collaboration and ICA. This is unfortunate considering the results of such studies have the potential to help educators, counselors, and other practitioners to develop interventions that aid international students with better handling acculturative stress and that aid all students with

initiating and developing cross-cultural relationships. To fill the gap in the literature and compensate for the lack of research that directly explores the potential impact of collaboration on ICA, we developed collaborative classes between a section of domestic students and a section of international students in a basic communication course in a midsized Midwestern university. The purpose of this study was to assess how face-to-face collaborative opportunities affected ICA levels of domestic and international university students. In order to understand whether or not collaborative opportunities will reduce ICA, it is first important to understand what factors contribute to ICA and the larger classification from which it stems, communication apprehension (CA). Studies that examine both CA and ICA are reviewed below.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Factors Contributing to CA and ICA

Two factors stand out in the literature as most significant in contributing to one's level of CA in general and to ICA in particular: one's own culture and one's confidence with the host culture's language.

Culture

Research reveals that individuals raised in the United States tend to report lower levels of CA than international participants (Croucher, 2013; Hsu, 2004; Mansson & Myers, 2009; Merkin, 2009; Neuliep, et al., 2003), likely due to the cultural value placed on communication. In individualistic cultures like the United States, where communication is highly valued and encouraged, individuals tend to have lower levels of CA. In contrast, individual expression is less valued in high context cultures—ones that rely upon contextual cues more than direct verbal communication—and members are more apprehensive (Pryor, et al., 2005). The same may be true with levels of ICA. For example, using Neuliep and McCroskey's (1997) Personal Report of Intercultural Communication Apprehension (PRICA), Merkin (2009) found that Koreans were significantly more apprehensive in their intercultural communication ($M = 37.21$, $SD = 9.34$) than Americans ($M = 27.79$, $SD = 9.70$). Merkin concluded the finding was due to Korean focus upon "Confucian values of harmony, not sticking out, and preserving others' face by not taking a stand" (p. 6). Clearly cultures that value direct and frequent interaction may provide greater opportunities for practice with intercultural communication.

The significance of practice with communication was also evident in Croucher et al.'s (2015) study, where results revealed that participants from England scored significantly lower than Finnish and German participants on totalCA, dyadicCA, and meetingCA and lower than German participants on publicCA [measures of McCroskey's (1982) Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24)]. Croucher et al. explained the results by examining the differences in public speaking training across these countries. Public speaking training is prevalent in K-12 education and compulsory in many programs in higher education in England; such training is not prevalent in Finland or Germany. In other words, collaborative

opportunities to practice communication help to reduce CA and may help to reduce ICA.

Confidence with the Host Language

Another factor often referenced in the literature as pertinent to CA and ICA is confidence with the host language. For example, Ying (2002) claimed that confidence with English language skills has been positively associated with the formation of relationships between international students and domestic students in the United States. Bahk and Jandt (2003) reported that English language competence among Korean sojourners and immigrants was negatively correlated with CA toward Americans. Finally, using Bahk and Jandt's (2003) Interracial Communication Anxiety Scale, Bahk (2004) found that communication anxiety toward White Americans was inversely associated with English language competence and traveling in the United States for the Taiwanese group ($F = 23.98, p < .001$). For the Polish group, communication anxiety toward White Americans was inversely associated with English language competence and U.S. media consumption ($F = 18.27, p < .001$). In other studies (e.g., Darwish, 2015; Rivas, et al., 2019), a lack of English proficiency acted as a significant barrier for international students in building personal and professional relationships with host students. To summarize, when foreigners felt confident in their English language skills and had exposure to the American culture, their communication anxiety was lower. These studies revealed the significance of confidence with the host language in reducing ICA. Taking into account cultural differences and the importance of feeling confident in using the language of the host culture, it is possible that opportunities to interact with diverse others in a comfortable environment may help to reduce levels of ICA.

Relationship between CA or ICA and Collaboration

There are very few studies that examine the relationship between CA and collaboration, and even fewer that examine the relationship between ICA and collaboration. Of the existing literature, some of it explores the impact of CA or ICA on participants' desire to collaborate or interact with diverse others. For example, in a study to test a proposed model of the relationship between ethnocentrism, ICA, intercultural willingness to communicate, and intentions to participate in an intercultural dialogue program, Lin and Rancer (2003) invited 339 college student participants to complete surveys measuring each of the listed concepts. Despite the direct influence of ethnocentrism on individuals' intentions to participate in an intercultural dialogue program, they found that ICA had no direct influence on intentions to participate. However, this was survey research, used to assess students' perceptions as to whether or not they would be interested in participating in a hypothetical intercultural dialogue program; it was not experimental data and therefore did not assess students' actual behavior.

There is also research suggesting that low levels of CA contribute to higher levels of interest in interaction. For example, Dobos (1996) examined effects of students' communication expectations and CA on the development of student motivation in

cooperative learning group activities and found that students with higher CA were less active in cooperative learning. Similarly, John and Jay (1991) found that college students with low CA tended to prefer cooperative learning. Finally, Lu and Chia-Fang (2008) found that both Chinese and Americans were significantly more willing to communicate with those from a different culture if they had low levels of ICA. Although scant, the bulk of this literature suggests that low levels of CA and/or ICA contribute to a desire to collaborate, but is it also true that collaborative opportunities can help lower one's CA and/or ICA?

There is evidence to suggest that opportunities to collaborate are likely to reduce students' levels of ICA. For example, using the PRCA-24 to measure CA of 295 American and Indian participants, Pederson, et al.'s (2008) regression results revealed that the more often a person encounters and the more important a person perceives a particular communication situation, the less CA the person experiences in that situation. In other words, the more often an individual has practice in particular communication situations, the less apprehensive they are in those same situations in the future, indicating the importance of frequent interaction opportunities in reducing CA. However, it is unclear as to whether or not the same would be true with ICA specifically.

Rahmani and Croucher (2017) investigated the relative CA score of Iranian Kurds, a minority group that is underdeveloped and marginalized, and the influence of sex, age, and education on CA. Results indicated that Kurds are relatively less apprehensive than many other cultures; the authors concluded that this was due to frequent social encounters. Rahmani and Croucher also found that individuals with more than a BA degree had significantly lower meeting CA and public CA. Rahmani and Croucher concluded that "a higher degree of education provides students with more social encounters and at the same time the confidence to communicate with more knowledge and expertise" (p. 9). These results suggest that CA may be reduced with increased opportunities to interact.

Bahk (2004) explored how 289 Taiwanese and Polish college students' real and mediated contact with White Americans was related to their levels of communication anxiety in interaction with them. Bahk found that real contact with White Americans in the United States significantly reduced apprehension for Taiwanese students, and mediated contact reduced apprehension for Polish students, indicating that the intercultural contact helped to reduce CA.

In contrast to these studies, Fall et al.'s (2013) research suggested that intercultural contact alone may not be sufficient to reduce the ICA of students. They assessed the relationship between ICA and emotional intelligence (EI) with 425 students in a public speaking course. Regression results revealed that three of the EI subscales (emotionality, sociability, self-control) predicted ICA such that individuals with higher EI "may be adaptable to avoid the physical and physiological effects of ICA" (Fall et al., 2013, p. 419). In other words, individuals with high EI may be able to mitigate the effects of ICA. With these findings, Fall et al. concluded that "intercultural communication should be approached in the classroom . . . through collaboration rather than forced behavioral change" (p. 421). Spencer-Rodgers and McGovern (2002) also found that contact alone with international students did not reduce negative feelings; U.S.-born university students felt "uncomfortable,

impatient, and frustrated when encountering communication difficulties with the international students on their campuses” (p. 623). Perhaps their discomfort was due to the human tendency toward in-group favoritism. Tajfel’s (1974) seminal work on social identity theory suggested that individuals develop an in-group mentality, which prevents them from a desire to connect with others from different cultural backgrounds.

Filling a Gap in the Research

Despite the conceptual similarities between CA and ICA and the similarities in how they are measured, it is important to recognize that the bulk of the studies reviewed assessed CA and not ICA. Furthermore, none of the studies directly examined collaborative opportunities between students of different cultures to assess the impact of ICA. In other words, it is still unclear whether or not teacher-structured classroom collaborative opportunities are effective in reducing the ICA levels of students. Therefore, it is imperative that researchers conduct experiments to examine the potential for collaboration to reduce ICA. Such was the aim of this study. Due to the paucity of research directly exploring the impact of collaborative opportunities on ICA levels, and the mixed findings of related studies, the following research question is advanced:

RQ: Will collaborative opportunities in mixed-culture groups reduce the ICA of domestic and international undergraduate students?

METHOD

Data Collection

Due to the limited number of participants available for study (i.e., there was only one section of international students, which allowed for collaborative opportunities with one open enrollment section), I recruited student participants through convenience sampling after receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board. Students in six sections of the basic communication course from a mid-sized Midwestern American university were invited to participate. Students in two of those six sections participated in face-to-face mixed-culture collaborations; this included one section of international students and one open enrollment section (with domestic students). Students in the other four sections were enrolled in traditional classrooms (control group). Participants were emailed a link to a Qualtrics survey to be completed anonymously twice during the semester: Week 1 (before collaborative activities) and Week 14 (following collaborative activities). Additionally, I interviewed the two instructors who taught students in the collaborative group to gather their perceptions of the impact of the collaboration upon student ICA levels.

Participant Demographics

One hundred twenty students participated in the study: 41 in the experimental (collaborative) group and 79 in the control group. About half of the participants in the

collaborative group ($n = 22$) were international students who came from many different countries, including Colombia, Moldova, China, Nepal, South Korea, India, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia, Ivory Coast, Nigeria, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. An international student was defined at this university as “a person who is not a citizen or national of the United States and who is in this country on a visa or temporary basis and does not have the right to remain indefinitely.” This is reported regardless of racial-ethnic status.

The remaining 19 student participants in the collaborative group were domestic students; of this subgroup, 79% self-identified as White, 10.5% Latino, and 10.5% as other ethnicities. The majority of participants in the collaborative group were aged 18–20 (70.7%). The remaining participants were aged 21–23 (17.1%), 24–30 (9.8%), and 31–40 (2.4%). Most participants were freshmen (41.5%) or sophomores (43.9%), while 12.2% were juniors and 2.4% were seniors. Finally, 36.6% of the students in the collaborative group were female.

Seventy-nine students participated as part of the control group. Most participants in the control group self-identified as White (70.9%), while the remaining participants identified as other (13.9%), African American (6.3%), Latino (5.1%), or Asian American (3.8%). The majority of participants in this subgroup were aged 18–20 (89.8%); the rest of them were 21–23 (7.6%), 24–30 (1.3%), or 31–40 (1.3%). Most of the participants were freshmen (51.9%) or sophomores (40.5%), with the remainder juniors (5.1%) and seniors (2.5%). Finally, 57% of the participants in this group were female.

Both instructors interviewed were female and in their 20s. One participant self-identified as African American, and the other White.

Course Structure

Experimental (Collaborative) Group

One section of the basic communication course at a mid-sized Midwestern American university was paired with an international student section of the same course for collaborative opportunities in approximately 50% of the semester classes. The two instructors of the sections co-developed lessons with a focus on intercultural communication and co-taught the collaborative classes. All collaborative activities were a core part of the curriculum and were compulsory; this decision was made due to research that reveals the importance of providing compulsory opportunities for mixed-culture interactions in order for students to feel compelled to participate in them (Borden, 2007; Campbell, 2008, 2012, 2016; Dunne, 2009).

The instructors co-developed lessons with dual purposes: to encourage idea exchange between students and to increase understanding of cultural similarities and differences, as relevant to the course content. In addition, factors that stimulate interaction were taken into account in planning the collaborative activities: nonroutine problems that do not have one right answer (Cohen, 1994), goal and resource interdependence (Johnson, et al., 1990), and rewards for the group while also holding individual group members accountable (Slavin, 1983, 1995). Tasks encouraged interaction and critical thinking. For example, “culture bingo” involved

students seeking others in the class who were able to sign off on a bingo square due to a match with what was listed on the square. The first student to earn enough signatures for a bingo won the game, but the purpose of the activity was to heighten awareness of cultural similarities and differences. In another lesson, in mixed-culture groups, students were tasked with reflecting upon socialized norms pertinent to group work in their cultures (e.g., structure, roles, and expectations).

Additionally, students were assigned to a mixed-culture group and groups developed final presentations. Some class time was given to work on the presentation, but it was also necessary for groups to meet outside of class time. In an effort to foster relationship development, groups were encouraged to meet in coffee shops or other locations of convenience and comfort to them.

Control Group

Control group participants were also recruited from sections of the basic communication course. However, they were recruited from sections with a traditional delivery format that did not have collaborative opportunities.

Measurement of Dependent Variable (ICA)

The data analyzed in this study are part of a larger data set I collected to examine the potential role of collaboration in affecting attitudes relevant to cross-cultural interactions of college students. My goal was to find ways to increase the comfort level of students when engaging in cross-cultural communication in order to increase the potential for all students to learn from the diverse backgrounds of others in a basic communication course. With that goal in mind, I collected data to examine student attitudes and comfort level pertaining to communication with diverse others. In order to fully explicate the quantitative and qualitative findings of the complete data set, they are described in two articles—one on the impact of collaboration upon ethnocentrism, and this one on the impact of collaboration upon ICA. Therefore, in my previous article (Jacobi, 2018), I assessed student responses to an ethnocentrism scale to explore the influence of collaborative opportunities upon ethnocentrism. I found no significant change in the ethnocentric attitudes of students as a result of collaboration. However, it is possible that the anxiety students typically experience in cross-cultural interactions may change as a result of compulsory collaborative opportunities since the comfort and attitudes of students in intercultural interactions may be determined in various ways. Therefore, included in this study are student survey responses to a measure of intercultural communication apprehension (PRICA) and interview responses from the co-teachers of the collaborative group. These dependent measures are described below.

PRICA

I used the newest version of PRICA (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997) to measure the degree of ICA of participants. The PRICA has been used in studies with American, Romanian, Chinese, Korean, and Japanese samples. It has proven to be a

reliable scale with Cronbach's alpha scores between .90 and .95 (Fall et al., 2013; Gibson & Zhong; 2005; Lin & Rancer, 2003; Lu & Chia-Fang, 2008; Merkin, 2009; Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997). The Cronbach's alpha was .93 at Time 1 and .92 at Time 2 in this study, again confirming the PRICA as a reliable scale with which to measure ICA. The PRICA includes 14 statements rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. A sample statement is "I am nervous while interacting with people from different cultures." Scores range from 14 to 70, with a high score (i.e., 52 and higher) indicative of a high degree of measured ICA and a low score (i.e., 32 and lower) indicative of a low degree of measured ICA.

I distributed the PRICA to student participants in the collaborative group at two points in the semester to determine whether collaboration would lead to a change in measured ICA: prior to collaborative activities and following collaboration at the end of the semester. I also administered the scale to a control group at the same times in the semester. To test for significant differences in means at Time 1 and Time 2 for both groups, paired samples *t* tests were used.

Instructor Interviews

In order to assess the impact of the collaboration upon student ICA from the perspective of the instructors, I interviewed the instructors of the students in the collaborative group separately. Using semistructured interviews, I asked the instructors to share their perception of the benefits and challenges of collaborations between international and domestic students. I also asked them to share their observations of the students during collaborative activities—group dynamics, perceived comfort level in working with diverse others, and changes across the semester in ICA levels.

Interview responses were transcribed and coded by three graduate student assistants. I chose an inductive content analysis for coding due to the paucity of research pertaining to collaboration and ICA, the phenomenon of study. Therefore, following transcription, I trained the graduate student assistants to code using the three stages defined by Elo and Kyngas (2008): open coding, categorization, and abstraction.

During open coding, notes and headings were recorded in the margins while reading through the transcripts. After open coding, lists of categories to be grouped together were created based on the nature of the comments. This allowed similar themes to be grouped into similar, yet broader, categories. Lastly, to engage in abstraction, categories were created using content-characteristic words. For example, interviewees offered themes related to community building, apprehension, and ownership. Results of the coding process are shared in the Results.

RESULTS

Quantitative Results

I ran a Mann-Whitney *U* test to determine if there were differences in PRICA_dif scores between the experimental and control groups. The PRICA_dif scores were

calculated by subtracting each participant's PRICA Time 1 scores from their PRICA Time 2 scores, which represented the change in PRICA scores over time. This nonparametric test was used because: (a) the sample sizes of experimental group ($n = 41$) and control group ($n = 79$) were unequal, and (b) the high baseline scores of the majority of participants on the dependent variable at Time 1 (i.e., PRICA 1) suggested the need for a nonparametric test. Distributions for the PRICA_dif scores were not similar, as assessed by visual inspection. PRICA_dif scores for experimental group (mean rank = 60.13) and control group (mean rank = 60.69) were not statistically different, $U = 1634.50$, $z = .083$, $p = .934$. This suggests that the collaboration did not significantly influence apprehension levels.

Qualitative Results: Instructor Interviews

Benefits of Collaboration in Reducing ICA

The instructors claimed three benefits of the collaboration that increased the likelihood of reduced ICA levels: increased opportunity for cross-cultural relationships, potential to challenge assumptions, and desire for collaboration by international students.

One benefit of collaboration is the increased opportunity for cross-cultural relationships. Providing domestic and international students with a platform to interact also provides the potential for relationships to form. The teacher of the domestic students talked about how she enjoyed the opportunity to “intermingle” between two communities—“because you build more bonds.” The instructors even talked about their attempts to build relationships with students who were not in their individual sections. For example, the international student instructor claimed that during collaborative lessons, she would intentionally avoid looking at her own students and “would look only at the other instructor’s students” in order to engage those students and increase their comfort level with her. Instructors also discussed how they used the collaborative space to build community. The classroom in which they met during collaborative lessons was the same classroom used by the domestic student section during individual lessons. It is a large space with 50 desks, so the instructor of the domestic student section required that her students sit in the first three rows. However, the instructors quickly realized that this was problematic when the international students came for collaborative lessons since they were then relegated to the back three rows and separated from the domestic students. Therefore, the domestic student instructor suggested that her students spread throughout the room. Following the change in seating, domestic students encouraged their group members from the international student section to sit by them, and class engagement and interactions improved.

In addition to increased opportunities to build cross-cultural relationships, the instructors also felt that the collaboration encouraged students to challenge their assumptions. For example, the instructor of the international students discussed the impact of the culture bingo lesson: “The discussion that came up after was kind of something that we couldn’t have planned for. It was nice to have students interacting

with one another, and challenging their assumption of what they think of the world and their globalized view.”

Finally, the instructor of the international students noticed a strong desire from her students to collaborate with domestic students. She stated that “a lot of the international students seek those relations with American students . . . but not all American students are willing to give that back to them.” Consistent with previous research (e.g., Rivas et al., 2019), it was clear that international students felt motivated to interact with the domestic students and craved the collaborative opportunities; however, that was not necessarily reciprocated by domestic students, which poses a challenge of the collaboration.

Challenges of Collaboration in Reducing ICA

The instructors claimed three challenges of the collaboration that had the potential to adversely affect ICA levels of students: student apprehension, situational constraints, and instructor ownership.

Despite a strong motivation on the part of international students to partake in the collaboration, there seemed to be apprehension from all students. The instructor of the domestic students said, “I felt like my students were definitely comfortable with each other more so than they were comfortable with the other class.” Consistent with previous research (e.g., Darwish, 2015; Rivas et al., 2019), the instructor of the international students recognized lack of confidence with English as the root of apprehension of international students: “They don’t feel confident, so I think that that can sometimes trickle down into their group setting.” This instructor also perceived the language barrier caused domestic students to be frustrated:

The student from the United States may feel like it’s a burden to work with an international student. They may feel like they’re not understanding if they’re sitting there and just getting head nods, rather than someone actually engaging in the discussion.

The instructor of the domestic students claimed that her students did in fact share their frustration pertaining to the lack of engagement of international students. She put into words how they felt about group interactions with the international students: “No one wants to say anything. So I feel like if I say something they’re automatically going to agree and will do it.” The apprehension of students, regardless of the cause, certainly has the potential to interfere with their confidence in interacting across cultures.

There were two situational constraints that may have interfered with the effectiveness of the collaborations, resulting in less of an impact on the ICA of students: time limitations and space limitations. The two sections met to participate in collaborative activities eight times over the course of the semester. Although it was expected that the small groups of students also met outside of class to work on their group presentations, both instructors felt that more time together would have been beneficial in reducing apprehension levels. Additionally, the collaborative lessons took place in the classroom used by the domestic student section. An unanticipated

result of this was that the instructor of the domestic student section felt as if her home space was invaded during collaborative lessons:

It was like, so you're coming into my home and you're engaged with my children. And like something could break . . . something could break. So I'm the curator of this museum with all these beautiful glass pieces, and I have a ton of visitors that must engage, but I'm worried.

This same sense of protective ownership was displayed in the interviews of both instructors in regards to their students.

Both instructors were protective of the students in their individual sections. Throughout the interviews, there were consistent references to "my students" and a focus upon what was best for the students in their individual sections as opposed to all students in the collaboration. The instructor of the domestic students admitted to having "become very protective of my students and like, really worried that you know, someone is mistreating them or someone won't do it like I would do it or the way I know I would appreciate it being done." She also claimed that it was difficult to find a balance between "'Yes, you're welcome, please come in, please be involved,' but also like 'I don't appreciate you saying that to my student the way you said it'." This sense of ownership represents a new factor for consideration in studies pertaining to the reduction of ICA.

Student apprehension, situational constraints, and the instructors' ownership over their individual sections may have acted as impediments to effective collaboration and therefore prevented true change in student levels of ICA.

DISCUSSION

Quantitative findings suggest that collaborative opportunities in mixed-culture groups do not contribute to reduced levels of ICA. However, it is interesting to consider these results in light of the qualitative findings. Qualitative findings indicate that there is potential for collaborative opportunities in mixed-culture groups to reduce the ICA of students. Both instructors recognized the potential for community and relationship building and the likelihood that mixed-culture groups may challenge student-held assumptions. In other words, collaboration provides the opportunity to reduce student ICA, but to be truly effective, collaborative lessons must be designed carefully, taking into account group mentality and motivation.

Group Mentality

Tajfel's (1974) social identity theory revealed that humans have the tendency toward in-group favoritism. In addition, Sumner (1940) found that people tend to be ethnocentric, perceiving that "one's own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it" (pp. 27–28). Taken together, these suggest that in a classroom setting, students are likely to see things from their own cultural perspective and to be territorial, displaying a sense of protection over those culturally similar to themselves. It is not surprising then that the domestic students and instructor in this study expressed concern when their space was "invaded" by

another instructor and set of students. It is also not surprising that the co-instructors conveyed a sense of ownership and protection over the students in their individual sections, often referring to them as “my students” and expressing concern over how the co-instructor managed them. This tendency toward territoriality and inclination toward ownership and protection suggests a need to consider ways to mitigate such feelings for collaborations to be successful. Educators might consider a third space for collaborative lessons for example—a space that is not the respective territory of either section for individual lessons. This may help to alleviate any sense that another instructor or group of students is invading a space “owned” by another group, and potentially reduce in-group favoritism and ICA. Educators might also consider immediate implementation of collaboration and more frequent collaborative opportunities. The collaboration in this study did not start until the third week of the semester, after students and instructors had likely already constructed an in-group mentality.

In addition, it would be prudent to focus upon building a shared team culture since research reveals the importance of doing so for successful collaborations (Cramton & Hinds, 2005; Herrington, 2004; Starke-Meyerring & Andrews, 2006). For example, Starke-Meyerring and Andrews (2006) implemented a semester-long intercultural virtual team project between a management communication course in the United States and one in Canada. At the end of the semester, they found that some teams never created a successful team culture but “remained firmly fixed on two sides of a fault line,” (p. 37) indicating that the mixed-culture groups had formed subgroups along cultural lines, displaying in-group bias for members of their own culture. Herrington (2004) claimed that chaos results when this happens—when students attempt to follow the rules of their own cultures while collaborating with other students from another culture who are doing the same. This is because shared characteristics among only certain group members can create boundaries and divide groups into subgroups (Cramton & Hinds, 2005). The qualitative data from the instructor interviews in this study reveal some evidence of this. For example, the instructors noted the reticence of students while working in their mixed-culture groups; students appeared hesitant to engage and would often sit in their groups along territorial lines, with domestic students on one side and international students on the other side of the circle. Research reveals that this is problematic because ethnocentric subgroups are less likely to cooperate or share information with the perceived “other” group (Cohen & Bailey, 1997), which may lead to communication problems and potentially failure (Earley & Mosakowski, 2000).

Motivation

In addition to in-group bias, research suggests that motivation is an important consideration for successful collaboration because the more people want to learn about cultural differences, the more likely they will initiate communication with people of a different culture (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996; MacIntyre et al., 2003). It is possible that the domestic students were less motivated to interact with international students because they did not need to learn about them. They were already in their home culture and likely had a comfortable understanding of the social

and academic norms. Consistent with previous research (e.g., Kashima & Loh, 2006; Sakurai et al., 2010; Zhang & Brunton, 2007), the international students were much more motivated to engage in the collaboration. This is likely because they needed to develop relationships in order to gain an understanding of the host culture and to be successful within it. This fits with previous research suggesting that the location of interaction makes a difference in one's motivation to interact across cultures. For example, Bahk (2004) found that foreigners were far more likely to interact with Americans in the United States than they were if they encountered them in their home countries. This suggests that while international students likely have the motivation to interact and collaborate with domestic students at an American school, the domestic students are much less likely to be motivated and may need additional motivational strategies, such as a direct emphasis on the benefits of working with international students (Campbell, 2016).

Additionally, it is possible that students were not very motivated to interact cross-culturally because they started with low levels of ICA. Neuliep and McCroskey (1997) reported that a score below 32 reflects low levels of ICA, and the mean scores at Time 1 were below 32, which likely indicate a lack of motivation to change. According to AUM, individuals who have low levels of anxiety with intercultural communication do not have much motivation to engage cross-culturally because there is no need to reduce their currently low levels of ICA (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997).

It is also important to consider the fact that the international student instructor recognized a lack of confidence with the English language as an inhibitor for her students. The international students were apprehensive and therefore less motivated to interact during the collaborations because they did not feel confident in their language skills, and this is not surprising considering other research has found the same (e.g., McCroskey et al., 2003; Rivas et al., 2019). Collaborations may be more successful if instructors pair international students with a buddy from the host culture (Campbell, 2012) or find other ways to reassure international students and help them to feel more confident when using the host language.

It seems likely that in-group favoritism and a lack of motivation for cross-cultural interactions both acted as barriers to successful collaboration, preventing true change in ICA levels of students.

CONCLUSION

Limitations

There are limitations that should be considered. First, due to the limited number of classes available for study (i.e., one international section of the course available for collaboration), convenience sampling was used, which limits generalizability. In addition, the international student participants came from various cultures. Although many of them shared common experiences and grew up in collectivist cultures, this again limits generalizability. Furthermore, while giving voice to the two instructors involved in the collaboration allowed for an exploration of pedagogical considerations, it is not clear that the same conclusions would be drawn by other instructors. Finally, despite evidence of the PRICA as a valid and reliable measure of

ICA, the scale could be insufficient to assess the impact of collaboration upon ICA levels of student participants.

Future Research

Future researchers might first consider sampling participants with high starting levels of ICA. It is difficult to understand the true impact of collaboration upon ICA levels without the potential for true change to occur. Next, in addition to gathering instructor perspectives, it may be beneficial to gather student perspectives of the impact of mixed-culture collaborations upon ICA through interviews or focus groups. Furthermore, to help prevent the formation of in-group bias, it is important to consider experimental conditions—i.e., a third space for collaborative lessons and immediate and frequent collaborative opportunities; such conditions may increase the likelihood of change in ICA levels. Finally, the motivation of students to engage in mixed-culture collaborations should be considered in future studies. Participants in this study may not have been motivated to engage fully, and previous research indicates that motivation may play a role in changing ICA levels of students in mixed-culture collaborations. Future research could explore motivating factors that may contribute to a true change in ICA levels.

Considering the large number of international students in American universities, it is crucial that educators find ways to reduce ICA levels of students, as mitigating ICA increases the potential for successful integration of international students and encourages the development of cross-cultural relationships for all students (international and domestic). Although the quantitative findings of this study indicate that face-to-face mixed-culture collaborations do not affect student levels of ICA, the qualitative findings suggest that there is potential for collaboration to reduce ICA. To create successful classroom collaborations, educators must address the tendency toward in-group favoritism and the potential lack of motivation of domestic students. All of this points to the need for training of instructors prior to implementation of cross-cultural collaborations. For example, if instructors were made aware of the potential for in-group favoritism in advance of the collaboration, they could help to prepare themselves and their students and decrease the potential for the occurrence of such favoritism. They could also take into account the significance of the meeting location for collaborative opportunities and consider the frequency of such opportunities. Finally, future research might examine the utility of motivational strategies in engaging mixed-culture groups in an effort to reduce ICA.

REFERENCES

- Arasaratnam, L. A. (2006). Further testing of a new model of intercultural communication competence. *Communication Research Reports*, 23, 93–99. doi:10.1080/08824090600668923
- Bahk, C. M. (2004). Perceiving and interacting with white Americans: The role of real and mediated contact among Taiwanese and Polish college students. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 33(4), 177–200.

- Bahk, C. M., & Jandt, F. E. (2003). The perception of Whiteness and interracial communication anxiety among Koreans in the United States. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 32(2), 97–115.
- Berry, S., & Woods, R. (2007). Personal report of communication apprehension. In R. A. Reynolds, R. Woods, & J. D. Baker (Eds.) *The handbook of research on electronic surveys and measurements* (pp. 364–366). Idea Group Inc.
- Borden, A. W. (2007). The impact of service-learning on ethnocentrism in an intercultural communication course. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 30(1), 171–183.
- Campbell, N. (2008). You've got mail! Using email technology to enhance intercultural communication learning. *Journal of Intercultural Communication*, 16, 1–17.
- Campbell, N. (2012). Promoting intercultural contact on campus: A project to connect and engage international and host students. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 16(3), 205–227. doi:10.1177/1028315311403936
- Campbell, N. (2016). Ethnocentrism and intercultural willingness to communicate. *Journal of Intercultural Communication*, 40(1), 1.
- Chen, G. M. (2010). The impact of intercultural sensitivity on ethnocentrism and intercultural communication apprehension. *Intercultural Communication Studies*, 19, 1–9.
- Cohen, E. G. (1994). Restructuring the classroom: Conditions for productive small groups. *Review of Educational Research*, 64(1), 1–35.
- Cohen, S. G., & Bailey, D. E. (1997). What makes teams work: Group effectiveness research from the shop floor to the executive suite. *Journal of Management*, 23, 239–290.
- Cramton, C. D., & Hinds, P. (2005). Subgroup dynamics in internationally distributed teams: Ethnocentrism or cross-national thinking? In B. M. Staw & R. M. Kramer (Eds.), *Research in organizational behavior* (Vol. 26, pp. 231–263). JAI.
- Croucher, S. M. (2013). Communication apprehension, self-perceived communication competence, and willingness to communicate: A French analysis. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, 6, 298–316.
- Croucher, S. M., Sommier, M., Rahmani, D., & Appenrodt, J. (2015). A cross-cultural analysis of communication apprehension: A comparison of three European nations. *Journal of Intercultural Communication*, 2015, 38.
- Darwish, R. H. (2015). *Sense of belonging among international students enrolled in graduate-level business programs: A case study* [Unpublished master's thesis]. Bowling Green State University, OH.
- Dobos, J. A. (1996). Collaborative learning: Effects of student expectations and communication apprehension on student motivation. *Communication Education*, 45(2), 118–134.
- Dunne, C. (2009). Host students' perspectives of intercultural contact in an Irish university. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 13(2), 222–239. doi:10.1177/1028315308329787
- Duronto, P. M., Nishida, T., & Nakayama, S. (2005). Uncertainty, anxiety, and avoidance in communication with strangers. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 29, 549–560. doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2005.08.003

- Earley, P. C., & Mosakowski, M. L. (2000). Creating hybrid team cultures: An empirical test of transnational team functioning. *Academy of Management Journal*, 43(1), 26–49.
- Elo, S., & Kyngas, H. (2008). The qualitative content analysis process. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 62(1), 107–115.
- Fall, L. T., Kelly, S., MacDonald, P., Primm, C., & Holmes, W. (2013). Intercultural communication apprehension and emotional intelligence in higher education: Preparing business students for career success. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 76(4), 412–426.
- Garcia, H. A., Garza, T., & Yeaton-Hromada, K. (2019). Do we belong? A conceptual model for international students' sense of belonging in community colleges. *Journal of International Students*, 9(2), 460–487.
- Gibson, D., & Zhong, M. (2005). Intercultural communication competence in the healthcare context. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 29, 621–634.
- Gudykunst, W. B. (2005). An anxiety/uncertainty management (AUM) theory of effective communication: Making the mesh of the net finer. In W. B. Gudykunst (Ed.), *Theorizing about intercultural communication* (pp. 281–322). SAGE.
- Gudykunst, W. B., & Kim, Y. Y. (1997). *Communicating with strangers: An approach to intercultural communication*. McGraw Hill.
- Gudykunst, W. B., & Nishida, T. (2001). Anxiety, uncertainty, and perceived effectiveness of communication across relationships and cultures. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 25, 55–71.
- Gudykunst, W. B., & Shapiro, R. (1996). Communication in everyday interpersonal and intergroup encounters. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 20, 19–45.
- Herrington, T. (2004). Where in the world is the Global Classroom Project? In J. DiLeo & W. Jacobs (Eds.), *If classrooms matter: Progressive visions of educational environments* (pp. 197–210). Routledge.
- Hsu, C. F. (2004). Sources of difference in communication apprehension between Taiwanese and Americans. *Communication Quarterly*, 52, 370–389.
- Jacobi, L. (2018). Ethnocentric attitudes of American and international students: Assessing the impact of collaboration. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 47(6), doi:10.1080/17475759.2018.1506352
- John, B., & Jay, S. (1991). *Communication apprehension and learning styles* [Paper presentation]. Annual Meeting of the Central States Communication Association, Chicago, IL
- Johnson, D., Johnson, R., & Stanne, M. (1990). Impact of goal and resource interdependence on problem-solving success. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 129, 507–516.
- Kashima, E. S., & Loh, E. (2006). International students' acculturation: Effects of international, conational, and local ties and need for closure. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 30, 471–485. doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2005.12.003

- Kassing, J. W. (1997). Development of the intercultural willingness to communicate scale. *Communication Research Reports*, 14(4), 399–407. doi:10/1080/088240997009388683
- Leask, B. (2009). Using formal and informal curricula to improve interactions between home and international students. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 13(2), 205–221.
- Lin, Y., & Rancer, A. S. (2003). Ethnocentrism, intercultural communication apprehension, intercultural willingness-to-communicate, and intentions to participate in an intercultural dialogue program: Testing a proposed model. *Communication Research Reports*, 20(1), 62–72.
- Lu, Y., & Chia-Fang, H. (2008). Willingness to communicate in intercultural interactions between Chinese and Americans. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 37(2), 75–88.
- MacIntyre, P. D., Baker, S. C., Clement, R., & Donovan, L. A. (2003). Talking in order to learn: Willingness to communicate and intensive language programs. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 59, 589–607.
- MacIntyre, P. D., & Charos, C. (1996). Personality attitude and affect as predictors of second language communication. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 15, 3–26.
- Mansson, D. H., & Myers, S. A. (2009). A reexamination of Swedish and American college students' communicative attributes. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 4, 78–96.
- McCroskey, J. C., Burroughs, N. F., & Marie, V. (2003). Relationship of self-perceived communication competence and communication apprehension with willingness to communicate: A comparison with first and second language in Macronesia. *Communication Research Reports*, 20, 230–239.
- Merkin, R. S. (2009). Cross-cultural communication patterns—Korean and American communication. *Journal of Intercultural Communication*, 20. <https://immi.se/intercultural/nr20/merkin.htm>
- Neuliep, J. W. (2012). The relationship among intercultural communication apprehension, ethnocentrism, uncertainty reduction, and communication satisfaction during initial intercultural interaction: An extension of anxiety and uncertainty management (AUM) theory. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 41(1), 1–16.
- Neuliep, J. W., Chadour, M., & McCroskey, J. C. (2003). A cross-cultural test of the association between temperament and communication apprehension. *Communication Research Reports*, 20, 320–330.
- Neuliep, J. W., & McCroskey, J. C. (1997). The development of intercultural and interethnic communication apprehension scales. *Communication Research Reports*, 14, 145–156.
- Pederson, J., Tkachuk, H., & Allen, M. (2008). How perceived situational frequency and situational importance affect communication apprehension: A cross cultural analysis. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 37(3), 189–198.
- Pryor, B., Butler, J., Boehringer, K. (2005). Communication apprehension and cultural context: A comparison of communication apprehension in Japanese and American students. *North American Journal of Psychology*, 7, 247–252.

- Rahmani, D., & Croucher, S. M. (2017). Minority groups and communication apprehension. *Journal of Intercultural Communication, 43*, 1. Retrieved from: <https://immi.se/intercultural/nr43/rahmani.html>
- Rivas, J., Hale, K., & Burke, M. G. (2019). Seeking a sense of belonging: Social and cultural integration of international students with American college students. *Journal of International Students, 9*(2), 687–704.
- Sakurai, T., McCall-Wolf, F., & Kashima, E. S. (2010). Building intercultural links: The impact of a multicultural intervention programme on social ties of international students in Australia. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 34*, 176–185. doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2009.11.002
- Samochowiec, J., & Florack, A. (2010). Intercultural contact under uncertainty: The impact of predictability and anxiety on the willingness to interact with a member from an unknown cultural group. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 34*(5), 507–515. doi: 10.1016/j.ijintrel.2010.05.003
- Shuya, P. (2007, November). *Intercultural communication apprehension, ethnocentrism and their relationship with gender: A cross-cultural comparison between the U.S. and China* [Paper presentation]. 93rd Annual Meeting of the National Communication Association, Chicago, IL.
- Slavin, R. E. (1983). When does cooperative learning increase student achievement? *Psychological Bulletin, 94*(3), 429–445.
- Slavin, R. E. (1995). *Cooperative learning: Theory, research, and practice*. Prentice Hall.
- Spencer-Rodgers, J., & McGovern, T. (2002). Attitudes toward the culturally different: The role of intercultural communication barriers, affective responses, consensual stereotypes, and perceived threat. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 26*, 609–631. doi:10.1016/S0147-1767(02)00038-x
- Starke-Meyerring, D, & Andrews, D. (2006). Building a shared virtual learning culture: An international classroom partnership. *Business Communication Quarterly, 69*(1), 25–49.
- Sullivan, C., & Kashubeck-West, S. (2015). The interplay of international students' acculturative stress, social support, and acculturation modes. *Journal of International Students, 5*(1), 1–11.
- Sumner, W. G. (1940). *Folkways: A study of the sociological importance of usages, manners, customs, mores, and morals*. The New American Library.
- Swagler, M. A., & Ellis, M. V. (2003). Crossing the distance: Adjustment of Taiwanese graduate students in the United States. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 50*(4), 420–437.
- Tajfel, H. (1974). Social identity and intergroup behavior. *Social Science Information, 13*(2), 65–93. doi:10.1177/053901847401300204
- Toale, M. C., & McCroskey, J. C. (2001). Ethnocentrism and trait communication apprehension as predictors of interethnic communication apprehension and use of relational maintenance strategies in interethnic communication. *Communication Quarterly, 49*, 70–83.
- Todd, P., & Nesdale, D. (1997). Promoting intercultural contact between Australian and international university students. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management, 19*(1), 61–75.

- Ward, C., Masgoret, A., & Gezentsvey, M. (2009). Investigating attitudes toward international students: Program and policy implications for social integration and international education. *Social Issues and Policy Review*, 3(1), 79–102.
- Ying, Y. W. (2002). Formation of cross-cultural relationships of Taiwanese international students in the United States. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 30(1), 45–55.
- Zhang, Z., & Brunton, M. (2007). Differences in living and learning: Chinese international students in New Zealand. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 11(2), 124–140. doi:10.1177/1028315320628934
-

LAURA JACOBI, PhD, is an Associate Professor in the Communication Studies Department at Minnesota State University, Mankato. Her major research interests lie in the areas of intercultural communication and communication pedagogy. Email: laura.jacobi@mnsu.edu

The Impact of Intercultural Exchange on Secondary School Exchange Students and Their Host Families

Manca Sustarsic
University of Hawai'i at Manoa, United States

ABSTRACT

The last decade has seen a significant increase of international student mobility and a growing popularity of secondary school exchange programs in the United States and around the world. Drawing upon culture learning theory, the purpose of this study is to understand the impacts, challenges, and rewards of intercultural exchange on secondary school exchange students and their host families. I performed a case study of in-depth interviews with six students who were placed in Hawai'i for an academic year on the Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Future Leaders Exchange merit-based scholarships, as well as interviews with their volunteer host families. Findings show that intercultural exchange occurs as a two-way process. Both students and host families reap the benefits of intercultural exchange by way of active interaction and culture sharing that is enhanced by a positive student–host relationship. This study sheds light not only on the experiences of secondary school exchange students but also on the experiences of the volunteer host families.

Keywords: globalization, host families, intercultural exchange, international students, secondary school education

INTRODUCTION

With rapid globalization, the last decade has seen a significant increase of international student mobility. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2014), 8 million students are expected to be studying abroad by 2025. In recent years, there has been a steady increase of students on a secondary school level who decide to study abroad. Between 2004 and 2016, the

number of these students tripled, with 82,000 international students in American high schools in 2016 (Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs [ECA], n.d.). Although international secondary school students account for only 0.5% of all secondary school students in the United States, their numbers are steadily growing (Institute of International Education [IIE], 2017).

In light of this increasing flow of young international sojourners who study abroad, this study sheds light on the experiences of international secondary school exchange students placed in Hawai'i as part of the two highly selective U.S. Department of State merit-scholarship programs: Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange (YES) and Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX). The students come from Eastern European, Eurasian, Asian, Middle Eastern, and African countries with which the U.S. government maintains good diplomatic ties. In contrast to F-1 students whose main goal is to earn American high school diploma, J-1 exchange students on the FLEX and YES programs are primarily motivated to come to the United States for cultural exchange (Farrugia, 2014) where they attend high school in the host family's district for an academic year.

The purpose of this study is to equip future participants of secondary school exchange programs with a better understanding of the culture sharing that occurs within a homestay program. It contributes to filling the gap in international study abroad literature that has neglected the experiences of secondary school exchange students as well as those of the volunteer host families. The findings also advance scholarly understanding of the experiences and impacts of state-funded scholarship programs and offer insights that might be useful for future program design such as cross-cultural training for students and host families.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Generally, student exchange programs are defined as “the international movement of scholars and students” (Harari, 1992, p. 69) with the United States as the top host country (IIE, 2017). In 2017, 21,005 students were on a short-term secondary school exchange programs, and lived with an American host family or at an accredited boarding school (ECA, n.d.). This includes the secondary school programs funded by the U.S. Department of State, such as FLEX and YES (Marklein, 2014) that are of vital importance for the U.S. government's efforts to expose foreign youth to American culture and values. Such merit-based scholarships remain an important tool of U.S. public diplomacy to promote people-to-people exchanges (Izadi, 2016; Marklein, 2014). Citizen diplomacy—engaging in cultural exchange on a personal level—is an integral part of public diplomacy with exchange students, host families, and wider host community being its agents (Bellamy & Weinberg, 2008). According to the U.S. Department of State, citizen diplomats have “the right to help shape U.S. foreign relations one handshake at a time” (National Museum of American Diplomacy, 2019). However, Knight (2017) argued that international education should move away from diplomacy that is informed mainly by the government's self-interests; rather it should employ knowledge diplomacy to address global issues and inequalities. For example, once in the United States, the FLEX and YES students are

required to participate in community service (ECA, n.d.), which exposes them to various social issues in the host community.

Funded by the U.S. government and administered by the ECA, the FLEX program for secondary school exchange was established in 1993 to promote people-to-people diplomacy with former Soviet Union countries, and has since expanded to include several countries of Eastern and Southeastern Europe. The YES program started in 2013 with a goal to maintain good diplomatic ties with predominantly Muslim countries. The selected FLEX and YES participants are regarded as the brightest students and future leaders of their home countries. They must undergo a rigorous testing process that takes about 1 year (American Councils for International Education [ACIE], n.d.-a, n.d.-b). According to the program application rules, selection is “based on merit as evidenced in a comprehensive application, teacher reference, and demonstrated preparedness for a year-long exchange experience” (ACIE, n.d.-a). Once in the United States, students are placed in a high school, where they are required “to maintain a high level of academic performance, learn about American history and society” (ECA, n.d.). Throughout the year, a local coordinator checks in with the students and host families. This structural support on the local level is of vital importance to these state-funded programs (ACIE, n.d.-a, n.d.-b).

Given that the FLEX and YES students are aged between 15 and 18, personal growth and development can be substantial after a year of exchange. The age of the international sojourner may prove more important than the length of international exposure. Lyttle et al. (2011) argued that individuals between 12 and 18 undergo “a period of meta-development, which includes comprehension of social norms and subgroups as well as increased cognitive complexity” (p. 688). While adults have developed personal identity and a sense of cultural belonging, secondary school-aged students’ personal identities have not yet been stabilized (Enloe & Lewin, 1987; Moore & Barker, 2012; Szkudlarek, 2010). Thus, the literature suggests that adolescent students may undergo profound cultural identity changes during and after international sojourn experience (Lyttle et al., 2011; Szkudlarek, 2010).

The secondary exchange students are relatively short-term visitors to a new culture and are very likely to experience culture shock. Although each student deals with the culture shock differently, and some may be able to cross cultures faster than others, studies show that cross-cultural contacts are innately stressful (Wan et al., 1992). Most studies agree that the sooner one overcomes culture shock, the more likely one will have a positive experience of living abroad (Brown, 2008; Brown & Holloway, 2008; Ward et al., 2005). Importantly, the exchange experience may contribute in large to positive and lasting life changes. Several studies among international students show that ultimately the rewards of an intercultural contact may outweigh its challenges (Bachner & Zeitschel, 2009; Chamove & Soeterik, 2006; Zhou et al., 2008). More specifically, studies conducted among high school returnees (Bachner & Zeitschel, 2009; Chang, 2010; Soeterik, 1998; Weichbrodt, 2014; Wilson, 1993) have confirmed immediate positive cognitive changes that students realize upon reentry, such as personal growth and increased feelings of independence, confidence, and cultural awareness. A large body of literature agrees that most people who undergo cross-cultural adjustment in their childhood feel changed or different from their peers who have not experienced living abroad. (Bachner & Zeitschel,

2009; Chamove & Soeterik, 2006; Hoersting & Jenkins, 2011). Hoersting and Jenkins's study (2011) showed that becoming bicultural is a possible result of experiencing two different cultures. It occurs when "individuals reap the psychological benefits of having better interpersonal adjustment and socio-cultural adaptation" (Hoersting & Jenkins, p. 18). This may also stem in large from a positive student–host relationship (Rohmann et al., 2014).

The literature that explores positive impacts of the international sojourn highlights that the experience of living abroad may substantially influence the sojourners' global understanding, intercultural communication skills, cognitive differentiation, intercultural awareness, sensitivity, and perception (Bachner & Zeuschel, 2009; Brown & Graham, 2009; Hoersting & Jenkins, 2011; Lyttle et al., 2011; Moore & Barker, 2012). According to the ECA's study (2009) among YES alumni, 94% of returnees embraced a positive image of the American society. Nine out of 10 reported that by sharing stories from their exchange experience, their family and friends understand Americans and the United States better. Similarly, Bachner and Zeuschel's study (2009) found that most German returnees recognized the necessity of bridging gaps between the United States and their home country. Several important studies (Hansel, 2008a, 2008b; Thomas, 2005; Weichbrodt, 2014) conducted among alumni 10–20 years following their exchange confirmed the lasting positive impact that the experience had on the alumni's intercultural skills and cultural identity. Alumni stated that because of the exchange experience they felt more comfortable encountering different cultures. Weichbrodt's study (2014) revealed that 80% of the German alumni agreed that their worldview has changed. By increased open-mindedness, they often cared to debunk common stereotypes about the host country.

An exchange year abroad may serve as a stepping-stone for future international mobility. For example, in Weichbrodt's study (2014), 80% of 3,000 exchange alumni returned to the host country for at least 6 weeks after the exchange, which indicates the alumni's desire to seek future opportunities to either study or work abroad. Although various factors may contribute to future international mobility, nearly half of the participants in Weichbrodt's study mentioned high school exchange as one of the main reasons to go abroad. Similarly, the American Field Service's long-term impact study revealed returnees' tendency for multicultural pursuits (Hansel, 2008a, 2008b).

Homestay may be one of the most influential components of the study abroad experience for many foreign students, especially when they actively participate in a host family life (Knight & Schmidt-Rinehart, 2010; Schmidt-Rinehart & Knight, 2004). As per the U.S. Department of State's Exchange Visitor Program document (§ Sec. 62.25), host families in the FLEX and YES programs shall receive no monetary payment for hosting (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services [USCIS], 2018). The role of a host family is to provide the student with a comfortable home, three meals a day, a bed of their own, and transportation to and from school activities. What is more, the host family is expected to treat the exchange student as a member of their family, and to include the student in any family activities (ECA, n.d.; USCIS, 2018).

Very little literature engages on the homestay component of the study abroad, especially from the host family's perspective. Schmidt-Rinehart and Knight (2004)

found that student–host interaction was limited due to the students’ busy schedule with outside activities. One of the factors that caused limited interaction may be the age of these university-level participants who possess a higher degree of independence to spend time outside of the host home compared with teenage students. Knight and Schmidt-Rinehart (2010) found that active communication between students and hosts may result in increased interaction, language learning, and cultural understanding. However, the participants in their study were university students who might have prioritized their own schedule before spending time with the host family. Thus, conscious effort through task-based learning had to be made to improve the quantity and quality of the interaction (Knight & Schmidt-Rinehart, 2010). Rodriguez and Chornet-Roses’ (2014) study examined an 8-week summer program in Luxembourg. Over one third of the participants felt like guests in their host families, while the idea of becoming a family member fell short of the student’s expectations. The length of the homestay was too short to develop deep relationships. As a result, students failed to adjust fully to the host family’s lifestyle. However, the study by Rohmann et al. (2014) showed that host families served as informational and emotional support to Swiss secondary school exchange students who studied in the United States and New Zealand for 10 months. Findings suggest that positive intercultural contact not only increases the chances of a positive experience for both students and hosts, but the study also found that due to such positive relationship, students are more likely to reach out to an unknown member of the host community.

Theoretical Framework

According to Berry et al. (2006), acculturation is “the process of cultural and psychological change that follows intercultural contact” (p. 305). As a result, acculturation can affect individuals’ affective, behavioral, and cognitive (ABC) responses to a new environment (Ward et al., 2005). Since the 1980s, social skills and culture learning became the foundation of the culture learning theory, which addresses the ABCs of transition and adaptation. Ward et al.’s (2005) culture learning model has often been used to describe various international sojourners’ experiences abroad. However, this framework may also be relevant to employ to the volunteer host family.

With its origin in social psychology, the ABC model emphasizes the behavioral aspect of intercultural contact (Kim, 2001; Zhou et al., 2008) that falls within the purview of intercultural exchange. More specifically, the behavioral component looks at intercultural interaction, such as contact with host nationals. The affective aspect focuses on the psychological and emotional well-being of a sojourner. Debunking stereotypes and prejudice falls within the cognitive facet that evolves around sojourners’ changed perceptions (Ward et al., 2001). There is no one single theory that could be applied to the study of both students’ and host families’ experiences; however, culture learning theory looks at the intercultural contact as it occurs in the exchange. “Social interaction is a mutually organized and skilled performance” (Zhou et al., 2008, p. 66). Furthermore, the impact of intercultural contact can be studied within sedentary communities (Ward et al., 2001) such as host families that bring an international student into their homes.

The intercultural exchange model in Figure 1 links the cross-cultural transition with the culture-specific skills acquisition as they occur in the process of intercultural exchange. When crossing cultures, students and host families alike may benefit from learning culturally relevant social skills. As per the culture learning theory, the responses of the intercultural exchange process include the three ABCs that are interrelated. Intercultural exchange experience requires a great amount of adaptation for the sojourner and the host family. The outcomes are divided between psychological, which result from affective responses, and sociocultural, which are the result of behavioral and cognitive responses. The study by Zhou et al. (2008) revealed that psychological and sociocultural adaptation are interdependent and intertwined. At the micro level, it is important to note the individual level factors, such as personality, values, and language fluency that can play a major role in an individual’s experience abroad. At the macro level, we may need to consider the societal level factors, such as society of origin and society of settlement.

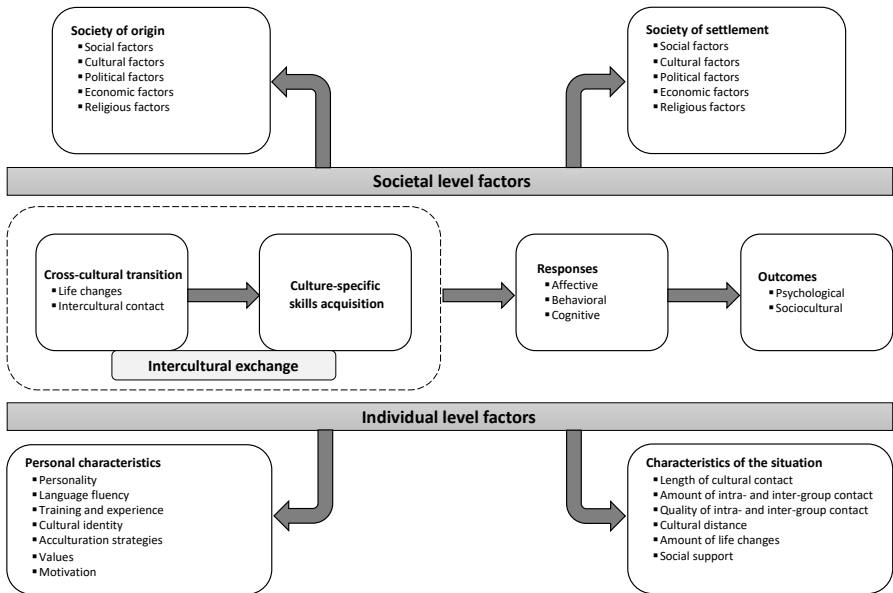


Figure 1: Factors Affecting Intercultural Exchange, Responses, and Outcomes

Note. Adapted from “Theoretical Models of Culture Shock and Adaptation in International Students in Higher Education,” by Y. Zhou et al., 2008, *Studies in Higher Education*, 33(1), 63–75. Copyright 2008 by Taylor & Francis.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative case study to explore the experiences of students and host families in Hawai’i in two specific exchange programs, FLEX and YES. Case studies often look at cases within a bounded system (particular context, time,

and place) to gain a comprehensive understanding of an issue (Stake, 2005). I used semi-structured interviews to get an in-depth understanding of the participants' intercultural experiences. To qualify for participation, students had to be current participants of the FLEX or YES programs (academic year 2017–2018), and living with a local volunteer host family in Hawai'i. The study ran at the eighth month of the exchange. The timing is important since "sociocultural adaptation follows a learning curve with a steep increase over the first four to six months" (Ward et al., 2005, p. 66). With this assumption, the participants should have adjusted to their homestay, yet they would be able to recall the initial stages of the exchange experience.

When this research took place, a total of 15 FLEX and YES exchange students were residing in the state of Hawai'i. Due to availability and efficiency in time, I used purposeful sampling to select a diverse group of students who may "purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 308). Six different countries across four geographical regions allowed for a heterogeneous sample. After identifying the students, I contacted their host families to seek their consent to participate in the study. One host parent in each host family volunteered to conduct the interview. I selected a total of 12 participants, six students and six host families.

The interviews were audiotaped and took about 45–60 minutes each. I interviewed two students in person at the exchange organization's office. I conducted four interviews via a Skype video call based on the participants' location. Considering families' busy schedules and distance, I conducted all interviews with host families over the phone, which is an alternative approach to access hard-to-reach participants (Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004). However, some of the limitations of telephone interviewing compared with in-person or video conferencing are that body language cannot be observed, and participants may generate short answers or may be cut off in the middle of a thought (Arksey & Knight, 1999). I first transcribed the data and then coded it to identify emerging themes both individually and across the interviews. Member checking guaranteed credibility and trustworthiness of the themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Participant Characteristics

As shown in Table 1, I interviewed three FLEX and three YES students. Four students were female and two were male. The average age of the participants was 16.7. Students came from Bangladesh, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Palestine, and Tanzania. Four students were placed with host families on the island of Oahu, and two on the Island of Hawai'i (Big Island). Three students switched host families during the exchange. It is common for a family to sign up as a welcoming host family for the first few months due to various personal reasons that may allow only for short-term hosting.

Table 1: Individual Characteristics of Exchange Students

Variable	Student 1	Student 2	Student 3	Student 4	Student 5	Student 6
Gender	F	F	M	F	F	M
Age	17	17	17	16	17	16
Program	FLEX	FLEX	FLEX	YES	YES	YES
Country	Lithuania	Georgia	Kazakhstan	Tanzania	Bangladesh	Palestine
Placement	Oahu	Oahu	Oahu	Oahu	Big Island	Big Island

Three host families, as shown in Table 2, are multigenerational with host parents, children, and grandchildren who live in the immediate vicinity, and who are also involved in the exchange experience. Two of these families were still working, while one was retired. The other three host families were retired single hosts.

Table 2: Individual Characteristics of Host Families (HF)

Variable	HF 1	HF 2	HF 3	HF 4	HF 5	HF 6
HF type	Three generation	Three generation	Single host father	Single host mother	Single host mother	Three generation
Years hosting	20	27	1	20	30	20
Exchange students ^a	6	15	1	3	8	16

Note. HF = host family.

^a The number of secondary school exchange students that host families hosted in previous years until now. Participants on programs other than secondary school exchange such as FLEX or YES that some of the host families may have hosted are not counted.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Understanding Host Families' Volunteer Motivations

All interviewed host families were highly educated and well-traveled. Most of them had some years of experience living abroad and may have been, as such, more open-minded since they had themselves experienced being a stranger in another country. Common motives to host exchange students among the interviewees included learning about different cultures and lifestyles, and extending American hospitality to young students by making them feel welcomed and part of the family.

The single hosts in particular indicated that companionship and being surrounded by young and smart people with leadership potential drove their desire to serve as hosts. Several hosts mentioned that they liked the idea that FLEX and YES students come well-prepared, and are oriented and monitored throughout the year by the local coordinator and by the U.S. Department of State. One host felt that “there is structural support not only for the host family but also for the student.” Another host added, “I

always expect they are going to be great. They just are superior, good students. Usually they have a good command of English.”

Most host families indicated no particular preference for gender, country, or religion of their students. Some hosts preferred students who were not too young, e.g. over 16 years old, while others preferred a specific gender based on previous good experiences. Some hosts started off with students from countries with which they were familiar, where they previously had lived or visited. However, after many years of hosting experience, families seemed to become more open to other countries or religions, as they wanted to learn something new from each student they hosted. As per one host, “I have been kind of open, I like something I have not experienced before.”

As shown in Table 2, five out of six host families had been involved in hosting for over 20 years. All of them started off hosting for short-term programs, such as weekend or week-long homestays. Only one of them indicated that they had begun as a paid host for another program, which at that time complemented the income. However, once the host recognized the value of intercultural exchange for the whole family beyond monetary reward, they continued to host voluntarily. As per the host father’s words, “I got used to having them with me. My kids got used to have exchange students in the house.” These host families recognized the positive impact that intercultural exchange brought into their lives, which served as the main drive to continue hosting.

Two of the host families had hosted over 15 secondary school exchange students over the last 20 years. I could sense the pride when they shared stories of keeping in touch with most of their “children,” as they often referred to their former students. One of the host families shared this sentiment excitingly: “We see their children, their husbands. And we see their weddings and then they have babies. It is really fun and we consider them all our extended family.” These families valued the relationship they established during the exchange that could be the beginning of a life-long friendship.

Intercultural Exchange Experiences of Exchange Students and Their Host Families

As illustrated in Figure 2, a number of themes emerged on both sides that correspond with the culture learning theory and its ABC responses. Improved English language skills, increased intercultural competence, independence, and maturity are commonly identified as life-changing developments after sojourners’ experience abroad. In line with culture learning theory and the studies that have focused on cognitive factors (Bachner & Zeuschel, 2009; Chamove & Soeterik, 2006; Chang, 2010; Hoersting & Jenkins, 2011; Jang & Kim, 2001; Wilson, 1993), students in this study emphasized personal growth and development as one of the personal impacts of the exchange. The Palestinian student felt that he knew himself better now. Likewise, the Georgian student shared that “the most important thing that I learned here, what I realized is just be who you are.” As per the Kazakh student’s observation, he became “more self-reliant, more versatile and more prepared to do anything in life.” As observed in the literature on cognitive changes, such profound changes in

identity development during the international sojourn may be related to the adolescent age of these students (Szkudlarek, 2010).

Multigenerational host families stressed the importance hosting had on their children and grandchildren. While having a foreign student in their home, one host

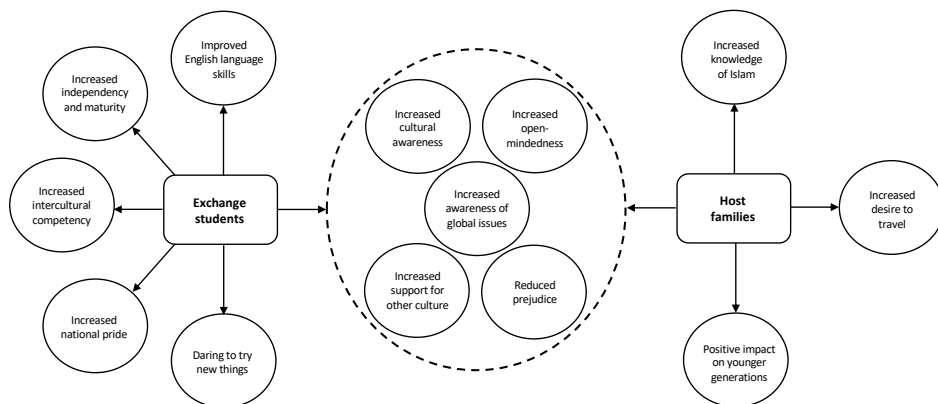


Figure 2: The Impacts of Intercultural Exchange on Exchange Students and Host Families

said that hosting “has provided my granddaughter with older sisters. And for my adult kids, they enjoy the exchange students as much as we do. [...] They really become a part of our extended family.” Another host noted that their grandchildren, “now have an experience. They know there are other people who live in different places around the world and they learn about differences in the cultures.” Thus, it is not only foreign student who benefit from intercultural contact with the host, but it may also be the extended host family that reaps benefits from the exposure to the foreign student. The culture learning theory stresses the importance of interaction between a sojourner and host nationals, which can result in fewer social difficulties (Ward et al., 2005). This may improve both students’ and host families’ intercultural competence and overall facilitate a more positive adaptation during the sojourn.

The following five themes emerged as a result of the homestay experience between students and host families: increased cultural awareness, increased open-mindedness, increased awareness of global issues, reduced prejudice, and increased support for each other’s country.

Increased Cultural Awareness

Most students acknowledged that they experienced culture shock in the initial stages of their stay in Hawai’i. They had been heavily influenced by American movies and felt that life in Hawai’i fell short of their expectations. As per the Tanzanian student’s realization: “I expected it to be more like mainland. I also expected all people to be OK, but when I came to Hawai’i I found homeless people. International problem.” Students admitted that they expected Hawai’i to be more westernized with

White Americans inhabiting the islands. However, they came to embrace the unique cultural diversity in Hawai'i. Not only did students learn about American, Hawaiian, Asian, and Polynesian cultures that coexist on the islands, they also built pride in their home culture by sharing it with others, which was similarly found in Wilson's study (1993). As per the Bengali student's reflection:

After the first two months here I started thinking about my own country. I think I started to appreciate my country and culture better. When I am home it is just everyday stuff, but here I realized how unique it is and the long history behind it.

Although all students shared photos, videos, books, and food from their countries with host families, the most culture sharing occurred over dinner conversations when students and hosts interacted and shared stories about daily life. These often advanced into culture sharing discussions that resulted in meaningful student–host interaction, and overall seemed to ease the cultural adaptation process. The student from Kazakhstan shared that during discussions, “He [host father] tells me about America and I tell him about my country.” The Georgian student claimed that “communication is the key.” Active interaction with her host parents helped this student adjust well to the daily life in Hawai'i:

Very often we have meaningful discussions. They [host parents] are very clever, very intelligent. I love talking with them because they teach me a lot of things starting from English to a lot of things like life. They give me motivation, and [they] give me advice on how to make my life better. So yes, discussions are one of the biggest things in my life with them.

The culture- and life-sharing discussions correspond well with the behavior component of the culture learning theory that states that “overseas students can benefit from interaction with host nationals socially, psychologically and academically” (Zhou et al., 2008, p. 70).

Host families, likewise, benefited from learning more about their student's culture. By increased cultural awareness hosts may also get to know their own culture better, which relates well with the culture learning theory (Ward et al., 2001). The host family of the Georgian student shared:

We have learned from this student so much about the culture, the way people see things and the way people behave and expressions. Americans tend to be more animated and more open. We have learned that Georgians tend to be a little more closed and subdued.

Increased Open-Mindedness

A year of living in a different culture may have students test their open-mindedness as they get exposed to new or unfamiliar things. By joining the host family activities, this sometimes means that students need to get out of their comfort zone. As per the culture learning theory and transformative learning theory (Taylor & Merriam, 2008), open-mindedness is an important life skill that sojourners acquire

while living abroad. The transformative learning theory argues, “When a sojourner moves to another culture to live for an extended period, they often experience a transformation out of a necessity for survival and a need to relieve stress and anxiety” (Brown & Graham, 2009, p. 82). Unlike several studies conducted among university-level students who indicated lack of engagement and interaction with the host family as one of the common problems (Knight & Schmidt-Rinehart, 2010; Schmidt-Rinehart & Knight, 2004), the FLEX and YES students in this study were encouraged by the program, and perhaps partially due to their adolescent age, joined host family activities and helped with family chores.

All student participants reported becoming more open to trying new things. For students who could not swim or had a fear of water, going to the beach in Hawai'i presented a big challenge. Nevertheless, the Tanzanian student signed up for swimming lessons with the help of her first host family who considered beach activities as important family events. Two other students tried out paddling and Tai Chi, activities that were, likewise, introduced to them by their hosts. In addition, students admitted to becoming less picky with food, especially when dining out with the host family. This was well-articulated by the Lithuanian student:

I learned how to try on new things, because in Lithuania I would get the same things in a restaurant. I would not experiment a lot. And here, I eat raw fish and that mochi thing. It is very interesting. I became more open-minded.

Often, students joined their hosts to attend a religious institution different from their own. For some of international students this may present a challenge, yet this study's YES students who were all Muslim, proved to be open-minded to the new experience. As they described, going to church with their host families was an opportunity to broaden their worldview, to socialize, and possibly, to expand their host national network, which is one of the vital components of the culture learning theory (Ward et al., 2005). Frequent interaction with host nationals, such as with host family and host community members, may bring emotional benefits and overall better psychological adjustment (Ward et al., 2005). Moreover, when the student–host relationship is of good quality, the willingness to explore the host environment is higher (Rohmann et al., 2014). The Bengali student shared her own experience:

Even though none of us is Christian, we went to church for Christmas and Thanksgiving shows. There I met a lot of random people just sitting beside me talking about the show. And I think this has helped me meeting a lot of people, just socializing with them.

Host families may also expand their open-mindedness by trying out traditional foods prepared by their students, and by getting more receptive to other religions, different ways of living, and different worldviews of their students. As per one host: “Sometimes we like to think that everybody thinks the way we do. You just learn that there are different perspectives and that these different perspectives should be recognized and respected.”

In addition, the hosting experience increased host families' desire to travel, particularly to their students' home countries that they would never have considered before, either due to the distance or current political situation. For instance, the host

father of the Palestinian student wanted to visit Palestine because “it is an area of the world, Middle East, that I have never been to.” Such change in attitude and open-mindedness on the host families’ behalf corresponds with the cognitive responses of culture learning theory (Ward et al., 2001).

Increased Awareness of Global Issues

For all student participants, community service involvement set the stage for increased awareness of not only local issues in Hawai’i but also global issues. Many studies have found that the experience of living abroad enhances one’s global understanding (Bachner & Zeutschel, 2009; Brown & Graham, 2009; Hoerstring & Jenkins, 2011; Lyttle et al., 2011; Moore & Barker, 2012). Although FLEX and YES programs require students to complete at least 20 hours of community service during the exchange, most students in this study completed well over 50 hours. Moreover, students genuinely embraced this idea to the point that they wanted to start community service clubs back home. Most of them got involved through school clubs or with the help of their host families. The Lithuanian student explained her newly found passion for environmental issues: “I am not using any plastic straws. I am not using any plastic zip lock bags. Even one thing can make a difference. I think this never occurred to me before. It became something that I am passionate about.”

As per ECA (n.d.), the international exchange students are regarded as future leaders of their countries. By increased awareness of global issues through active participation in community service, participants of this study may have developed leadership skills. With hands-on experience, students may undergo cognitive changes in attitude and behavioral responses that trigger them to take action during their exchange experience and most importantly, upon reentry to their home country. The studies among alumni have shown that the exchange experience in the United States made YES alumni (ECA, 2009) and alumni in Wilson’s study (1993) think of ways to apply new skills stemming from the American culture, such as community service, to benefit the society at home. The Tanzanian student’s motivation captures this well:

Before coming here, I did not think of those kinds of issues, because I am eating well. So, I did not think of anybody going to bed without food. I wish I could make the global issues club back home.

In addition, most students reported that they followed the international news more often. Students and hosts agreed that they enjoyed discussing politics of the United States and of the students’ home countries. Some hosts found it important to share with the student what was happening in the United States politically. Articulated well by the Palestinian student’s host father, host families may become more attuned to the pertinent issues in the student’s home country:

I have become very much aware of the problems and what is happening now in Palestine and the Gaza strip over there and confrontation between Palestinians and Israelis. It made me very aware of conflicts that impact the lives of these students.

Reduced Prejudice

Both students and host families indicated that the intercultural exchange reduced their prejudice about other cultures and religions. This corresponds with the cognitive response of culture learning, as increased positive contact with a host national may decrease perceived prejudice (Zhou et al., 2008). In a homestay environment, students and hosts get familiar with each other's lifestyle. Most students noted that they held a certain degree of stereotypes about Americans before coming to the United States. The Tanzanian student expected the United States to be more racist. The Kazakh student thought that he could understand the United States much better, and could see that "stereotypical things were not true." Studies conducted among the YES alumni (ECA, 2009) indicate that once students experience living in the United States, they may embrace and share some of the American values with their family and friends back home.

As opposed to the students on the mainland United States, the benefit for the students placed in Hawai'i was learning about various Asian and Polynesian cultures that coexist on the islands. For example, the student from Georgia changed her opinion about Japanese as she realized that "you cannot blame the whole country because of ten people. And I realized how great Japanese people are. I just learned so much because of that diversity here." Likewise, the Bengali student said, "I think I have gotten to be less stereotypical. I have just learned to never assume. I have just learned to accept that people are different." These findings correspond with studies on intercultural contact that show that positive contact with host nationals is likely to reduce prejudice (Rohmann et al., 2014).

The host families indicated becoming more tolerant towards different cultures and religions. Having a foreign student in their home for a year allowed them to experience foreign culture first-hand. Some hosts said that they became more understanding of nondemocratic political systems. For example, the host father of the Kazakh student acknowledged that his student "has different political values, because they have dictatorship"; however, this did not distract in any way from the relationship they established. The families that hosted YES students all mentioned learning more about the Islam religion. The host of the Tanzanian student in particular enjoyed when her student shared Islamic traditions and stories from the Quran. She said: "Having conversations about religion now is very informative. Especially with Islam I think Americans do not know many things about it except it must be bad." These two examples demonstrate that hosts may benefit from cognitive changes in attitudes toward different political systems and religious groups.

Also, hosts became more aware of the stereotypes that foreigners perceive about Americans. One host raised the issue of common misconceptions: "There is a stereotype of what Americans are. You know we are all blond-haired and blue-eyed and we eat potatoes and steak for dinner." Tolerance and cultural relativism are based on the assumption that no single culture is superior to another culture (Hofstede, 1991). This can be seen from another host family's comment:

I think it is important for Americans to experience foreigners because we have a tendency being surrounded by ocean on both sides of the continent,

and the mentality that we are first or that we are the biggest and more powerful.

Being able to discuss difficult topics such as politics and religion was significant, especially given the young age of this study's participants. This choice of topics may indicate a high level of proficiency in English language among students, as well as a certain degree of comfort and trust in a student–host relationship to be able to discuss such issues. This finding adds to the importance of the quality interaction in a homestay, as articulated in the Knight and Schmidt-Rinehart study (2010) in which students struggled to talk about difficult topics with their hosts.

Increased Support for Each Other's Country

Students grew fond of their life in Hawai'i. Some embraced the culture by learning the Hula or ukulele, two staple traditions of the Hawaiian culture. The Georgian student said: "I feel like I belong here. I am calling myself like I am Hawaiian and everybody does. Sometimes I feel like I am representing Hawai'i more than my country." The Lithuanian student felt that she has learned a lot about the United States and may struggle upon reentry, because people back home may not understand why she wants to discuss the events that pertain to the United States. Despite initial denial, most students recognized that they might experience reverse culture shock once they returned home, because they had gotten used to the American lifestyle. The Georgian student explained her feelings about re-entry: "I think as soon as I go back, I will miss my life here. And whenever I have a sad moment in life, I will miss Hawai'i and being here."

Overall, all students indicated that their experiences in Hawai'i exceeded their expectations. After returning home for at least 2 years, as required by the J-1 visa, students wished to be able to study abroad again. Half of them hoped to return to the United States; however, despite their positive experiences in Hawai'i, students felt more open and prepared for future multicultural pursuits elsewhere. These findings are similar to the studies among alumni. Compared to their immobile peers, students who return from studying abroad may feel equipped with skills such as independence, courage to try new things, leadership skills, and open-mindedness to explore the world, which may ease their adjustment period during any future international sojourn (Hansel, 2008a, 2008b; Weichbrodt, 2014).

Host families grew supportive of their students' home countries. This stemmed in part from an increased understanding of the student's culture, which can result in behavioral responses (Ward et al., 2001). Some hosts felt strongly about speaking up for the student's religion, especially when they heard people spread misinformation. The host mother of the Bengali student commented on the misconceptions people have about Islam:

When I hear people make statements that are judgmental, I speak up. Whereas in the past, I think I would be just "Yeah, yeah, yeah" and let it go. And now I need to correct some of these misconceptions.

The host family of the Lithuanian student summed up this idea by saying, “When you host you begin to care about geographical areas, even if you never thought about them before.”

Rewards and Challenges of Intercultural Exchange

For most students, culture shock presented the biggest challenge in the first few months. A positive sign of the adjustment to their homestay is that students reported very little homesickness, which was mostly credited to the initial stages of sojourn. This was often due to receiving the host national’s social support or affective adaptation (Zhou et al., 2008). Many studies (Grove & Hansel, 1983; Hoerstring & Jenkins, 2011; Wilson, 1993) attribute positive adjustment to increased acceptance of cultural differences. Also, positive intercultural contact is closely associated with one’s overall satisfaction (Zhou et al., 2008). In this study, both students and host families admittedly demonstrated so.

Furthermore, studies about the affective component of the culture learning approach state that psychological and sociocultural adjustment issues occur mainly during the early stages of the sojourn, and then decrease over time (Ward et al., 2001). Having been treated as a real member of the host family has proven a significant factor that facilitated positive adjustment. The Georgian student said: “I feel 100% part of the family. I just love being with them. I feel like they love me too. I feel like they treat me as their little sister.” This strong sense of belonging to one’s host family was achieved through active participation in host activities and chores over the course of the year. This is in contrast to the extant research, such as the Rodriguez and Chornet-Roses’ study (2014), in which students could not move beyond guest–host relationship.

Three students switched their host families during the year. Two of them had to do so because their first family signed up as a welcoming host for the first few months. The Palestinian student had to request change with the local coordinator’s help due to unexpected personal disagreements with his first family. The role of the local coordinator is to recruit host families, to monitor the exchange experience, and often to serve as a mediator between student and host. When this student moved to his new host, he admitted that open communication and active participation proved to be the key to success:

We communicate well. We work together around the house, in the garden. I did not have any problems since I came here with my host family. We agree to a lot of things. And we are like even more friends than a family. We are very open to each other.

In addition, the Tanzanian student appreciated the time spent with her first host family: “I shifted family but still I communicate with my first host family, and I send some pictures to them. So, I still communicate with them.” All of these students found it challenging and stressful at the time, but they realized that they had grown and become more adaptable from this experience.

Sometimes students, being placed in a family that has hosted for many years, felt like they were just one of the exchange students, and not “the one.” Nevertheless,

these families cared about each and every student they hosted, and usually wished to continue a life-long friendship with all of them. Increased social and emotional support by a host family is part of the affective response of culture learning theory that contributes to the enhanced psychological well-being of a student (Zhou et al., 2008).

Internal family dynamics may play a role in shaping the student–host relationship. Families with children may face jealousy issues as the attention suddenly gets divided among the children. Most hosts agreed that the reward of having their children and grandchildren exposed to different cultures outweighed such challenges. While working families may have struggled to dedicate quality time to the exchange student, and may have even felt guilty for this, single hosts often felt like they were “boring” or “not the perfect host family.” As it may be expected from adolescent students, most of them hoped to be placed in a traditional home with two parents and children of similar age. However, this rarely happens. Those students who imagined such a family were initially disappointed to be placed with a single host. As per the interviews, all those students now appreciate the attention and care they received from the single hosts. They seem to have developed a close bond, more of a friendship than of a parent–child relationship. One student said that he saw his host father “like an older brother.” Students felt this friend-like relationship showed most when hosts asked their opinion and respected it. This theme was supported by the hosts themselves. As per one host father: “We have become very good friends.” Nevertheless, the host families tend to act as parents when needed, which was described by the Tanzanian student: “If I do something wrong, she will treat me like her daughter. So, I feel like I am part of the family because she cares if I did something wrong.”

Finally, the true value of the intercultural exchange came into play when the student, despite the challenges, felt like a real member of the family, which came with both responsibilities and rewards. Likewise, when a host family treated a student as their own child, they would miss their presence when they leave. As per the host of the Lithuanian student:

Because she has fit in so well with our family, she is going to leave a huge hole. Just the fact that she will not be in the bedroom, she will not be going to school in the morning, she will not be somebody that we have to include in the family... It is really like a family member growing up and going away to college.

CONCLUSION

This qualitative study explored the experiences of the FLEX and YES secondary school exchange students placed in Hawai’i and their matched host families. The aim was to show that intercultural exchange occurs as a two-way process between students and their host families. Indeed, this study found that both groups reaped mutual benefits of the intercultural exchange as they learned from each other by living together in a homestay where the culture-sharing occurred on a daily basis. Active participation in host family activities and interaction that revolved around topics of

culture, politics and religion seemed to enhance the positive student–host relationship. In addition, host families often served as emotional and social support to students. The most significant finding, though, is that students and their hosts reaped a number of common benefits through intercultural exchange. These included increased cultural awareness, open-mindedness, awareness of global issues, and support for each other’s country, and reduced prejudice. With proper structural support that students and volunteer host families receive throughout the year, the state-funded exchange programs such as FLEX and YES may yield outcomes that are different from private exchange programs that lack government support.

Drawing upon the culture learning theory, this study incorporated both students’ and host families’ intercultural contact and experience. The ABC responses to the intercultural contact through intercultural exchange showed that these responses were interrelated and intertwined. Psychological and sociocultural outcomes of intercultural exchange could be observed among both groups; however, the emphasis of this study is put on the sociocultural impacts that largely resulted from behavioral and cognitive responses. For students, some of the immediate life-changing outcomes included personal growth and development, as well as improved English language skills, which fell within the most important cognitive changes. The behavioral and social adaptation was mainly seen in increased intercultural competence that students attributed in large to the homestay environment. These newly acquired sociocultural skills may prove helpful to these students in easing the adjustment in possible future international pursuits. Since this study took place in Hawai’i, its cultural uniqueness that students experienced contributed to increased multicultural awareness that extended to Hawaiian, Asian, and Polynesian cultures.

One of this study’s limitations is its small and limited sample of students and host families. A bigger sample would allow for possible cross-country or cross-gender comparisons, among others. Another limitation might be that participants who agreed to be part of this study did so due to the mostly positive experiences. Students and host families were self-selected. All host families were highly educated and well-travelled, which may attribute to increased open-mindedness from the get-go. In addition, all host families except one identified themselves as experienced in hosting. As such, they may have been keen on emphasizing the positive experiences they recognized in the value hosting has had on their lives.

One limitation of the culture learning theory is that it does not consider host families as possible beneficiaries of intercultural contact and exchange. Thus, the framework should expand to include various groups of people who are immersed in foreign cultures daily, even if it occurs in their homeland. Despite the small sample size, this study aims to contribute to future development of a more comprehensive framework that would consider the impacts of intercultural exchange between students and host families. Future studies should draw on a larger sample among various geographical areas in the United States and beyond. They should consider a variety of host family profiles and various lengths of hosting. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to incorporate quantitative methods to measure specific ABC responses of the culture learning theory in detail. This would contribute greatly to the development of a new framework.

For now, this study confirms that public diplomacy as promoted by the FLEX and YES programs indeed exposes international secondary school exchange students to American culture and values, and it gives an opportunity to American families to learn about foreign cultures. This is in line with the ECA's goals to promote mutual understanding between Americans and foreigners by learning about American culture, democratic institutions, and civic rights while in the United States. As per participants in this study, the value of intercultural exchange through citizen diplomacy can be supported by the fact that many host families who have hosted for over 20 years believed in the long-term benefits of the intercultural exchange. More studies among alumni and host families are needed to examine whether the impacts of the intercultural exchange hold true in the years following the exchange, and how alumni and host families use the newly acquired sociocultural skills due to this experience.

REFERENCES

- American Councils for International Education. (n.d.-a). *FLEX (Formerly A-SMYLE) application information*. Retrieved March 21, 2019 from <http://ac-see.org/new/flex-program/#sixth>
- American Councils for International Education. (n.d.-b). *YES in Southeast Europe application information*. Retrieved March 21, 2019 from <http://ac-see.org/new/yes-program/>
- Arksey, H., & Knight, P. T. (1999). *Interviewing for social scientists: An introductory resource with examples*. SAGE.
- Bachner, D., & Zeuschel, U. (2009). Long-term effects of international educational youth exchange. *Intercultural Education, 20*(1–2), 45–58.
- Bellamy, C., & Weinberg, A. (2008). Educational and cultural exchanges to restore America's image. *The Washington Quarterly, 31*(3), 55–68.
- Berry, J. W., Phinney, J. S., Sam, D., & Vedder, P. (2006). Immigrant youth: Acculturation, identity, and adaptation. *Applied Psychology: An International Review, 55*(3), 303–332.
- Brown, L. (2008). The incidence of study-related stress in international students in the initial stage of the international sojourn. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 12*(1), 5–28.
- Brown, L., & Graham, I. (2009). The discovery of the self through the academic sojourn. *Existential Analysis, 20*(1), 79–93.
- Brown, L., & Holloway, I. (2008). The initial stage of the international sojourn: excitement or culture shock? *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling, 36*(1), 33–49.
- Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. (n.d.). *What is hosting?* Retrieved March 3, 2019 from <https://eca.state.gov/programs-initiatives/host-high-school-student>
- Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. (2009). *Evaluation of the youth exchange & study program. Final report, August 2009*. InterMedia.
- Chamove, A. S., & Soeterik, S. (2006). Grief in returning sojourners. *Journal of Social Sciences, 13*(3), 215–220.

- Chang, Y. Y. (2010). Are you my guest or my child? Mothers' uncertainties in interacting with their returnee children in China. *Chinese Journal of Communication*, 3(2), 167–184.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among the five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE.
- Enloe, W., & Lewin, P. (1987). Issues of integration abroad and readjustment to Japan of Japanese returnees. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 11(3), 223–248.
- Farrugia, C. A. (2014). Charting new pathways to higher education: International secondary students in the United States. *IIE Center for Academic Mobility Research Institute of International Education*.
- Grove, C. L., & Hansel, B. (1983). *Updated findings of the AFS impact study*. AFS International/Intercultural Programs.
- Hansel, B. (2008a). *AFS long term impact study. Report 2: Looking at intercultural sensitivity, anxiety, and experience with other cultures*. AFS International.
- Hansel, B. (2008b). *AFS long term impact study. Report 1: 20 to 25 years after the exchange experience, AFS alumni are compared with their peers*. AFS International.
- Harari, M. (1992). The internationalization of curriculum. In C. B. Klasek, B. J. Garavalia, & K. J. Kellerman (Eds.), *Bridges to the future: Strategies for internationalizing higher education*. Southern Illinois University at Carbondale.
- Hoersting, R. C., & Jenkins, S. R. (2011). No place to call home: Cultural homelessness, self-esteem and cross-cultural identities. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35(2011), 17–30.
- Hofstede, G. (1991). *Cultures and organisations: Software of the mind*. Harper Collins.
- Institute of International Education. (2017). Globally mobile youth. *IIE Center for Academic Mobility Research and Impact*. <https://p.widencdn.net/xguzsn/Globally-Mobile-Youth-Trends-in-International-Secondary-Students-in-the-United-States-2013-201>
- Izadi, F. (2016). US public diplomacy: A theoretical treatise. *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society*, 46(1), 13–21.
- Jang, D., & Kim, D. Y. (2010). The influence of host cultures on the role of personality in the acculturation of exchange students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 34(4), 363–367.
- Kim, Y. Y. (2001). *Becoming intercultural: An integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation*. SAGE.
- Knight, J. (2017). Global: Moving from soft power to knowledge diplomacy. In G. Mihut, P. G. Altbach, & H. Wit (Eds.), *Understanding higher education internationalization. Global perspectives on higher education*. Sense Publishers.
- Knight, S. M., & Schmidt-Rinehart, B. C. (2010). Exploring conditions to enhance student/host family interaction abroad. *Foreign Language Annals*, 43(1), 64–71.
- Lyttle, A. D., Barker, G. G., & Cornwell, T. L. (2011). Adept through adaptation: Third culture individuals' interpersonal sensitivity. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35(2011), 686–694.

- Marklein, M. B. (2014, July 8). International students flock to U.S. high schools. *USA Today*. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/07/08/high-school-foreign-international-students/12296741/>
- Moore, A. M., & Barker, G. G. (2012). Confused or multicultural: Third culture individuals' cultural identity. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 36(2012), 553–562.
- National Museum of American Diplomacy. (2019). *Discover diplomacy*. Retrieved March 21, 2019 from <https://www.state.gov/discoverdiplomacy>
- Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2014). *Education at a glance*. <https://www.oecd.org/edu/Education-at-a-Glance-2014.pdf>
- Rodriguez, S., & Chornet-Roses, D. (2014). How 'family' is your host family?: An examination of student–host relationships during study abroad. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 39, 164–174.
- Rohmann, A., Florack, A., Samochowiec, J., & Simonett, N. (2014). "I'm not sure how she will react": Predictability moderates the influence of positive contact experiences on intentions to interact with a host community member. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 39(1), 103–109.
- Schmidt-Rinehart, B., & Knight, S. (2004). The homestay component of study abroad: Three perspectives. *Foreign Language Annals*, 37(2), 254–262.
- Soeterik, S. M. (1998). *Re-entry adjustment of high school exchange students to New Zealand: Cross-cultural transition within a loss and grief framework* [Unpublished master's dissertation]. Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand.
- Stake, R. E. (2005). Qualitative case studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 443–466). SAGE.
- Sturges, J. E., & Hanrahan, K. J. (2004). Comparing telephone and face-to-face qualitative interviewing: A research note. *Qualitative Research*, 4(1), 107–118.
- Szkudlarek, B. (2010). Reentry—A review of the literature. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 34(2010), 1–21.
- Taylor, E., & Merriam, S. (2008). Transformative learning theory. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 2008(119), 5–15.
- Thomas, A. (2005). Long-term effects of international students exchange programs. In W. Friedlmeier, P. Chakkarath, & B. Schwarz (Eds.), *Culture and human development: The importance of crosscultural research for the social science* (pp. 303–320). Hove.
- U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. (2018). § Sec. 62.25 Secondary school students. *Exchange Visitor Program*. <https://www.uscis.gov/ilink/docView/22CFR/HTML/22CFR/0-0-0-1/0-0-0-3590/0-0-0-4552.html>
- Wan, T., Chapman, D., & Biggs D. (1992). Academic stress of international students attending U.S. universities. *Research in Higher Education*, 33(5), 607–623.
- Ward, C., Bochner, S., & Furnham, A. (2005). *The psychology of culture shock*. Routledge.
- Weichbrodt, M. (2014). Learning mobility: high school exchange programs as a part of international mobility. *Children's Geographies*, 12(1), 9–24.

- Wilson, A. H. (1993). A cross-national perspective on reentry of high school exchange students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 17(1993), 456–492.
- Zhou, Y., Jindal-Snape, D., Topping, K., & Todman, J. (2008). Theoretical models of culture shock and adaptation in international students in higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 33(1), 63–75.
-

MANCA SUSTARSIC, MA, is a PhD Candidate in the Educational Foundations department at University of Hawai'i at Manoa. Her major research interests lie in the area of international student mobility and secondary school exchange programs. Email: msustars@hawaii.edu

© *Journal of International Students*
Volume 10, Issue 4 (2020), pp. 934-953
ISSN: 2162-3104 (Print), 2166-3750 (Online)
Doi: 10.32674/jis.v10i4.1277
ojed.org/jis

Outside the Classroom: The Language of English and its Impact on International Student Mental Wellbeing in Australia

Catherine Gomes
RMIT University, Australia

ABSTRACT

International students from culturally and linguistically diverse countries travel to Australia because of the opportunity to study courses in the English language with some coming to this country just to study the language itself. Such desires moreover create students to engage in creative strategies to improve their language skills. This paper, however, suggests that the desire to be skilled in English through immersion in an English-speaking country like Australia creates challenges to the mental wellbeing of international students. Reporting on interview data with 47 international students of Asian descent in the Australian city of Melbourne, this paper reveals these challenges to include lived and perceived notions of self and belonging, as well as loneliness.

Keywords: Australia, Asian international students, challenges, creative learning strategies, English language proficiency, stress, wellbeing

What can we learn about Asian international students' relationship to the English language? By interviewing 47 international students of Asian descent in Australia, this paper argues that although international students desire to better their professional prospects outside their home countries by improving their English communication skills, the methods they utilize to do so leaves them insulated within their own international student networks and ultimately isolated from immersing themselves from Australian society. The insulation and isolation are incongruous to their very intentions for adjusting and adapting to everyday life in Australia as they navigate life overseas and their aspirations for further transnational mobility and global

citizenship. English-language learning, in other words, inadvertently creates unique yet worrying challenges to international student mental wellbeing outside the classroom – an issue which the literature on international student language learning in Australia does not cover in-depth. As transient migrants, international students are visitors in countries where they are often young people who are new to social and academic environments foreign to what they are used to while at the same time being away from their own support systems (Forbes-Mewett, 2019). The findings are relevant for our understanding of how international students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD) meet the challenges of English language learning outside the classroom and how the perceived lack of English language proficiency leads to real concerns of individual wellbeing. The findings are also significant for continued understanding of the experiences of international students as transient migrant subjects in the overlapping migration-mobility-international education studies space.

International students in Australia see English as a significant skill to possess for two reasons. The first reason is that they consider English a passport for greater professional and education mobility, not only in Australia but also elsewhere. In other words, possessing good English-language skills is a necessary social and professional lubricant (Mitchell, Tracy-Ventura & McManus, 2017) for long-term residency in Australia as well as for working and living in the cosmopolitan capitals of the English-speaking world (Gomes, 2015). In addition, international students consider themselves ‘global citizens’ because they are mobile actors who venture beyond their countries of birth for education (Bourn, 2009). The second and more pressing reason international students see English skill acquisition as important is that they see this language as a way of adjusting and adapting to life in Australia (Gomes, 2017; Benson Chappell & Yates, 2018). A good command of the English language not only helps with study but also with their negotiation of everyday life in a country that is culturally and linguistically different from what they are used to – yet keen to gain footholds on (Briguglio & Smith, 2012). Hence international students in Australia become heavily invested in bettering their English-language skills. Besides attending formal classes to improve their English speaking and writing abilities to fulfill their transnationally mobile aspirations, international students partake in immersion tactics such as viewing English-language media productions (e.g., Hollywood films and television programs) which they can easily access online and talking to their friends in English (Gomes, 2017).

The literature on English-language learning, especially in Australia, indicates two issues: (a) the desire international students have to be proficient in the English-language and (b) the classroom difficulties international students encounter when they are enrolled in and actively partake in English-language learning (Carey & Robertson, 2015). This paper, however, takes another different direction by pointing to the challenges associated with language learning *outside* the classroom. Here, reasons such as perceived racism from domestic students, the ease of identifying with other international students, and the almost exclusivity of international student friendship networks dominating international students’ lived experience indicate issues hampering students’ sense of belonging in Australia. This lack of sense of belonging can sometimes have more detrimental effects on the social and mental wellbeing of

international students where students not only cut themselves off from local Australian communities but also from other international students resulting in loneliness and isolation precisely because they are transient transnationals (Sawir et al., 2008; Hendrickson, Rosen & Aune 2011; Gomes, 2015; Gomes et al., 2015).

LITERATURE REVIEW

In her work on the mental health of international students in Australia, Helen Forbes-Mewett (2019) clarifies that an “[u]nfamiliar academic environment, English language challenges, modes of teacher/student interaction’ contributes and compounds international student mental wellbeing” (p. 3). This is especially worrying since international students are at an age when mental health issues might arise. Forbes-Mewett also adds that “[a] reluctance to seek help due to cultural perceptions, help-seeking delays associated with stigma, fear of ‘losing face’ or reputation, or disclosing personal information were reasons given why international students avoid the use of counselling services” (p. 3). Hence students who are secluded with other international students or, worse still, isolated may not be getting the help they need (Forbes-Mewett, 2019). Hence, what is largely missing from the literature on international student English-language learning in Australia is the impact caused by variables such as cultural, societal, and linguistic differences international students face in destination countries on language learning.

Insulated and Isolated: International Students as Transient Migrants

While migrants of any kind – settlers and non-settlers – face similar challenges such as adapting to the culture/s of the receiver nation and sometimes more sinister issues such as racism, both these broad groups of migrants though defined by their temporal status, are inherently different. Moreover, there is evidence that international students become insulated and isolated in Australian society, thus affecting their mental wellbeing.

Insulated: International Students Living in a Parallel Society

In previous writing, I (2015; 2017; 2018) argue that international students form a parallel society in Australia. By parallel society, she explains that while they may live in Australia and among Australians, they set themselves apart by creating groups and communities made up of other international students, whether co-nationals from the same region or elsewhere, for precisely reasons that are strongly associated with their status and experience as international students (Gomes, 2015, 2017, 2018). Hence while they may do similar activities as Australians, particularly their domestic student peers (e.g., having coffee in cafes), they do so with each other and not with other students, even course mates who they see in classes, tutorials, or lectures. Moreover, the international students she reports on see ‘Australian’ as ‘white.’ By ‘white’, they also include anyone who is not broadly of Asian and African appearances. So often, Australians of Middle Eastern and Mediterranean heritage would be considered ‘white.’ She also notes that international students interviewed

while acknowledging that there are Australians who are Asian-born or who grew up in Australia with some ethnic Chinese and Mainland Chinese international students referring to them as ABCs (Australian-born Chinese), admitted that they had next to no friends in this group despite them being good English- speakers. In a separate study of 6,699 international students in Australia, with 67 percent identifying themselves as from Asia, international students were asked whether they had friends who were Australian but who were of the same ethnicity as them. Less than 1 percent reported having friends in their social groups who were of the same ethnic group (Gomes et al., 2015). The assumption here is that Asian international students do not see Asian-Australians – those born and those who grew up in Australia - as friends. International students form strong bonds with other international students, often conationals but increasingly with international students from other countries, particularly from their own region (e.g., Asian international students with other international students from the region) and elsewhere. These bonds are formed based on a common identity as an international student where similar experiences as ‘foreign’ students. However, because international students are only maintaining friendship groups with other international students, they insulate themselves away from domestic students and the Australian on the whole (Gomes, 2018). While international students acculturate into Australian culture where they take on certain aspects of Australian culture (of university students) as part of their everyday lifestyle which are attractive to them (e.g., having coffee in cafes), they do so in parallel to Australian society since they only do this with fellow international students. In other words, international students become insulated within their own international student networks.

If international students choose to stay longer after graduation as skilled workers, permanent residents, or citizens, being excluded from Australian society has longer-term effects on social cohesion in Australia. Those international students I (Gomes, 2017) spoke to who expressed a desire for permanent residence after they finished their studies, explained that their reason for wanting permanent residence is that they felt that the pace of life in Australia was more to their liking. To them, this work-life balance was the primary aspect of Australian culture they were attracted to, with no international student mentioning Australian society as a driver for staying after graduation. And not because of Australian society. If international students are already living in a parallel society as international students, would they continue doing so with other international students-turned-permanent migrants? A more troubling issue which international students face is isolation.

Isolation

Research on international student wellbeing in Australia (Sawir et al., 2008) and elsewhere (Hendrickson et al., 2011) often express concern at the mental state of international students, pointing out that being in a foreign country while separated from family and friends have led to emotional and social dissonance such as loneliness and homesickness. While research has shown that over time in the country of study, international students learn to cope with living away from home and loved ones. However, for some international students, certain conditions affecting social

and emotional health, and therefore, mental wellbeing need to be addressed. Isolation particularly is an issue of concern which international education stakeholders must address. Again, in the previously mentioned study of 6,699 international students, 4 percent of respondents noted that they did not have any friends in Australia (Gomes et al., 2015). While the percentage may seem small, this group is still a matter of concern since they do not have support networks during their sojourn. Loneliness is a common wellbeing issue international students face because they do not feel included in their academic environment (Will, 2016). However, loneliness is not only prevalent in face-to-face interactions but also in the online environment. In their study of international graduate students' perception of academic and social isolation, Erichsen and Bolliger (2010) found that students felt isolated when enrolled in both face-to-face and online courses. The researchers further found that students who were enrolled in online courses felt even more academically and socially isolated than their counterparts enrolled in face-to-face courses. Various studies in the past decade have increasingly shown that international students suffer from mental and emotional issues precisely because they are living away from family and home-grown friends in a foreign country without cultural, language, and/or societal familiarity (Sawir et al., 2008; Hendrickson et al., 2011). Moreover, some may face direct, indirect, or perceived forms of racism, encouraging them to withdraw into their own worlds even more (Brown & Jones, 2013; Lee, Jon & Byun 2017; Gomes, 2017).

International Students are Transient Migrants: A Mobility Studies Lens

Traditional migration theoretical and analytical frameworks that almost wholeheartedly examine permanent migrant(ions) specifically in the areas of economics, race and ethnicity, social structure, and political/public policy should not be used to interpret and understand the agendas and aspirations of international students. This is because international students are transient migrants, and hence, have different agendas and aspirations to permanent settlers (new citizens and permanent residents) (Gomes, 2019). Their agendas and aspirations are different from migrants who want to make Australia a permanent home for themselves, their children, and sometimes wider family (e.g., parents). While permanent settlers may be concerned about issues of citizenship such as a sense of belonging in the adopted nation and societal acceptance by the citizenry (e.g., Wise, 2014; Fozdar, 2012; Hebbani, Colic-Peisker & Mackinnon, 2017), international students are not bound by such anchoring. Instead, as transient migrants, international students' residency status is determined by the temporary (student) visa. However, as I point out previously when understanding transient migrants as constantly mobile subjects, transient migrants, such as international students are open to their own (im)mobilities and residencies:

Some transnational transient migrants may not, for instance, want to prolong their overseas experience in the receiver country, while others may want to settle more long-term as permanent residents or even as citizens. The term transient migration thus allows for a manoeuvring of visa and residency statuses within these two categories, for example, individuals on

international student visas may shift to working professional visas. Transient migrants thus are transient within the temporary migrant space as they move and upgrade their visa statuses and conditions. In other words, while “temporary” implies a direct and opposing situation to permanence, “transient” is not so limited and instead allows for mobility within the term itself. (Gomes, 2018: 3-4)

International students’ agendas thus are fuelled by their aspirations of (im)mobility. In other words, international students may want to be immobile by staying in the receiver country whether in the short term or for longer periods of time; be mobile then immobile by returning to the sender country and possibly being mobile again; or continue their mobilities by going elsewhere with the prospect of anchoring outside the sender nation and the current country they are transient in. Because international students and permanent settlers have different agendas and aspirations, approaches to language should not be framed from a non-settler/citizenship structure. Most academic writing in Australia concerning language, particularly English as a language of communication for non-native speakers within the multiculturalism and diversity framework (e.g., Matthews, 2008) argues that the Australian cosmopolitan society needs to accept that different migrant communal societies speak languages other than English, sometimes almost exclusively. This paper thus points out that the English language provides a pivot in the way in which we understand the agendas and aspirations of international students, and thus adding another level of understanding of the different experiences and hues of transnational migration and mobility. Additionally, this paper starts to plug a gap in the literature on English-language learning in Australia by highlighting the challenges international students face outside the language classroom in terms of their sense of belonging in Australia and, inadvertently, their mental wellbeing. Before diving into discussions of the significance of the English-language in Australia, let me first briefly introduce Australian international education, a sector which has not only led to significant numbers of foreign students entering into the country, but also contributes billions into the economy through study (e.g., full fees) and non-study (e.g., rental accommodation) related expenses.

The International Education Sector in Australia

International education in Australia had its humble beginnings in the 1950s with small scale friendship programs. For instance, from 1951 and right through the next three decades, Australia became a destination country under the Colombo Plan program, where sponsored students from soon to be decolonized nations and former colonies in the British Commonwealth entered the country to be trained in skills that would assist in the economic, infrastructural and social development of their sender nations. By the 1980s, however, Australia saw that international education was becoming an economic export boom as the country started to cater to the rising middle class from the Asian region who were hungry, particularly for tertiary education. Today, Australia has become a global player in the export of education in the region

by offering courses and qualifications which attract students from Southeast Asia and, increasingly, from Northeast and South Asia with plans to increase numbers from the Middle East and Latin American by 2025 (Australian Government, 2016). By the end of 2017, education services brought in upwards of AUD\$30.9 billion through full fee-paying international students, the majority of whom are enrolled in the higher education sector. International students who number approximately 624,000 during this period come from 194 different countries, with China and India contributing the largest numbers (Australian Government, 2018). By 2025, Austrade, which is the Australian Trade and Investment Commission, predicts the following for its international education sector:

- Australia's onshore international education sector is forecast to grow from 650,000 enrollments today to 940,000 by 2025 (which equates to a compounding annual growth rate of 3.8 percent).
- The international education sector's contribution to export earnings is expected to almost double to in excess of \$33 billion by 2025.
- The top eight source markets for onshore international learner enrollments across all sectors in 2025 are expected to be China, India, Vietnam, Thailand, Nepal, Malaysia, Brazil, and South Korea. Much of the growth in onshore learner enrollments will be driven by Asia – in particular China, India, Nepal, Vietnam, and Thailand.
- Over the period to 2025, the fastest growing sectors in onshore international education are expected to be higher education and VET (in percentage terms). By 2025, these two sectors are expected to account for 72 percent of all onshore international learner enrollments.
- China is set to remain Australia's largest source market for onshore enrollments in 2025 and is expected to occupy the largest number of higher education, schooling, and ELICOS¹ enrollments. The largest number of VET onshore enrollments in 2025 are forecast to come from India (16 percent), Thailand (eight percent) and South Korea (seven percent).

From Austrade (2018).

While there are high school-going international students in Australia, their numbers are not comparable to those who are undertaking post-secondary study in universities, vocational education and training (VET) institutes and English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) colleges².

¹ ELICOS is also currently known as English Australia.

² The term 'overseas student' was used more frequently in the 1980s and 1990s before the current term 'international student.'

English Language Learning in Australia

Proficiency in the English language is considered by non-English speakers as an incredibly important skill to possess. This is because English is deemed to be the currently accepted language for communication and professional and business mobility (Mitchell, Tracy-Ventura, & McManus, 2017). Moreover, English language proficiency is thought to be social currency in some cultures. In Japan, for instance, knowing English is looked upon in a positive light even though it is not a language that might be used as a language of communication in Japan (Tsuboya-Newell, 2017). In Asia, Latin America, Africa, and Europe, there are growing numbers of both foreign and locally owned private and public (government-funded) service providers specializing in teaching English. The British Council, for example, is perhaps the most respected English language teaching organization with over a hundred centers around the world. The British Council - ‘the United Kingdom’s international organization for cultural relations and educational opportunities’ (The British Council, 2018) – not only teaches English but also administers the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), which is a well-regarded and universally recognized English language test for non-native speakers for the purpose of further education in English and international mobility in English-speaking countries such as Australia. Often English teachers in the British Council and other language learning service providers employ native speakers from the United Kingdom and Australia.

International students from culturally and linguistically diverse countries across all education sectors (e.g., higher education, vocational and technical training, and schools) are arguably attracted to Australia as a place to study because English is not only the medium of instruction but the national language³. Learning and improving language skills through non-language specific courses is not a new phenomenon with international students traveling to places where they would like to improve their spoken and written abilities with countries where English is a native language being the most popular destination for such purposes⁴.

³ While there is literature on permanent residents and international students in Australia pointing to education as a pathway for residency (e.g., Baas, 2010 and Soong, 2015), a recently released report by the Australian Government (2018) on migration trends tells another story. Here the report noted that in the period 2000 to 2014, only 16 percent of international students converted their status to permanent resident. Previous studies made links between international education and permanent residence primarily because ethnographic work was confined to former international students who were already permanent residents (Soong, 2015) and the focus on specifically students who expressed aspirations for permanent residency (Baas, 2010).

⁴ While non-English speaking countries such as France and China attract international students who study non-language related courses in these places as part of their own desires and aspirations for language learning – in this case, French and Mandarin – countries where English is not the native or national language also offer English-

Likewise, in her work on English-language skills transnational education, Phan Le-Ha (2017) notes that even students who enroll in Western ‘English’ institutions in their home countries do so because both parents and students feel that they will be getting an ‘English’ degree and that they will be improving their language skills since courses are taught in English and an expectation that enrolled students will also be conversing in English. Hence, Western institutions from English-speaking Australia and the United Kingdom, which have opened campuses in non-Western countries (Dubai, Vietnam, and Singapore) are attractive to local (international) students. Students, in other words, enroll not for the courses but to improve their English-language skills since English is viewed as a language of social-economic mobility. Clearly, English language skills are significant not only for the present but for the professional futures of international students.

However, international students who are not very well versed in the language also struggle in their courses – particularly at university - with their spoken and written English (Arkoudis and Doughney, 2014). This has resulted in unfortunate grievances by both teaching staff and domestic student peers who find this lack of English language proficiency difficult for teaching and learning with calls for language proficiency courses to be incorporated into university courses for international students (Arkoudis, Baik, Bexley and Doughney, 2014). The negativity surrounding international students and their English language skills, as mentioned in the introduction, is not limited to the education space but a widely held view by the Australian general public.

To improve their English language skills, international students enroll specifically in English language courses in Australia. Twenty percent of Australia’s 792,422 enrolled international students⁵ (Australian Government, 2017) – some of whom are enrolled in 2 or more courses - are in institutions offering ELICOS (*English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students*) courses in order to improve their language skills. ELICOS courses prepare and test students on a number of popular English language tests which include IELTS, TOEFL IBT (Test of English as a Foreign Language internet-Based test), PTE (Pearson Test of English), CAE (Academic Cambridge English: Advanced test (also known as Certificate in Advanced English), OET (Occupational English Test), and TOEFL PBT (TOEFL Paper-Based Test is accepted in a number of countries where IELTS is not available) (ELICOS, 2018). Most students enroll in ELICOS courses before embarking on the next stage of their education journey, often in higher education institutions in Australia, while others just want to improve their language skills as they see Australia as the best place to do so.

language courses in order to attract international students. China increasingly offers English language courses despite Mandarin being its national language.

⁵ This number is inflated because while there were over 624,000 international students in Australia in 2017, some of these students were also enrolled in other courses; thus, they were ‘enrolled international students.’

Going overseas to an English-speaking country to study English presents challenges to the transient international student. The literature on English-as-a-second-language learning in the home country often tells us that students encounter a range of challenges such as lack of language immersion, quality of teachers, pedagogy, and so on (e.g., Phan, 2018). Likewise, the literature on international students and their English-language learning (in Australia and elsewhere) reveal similar classroom and pedagogical issues (e.g., Arkoudis, Baik, Bexley, & Doughney, 2014; Arkoudis & Doughney, 2014). This paper, however, highlights the troubling wellbeing issues confronting international students in their quest to better their English-language skills in order to realize their aspirations and ambitions.

In this paper, I look at the significance of English language proficiency among a group of international students living in Melbourne in the state of Victoria; and the strategies they take to improve this proficiency and the issues around belonging and mental welfare and wellbeing associated with their quest. In the state of Victoria, international education is the biggest export earner, and in 2017, it was worth \$9.1 billion to the state economy while supporting 58,000 jobs (State Government of Victoria, 2018). International education has also changed the ethnographic and urban landscapes of Melbourne city and the surrounding suburbs, which support universities and private colleges – both of which have ELICOS courses. In 2016 there were 200,000 international students studying in the state, with a quarter of the students living in the Melbourne Central Business District while a third living in neighboring Carlton (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014). These areas in Melbourne are host to building developments and businesses catering to the growing numbers of international students, such as accommodation and retail.

METHOD

This paper is part of a larger project study looking at the everyday lives of transient migrants (international students, exchange students, working holiday visa holders, 457 visa holders, and bridging visa holders) in Australia and Singapore. This 3-phased project involved collecting data from 201 interviews, 40 journal entries, and 385 responses to a survey of transient migrants across both countries between 2013 to 2014. Participants were asked a series of questions about their self-perceived identities (i.e., who they think they are), their social networks (i.e., friendship groups), media consumption (e.g., what they watched for entertainment and news online), communication use (e.g., what social media platforms they use) and aspirations for the future (e.g., where they saw themselves living and working after graduation).

This paper, however, specifically looks at interview data (Phase 1) gleaned from forty-seven Asian international students studying at Melbourne higher education institutions: universities and colleges. While this project never sought to understand English proficiency among international students, nor were participants asked about their attitudes towards English-language, the Asian international student participants in Australia brought up this topic when discussing their social networks and aspirations. Here the 47 Asian international students who participated in the Australian leg of this project considered English language proficiency a significant skill to have and resorted to various ways of improving their language abilities. Ethics

approval for this study was granted by the RMIT College Human Research Advisory Network committee (CHEAN A-2000827-01-13). Respondents were recruited through advertisements in the Australian online classified website Gumtree, through colleagues from various Victorian universities (e.g., RMIT University, La Trobe University, and Melbourne University), through international student society groups, through the City of Melbourne, and through the snowball effect where respondents brought along their friends for scheduled interviews with the researchers. The advertisements requested respondents over the age of 18 who have lived in Australia for a minimum of 3 months. Participants were remunerated with a \$30 shopping gift voucher each for their time.

The respondents were interviewed in focus groups, small groups and as individuals in addition to a short survey which captured their background information such as age, gender, country of birth/citizenship, ethnicity(s), number of years in Australia to date, course of study/work, media use and hobbies. Two focus groups with 3 and 7 international students, respectively, took part in the pilot study of this project. There were 13 individual interviews, while the rest were interviewed in small groups of no more than two respondents each. The data in this paper is reflective of the open-ended questions that were asked pertaining to respondents' social networks (friendship networks/groups), their impressions of Australian society, and entertainment media consumption. The duration of the interviews ranged from 30 minutes to 60 minutes, depending on the willingness of the respondents to go into more depth. This study's research strategy was amended from focus groups to individual and small groups because both focus group sessions ran for between 90 minutes to 150 minutes longer than the anticipated 1 hour.

Table 1 provides a demographic breakdown of the students. It shows that international students pursue a variety of diploma/degree programs across a wide cross-section of disciplines and come from a range of countries in Asia. It also indicates that most respondents have been studying in Australia for more than a year while half work part-time.

Table 1. Demographic Breakdown of Asian International Students ($N = 47$)

Variables	Information
Gender	M (18) F (29)
Age Range	19 to 24 (28) 25 to 29 (15) 30+ (4)
Education Pursuit	ELICOS (8) Bachelor degree (19) Masters degree & higher (20)
Home Country	Bangladesh (2) China (8)

	India (6)
	Indonesia (3)
	Japan (1)
	South Korea (4)
	Malaysia (5)
	Pakistan (3)
	Singapore (8)
	Vietnam (6)
	New Zealand, originally China (1)
Length of stay in Australia at the time of interview	3 months (3)
	3.1 to 6 months (5)
	6.1 months to 1 year (7)
	1 year 1 month to 2 years (15)
	2 years month to 3 years (7)
	3 years 1 month to 4 years (8)
	4 years 1 month and more (3)

An issue this study encountered with the interviewees, which is relevant to this paper, is that some students had problems understanding some of the interview questions; in particular, those questions connected to identity. For instance, some could not understand what was meant by 'identity' in terms of the concept itself. Hence the question on identity was readjusted to: 'who do you think you are.' While those who had difficulty with English may have struggled a little during interviews, they persevered and were keen to answer the questions as best they could. Moreover, they insisted on conversing in English despite being in focus or small groups with others – often friends that came with them as interviewees – with who they shared common mother tongues. This study also learned about the bond English creates among international students who desire to better their language skills coupled with their desire to improve their English with each other. For instance, two university-going international students interviewed for this study were friends with each other, meeting at an ELCOS class a year earlier. One was a female postgraduate from South Korea and another male postgraduate from China. The South Korean respondent found understanding some of the interview questions challenging because they were in English. However, whenever she had difficulty, she turned to her Chinese friend, who attempted to help her language skills and reiterated what was asked into simpler English so she could understand. They also revealed that their close friends at the time of the interview were fellow students they met during English language classes who were now studying at various higher education institutions in Melbourne. Why is English language proficiency important to the international student respondents, and what are the strategies students use to improve their language skills?

RESULTS

Acquiring English-language Proficiency: Conventional and Creative Strategies

As mentioned earlier in this paper, the ability to speak good English - for international students - is equated with success and is highly desirable (Piller and Takahashi, 2006). As inferred to earlier, affluent and increasingly affluent Asian countries such as Japan and China, respectively, have English-language schools staffed by native speaking English-language teachers from Australia, New Zealand, Europe, and America. These schools are filled with locals wanting to acquire English-language skills, which they see as a form of social capital and an identifier of success (Yang, 2016). However, traveling to an English-speaking country in order to study in English and where English is the medium of instruction is considered even more prestigious since this allows students of English to differentiate themselves from those who are still in the home nation.

The international students interviewed in this study were committed to improving their English language skills and used a variety of expected and creative ways to do so. Unsurprisingly, enrolling in English language courses (ELICOS) were good ways for them to improve their language proficiency with eight students actively doing such courses. Other students, however, were alumni of ELICOS prior to their undergraduate/postgraduate study, while others might enroll in such courses while completing their university degrees as implied by the Chinese national in the previous section.

The most creative way in which respondents stated how they improved their language skills was by engaging in English-language media productions such as film and television together with looking through YouTube sites such as TED (Technology, Entertainment, and Design) Talks in order to improve their language skills. The intention to learn English was not surprising for some of those interviewed since they were specifically in Australia as English-language students. A 19-year-old Vietnamese male who is an undergraduate in Melbourne, for example, states that he has been studying English from a young age and grew up watching English-language television shows and films. His intention to ingrain himself in the English language is strong while at the same time clarifying that he is not interested in Vietnamese media or accessing it while in Australia. He studied English from a young age and has lived in the U.S. For him watching television helps him learn a lot about English:

Actually, yeah, it's quite helpful for me like when I watching TV for subtitle — English subtitle, I learn a lot of from these, I learn a lot of like — a lot or a lot of sentence.

Though respondents such as those above may watch programs and listen to music in their own languages either from their home nations or from other countries and cultures (e.g., ethnic Chinese respondents outside of China consuming music, films, television, and internet-productions from Taiwan and Hong Kong), this study reveals that respondents engage more with English-language American productions than any other language mediums. Moreover, they prefer English language productions made

outside of Australia. In Australia, the only locally made television shows which respondents watched are reality franchises, which reflected English-language (American) music such as *The Voice* (de Mol, 2012-present) and non-culturally specific but English-language cooking shows such as *Masterchef* (Roddam 2009-present).

Generally, the respondents largely prefer to listen to English language music from the United States/United Kingdom, such as New Direction and to watch television shows and films from the Hollywood entertainment industry. They also preferred reading online news programs that are American and United Kingdom dominated, the Cable News Network (CNN) and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) particularly. While both CNN and the BBC are well established and widely known popular news agencies, they are also generally accepted as international news specialists. International student respondents have known CNN and the BBC from their home nations as international news specialists and would turn to them while in the host nations more so than the nationally based news sites reflective in Australia. While the commercial and government-funded news agencies in Australia (e.g., Channel 10 and Australian Broadcasting Corporation, respectively) are understandably and necessarily parochial with their reporting, they do report on international news; they are still not the news agencies of choice for respondents⁶.

International students interviewed provided different reasons for not listening to or reading news from host nation news sites. These included a disinterest in the politics and the experiences of the host nation, with the exception being issues that touched them directly (e.g., changes in permanent migration policies). International students also could not identify with the issues affecting the host society nor the ways in which English or their ethnic cultural languages were spoken in the host nation. These reasons reveal a desire instead to feel 'international' and cosmopolitan rather than local. Respondents here thus revealed more than just 'a sense of non-national affiliation' (Inglis & Delanty, 2011, p. 1) but rather the complexities of being a global citizen whereas Inglis and Delanty (2011, p. 1) point out, is about 'a much wider range of issues, all of which are to do with how to think and act in ways that systematically take account of living at a time of wide-ranging a deep-seated global connectivity among all people on the planet'. Ironically in order to be cosmopolitan through what they perceive to be the language of cosmopolitanism – English – international students may end up cutting themselves off from local society because of a lack of local cultural touchpoints which allow them, not only to form a sense of belonging while in Australia, but also opportunities to converse in English with native speakers. Achieving the latter point, however, is not as easy to facilitate for internationals students due to perceived notions of racism they feel they face.

⁶ Singapore's entertainment and news outlets — whether government-funded (e.g. Mediacorp) or international (e.g., BBC) are regulated by the government.

'Because My English Very Poor so I Can't Communicate Very Well': The Stress of English in the International Student Lived Experience

The international students interviewed, too, stated that they wanted to improve their English-speaking skills because they saw possessing proficiency in English as a positive step for their future and a personal commodity to possess for their global mobility. They expressed a desire to live and work (and some noting to study) in the English-speaking financial capitals of New York and London. In order to work and/or study in these highly desirable locations, respondents felt that they needed to possess very good English language communication skills in order to not only enter into the job market and/or be accepted into institutions there but also to navigate their social relations with people who live in those locations. Likewise, respondents who expressed a desire to live in Australia after graduation for longer periods of time as permanent residents or skilled workers felt that having a good command of the English language would hold them in good stead among the citizenry. As the following male Chinese national explains:

I try to talk with them but maybe because my English very poor so I can't communicate very well. And also they maybe don't want to make the situation become too awkward, so they just stop it to talking with us, so maybe I, just think I need to improve my English skill and try to talk with them and living to ... to feel suited ... Australia.

Meanwhile, a popular yet unconventional way of improving their English-speaking skills was speaking with other international students despite their and their peers' level of English proficiency. The following female South Korean student, for instance, explains that she prefers to speak English with other international students – mostly from Taiwan and China – because she becomes embarrassed to speak to native (Australian) speakers who she feels have superior language skills by comparison. She explains:

I also feel very stressful to talk with local students because their speaking is very fast and they, even they, I think even they can't guess which words we can't get it, because they haven't been in, like a situation, they are natural English speaker.....But among international students, even though some of student, if English is really bad we can just understand.

Clearly, both these respondents feel that being proficient in English is of vital importance to their stay in Australia. However, while the Chinese male student tells us that a good command of the English language will help him assimilate better into Australian society, the South Korean female student reveals that she is more comfortable talking in English to her other international student friends. For her, the parallel society of international students (Gomes, 2015) she is a part of, provides her perhaps a sense of belonging with other international students in Australia but not with Australian society itself. While it is clear that the international students interviewed did not only value English but also used a variety of (formal and more so

informal) measures to improve their spoken language skills particularly, the methods used might well contribute to them insulated within their own international student networks and ultimately isolated from immersing themselves among native English-speaking Australians. What these respondents reveal here is their perceived understanding of their (lack of) relationships with Australians, which they directly equate to their inability to speak English. Here they associate their sense of acceptance with Australians and therefore belonging in Australia with his English-language skills. While on one level their insecurities might be self-perceived, on another, there might be some truth to his sensitivities regarding his language skills. In previous work I conducted on Singapore, transient, migrants and language, she argued that the ability to speak English, particularly localized English, was important for integration (2015). Singaporeans, for instance, complained incessantly online that one of the issues they took issue with transient migrants is their inability to speak Singapore English or Singlish as it is called. Additionally, she found that Singaporeans who she spoke to were angry that some transient migrants were unable to converse in basic English. They felt that as foreign guests and future permanent residents working and studying in Singapore, transient migrants should learn how to speak basic English in order to communicate with Singaporeans. The prominent theme that was most brought up by Singaporeans was that they felt alien in their own country because the transient migrants were not conversing in a common language often used by Singaporeans themselves to communicate with each other⁷.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This paper discusses the significance of English language skills for international students in Australia. It highlights how international students in Australia not only value the English language as a skill to have for everyday living in Australia but also for their futures. Additionally, this paper describes how international students resort to both conventional and creative yet informal ways of improving their language skills, which they incorporate into everyday living in Australia. The conventional ways of improving their English-language skills primarily relate to enrolling in ELICOS courses an acronym for English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas

⁷ Anecdotally, in discussions with Singaporean friends about the use of English in Singapore, I was told that speaking good English is now valued among Singaporeans. They noted that Singaporeans who went to schools, which emphasized spoken and written English as a vital part of the curricular were held with much esteem. Schools that commonly emphasized English in this way were the Catholic mission schools. These schools, although founded by Catholic missionaries during the colonial period of Singapore's history, are governed by the nation's Ministry of Education, just like any other school in Singapore. However, internally these schools strived to produce students with excellent English communication skills and take pride in their students doing exceptionally well in English-language examinations during the national assessment programs such as the Cambridge 'O' and 'A' levels.

Students; while the creative yet informal ways include social relations between international students and turning to English-language entertainment and news media from the United States, the United Kingdom, and, at a lesser level, Australia to improving English proficiency. So, what practical implications can we develop from knowing that English has meaningful significance for international students that go beyond study?

To be skilled in English is vitally important to international students in Australia who come from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds where English is a foreign language. While this paper notes that international students see the value and benefit of possessing a good command of the English language, it also highlights significant yet unintentional negative outcomes of the creative strategies international students use to learn English: insulation and isolation. Would these wellbeing issues be even more pronounced as tertiary institutions increasingly turn towards blended learning? In other words, could blended learning – which is a combination of face-to-face teaching and online learning styles – possibly result in international students becoming even more disconnected from the wider student community since they are able to engage in their courses without leaving their residence in Australia? Institutions thus need to put in place strategies that support international student welfare side by side new and emerging pedagogies in order to cope with possible student wellbeing issues. One method of facilitating a sense of belonging for international students with bettering their command of English could be done at the institutional level.

In yearly international student satisfaction surveys such as the International Student Barometer (i-graduate International Insight, 2018) which are conducted in key English-speaking Western international education destinations the United Kingdom, Australia, the United States and Canada, international students often say that while they are largely satisfied with their study experience in Australia yet unhappy that after their entire degree or diploma, they did not make any Australian friends. Moreover, such surveys also reveal that international students who are not satisfied with their study experience are a source of negative publicity for countries and institutions since respondents admit that they would actively dissuade potential students from enrolling. The classroom (and lecture theatre) environment, ironically, where international and domestic students meet is the environment where students from both sides barely talk to each other. Research into international student wellbeing often notes that having meaningful relationships with domestic students leads to happier and more adjusted international students who otherwise might suffer from emotional and mental issues connected with being away from family, friends, and the familiarity of home country, culture, and society. To plug this friendship gap, institutions could devise programs – possibly introducing them at orientation - to help international students with language. Such programs openly facilitate mixing between international and domestic students, hence allowing international students the opportunity to make inroads into possible meaningful relationships with domestic students in a more conducive environment arrangement outside of the classroom.

REFERENCES

- Arkoudis, S. & Doughney, L. (2014). *Good Practice Report: English Language Proficiency. A report for the Office for Learning and Teaching, Australia*. Retrieved from the University of Melbourne website: https://melbourne-cshe.unimelb.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/1491745/ELP_Employability_Framework_Final_Report_181114.pdf.
- Austrade. (2018). Growth and opportunity in Australian international education. *Australian International Education 2025*. Retrieved from the Austrade website: <https://www.austrade.gov.au/Australian/Education/Services/Australian-International-Education-2025/growth-and-opportunity>.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2017). Over 28 percent of Australians born overseas. *Media Release 30 March*. Retrieved from the Australian Bureau of Statistics website: <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/lookup/3412.0Media%20Release12015-16>.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2014). Where do Migrants Live? *Australian Social Trends 2014*. Retrieved from the Australian Bureau of Statistics website: <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4102.0main+features102014>
- Australian Government (2018). *Research snapshot: Export income to Australia from international education activity in 2017.*, Retrieved from the Department of Education and Training, Australia website: <https://internationaleducation.gov.au/research/Research-Snapshots/Documents/Export%20Income%20CY%202017.pdf>.
- Australian Government (2018). *Shaping a nation: Population growth and immigration over time. A report for the Department of Education and Training, Australia* (Report). Retrieved from the Department of Education and Training, Australia website: <https://cdn.tspace.gov.au/uploads/sites/107/2018/04/Shaping-a-Nation-1.pdf>.
- Australian Government. (2016) *National Strategy for international education 2025*. Retrieved from the Australian Government website: <https://nsie.education.gov.au/>.
- Baas, M. (2010). *Imagined mobility: Migration and transnationalism among Indian students in Australia*. Anthem Press.
- Benson, P., Chappell, P., & Yates, L. (2018). A day in the life: mapping international students' language learning environments in multilingual Sydney. *Australian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 1(1), 20-32. <https://doi.org/10.29140/ajal.v1n1.21>
- Bourn, D. (2009). Students as global citizens. In E. Jones (Ed.), *Internationalisation and the student voice*, (pp. 44-45) . Routledge.
- Briguglio, C. & Smith, R. (2012). Perceptions of Chinese students in an Australian university: Are we meeting their needs?. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 32(1), 17-33, DOI: 10.1080/02188791.2012.655237
- Brown, L. & Jones, I (2013). Encounters with racism and the international student experience. *Studies in Higher Education*, 38:7, 1004 1019, DOI: 10.1080/03075079.2011.614940

- Carey, M. & Robertson, A. (2015). ELT practice in Australia across three sectors: state education, migrant education and ELICOS. In L-P. Wong and A. Dubey-Jhaver (Eds.), *English language education in a global world: Practices, issues and Challenges*, (pp. 147-160). Nova Science Publishers, Inc.
- de Mol, J. Jr. (Creator) (2012-present) *The Voice Australia* [Television series]. Australia, Network Nine.
- ELICOS (English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students). (2018). Study English in Australia. Retrieved from ELICOS website: <http://www.elicos.com/>.
- Erichsen, E.A., Bolliger, D.U. (2011). Towards understanding international graduate student isolation in traditional and online environments. *Education Tech Research Dev*, 59, 309–326.
- Forbes-Mewett, H. (2019). Mental health and international students: issues, challenges and effective practice (Research digest 15). Retrieved from International Education Association of Australia (IEAA) website: <https://www.ieaa.org.au/documents/item/1616> .
- Fozdar, F. (2012). Social relations and skilled Muslim refugees in Australia: employment, social capital, and discrimination. *Journal of Sociology* 48 (2), 167 – 18.
- Gomes, C. (2018). *Siloed diversity: Transnational migration, digital media and social networks*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gomes, C. (2017). *Transient mobility and middle class identity: Media and migration in Australia and Singapore*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gomes, C. (2015). Negotiating everyday life in Australia: Unpacking the parallel society inhabited by Asian international students through their social networks and entertainment media use, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 18(4), 515 – 536, DOI: doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2014.992316.
- Gomes, C., Chang, S., Jacka, L., Coulter, D., Alzougool, B. & Constantinidis, D. (2015, December). Myth busting stereotypes: The connections, disconnections and benefits of international student social networks [Paper presentation]. In *26th ISANA International Education Association Conference*, Melbourne, Victoria (pp. 1-11). ISANA.
- Hebbani, A., Colic-Peisker & V., Mackinnon, M. (2017). Know thy neighbour: Residential integration and social bridging among refugee settlers in Greater Brisbane. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 31(1), 82-104. DOI: doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fex016.
- Hendrickson, B., Rosen, D. & Aune, R.K. (2011). An analysis of friendship networks, social connectedness, homesickness, and satisfaction levels of international students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 35 (3), 281-295.
- i-Graduate International Insight (2014). *The international student barometer*. i-Graduate International Insight. Retrieved from i-Graduate International Insight website: <https://www.i-graduate.org/services/international-student-barometer/>.
- Inglis, D. & Delanty, G. (Eds.). (2011). *Cosmopolitanism. critical concepts in the social sciences*. Routledge.

- Lee, J. J., Jon, J. E., & Byun, K. (2017). Neo-racism and neo-nationalism within East Asia: The experiences of international students in South Korea. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 21(2), 136-155. DOI: doi.org/10.1177/1028315316669903
- Matthews, J. (2008). Schooling and settlement: refugee education in Australia, *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 18(1), 31-45. DOI: doi:10.1080/09620210802195947
- Mitchell, R., Tracy-Ventura, N., & McManus, K. (2017). *Anglophone students abroad: identity, social relationships, and language learning*. Routledge.
- Phan, H. L. L. (2017). *Transnational education crossing 'the West' and 'Asia': Adjusted desire, transformative mediocrity, and neo-colonial disguise.*: Routledge.
- Piller, I & Takahashi, K. (2006). A passion for English: Desire and the English language market. *Bilingual Minds: Emotional Experience, Expression and Representation*. In A Pavlenko (Ed.). (pp. 59-83). Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Roddam, F. (Creator). (2009-present). *Masterchef Australia* [Television series]. Australia: Network Ten.
- Sawir, E., Marginson, S., Deumert, A., Nyland, C. & Ramia, G. (2008). Loneliness and international students: An Australian study. *Journal of Studies in International Education* 12 (2), 148–180.
- Soong, H. (2015). *Transnational students and mobility: lived experiences of migration*. Routledge.
- The British Council. (2018). *The British Council*. Retrieved from The British Council website: <https://www.britishcouncil.org/>.
- Tsuboya-Newell, I. (2017, 29 Oct). Why do Japanese have trouble learning English?, *The Japan Times*.
<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2017/10/29/commentary/japan-commentary/japanese-trouble-learning-english/#.W0ROtdIzblU>.
- Victoria State Government. (2018, 18 April). *International education*. Retrieved from Vicroei State Government website: <https://djpr.vic.gov.au/priority-industries-sectors/international-education>.
- Will, N L. (2016). From isolation to inclusion: Learning of the experiences of Chinese international students in U.S. *Journal of International Students*, 6(4), 1069-1075.
- Wise, A. (2014). Everyday multiculturalism. In B. Anderson & M. Keith (Eds.). *COMPAS Anthology of Migration*. Retrieved from COMPAS website: http://compasanthology.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Wise_COMPASMigrationAnthology.pdf
- Yang, P. (2016). *International mobility and educational desire: Chinese foreign talent students in Singapore*. Palgrave Macmillan.

CATHERINE GOMES, PhD, is an Associate Professor in the School of Media and Communication at RMIT University. Her major research interests lie in the area of transience in migration and mobility, the cultural, social and digital spaces of international students, and multiculturalism. Email: catherine.gomes@rmit.edu.au

“I Was New and I Was Afraid”: The Acculturation Strategies Adopted by International First-Year Undergraduate Students in the United States

Masha Krsmanovic
University of Southern Mississippi, USA

ABSTRACT

This article utilized Berry’s acculturation model (1974, 1980, 1997) as the framework for understanding the social experiences of international first-year students in a large, public institution in the Southeast United States. Using a descriptive phenomenological research design and a sample of 10 international students, this study examined the extent to which each of the four strategies defined by the acculturation model—assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization—emerged from the social experiences of international students during their first year of college. The results revealed that all 10 participants shared the experiences of separation, either voluntary or involuntary. For seven students in the sample, the freshman year was characterized by either willing or unwilling integration. The strategy of assimilation, both freely pursued and imposed, was reported by six students. The least evidence was recorded for the pattern of voluntary or involuntary marginalization, which emerged from the experiences of four respondents.

Keywords: acculturation, culture, first-year students, international students, social integration

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, the United States has recorded an incremental but stable increase in international student enrollments. American colleges and universities have enjoyed a 5.1% annual growth in the number of international students over the past

10 years, with global recruitments surpassing 1 million in 2018–2019 (Institute of International Education, 2019).

Consequently, the efforts invested by higher education scholars and practitioners have been more actively devoted toward developing strategies to support the adjustment of international students and their successful transition into not only American higher education, but also their respective communities. As a result, the literature on international student adjustment is continuously expanding to include a plethora of factors that may hinder or facilitate their experiences within a host culture. In that regard, particular attention has been dedicated to understanding the contributors to students' cultural adjustment and the interdependency of their social experiences and academic performance (Chavajay & Skowronek, 2008; Wu et al., 2015).

However, contemporary research in this domain still remains limited in one important aspect. Even though a great body of knowledge has been produced in connection to international student social and cultural adjustment, very little evidence has been generated exclusively among the international first-year undergraduate students. This limitation is best reflected in the fact that the first-year transition of international students has been examined in the literature through common experiences of undergraduate and graduate students simultaneously (Hirai et al., 2015), thus limiting the opportunity for understanding the unique transitional experiences of international undergraduates. The urgency of empirically investigating the experiences of international students during their first year of college becomes even more critical when perceived through the lenses of the growing national commitments to providing wide-ranging freshman year programming and support services. Among these efforts, the most prevalent ones include first-year advising, early alert systems, orientations, and first-year seminar courses (National Resource Center, 2019). These efforts are not surprising knowing that the literature on undergraduate student success continuously identifies freshman year as a critical predictor of students' overall academic performance, retention, and degree attainment (Sidle & McReynolds, 2009).

In the attempt to enrich the ongoing scholarly discussion regarding the first-year student adjustment, this article utilized Berry's acculturation model (1974, 1980, 1997) as the theoretical framework for understanding the social experiences of international undergraduate students in a large, public institution in the Southeast United States. More specifically, this research study examined the extent to which each of the four strategies defined by the acculturation model—assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization—emerged from the social experiences of international students during their first year of college. To gain such an understanding, the following research question was investigated:

What acculturation strategies do international undergraduate students' enrolled in a large, public university employ during their first year of college?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Challenges to Cultural Adjustment

The research exploring the acculturation of international students in America has identified a multitude of obstacles impeding their successful integration in the host communities. Among the recorded barriers, the unfamiliarity with American culture represents the most prevalent one (Andrade, 2005; Kim et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2015). Findings related to this phenomenon include international students' difficulties in adapting to the cultural practices of their host country, understanding the nature of interpersonal relationships in the host culture, and instances of miscommunication and misunderstandings (Leong, 2015; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Moreover, international students' inability to form friendships with the members of the host culture has been found to result in voluntary and involuntary self-segregation, social isolation, and loneliness (Leong, 2015; Wu et al., 2015).

Another recurring theme in contemporary scholarship is the widespread phenomenon of international student acculturative stress, which has been attributed to varied aspects of their personal, social, and academic lives. Some evidence ascribed acculturation stress to students' perceptions of their host communities as environments with limited understanding of cultural diversity (Chavajay & Skowronek, 2008), while others associated it with perceptions of discrimination, discomfort with others, and feelings of guilt due to not being able to fit in (Zhang & Yung, 2018).

Additionally, a considerable amount of research has been devoted to documenting the relationship between international students' acculturation stress and mental health, thus further supporting the need for better understanding their acculturation patterns. Despite the diversity of international students investigated in these studies, the conclusions remained consistent—low levels of acculturation and high levels of acculturative stress have been strongly associated with students' psychological distress and depression (Hamamura & Laird, 2014; Shadowen et al., 2019). Not surprisingly, cultural assimilation and social relationships emerged as a significant predictor of students' psychological well-being and mental health (Jackson et al., 2013).

The Contributors to Cultural Adjustment

Along with identifying the main barriers to international student cultural adjustment, the literature has distinguished a wide range of factors associated with one's successful transition and integration within the host culture. According to the available evidence, international student socialization and social support have been identified as the most powerful predictor of acculturation (Baba & Hosoda, 2014; Gomez et al., 2014; Mahmood & Burke, 2018; Zhang & Yung, 2018). While some studies have provided evidence of a positive relationship between acculturation and both on- and off-campus socialization (Gomez et al., 2014), others have documented that social support from the educational institution, in particular, was significantly

and negatively correlated with students' perceived discrimination, stress, fearfulness, and guilt (Zhang & Yung, 2018).

Early Intervention

Of particular importance for this study are the findings that, for international students, social and cultural stressors appear most intensely early on and decline significantly as students progress through their undergraduate or graduate education (Ying, 2005). In fact, the challenges to successful social and cultural integration have been found to be more prominent among undergraduate students than their graduate peers (Zhang & Yung, 2018) and the most intense in the first year of college (Starr-Glass, 2016). Additionally, international students who fail to adjust to their new educational setting within the first 6 months have been found more likely to continue experiencing prolonged adjustment challenges (Hirai et al., 2015).

Still, despite these critical findings, very little evidence has been produced regarding the acculturation strategies of international students in their first year or first semester of undergraduate study. As an illustration, the sample for all studies explored in this section consisted of either both undergraduate and graduate learners or of undergraduate students from all academic levels, thus limiting the applicability of this knowledge to specifically first-year undergraduate students. Therefore, the existing research on cultural adjustment of international students' needs to be expanded to differentiate between not only undergraduate and graduate learners, but also between undergraduate students of varied academic levels, primarily the first-year student population.

Theoretical Framework

The primary purpose of Berry's (1974, 1997) acculturation model was to investigate "what happens to the individuals who have developed in one cultural context when they attempt to re-establish their lives in another one" (p. 5). Defining the types of change that can result from sustained group contacts, Berry (1980) established four possible ways in which one group can interact with another. Assimilation takes place when individuals do not maintain their cultural identity but successfully develop relationships with the dominant culture. Separation occurs when individuals preserve their heritage but avoid interactions with the host group. Integration can be recognized when an individual simultaneously maintains their cultural heritage while developing a relationship with the host society. Lastly, marginalization occurs when there is little or no success in either maintaining one's own heritage or developing relationships with the new culture.

Table 1: Acculturation Strategies (Berry, 1980)

Acculturation strategy	Intent to maintain one's home culture	Intent to maintain relationships with one's host culture
Integration	Yes	Yes
Assimilation	No	Yes
Separation	Yes	No
Marginalization	No	No

Given that the four acculturation strategies do not account for the possible ways in which the members of a dominant group can respond to acculturation, Berry (1980) recognized the third, essential question: “Who has the right to decide the first two questions?” (p. 13). Consequently, each of the four strategies became either (a) voluntary—when the members of a weaker group perceive that their acculturation strategies were developed by choice, and (b) involuntary—when the members of a weaker group perceive that their acculturation strategies were the choice of the dominant group.

For the purpose of this study, international first-year students were perceived as the members of the weaker (i.e., immigrant, nondomestic) group attempting to re-establish their lives in a new cultural, educational, and social setting. Utilizing Berry’s acculturation model, this study attempted to identify and describe the changes that international students undergo as a result of sustained contacts with the members from the dominant group—domestic students, faculty, staff, and local community members.

METHOD

Design

I selected descriptive phenomenological research as the most appropriate design for depicting the essence of a shared experience of international students’ acculturation during their first year of college (Moustakas, 1994). Guided by the central research question, the purpose for employing a phenomenological design was to explore and understand meaning structures behind a specific human phenomenon, in this case, international students’ cultural integration (Van Manen, 2014). The ultimate aim of such an approach was to provide a comprehensive description of the common experience shared by all participants (Moustakas, 1994).

Setting

This study took place at a large public university in the Southeast region of the United States. The institution defines an international student as a nonresident alien entering the United States on an F-1 or J-1 visa. All international undergraduate students in the institution start their undergraduate education through a two-semester transitional program whose name was pseudonymized to the Bridge Program.

Participants

I followed the frequently adopted recommendation for participant selection in qualitative research and interviewed students until reaching a point of saturation or redundancy. Saturation was determined when the data collection no longer produced new insights into the phenomenon explored (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Following the guidelines of Rubin and Rubin (2012), I concluded the data collection after 10 interviews when I realized that each new conversation added less and less to the narratives that had been already gathered and when the patterns in participants responses became redundant.

At the time I collected the data, two students were freshmen and still enrolled in the Bridge Program, while the remaining eight were sophomores who successfully completed the program. The sample consisted of students from the following seven countries: Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Indonesia, Thailand, Zimbabwe, and Oman. Seven participants were females and three were males. For five participants this was the first time in the United States, while the remaining five had already been in the host country for either travel or short-term exchange study programs. The sample was represented by students from eight majors: business management, computer engineering, event management, advertising and public relations, industrial engineering, psychology, forensic science, and biomedical science.

Data Collection

Upon obtaining the approval from the Institutional Review Board, I obtained an email list of all students in the Bridge Program from the university's International Student Services. In January 2018, I invited all students to participate in one-on-one, semistructured, and face-to-face interviews. The interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions focusing on participants' background, prior academic experiences, overall first-year experience in the current institution, and social and academic experiences underlying their acculturation.

In order to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, I employed two strategies. During the data collection and analysis, I engaged in the process of bracketing or exploring my own experiences, viewpoints, and assumptions in relation to the study (Moustakas, 1994). At the time of the study, I was an international doctoral student. Even though I taught first-year seminar courses at the institution where I conducted the study, I did not teach international students or did not have any prior interactions with this population within the institution. By practicing bracketing, I engaged in a continuous self-dialogue to reduce any underlying influence of preexisting thoughts, judgments, and biases.

Additionally, I employed intercoder reliability, which involved another "equally knowledgeable coder operate in isolation to code the same unit of text" (Campbell et al., 2013, p. 297). The second coder was also a first-year seminar instructor at the institution and experienced in qualitative data analysis. After we independently analyzed the data and developed themes, we met to discuss our findings. We reached intercoder agreement when we "reconciled though discussion whatever coding discrepancies they had for the same unit or text" (Campbell et al., 2013, p. 297). This

approach minimized the influence of my positionality and any unintentional misinterpretation of study findings.

Data Analysis

I analyzed interview transcripts using descriptive coding or assigning one-word labels to participants' responses (Miles et al., 2014). In assigning codes, I utilized the following three-stage framework established by Berry (1974, 1980): (a) the responses coded as participants' intent to maintain their own cultural identity (b) the responses coded as participants' intent to develop relationships with the dominant group, and (c) the responses coded as participants' perceptions of their acculturation strategies as either voluntary or involuntary. I then grouped the coded data for the four frames of the theoretical framework: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization.

RESULTS

The results that emerged from the data analysis revealed participants' diverse experiences regarding their first-year acculturation processes. Table 2 illustrates the thematic representation of acculturation strategies adopted by the students' during their freshman year, as well as the frequency of each strategy among the 10 participants.

Table 2: Participants' Acculturation Strategies

Strategy	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10
Voluntary integration	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	
Involuntary integration	✓						✓			
Voluntary assimilation		✓							✓	✓
Involuntary assimilation					✓		✓		✓	✓
Voluntary separation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Involuntary segregation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Voluntary marginalization				✓				✓		

Strategy	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10
Involuntary marginalization						✓			✓	

Evidence of Integration

Distinguishing between voluntary and involuntary integration, Berry (1974) defined voluntary pattern as any instance where an individual freely moves from one culture to another and chooses when to maintain positive intergroup relations for the benefit of both the individual and the dominant society. On the other hand, integration becomes involuntary when the dominant society requires the individual to maintain their own cultural heritage and to establish positive intergroup relations, thus denying that individual the choice of declining these relations as needed.

According to the findings in this study, seven participants shared the experience of integrating into their new social setting. While all seven students perceived their integration as voluntary, two students reported experiencing voluntary and involuntary integration simultaneously.

Voluntary Integration

The participants who reported developing the pattern of voluntary integration attributed these experiences to both academic and social settings. Academically, some students reported that utilizing the knowledge, skills, and competencies obtained in their home countries was not only encouraged in their new environment, but also highly appreciated and rewarded:

Last semester I took the English Composition class and my writing English was not as good as my speaking English, so I would use really simple words. Still, I would get high grades and American students would get lower grades than me. And they would ask me—how did you do it? They use big words and I use small words, but I still get a better grade. Then I asked the professor and she told me—It's the way you elaborate topics, it makes sense, and it is interesting to learn how other people think. —P2, Oman, Computer Engineering

Academic integration was further evidenced in students' narratives about the perceived benefits of utilizing professors' office hours, but also the faculty appreciation of insights and perceptions that students shared during these meetings. For instance, P8, a psychology major from Thailand, shared that he initially started visiting his professor's office hours only because he noticed other students doing so. However, this practice led him to not only improve his grades, but also understand why he was not performing to the best of his abilities. As a result, he was successful in rectifying the wrong practices. Due to this faculty member being particularly welcoming and supportive, the student started utilizing office hours in his other courses too.

The evidence of voluntary integration was much more abundant in regards to students' social experiences. Five participants particularly emphasized the willingness of various student groups on campus to welcome and include international students:

One time we went to a Greek party which was so American. Just like in the movies. We came directly to one guy and said this is our first year here and we don't know anything about Greek life. And he explained everything. He told us about Greek community and everything about it. We didn't go to those parties again because they are so different from ours but, still, they were very friendly and helpful. —P1, Ukraine, Business Management

For other students, social integration was reflected in taking group fitness classes, joining campus clubs or organization, volunteering, being invited to social events hosted by their American peers, finding the interest of the host community to learn about their counties, cultures, and language, or establishing relationships with their peer mentors. Additionally, some students revealed that campus resources and career services, in particular, further facilitated their social integration.

As illustrated by the students' responses, some participants felt integrated into their new environment on academic and social levels simultaneously and perceived that the cultural diversity they brought to their new settings was not only accepted but also highly valued. What made this integration perceived as voluntary were the participants' testimonies of the dominant society's respect for their choice to decline intergroup relations at times.

Involuntary Integration

On the other hand, two students shared experiences when they felt they had no choice over the course of their academic or social integration. Academically, involuntary integration was evidenced by participants' perceptions of being required to attend events specifically designed for international students, namely study groups, workshops, or seminars which they had no interest in and did not find beneficial:

I remember that the Bridge Program [pseudonymized] had this thing where they would make us [international students] study for five hours in a specific room during the week. And I was already very focused on my academics. But just the thing that it was mandatory and they were making me do it was irritating. I would go home and study twice more than they asked me to, but this fact was just irritating. —P7, Russia, Industrial Engineering

Acknowledging the fact that the first semester was particularly hard in terms of the amount of information any new international student needs to acquire, P1, a business management student from Ukraine, added that such extensive and rigorous programming was often overwhelming and counterproductive:

I would give at least a little bit of relief to international students in terms of all the things they have to do. We did too much. I would simply put less pressure on our shoulders. The first semester was really tough in terms of

the amount of information literary attacking my head. After going to all those meetings and informational workshops, I really felt like my head was about to explode.

In relation to her social integration, P1 expressed feelings of dissatisfaction stemming from not being allowed to decline participation in certain social events. For her, some of the events she was required to attend were not particularly useful and she considered them to be an unproductive use of her time.

Evidence of Assimilation

The pattern of assimilation is characterized by the decision of a nondominant group to allow their cultural identity to blend into the culture of the dominant society for the purpose of accomplishing common goals (Berry, 1974). In the case of voluntary assimilation, the members of weaker groups see the value of and the need for adapting to the new society and willingly choose to do so. In the case of involuntary assimilation, however, this decision pattern is perceived as imposed by the dominant group.

Among the participants in this study, the assimilation pattern emerged from the experiences of five students, of which one student perceived their assimilation as voluntary and two believed this strategy was imposed by their cultural setting. The remaining two respondents experienced both voluntary and involuntary patterns simultaneously.

Voluntary Assimilation

The students who willingly decided to merge their cultural identity with that of their new setting reported doing so because they believed it would help them be more successful in their new environment:

In my first semester I would often take couple of minutes to recap what I know and how I think. And I would tell myself – ok, you think this way, but they [American students] think that way, so I should try to think in their way so that I could fit in better and do better. —P2, Oman, Computer Engineering

These students further shared that even though they abandoned some of the cultural practices from their home countries, they were highly satisfied with the outcome of such a decision, mainly in terms of getting out of their comfort zone, becoming more social, and establishing relationships with the members of the host society. For example, P10, a biomedical science student from Zimbabwe, reflected on her upbringing in her home culture and shared having been raised as a reserved child who was not prone to publicly expressing her opinion:

Back home, my mom has always sheltered me... Even in school, I was always just given information. Like, they would tell you—go and read this. The professors would just say stuff and you would do it... But here, people are extremely outspoken. Back home, we are different people. I don't know. In my country it is very uncommon to approach someone and start talking

to them. We just talk to the people we know. But then I saw that it's really, really normal for people to talk here. I feel that am more vocal than I ever was. I speak more than I used to. I am more confident about public speaking which is surprising. My mom was even shocked to hear that.

Involuntary Assimilation

At the same time, four students felt that adopting the academic and social patterns of their host culture was not a voluntary decision. These feelings were mainly supported by students' perceptions that their new educational setting did not account for many attributes and qualities that these learners possessed:

Some things I learned back home actually make me be ahead in some of the classes here, but I sometimes felt that professors underestimate us [international students] in a way. I think it would be good to be open-minded to people who learned all those things at home. P9, Indonesia, Forensic Science

P7, an industrial engineering major from Russia, added: "Some of the classes that we took were only for international students but, at the same time, the fact that international students come from different environments was not considered."

Similar to the students' experiences with integration, participants' narratives regarding assimilation revealed that adopting this acculturation pattern had more positive effects when freely pursued. If the participants believed that seeking a closer interaction with the dominant culture and adopting their cultural norms was advantageous, they were more willing to make such efforts. However, if such adaptation was not freely pursued, the students were not as willing to give up their cultural heritage or to see the benefits of doing so.

Evidence of Separation

The strategy of separation is characterized by the affirmation of one's cultural identity and rejection of positive intergroup relations (Berry, 1974). In some cases, members of nondominant groups can choose to reaffirm their own culture by deciding not to adapt to the new one (i.e., voluntary separation). In other cases, the members of a weaker group can regard that the larger society prevents them from establishing such intergroup relations (i.e., involuntary separation).

The separation pattern, whether voluntary or involuntary, was the only acculturation strategy experienced by all participants in the sample. Even though students shared more examples of willingly separating themselves from the host society, their narratives revealed some instances where the segregation was perceived as imposed.

Voluntary Separation

The pattern of voluntary separation or self-segregation was mainly reflected in the fact that participants' support systems consisted primarily of other international

students. Another common experience that the participants shared was that the majority justified the phenomenon of self-segregation by their perceptions of being a burden to their American peers due to deeply rooted customs, traditions, attitudes, and values of their home cultures. As a result, the pattern of self-segregation emerged in students' voluntary practices of associating themselves only with the members of the same culture-sharing groups:

Ever since I came, I wanted to get closer to domestic students. It would be unfair to say that it's impossible, but for an international student it is very hard. I do not think it's a language barrier, because most of us can express ourselves easily. Language is really not the issue. But we are strangers, we are foreigners. They [American students] are used to their culture and they lived here their whole lives. So they feel like—ok, this is my country, I already have my life here, I don't need anyone else... So now I stick to other Russians. To the same language group. I understood quite quickly that you can't do anything about it. —P7, Russia, Industrial Engineering

Several students expressed a similar belief and reported that, due to their underlying cultural heritage, they would perceive themselves as “foreigners,” “aliens,” “different,” or “hard to understand.” Even though the practice of establishing relationships only with students from same cultural backgrounds was not the participants' intended goal, it emerged as the natural outcome of their voluntary decision not to be a burden to their American peers and to associate only with their culture-sharing peers.

Involuntary Separation

Equally prevalent as the pattern of self-segregation was the strategy of involuntary separation, which was evidenced through students' perceptions of being excluded from their new cultural setting and, consequently, exposed only to their own cultures. For eight respondents, involuntary separation was manifested through students' perceptions that their efforts to establish contact with the dominant culture were mainly hindered by being separated from their American peers in classes, social events, or housing and, therefore, limited only to interactions with other international students. In two cases, however, the participants' reported that the segregation pattern emerged as the outcome of noninclusive attitudes and behaviors expressed by the members of the dominant group:

People often assume I am American, because of my English and because I look African-American but once I tell them I am not, I see the change in the way they talk to me. They use less English, they don't talk to me as much, and they are like—he might not know what's going on, he might not understand what we are trying to say. I can see them slowly distancing themselves. On the other hand, when I am with international students—everyone is as smart and as dumb as the other. —P2, Oman, Computer Engineering

For two students the pattern of academic segregation was manifested through the feelings of being excluded from in-class discussions in their “open classes” (i.e., classes where domestic students constituted the majority) and capitalizing on their international peers in their “closed classes” (i.e., classes composed only of international students):

I don't think that all professors are aware that they have international students in the class [open class]. Sometimes they are speaking very fast or use English slang or talk about examples and things that every American would know but not international students. So I get confused ... But when I take classes with international students, we help each other, ask questions to each other, explain in a way that we understand... —P6, Costa Rica, Advertising and Public Relations

Overall, participants' responses revealed that all of them failed to establish positive relations with the larger society at some point during their first year of college, whether willingly or unwillingly. As a result, their intergroup relations were limited to students from their own culture or other non-American cultures. In some cases, this withdrawal was self-imposed and initiated out of respect for the norms, beliefs, and traditions of the larger society. In other instances, it was perceived as imposed by the dominant culture in reaction to international students' underlying cultural attributes.

Evidence of Marginalization

Students' shared experiences displayed the least evidence of the fourth acculturation strategy—marginalization. Under voluntary integration, the members of a nondominant group choose not to culturally identify with either their own cultural system or the larger society. Involuntary marginalization, on the other hand, occurs when both the relation to one's own heritage and the relation to the new culture are considered as suppressed by the dominant society. In that case, Berry (1974) argued, the members of the weaker group become not only marginalized, but also characterized by high levels of apathy and loss of motivation.

Voluntary Marginalization

Within the sample of this study, only two participants felt willingly marginalized during their first year of college, while two experienced involuntary marginalization. As an illustration, P4, an advertising major from Kazakhstan, experienced marginalization only during her first semesters and attributed this experience to increased concern for her academics: “The entire first semester I was isolated in my room because I was afraid to be influenced by people who like to party and go out. I was new and I was afraid.” Justifying why some international students decide to distance themselves not only from their new setting but also from their families and friends back home, P8, a Thai psychology student, said:

I think that a lot of international students struggle because they know how important it is to get good grades and how hard it is for their families to pay

for their education. So a lot of students don't realize that they develop this depression or anxiety and they suppress it so that no one else can see it. They just don't talk to anyone. That was one of my problems when I got here first. I didn't want to talk to anyone here and didn't want to burden anyone home with it.

Involuntary Marginalization

At the same time, two students shared their belief of having no control over becoming marginalized in their new academic settings. In the case of P6, a Costa Rican student in the advertising track, marginalization occurred after progressing from the Bridge Program and upon becoming immersed into his new cultural and academic environment. As he explained, involuntary marginalization occurred upon realizing that he was no longer able to utilize his own cultural heritage to ease this transition nor knew how to seek the adequate support from the host culture:

Something that I feel should be improved for us [new international students] is the transition from Bridge Program [pseudonymized] to the university. I felt so lost when I left the Bridge Program. Things actually change and you start having questions and questions and you don't know where to look for answers. The college, your major classes, everything is different from home... And you are also not in the Program anymore... I didn't even know who my advisor was or how to find them... I kept asking questions to my Bridge Program advisor but they couldn't help me anymore. And I didn't know these things. So I didn't know where to go.

On the other hand, P9, a forensic major from Indonesia, shared the belief of being excluded from access to certain opportunities, mainly co-curricular learning experiences such as internships and work opportunities:

My advisors told me that whatever experience I have from home—that stays home and I need to get new experience here. I tried applying for some internships, but they told me they were not open for international students. This makes it difficult for us to actually get that experience and to network with other people from our majors.

Even though voluntary and involuntary marginalization were the least frequently employed acculturation strategies, they were still adapted by several international students. Additional examples of marginalization pattern included students' decreased willingness to seek and utilize the support from either of the two cultural groups—their own or the dominant one. On a positive note, the responses of some students allowed for the assumption that, at least in regard to voluntary marginalization, the pattern of rejecting the new culture and abandoning one's own heritage can be expected to subside over time.

DISCUSSION

This purpose of this study was to identify and describe the acculturation strategies adopted by international undergraduate students during their first year of college. The presented results revealed that all 10 participants shared the experiences of separation, either voluntary or involuntary. For seven international students in the sample, the freshman year was characterized by either willing or unwilling integration. The strategy of assimilation, both freely pursued and imposed, was reported by six students. The least evidence was generated for the pattern of voluntary or involuntary marginalization, which emerged from the experiences of four respondents.

The narratives of seven international students who felt integrated into their host culture supported Berry's (1974) premise that self-governed and free interaction of newcomers with the dominant group, while ensuring the retention of their cultural integrity, can facilitate a successful accomplishment of mutual goals. Within the context of this study, mutual goals accomplished by voluntary integration emerged in the form of student transition, adjustment, satisfaction with college experience, academic performance, and successful completion of the Bridge Program.

These findings supported the existing scholarly evidence examining the relationship between international student social support and successful acculturation (Baba & Hosoda, 2014; Gomez et al., 2014; Mahmood & Burke, 2018; Zhang & Yung, 2018). The previously documented relationship between on-campus socialization and integration (Gomez et al., 2014) was also expressed by the participants in this study for whom the engagement in campus clubs, events, and organizations was particularly beneficial for integrating into their new environment. Even though this qualitative study cannot support a causal relationship between social support and acculturation or attempt to predict successful acculturation of any international student, its findings nonetheless provide important insights into students' perceptions of the role that on-campus socialization and social support have on their ability to more smoothly integrate into the host culture.

Participants' narratives illustrating the separation pattern confirmed the existing scholarly findings according to which international students' difficulty to adapt to the cultural practices of their host country can lead to separation, isolation, and loneliness (Leong, 2015; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Wu et al., 2015). Moreover, the participants also attributed their separation to feelings of guilt due to not being able to fit in and the resulting emotions of discomfort with others (Zhang & Yung, 2018).

Simultaneously, this study provided unique insights into why these feelings occur and how they are manifested. Even though participants' narratives confirmed prior findings of attributing the separation pattern to difficulties in understanding the nature of interpersonal relationships in the host culture and the instances of miscommunication and misunderstandings (Leong, 2015; Smith & Khawaja, 2011), this research produced an alternative justification. For the majority of the respondents, the pattern of separation was perceived as imposed by the dominant culture, whether by the actions of its members or by the design and structure of the international student program. Consequently, these results shed the important light on the unintentional consequences that specific practices of international student programming can have on participants' acculturation.

Additionally, this research emphasized the important need for differentiating between the patterns of separation and marginalization adopted by international students. While the majority of literature examining international student acculturation reported the prevalence of separation or segregation patterns (Leong, 2015; Wu et al., 2015), this research demonstrated that the pattern of marginalization, even though less prevalent, is still present among international first-year students. The urgency of acknowledging and exploring this acculturation strategy is even more evident knowing that the pattern of marginalization is the only strategy that includes the rejection of both one's home and host culture. Although the pattern of involuntary marginalization had a low frequency (i.e., two out of 10 cases), it is nonetheless a very important finding that needs to be further explored and addressed within this or other educational settings.

Next, even though the sample in this study included international students from seven countries (Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Indonesia, Thailand, Zimbabwe, and Oman), none of the participants came from the leading places of origin for international students in the United States—China, India, South Korea, or Saudi Arabia (IIE, 2019). On one hand, this limitation challenges the pertinence of the findings among the most prevalent international student groups in the United States. At the same time, however, the unique nature of the sample offers valuable insights into the experiences of underrepresented and minority international students whose acculturation strategies have been less frequently explored in the literature. As an illustration, the participant samples in the scholarship reviewed for this study were predominantly represented by the students from East Asia (Baba & Hosoda, 2014; Chavajay & Skowronek, 2008; Glass, 2012; Gomez et al., 2014; Hansen et al., 2018; Hirai et al., 2015; Wu et al., 2015). The remaining studies used even more limited samples composed of either Chinese students (Leong, 2015; Zhang & Jung, 2018) or Taiwanese participants (Ying, 2005).

At the same time, however, the readership should remain cautious about generalizing the explored patterns across the cultures represented by international students in this study. Even though the experiences of participants were associated with the four acculturation patterns, it is critical to highlight that the ways in which these patterns are manifested undoubtedly remain unique to students' cultural backgrounds. Specifically, seven nationalities were represented in this study—Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Indonesia, Thailand, Zimbabwe, and Oman. In that regard, Nguyen and Larson (2017) documented that Indonesian international students, for example, share very unique acculturation needs such as culturally relevant student organizations, inclusive environments, and religiously affiliated centers in their adjustment. The cultural adjustment of Arab students, on the other hand, has been found to be characterized by high levels of culture shock, perceived prejudice, stereotypes, and isolation (Rabia, 2017). Unique acculturation patterns have also been identified for African international students as they navigate the assumptions made by their American peers and faculty (Mwangi et al., 2018) and misunderstandings about their culture and religions (Lee & Opio, 2011).

Lastly, participants' narratives supported the frequently recorded interdependency of international student cultural experiences and their academic performance (Mahmood & Burke, 2018; Wu et al., 2015). For all students in this

study, the adopted acculturation strategies were developed in relation to both social and academic experiences. Comparable to the contemporary findings, successful academic adaptation and positive academic experiences were positively associated with the pattern of integration (Mahmood & Burke, 2018). On the other hand, academic concerns and difficulties, as well as pedagogical differences and differences in academic resources, were associated with the pattern of separation (Chavajay & Skowronek, 2008; Leong, 2015).

Implications

There are several ways in which the findings of this study can be applied to support the acculturation of international students during their first year of undergraduate study. Mainly, the participants in this study shed light to unintentional ramifications that separate first-year programming for international students, such as the Bridge Program, can have on their successful integration. Even though the purposeful design of such separate programming undoubtedly has many positive effects, the participants in this study revealed critical impacts of such practices on their separation and marginalization. Therefore, International Student Services should recognize the additional responsibility of not only orienting incoming students through the programming designed specifically for this student group, but also providing them with the sufficient opportunity for cross-cultural interactions and early exposure to the host society's culture.

Similarly, students' narratives of the role of academic experiences on their acculturation further indicate that cross-cultural socialization should not be regarded as a guarantor of successful integration. Participants' experiences indicated that successful integration is also sustained by culturally responsive teaching practices adopted by faculty, as well as academic interactions with domestic students. Therefore, colleges and universities should no longer perceive acculturation only in relation to one's social interactions, but should understand that all four strategies—integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization—are also shaped by students' academic experiences.

The overall implication for higher education institutions that can be deduced from participants' experiences is the necessity for establishing a more direct collaboration of campus services to promote international students' acculturation. The majority of participants in this study perceived utilization of institutional resources, mainly career and academic services, as vital to their acculturation. Therefore, institutions need to apply this knowledge by engaging their campus communities in a collaboration that would increase international students' awareness of campus opportunities and resources that can be utilized to not only promote integration but also, more importantly, overcome any emerging feelings of separation and marginalization.

Limitations

Even though this study produced important knowledge regarding the international student acculturation processes during the first year of college, the

results remain limited in several important aspects. The first limitation involves research design and sample. Phenomenological research is primarily a method for questioning, not a method for answering or drawing definite conclusions (Van Manen, 2014). As such, the research design employed in this study could only describe the phenomenon of international student acculturation and could not provide diagnostic or prognostic tools and deeper insights into the likelihood of international students to adopt a particular acculturation pattern.

Second, even though the sample included international students from various countries, they all attended one institution and resided in a metropolitan city in the Southeastern region of the United States. Other higher education institutions, particularly those located in other geographical areas, or those of different sizes, may have different international student representation, campus culture, and university resources dedicated to this student group. Therefore, future research efforts should expand to colleges and universities of different types and sizes and to other regions of the United States. Such research direction would allow for exploring the acculturation differences or commonalities among international students in the United States and provide each host institution with the most appropriate recommendations for serving their students.

Third, the literature has already documented that international students' acculturation challenges are the most pronounced and strongest during their first year of college (Starr-Glass, 2016). Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that the timing of the interviews conducted for this study (i.e., first semester) probably had significant impacts on participants' acculturation experiences. Consequently, the results cannot be generalized to other timings in international students' first year. Additional research is needed to gain insights if the participants would report the same acculturation strategies at the end of their first year.

Fourth, the cultural backgrounds of participants in this study yield themselves to a particular set of limitations. The findings in this research were deduced from the sample of 10 students representing seven different cultures. Thus, the results can be challenged by prior studies that documented a strong relationship between international students' acculturation levels and countries of origin (Hansen et al., 2018; Zhou et al., 2018), or their cultures and adjustment needs (Behl et al., 2017). For instance, students from Middle East were found to experience significantly higher level of acculturative stress than their peers from other cultural backgrounds (Behl et al., 2017), while Asian students displayed a greater level of acculturative stress than their European counterparts (Hansen et al., 2018). Consequently, the results of this study should be interpreted with a caution against unintentional generalization across participants' diverse cultural backgrounds.

Additionally, due to the strong interdependence of students' academic and acculturation experiences reported in this study, future research is needed to quantitatively measure the academic achievement of international students in relation to their acculturation. Lastly, both the findings of this study and the reviewed literature were limited to the international students in the United States. As the cultural adjustment of international students will inevitably differ from one host country to another, future research may conduct similar studies in other countries.

CONCLUSION

The participants in this study exhibited varied experiences regarding the acculturation strategies they developed while navigating their academic and social experiences during the first year of college. In accordance with Berry's (1980) description of acculturation, international first-year students' sustained contact with the dominant group was experienced as "difficult, reactive, and conflictual rather than a smooth transition" (p. 10). Additionally, acculturation strategies adopted by the international students in this study were consistent with Berry's (1997) argument that the four acculturation patterns should not be expected to be static or predictable, but context-specific and dependent on situational factors.

In conducting this study, my intent was to produce knowledge that will assist all stakeholders involved in international student acculturation in identifying key factors influencing the adoption of a particular acculturation pattern and developing appropriate programs to promote students' voluntary integration into the American culture and education. This study particularly contributes to expanding the scarce research on international student first-year programming and the limited knowledge on the international student academic and social transition during the freshman year of undergraduate study. Knowing that acculturation stress is the most intense in early stages of one's educational journey (Ying, 2005) and more prevalent among undergraduate than graduate international students (Zhang & Yung, 2018), I hope that this study can serve as a critical foundation for early alert efforts and interventions aimed toward addressing international students' adjustment needs timely and effectively.

REFERENCES

- Andrade, M. S. (2005). International students and the first year of college. *Journal of the First-Year Experience*, 17(1), 101–129.
- Baba, Y., & Hosoda, M. (2014). Home away from home: Better understanding of the role of social support in predicting cross-cultural adjustment among international students. *College Student Journal*, 48(1), 1–15.
- Behl, M., Laux, J. M., Roseman, C. P., Tiarniyu, M., & Spann, S. (2017). Needs and acculturative stress of international students in CACREP programs. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, 56, 305–318. doi:10.1037/dhe0000076
- Berry, J. W. (1974). Psychological aspects of cultural pluralism. *Culture Learning*, 2, 17–22.
- Berry, J. W. (1980). Acculturation as varieties of adaptation. In A. M. Padilla (Ed.), *Acculturation: Theory, models, and some new findings* (pp. 9–25). Westview.
- Berry, J. W. (1997). Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 46, 5–34. doi:10.1111/j.1464-0597.1997.tb01087.x
- Campbell, J. L., Quincy, C., Osserman, J., & Pedersen, O. K. (2013). Coding in-depth semi-structured interviews: Problems of unitization and intercoder reliability and agreement. *Sociological Methods & Research*, 42(3), 294–320. doi:10.1177/0049124113500475

- Chavajay, P., & Skowronek, J. (2008). Aspects of acculturation stress among international students attending a university in the USA. *Psychological Reports, 103*, 827–835. doi:10.2466/PRO.103.3.827-835
- Glass, C. R. (2012). Educational experiences associated with international students' learning, development, and positive perceptions of campus climate. *Journal of Studies in International Education 16*(3) 228–251. doi:10.1177/1028315311426783
- Gomez, E., Urzua, A., & Glass, C. R. (2014). International student adjustment to college: Social networks, acculturation, and leisure. *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration, 32*(1), 7–25.
- Hansen, H. R., Schneiderman, Y., McNamara, G. S., & Grace, L. (2018). Assessing acculturative stress of international students at a U.S. community college. *Journal of International Students, 8*(1), 215–232. doi:10.5281/zenodo.1134293
- Hamamura, T., & Laird, P. G. (2014). The effect of perfectionism and acculturative stress on levels of depression experienced by East Asian international students. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling And Development, 42*, 205–217. doi:10.1002/j.2161-1912.2014.00055.x
- Hirai, R., Fraizer, P., & Syed, M. (2015). Psychological and sociocultural adjustment of first-year international students: Trajectories and predictors. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 62*(3), 438–452. doi:10.1037/cou0000085
- Institute of International Education. (2019). *Open Doors report*. <https://www.iie.org/en/Research-and-Insights/Open-Doors/Data>
- Jackson, M., Ray, S., Bybell, D. (2013). International students in the U.S.: Social and psychological adjustment. *Journal of International Students, 3*(1), 17–28.
- Kim, Y. K., Collins, C. S., Rennick, L. A., & Edens, D. (2017). College experiences and outcomes among international undergraduate students at research universities in the United States: A comparison to their domestic peers. *Journal of International Students, 7*(2), 395–420.
- Kim, Y. K., Edens, D., Iorio, M. F., Curtis, C. J., & Romero, E. (2015). Cognitive skills development among international students at research universities in the United States. *Journal of International Students, 5*(4), 526–540
- Lee, J., & Opio, T. (2011) Coming to America: challenges and difficulties faced by African student athletes, *Sport, Education and Society, 16*(5), 629–644, doi:10.1080/13573322.2011.601144
- Leong, P. (2015). Coming to America: Assessing the patterns of acculturation, friendship formation, and the academic experiences of international students at a U.S. college. *Journal of International Students, 5*(4), 459–474.
- Mahmood, H., & Burke, M. G. (2018). Analysis of acculturative stress and sociocultural adaptation among international students at a non-metropolitan university. *Journal of International Students, 8*(1), 284–307. doi:10.5281/zenodo.1134307
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook*. SAGE.
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. SAGE.

- Mwangi, C. A. G., Changamire, N., & Mosselson, J. (2018). An intersectional understanding of African international graduate students' experiences in U.S. higher education. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 12(1), 52–64. doi:10.1037/dhe0000076
- National Resource Center. (2019). *2017 national survey on the first-year experience*. <https://nrcfye.presswarehouse.com/browse/book/9781942072324/2017-National-Survey-on-The-First-Year-Experience>
- Nguyen, D. J., & Larson, J. B. (2017). Exploring the influence of student affairs on adjustment and adaptation for Indonesian graduate students. *Journal of International Students*, 7(4), 1010–2019. doi:10.5281/zenodo.1035955
- Rabia, H. M. A. (2017). Undergraduate Arab international students' adjustment to U.S. universities. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 6(1), 131–139. doi:10.5430/ijhe.v6n1p131
- Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2012). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data* (3rd ed.). SAGE.
- Shadowen, N. L., Williamson, A. A., Guerra, N. G., Ammigan, R., & Drexler, M. (2019). Prevalence and correlates of depressive symptoms among international students: Implications for university support offices. *Journal of International Students*, 9(1), 129–148. doi:10.32674/jis.v9i1.277
- Sidle, M. W., & McReynolds, J. (2009). The freshman year experience: Student retention and student success. *NASPA Journal*, 46(3), 434–446.
- Smith, R. A., & Khawaja, N. G. (2011). A review of the acculturation experiences of international students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 35, 699–713. doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2011.08.004
- Starr-Glass, D. (2016). The self, the other, and the international student. *Journal of International Students*, 6(1), 314–318.
- Van Manen, M. (2014). *Phenomenology of practice: Meaning-giving methods in phenomenological research and writing*. Routledge.
- Wu, H. P., Garza, E., & Guzman, N. (2015). International student's challenge and adjustment to college. *Education Research International*, 2015, 1–9. doi:10.1155/2015/202753
- Ying, Y. W. (2005). Variation in acculturative stressors over time: A study of Taiwanese students in the United States. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 29, 59–71. doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2005.04.003
- Zhang, Y., & Jung, E. (2018). Multi-dimensionality of acculturative stress among Chinese international students: What lies behind their struggles? *International Research and Review*, 7(1), 23–43.
- Zhou, Y., Zhang, H., & Stodolska, M. (2018). Acculturative stress and leisure among Chinese international graduate students, *Leisure Sciences*, 40(6), 557–577. doi:10.1080/01490400.2017.1306466
-

MASHA KRSMANOVIC, PhD, is an Assistant Teaching Professor at the School of Education, University of Southern Mississippi. Her major research interests lie in the area of international students' acculturation, academic, and social integration; international student access, opportunity, and affordability; first-year experience and

transition; qualitative research; and systematic reviews. Email:
masha.krsmanovic@usm.edu

International Saudi Arabia Students' Level of Preparedness: Identifying Factors and Maximizing Study Abroad Experience Using a Mixed-Methods Approach

Janina Brutt-Griffler

The State University of New York at Buffalo, USA

Mohammad Nurunnabi

Prince Sultan University, Saudi Arabia

Sumi Kim

The State University of New York at Buffalo, USA

ABSTRACT

Given that students' level of preparedness for study abroad is malleable, this study aimed to assess Saudi students' level of preparedness academically and socioculturally to enhance their overseas experiences and success in higher education. Using a mixed methods research design consisting of survey data, semistructured interviews, and case studies with undergraduate and graduate students in a predeparture Saudi context and those enrolled in U.S. programs, the study provides empirical data to understand students' intent to study abroad, local institutions' contributions to preparation, and challenges encountered. Findings across datasets consistently corroborated that Saudi students are highly motivated, while articulating the need for substantive supports toward a better understanding of U.S. higher education, academic expectations, and sociocultural practices. Participants articulated the need for advanced English skills, especially academic literacies (academic writing and reading strategies) to cope with demanding workloads in graduate programs. The study discusses curricular implications for higher education in binational contexts.

Keywords: academic literacy, cross-cultural understanding, higher education, international students, Saudi students, socialization, study abroad

INTRODUCTION

The present study offers an empirical and multilayered examination of Saudi students' study abroad experiences by employing a mixed-methods approach (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The study analyzed students' intention to study abroad, their actual overseas lived experiences, and how they negotiate needs to pursue academic goals within institutions of higher education. We pay special attention to their preparation before and while in attendance. Based on the findings, we draw out implications for improving international students' academic and social success in the context of higher education.

Why Saudi Students?

According to the Institute of International Education (IIE, 2018), there were 1,094,792 international students at U.S. higher education institutions in the academic year 2017–2018, an increase of 1.5% over the previous year. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) ranks fourth behind China, India, and South Korea as a sending nation, the only Middle Eastern country in the top 10 (IIE, 2018). The King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP), established by the Saudi government in 2005 to promote “a cultural exchange with the intention of being mutually beneficial for both Saudi Arabia and the host country” (Taylor & Albasri, 2014, p. 111), has played an integral role. The United States has been the leading host nation (Denman & Hilal, 2011).

Researchers know relatively little about Saudi students' reasons for entering U.S. institutions (Yakaboski et al., 2017). Few studies have looked at Saudi students' academic and social practices in the United States (Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015; Sandekian et al., 2015; Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013). Research has focused largely on East Asian students (Kim, 2006; J. Q. Li et al., 2013; Ra & Trusty, 2017). There is little scientific evidence to develop or adjust curricula for Saudi students' needs. An investigation of their experiences is needed to inform educators, administrators, and policymakers in both KSA and the United States, paying close attention to the factors affecting Saudi students' intentions and experiences in the U.S. higher institutions.

Theoretical Grounding

Over the past several decades, there has been increasing interest in issues surrounding international education, in particular in factors influencing the decision to study abroad and in methods of preparing students for academic and cross-cultural success in the host environment. Many scholars (e.g., Lam et al., 2011; Wilkins & Huisman, 2011) frame students' decision to study abroad through the lens of the push–pull model that represents a two-way relationship between push and pull factors that determine students' motivation for international academic mobility. More

specifically, push factors in the students' home country (e.g., economic and political status) drive students' willingness to study abroad, while pull factors from their host country (e.g., tuition, school rankings, and living expenses) primarily influence the choice of desirable institutions (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

Despite the importance of the push–pull model that explained some students' decision making, there is a need to generate empirical knowledge of students' academic and social experiences as well as to theorize those experiences (cf. Perna et al., 2015). Furthermore, as Kim (2011) noted, the push–pull model pays little attention to the “geopolitics of knowledge-degree production and consumption” (p. 111) among the students; academic mobility develops “the symbolic and cultural resources to demarcate global elites from others” (p. 121). Also, much remains unknown about how students filter their decisions through their personal qualities and needs, including their personal drive to study (Li & Bray, 2007; Yakaboski et al., 2017). In this regard, Yakaboski et al. (2017) argued that the push–pull model is inadequate to explain “more nuanced or culturally specific reasons why individuals participate in study abroad and where they end up studying” (p. 95). Given that extensive research is needed to build a sound theoretical grounding for students' outbound and upward mobility through study abroad, the examination of Saudi students' international mobility in the present study incorporates elements of Perna's (2006) model of college choice that unites “aspects of economic and sociological approaches” (p. 101).

Emphasizing the necessity of students' pursuit of higher education, Perna (2006) theorized students' college choice within a multilayered framework that consists of (a) habitus, (b) school and community context, (c) higher education context, and (d) social, economic, and policy context. Each layer affecting students' higher education opportunities is systematically driven from an individual level (e.g., parental, social and cultural capital) to a societal level (e.g., features of public policy). Thus, this model stresses that students' decision-making process of college choice is not confined to one specific tier; rather, it is highly interdependent, specifically when key factors unfold in each layer and operate closely with each other (see also Perna & Thomas, 2008).

While Perna's (2006) model of college choice has been used in explaining the U.S. context, we believe that this conceptual framework lends itself to the examination of students' predisposition to study abroad due to its attention to the significance of “the situated context of the student as well as the unique characteristics of a higher education environment” (Salisbury et al., 2011, p. 125). Pursuing this line of inquiry, Salisbury and others (e.g., Salisbury et al., 2011; Salisbury et al., 2009) have sought to provide empirical evidence pertaining to issues of students' intent to study abroad, which generate a more comprehensive knowledge of “a combination of pre-college socio-economic status and the social and cultural capital accumulated before entering and during college” (Salisbury et al., 2009, p. 122). Furthermore, in validating Perna's (2006) model, Salisbury et al. (2009) focused on a large survey data set from the Wabash National Study on Liberal Arts Education to study students' intent to study abroad. Findings confirmed that students require access to four types of capital—financial, human, social, and cultural—in order to pursue academic and social mobility through overseas learning. Gender also plays a significant role, as

females are more likely to study abroad than males (for in-depth analyses of gender differences, see Salisbury et al., 2010). A recent study by Thirolf (2014) examined male students' perceptions of study abroad involvement by taking up *habitus* that pertains to the first tier of Perna's (2006) model. Thirolf (2014) integrated gender socialization theory into Perna's (2006) model to better understand "subjective, personal, and often unobservable ways in which individuals make decisions" (pp. 247–248). According to Thirolf's (2014) study, for male students, study abroad experience, in particular, one that is gained from a short-term intercultural program, is not considered an economically efficient activity. That finding suggested that gendered ideologies play a role in deterring male students from short-term study abroad programs. Such a consideration impacts how study abroad programs should be designed, emphasizing "the tangible and intangible benefits of participating, especially noting the concrete outcomes" (Thirolf, 2014, p. 256).

Most studies using Perna's model (2006) focus on economic questions in examining students' intent to participate in study abroad programs. Thirolf's (2014) study has been one of the few new departures. There is lack of research that pays attention to students' own goals and experiences to inform institutional efforts to develop programs and curricula. To fill this gap, the present study draws on Perna's (2006) conceptual model to examine the forces that affect Saudi students' intention to study abroad as articulated in their home context, together with Saudi students' lived experiences of studying abroad in the United States. Our study, therefore, offers an emic perspective and has the potential to inform institutions on how to better tailor programs and curricula to meet the demands and aspirations of Saudi students.

Students' Study Abroad Experience

Scholarly attention has begun to shift to students' social and academic experiences, engagement, and inclusion in the host country. Much of that work (e.g., Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004; Kuo, 2011; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007) has argued that international students' experience has mainly been characterized by a variety of factors and discourses, especially cultural adaptation, language barriers, and educational demands.

Reviews of international students' cultural adaptation have found that international students, particularly Asians, have difficulty in fully integrating into their host culture and lifestyle (Ra & Trusty, 2017; Yan & Berliner, 2011). Yan and Berliner (2011) showed the challenge for Chinese students in keeping up with the dominant culture academically and socially in the United States due to "both the unexpected nature of the difficulties and their inability to effectively deal with those difficulties" (p. 182). The challenges among Asian students in cultural adaptation may be derived from the different sociocultural orientations, norms, and ideologies between their home and host contexts (see also Brutt-Griffler & Kim, 2018a; Yeh & Inose, 2003). During their study abroad, the demotivating conditions of cultural adaptation may lead to negative indicators of psychological well-being, such as depression, homesickness, discrimination, and social disconnectedness (Hamamura & Laird, 2014; Jung et al., 2007; Mori, 2000).

Some research has stressed the need for changes in host communities' perceptions of international students, particularly for students from the Middle East (Giroir, 2014; Rich & Troudi, 2006; Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013; Yakaboski et al., 2018). Tummala-Narra and Claudius (2013), studying Muslim students in American graduate programs, found that obstacles to societal integration are often caused by broader sociopolitical issues, including religion, or a constellation of biased beliefs about students sharing a cultural background. Rich and Troudi (2006) found that Saudi students placed themselves in "a marginalized and inferiorized position on account of their culture, colour, ethnicity, and nationality" (p. 623). Saudi students' sense of belonging in host contexts may present "limited identity options" (Giroir, 2014, p. 52).

International students' academic skills and confidence are critical, determining their socialization into academic programs and motivation to learn more about the culture and environment (Morita, 2004; Sasaki, 2011; Yang & Kim, 2011). Language proficiency constitutes one of the main hindrances to academic engagement of students from countries where English is not a first or second language (Andrade, 2006). Unsatisfactory English language proficiency carries with it an increased burden of stress and anxiety and is highly correlated with a low sense of integration into U.S. academic life (Cheng et al., 2004; Kim, 2006; Kuo, 2011).

Other crucial factors include exposure to a new academic culture. Sandekian et al. (2015) considered the challenges facing female KASP-funded Saudi students pursuing doctorates in the United States to include language barriers, new curricula and structures, as well as gender roles. Though highly motivated "for personal fulfillment, possible future employment, and as a means to give back to their communities and government" (Sandekian et al., 2015, p. 367), the subjects' narratives showed that their socially constructed reality was shifted with their effort to assimilate to new academic norms and culture. Some Saudi female students were more frustrated by the attempt to build a good relationship with Saudi male peers than with American males. They perceived the Saudi men as reluctant to accept new sociocultural values, specifically gender roles that are noticeably different from their native culture. Female Saudi students' participation was in some cases curtailed by the cultural prejudices of their male counterparts, highlighting the implications of how educators can understand and support social equity among international students in developing meaningful learning experiences.

Much of the existing research provides fragmentary evidence rather than encapsulating the entire process from the student's intention to study abroad to its close relation to their actual experience, a dynamic process constantly negotiated through practices and perceptions in the new settings. This process is not limited to a single factor and should be examined at a group and an individual level, incorporating a multilayered level of analysis. Using a mixed-methods approach (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011), we aim to develop a more comprehensive understanding of Saudi international students by investigating intent, level of preparedness, and academic and social experiences. Our study addresses the practical concerns of higher education necessary to maximize Saudi students' study abroad learning.

METHOD

Many researchers contend that a mixed-methods approach is beneficial to gain “*a better understanding of the phenomena being studied*” (Greene, 2007, p. 98, emphasis in original). It is indispensable to “address more complicated research questions and collect a richer and stronger array of evidence than can be accomplished by any single method alone” (Yin, 2018, p. 63). A mixed-methods approach postulates that both research methods can be complementary and offer a more comprehensive understanding of a research agenda (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Also, multiple and triangulated data sources play a crucial role in increasing and ensuring validity (Patton, 2015).

Research Design

This study purposely employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). In doing so, the first research instrument, a survey completed by 34 Saudi students, was used to present “a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of the population” (Creswell, 2014, p. 155). For this purpose, we developed a survey containing 14 closed-ended and two open-ended questions. The closed-ended questions measured the degree to which the subjects perceived different aspects of study abroad, defined as “students’ perceptions of study abroad.” These items were considered to be possible factors in assessing students’ perceived value in pursuing study abroad. The items used a Likert-type scale with five possible responses to each of the items, ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*). For statistical analysis, all of the positively stated items were reverse-coded to keep a consistent pattern. For all variables, accordingly, 1 refers to the most negative response, while 5 refers to the most positive response. We used IBM SPSS statistics software to analyze all statistical analyses. We analyzed all responses to open-ended questions using an open-coding process via ATLAS.ti (<https://atlasti.com>), a high-quality computer-assisted qualitative analysis software program that allows the researcher to facilitate thematic coding of the data objectively. In essence, using ATLAS.ti was particularly effective and efficient in handling data in this collaborative research project that “involved multiple analysts coding the same data set and then integrating their coding” (Woods et al., 2016, p. 608). We were able to analyze a large qualitative data set in an objective manner to avoid researcher-generated bias. Along with the coding procedure, the open-ended responses, which are an important source of qualitative data in the present study, were calculated in order to “establish the frequency of different kinds of reasons or explanations” (Yin, 2011, p. 198) in clarifying and supporting the previous closed-ended questions.

In accordance with our sequential mixed-methods design, we subsequently conducted semistructured group interviews and case studies. Such qualitative inquiry plays a significant role in “exploring a problem and developing a detailed understanding of a central phenomenon” (Creswell, 2012, p. 16). The nature and scope of the study, quality of data, as well as the emic perspectives of the participants provided the prime motivation to adopt the qualitative research design (cf. Morse,

2000). The study adopted the “localist” approach of face-to-face interviews with the respondents (Alvesson, 2003). Semistructured interviews were conducted with 17 Saudi students in the KSA’s urban university to gain an understanding of the reasons for their study abroad and any linkages to their academic and social mobility that was not fully uncovered in the quantitative data. We analyzed data collected from semistructured interviews thematically in accordance with grounded theory, which as qualitative researchers point out “successively moves from studying concrete realities to rendering a conceptual understanding from these data” (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012, p. 347; see also Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this way, we were able to first seek and identify the themes and patterns emerging from the semistructured interviews that were aligned with the theoretical notions in the study. Based on the underlying themes and patterns, we developed interview protocols for a case study inquiry with two PhD participants in a study abroad context in the United States, since a case study provides “a contemporary phenomenon (the ‘case’) in-depth and within its real-world context” (Yin, 2018, p. 15). It is consistent with one of our goals in the study, to better understand Saudi students’ lived experiences of studying abroad. We expected that the emergent themes from the semistructured interviews would provide a well-grounded, holistic framework for the case studies, and ultimately a more comprehensive understanding of Saudi international students.

QUANTITATIVE DATA RESULTS

The survey was sent electronically in December 2017 to Saudi students already in a study abroad context or preparing for one. We administered the survey to a total of 150 students. We sent an electronic copy/survey to students preparing to study abroad at one KSA research university. The initial rate of response was 10%. Subsequently, to gain the students’ insight in the context of study abroad, we sent the survey via Twitter accounts that are associated with Saudi international students studying at research universities in the United States. The rate of response increased after we sent the survey to the Twitter accounts. We received 14 more responses totaling 34 responses, representing 22.63% of the population. The rate of response, albeit low, is consistent with other studies using surveys in the Middle East (cf. Joshi et al., 2008). We asked students to report whether they studied abroad, as we believe that the firsthand experience would allow them to better report on the overseas challenges and whether they were prepared to handle them. We assessed the degree of preparedness using a 5-point Likert scale. This information has been added to the narrative.

Out of the total of 34 students (11 females; 23 males) there were eight students (23.5%) at the undergraduate level and 26 students (76.5%) at the graduate level. The participants represent heterogeneous academic majors: We had 12 students (35.3%) in education; seven students (20.6%) in engineering and applied science; six students (17.7%) in management, accounting, and finance; three students (8.8%) in medicine and biomedical science; three students (8.8%) in arts and sciences; one student (2.9%) in law; and two students (5.9%) who did not indicate a field of study or academic major. Most participants ($n = 32$, 94.1%) considered Arabic to be their first language, while two students (5.9%) indicated English as their first language. Of the participants, 20 (58.8%) had previously lived in or visited English-speaking countries

(the United States or the United Kingdom), while 14 students (41.2%) had never lived or studied abroad. Students also self-rated their foreign language proficiency on a 5-point scale: *fluent* (14.7%), *proficient* (20.6%), *advanced* (44.1%), *intermediate* (17.7%), and *not proficient* (2.9%).

The Identification of Factors and the Validity of the Survey

We carried out exploratory factor analysis using the principal component method with varimax rotation for the first focus of interest. It allowed us to determine the construct validity of the research instrument, which queries students' perceptions of study abroad, by identifying the underlying scales among the variables based on factor loadings. We found that the factor analysis yielded four well-defined factors without eliminating any survey items, as presented in Table 1. The first factor, which consists of four items, is categorized as "students' intention to study abroad" and operationalized with Items 1–4. The second factor refers to "students' perceptions of challenges of study abroad" and is operationalized by Items 5a–5e. The third factor represents "degree of preparation for study abroad" and is operationalized by Items 8 and 9. The fourth factor comprises three items and is labeled "areas for development" (Items 6, 7, and 10). Each factor loading score, which accounts for how strongly an item is related to the scale, was greater than .40. Cronbach's coefficient alpha was computed to evaluate the internal reliability of each factor. For all scales, Cronbach's alphas were greater than .70, indicating strong internal consistency as follows: $\alpha = .78$, $\alpha = .82$, $\alpha = .73$, and $\alpha = .84$, respectively. The results of exploratory factor analysis and Cronbach test for reliability are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: The Results of Exploratory Factor Analysis and Cronbach Test

Factors and questionnaire items	Factor loading
Factor 1: Students' intention to study abroad ($\alpha = .78$)	
1. I am interested in studying abroad. (Interest in SA)	.76
2. I believe that studying abroad will be of significant benefit to me. (Significant benefits)	.90
3. I believe that studying abroad will be of particular benefit to my language abilities. (Beneficial to language development)	.76
4. I believe that studying abroad will be of particular benefit to my employment prospects. (Beneficial to employment)	.75
Factor 2: Students' perceptions of challenges of study abroad ($\alpha = .82$)	
5a. I am very concerned about the following challenge I will face in my study abroad program: Language. (Perceived challenges in language)	.46
5b. I am very concerned about the following challenge I will face in my study abroad program: Culture. (Perceived challenges in culture)	.55

Factors and questionnaire items	Factor loading
5c. I am very concerned about the following challenge I will face in my study abroad program: Academic expectations. (Perceived challenges in academic expectations)	.69
5d. I am very concerned about the following challenge I will face in my study abroad program: Family. (Perceived challenges in family)	.90
5e. I am very concerned about the following challenge I will face in my study abroad program: Social. (Perceived challenges in social)	.68
<hr/>	
Factor 3: Degree of preparation for study abroad ($\alpha = .73$)	
8. I have received sufficient preparation for a study abroad program at my university. (Sufficient preparation at my university)	.78
9. I feel well prepared to face the challenges of studying abroad. (Well-prepared to face challenges)	.93
<hr/>	
Factor 4: Areas for development ($\alpha = .84$)	
6. In order to be better prepared for studying abroad, I would like the opportunity to improve my language skills. (Improve my language skills)	.85
7. In order to be better prepared for studying abroad, I would like the opportunity to learn more about the academic expectations for succeeding in foreign universities. (Learn about academic expectations)	.84
10. In order to succeed in a study abroad program, I believe that I need to participate in a study abroad orientation program. (Participate in a SA orientation program)	.79

Note. SA = study abroad.

Differences Between Undergraduate Versus Graduate Levels and Between Genders: The Results of Mann-Whitney *U* Tests

To observe the overall trends of the data, we calculated descriptive statistics for all variables by academic level and gender, separately. Table 2 displays that the examination of undergraduate and graduate students' data revealed that, on average, both groups' intention to study abroad is high. Compared with graduate students, undergraduates were more likely to worry about challenges that they may encounter during the period of their study abroad, even though they were more likely to feel that they were prepared for the challenges before leaving their home country. The findings allowed us to conduct in-depth analysis because the mean differences of all variables on students' perceptions of challenges of study abroad seem to be considerable. Also, as compared with their graduate counterparts, on average, undergraduates were more

likely to perceive the importance of the areas for development for a successful study abroad, such as improving language skills and learning about academic expectations.

Our analysis uncovered a shared high motivation to study abroad among both females and males. While comparing their mean scores, however, males were more likely to worry about the challenges they might encounter than their female counterparts. Females were more likely to perceive an insufficiency of preparation in their home institutions. Given that the mean difference of “sufficient preparation at my university” between females and males appears to be quite considerable, we are convinced that in-depth examination is needed. On average, males were more likely to perceive the importance of the areas for development for a successful study abroad when compared to females.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for All Variables by Academic Level and Gender

Items	Academic level				Gender			
	Undergrad (<i>n</i> = 8)		Grad (<i>n</i> = 26)		Female (<i>n</i> = 11)		Male (<i>n</i> = 23)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Students' intention to study abroad								
Interest in SA	4.50	0.76	4.62	0.57	4.55	0.69	4.61	0.58
Significant benefits	4.75	0.46	4.62	0.57	4.73	0.65	4.61	0.50
Beneficial to language development	5.00	0.00	4.69	0.47	4.73	0.47	4.78	0.42
Beneficial to employment	4.75	0.46	4.50	0.81	4.36	1.03	4.65	0.57
Students' perceptions of challenges of study abroad								
Perceived challenges in language	1.75	0.89	2.31	1.23	2.73	1.19	1.91	1.08
Perceived challenges in culture	1.50	0.54	2.42	0.95	2.36	1.03	2.13	0.92
Perceived challenges in academic expectations	1.38	0.52	2.00	0.98	2.00	1.00	1.78	0.90
Perceived challenges in family	1.50	0.76	2.12	0.82	2.09	1.04	1.91	0.73
Perceived challenges in social	1.50	0.54	2.23	1.11	2.27	1.10	1.96	1.02
Degree of preparation for study abroad								
Sufficient preparation at my university	3.25	1.49	3.35	1.32	2.64	1.12	3.65	1.34
Well-prepared to face challenges	4.25	0.71	3.88	0.99	3.82	1.08	4.04	0.88

Items	Academic level				Gender			
	Undergrad (<i>n</i> = 8)		Grad (<i>n</i> = 26)		Female (<i>n</i> = 11)		Male (<i>n</i> = 23)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Areas for development								
Improve my language skills	4.63	0.74	4.19	1.30	3.91	1.38	4.48	1.08
Learn about academic expectations	4.63	0.74	4.23	1.21	4.18	1.25	4.39	1.08
Participate in a SA orientation program	4.38	0.74	3.92	1.09	3.91	0.94	4.09	1.08

In order to find any statistical significance between students’ academic level and between genders, we carried out data analysis using nonparametric tests due to the nonnormally distributed data sets, which we attribute to the small sample of data. We selected Mann-Whitney *U* tests as nonparametric equivalents to independent samples *t* tests to examine group differences in the subjects’ perceptions. We used a series of Mann-Whitney *U* tests to compare the score distributions of students’ perceptions of study abroad between (a) academic level (undergraduate or graduate), (b) previous study abroad experience (yes or no), and (c) gender (female or male). An alpha level of .05 was used for all statistical tests.

The results of Mann-Whitney *U* tests showed that, in terms of students’ academic level, there was a significant difference between the groups. Undergraduates’ perception of cultural challenges was greater in comparison with graduate students in the context of study abroad ($U = 44, p = .013$), suggesting that undergraduates are more likely to be concerned about the cultural challenges they may face. Further analysis revealed gender differences in terms of how students perceive their university preparation for study abroad. Females report a lower level of satisfactory preparation ($U = 72.5, p = .046$). Other statistically significant differences did not exist between females and males. The following two tables summarize the Mann-Whitney *U* analyses that show significant differences between undergraduate and graduate students (Table 3) and between females and males (Table 4).

Table 3: The Result of Mann-Whitney *U* Test for “Perceived Challenges in Culture” Between Undergraduate (*n* = 8) and Graduate (*n* = 26) Students

Mann-Whitney <i>U</i>	<i>Z</i>	Asymp. Sig.	Exact Sig.
44.00	-2.579	.010	.013 ^a

^a Not corrected for ties

Table 4. The Result of Mann-Whitney *U* Test for “Sufficient Preparation at My University” Between Female (*n* = 11) and Male (*n* = 23) Students

Mann-Whitney <i>U</i>	<i>Z</i>	Asymp. Sig.	Exact Sig.
72.50	-2.053	.040	.046 ^a

^aNot corrected for ties

QUALITATIVE DATA RESULTS

Along with the closed-ended questions, we also asked participants to respond to two open-ended survey questions to obtain more detailed evidence of their needs. The data set consisted of a higher number of response items than the total number of participants. A few students did not respond to the open-ended questions and a few of the answers were unclear or not legible due to spelling errors, and could not be included in the analysis.

Table 5 displays the analysis that yielded three significant and well-defined themes, which highlight how students understand the higher education context and specifically how they perceive their needs abroad. First, the majority reported the need to understand the characteristics of the higher education system and academic expectations abroad (procedures for applying to schools, making appropriate college and program choices, and taking advantage of academic guidance that might be specific to another country). Second, they stressed the need to understand the sociocultural context. Third, they discussed their need for adequate English proficiency for their academic level, as summarized in Table 5.

Table 5: A Summary of Saudi Students' Needs for Successful Study Abroad Experience

Domains	N	%
Understanding higher education context and expectations	43	100
Academic life (procedures for applying to schools, how to choose the school and program, academic guidance, understanding educational system, time management)	16	37
Academic skills (academic knowledge [subject matter], different teaching and learning experience, critical thinking, [academic] writing, research, data analysis, technology skills)	27	63
Understanding social/cultural context	18	100
Culture or social	5	28
Learning social skills [or learning socialization, cultural adaptation], learning other [diverse] cultures)	11	61
Country's role and regulations	2	11
Adequate English language skills	14	100
Language	6	43
English skills improvement (or English language proficiency, proficiency in a language, learning language, language skills)	7	50
Language school	1	7

As shown in Table 5, the first theme received the highest number of responses. It led us to differentiate students' responses into two distinct dimensions that higher

education demands from students: their “social capital competences” and strictly “academic competences.” Students expressed how choosing and adapting to the college academic environment properly and quickly is necessary but challenging. They stated that knowing “procedures for applying to schools,” “how to choose the school and program,” “academic guidance” and the like ($n = 16, 37\%$) can be challenging. As one of the respondents suggested, “Proper lengthy orientation and guid[ance] from the American university that I am attending the internship of the logistics, expectation, registrations, deadline, library, how to get support” and “clear academic expectations in terms of reading and writing since USA teaching is student-centered rather than teacher-centered” would be valuable. A substantive number of the respondents pointed to the need for academic skills ($n = 27, 63\%$): “academic knowledge (subject matter),” “critical thinking, (academic) writing,” “research, data analysis,” and being “psychologically prepared for the high academic pressure.” Some respondents noted that “even if you are fluent in the language, the academic pressure, and the expectations are high.”

A second major theme pertains to their need to better understand the social/cultural rules they will encounter. A majority stated that “learning social skills” and similar expressions such as “learning how to socialize,” “cultural adaptation,” and “learning other (diverse) cultures” ($n = 11, 61\%$) is very important. In some cases, social/cultural awareness was aligned with students’ concerns relating to pursuing their personal life. A respondent asserted,

We need guidance before going to the new country to prepare ourselves. The Saudi clubs must be more active with new students. The SACM (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission) should provide contact with new students when they arrive in their cities until they get an apartment [and] start studying.

Most importantly, keeping up with the “country’s rules and regulations” was said to be crucial.

With respect to the third category, a majority felt that being equipped with satisfactory English language proficiency is essential. Some categorized it as “language” needs ($n = 6, 43\%$), while others described it in terms of “English skills improvement,” “English language proficiency,” “proficiency in a language,” and “learning English” ($n = 7, 50\%$).

Semistructured Group Interviews: Saudi Students’ Study Abroad Experience

As a follow up to the quantitative results of the survey and to gain deeper understanding of Saudi students’ study abroad preparation in the KSA institutional context, we selected 17 students for a semistructured interview. We used stratified nonrandom sampling methods (Gibbs, 2008) with a purposive selection of interviewees (Creswell, 2013) to select the sample. Among the 34 students, we invited 17 for an interview session from January to April 2018 at a Saudi research university located in a major urban city. The semistructured interviews were held at the university’s spacious research center at a time convenient for the students. The selection of the sample size is supported by Creswell (2013), who suggested that the number of respondents in an interview-based qualitative study generally ranges from

10 to 40. As a quality safeguard, they were informed of the nature and purpose of the research and guaranteed anonymity. Each interview lasted from 40 to 50 minutes.

We designed the main protocols for the semistructured interviews to elicit the following: students' academic background, intention to study abroad, perceived challenges to studying abroad, and the degree of study abroad preparation in KSA. The interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently analyzed and coded for major themes and subthemes using qualitative software (see Table 6).

Table 6: Qualitative Data from Semistructured Interviews

Major themes	Subthemes
Intention to pursue a study abroad	Individual factors <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Desire to learn; enhancement of social and cultural capital Societal factors <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Contribution to family, community, nation
Sociocultural/academic challenges	Linguistic challenges <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Insufficient English proficiency Academic challenges <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Course difficulty; knowledge gap; encounters with new teaching/learning approaches; intercultural engagement in class Sociocultural extra-curricular challenges <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Finding a suitable place to live; missing family; financial uncertainty
Agency in preparing for study abroad	Gaining information <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Seeking advice from mentor and students who are in the target context (Saudi student association; friends who experienced study abroad)• Online search• Seeking advice from family members Personal efforts <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Investment in improving language skills (English)• Improving academic skills (content knowledge, academic writing)• Improving sociocultural skills (interpersonal knowledge, social norms and regulations)

Interview data corroborated the high level of intention to study abroad among Saudi students found in the quantitative findings. Students' decision to go abroad was linked to their own individual aspirations as well as those of advancing their communities and society. A doctoral student illustrated the sentiments of many in wanting "better education and better opportunities for his future"; others stated that "having the degree from another country...will open a new horizon when [I] come

back to my country.” Many students link their intention to study abroad to “family support” and some to religious conviction.

Subjects also shared a collective understanding of the sociocultural and academic challenges of studying abroad. One student captured this intricate relation underscoring the difficulty of having to “adapt to [a] new country and culture, and to adapt to different approaches to teaching and learning and to being away from home.” Most felt under pressure to succeed, especially through gaining adequate language proficiency enabling them to adapt and respond to new sociocultural environments and academic settings. Insufficient knowledge and skills in English, including accent or inappropriate expressions, produces anxiety. Doctoral students, who comprised the majority, expressed the desire to “fit in the American classrooms” and understand the “different educational system” to succeed on exams and projects. Their concern seemed to stem from the academic experiences they had so far in public institutions. Few had an opportunity to attend seminars or conferences offered by their universities. Most of the students voiced their reliance on informal contact with friends and students who had previously studied abroad, for example, the Saudi club or Saudi student association. They noted, “I have asked classmates and friends about the university and some courses and asked for their advice. I have also asked friends from my culture.” They additionally stressed that searching online provided a useful pathway for them to obtain relevant information. A female student stated, “Reading through online forums and threads specific to the city, the university I am applying to.” They have striven to create opportunities to improve their knowledge and skills on their own. Like many, a law student shows agency in self-preparation: “I spent a lot of time reading about my study and improving my language.” A doctoral student who studied linguistics invested her time in “reading English novels and listening to English news such as CNN and BBC” to get to know the target context.

Case Studies: Amira and Laila’s Study Abroad Experience

In order to support a deeper interpretation of the results, especially of Saudi students’ study abroad experience, our research design further included case studies of two female doctoral students who provided first-person narratives in the study abroad context in the United States. We selected Amira and Laila (pseudonyms) using a purposeful sampling technique to provide “*information-rich cases* for in-depth study” (Patton, 2015, p. 264, emphasis in original). The two students were enrolled in doctoral programs at a large urban Research 1 university in the northeast in the United States. Each individual interview was held at the student’s convenience with respect to time and place. The students chose the university’s research lab that provided a secure space for being interviewed. They were selected as well positioned to illustrate Saudi student perceptions and lived experience academically and culturally in a study abroad. They share certain commonalities:

- exposure to English in a native English-speaking nation (the United States and the United Kingdom) at a very early age;
- pursuit of MA and PhD studies in the same university located in the United States;

- KASP-funded doctoral studies;
- highly academically motivated; and
- academically successful in their U.S. doctoral programs.

Prior to carrying out these case studies, we sent an invitation email to Amira and Laila separately in order to ask if they were willing to take part in an individual interview. With the two students' consent, each approximately 90-minute interview was audio-recorded while detailed notes were taken. During the two interviews, the interviewer, who has a deep commitment to social equity and justice in education, was positioned as a researcher as well as an educator in order to discern how the two students have tried to (re)define a combination of factors experienced in KSA in order to fit into new academic and social circumstances. In this sense, we asked the participants to share their insights regarding their study abroad choice, preparation, and their reflections on their current experience as doctoral students. We sum up the themes from the interview in Table 7, and subsequently, we provide a full discussion of the cases.

Table 7: Qualitative Data from Case Studies: Amira and Laila

Themes	Explanatory Reasons
Intention to pursue a study abroad	High desire and commitment to higher education in the United States (pursuit of a PhD degree) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sufficient support from family (financially and morally)• High confidence in English language use (no language barrier)• High awareness of new social trends and needs
Sociocultural/academic challenges	Sociocultural challenges <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Low sense of belonging in U.S. social communities (settlement)• Perceived gap between two cultures (cross-cultural understanding) Academic challenges <ul style="list-style-type: none">• High anxiety regarding academic demands and expectations• Low ability to adapt to different culture and climate in the U.S. higher education
Agency in preparing for study abroad	Development of their own strategy <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Seeking peer or mentor support• Developing their own strategies for academic skills (writing and reading)• Developing a community/networks of support

Intention to Pursue a Study Abroad

Both Amira and Laila grew up in Arabic–English bilingual families and attended bilingual or English language schools. Their families’ strong support and overseas experience gave them self-confidence in speaking English. This experience gave them a sense of greater inclusion and belonging in an English-speaking nation. The parents of each encouraged them to pursue their academic goals in the United States.

Their determination of studying abroad stemmed from a couple of primary factors. Amira stated that “most of us come with a very high level of motivation because PhD degree specifically...you are coming for voluntarily.” Amira emphasized that the best careers for women require a PhD. She explained,

My study abroad strengthens my abilities in terms of language skills, teaching...and I have both knowledge and skills...I knew that the American credentials are even more valued in Saudi Arabia.

For similar reasons, Laila believes that obtaining a PhD could act as a stepping stone to her future career in KSA since its universities tend to seek faculty who completed PhD studies abroad. As young women, Amira and Laila felt motivated for their study abroad experience and took inspiration from the changing roles of women in Saudi society. Thus, their intention to study abroad reflects sensitivity to social and cultural capital that is open to the development of their social mobility.

Sociocultural Challenges

Despite their seeming preparedness for study abroad, Amira and Laila articulated their drive to acquire essential and relevant information for better adaptation to the new culture and lifestyles. According to Amira, getting to know a new culture is “always challenging,” and she clarified how different the new culture is from her native one. She reflected how difficult settlement is without adequate knowledge of the target culture. Laila expressed a similar view, stressing that sufficient time is necessary to get settled in the town where she would study:

I was more concerned about...first of all, personal...like...my family and being comfortable in the city that I’m going to live in. We arrived just before classes like a week or two...and...it was not a good idea because you have a lot of things that you need to figure out before you study. It is hard to...to start classes.

She further confessed that at some point during her transition she faced tremendous emotional challenges such as “homesick(ness) and loneliness.” She stated that being away from her family for a long time made it difficult to endure studying abroad, concluding that studying in “more friendly and welcoming areas” could be a key factor fostering a sense of belonging among Saudis.

Academic Challenges

As doctoral students, Amira and Laila were exposed to stringent academic demands and expectations from their institutions. Amira reflected, “I thought I was prepared, but I was not. I was shocked.” To explain her academic challenges, Amira compared how her PhD studies were different from her master’s studies, saying,

I think I was very optimistic when I became a PhD student. [...] I believed that I was...way to be optimistic which was not realistic. Maybe I was too confident in my abilities because I was successful in my master’s studies, successful in my work.

She stated that during “my first semester I had to write 100 pages. Each course would require about 25 pages...The reading here is required and demanding. If you are taking four courses, you might end up as PhD students reading up to 700 pages weekly.” Amira described the feeling of frustration of not being able fully to comprehend the texts she read.

She was well aware that there was a difference between the cross-national curricula and educational systems. In academic writing, Amira noted that U.S. education is much more focused on critical thinking that encourages students to construct their viewpoint and process academic contents in “active and analytical ways.” She was not trained in schools in this manner: “We are not prepared to write, not even in Arabic. We don’t write; we are not that culture.” She believed that Saudi education too much adheres to “memorizing and summarizing” and “teacher-centered learning.” She further explained the differences:

In the Saudi context, we are used to lecturing type format. But here it is more seminars, so you need to come to class, and you have to prepare for it...the professor expects you have read things and you come to discuss the material. This is different, I think. In Saudi Arabia, we go to class...we get all the knowledge from the professor.

As Amira progressed, she gradually learned how to handle the heavy course load, different curricular and instructional techniques, and academic integrity. Laila offered a similar perspective, expressing distress over her academic writing skills:

Writing is the most important for, especially for a person in the education department because there is a lot of demand for writing...even if your writing is good, it takes more time to revise...to check the meaning...Since you are a graduate student, you have to...you know...use specialized words more.

She pointed to a notable drawback of the instructional approach to reading in her home country:

We didn’t really focus on reading that much...I mean most teachers wouldn’t put effort into reading. I remember most of us didn’t really read because we knew that the teacher wouldn’t ask about the reading.

Laila described her anxiety about her academic ability particularly compared with native speakers of English. Laila's awareness too was heightened when she was confronted with unfamiliar academic circumstances that required her to seek support from her peers and faculty/staff members:

When I was taking my courses, actually one of my instructors said that I should not read everything, but I keep doing it. I am just used to reading from the first word until the last word. While there are different techniques of reading, there is like a research study...you should start with...sometimes methodology and mingle back to the research questions and the method, but from my thought, I think for...Saudi students, generally we are just used to thinking it like...step by step and...follow the text.

Both Laila and Amira continued to view writing and reading competences as the greatest challenges.

Agency in Preparing for Study Abroad

Amira and Laila strongly agreed on the role of home institutions in developing a global perspective that would cultivate the space in home institutions for students to build their social and academic skills necessary for study abroad prior to departure; they reflected on their experience and a lack of preparedness for study abroad programs at home universities. Amira commented, "The university is...um...it was not very concerned whether we gonna have troubles or not." Such a lack of preparedness at her Saudi institution left her struggling with adapting to a different academic culture and climate. Laila also felt that her university in the KSA provided her with insufficient academic preparation for study abroad. She resorted to Internet sources to "get general perspectives" on academic and cultural expectations in the United States. When she arrived, she sought assistance from her friend who shared the same sociocultural background with her:

[I had] first-hand experience from friends not local institutions. I was lucky anyway because I was able to find Fayza (pseudonym) and...I asked her about my program. Having someone in the same department can be very helpful...especially from the same cultural background and from the same first language...Fayza gave me her experience in the department. She also gave me information about a different program. I was able to take my time to review two programs.

Amira and Laila stressed the importance of a close relationship with the KSA government that plays a key role for KASP recipients in enhancing their academic mobility.

I attended a workshop presented by the Saudi government. That was a three-day workshop. That was about academic readiness, cultural readiness...like differences between Saudi culture and American culture. They talked about plagiarism. They talked about how to get your house, how to open your bank account...They brought students who spoke about their experiences...so

they gave us an orientation...I thought that it was a very short workshop...it was not sufficient for me (Amira).

However, she pointed out that the programs or orientations were a one-off event, seldom offering students ongoing training and support. Similarly, Laila said that information provided by the KSA government was not always helpful because it was somewhat general and cursory. In this regard, she spoke of the need for an internship program designed for students' specific majors and programs, which would help students who are willing to study abroad gain more academic and professional knowledge and training. She believed that such an internship program could "make [a] difference" in students' adjustment to the new academic environment as well as in applying for a job after completing degree programs abroad.

DISCUSSION

This study contributes to a richer understanding of Saudi students' intentionality of study abroad, perceived preparation, and their lived experiences in studying abroad. It synthesizes key findings uncovered in the present study through both quantitative and qualitative data (surveys, semistructured interviews, and case studies). The analysis of quantitative data reveals that Saudi students highly value study abroad; for many, it is a means of social mobility and cultural capital that they aspire to acquire. However, they acknowledge a broad spectrum of challenges in the personal, academic, and social realms.

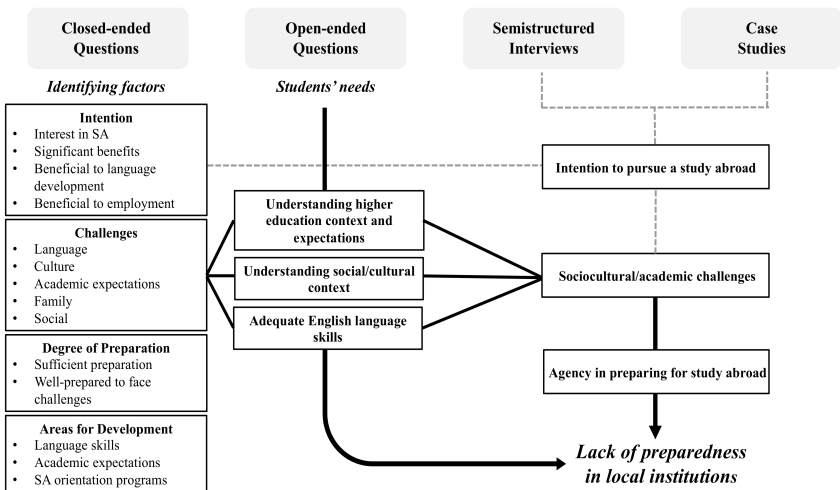


Figure 1: A Summary of Findings

The survey data show that, at an institutional level, some Saudi students do not appear to have had adequate preparation, including academic courses or training, to thrive academically or socially in a study abroad; they felt insufficiently prepared for

the challenges (see Table 2). The findings derived from the analysis of the open-ended question of the survey show three key domains of Saudi students' needs: a better understanding of the U.S. higher education context and expectations, a better understanding of the social/cultural context, and a need for adequate English language skills (see Table 5). The lack of sufficient preparation for studying abroad has left them feeling that they have limited options available for coping with difficulties in pursuing their academic and social goals in the United States or other contexts.

In addition, Saudi students' intentions, challenges, and agency emerged prominently in the interview data collected from 17 students and two case studies. Saudi students are committed to their initial reasons to study abroad—not only to promote their own social and cultural capital but also to contribute to their local communities, country, and family. What is particularly notable is their commitment to local Saudi communities, with the KASP emerging as one of the most significant factors. Saudi students elected to study abroad due to their perceived ability to gain “assets to attain higher social status beyond national boundaries” (Kim, 2011, p. 112). The choice of study abroad is consistent with their belief that it offers them the perceived rewards and outcomes, including richer linguistic, academic, and social growth, particularly when they return to their home country. In the context of the current social changes in KSA, our female case studies believed that being educated in an overseas context would allow them to contribute to these changes and, at the same time, be professionally valued. These findings are well aligned with our conceptual framework (Perna, 2006) with respect to students' college choice, specifically, underscoring the dynamic nature of variables that make up their social, economic, and policy contexts.

Our study also uncovered Saudi students' potential and lived challenges while studying abroad. As such, it underscores the significant role that institutions need to play to minimize potential and real obstacles to ensure KSA students' success. Drawing on Perna's (2006) model allowed us to delve more into the school and higher education contexts (Layers 2 and 3 of Perna's model) from which our subjects narrated their experiences. Our qualitative data has shown that Saudi students often struggle in study abroad contexts. Yet most of them, similarly to our doctoral student case studies, placed high academic demands and overwhelming workloads on themselves “to become an independent scholar through the values, norms, knowledge, beliefs, and interpersonal skills” (Gardner, 2008, p. 333). There are implications for institutions of higher education in KSA and for the United States to recognize the uniqueness of the Saudi students' experiences in order to develop support for them. Unlike our case study subjects having the benefit of prolonged exposure to English at an early age, the findings from semistructured interviews highlight language challenges as one of the chief obstacles to Saudi students' academic and social engagement. Our findings buttress the conclusion that long-term and deep involvement of local and overseas institutions and communities is important to provide “more involved guidance counseling, and additional supplemental programs and services” (Perna, 2006, p. 142) for the students.

Improving Saudi students' academic and social skills is an important task to be taken up prior to the beginning of study abroad. Based on our data, our subjects do not identify local higher education institutions and programs as playing a major role

in the development of their targeted academic skills and cultural awareness that would better prepare them. Only short preparation workshops for study abroad have been implemented at a national level; however, they pointed out that such sociocultural knowledge such as adjustment to U.S. culture, academic competences, and advanced writing are not fostered sufficiently and early in their home institutions. For these reasons, as shown in our case studies, in preparing for study abroad students relied on personal contact with individuals equipped with knowledge and experience. Our quantitative findings also suggest that attention to designing a clear, recursive, and productive mentoring program to prepare Saudi students for study abroad programs is needed. This need deserves closer consideration both from policy and practical standpoints among educators and administrators. As Salyers et al. (2015) emphasized, preparedness for study abroad in students' home country exercises a profound influence on students' global learning experiences. They further suggested that practical predeparture programs and activities should be developed, considering students' needs and expectations. It is also important, however, to involve the host nation in a legitimately binational preparation program that addresses the domains of needs to aid student success.

When looking at English language proficiency, it is important to note that there is a need for a practical consideration in order to maximize the effectiveness of study abroad. Two female students in our case studies, who each grew up in a bilingual home, clearly showed a confident attitude toward intention to pursue a study abroad, whereas others who participated in our survey and semistructured interviews appeared to believe that their lack of English language knowledge and skills was one of the crucial barriers that may bring about insufficient prospects to become a member of the new academic community. It is congruent with previous research that underscores the detrimental effects of language knowledge among international students (cf. Kim, 2006; Kuo, 2011). Our findings indicate that English language preparation must be underscored as part of predeparture guidelines for successful study abroad. In this regard, we suggest more extensive language training programs for Saudi students, particularly those who are willing to go abroad, in order to build upon the foundations of English language proficiency and strengthen their confidence in English use. As one step toward this, we also suggest the necessity of professional support for local English language teachers in order to develop a mastery of English so that they can deliver their expertise effectively to students in accordance with students' needs and requirements for study abroad.

CONCLUSION

Implications and Recommendations

In this study, preparedness to study abroad pertains to the degree of knowledge/competences and cross-cultural openness among students to be able successfully engage in a new learning context. Such knowledge includes linguistic, academic, and sociocultural domains. To maximize Saudi students' study abroad experience, below we offer recommendations for programs, practitioners, and researchers who are involved in international education.

Implications for KSA Higher Education

Our empirical inquiry underscored the need for KSA higher education institutions to identify and assess any existing preparatory programs that aid students in academic and social development for studying abroad. Such a recommendation is in the national interest to maximize the investments that are made. As Salisbury et al. (2009) pointed out, study abroad programs potentially “instill the human capital” (p. 124). That includes greater preparation in linguistic, academic, and sociocultural domains prior to study abroad. Based on our theoretical framework of students’ college choice, we recommend that professional development training for KSA faculty and administrators is needed to strengthen Saudi students’ intellectual interests and achievements.

Given the significance of home institutions for Saudi students, the professional development programs should be designed to promote faculty and administrators to (a) understand academic and logistical expectations for study abroad, (b) meet students’ learning goals as well as foster their global citizenship, and (c) be aware of the purpose of the governmental goals and projects (i.e., KASP) to aid their objectives. In doing so, qualified faculty and administrators can play a vital role in contributing to the development of effective and systematic curricula that promote Saudi students’ study abroad. In addition, challenges to access new academic and social norms and cultures that Saudi students may encounter can be alleviated when the local faculty and administrators actively seek to not only interact with the host institutions and communities but also work closely with SACM, which mainly serves as an intermediary between local and target institutions. We believe that all these efforts will fully resonate with Saudi students’ academic and cross-cultural learning.

Implications for U.S. Higher Education

In a similar vein, U.S. higher education institutions should put out a concerted effort to maximize Saudi students’ learning opportunities and outcomes, including reducing anxieties and challenges that may occur in new environments. As our findings have shown, Saudi students primarily and practically need to rely on the faculty and administrators of the host university in making a smooth transition and a successful adjustment to the academic culture. Yakaboski et al. (2018) noted that Muslim students often confront stereotypes. In an effort to overcome this challenge, we stress that professional development programs for faculty and administrators should be implemented in order to promote Saudi students’ academic choice, retention, and academic attainment, and cultural knowledge and sensitivity.

The implementation of high-quality professional development programs should be carefully considered for faculty and administrators associated with U.S. higher education to (a) have a strong leadership role and responsibility in order to establish partnerships with KSA institutions for an easier transition for Saudi students as well as to increase institutional and educational quality; (b) provide a mentor who maintains a relationship with Saudi students to guide the students to feel connected to new academic settings and who is committed to the elimination of stereotyped and biased notions imposed on the students; and (c) develop educational and professional

services underpinned by creative and analytical approaches to learning. We emphasize that U.S. institutions' ongoing efforts in internationalizing their institutions and students align with Saudi students' academic interests and professional goals.

In addition, developing Saudi students' awareness of gender equity is an important yet sensitive topic to be dealt with in the context of U.S. higher education. Saudi society has clear and systemic demarcations for the roles that males and females occupy. From the standpoint of the U.S. context, these roles often indicate visible gender inequalities. That being said, attitudes are changing, and under the Saudi Vision 2030, there is a new level of commitment to social development and women's empowerment (Saudi Vision 2030, 2016). We expect that more and more students coming to the United States will be influenced by the new changes at home and should be better prepared to make the transition. For many students, a study abroad presents a context for new learning, including understanding how to better achieve gender equity. Many Saudi women who will be educated overseas will play more prominent roles and aid gender empowerment and equality in KSA. Thus, their experience of studying abroad should be a positive factor in strengthening gender equality in KSA. Our two case studies speak eloquently to it. The two Saudi females show that the students viewed their study abroad as a means to "surmount iniquitous gender roles and provide them with a new linguistic and social space to advance their aspirations" (Brutt-Griffler & Kim, 2018b, p. 18). Of course, achieving gender equality is a prolonged process in any society. As previous literature (e.g., Sandekian et al., 2015) has indicated, Saudi male students are highly socialized with traditional gender norms and expectations; their socialization may prevent them from developing a new mindset and new cultural values in a study abroad. It seems that institutions of higher education may be sensitive to this reality and may need to raise awareness in a variety of ways that are culturally sensitive (for further recommendations, see Brutt-Griffler & Kim, 2018a).

Furthermore, building institutional partnerships between Saudi and U.S. universities holds the potential to enhance Saudi students' study abroad experience. Accordingly, it should be reiterated that a successful academic and social journey can be accomplished effectively when local and host institutions' efforts work in parallel. We firmly believe that it will positively yield short- and long-term results to meet the perceived needs of Saudi students, in particular degree-seeking students selecting to pursue a study abroad.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study are specific to the experiences of Saudi students who prepare for academic and social mobility. Despite the significance of the present study, some limitations should be addressed to continue addressing the lack of empirical evidence on Saudi students in higher education. One of the limitations of this study is the sample size. We are confident that the Saudi students' attitudes and perceptions toward study abroad revealed in the present study would be commonly observed in the general student body of KSA today; however, further research that relies on larger and more diverse samples of Saudi students should be carried out to

confirm whether they confront similar barriers. We believe that larger samples of quantitative and qualitative data will provide valuable insights to issues such as gender equality and student acculturation. Second, the present study does not include academic personnel (i.e., teaching faculty and administrative staff). Important questions remain as to how academic personnel can be a positive step toward identifying, preparing, and refining Saudi students' academic knowledge and sociocultural experience.

REFERENCES

- Alvesson, M. (2003). Beyond neopositivists, romantics and localists: A reflexive approach to interviews in organizational research. *Academy of Management Review*, 28(1), 13–33.
- Andrade, M. S. (2006). International students in English-speaking universities: Adjustment factors. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 5(2), 131–154.
- Brutt-Griffler, J., & Kim, S. (2018a). Gender socialization: From L1 to L2 languacultures. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 28(1), 102–118.
- Brutt-Griffler, J., & Kim, S. (2018b). In their own voices: Development of English as a gender-neutral language. *English Today*, 34(1), 12–19.
- Chapdelaine, R. F., & Alexitch, L. R. (2004). Social skills difficulty: Model of culture shock for international graduate students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 45(2), 167–184.
- Charmaz, K., & Belgrave, L. L. (2012). Qualitative interviewing and grounded theory analysis. In J. F. Gubrium, J. A. Holstein, A. B. Marvasti, & K. D. McKinney (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of interview research: The complexity of the craft* (2nd ed., pp. 347–366). SAGE.
- Cheng, L., Myles, J., & Curtis, A. (2004). Targeting language support for non-native English-speaking graduate students at a Canadian university. *TESL Canada Journal*, 21(2), 50–71.
- Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (4th ed.). Pearson.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. SAGE.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE.
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2011). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (2nd ed.). SAGE.
- Denman, B. D., & Hilal, K. T. (2011). From barriers to bridges: An investigation on Saudi student mobility (2006-2009). *International Review of Education*, 57(3–4), 299–318.
- Gardner, S. K. (2008). “What’s too much and what’s too little?”: The process of becoming an independent researcher in doctoral education. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 79(3), 326–350.
- Gibbs, G. (2008). *Analyzing qualitative data*. SAGE.

- Giroir, S. (2014). Narratives of participation, identity, and positionality: Two cases of Saudi learners of English in the United States. *TESOL Quarterly*, 48(1), 34–56.
- Greene, J. C. (2007). *Mixed methods in social inquiry*. Jossey-Bass.
- Hamamura, T., & Laird, P. G. (2014). The effect of perfectionism and acculturative stress on levels of depression experienced by East Asian international students. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 42, 205–217.
- Institute of International Education. (2018). *Open Doors 2018 report on international education exchange*. Retrieved April 29, 2019, from <https://www.iie.org/Research-and-Insights/Open-Doors>
- Joshi, P. L., Bremser, W. G., & Al-Ajmi, J. (2008). Perceptions of accounting professionals in the adoption and implementation of a single set of global accounting standards: Evidence from Bahrain. *Advances in Accounting*, 24(1), 41–48.
- Jung, E., Hecht, M. L., & Wadsworth, B. C. (2007). The role of identity in international students' psychological well-being in the United States: A model of depression level, identity gaps, discrimination, and acculturation. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 31, 605–624.
- Kim, J. (2011). Aspiration for global cultural capital in the stratified realm of global higher education: Why do Korean students go to US graduate schools? *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 32(1), 109–126.
- Kim, S. (2006). Academic oral communication needs of East Asian international graduate students in non-science and non-engineering fields. *English for Specific Purposes*, 25(4), 479–489.
- Kuo, Y-H. (2011). Language challenges faced by international graduate students in the United States. *Journal of International Students*, 1(2), 38–42.
- Lam, J. M. S., Ariffin, A. A. M., & Ahmad, A. H. (2011). Edutourism: Exploring the push-pull factors in selecting a university. *International Journal of Business and Society*, 12(1), 63–78.
- Lefsdahl-Davis, E. M., & Perrone-McGovern, K. M. (2015). The cultural adjustment of Saudi women international students: A qualitative examination. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 46(3), 406–434.
- Li, J. Q., Liu, X., Wei, T., & Lan, W. (2013). Acculturation, internet use, and psychological well-being among Chinese international students. *Journal of International Students*, 3(2), 155–166.
- Li, M., & Bray, M. (2007). Cross-border flows of students for higher education: Push-pull factors and motivations of mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong and Macau. *Higher Education*, 53, 791–818.
- Mazzarol, T., & Soutar, G. N. (2002). “Push-pull” factors influencing international student destination choice. *The International Journal of Educational Management*, 16(2), 82–90.
- Mori, S. (2000). Addressing the mental health concerns of international students. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 78, 137–144.
- Morita, N. (2004). Negotiating participation and identity in second language academic communities. *TESOL Quarterly*, 38(4), 573–603.

- Morse, J. M. (2000). Determining sample size. *Qualitative Health Research, 10*(1), 3–5.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (4th ed.). SAGE.
- Perna, L. W. (2006). Studying college access and choice: A proposed conceptual model. In J. C. Smart (Ed.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research*, Vol. XXI (pp. 99–157). Springer.
- Perna, L. W., Orosz, K., Jumakulov, Z., Kishkentayeva, M., & Ashirbekov, A. (2015). Understanding the programmatic and contextual forces that influence participation in a government-sponsored international student-mobility program. *Higher Education, 69*(2), 173–188.
- Perna, L. W., & Thomas, S. L. (2008). *Theoretical perspectives on student success: Understanding the contributions of the disciplines*. ASHE Higher Education Report (Vol. 34, No. 1). Jossey-Bass.
- Poyrazlı, S., & Grahame, K. M. (2007). Barriers to adjustment: Needs of international students within a semi-urban campus community. *Journal of Instructional Psychology, 34*(1), 28–45.
- Ra, Y.-A., & Trusty, J. (2017). Impact of social support and coping on acculturation and acculturative stress of East Asian international students. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development, 45*(4), 276–291.
- Rich, S., & Troudi, S. (2006). Hard times: Arab TESOL students' experiences of racialization and othering in the United Kingdom. *TESOL Quarterly, 40*(3), 615–627.
- Salisbury, M. H., Paulsen, M. B., & Pascarella, E. T. (2010). To see the world or stay at home: Applying an integrated student choice model to explore the gender gap in the intent to study abroad. *Research in Higher Education, 51*(7), 615–640.
- Salisbury, M. H., Paulsen, M. B., & Pascarella, E. T. (2011). Why do all the study abroad students look alike? Applying an integrated student choice model to explore differences in the factors that influence white and minority students' intent to study abroad. *Research in Higher Education, 52*(2), 123–150.
- Salisbury, M. H., Umbach, P. D., Paulsen, M. B., & Pascarella, E. T. (2009). Going global: Understanding the choice process of the intent to study abroad. *Research in Higher Education, 50*(2), 119–143.
- Salyers, V., Carston, C. S., Dean, Y., & London, C. (2015). Exploring the motivations, expectations, and experiences of students who study in global settings. *Journal of International Students, 5*(4), 368–382.
- Sandekian, R. E., Weddington, M., Birnbaum, M., & Keen, J. K. (2015). A narrative inquiry into academic experiences of female Saudi graduate students at a comprehensive doctoral university. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 19*(4), 360–378.
- Sasaki, M. (2011). Effects of varying lengths of study-abroad experiences on Japanese EFL students' L2 writing ability and motivation: A longitudinal study. *TESOL Quarterly, 45*(1), 81–105.
- Saudi Vision 2030. (2016). *Vision 2030: Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*. Retrieved February 5, 2020, from <https://vision2030.gov.sa/en>
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. SAGE.

- Taylor, C., & Albasri, W. (2014). The impact of Saudi Arabia King Abdullah's Scholarship Program in the U.S. *Open Journal of Social Science*, 2(10), 109–118.
- Thirolf, K. Q. (2014). Male college student perceptions of intercultural and study abroad programs, *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 51(3), 246–258.
- Tummala-Narra, P., & Claudius, M. (2013). A qualitative examination of Muslim graduate international students' experiences in the United States. *International Perspectives in Psychology: Research, Practice, Consultation*, 2(2), 132–147.
- Wilkins, S., & Huisman, J. (2011). International student destination choice: The influence of home campus experience on the decision to consider branch campuses. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 21(1), 61–83.
- Woods, M., Paulus, T., Atkins, D. P., & Macklin, R. (2016). Advancing qualitative research using qualitative data analysis software (QDAS)? Reviewing potential versus practice in published studies using ATLAS.ti and NVivo, 1994–2013. *Social Science Computer Review*, 34(5) 597–617.
- Yakaboski, T., Perez-Velez, K., & Almutairi, Y. (2017). Collectivists' decision-making: Saudi Arabian graduate students' study abroad choices. *Journal of International Studies*, 7(1), 94–112.
- Yakaboski, T., Perez-Velez, K., & Almutairi, Y. (2018). Breaking the silence: Saudi graduate student experiences on a U.S. campus. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 11(2), 221–238.
- Yan, K., & Berliner, D. C. (2011). Chinese international students in the United States: Demographic trends, motivations, acculturation features and adjustment challenges. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 12(2), 173–184.
- Yang, J-S., & Kim, T-Y. (2011). Sociocultural analysis of second language learner beliefs: A qualitative case study of two study-abroad ESL learners. *System*, 39, 325–334.
- Yeh, C. J., & Inose, M. (2003). International students' reported English fluency, social support satisfaction, and social connectedness as predictors of acculturative stress. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, 16(1), 15–28.
- Yin, R. K. (2011). *Qualitative research from start to finish*. Guilford.
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). SAGE.
-

JANINA BRUTT-GRIFFLER, PhD, is Professor in English Education and Vice Dean for International Education and Language Programs at The State University of New York at Buffalo (SUNY). She also serves as Director of the Center for Comparative and Global Studies in Education. Professor Brutt-Griffler's research interests include policy and evaluation in higher education, bilingual curricula and theory of language development, and sociolinguistics of English as a global language. She is the Editor of the *International Journal of Applied Linguistics* (Wiley-Blackwell). She has published award winning books (*World English: A Study of its Development, English and Ethnicity*, and *Bilingualism and Language Pedagogy*) as well as numerous peer-reviewed articles. She regularly teaches graduate seminars in

sociolinguistics and policy, applied linguistics, research in English in higher education, and language learning theory. Email: bruttg@buffalo.edu

MOHAMMAD NURUNNABI, PhD, CMA, SFHEA, FRSA, FAIA (Acad), CMBE, is the Aide to the President on Research, Ranking and Internationalization, and Chair of the Department of Accounting at Prince Sultan University, Saudi Arabia. He is an Academic Visitor (Senior Member) of St Antony's College, University of Oxford, Oxford, United Kingdom. His most recent book is *The Role of the State and Accounting Transparency* (Routledge: London and New York). He currently serves as Editor-in-Chief of *PSU Research Review: An International Journal*, Emerald, and Senior Associate Editor of *Journal of the Knowledge Economy*, Springer (SCOPUS Indexed). He has published over 100 articles in international journals including ABDC Ranked, ERA Ranked, ABS Ranked and Scopus/ISI indexed. He is one of the founding leaders of the Global Education Policy Network (GEPN). Email: mnurunnabi@psu.edu.sa

SUMI KIM, PhD, is a Research Fellow in the Center for Comparative and Global Studies in Education at the State University of New York at Buffalo. Dr. Kim's research interests include bi/multilingual development, transnationalism and academic mobility, social equity through education and training, and digital literacy. Her current research focuses on language education reform for international K-12 students' multiliteracy development through English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI). She has taught linguistics, applied linguistics, and second language acquisition for master's students at the State University of New York at Buffalo. Email: sk336@buffalo.edu

Challenges Facing Mexican Students in the United Kingdom: Implications for Adaptation During the Early Stage

Elizabeth Margarita Hernández López
University of Guadalajara, Mexico

ABSTRACT

This article reports data drawn from a doctoral qualitative case study conducted during the 2016–2017 academic calendar. The study explored the academic, sociocultural, and affective challenges a cohort of Mexican postgraduate international students faced during their first 2 weeks at a university in England. Twenty students participated in three focus groups, while seven were involved in in-depth interviews. The findings support the notion that the adaptation experiences of Mexican postgraduate international students in the United Kingdom are like those of other groups of overseas students. They undergo an extensive array of challenges related to the perceived extent of cultural distance and differences in individual and societal characteristics, as outlined by Ward et al. (2001). Concerning the early stage, findings did not seem to support traditional views of culture shock (Adler, 1975; Lysgaard, 1955; Oberg, 1960).

Keywords: challenges, cultural distance, culture shock, early period, Mexican international students

INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades, universities in the United Kingdom have been making substantial investments in increasing international student enrollment (Altbach & Knight, 2007; British Council, 2012). Their efforts have been concentrated largely on students of Asian origin, with students from Latin America and the Caribbean considered as a low outbound mobility group (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2016).

However, as Berry (1997) noted, international students comprise different cultural groups who willingly migrate to a different location in order to pursue or continue their studies for a temporary period.

Extensive previous research has been focused on finding out the challenges international students face and how best to overcome them (Brown, 2008; Hausmann-Stabile et al., 2011; Menzies et al., 2015; Roberts & Dunworth, 2012; Schartner, 2014; Schartner & Cho, 2017). These studies have usually grouped international students together and treated them as a whole (Delgado-Romero & Sanabria, 2007). Subsequently, academic reports on the experiences of diverse groups of international students have largely focused on Asian students, with the wide-ranging experiences of Latin American students classified under the catch-all category of “other” (Urban et al., 2010). This one-size-fits-all approach, where small numbers of diverse international students are grouped as “other,” tends to provide a limited perspective. It fails to capture the impact of cultural nuances on the experiences of diverse students studying abroad (Furnham & Bochner, 1982; Hofstede, 1986).

To bridge this gap, this study focused on Mexican students, the largest group of Latin American higher education international students in the United Kingdom (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2018), as well as the least targeted subset of the international student population that has been understudied (Delgado-Romero & Sanabria, 2007; Urban et al., 2010; Foley, 2013; Tanner, 2013). The study aimed to identify the challenges the participants faced during their initial stage in the United Kingdom in order to build a more solid understanding of what their experience abroad actually entails.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on the early stage of international students’ sojourn offers two basic perspectives. On the one hand, traditional models of culture shock and cross-cultural adaptation depict the initial phase of arrival in a foreign context with an impressionistic behavior and a fascination for the host culture. Supporting this notion, Lysgaard (1955) asserted that the first stage is filled with feelings of easiness and success in the new environment. Similarly, Oberg (1960) conceptualized it as the “honeymoon stage.” According to Oberg, “During the first weeks, most individuals are fascinated by the new” (p. 178). Opposite to this perspective is that of contemporary theorists (Brown, 2008; Kim, 2001; Schartner, 2014; Ward et al., 2001), who claim the early stage of the international experience is the most stressful period. These studies argue that stress is more acute upon arrival due to the unfamiliarity of the new environment and lack of knowledge on how to navigate the host culture (Ward et al., 2001).

While the foregoing literature suggests that the early stage is a key period in the adjustment of international students (Westwood & Barker, 1990), the depth of our understanding of the nature of this stage remains shallow. Still unclear, for instance, is the duration of the early stage or the breadth of its timespan. Brown’s (2008) study of the adjustment journey of international postgraduates in England revealed the threshold of culture shock was the first 4–5 weeks. Although the first month was contained in the broad scheme of this research project, the present study reports only

on the challenges faced during the participants' first 2 weeks in the United Kingdom. The goal is to provide a deeper understanding of what those first weeks entailed. The central question addressed is: Do the Mexican students embrace the early stage of their sojourn in the United Kingdom as a "honeymoon" or as a period dominated by stress?

Two conceptual frameworks served as the basis for addressing this question: Babiker et al.'s (1980) concept of cultural distance and the individualistic versus collectivistic dimension of Hofstede's 4-D model of cultural differences. The concept of cultural distance postulates that the symptoms and stresses international students face during their adjustment period is varied by the extent of the cultural differences between their home and host cultures. The concept of cultural distance is used here to explain the challenges the participants confronted during their early stage. Accordingly, this study proposes, "The greater the cultural gap between participants, the more difficulties they will experience" (Ward et al., 2001, p. 9).

Similarly, Hofstede's (1986) individualistic versus collectivistic dimension has been used to explain the difficulties arising from intercultural encounters. According to him, in a collectivistic-oriented society, the bonds between its members are assumed to be strong. Therefore, the primary individual is concerned about feeling connected. The opposite is said to be true of individualistic societies, where the primary interest lies in looking after oneself and immediate family (Hofstede, 1986). Because Hofstede's dimensions emerged from data captured on work-related values at a national level in over 50 countries, it is necessary to urge caution when applying it to a single society, as different gradations of the posited dimensions may be found (Ward et al., 2001). However, given that previous examinations of the individualism–collectivism constructs have found consonance in the values and attitudes of study participants, Hofstede's nationality classification is used in this study to assist the interpretation of findings.

What constitutes successful adaptation? How can it be effectively studied? These are relevant questions for which the literature has yet to provide clear-cut answers. As Ward and colleagues (Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward & Kennedy, 1993) noted, there is a lack of an integrated framework for the study of cross-cultural adaptation. Thus, Ward and Kennedy (1994) posited that the adjustment process could be best studied by examining psychological and sociocultural dimensions. Yang et al. (2006) said that psychological adjustment is concerned with the emotional and affective extents of the transition. It describes the stress individuals undergo when immersed in a new culture, as well as the "feelings of well-being and satisfaction" associated with it (Ward & Kennedy, 1993, p.131). In this present study, the construct of "affective domain" is preferred to describe the set of difficulties associated with the psychological adjustment of the participants.

According to Ward and Kennedy (1994), sociocultural adjustment is concerned with the skill of the individual to accommodate, convey, and interact with values of the new society in everyday situations. The sociocultural domain relates to the behavioral aspect of the sojourning experience. It manifests as the difficulties faced in adjusting socially to the new milieu.

To complement the psychological and sociocultural realms, Schartner (2014) proposed the integration of an academic dimension in the comprehensive study and

holistic understanding of the international students' experience. Academic adjustment refers to the "adjustment to the specific demands of academic study. It includes styles of teaching and learning at the host university, such as lecture style, relationships between and with staff, and assessment procedures" (Schartner, 2014, p. 32). The present article discusses not only the academic, sociocultural, and affective challenges a cohort of Mexican international postgraduate students experienced in the initial stage of their sojourn, but also the impact of these challenges on students' adaptation and wellbeing.

METHOD

The data for this article was drawn from the researcher's dissertation: a qualitative study investigating the adaptation experience of international students from Mexico, at a university in southern England. As Berg and Lune (2012) noted, the qualitative approach is most suitable for comprehending the nature of things. A case study was conducted at a well-reputed U.K. university holding one of the largest concentrations of Mexican international students in the United Kingdom (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2018). This site and participants were purposefully identified, in accordance with acceptable case study practice (Creswell, 2014). Mexican international postgraduate students were selected as participants because Mexico is the leading Latin American country that sends higher education students to the United Kingdom (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2013). Postgraduate students were targeted for two reasons. First, full-time postgraduate programs in the United Kingdom have the largest concentration of international students. Second, funds and scholarships for Mexican international students seem to be more accessible for postgraduate studies, especially in STEM-related disciplines (Rushworth, 2017).

The inclusion criteria for selecting participants were grounded on homogeneous sampling. The participants were newly arrived Mexican students, pursuing postgraduate studies and enrolled in the 2016–2017 academic calendar. To capture multiple perspectives within the population, this study adopted a maximal variation sampling (Lofland, 2006). The participants included eight females and 19 males, who mostly anticipated a 1-year stay, as they were pursuing a master's degree. A few others were pursuing a PhD and aimed to stay at least 3 years.

The students were enrolled in various programs, but those in STEM-related subjects took precedence. In terms of accommodation, students living on and off campus were included. However, most of them had opted for university lodging. Finally, students included in this study were with and without previous experience abroad. Those with previous international experience had been to countries such as Brazil, the United States, Canada, Japan, Finland, Spain, France, and the United Kingdom. In all, 20 students participated in three focus groups in mid-October 2016 and seven took part in an in-depth interview in late October 2016. The focus groups and in-depth interviews were used to obtain a holistic and in-depth understanding of the situation under investigation (Thomas, 2016).

Initially the intention was to approach the participants at their arrival in the United Kingdom, in order to follow their process of adaptation right from the beginning and report data in real time. This became impossible due to logistical

considerations. As a result, the participants were invited to take part in the study at an institutional event planned especially for their region of origin. This event took place approximately 10 days after the institutional stipulated date for arrival. Data were collected in Weeks 3 and 4 of the participants' arrival. Even though some case data were reported retrospectively, the comments presented here were still fresh, as they could only be referring to a maximum of 2 weeks after their arrival time.

In accordance with the qualitative research principle that "value-free knowledge is not possible" (Scotland, 2012), I acknowledge being an insider, who shared both the participants' nationality and role as an international postgraduate student. This insider knowledge may have offered the possibility of sympathetic understanding, reliance, and collaboration between those to be researched and the researcher (Mullings, 1999). To ensure that my own beliefs and experiences were not substituted for those of the participants, two precautions were taken. First, I kept a reflective research journal, which was used to scrutinize my thinking and monitor how my insights were developing as the research progressed (Hellowell, 2006). This tactic encouraged reflexivity during the research process itself. Second, being aware of the risk that prolonged involvement with the participants could bring (Guba, 1981), I consciously reduced sources of influence by not becoming an active member of the Mexican society and by not accepting social media invites from the respondents.

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical regulations stipulated by the Ethics and Research Governance Online system of the Institutional Review Board of the U.K. university under study. Access to the participants was gained through support from institutional gatekeepers. I informed the participants about the study, what their contribution entailed, and their right to withdrawal by means of an information sheet. Then, they signed a consent form (Cohen et al., 2011). The participants understood that full anonymity could not be promised, as the focus groups and interviews involved face-to-face communication. Nevertheless, using pseudonyms when reporting findings anonymized their responses. Careful thought was given to how names were assigned as pseudonyms, bearing in mind the cultural context of the participants (Guenther, 2009).

The transcript of the focus groups and in-depth interview were analyzed for themes. I used the themes to summarize what the participants conveyed about their adaptation experience (Bloomberg & Volper, 2012). Allocating a theme under a specific coding category required iteratively going over the data with several coding attempts. Thus, I categorized the participants' experiences as positive, neutral, negative, and challenging. Challenging comments were those where the participants characterized their experience with words such as "a struggle," "a difficulty," "a challenge," or "a hindrance to adapt." I also categorized challenges into academic, sociocultural, and affective dimensions, as suggested by Ward and Kennedy (1994) and Schartner (2014). This was done to obtain a deeper identification of the types of challenges the participants had undergone. Finally, I adopted a combination of deductive (previously informed by the literature) and inductive (emerging from the data) coding categories (Berg & Lune, 2002). This was based on the understanding that successful empirical research emerges from a combination of rationally derived assertions, as well as those, which arose "serendipitously" (Merton, 1957).

Finally, data were collected in Spanish so that all respondents had an equal opportunity for participation. Therefore, I provided translations for the direct quotes reported here because I belong to the same linguistic community.

RESULTS

Challenges Faced by the Participants

The challenges the participants encountered within their first 2 weeks of stay in the United Kingdom fell under three broad categories: academic, sociocultural, and affective aspects. Each category is described separately to capture the extent of the difficulties associated within.

Academic Challenges

The academic difficulties related to an overlap of administrative and academic tasks that the participants had to complete as they settled into their new environment. In the United Kingdom, first-year students are required to participate in a program of orientation activities for a few days or even a week before the full academic term begins on Week 1 (Simons et al., 1988). This is called “Week 0” or “Fresher’s week.” During this week, the participants were introduced to new academic conventions. Two challenges emerged. The first one was an overlap of activities that gave the participants no time to settle in before starting their academic endeavors. The second was the recognition that understanding academic English was a challenge.

Overlap of activities on Week 0. Except for a few students who arrived a week or two before Week 0, the participants in this study had been in the United Kingdom for a maximum of 4 days and a minimum of 1 day at the beginning of Fresher’s week. Even though a brief orientation was provided, the participants were thrust into the academic environment, in some cases a day after arrival. Therefore, an overlap of activities did not give the students enough time to settle into their new setting. There were administrative (e.g., enrolling in courses) and academic matters (e.g., attending classes) that needed to be dealt with right away. These presented a challenge to overcome during the first week of the students’ transitions:

... it took me a week maybe to settle in a small room, only because I came to the University every day to do all that paperwork ... it was a little hard.
—Arturo, interview

Even though the students expected that their chosen disciplines would have academic rigor, they expected a “longer period” to adjust. This expectation was not met. Attending classes the day after arrival was perceived as problematic and stressful since there was no time even to do shopping as classes took place every day right after arrival:

... I thought it was going to be intense, heavy, but not so much since week zero... Week 0 was very, very heavy ... I imagined, like the first month ... was going to be a bit more of introduction, basic knowledge... Not that it’d start so full on. —Mateo, Focus Group (FG) 1

In addition to the academic and administrative clash of activities as they settled in the new environment, the participants resented not being able to take part in social activities planned in Fresher's week, due to academic commitments:

... I would've liked to enjoy the Fresher's week, but unfortunately... as soon as we arrived, the first Monday, lectures and lectures and lectures... So, the truth is that I would've liked to have a slightly longer period of adaptation, or to learn a little more about how things were...
—Gustavo, FG 2

This finding is consistent with Simons et al. (1988), who identified dealing with administrative tasks as one of the major tasks to undergo during the induction week. According to them, dealing with a list of bureaucratic chores upon arrival sent the message of "being processed" like a product, rather than making the student feel "welcomed or introduced" (p. 10). In addition to the impersonal feeling this approach conveyed, having to perform administrative duties that they knew nothing about, while concurrently settling in daily life domains, only appeared to augment stress.

A distinguishable characteristic of Fresher's week is its social drive. A vast array of on-and-off social campus activities is especially tailored for new undergraduates (Simons et al., 1988). Although undergraduate students in the current research setting were mainly of domestic origin, the postgraduate students who were mostly international and who longed to socialize believed they could have benefited from attending Fresher's week events, even when the events were not targeted for them. The overlap of Fresher's week socials and academic duties prevented the participants from attending.

Schartner and Cho (2017) have criticized running different introductory activities for domestic and international students. They say this segregation dissuades international students from any meaningful integration. For example, in this study the arrival date set by the university for international students was only a day or two before that of domestic students. The findings in this study suggest this approach was unfeasible. The international participants needed more time and space to gradually transition into the academic and social setting. International students were just "getting the hang of it" when the university became massively populated by the arrival of domestic students. Thus, they lost any achieved sense of control. Therefore, careful planning should be given to the timing and length of the induction activities. These activities should be planned to avoid an overlap of the different elements and stages international students must navigate before commencing their academic studies.

Language understanding. During the first week, as the students were just being introduced to their educational endeavors, coming to terms with English in classes was a challenge. The participants indicated that listening to unfamiliar accents presented more difficulty than anticipated and had a negative effect on their self-esteem:

... as soon as I heard the first lecturer with an accent... from I don't know where... out of every 10 words I understood 4... it was a huge downer

because I was pretty sure that I was going to understand at least a bit more than that... —Armando, FG 2

The finding resonates with Dean (2012), who indicated that the difficulty of understanding the regional accent of lecturers was the main challenge undergraduate and postgraduate international students in the United Kingdom faced in their efforts to adjust academically. Being unfamiliar with different accents in the host language may not have been, by itself, the source of the problem. Rather, it might have been the combination of different paralinguistic elements, such as speed, intonations, pitch levels, and accents with which the language was uttered (Kim, 2001). Schartner and Cho (2017) explored “internationalization” at a U.K. university and found that staff were not properly prepared to address a multilingual and multicultural audience. When teaching, instructors used idiomatic expressions and metaphors that nonnative English speakers would only partially get or mistake their meaning entirely.

Brown and Holloway (2008) noted that this feeling of linguistic incompetence could have a negative effect on students’ wellbeing. The participants in this study reported feeling tension derived from linguistic incompetence during the first few weeks. Therefore, to ensure their wellbeing and academic success, this researcher recommends that students be encouraged to improve their mastery of spoken and listening practices in the target language prior to embarking in their experience abroad. Also, lecturers should be equally encouraged to increase their understanding of the challenges likely to be faced by their international students (Ryan, 2005). This may result in a less sophisticated use of the language and a better reception of the message conveyed.

Sociocultural Challenges

The sociocultural challenges the students faced during their first 2 weeks in the United Kingdom related to lack of knowledge about British cultural norms and practicalities. There were complications with accommodation, getting supplies, and unfamiliarity with driving rules. There was also the issue of dealing with jet lag and adjustment to new diets.

Accommodation upon arrival. Accommodation issues were a prominent concern for the participants upon arrival. Students who did not arrange accommodation prior to arrival and those who did faced different challenges. Like the findings of Menzies et al.’s (2015) study of international postgraduate students in Australia, students who did not make prior arrangements found accommodation difficult to obtain upon arrival in the United Kingdom. Not knowing the host culture’s way of doing things appeared to have hindered the process. In general, the participants appeared to have underestimated how long it would take to find accommodation and the requirements for it:

It was hard for me ... I thought ... it was going to be very easy to find something ... but... they asked to pay the whole year in advance ... or to make monthly payments you need a guarantor... so I lived two weeks on an Airbnb. It was tough. —Paola, FG 1

This finding resonated with the cultural, social, and academic challenges that Hausmann-Stabile et al. (2011) observed in their study of Latin American-trained international medical graduates in the United States. Hausmann-Stabile et al. (2011) concluded that “lost time and money” (p. 10) could have been saved, had the graduates been better equipped with knowledge prior to their arrival. It is necessary, therefore, to reinforce the need for thorough preparation that requires arranging accommodation prior to departure. This would reduce the strain that otherwise could emerge.

The participants who had made prior arrangements for accommodation had saved themselves from the worry of finding a place to live upon arrival. Instead, their main challenge concerned finance. There was discontent over the perceived overly expensive cost of housing, and the extra payment to use laundry facilities in university accommodation:

I think our halls’ payments are not that cheap... and it seemed absurd to me having to pay separately for the laundry. —Roberto, FG 3

Students who opted for private accommodation resented not being eligible for a university bus card that was given to students staying in university lodging. This would grant the participants access to free city:

...I had to pay for it separately, because I’m not staying in school accommodation, so... it’s like a disbursement that I had not contemplated.
—Enrique, interview

In Brown and Aktas’ (2011) study of Turkish international students, satisfaction with student housing was likened to finding the comfort and ease they would have at home. In the present study, however, satisfaction with student accommodation was based on a cost-benefit calculation. Money was a fundamental element to feeling satisfied or dissatisfied with lodging.

The basics of culture. The sociocultural challenges the participants encountered within their first 2 weeks appeared to have emerged from the dissimilarity or unfamiliarity of cultural practices in the broader context, as was found in Roberts and Dunworth (2012). The participants seem to lack the necessary skills to cope with everyday situations (Searle & Ward, 1990). These included not knowing where and how to do grocery shopping and being unfamiliar with lefthand-side driving (Brown & Holloway, 2008; Furnham & Bochner, 1982). This difficulty did not seem to stem from the complexity of the actions themselves, but from being exposed to a new activity without the necessary prior knowledge of how to do them:

...when you first arrive and you’ve never seen it, you wonder ‘and now what do I do?’ Once you learn it, you realize it’s very easy. For example, in the supermarket, that you can go ahead with your basket and pay by yourself.
—Mateo, FG 1

Schild (1962) noted that suitable procedures are needed for effective communication to occur between the foreign student and the host culture. Furnham and Bochner (1982) and Furnham (1993) observed that in the beginning people in new cultures tend to be socially unskilled and challenged by the norms and daily

practices of the host society; errands that were not an issue in their home countries become problematic in the new environment. In view of this, it is necessary to familiarize international students with the cultural rituals of their host countries, such as how to go grocery shopping and use self-service machines.

Another challenge during the first days related to the rules of the road, included driving on the left side and unfamiliar road signs. The participants considered this as a “very big difference” between the United Kingdom and Mexico where driving is on the right:

...I come to the University in bicycle, so at the beginning it was a challenge to know how to move on the bicycle, if I have to bike on the sidewalk...on the road, and then, on the left side. —Paloma, FG 3

When I arrived, it was difficult for me because, at least in London, it tells you what side you have to look to, and that’s not the case here. —Isabel, FG 1

The negative emotional impact of lacking culture-specific knowledge and having limited financial resources calls for concerted action by both students and institutions. On the one hand, host institutions could devote more effort to providing students with assistance on daily matters. On the other, students could increase their awareness about the living standards of the United Kingdom prior to arrival. This could help them to prepare financially, thereby reducing the financial stress they could encounter upon arrival.

Physical health adjustment. Brown and Holloway (2008) noted that moving to a foreign context triggered not only psychological and affective disruptions, but also physical detachment. The findings of this study supported this. The change of time zone from the eastern to the western hemisphere presented two internal physical health challenges to the adjustment of the participants. These are the re-regulation of the body clock and change of diet habits. Poor sleeping and eating habits interfered with the participants’ capacity to perform optimally in the new environment. Jet lag was reported to have lasted between 5–14 days. The symptoms were perceived differently depending on how much it had interfered with school performance. For instance, participants who arrived a few days earlier than the beginning of Week 0 expressed fewer sleep disruptions. These did not perceive jet lag as a hindrance to their adaptation:

It lasted like 5 days... it wasn’t really a problem. —Enrique, interview

However, students who arrived a day before the beginning of Fresher’s week experienced greater difficulty in adjusting. For these, jet lag symptoms conflicted with academic duties:

... the first two weeks... I was falling asleep in class. —Mateo, FG 1

The other welfare concern was adjusting to British diets. Adapting to English food was reported as one of the recurrent and “most difficult” aspects of adjustment upon arrival.

The food, I'm missing it a lot... —Armando, FG 2

The difference between Mexican and British cuisine was perceived as significant:

Food seems bland... and expensive to me; ... it's not worth what it costs ... doesn't seem tasty to me. —Arturo, interview

The participants' dislike for the new type of food brought preoccupation with the negative impact it could have on health. They were conscious of the fact that they needed to adjust to the food quickly:

... solving the food issue... was one of my priorities, the first few days... because otherwise "I'm not going to eat here, I'll lose weight," and I said, "this can't be possible." —Pablo, interview

This finding supports previous research, which recognizes an evident link between food and cultural identity (Warde, 1997). Similarly, Brown and Aktas (2011) revealed food and the socialization around it as a main concern for Turkish international students. In this study, however, there were no associations found between the dislike for local food, as it pertains to the longing for the situational context in which home meals were taken.

Affective Challenges

Within the first 2 weeks, the participants' wellbeing was influenced by homesickness and financial stress, in different ways and to different extents.

Homesickness. Concerning homesickness, the participant's views were varied by how distal or proximal the host culture was perceived. The students who perceived the U.K. environment as "familiar" did not seem to miss home:

... I don't feel that I'm in England... I never thought that things were so, so similar in many ways... I feel that I'm in Mexico. Well... in a familiar place. —Sara, interview

Conversely, the feeling of homesickness was stronger when the U.K. culture was perceived as very different and distant from their own:

... in the United States, there are a lot of people from Mexico ... you still feel more like sheltered than in here, right? Here you still struggle a little, you struggle. —Jorge, interview

These findings support the previous research claims that there is a relationship between the cultural distance and the level of difficulty in settling in the new environment (Babiker et al., 1980). As Furnham and Alibhai (1985) and Searle and Ward (1990) noted, the greater the cultural gap between home and host culture, the more difficulties the student would face to adapt. However, homesickness was not seen as a difficulty when it was understood as an expected challenge to face, regardless of the degree of cultural familiarity:

The other part, the emotional, that I miss my mom and my boyfriend, ... here, there and everywhere ... it would've been the same. —Ariana, FG 2

The foregoing assertion partially opposes Searle and Ward (1990), who acknowledged that expected difficulties and cultural distance were the most influential factors of sociocultural adjustment. However, the findings of this study show that those two elements (expecting a difficulty and cultural gap) did not have to happen simultaneously to influence the difficulty of settling into the new culture.

Financial stress. In corroboration of Brown and Holloway (2008) and Newsome and Cooper (2016), the participants indicated that finances were a source of stress. The stress emanated from the struggle to meet the high living costs in the United Kingdom. Three related causes were revealed. The first related to the exchange rate. There was a significant disparity between Mexican peso and the British pound, and the product of this appeared to have taken a toll on the students' emotional wellbeing:

I had pesos, not pounds, so I was paying in pesos, but it does hurt you a bit.
—Isabel, FG 1

The second related to not knowing how to manage their own expenses, due to an apparent overreliance on scholarship. The students found managing day-to-day financial responsibilities through budgeting as a significant challenge:

It's a bit difficult ... to manage the money you've got ... for the first days and all of a sudden, it gets extended because it so happens that [sponsor] deposits ... on the fifth working day. So, you're with the same twenty pounds in the pocket ... it's like a stress you've got that doesn't let you start enjoying the experience from the beginning. —Gustavo, FG 2

Third, the overreliance on scholarship led to a feeling of financial and emotional insecurity:

I didn't come with a lot of money ... and I said to myself 'this has to be enough' until [sponsor's name] makes our deposit ... So, I was a bit ..., too apprehensive the first two weeks; I couldn't enjoy all of it. —Armando, FG 2

The psychological implication of being financially constrained produced the feeling of stress and apprehension that negatively affected the participants' intellectual capacity and ability to concentrate on the academic tasks they were to pursue (Haushofer & Fehr, 2014). Thus, Schulte and Choudaha (2014) and Brown and Holloway (2008) recommended that prospective students seek predeparture, forthright and detailed information about the complete costs of attendance as a helpful tactic for the students to be better prepared (Schulte & Choudaha, 2014).

DISCUSSION

Participants' Adaptation in the First 2 Weeks

The findings from this research support the notion that Mexican postgraduate international students were comparable to other groups of overseas students in undergoing an extensive array of challenges, as asserted by Ward et al. (2001). To varying degrees, these difficulties included academic, linguistic, sociocultural, physiological, affective, and financial challenges. Lack of time, inadequate preparation, personality, and societal attributes played an influential role in the type of challenges the participants experienced during their first 2 weeks in the United Kingdom.

The university where this study took place advised its international students to arrive the Wednesday or Thursday prior to the beginning of Week 0. However, the majority of the participants arrived only a couple of days before the beginning of Fresher's week. This gave them little or no time to adjust. Even when the participants arrived on the institutionally advised day, an overlap of activities hampered the students' adaptation. The participants had to deal with not only university and outside life, but also academic and administrative demands. Also, physiological factors, such as jet lag, interfered with the students' academic performance. A dearth of opportunities for the participants to socialize with domestic students featured equally as a hindrance to adaptation.

Hofstede (1986) and Urban et al. (2010) have classified Latin America as a collectivist society. Societies classified as such, including Mexico, tend to prioritize the building of social relationships to foster its members' wellbeing. It is not surprising, therefore, that the participants longed for more social activities that would have increased their confidence and connection with the host environment. But not all students from collective societies seek this level of connectedness. Peacock and Harrison (2009) highlighted how Chinese students, who originate from a collectivist society, exhibited some of the most excluding behaviors among other groups of students. This might suggest that while some attributes of a collectivist society are shared, others are not. Therefore, the change of circumstances that tax international students' personal resources and result in psychological discomfort may depend also on other cultural and personal micro level characteristics.

The lack of information about the English culture and university life in the United Kingdom emerged as major hindrances to a smooth transition. This lack of culture-specific knowledge was also found to be an obstacle to the acculturation of a group of Dominican international students in the United States (Urban et al., 2010). Being unaware about what the participants would encounter culturally, socially, administratively and academically upon arrival caused them varying degrees of stress during their first 2 weeks of stay. This included lack of knowledge about how to look for suitable accommodation, enroll in courses, do grocery shopping, and real costs of living and studying in the United Kingdom. These hindrances stalled the adaptation of the participants to on-and-off-campus U.K. contexts.

Concerning accommodation, the findings showed that students who opted out of university's lodging felt adrift. Institutional guidance was apparently not available to

students who decided to stay in private housing. These students had to discover by themselves how to deal with bureaucratic procedures. This is consistent with Roberts and Dunworth's (2012) conclusion that students who did not request the university housing felt left alone. This seems to indicate different treatment and level of support for students staying in or out of university. Opting for university accommodations apparently granted students "privileges." This suggests the need for U.K. universities to inform international students about the advantages and disadvantages of choosing university versus private accommodations. This might assist them in making an informed decision about their choice of housing and diminish the stress experienced on arrival.

The findings related to financial stress appear to resonate with Menzies et al. (2015), who noted that a miscalculation of the costs of living and studying in the host country hindered the experience of the international postgraduate students in their study. Not knowing what the housing service should include, and what it actually entails, contributed to the participants' budgeting oversight (Roberts & Dunworth, 2012). As Cemmell and Bekhradnia (2008) pointed out, the total cost of getting a degree overseas include not only the tuition and fees, but also living costs and other expenses. Therefore, having the necessary information beforehand might help to raise awareness about the living standards in the United Kingdom. This would help the financial preparation of the students for the experience abroad. This groundwork could in turn help to lessen the financial stress faced on arrival (Ward et al., 2001).

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study do not seem to support traditional views of culture shock (Lysgaard, 1955; Oberg, 1960), in which the early stage of the experience is marked by feelings of excitement. Like Brown (2008), who also investigated postgraduate internationals studying in the United Kingdom, this research identified the first 2 weeks as a period where stress and uncertainty were at peak. The participants did not feel that their first stage upon arrival corresponded with those of a honeymoon phase. Rather, they likened their experiences to those of the crisis stage, where travelers actually experience "the real conditions of life" (Oberg, 1960, p. 178). This is when sojourners undergo a significant amount of stress, as stipulated by the contemporary theories of culture shock and cross-cultural adaptation (Ward et al., 2001).

With respect to cultural distance, the findings seem to support the theory that the greater the cultural gap between home and host culture, the more difficulties the student would face in adapting (Babiker et al., 1980; Furnham & Alibhai, 1985; Furnham & Bochner, 1982; Searle & Ward, 1990). However, the breadth of this cultural gap seemed to be associated with how distal or proximal the host culture was perceived by the participants, rather than with actual regional and geographic distance. In other words, the participants' perception of a cultural gap, and the ease or difficulty to adapt, differed despite belonging to the same cultural group. While some participants perceived the U.K. culture as very different and were finding it difficult to settle, others, even without previous experience, felt the culture was very similar to their own and were finding it easier to settle. Thus, this research supports the notion that there is a relationship between cultural distance and level of difficulty

in settling into the new environment. It highlights the claim that the extent of difference could be perceived or real (Babiker et al., 1980). This finding might help in promoting the view that adapting to a new culture requires shared national and cultural traits, as posited by Hofstede (1986). However, adjustment seemed to go beyond these macro level characteristics. It included individual personality features that may have impacted the sojourners' perception of the host culture (Ward et al., 2001).

Implications

Based on the findings, consideration should be given to providing a longer period for international students to arrive and settle before they are to start pursuing their academic goals. Such allowance would provide the students more time to find their way around, in and outside campus. This will help them to deal with physiological adjustment issues, such as jet lag, before encountering administrative and academic demands that would induce stress. Likewise, it calls for more thorough pre-arrival preparation to better equip international students for the challenges likely to be faced upon arrival.

REFERENCES

- Adler, P. S. (1975). The transitional experience: An alternative view of culture shock. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 15*(3), 13–23.
- Altbach, P. G., & Knight, J. (2007). The internationalisation of higher education: Motivations and realities. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 11*(3–4), 290–305.
- Babiker, I. E., Cox, J. L., & Miller, P. M. C. (1980). The measurement of cultural distance and its relationship to medical consultation, symptomatology, and examination performance of overseas students at Edinburgh University. *Social Psychiatry, 15*(3), 109–116.
- Berg, B. L., & Lune, H. (2012). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences*. Pearson.
- Berry, J. W. (1997). Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation. *Applied Psychology, 46*(1), 5–34.
- Bloomberg, L. D., & Volpe, M. (2012). *Completing your qualitative dissertation: A road map from beginning to end*. SAGE.
- British Council. (2012). *The shape of things to come: Higher education global trends and emerging opportunities to 2020*. https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/the_shape_of_things_to_come_-_higher_education_global_trends_and_emerging_opportunities_to_2020.pdf
- Brown, L. (2008). *The adjustment journey of international postgraduate students at a university in England: An ethnography* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Bournemouth, UK.
- Brown, L., & Aktas, G. (2011). Fear of the unknown: A pre-departure qualitative study of Turkish international students. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling, 39*(4), 339–355.

- Brown, L., & Holloway, I. (2008). The initial stage of the international sojourn: Excitement or culture shock? *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 36(1), 33–49.
- Cemmel, J., & Bekhradnia, B. (2008). *The bologna process and the UK's international student market*. Higher Education Policy Institute.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2011). *Research methods in education* (7th ed). Routledge.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Educational research: Planning, conducting and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (4th ed). Pearson.
- Dean, A. (2012). Improving the learning experience for international students. *International Journal of Management Cases*, 14(1), 207–222.
- Delgado-Romero, A., & Sanabria, S. (2007). Counseling international students from Latin America and the Caribbean. In H. Singaravelu & M. Pope (Eds.), *A handbook for counseling international students in the United States* (pp. 150–172). American Counseling Association.
- Foley, A. G. (2013). *The role of international school counselors in US college recruitment strategy* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Delaware.
- Furnham, A. (1993). Communicating in foreign lands: The cause, consequences, and cures of culture shock. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 6(1), 91–109.
- Furnham, A., & Alibhai, N. (1985). Value differences in foreign students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 9(4), 365–375.
- Furnham, A., & Bochner, S. (1982). Social difficulty in a foreign culture: An empirical analysis of culture shock. In S. Bochner (Ed.), *Cultures in contact: Studies in cross-cultural interaction*, 1 (pp. 161–198). Pergamon Press.
- Guba, E. (1981). Criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of naturalistic inquiries. *Educational Communication and Technology Journal*, 29(2), 75–91.
- Guenther, K. M. (2009). The politics of names: Rethinking the methodological and ethical significance of naming people, organizations, and places. *Qualitative Research*, 9(4), 411–421.
- Haushofer, J., & Fehr, E. (2014). On the psychology of poverty. *Science*, 344(6186), 862–867.
- Hausmann-Stabile, C., Zayas, L. H., Hauser, D., Carvajal, C., Mejia, C., & Nieves, D. (2011). Challenges and solutions for Latin American-trained international medical graduates in psychiatry residency. *International Journal of Mental Health*, 40(3), 29–40.
- Hellawell, D. (2006). Inside-out: analysis of the insider-outsider concept as a heuristic device to develop reflexivity in students doing qualitative research. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 11(4), 483–494.
- Higher Education Statistics Agency. (2018). *HESA Data Request 56952. 2014/15-2016/17 HESA Student Record*. Retrieved April 27, 2018, from <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/services/custom/data>
- Hofstede, G. (1986). Cultural differences in teaching and learning. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 10(3), 301–320.
- Kim, Y. Y. (2001). *Becoming intercultural: An integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation*. SAGE.

- Lofland, J. (2006). *Analyzing social settings. A guide to qualitative observation and analysis* (4th ed). Wadsworth.
- Lysgaard, S. (1955). Adjustment in a foreign society: Norwegian Fulbright grantees visiting the United States. *International Social Science Bulletin*, 7, 45–51.
- Menzies, J. L., Baron, R., & Zutshi, A. (2015). Transitional experiences of international postgraduate students utilising a peer mentor programme. *Educational Research*, 57(4), 403–419.
- Merton, R. K. (1957). *Social theory and social structure*. Free Press.
- Mullings, B. (1999). Insider or outsider, both or neither: Some dilemmas of interviewing in a cross-cultural setting. *Geoforum*, 30(4), 337–350.
- Newsome, L. K., & Cooper, P. (2016). International students' cultural and social experiences in a British University: "Such a hard life [it] is here". *Journal of International Students*, 6(1), 195–215.
- Oberg, K. (1960). Cultural shock: Adjustment to new cultural environments. *Practical Anthropology*, 7(4), 177–182.
- Peacock, N., & Harrison, N. (2009). "It's so much easier to go with what's easy," "mindfulness," and the discourse between home and international students in the United Kingdom. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 13(4), 487–508.
- Richardson, J. T. (1994). Mature students in higher education: I. A literature survey on approaches to studying. *Studies in Higher Education*, 19(3), 309–325.
- Roberts, P., & Dunworth, K. (2012). Staff and student perceptions of support services for international students in higher education: A case study. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 34(5), 517–528.
- Rushworth, P. (2017). *Latin America set to become third largest global region for international HE recruitment*. The Education Studio. <http://www.education-studio.co.uk/latin-america-set-become-third-largest-global-region-international-recruitment/234>
- Ryan, J. (2005). Improving teaching and learning practices: Implications for curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. In J. Carroll & J. Ryan (Eds.), *Teaching international students* (pp. 92–101). Routledge.
- Schartner, A. (2014). *Cross-cultural transition in higher education: The academic, psychological, and sociocultural adjustment and adaptation of international postgraduate students at a British university* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Newcastle, United Kingdom.
- Schartner, A., & Cho, Y. (2017). 'Empty signifiers' and 'dreamy ideals': Perceptions of the 'international university' among higher education students and staff at a British university. *Higher Education*, 74(3), 455–472.
- Schild, E. O. (1962). The foreign student, as stranger, learning the norms of the host-culture. *Journal of Social Issues*, 18(1), 41–54.
- Schulte, S., & Choudaha, R. (2014). Improving the experiences of international students. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 46(6), 52–58.
- Scotland, J. (2012). Exploring the philosophical underpinnings of research: Relating ontology and epistemology to the methodology and methods of the scientific, interpretive, and critical research paradigms. *English Language Teaching*, 5(9), 9–16.

- Searle, W., & Ward, C. (1990). The prediction of psychological and sociocultural adjustment during cross-cultural transitions. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 14(4), 449–464.
- Simons, H., Parlett, M., & Jaspan, A. (1988). *Up to expectations: A study of the students' first few weeks of higher education*. Nuffield Foundation.
- Tanner, G. G. (2013). *The graduate experience of Mexican international students in US doctoral programs* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Michigan State University.
- Thomas, G. (2016). *How to do your case study*. SAGE.
- UNESCO Institute of Statistics. (2016). *Net flow of internationally mobile students*. Retrieved May 31, 2016 from <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Pages/international-student-flow-viz.aspx>
- Urban, E. L., Orbe, M. P., Tavares, N. A., & Alvarez, W. (2010). Exploration of Dominican international students' experiences. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 47(2), 233–250.
- Ward, C., Bochner, S., & Furnham, A. (2001). *The psychology of culture shock*. Routledge.
- Ward, C., & Kennedy, A. (1993). Psychological and socio-cultural adjustment during cross-cultural transitions: A comparison of secondary students overseas and at home. *International Journal of Psychology*, 28(2), 129–147.
- Ward, C., & Kennedy, A. (1994). Acculturation strategies, psychological adjustment, and sociocultural competence during cross-cultural transitions. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 18(3), 329–343.
- Warde, A. (1997). *Consumption, food, and taste*. SAGE.
- Westwood, M. J., & Barker, M. (1990). Academic achievement and social adaptation among international students: A comparison groups study of the peer-pairing program. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 14(2), 251–263.
- Yang, R. P. J., Noels, K. A., & Saumure, K. D. (2006). Multiple routes to cross-cultural adaptation for international students: Mapping the paths between self-construals, English language confidence, and adjustment. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 30(4), 487–506.

ELIZABETH M. HERNANDEZ LOPEZ, PhD, is a lecturer in the Modern Languages Department, University of Guadalajara. Her major research interests lie in the area of the internationalization of higher education, intercultural communication, and foreign language teaching and learning. Email: elimahelo@gmail.com

Why Japanese? Why Not Japanese? A Case Study of Chinese International Students Studying Japanese at American Universities

Jun Xu
Colorado State University, USA

ABSTRACT

As Chinese students have become a larger share of the international student population at U.S. universities, their participation in Japanese language classes has increased. However, Chinese student enrollment significantly decreases after the completion of the first Japanese class, and consequently, fewer Chinese students take intermediate or advanced level classes. This study examined the experiences of Chinese international students enrolled in Japanese classes as well as those who stopped taking Japanese after the first quarter or first-year class in a private university in the United States. We used semistructured interviews to investigate the reasons and goals of Chinese international students for studying the Japanese language, the successes or challenges both inside and outside of the Japanese classroom, and the reasons students continue or discontinue learning Japanese.

Keywords: Chinese international students, higher education, Japanese, motivation

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the number of Chinese international students in U.S. universities has dramatically increased. According to the 2018 *Open Doors Report*, the number of Chinese international students in the United States in the 2017–2018 academic year reached 363,341, which accounts for 33.2% of international students in U.S. universities (Institute of International Education [IIE], 2018). Over the past 2 decades, Chinese international students' enrollment in undergraduate programs has increased. In 2001, only 8,252 Chinese international students were in undergraduate programs,

while the number has now significantly increased to 148,593, almost 18 times the number in 2001 (IIE, 2018). This dramatic increase has brought changes to various aspects of U.S. universities, including Japanese language programs.

The rapid increase of Chinese international students appears to partially contribute to the increase in the enrollment of Japanese programs. Mori and Takeuchi (2016) reported that the percentage of international students in the Japanese programs of nine large public universities located in Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, ranged from approximately 25% to 65% and averaged 45%. In one of those universities, almost half of undergraduates who enrolled in Japanese language courses were international students from Asia, the majority of whom were Chinese.

Despite the substantial number of Chinese international students enrolled in Japanese classes across universities in the United States, this group receives little attention regarding their reasons and motivations for learning Japanese. This is particularly so considering that international students are not required to complete any foreign language requirement. Further, there is minimal exploration regarding Chinese international students in the Japanese classroom.

Using semistructured interviews, this study investigated Chinese international students' reasons and goals for studying Japanese, both in and out of the Japanese classroom experience, and reasons to continue or discontinue studying Japanese. This study offers new insights into understanding the learning experience of Chinese international students in universities in the United States and highlights vital considerations in recruiting, retaining, and teaching foreign languages to international students. The findings also make an essential contribution to the field of study of language learning motivation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chinese International Students in the United States

The United States is one of the most popular study abroad countries for Chinese international students. Earning a diploma in a country like the United States is considered beneficial in obtaining a better job as well as improving social status (Griner & Sobol, 2014; Hao, 2018; Sánchez et al., 2006; Yan & Berliner, 2011, 2013; Yi, 2001; Zhang, 2000).

Since China and the United States agreed to exchange students and scholars in 1978, the number of Chinese students in U.S. universities has increased significantly. In the academic year of 1980–1981, fewer than 1,000 Chinese students studied in limited institutions, while more than 360,000 Chinese students enrolled in U.S. institutions in the academic year of 2017–2018 (IIE, 2018; Yan & Berliner, 2011).

Regarding the process of Chinese international students deciding to study abroad, parents and peers play an essential role in deciding where to study abroad (Deutsch, 2004; Griner & Sobol, 2014; Hao, 2018; Rafi, 2018; Yi, 2001). After arriving at universities in the United States, they face academic, sociocultural, and personal challenges (Hao, 2018; Heng, 2017, 2018; Yan & Berliner, 2011). The most significant concern for most Chinese international students is academic success. Yan

and Berliner (2011) found that Chinese international students devote most of their time to schoolwork. As a result, they have little time for other interests and recreation. Further, Chinese international students tend to interact mostly with co-nationals due to the cultural differences between China and the United States (Hao, 2018; Yan & Berliner, 2011). Hao (2018) pointed out that Chinese international students cherish their circle of fellow Chinese international students because they hold essential values in common and feel most supported by these friendships that assist in dealing with the academic and sociocultural challenges.

Reasons and Motivations for Learning Japanese

Japanese has been one of the popular languages for college students in the United States. Although the enrollment of students has decreased across most foreign language classes, only Japanese and Korean, out of the 15 most commonly taught languages, showed increases between 2013 and 2016 (Looney & Lusin, 2018).

Japanese pop culture seems to be one of the significant attractions for students to study Japanese language in the United States (Japan Foundation, 2013). Japanese anime, video games, pop music, movies, and TV programs have attracted a significant number of students into Japanese classrooms. Research has identified various factors contributing to the motivation of continuing to learn Japanese (Matsumoto, 2007; Tsang, 2012). First, the enthusiasm level of the teacher significantly influences the students' motivation. Tsang (2012) found that students are motivated to stay in a Japanese class if the teachers genuinely care about them. Furthermore, teachers who create an encouraging learning environment and provide feedback also influence their motivations. Students value correction of mistakes as well as remarks on their learning progress. Concerning demotivational factors, the major ones include routine memorization of numerous characters, and inadequate opportunities to use the Japanese language outside class (Matsumoto, 2007; Tsang, 2012).

In China, Japanese is also one of the most popular foreign languages. China has 953,283 Japanese learners, the highest number in the world (Japan Foundation, 2017). Among them, 65.6% are in higher education institutions. The significant motivations to study Japanese at universities are interests in Japanese culture, Japan-related products, and employment opportunities (Gao & Lv, 2018; Huang & Feng, 2019; Teo et al., 2019). China has overwhelming been the first choice destination for Japanese companies when expanding their businesses overseas. In 2017, there were 32,349 Japanese companies in China (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2018). Although English is predominantly the first foreign language in China, knowing Japanese is considered beneficial for job hunting (Kubota, 2013).

While Japanese is one of the most challenging languages for native English speakers to achieve a high level of proficiency (National Standards Collaborative Board, 2012), Japanese is not necessarily as challenging for native speakers of Chinese. Although Chinese and Japanese are typologically different, Chinese characters known as *kanji*, form part of written Japanese, and a significant number of Sino-Japanese words constitute modern Japanese (Shibatani, 1990). Also, along with modern civilization in the first half of the 20th century, a large number of vocabularies written in Chinese characters created by Japanese were adapted into modern Chinese

(Norman, 1988; Novotna, 1967). Thus, memorization and text comprehension of Japanese words in Chinese characters are less challenging for Chinese learners of Japanese (Horiba, 2012). Also, the young generation of Chinese is familiar with Japanese culture, which is beneficial for language acquisition. First, China and Japan share certain cultural roots and traditions due to the cultural exchange over centuries. Second, Japan's modern pop culture has influenced younger generations of Chinese since China opened up to the world in 1978. Japanese manga, games, television dramas, and movies are easily accessible to younger generations of Chinese (Gao & Lv, 2018; Huang & Feng, 2019; Teo et al., 2019).

Mori and Takeuchi's (2016) research appears to be the only one examining reasons and experiences of Chinese international students learning Japanese in the United States. Although diversity on campus and in the classroom is the focus of their research, they compared Chinese international students with domestic students enrolled in third- or fourth-year Japanese courses. They found that Chinese international students study Japanese as an additional language to become more competitive in the global market, in addition to their interest in Japanese culture. In terms of their goals of learning Japanese, Chinese international students are more interested in the interpretive mode of communication than interpersonal communication. Also, Mori and Takeuchi (2016) pointed out that the current pace of instruction may be slow for some Chinese students. The dissatisfaction due to unmet needs might prompt some students to discontinue the Japanese program.

The studies presented thus far outline the reasons and motivations for learning Japanese in the United States and China. However, it is evident that Chinese international students in Japanese classes in the United States have not received much attention in the literature. Thus, this study focuses on Chinese international students' reasons and motivations for learning Japanese, given that international students generally do not need to complete a foreign language requirement.

While Mori and Takeuchi (2016) focused on Chinese international students in an advanced level of Japanese class, this study investigated students primarily in lower level classes and addressed the following questions:

1. What are the reasons and the goals of Chinese international students for studying Japanese as an additional foreign language?
2. What are their experiences of learning Japanese in class?
3. What kind of out-of-class learning activities have the students participated in, and how did they feel about those activities?
4. What are the reasons to continue or discontinue learning Japanese?

METHOD

Participants

During December 2017 and January 2018, I conducted individual interviews with 16 Chinese international students (10 female students and six male students). All the participants were from a large private university located in a city in the western

United States that runs on an academic quarter system and offers three levels of Japanese classes. I was a faculty member of the university and taught many Chinese international students enrolled in Japanese classes. In the 2016–2017 academic year, there were about 40 Chinese international students in the first-year Japanese class, accounting for nearly half of the first-year students. The number of Chinese international students decreased significantly in the second- and third-year Japanese classes (10 and five Chinese international students, respectively). Although undergraduate students must complete a foreign language requirement, students who completed academic secondary education in a language other than English are exempt from this language requirement. Thus, no participants were required to take any foreign language classes at the university.

All the participants graduated from high school in China. Before enrolling in regular classes, the majority of participants studied English for between 6 months and 1 year at the university's English Center. No participant had any experience of formal instruction in Japanese before taking Japanese classes at the university. The students started to take Japanese classes from the first quarter of the first-year Japanese class at this university. At the time of the interview, five of the participants had enrolled in Japanese classes: four were in the second-year class, and one was in the third-year class. Eleven students discontinued learning Japanese. Seven students stopped studying Japanese after one quarter or 1 year (three quarters). See Table 1 for the details of the participants.

Table 1: Summary of Participants

Participant	Code name	Gender	Enrollment	Completed quarters of Japanese
1	C1	M	Continuing	4
2	C2	M	Continuing	4
3	C3	M	Continuing	4
4	C4	F	Continuing	4
5	C5	F	Continuing	7
6	D1	F	Discontinuing	1
7	D2	F	Discontinuing	3
8	D3	F	Discontinuing	6
9	D4	M	Discontinuing	1
10	D5	M	Discontinuing	1
11	D6	F	Discontinuing	1
12	D7	F	Discontinuing	7
13	D8	F	Discontinuing	1
14	D9	F	Discontinuing	4
15	D10	F	Discontinuing	4
16	D11	M	Discontinuing	1

Note. Continuing enrollment indicates the student was enrolled in Japanese classes at the time of the interview. Discontinuing enrollment indicates students who stopped studying Japanese.

Procedures

Participant recruitment occurred either through emails sent directly from their instructors or through personal contacts. I directly contacted some participants, and some participants introduced me to others. Face-to-face, semistructured interviews formed the meeting structure. Before the interviews, the Institutional Review Board approved the process. Participants received an explanation of the nature of the study in person in English and read through and signed an informed consent form. In order to elicit the richest possible information and ensure a comfortable speaking environment, Mandarin Chinese was the language used during the interview. Interviews took place at a study room of the library on campus. The interviews lasted from 15 to 45 minutes.

The data were transcribed and subsequently coded iteratively (Dörnyei, 2007). First, codes developed from the research questions provided the basis to sort responses (e.g., reasons and goals of learning Japanese, successes and challenges in the classroom, extracurricular activities, reasons of dis/continuing learning Japanese). Within these categories, I identified high frequency item-level data (e.g., repeating words like job, grade point average [GPA], anime, major). When item-level data overlapped, I clustered them together under a broader level (e.g., culture, instrumental motivation, teacher, difficulty, academic major). I examined relationships between different categories and recorded my observations.

RESULTS

The following sections illustrate the similarities and differences between participants who continued or discontinued their study of Japanese, specifically regarding their reasons and goals for studying Japanese, in- and out-of-classroom experiences, and motivations to continue or discontinue learning Japanese.

Reasons for Studying Japanese

The participants' responses showed the multifaceted nature of their motivations to learn Japanese. Students who continued their enrollment commonly mentioned an interest in Japan and Japanese culture. Three of five continuing students mentioned that interest in Japanese anime or manga was one of the reasons that triggered their interest in taking Japanese classes. Students who continued their studies also evidenced instrumental motivation for studying Japanese. Four of five continuing students mentioned that learning Japanese is useful for them. Among them, three students mentioned that having Japanese proficiency in addition to Chinese and English is beneficial for future careers because "language is a tool," and one student said that knowing Japanese is also helpful for his future travel in Japan.

In contrast, only three of 11 students who discontinued their Japanese studies indicated that they decided to take the classes partially because of their interests in Japanese anime or manga. Only two of the 11 students mentioned that they took Japanese class because Japanese is beneficial for study abroad or future career.

Instead, students in discontinuing groups had distinctive reasons for learning Japanese. First, “*Wo tingshuo riyu ke hen shui* (I heard that Japanese class is an ‘easy A’ course)” was the most frequent answer for discontinuing students when asked why they decided to take Japanese classes. Nine of 11 students emphasized that one of the reasons for studying Japanese was that they heard from their friends that Japanese class is “easy.” They further explained the importance of having an “easy” class in their schedule. The reasons included to receive credits with less effort, to maintain or improve GPA, and to balance an already stressful class schedule. For example, D6 said that Japanese was simply an easy class to get the necessary credits for graduation. She had no interest in Japanese and no intention to study Japanese in the first place. The reason she chose the Japanese class was that she could not enroll in other “easy” courses. Thus, D6 made the least possible effort to receive the necessary credits. D7 had a similar reason. She took Japanese because she could not enroll in an oil painting class.

Five discontinuing students highlighted the importance of maintaining or improving a GPA. For example, D4 had no interest in Japanese anime and manga. He emphasized that one of the reasons he chose Japanese was because he did not want to have an elective course negatively affect his GPA. Instead, taking a Japanese class could positively impact his GPA because his friends told him that it was easy to receive an A.

Furthermore, three students responded that they needed a less stressful class when taking three courses in their majors, which required significant effort. Several discontinuing students enrolled in a particular college in the university, and, because of prerequisites and sequential class schedules of that college, the students usually selected required classes first. In general, they chose three courses in their major fields first, and then tried to enroll in an elective class. Because of challenges in their major classes, they needed one more comfortable class to balance out their workloads. As a result, Japanese became one of the popular choices among classes such as piano, drawing, and photography.

Second, discontinuing students also emphasized the importance of their friends in the decision-making process. All 11 discontinuing students took Japanese because they wanted to take the same course as their friends or their friends recommended the Japanese course to them. Third, several students also mentioned that they took Japanese because they heard the instructors of Japanese classes were friendly.

D4’s comments on his reasons to learn Japanese are representative of discontinuing students:

“I don’t watch Anime.”

“I am not good at languages. I want to study Japanese to see how it looks like.”

“Because my friends were going to take Japanese.”

“Who is the instructor is also important.”

“I don’t want to receive B at an elective class, which negatively affects my GPA.”

“I decided to take a relatively easy class in which I have a little interest as long as the instructor is friendly, and friends are also in the class.”

“Japanese was relatively easy. It was easy to get an A as long as you studied hard.”

Goals for Studying Japanese

Most participants who did not continue the course mentioned that they had no goals or specific Japanese proficiency level they wanted to achieve. Most of them had a taste of Japanese class and stopped as D4 mentioned previously. Only one student, D9, indicated that she wanted to achieve a proficiency level at which she was able to understand a Japanese television program without the help of subtitles.

All continuing students displayed concrete goals or a specific Japanese proficiency they aimed to achieve. Three students emphasized communication proficiency in daily or business settings. C3 notably indicated the ability to translate from Japanese to Chinese. Because of his interest in anime, his goal was to be able to translate Japanese anime into Chinese. C1 directly mentioned that his goal was to pass the N1, which is the highest level of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test, the most widely recognized standardized test of Japanese. He mentioned that “A language is a tool. You must test whether it works well. Since you have studied, you must get the ‘tool.’ Otherwise, it is just a waste of time.”

Positive Experience in Class

In general, participants displayed no significant distinctions concerning the in-class experience of class instructions and Japanese instructors. Overall, all participants gave positive comments on Japanese class. They enjoyed learning in the Japanese classes, had a feeling of accomplishment, felt a sense of equality with domestic students, and shared a great time with their instructors. C1 even used “perfect” to describe his Japanese classes. Only one discontinuing student mentioned that one of the reasons she stopped learning Japanese was because of dissatisfaction with her instructor.

As expected, most participants noted that the Japanese class was not challenging. First, Chinese characters are one of the reasons for the ease of learning Japanese. Also, some participants emphasized that specific grammar points were easy for the native speaker of Chinese. D2 used topicalization as an example to illustrate the similarity between Chinese and Japanese languages. For example, when people describe things on a table, the Chinese and Japanese share a similar structure. Another participant, C4, mentioned that grammar points, such as the use of the Japanese particle “*no*,” were remarkably similar to the Chinese particle “*de*.” For her, it was so straightforward that no explanation was necessary.

Further, two participants emphasized the cultural similarities between China and Japan to explain the ease and enjoyment of Japanese class. Although providing no examples, C5 said that “sometimes I wonder why American students ask why Japanese must be spoken in certain ways.” For her and perhaps other Chinese students, it was easier to understand specific Japanese usage because of cultural

similarities between Japan and China. Cultural similarities also appeared to influence the relationship between students and instructors. D10 noted that she felt that she and her female Japanese instructor shared a similar way of thinking, even had a similar fashion sense, which made her feel much closer to her Japanese instructor than to other American professors.

Meanwhile, several participants mentioned that Japanese class gave them a sense of accomplishment. They felt that they built up new vocabulary and grammar knowledge each day. Whenever they heard, saw, or used some words or grammar learned on anime, at grocery stores, or in Japanese restaurants, they felt joy at learning Japanese.

Japanese classes were enjoyable not only because of their relative ease but also because the participants had more opportunities to interact with classmates and instructors, something rare in other classes. They mentioned that the instructors of the Japanese classes were amiable and accessible for questions. In particular, D6 emphasized that Chinese international students thought it was beneficial to have Japanese faculty from China because they could ask questions in Chinese after class.

Most participants also mentioned the feeling of “equality” in Japanese class. Due to different English proficiency among the participants, some students avoided class participation in classes taught in English. D1 said that she was not as confident in classes taught in English in comparison to her Japanese classes. Since almost everyone in the Japanese class learned Japanese from scratch regardless of nationality, she felt that everyone was on the same level and equal. Another participant, D7, mentioned she felt domestic students had to put up with her English in other classes taught in English. In Japanese class, however, she felt that finally, they were equal because none of them were native speakers of Japanese. She said:

At other classes, American students are very tolerant because I am not a native speaker of English. However, it is not equality. They are trying to understand what you are saying. It’s a feeling of being tolerated. At Japanese class, no matter you are Chinese or American, everyone is the same. But at other classes, we are different because they are native [speakers of English].

Challenges in Class

When asked about the challenges of the Japanese language and Japanese class, the majority of participants responded that Japanese was not as easy as they expected even though it was not very difficult. Only one participant, D7, considered the language too complicated to understand.

First, grammar was described as the most challenging area of study. Several participants particularly mentioned conjugation and the honorific forms. It is noteworthy that students who discontinued learning after 1 or 2 years of study illustrated specific difficulties learning Japanese. Participants who stopped learning after one quarter provided a general explanation for their difficulties. For them, the challenge was vocabulary memorization because they had to prepare for vocabulary quizzes. Some students felt that memorizing vocabulary for quizzes was a burden for them even though “it was not that difficult” (D4). Furthermore, there were five

discontinuing students who said their reluctance to spend time on homework and reviewing contributed to the challenge of Japanese class. For example, D6 took first quarter Japanese twice. The first time she dropped the class because her instructor told her that she probably would fail the class. Even when repeating the class, she said she did not study Japanese outside class. As long as she could pass, she had no intention to study hard.

Second, several participants also commented on the difficulty of understanding the English explanation in the textbook. While acknowledging the class design was for English speakers, they noted that while English explanations in the textbook might be useful for domestic students, those explanations might not be necessary for them and indeed might even be confusing. For them, Chinese resources were helpful when encountering problems. D3 mentioned that she had to turn to a Japanese instructor from China to explain grammar in Chinese because she could not understand the explanation provided by textbooks and another instructor in English. When she moved to the next level, the instructor was an American who could not provide an explanation in Chinese. Consequently, she stopped studying Japanese because she could not understand the English explanations in the textbook or from the instructors. C3 mentioned that he had to consult with books in Chinese to help him understand explanations of grammar. He said:

When I review, I will compare textbooks with other books in Chinese. My English is not good. I wanted to know how certain grammars were explained in Chinese books because the English explanations in the textbook were difficult to understand. It was much easier to understand the explanations in Chinese books.

Out-of-Class Activities

No significant distinctions existed between participants who continued or discontinued Japanese regarding their experience of extracurricular activities. Considering the Japanese program offered only limited extracurricular activities, participants first identified whether they participated in any Japanese out-of-class activities. Then they were asked about their experience in out-of-class activities in other classes.

The majority of participants never participated in any Japanese out-of-class activities. Only two students participated in the Japanese-related club at the university. C1 went to the Japanese Culture Club once. He stopped participating because the scheduled activities were not enjoyable. For him, unappealing activities included communicating with simple grammar, talking about movies, or taking quizzes on knowledge about Japanese such as “What is *arubaito*?” When asked what kind of activities interested him, he listed the following things: “deeper discussion about Japanese grammar, especially grammars for spoken languages; things you won’t learn from your instructors; things about Japanese that people usually don’t know.”

Another participant, D1, stopped going to Anime Club after a couple of times because of cultural differences. She liked an anime called “*natsume yuujiin tayo*” in

Japanese. However, she only knew the reading of the title as “*xiaomu youren zhang*” in Chinese and the names of characters of the anime in Chinese. Pronunciations of the title and names of characters in Chinese are utterly different from those in English, which made the conversation about the anime with other American students difficult. She further mentioned:

I don't want to go to the club anymore. We chatted about animes before and after the screening, but I could not hold the conversation. Very exhausting. Characters' names, titles, all were different. We had to use pictures (to communicate). I felt exhausted.

When asked about participation in out-of-class activities in other classes, all participants mentioned they only participated in minimal out-of-class activities. Most of the time, those activities were required. If not required, they preferred spending time on their studies. Although extra credits were incentives for some students, others mentioned that they still would not participate unless they needed extra credits to improve their grades.

Four of 16 students indicated that they would like to participate in activities related to Japanese traditional culture such as a tea ceremony because they usually do not have opportunities to do that. However, they also remarked that they would prioritize their major class studies if there was a schedule conflict.

Reasons for Continuing or Discontinuing Japanese Studies

As noted above, students who continued their Japanese studies had clear goals when learning Japanese. Thus, it is natural for them to continue learning for individual purposes. They continued learning Japanese to achieve a specific proficiency level of Japanese, including passing the N1 level of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test. Enjoyable learning experiences also motivated them to stay in Japanese classes.

However, despite the positive learning experience all participants had, 11 chose not to continue learning Japanese. Close examination of the comments of the discontinuing students reveals at least two primary reasons for discontinuing Japanese learning. First, four of 11 participants mentioned that their schedules were full and without room for Japanese classes. These four students completed between one and seven quarters of Japanese classes. For them, their priority was study in their major fields because of the impact on their graduation schedule. For them, the Japanese class appeared always to be secondary and replaceable. For example, D7 decided to stop learning Japanese after more than 2 years (seven quarters). She had no interest in Japan when she started studying Japanese. She started with Japanese only because of her friend's recommendation. She enjoyed learning Japanese in class and felt very satisfied when she became able to talk with a Japanese chef in Japanese at a restaurant. When a friend with whom she was having dinner was surprised at her fluency in Japanese, she was very proud of herself. However, even so, she discontinued learning because “Japanese is a language I can learn by myself in the future. But graduation is about my life.”

Some participants also wanted a taste of Japanese. They had no intention of continuing Japanese study in the first place. They were either curious about the

Japanese language or wanted an “easy” class. Three of five students in this group decided not to continue because the class turned out not to be as easy as they thought because of the required effort for quizzes and homework. The other two students mentioned that they had no intention of continuing in the first place because they needed an “easy” class for that quarter.

Meanwhile, there were two participants whose reasons were different. One student stopped because she did not like her new Japanese instructor’s teaching style after taking six quarters of Japanese. Another student stopped because of some personal issues after four quarters of Japanese classes.

DISCUSSION

The findings of students who continued their Japanese studies are consistent with those of Mori and Takeuchi (2016) that Chinese international students take Japanese because of interest in Japanese culture and possible positive impact on future careers. The continuing students also showed clear goals when learning Japanese. Achieving a certain level of Japanese proficiency was their motivation. Continuing students also emphasized translation ability.

The most interesting finding is about students who discontinued their studies. As noted previously, the teacher, course feedback, difficulty of the class, and feelings of progress are four salient factors that motivate Japanese learners in U.S. universities (Matsumoto, 2007; Tsang, 2012). However, the present study’s findings suggest alternative explanations for why Chinese students discontinued taking Japanese language classes, at least among this study’s participants. Although all participants had a positive learning experience in Japanese classes, including friendly instructors and an enjoyable in-class experience, those positive factors did not motivate them to keep learning Japanese. Even more, and especially in the case of D7, the feelings of progress, achievement, and satisfaction of learning Japanese were insufficient to keep them in Japanese classes.

Another critical finding was about the myth that Chinese international students take Japanese simply because it is “easy.” These results reveal that although the relative ease of learning Japanese for Chinese international students can be one of the motivating reasons to take Japanese classes, it is not the primary reason motivating students to continue learning Japanese. Instead, the study shows that many students consider Japanese classes as a means to “outsmart” the university’s dominant GPA-oriented system (Nomura et al., 2019). In addition, considering the academic, emotional, and social challenges that Chinese international students face, Japanese classes also appeared to provide a space in which the students could enjoy and feel secure, something that they usually did not experience in other classes (Kubota, 2011; Nomura et al., 2019).

The current study also found that for the students who discontinued their studies of Japanese, graduation on time was the primary concern. This result confirmed the findings in the literature that Chinese international students’ primary concern is academic success (Hao, 2018; Heng, 2017, 2018; Yan & Berliner, 2011). As a result, whether the reason for learning Japanese was to maintain or improve GPA, to have a taste of Japanese language or Japanese culture, to connect with friends, or participate

in out-of-class activities regardless of whether the activity is Japan-related, their priority was the study in their major fields, while learning a second foreign language is always secondary. To be able to graduate on time was the most critical factor for their study.

The current study also showed a picture of diversity among Chinese international students, often considered a homogeneous group (Griner & Sobol, 2014; Hao, 2018; Heng, 2017, 2018). Although to a certain extent, the participants who continued or discontinued their Japanese studies shared some similarities, distinctions existed in terms of motivations and reasons for studying Japanese. Thus, instructors must acknowledge the diversity among Chinese international students in Japanese classes.

Further, the findings indicated several significant considerations for the future of Japanese language education. First, in addition to the interest in Japanese pop culture, the primary reason that Chinese international students keep learning Japanese is to gain add-on value. This add-on value can vary individually. Some students wish to apply Japanese in future careers in business settings. Some students aim to gain the ability to communicate with Japanese in informal settings. For example, C3 especially emphasized his goal of being able to translate Japanese television programs into Chinese. To meet these different needs, program directors and instructors may need to design different courses or differentiated modules within a course to better address students' individual needs (Mori & Takeuchi, 2016). For example, a translation course can add a module for translating Japanese in media such as television programs and movies or allow students to choose their desired materials to translate. In a business Japanese course, instructors may need to consider Japanese usage outside of business settings in Japan and the United States to prepare international students to be ready for using Japanese in their home countries. Further, while achieving a certain level on the Japanese Language Proficiency Test, usually N2, is required for nonnative speakers searching for a job in Japan and Japan-related jobs in other countries, preparation courses for the proficiency test might be beneficial for domestic and international students (Hudson-Endo, 2014).

Second, one of the challenges that Chinese international students faced is that they learned Japanese via English. Since foreign language classes in U.S. higher education institutions have traditionally been designed primarily for native speakers of English, it can be challenging for some students because of their various English proficiencies and linguistic backgrounds. As indicated by the participants' comments, sometimes English explanations provided by textbooks and instructors were not necessarily helpful for them. The difficulty may have been with students' English proficiency or unfamiliarity with linguistic terms in English. Resources in the students' native languages would facilitate learning. As Mori and Takeuchi (2016) pointed out, however, instructors are rarely proficient in the native languages of all their international students. If the development of linguistic proficiency is the primary goal, it is of importance to increase faculty with international backgrounds to provide useful guidance and individualized instruction to various international students. Also, program directors and instructors can work with the university library to make complementary learning materials in other languages available for international students.

Meanwhile, the results of the interviews also revealed the importance of being visible on campus for the Japanese program to recruit students. Many students mentioned that they started learning Japanese in the second year on campus. They did not know about Japanese class offerings until friends recommended Japanese classes or their friends were going to take the same class. Program directors can work with the international office on campus to make foreign language class information available to international students when they arrive on campus. Given that Chinese international students often seek academic and emotional support from their international peer students (Hao, 2018), it is also essential to integrate enrolled students in the process of recruitment.

CONCLUSION

Limitations

Given that interviews from only a small number of Chinese international student participants from a single private university took place for this research, the study's findings cannot necessarily be generalized to other contexts. Further, the interviews were between the Chinese international students and their former instructor. The relationship between the participants as well as my background (e.g., native speaker of Chinese, an international student in Japan and the United States for a number of years, an advanced Japanese learner, and teacher of Japanese in the United States for a number of years) might have influenced the participants' responses and the interpretations of their responses by the researcher.

Future Research

Future research should investigate students from various institutions as well as with different backgrounds to address the issues of foreign language education related to international students. Also, future work could focus on the instructors' perspectives on teaching diverse international students in foreign language classes. Additionally, a combination of surveys and interviews might lead to a broader understanding of Chinese international students' learning experiences.

Increasing Chinese international student enrollment has influenced various aspects of higher education, including Japanese language classes, at universities in the United States. Nevertheless, the (de)motivational factors of learning Japanese for Chinese international students, as well as their experiences in and out of class, have received little research attention. The findings of this study showed that Chinese international students are a diverse group rather than a homogeneous one considering that they start and continue or discontinue learning Japanese for various reasons. The results also indicated that the reasons Chinese international students take Japanese classes are not merely because of so-called easiness as some anecdotal experience might suggest. The expectations of academic success among Chinese international students, as many studies have suggested (Hao, 2018; Heng, 2017, 2018; Yan & Berliner, 2011), played an essential role in the participants' decision-making process. Acknowledging the growing diverse backgrounds of international students in a

foreign language classroom, the insights that emerge from this study can inform foreign language instructors, program directors, and institutions about recruiting and retaining students, teaching, and training, and eventually help improve the learning experience of international students in the future.

REFERENCES

- Deutsch, F. M. (2004). How parents influence the life plans of graduating Chinese university students. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 35(3), 393–421.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2007). *Research methods in applied linguistics: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methodologies*. Oxford University Press.
- Gao, X., & Lv, L. (2018). Motivations of Chinese learners of Japanese in mainland China. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 17(4), 222–235.
- Griner, J., & Sobol, A. (2014). Chinese students' motivations for studying abroad. *Global Studies Journal*, 7(1), 2–14.
- Hao, J. (2018). *Being an international student: Experiences of Chinese undergraduate students in a large research university* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of California, Santa Barbara.
- Heng, T. T. (2017). Voices of Chinese international students in USA colleges: 'I want to tell them that...' *Studies in Higher Education*, 42(5), 833–850.
- Heng, T. T. (2018). Exploring the complex and non-linear evolution of Chinese international students' experiences in U.S. colleges. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 37, 1141–1155.
- Horiba, Y. (2012). Word knowledge and its relation to text comprehension: A comparative study of Chinese-and Korean-speaking L2 learners and L1 speakers of Japanese. *The Modern Language Journal*, 96(1), 108–121.
- Huang, W., & Feng, D. (2019). Exploring the dynamics of motivation for learning Japanese among Chinese learners: An elicited metaphor analysis. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 40(7), 605–617.
- Hudson-Endo, M. (2014). Nihongo Noryoku shaken N2 juken junbi no tame no koza-jissen to sono yigi [The practice and significance of a course for Japanese Language Proficiency Test N2]. In M. Tsutsui, O. Kamada, & W. M. Jacobsen (Eds.), *New Horizons in Japanese Language Education* (pp.117–125). Hitsuji Shobo.
- Institute of International Education. (2018). *Open Doors 2018*. Retrieved February 3, 2019, from <https://www.iie.org/Research-and-Insights/Open-Doors/Data/International-Students>
- Japan Foundation. (2013). *Survey report on Japanese-language education abroad 2012*. https://www.jpf.go.jp/j/project/japanese/survey/result/dl/survey_2012/2012_s_e_xcerpt_e.pdf
- Japan Foundation. (2017). *Survey report on Japanese-language education abroad 2015*. https://www.jpf.go.jp/j/project/japanese/survey/result/dl/survey_2015/Report_a_ll_e.pdf

- Looney, D., & Lusin, N. (2018). *Enrollments in languages other than English in United States institutions of higher education, summer 2016 and fall 2016: Preliminary report*.
<https://www.mla.org/content/download/83540/2197676/2016-Enrollments-Short-Report.pdf>
- Kubota, R. (2011). Learning a foreign language as leisure and consumption: Enjoyment, desire, and the business of *eikaiwa*. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 14(4), 473–488.
- Kubota, R. (2013). ‘Language is only a tool’: Japanese expatriates working in China and implications for language teaching. *Multilingual Education*, 3(1), Article 4.
- Matsumoto, H. (2007). Peak learning experiences and language learning: A study of American learners of Japanese. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 20(3), 195–208.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (2018). Economic relationship between Japan and China. <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/000007735.pdf>
- Mori, J., & Takeuchi, J. D. (2016). Campus diversity and global education: A case study of a Japanese program. *Foreign Language Annals*, 49(1), 146–161.
- National Standards Collaborative Board. (2012). *Standard for Japanese language learning* (3rd ed.).
- Nomura, K., Kataoka, S., & Mochizuki, T. (2019). Understanding the motivations of fluent speakers in beginner-level foreign language classrooms: A Hong Kong study. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 40(7), 618–632.
- Norman, J. (1988). *Chinese*. Cambridge University Press.
- Novotna, Z. (1967). Linguistic factors of the low adaptability of loan-words to the lexical system of modern Chinese. *Monumenta Serica*, 26(1), 103–118.
- Rafi, M. (2018). Influential factors in the college decision-making process for Chinese students studying in the U.S. *Journal of International Students*, 8(4), 1681–1693. <https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v8i4.224>
- Sánchez, C. M., Fornerino, M., & Zhang, M. (2006). Motivations and the intent to study abroad among US, French, and Chinese students. *Journal of Teaching in International Business*, 18(1), 27–52.
- Shibatani, M. (1990). *The languages of Japan*. Cambridge University Press.
- Teo, T., Hoi, C. K. W., Gao, X., & Lv, L. (2019). What motivates Chinese university students to learn Japanese? Understanding their motivation in terms of ‘posture.’ *The Modern Language Journal*, 103(1), 327–342.
- Tsang, S. Y. (2012). Learning Japanese as a foreign language in the context of an American university: A qualitative and process-oriented study on de/motivation at the learning situation level. *Foreign Language Annals*, 45(1), 130–163.
- Yan, K., & Berliner, D. C. (2011). Chinese international students in the United States: Demographic trends, motivations, acculturation features and adjustment challenges. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 12(2), 173–184.
- Yan, K., & Berliner, D. C. (2013). Chinese international students’ personal and sociocultural stressors in the United States. *Journal of College Student Development*, 54(1), 62–84.
- Yi, S. G. (2001). Why do college and middle school students want to go abroad? *Chinese Education & Society*, 34(3), 48–56.

Zhang, Q.P. (2000). Reform and development of study-abroad activities in China's new era. *Chinese Education & Society*, 33(5), 91–101.

JUN XU, PhD, is an Assistant Professor of Chinese and Japanese in the Department of Languages Literatures and Cultures at Colorado State University. His major research interests lie in the area of Second Language Acquisition, Foreign Language Pedagogy, and Pragmatics. Email: jun.xu@colostate.edu

Object in View: Understanding International Students' Participation in Group Work

John Straker
University of Exeter, UK

ABSTRACT

The literature on international student participation in Anglo-Western universities is predicated on an assumption of underachievement. Reductive understandings prevail with English language competence and cultural background highlighted. Drawing from a case study of group work in a first-year module in a management course at an internationalizing university in the United Kingdom, this article explores students' perceptions of the impact of English language competence on participation. The case study, which aimed at a holistic understanding, adopted an activity theoretical framework for modeling participation and for analyzing focus group data. Four educational objects were identified with the construct "object in view" employed in recognition of the plurality of the object. The in-depth analysis focused on the object. Although the focus groups traversed a range of topics, English language competence was widely discussed. However, the analysis suggests that the extent English language was perceived as an issue was relative to the object in view.

Keywords: activity theory, English for Academic Purposes, international students, object in view, United Kingdom

The scholarly literature in the field of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) has focused on the linguistic features of academic genres and their associated pedagogies (Hamp-Lyons, 2015). This literature informs the practice of EAP teachers, including those providing language support for international students engaged in university study. However, familiarity with the genres they need to command is not in itself sufficient; international students' success will ultimately depend on how successfully they participate in their academic programs, and it follows that to better help their

students, EAP practitioners need to understand what the students experience in the mainstream. The advice we give them, and how we engage them in discussions about the challenges they face, requires an understanding of “the contexts they come from and go back to while taking our courses” (Hamp-Lyons, 2015, p. A2).

This article draws from a case study (Straker, 2014) that sought to better understand one such context: a first-year undergraduate module in management in a U.K. business school. The module was taught primarily through tutorial classes with group work as the principal mode of pedagogy. The study adopted a holistic approach using an activity-theoretical framework that enabled a broad range of factors to be seen as impacting participation. This article concentrates on one aspect, students’ perceptions of the impact of language use and competence in English on participation in group work. It uses the construct “object in view” (Hiruma et al., 2007) to argue that students’ understandings, experiences, and responses to group work can be better understood in the light of their varying perceptions of the object of activity. Focus groups were used as the research instrument, providing data on both international and home students’ experiences of working together in diverse work groups.

Following some introductory comments on the focus of previous research, my position, and the theoretical framework, the article proceeds with a brief review of the literature on the impact of international students’ English language competence on participation in university classes, followed by a critique of how participation has been understood. The research design of the larger study and the presentation of findings germane to this article are then presented. In the discussion, the case will be made that alongside our preoccupation with the impact of English language competence on international student participation, we should concern ourselves with the contexts in which such competence is perceived as an issue.

The Focus of Previous Research

What facilitates or impedes international student participation in Anglo-Western universities (Carroll, 2015) has been a topic of research since the 1990s and reported in a variety of journals. The debate has been most active in Australia, with the primary driver that the classroom participation of students from countries that share a Confucian heritage fall short of the ideal. Although participation is the matter at issue, the focus has been on international students themselves—on what makes them different—rather than their participation per se. The relative impact of English language competence, on the one hand, and culture of origin, on the other, has been central. While a number of contributors have argued that linguistic, sociolinguistic, or psycholinguistic factors have been paramount (e.g., Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Lee, 2007), others remind us that competence in language includes competences shaped by culture (Jones, 1999), or of the indivisibility of second language acquisition and students’ intercultural journeys (Gu, 2009). Regarding culture of origin, the literature has moved from the polarized early positions, which elevated the impact of culture (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991) or vigorously challenged it (Biggs, 1987, 1996), to more nuanced understandings (Louie, 2005; Ryan & Louie, 2007). In the postmillennial period, the move has been toward interculturalism (Brown & Jones, 2007; De Vita, 2007). While responsive to the concerns of reification, stereotyping, and cultural

hegemony raised by the earlier literature (Kumaravadivelu, 2003), these concerns have not been entirely swept away.

My Position

For educators involved in the teaching of international students, the debate has not always been helpful as it fosters a deterministic mindset in which the challenges international students face in Anglo-Western higher education are too readily seen as rooted in competence in English or cultural difference, with both often construed in deficit terms (Straker, 2016). This is not to deny the importance of these factors; indeed, this article focuses on the language issue. Rather, it is to call for an approach that is holistic and contextual: one that appreciates that many of the challenges international students face are generic to all students; that their participation will also be shaped by what others bring to the interaction; and that what participants in learning encounters hope to achieve will influence their experiences and behaviors. The case study that informs this article attempts such an approach.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study used activity theory as a framework for conceptualizing group work and for analyzing the focus group data. As a further benefit, activity theory offers a theorized understanding of the relationship between participation and learning.

Activity theory takes Vygotsky's triangular conception of mediation as its starting point, with the "subject" seen to use "tools" to achieve their "object" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 40). In its classic representation, second generation activity theory, Engeström (1987, p. 78) following Leontiev (1978), elaborated the Vygotskian triangle to include the social elements of "rules," "community," and "division of labor" (Figure 1). It is through the interaction of these six elements that what facilitates or impedes the pursuit of the object can be explored. In the study, group work was understood as a collective activity operating as a single activity system with learning its object, and Engeström's (1987) second generation model was adopted as the theoretical framework, complemented by Hedegaard's (2001) construct of "institutional practice," which serves as a bridging element helping to locate activity in an institutional context.

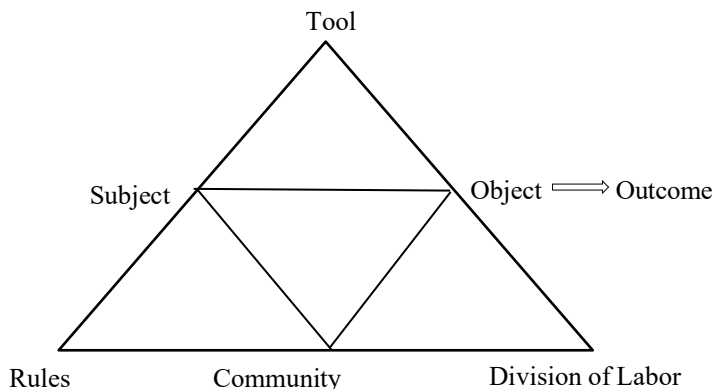


Figure 1: Second Generation Activity Theory

Note. From *Learning by expanding: An activity-theoretical approach to developmental research* by Y. Engeström, 1987, Orienta-Konsultit, p.78. Copyright 1987 by Orienta-Konsultit .

For Stage 1 of the analysis, the framework was reworked as a coding frame. In Stage 2, given its centrality in activity theory, the analysis focused on the object, understood as both the object to which the activity was directed and the motive for engaging in activity (Leontiev, 1978). While Engeström’s understanding of activity assumed a unitary object, recognizing object ambiguity—and its explanatory potential—has been a feature of some activity theoretical research in education studies. Fisher (2007), for instance, in her study of oracy in the primary classroom, noted that understandings of the object of activity differed, as the subject consisted of multiple actors (teacher and students) who did not see eye to eye, resulting in mismatched expectations regarding what was desirable in classroom speaking. The key argument of this study is that participants’ varying interpretations of the object, evidenced in Stage 1, influenced their assessment of their own and each other’s participation and of their behaviors in their work groups. While Fisher (2007) used the term “object in mind” to describe those immediate objects that shaped actions, in this study I use the term “object in view” (Hiruma et al., 2007) in preference, as it better captures the real-world nature of the object.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Impact of English Language Competence on Participation

The internationalizing of Anglo-Western higher education has meant that English as the medium of instruction is a second language for many students (Carroll, 2015). The main issues concern students’ competence in English at entry, the language entry policy of universities, and competence in academic English appropriate to the context. Carroll (2005a) considered it unsurprising that the English

language competence of international students was often viewed as the main cause of their difficulties, given the probability that most were nonnative English speakers who may not have studied previously through the medium of English. Marginson and Sawir (2011) noted that the competition among universities for international students in many Western countries resulted in English language entry levels being set too low for students to manage without English language support. Mclean and Ransom (2005) suggested that the linguistic challenges to international students went beyond the obvious; citing the literature on contrastive rhetoric, they noted that even the structure of academic texts was language dependent. In the EAP literature, the specificity of disciplinary discourses, and the challenges they present to international students, have been repeatedly emphasized (e.g., Hyland, 2006; Swales, 1990).

Several studies that have considered the experiences and understandings of international and home students working together in multilingual, multicultural higher education settings have emphasized language. Barron's (2006) survey of Australian university students concluded that for both home and international students, the language level of international students created problems, including communication breakdown, pressure on home students to edit international students' work, and language fatigue. Harrison and Peacock's (2010) U.K. study into the anxieties home and international students experienced in studying together concluded that language was perceived as a barrier to interaction and learning. In Osmond and Roed (2010), language was also seen as an issue for both international and home students.

International students are often critical of their own English language level and of home students and lecturers for not accommodating them. Morita (2004), in an ethnographic study of six Japanese postgraduates, noted that Rie, one of her subjects, ascribed her feelings that both her classmates and the instructor were ignoring her, to her language level. Ramsay et al. (1999), in a study of first-year undergraduates, noted that international students related their difficulties in understanding lecture content to their language level, and lecturers' speed of delivery and choice of vocabulary. Language and academic ability were sometimes conflated. Harrison and Peacock (2010) noted that home students were repeatedly characterized as experts, while Osmond and Roed (2010) reported international students' experiences of rejection by home students, noting one student's admission to feeling "very stupid" when working with British classmates (p.115). While the literature has emphasized competence, confidence has also been a consideration. Martirosyan et al. (2015), for instance, evidenced that students' self-perception of English proficiency impacted academic performance.

For home students, the issue gave rise to both positive and negative responses. Students reported a willingness to edit international students' work (Harrison & Peacock, 2010; Osmond & Roed, 2010) and to sit with international students to help them undertake tasks (Harrison & Peacock, 2010). These altruistic behaviors were juxtaposed to the increase in workload home students reported, perceptions that language level made it difficult to assess international students' other skills, and the undermining of home students' confidence that international students understood subject content (Osmond & Roed, 2010). Home students noted that ensuring meaning was shared led them to moderate their speech to accommodate international students,

making group work slower and more fraught (Harrison & Peacock, 2010). Some feared a negative impact on the academic outcome of group work (Jackson & Huddart, 2010). Home students' frequent expressions of discomfort working with international students was characterized by one as "walking on eggshells" (Osmond & Roed, 2010, p. 118). Zhu and Bresnahan (2018) captured U.S. home students' experiences of their relationships with Chinese international students in terms of the conflicting emotions of frustration with their unequal contributions and the feelings that they should befriend them.

It is clear in these studies of working together that the English language competence of some international students, or perceptions of their competence by themselves and others, present challenges to participation. Insufficient attention, however, has been paid to why students interact, or experience interactions, in the way their interactions were reported, or why they reported them in the way they did. In sum, little insight has been offered into the underlying motives of participants.

Use and Understanding of Participation

While concern with international student participation as the rationale for this research field is evident, understandings informed by what makes international students different have been central, with participation often sidelined or overlooked and the term largely undertheorized.

Where participation is in the frame, it is commonly understood in terms of language, specifically spoken language; for instance, all items in Lee's (2007) 8-point questionnaire, which sought a quantifiable measure of participation, related to speaking. Other writers emphasized listening (Thom, 2010; Trahar, 2010). However, perhaps most discussion has surrounded the question of silence, which is commonly seen to characterize nonparticipation (Hsieh, 2007; Ramsay et al., 1999). Jones (1999) exhorted lecturers to help international students "out of silence into talk" (p. 248), a concern prevalent even in recent literature (Freeman & Li, 2019), with the importance of lecturers and classmates creating an inclusive learning environment reiterated (Hsu & Huang, 2017). There is also a critical dimension. Morita (2004) and Hsieh (2007) referred to international students as being silenced by more dominant (domestic) participants, while Chanock (2010) saw students who chose to remain silent as exercising their "right to reticence." Others have argued that silence can be participatory; Mclean and Ransom (2005) noted that silence may mean "engagement in thought, not lack of ideas" (p. 50), while Carroll (2015) criticized lecturers for misinterpreting the fixed expressions on students' faces as indicative of passiveness and disengagement.

Broader understandings of participation are also present. Marlina (2009) noted that the students in her study considered the reading and thinking they did in preparation for classes a form of participation, whereas Carroll (2005b) identified the ability "to crunch the data" and generate PowerPoint slides as nonverbal participation (p. 90). Mclean and Ransom (2005) saw the unorthodox behavior of some local students (putting their feet on the table) as a form of participation.

The relationship between participation and learning is more commonly assumed than articulated (Marlina, 2009). Ryan and Hellmundt (2005, p. 15), for instance,

spoke of international students' "right" to participate so that they could learn effectively. Morita (2004) was unusual in employing the terms "peripheral" and "full participation," making reference to Lave and Wenger (1991). It is my view that studies into participation in educative contexts should have a theorized understanding of the relationship between participation and learning as their starting point.

From a Vygotskian, sociocultural perspective, participation is more than taking part as it embodies personal development. In educative contexts, through their participation, students acquire new competencies while building on what they know. In activity theory, the modeling of activity as a complex system supposes the modeling of participation, as it enables inquiry to focus on how participation may be facilitated or impeded, and how this participation facilitates or impedes the pursuit of the object. Given the motivational aspect of the object (Leontiev, 1978, p. 62), it is understandings of the object that have the most potent impact on what is learned.

METHOD

Undertaking the Research

The rationale for selecting a U.K. university business school as the research site lay in the popularity of business disciplines among students in EAP classes in my practice context. I adopted a case study methodology given its appropriacy for context-specific research in the social sciences where preserving some distance between researcher and participants is both necessary and desirable. It takes as a given an interpretive approach (Yin, 2003). The case itself was not predetermined but arose through contact with the business school in question and familiarization with the school's pedagogies. The research procedure observed British Educational Research Association ethical research guidelines (2011), and was certified as ethical by my affiliated institution. Following exploratory observations of undergraduate classes, group work in a first-year undergraduate module, Theory and Practice of Management (hereafter TPM), emerged as an appropriate case for study. International students were well represented in the module while group work, as the dominant pedagogy, offered a ready way to explore international student participation. In contrast, in other of the business school's subject areas (e.g., accountancy, economics), lectures were the principal mode of delivery and students focused on individual study.

TPM was large in the institutional context (>250 students) and was taught in several tutorial classes, averaging 16–25 students per class. The course was mandatory for all management students. A lecture series and weekly drop-in sessions complement the tutorials, which form the core of the module. To enable group work, tutorial groups were divided into work groups, consisting of four to seven members and "engineered" to be as diverse as possible. In the first tutorial, course tutors used an ice-breaking activity to encourage students to engage with others different from themselves with whom they might not normally speak. This activity led to the formation of work groups. In these groups, students prepared a group report (written) and a group presentation, both assessed components. As a first-year module, the module grade was not included in their final degree assessment; the requirement was

only to pass. Work groups met regularly both in and out of class. Several tutorials in the second half of the term were dedicated to giving presentations, which included a question-and-answer (Q&A) session, with each work group presenting to the tutorial group. Each work group received written feedback from another work group on both their presentation and report, a peer review process.

The Term “International Student”

Some clarity was sought for this study regarding the term “international student” and its operational definition, given the distinction between the institutional use in the United Kingdom, where it refers to a fee category, and use in the literature on international student participation, where its value lies in identifying a group of students for whom coming from abroad generally signifies being nonnative English speakers and lacking experience of Anglo-Western education (Carroll, 2005a). In its U.K. institutional use, the term includes students from English-speaking countries who would not normally be included in the understanding of the term in the literature cited in this article. Likewise, it cannot be assumed that “home student” refers to a homogenous group who have English as their native language and familiarity with the U.K. academic culture. In this study, however, there was a close match between how the participants identified as native/nonnative English speakers and how they were classified in the institution’s admission data, with all nonnative English speakers recorded as either international or non-U.K. European Union students. This classification allowed students’ identifications as native or nonnative English speakers to be used as proxies for home/international students. In the write-up of findings, nonnative English speakers were assumed to be international students and native English speakers, home students, unless otherwise stated. Of the native English speakers, all bar one, were home students.

Data Collection

I derived a broad understanding of the teaching context through observation of tutorials and lectures over two terms (two iterations of the module), and through ongoing informal catch-ups with TPM tutors. However, the data set consisted of recorded focus group interviews with students. A particular advantage of the focus group as a research instrument lay in facilitating the reenactment of the type of discussions students had had in their work groups, hence its appropriacy to a study seeking a holistic understanding of participation in group work. After working with two focus groups as a pilot, I revised the interview prompt. The final data set comprised the focus groups undertaken with students from the second module cohort: eight focus groups, FG03–FG10 (Table 1). These focus groups were scheduled in the final week of the term with all students taking the module invited to attend. The sample size ($N = 51$) comprised those students who volunteered to take part, with the distribution across focus groups determined by the students’ availability around end-of-term activities. Although the length of the interviews was nominally 45 minutes, I allowed them to reach their natural end.

Table 1: Focus Groups Included in the Data Set

Focus group	Nonnative English speakers	Native English speakers	Length of focus groups (min)
FG03	4	—	51
FG04	3	—	45
FG05	6	—	54
FG06	5	6	62
FG07	7	2	49
FG08	5	2	58
FG09	2	1	42
FG10	6	2	61
Total	38	13	

As part of the focus group procedure, the research subjects completed a brief survey of their language background (Table 2). Of the 51 subjects, 38 were nonnative English speakers and 13 were native English speakers. Three groups consisted solely of nonnative English speakers. Among nonnative English speakers, multilingualism was the norm, while native English speakers reported low levels of competence in languages other than English. Summers and Volet (2008) reported similar findings.

Table 2: The Language Background of Participants

Tag	M/F	FG	First language	Near native	Fluent	Functional	Basic	Level not specified
Charlie	M	3	Vietnamese		English			
Chloe	F	3	Spanish		English		French	
Gabriella	F	3	Italian		English, French			
Katie	F	3	Cantonese		English	Putonghua		
Amelia	F	4	Thai		English			
Grace	F	4	Farsi	Turkish	English			
Jessica	F	4	Thai		English	Dutch		
Charlotte	F	5	Kazakh					Russian, Turkish, English
Eleanor	F	5	Russian		English			
James	M	5	Malay		English		Arabic	
Joshua	M	5	Russian			English		
Rebecca	F	5	Malay		English		French, Arabic	
Sarah	F	5	Japanese					
Alfie	M	6	English				French, Spanish	

Journal of International Students

Tag	M/F	FG	First language	Near native	Fluent	Functional	Basic	Level not specified
Emma	F	6	English			Spanish		
Ethan	M	6	Czech		English		German	
Freya	F	6	English			Spanish, French		
Hannah	F	6	Japanese			English		
Holly	F	6	Bulgarian	Czech	English	French	Spanish	
Jacob	M	6	English					
Lucy	F	6	English				French	
Nicole	F	6	German	English, Creole		French	Italian	
Nicole	F	6	German	English, Creole		French	Italian	
Thomas	M	6	Russian					English
Abigail	F	7	Bulgarian		English		German	
Daisy	F	7	German	Danish	English		French	
Erin	F	7	English			French		
Imogen	F	7	Chinese				French, English	
Jasmine	F	7	Chinese	Two Chinese dialects			English	
Matilda	F	7	Bulgarian		English	Russian, Spanish		
Megan	F	7	English					
Patrick	M	7	German		English			
Poppy	F	7	French		English		German	
Alexander	M	8	English	French, Spanish				
Daniel	M	8	Russian		English			
George	M	8	Gujarati		English, Kiswahili, Hindi		French, Spanish	
Layla	F	8	English					
Maisie	F	8	Russian		English, German	Italian		
Samuel	M	8	Russian		English		Chinese	
William	M	8	Italian		English			
Lucas	M	9	French		English		Italian	
Oscar	M	9	English				French, Spanish	

Tag	M/F	FG	First language	Near native	Fluent	Functional	Basic	Level not specified
Phoebe	F	9	French					Spanish, Norwegian, English
Anna	F	10	Swedish		English		Spanish	
Benjamin	M	10	German		English		Spanish, French	
Dylan	M	10	Russian					Armenian, English
Henry	M	10	Romanian	English		German	Spanish	
Max	M	10	Italian	English		Spanish	Mandarin	
Maya	F	10	English			French	Spanish	
Molly	F	10	English				French	
Scarlett	F	10	French	English		Spanish		

The focus group prompt asked students to discuss their experiences of participation in their module work groups. The wording derived in part from the TPM module description, which specified positive collaboration in group work in the course learning outcomes. The prompt reminded participants that groups were diverse, with participants coming from different countries and regions. Subprompts, which were more narrowly focused, were occasionally used when discussion faltered. Prompts were projected on a screen with this the only interaction between me and the subjects during the interviews, other than conducting the survey and the formalities of opening and closing. The focus groups were recorded using video and audio devices. The raw interview data was fully transcribed, following standard conventions for transcribing classroom talk (Stubbs et al., 1979), providing a verbatim transcription rendered in written form. No attempt was made to correct nonnative English language errors. Additional signaling of some paralinguistic features (e.g., laughter) was added.

Data Analysis

The first stage of the analysis served to sift the data, coding to the predetermined categories of subject, object, tools, rules, community, division of labor (Engeström, 1987), and institutional practice (Hedegaard, 2001). The insight deriving from Stage 1 that the abstract object “learning” was perceived by focus group participants as multiple objects in view, shaped the second stage of analysis. The second stage focused on the single category of object, seen simultaneously as the focus of the analysis and the lens through which activity could be viewed. The objects in view, identified as collaborating in work groups, fulfilling a task, academic study, and gaining professional experience, were used as Level 1 categories, and in coding it was useful to keep in mind the question, “What object does the speaker have in view?” Coding at Stage 2 proceeded through a total of eight levels, with the number of excerpts coded to categories falling to single digits. It provided a layered and

multithemed analysis; however, language or language-related items repeatedly emerged as coding categories. A simplified representation of the analysis of object, insofar as it relates to participants' experiences and understandings of language or language-related items, is provided in Table 3.

Table 3: Analysis of the Educational Objects in View

Level 1	Level 2	Levels 3–8
Collaboration	Dealing with linguistic diversity	Degrees of competence and confidence in English—impact on collaboration Using English to exclude Speaking languages other than English Assumptions about and expectations of native/expert English speakers
Task	Language level as an issue	English language level at entry English language competence as an obstacle to task accomplishment
Academic study	Developing skills and skill use	English language skills Study skills IT skills
Professional practice		

I used NVivo software for coding at both stages, with each excerpt tagged with a unique reference identifying the speaker by focus group, gender, and whether they identified as native English speakers (NS) or nonnative English speakers (NNS). Subsequently, proxy male and female names, taken from a web-based list of popular U.K. first names, were randomly assigned as individualized gendered markers and to humanize the write up.

RESULTS

The findings reported in this section focus on how participants in the focus groups spoke about language when collaboration, task, and academic study were the objects in view. No categories relating to language were identified when professional practice was the object.

Collaboration

Data excerpts were coded to collaboration when participants discussed their experiences of group work in terms of the object of working together collaboratively. While it was uncommon for this object to be explicitly articulated, Henry (FG10NNS) did so when he questioned the understanding of the object as getting “the highest grade possible” (task accomplishment), arguing “the most important thing [was] working in the group” (collaboration).

Dealing with Linguistic Diversity

Data coded to this Level 2 category included discussion of the impact on collaboration of degrees of competence in English, using English to exclude, the use of languages other than English, and expectations of expert English speakers (Levels 3–8).

Linguistic diversity was commonly reduced to the native/nonnative English speaker binary, terms carrying assumptions of disadvantage or advantage. Imogen (FG07NNS) put her difficulty in the presentation down to her first language not being English, while Alfie (FG06NS) presupposed that expertise in English brought academic benefits and vice versa:

[W]hen you’ve got foreign students in your group, you presume that you’re going to be able to the work at a higher level. ... It’s not saying that they can’t do it, it’s just, if they do have a language barrier...

The belief that competence in English could obstruct group work was frequently expressed. Molly (FG10NS) noted, “It’s very difficult for people whose English is very good to work with people whose English isn’t so good ...” Deeper sensitivities were also evidenced. Rebecca (FG05NNS) characterized home students’ construction of international students as weak linguistically as a way to rationalize her perception of their reluctance to accept international students as full participants:

The home students ... have this assumption that international students cannot speak English... . [T]hey will always say ... the big part we’ll give to the UK students.

Phoebe (FG09NNS) likewise supposed ulterior motives, arguing that the whispering of home students in her group could not be justified as a reasonable response to the presence of nonnative English speakers who might not understand, but rather a deliberate intention to exclude international students.

References to the use of languages other than English further highlighted how language use might exclude. Lucy (FG06NS) reported how two members of her group “often speak together in their own language,” noting how this made “collaboration within the group harder” by setting up a “language barrier.” There were no mentions of benefits that might arise from language plurality.

Many international students had high expectations of expert English speakers. Katie (FG04NNS), identifying the advantages of British groupmates, observed, “I can ask them to help me to proofread my composition.” Some saw help from native

English speakers as indispensable; Jasmine (FG07NNS) described her group's dismay when their native English-speaking groupmate fell sick the day before the presentation:

[Y]ou became really stressed when the only guy who can speak this language properly, he was ill. ... [F]or international students it was so hopeless.

Expert speakers were divided in their responses. Many met expectations; Layla (FG08NS), for instance, detailed how her group supported an international student by slowing the conversation, explaining things, and "happily" correcting language errors. But there were also tensions around being cast as an English expert. Molly (FG10NS) acknowledged the value of language help to international students while emphasizing the extra work involved and her discomfort in being cast as a teacher:

They are benefiting ... but you have to work so much harder to drag them up ... go over their work, check it like you're the teacher.

Others showed frustration when their efforts to help seemed taken for granted. Scarlett (FG10NNS) described correcting another student's work during a meeting, observing "the girl who had actually written that part wasn't even, like, paying that much attention." However, there were also expressions of gratitude for help received. Speaking of the British students in her group, Matilda (FG07NNS) noted, "They really tried to help the international students."

From the activity theoretical perspective, when the object collaboration was in view, the instrumental character of language was evident, with individuals' varying competence in English seen to facilitate or impede collaboration. While expert speakers commonly accommodated to less competent speakers and the less competent assumed the support of experts would be forthcoming, the findings also indicated that facilitating communication coexisted with tensions around the social elements: community (feelings of being otherized); rules (which language might be used and when, delimitations of roles); and division of labor (how tasks should be distributed). There was also a recognition of language as "constitutive" (Turner, 2004) in the understanding of the reluctance to communicate as embodying reluctance to collaborate, and in this sense language ceased to be seen as purely instrumental but rather as a dimension of the object. There were occasions when mismatched expectations suggested participants had different objects in view. As Scarlett's frustration with her groupmate instances, those prioritizing collaboration were unlikely to see eye to eye with groupmates who saw the part they played solely in terms of its contribution to accomplishing the task.

Task

The written report and the group presentation were the main tasks students were set in their work groups. These deliverables incorporated reflective tasks, principally peer review. Data was coded to "task" when speakers' utterances indicated they were mindful of the module tasks and the purposeful nature of the work to accomplish them.

Language Level as an Issue

At this Level 2 category, focus group participants expressed concern about the language level at entry and the linguistic challenges associated with the module tasks (Levels 3–8). Samuel (FG08NNS) saw the former as the root cause of difficulties, noting, “It’s so strange how all these people get an offer to University because it’s ... a pretty high standard for IELTS.” Discussion followed concerning what language exams test, coaching, and speculation regarding the university’s softening of language entry levels.

For many, language level was perceived as an obstacle to task accomplishment. Jessica (FG03NNS) observed, “There are a couple of people who are finding it really difficult to actually *do* things in English” (her emphasis). For native and expert English speakers, concern about English seemed most in evidence in editing written tasks. Surprise was commonly expressed at the work involved; Phoebe (FG09NNS) commented:

I thought it would be really easy, I mean I would do it in 20 minutes, but when you have to turn around all the sentences and try to find a bit more diverse vocabulary ... it does take some time. To note, she does not question the necessity for rigorous editing. The peer review process, poorly understood and often delayed, was a focus of tension, with the expert English users who consistently led, doing so with less grace. Alexander (FG08NS) expressed his frustration at the lack of involvement of his groupmates and how this colored his view of group work:

[N]obody was doing it ... and in the end it just involved me and [an]other girl And that ... affected the way that I perceived my group.

This comment prompted George (FG08NNS) to relate his experience, framing it in terms of home and international students. He noted how the home students went ahead with the peer review without consultation, expressing with bitterness his belief that this was to be expected:

George: The two English guys in our group did the peer review ... [T]hey just came and said they had done the peer review.

Alexander (NS): They didn’t even ask you ... to check it?

George: Oh, why would they ask us to? ... [I]n our group they’re two English students and the rest of them are international students. I doubt if they’d had said, “Do you want to check it?”

Much of the discussion of the presentation concerned the challenges that answering questions posed for nonnative English speakers. As Jasmine (FG07NNS) noted, her panic when the native English speaker in her group fell ill related to the Q&A session. Regarding comprehension, participants mentioned accents (Charlotte, FG05NNS; Eleanor, FG05NNS); speed of delivery (William, FG05NNS), and the coherence of utterances, particularly when the speaker was also an international student (Eleanor, FG05NNS). In formulating responses, Jessica (FG04NNS) identified the demands of “think[ing] on the spot” as compounding the difficulty in understanding, highlighting the impact on her participation:

I can't really interpret the question well and I can't really think on the spot, so I think that ... makes it quite difficult for me to ... participate in that discussion group.

Some believed that in order to impress the tutor or reduce others' chances of doing well, students acted competitively (Eva, FG07NNS; Rebecca, FG05NNS), asking "killer questions" (Rebecca). In a focus group consisting only of international students (FG05), the participants discussed a strategy for dealing pragmatically with Q&A sessions, involving the exchange of prescribed questions. James (FG05NNS) explained:

[T]he group ... who is going to present distribute a set of questions to the other groups ... [T]hey already know the answers, so they won't look stupid in front of everyone ... like a mutual agreement.

In the ensuing discussion, Sarah (FG05NNS) defended this practice noting, "I think it is good to collaborate."

In activity theoretical terms, the instrumentality of language was uppermost when task completion was prioritized, with some international students' competence in English perceived as an obstacle to task accomplishment. The efforts to overcome this barrier were evident in the division of labor within groups, with English experts spending time on editing and being relied on to take the lead in presentations. This dependence could lead to tensions when group members were not seen to be pulling their weight (rules) or when other objects were present, as was evident in Alexander (FG08NS) and George's (FG08NNS) contrasting recollections of the peer review. While Alexander prioritized task accomplishment, George saw the home students as overlooking the object of collaboration. When the challenges to task accomplishment appeared insurmountable, as in the Q&A sessions, there was evident flouting of rules, albeit artfully justified by Sarah through invoking an alternative object (collaboration). At points, language seemed to merge with the object; not questioning the necessity of correct written English supposed that this was perceived as an aspect of the object, part of the defining criteria, rather than an instrument for achieving it.

Academic Study

Academic study as an object was always implicit but rarely explicit, with reminders that this was the *raison d'être* for attending university provided circuitously. Anna (FG10NNS) ventriloquized the geography students she rooms with ("Why are you in the library all the time? Do you even have to study?"), making the point that while geography students might have an easy time, as a management student she needed no reminder of the purpose of university. When academic study was the object in view, participants distinguished between subject knowledge and skills, recognizing the necessity of language and study skills, including computer skills, to acquire and articulate subject knowledge.

Developing Skills and Skill Use

Despite the many references to language level, explicit recognition by international students of the need to improve English, how to do so, and the outcomes of any actions were less evident. Max's (FG10NNS) work group was unusual in conducting a skills audit. In a frank discussion, group members informed others in the group of the need to improve their English. Max recognized this topic as a sensitive issue, describing the initial reticence of group members to participate. Maya (FG10NS), herself an international student, took this issue further, implying that stigma was attached to admitting one's language level was inadequate. Even to enter the Language Centre, which provided classes in EAP, was to lose face:

If you're coming ... from Russia, from China, you don't want to admit that you're falling behind If you walk through these doors you're always already showing you're weaker than someone else who's English.

Focus group participants identified shortcomings in their language skills more readily than how they might address them. Rebecca (FG05NNS) noted her need to work on her listening skills, Jessica (FG04NNS) her lack of fluency. William (FG08NNS), an exchange student, stated that his main purpose in coming to the United Kingdom was to improve his English "of course," the tag affirming his belief in the generality of this view. The language learning strategy with which participants seemed most at ease was informal peer communication. Maisie (FG08NNS) spoke of living with native English speakers, Ethan (FG06NNS) of socializing with British friends, while William (FG08NNS) observed, "I can just cover my English classes talking with people." Max (FG10NNS) criticized what he saw as the reluctance to attend EAP classes. Indeed, George (FG08NNS) was in a minority in stating that he did so, taking at face value a request to explain what this entailed. It is unclear whether focus group participants knew as little as they appeared to about the availability of language support.

Participants also reported on their progress; George (FG08NNS), for example, spoke of the language teacher helping him with his grammar. However, progress also came through gains in confidence, with students pushed from their comfort zones realizing they could manage. Reflecting on her panic about the Q&A session, Jasmine (FG07NNS) observed how her native-speaking groupmate's absence "really pushed you to work," resulting in an unexpectedly favorable outcome.

International students seemed to find it less hard to accept the role of formal learning for developing study skills, where they were also seen to lag behind home students. Max's (FG10NNS) pragmatic approach to improving his study skills ("It's not a matter of how smart you are; it's a matter of how much time you give to it") is not contested or seen as stigmatic. In contrast to both these areas, focus group participants appeared comfortable with the need to acquire computer skills. While being an international student was not considered disadvantageous in this context, cultural background did have a place, with students' nationalities commonly referenced. Anna (FG10NNS) mentioned learning to use spreadsheets from an Indian student, while Lucas (FG09NNS), referring to Google Docs, noted "the American guy showed us how it worked."

From the activity theoretical perspective, while the acquisition of skills was broadly viewed as mediating the learning and presentation of subject knowledge (tool), developing these competencies was perceived as a dimension of the object “academic study.” A variety of English language skills and subskills were deemed necessary and in need of improvement. However, while international students recognized this need, they showed reluctance to engage in formal language learning. Despite the availability of EAP classes (institutional practice), the majority clearly favored informal learning. The discomfort around this area, arising from the values brought to or inherent in the interaction (community) and captured in the encultured notion of stigma, impeded the pursuit of the object. Stigma was less evident with study skills, while work groups seemed to develop effective and uncomplicated divisions of labor for developing computer know-how. William’s single-minded preoccupation with improving his English illustrates the bidirectional instrumentality between skill acquisition and subject knowledge familiar to language teachers, and incorporated into some language teaching methodologies.

DISCUSSION

The study from which this article draws sought to contribute to the literature on international student participation in Anglo-Western higher education. Like this literature, it assumed as valid the juxtaposition of international and home students. While the distinction facilitates understanding of the needs of a particular group of students, readers will not need reminding that these terms are problematic; they resist definition and incline debate toward what divides them. Notwithstanding, the following points should be kept in mind:

- The study participants readily used these terms and it was clear that the distinction was meaningful for them.
- Conflating ‘home student’ with ‘native English speaker’ and ‘international student’ with ‘non-native English speaker’ worked in this study and concurred with the students’ use and understandings of these terms.
- Moving the focus from international students themselves to their participation meant that the ways in which international students might be distinguished from other students was not the main concern.
- The identification in the findings of some non-native English speakers as English experts diminished the imperative of the native speaker/non-native speaker binary.

In particular, the study sought to contribute to those studies that recognize that international students’ experiences of learning encounters are shaped as much by their interactions with home students as by what they themselves bring to the learning environment.

The reductivist approach prominent in the literature was considered important to challenge. For educators working with international students, reductivist thinking,

while providing ready answers, has reinforced preconceptions and oversimplified. This is not to deny the relevance of English language competence or culture of origin; indeed, this paper addresses the former, but rather to highlight the virtue of developing approaches to inquiry that are holistic in nature and contextual. In the study, Activity Theory, primarily Engeström's Second Generation model (1987), was adopted as the theoretical underpinning, as it offered a framework that comprises a diverse range of elements related to doing and the social constraints on collective human activity. As such, it accommodates factors unrelated to being international students and the recognition that learning cultures conducive to participation are co-constructed. As a post-Vygotskian approach, Activity Theory has the further virtue of furnishing a theorized understanding of the relationship of participation to learning. The focus group as the research instrument had particular resonance given that the unit of analysis was group work.

The findings of the study reported in this article relate to students' understandings and experiences of the impact of English language competence and language use on participation in their work groups. International students often mentioned the benefits of working with native English speakers. Although some were fulsome in their gratitude, others seemed to take for granted the help they received. While some English experts met these expectations, demonstrating altruistic behavior, others expressed their frustration in working with students whose English language competence did not always seem adequate. With identities readily built around being international or home students, there was a tendency to otherize (Said, 1978), inclining towards misrepresentation and misunderstanding. Notwithstanding, as noted, being an expert English user in this study was not synonymous with being a home student or native English speaker, and expert English users who were international students often seemed to share more in common on the language issue with native English speakers than with other international students. In terms of the relationship between international and home students—on the one hand, the reaching out, on the other, the frustrations and tensions—these findings echo other post-millennial UK studies into multilingual, multicultural group work in higher education contexts (Harrison & Peacock, 2010; Osmond & Roed, 2010), although the heightened emotions reported in some literature, including aggressive behavior (Osmond & Roed, 2010), were not in evidence.

The theoretical framework furnished by Activity Theory offered a way to understand participation in terms of the core components of the Vygotskian triangle and the social elements introduced by activity theorists. Given the primacy of the object in Activity Theory, and the insight of the first stage of the analysis that focus group participants had multiple understandings of the educational object of group work, the in-depth analysis was restricted to the category of the object. Accepting that the object might have multiple interpretations, although a departure from the standard position in Second Generation Activity Theory, has precedent in education studies. While Engeström explored this possibility in Third Generation Theory, which considers the interactions of adjacent activity systems (1999, 2001), in this study the integrity of the activity system was not at issue, only the plurality of the object. The meaningful relationship between the expectations and behaviors of subjects and their different understandings of the object observed by Fisher (2007) was also evident in

this study. As such, the construct 'object in view' (Hiruma et al., 2007), which the study adopted, offers explanatory potential. In the in-depth analysis of the object, the 'objects in view' were employed as first level categories.

Using the descriptive language of Activity Theory, understandings facilitated by the different objects in view, in so far as they related to the language issue, were presented above (Findings). The distinct contribution of the construct 'object in view' can be summarized as follows:

When 'collaboration' was the object in view, focus group participants expressed frustration at the ways language might impede collaboration, while actively seeking ways of improving communication in their groups. The good intentions, however, were sometimes marred by misunderstandings including second-guessing the motives of others. (Language was a challenge.)

When 'task' was the object in view, the language issue tended to be viewed as an obstacle to task accomplishment. Pragmatic responses by either the institution or participants, were seen as necessary, but these were deemed to come at a cost. (Language was a barrier that needed to be overcome.)

When 'academic study' was the object in view, awareness of the English language as a set of skills requiring enhancement was juxtaposed to the stigma associated with this need. Participants sometimes found it hard to divorce language from ability in general, leading to questions of identity and self-worth, and in this sense language as a set of skills was viewed differently from other skill areas. (Students were reluctant to address the language issue.)

Recognition that understandings of the object of activity impact on students' perceptions of English language competence is of value to EAP teachers and others involved in the education of international students in Anglo-western higher education. It invites us to go beyond a concern with the nature or degree of the linguistic challenge international students face, to ask questions of the contexts in which English language competence is perceived as an issue. In encouraging educators to qualify deficit perceptions of language (or for that matter culture) it reminds us that the urge to 'fix' international students language should not be divorced from concerns to re-model the learning environments in which language is perceived as needing 'fixing'. A premise of this paper has been that Activity Theory, as a dynamic framework that perceives activity as both social and developmental, may help to move away from the reductivist discourse that has prevailed in the literature. In particular, it has been argued that the more nuanced understanding of the object furnished by the construct 'object in view' facilitates understanding of why participants in activity act in the way they act, express the views they do, differ in their views, or hold views perceived as contradictory. A particular 'take-away' for EAP practitioners is that accenting the deficit in support, is unlikely to curry favor among students.

REFERENCES

- Ballard, B., & Clanchy, J. (1991). *Teaching students from overseas: A brief guide for lecturers and supervisors*. Longman Cheshire.
- Barron, P. (2006). Stormy outlook? Domestic students' impression of international students and an Australian university. *Journal of Teaching in Travel and Tourism*, 2(2), 5–22.
- Biggs, J. (1987). *Student approaches to learning and studying*. Australian Council for Educational Research.
- Biggs, J. (1996). Western misconceptions of the Confucian heritage learning culture. In D. Watkins & J. Biggs (Eds.), *The Chinese learner: Cultural, psychological, and contextual influences* (pp. 45–67). Comparative Education Research Centre/Australian Council for Educational Research.
- British Educational Research Association. (2011). *Ethical guidelines for educational research*. <https://www.bera.ac.uk/publication/bera-ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-2011>
- Brown, S., & Jones, E. (2007). Introduction: Values, valuing and value in an internationalised Higher Education context. In E. Jones & B. Brown (Eds.), *Internationalising higher education* (pp. 1–6). Routledge.
- Carroll, J. (2005a). “Lightening the load”: Teaching in English, learning in English. In J. Carroll & J. Ryan (Eds.), *Teaching international students: Improving education for all* (pp. 35–42). Routledge.
- Carroll, J. (2005b). Multicultural groups for discipline-specific tasks. In J. Carroll & J. Ryan (Eds.), *Teaching international students: Improving education for all* (pp. 84–91). Routledge.
- Carroll, J. (2015). *Tools for teaching in an educationally mobile world*. Routledge.
- Chanock, K. (2010). The right to reticence. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 15(5), 543–552.
- De Vita, G. (2007). Taking stock: An appraisal of the literature on internationalising HE learning. In E. Jones & B. Brown (Eds.), *Internationalising higher education* (pp. 154–168). Routledge.
- Engeström, Y. (1987). *Learning by expanding: An activity-theoretical approach to developmental research*. Orienta-Konsultit.
- Engeström, Y. (1999). Activity theory and individual and social transformation. In Y. Engeström, R. Miettinen, & R.-L. Punamäki (Eds.), *Perspectives on activity theory* (pp. 19–38). Cambridge University Press.
- Engeström, Y. (2001). Expansive learning at work: Toward an activity theoretical reconceptualization. *Journal of Education and Work*, 14(1), 133–156.
- Fisher, R. (2007). Talking of talk: How exploration of the object can illuminate participants' understanding of classroom discourse. In R. Alanen & S. Pöyhönen (Eds.), *Language in action: Vygotsky and Leontievian legacy today* (pp. 223–244). Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Freeman, K., & Li, M. (2019). “We are a ghost in the class”: First year international students' experiences in the Global Contact Zone. *Journal of International Students*, 9(1), 19–38.

- Gu, Q. (2009). Maturity and interculturality: Chinese students' experiences in UK higher education. *European Journal of Education*, 44(1), 37–52.
- Hamp-Lyons, L. (2015). The future of JEAP and EAP. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 20, A1–A4.
- Harrison, N., & Peacock, N. (2010). Interactions in the international classroom: The UK perspective. In E. Jones (Ed.), *Internationalisation and the student voice* (pp. 125–142). Routledge.
- Hedegaard, M. (2001). Learning through acting within societal traditions: Learning in classrooms. In M. Hedegaard (Ed.), *Learning in classrooms: A cultural historical approach* (pp. 15–25). Aarhus University Press.
- Hiruma, F., Wells, G., & Ball, T. (2007). The problem of discoursing in Activity. *An International Journal of Human Activity Theory*, 1, 93–114.
- Hsieh, M. (2007). Challenges for international students in higher education: One student's narrated story of invisibility and struggle. *College Student Journal*, 41(2), 379–391.
- Hsu, C., & Huang, I. (2017). Are international students quiet in class? The influence of teacher confirmation on classroom apprehension and willingness. *Journal of International Students*, 7(1), 38–52.
- Hyland, K. (2006). *Writing in the academy: Reputation, education and knowledge*. Institute of Education, University of London.
- Jackson, E., & Huddart, T. (2010). Curriculum design based on home students' interpretations of internationalisation. *ARECLS*, 7, 80–112.
- Jones, J. (1999). From silence to talk: Cross-cultural ideas on students' participation in academic group discussion. *English for Specific Purposes*, 18(3), 243–259.
- Kumaravadivelu, B. (2003). Problematising cultural stereotypes in TESOL. *TESOL Quarterly*, 37(4), 709–718.
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge University Press.
- Lee, E. L. (2007). Linguistic and cultural factors in East Asian students' oral participation in U.S. university classrooms. *International Education*, 36(3), 29–47.
- Leontiev, A. N. (1978). *Activity, consciousness and personality*. Prentice Hall.
- Louie, K. (2005). Gathering cultural knowledge: Useful or use with care? In J. Carroll & J. Ryan (Eds.), *Teaching international students: Improving education for all* (pp. 17–25). Routledge.
- Marginson, S., & Sawir, E. (2011). *Ideas for intercultural education*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Marlina, R. (2009). "I don't talk or I decide not to talk? Is it my culture?" International students' experiences of tutorial participation. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 48, 235–244.
- Martirosyan, N. M., Hwang, E., & Wanjohi, R. (2015). Impact of English proficiency on academic performance of international students. *Journal of International Students*, 5(1), 60–70.
- McLean, P., & Ransom, L. (2005). Building intercultural competencies. In J. Carroll & J. Ryan (Eds.), *Teaching international students: Improving education for all* (pp. 45–62). Routledge.

- Morita, N. (2004). Negotiating participation and identity in second language academic communities. *TESOL Quarterly*, 38(4), 573–603.
- Osmond, J., & Roed, J. (2010). Sometimes It means more work ... Student perceptions of group work in a mixed cultural setting. In E. Jones (Ed.), *Internationalisation and the student voice* (pp. 113–124). Routledge.
- Ramsay, S., Barker, M., & Jones, E. (1999). Academic adjustment and learning processes: A comparison of international and local students in first-year university. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 18(1), 129–144.
- Ryan, J., & Hellmundt, S. (2005). Maximising international students' cultural capital. In J. Carroll & J. Ryan (Eds.), *Teaching international students: Improving education for all* (pp. 13–16). Routledge.
- Ryan, J., & Louie, K. (2007). False dichotomy? “Western” and “Confucian” concepts of scholarship and learning. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 39(4), 404–417.
- Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism*. Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Straker, J. (2014). *A case study of international student participation in an undergraduate module in management in a UK business school using the lens of activity theory* [Unpublished doctoral thesis]. University of Exeter, UK.
- Straker, J. (2016). International student participation in higher education: Changing the focus from ‘international students’ to ‘participation’. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 20(4), 299–318.
- Stubbs, M., Robinson, B., & Twite, S. (1979). *Observing classroom language*. Open University.
- Summers, M., & Volet, S. (2008). Students' attitudes towards culturally mixed groups on international campuses: Impact of participation in diverse and non-diverse groups. *Studies in Higher Education*, 33(4), 357–370.
- Swales, J. (1990). *Genre analysis: English in academic and research settings*. Cambridge University Press
- Thom, V. (2010). Mutual cultures: Engaging with interculturalism in higher education. In E. Jones (Ed.), *Internationalisation and the student voice* (pp. 155–168). Routledge.
- Trahar, S. (2010). Has everybody seen a swan? Stories from the internationalised classroom. In E. Jones (Ed.), *Internationalisation and the student voice* (pp. 143–154). Routledge.
- Turner, J. (2004). Language as academic purpose. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 3(2), 95–109
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
- Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods* (3rd ed.). SAGE.
- Zhu, Y., & Bresnahan, M. (2018). “They make no contribution!” versus “We should make friends with them!”—American domestic students' perception of Chinese international students' reticence and face. *Journal of International Students*, 8(4), 1614–1635.

JOHN STRAKER, EdD, is an Associate Research Fellow in the College of Social Sciences and International Studies at the University of Exeter and program manager of the English language skills development program, INTO University of Exeter. His main professional and research interest is facilitating international student participation in degree programs. His current research explores the utility of activity theory as a framework for understanding and researching international student participation. Email: j.o.straker@exeter.ac.uk

Chinese Students' Experiences Transitioning from an Intensive English Program to a U.S. University

Jill M. Fox
Creighton University, USA

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of former intensive English program (IEP) Chinese students by concurrently examining national origin, language problems, forms of capital, culture shock, and institutional programming using qualitative case study methods. The findings give us insights into the students' sociocultural and academic transitions, which have implications for intensive English program and university recruitment, admissions, instruction, student support, and programming.

Keywords: acculturation, Chinese students, intercultural communication, intensive English programs, pathway programs

In the 2018–2019 academic year, almost 1.1 million international students came to the United States for higher education (Institute of International Education, 2019). International students from non-English-speaking countries must demonstrate adequate English proficiency for admission to U.S. degree programs. Students who do not show proficiency might be offered conditional admission, met when the student achieves the necessary minimum proficiency score, or in many cases, upon completion of a partnering English language program. These language learning institutes for pre-admission English-as-a-second-language (ESL) students are intensive English programs (IEPs).

Noncredit IEPs remain mainstays of higher education, but credit-bearing ESL courses are increasingly popular as pathways into degree programs (Cross & O'Loughlin, 2013; Melles et al., 2005). Credit or partial credit programs combine ESL classes with for-credit coursework for one or more semesters before international

students can progress through their university degree programs. These programs are often called pathway programs, bridge programs, or Credit English for Academic Purposes (CEAPs).

Many universities rely on international students, who typically pay full tuition, as revenue streams (Hawthorne, 2010). Thus, international students have a positive financial impact on universities. But “higher education institutions that take international students for granted, as ‘cash cows’, do so at their peril” (Peterson et al., 1999, p. 69). With increasing numbers of international students attending English-speaking universities, a disconnect between recruitment policies and goals regarding international students and the support services created to assist them could evolve (McGowan & Porter, 2008). As student populations diversify, universities and academic staff face more challenges in supporting international students’ transitions and facilitating learning within their degree programs (McGowan & Porter, 2008). In turn, international students are more likely than domestic students to drop out of universities; the lack of support for integration into the university cultural context may be responsible (Smith & Naylor, 2001).

Much of the research on international students has been conducted viewing international students as a single population, but because Chinese students constitute the largest international student population in the United States, it is beneficial to foster deeper understanding of how Chinese students experience academic stresses (Yan & Berliner, 2009, 2011). Chinese students’ experiences of stress may be more difficult than students from other Asian countries, since China and the United States have been identified as having maximum cultural distance (Samovar & Porter, 1997). Greater cultural difference equates greater cultural distance, and the degree of cultural distance relates to the degree of psychosocial distress in cross-cultural transition (Demes & Geeraert, 2014). To explore how former IEP/CEAP students describe their experiences transitioning to the university, this study concurrently examines national origin, language problems, theoretical models of culture shock, and institutional programming within a conceptual framework that defines and relates the concepts of social and cultural capital.

BACKGROUND

Language Problems

Many international students arrive at U.S. universities with passing language proficiency scores, but language proficiency requires more than language test skills. Truly proficient speakers recognize cultural conceptualization systems (Sharifian, 2009). Findings from a study of pre-sessional international students in Britain identified four major language speaking encounters: service, social, casual, and academic (Copland & Garton, 2011). Service encounters are conversations to obtain information or complete errands—for example, at a bank or restaurant. Social encounters are to start or maintain relationships with friends, classmates, and coworkers. Casual encounters are short conversations with strangers, like asking for directions. Finally, academic encounters are about course-related matters with classmates and professors (Copland & Garton, 2011).

Often, service encounters are the first students will have upon arrival. If language use is unclear or different from expected, nonnative speakers may become confused during complex service encounters, and may in turn infer unintended meanings (Touchstone et al., 2017). International students have reported social opportunities to speak and interact in English are rare (Copland & Garton, 2011), and have indicated problems with academic language in terms of taking notes, interacting in group discussions, reading textbooks, demonstrating comprehension on written exams, and understanding professors' lectures, expectations, and grading (Bastien et al., 2018; Gebhard, 2012).

International students also often want assistance with identifying community living essentials, understanding academic systems, and developing social networks (Kim & Egan, 2011; Guo & Chase, 2011). Students with access to noneconomic forms of capital, such as language proficiency and cultural knowledge, can navigate environments with greater ease than those who lack such capital; they benefit from the social and cultural resources available to them through their social networks, and this plays an important role in students' adjustment processes (Glass et al., 2015).

Forms of Capital

Social capital is the sum of resources available through one's acquaintance network (Bourdieu, 2011/1986), described as social networks embedded in relationships. International students leave social networks in their home countries; consequently, they need to form new ones that often are very different from those of domestic students (Lacina, 2002). Neri and Ville (2007) found only a minority of international students forged relationships with host country nationals, but it is social ties that give international students access to other networks, information, and resources. Accessing such resources is a basis of increasing one's social capital (Hendrickson et al., 2011; Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2013). Instead, most social capital investments by international students occur with other international students, predominantly from the same country of origin (Neri & Ville, 2007). As well as language problems, cultural differences could also contribute to international students' inability to forge social networks (Lacina, 2002). This could imply that accumulation of social capital is dependent on language skills and having the right cultural capital.

Cultural capital is defined as culturally relevant knowledge, skills, abilities, or other symbolic elements serving as a form of currency in social settings, such as taste in music, clothing styles, or mannerisms (Bourdieu, 1979/1984; Longhofer & Winchester, 2016). Cultural capital can be acquired in two ways—through one's social origin and through education (Bourdieu, 1979/1984). Bourdieu mentions linguistic capital as mastery of and relationship to a language. Included as a subset of cultural capital, he claims it must be acquired to achieve academic success (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). The unavailability of linguistic capital to some international students conceals the worth of the cultural capital that international students bring with them (Lin, 2008). These aspects of an international student's identity, language proficiency, and capital affect the process of acculturating to life in the United States, the process known as culture shock.

Culture Shock

Oberg (1960) first explained culture shock as a disorientating process of transitioning through an unfamiliar culture. Individuals wanting to adapt and acculturate in a new culture need strategies to acquire new social skills (Belford, 2017). In a 2017 Institute of International Education survey, many universities indicated they explicitly support international students, provide opportunities for students to discuss events, and/or offer counseling for students about the U.S. social and political climate (Elturki et al., 2019). Nevertheless, many students do not utilize support services for lack of familiarity, not seeing the usefulness, viewing them in a negative light, or perceiving co-national student support as sufficient. Additionally, international students are significantly less likely than U.S. peers to have previously accessed counseling or consider doing so in the future (Yakunina et al., 2011). International students also have more negative perceptions of available educational services than do domestic students (Sherry et al., 2004).

The quality of international students' experiences is important for continued university enrollment of international students and overall intercultural global understanding (Zhou et al., 2008). Findings from a survey of international students' educational satisfaction suggest that an international student's personal identity can be affected by adjustment levels and perceptions of discrimination from host culture members; this can create further stress levels, hinder adjustment processes, and decrease overall educational satisfaction (Wadsworth et al., 2008). Conversely, a study at an English university found international students with near-native English proficiency experienced less culture shock (Brown & Holloway, 2008). English proficiency was a predictor for both psychological and sociocultural adjustment (J. Zhang & Goodson, 2011). These findings indicate that language skills and forms of capital can determine international students' success in navigating culture shock.

Chinese Students at U.S. Universities

While there are shared attributes for the adaptation process across cultural groups, the experiences of transitioning vary among cultural groups (Yoon & Portman, 2004). International students from Western and English-speaking countries face little-to-no discrimination (Lee & Rice, 2007), whereas American students' perceptions about Chinese students as an "outgroup" leads to communication anxiety and less willingness to attempt communication (Ruble & Zhang, 2013). Asian students are generally less engaged in diversity-related classroom activities than counterparts from other regions of the world (Zhao et al., 2005), and students from Southeastern Asia perceived greater constraints to participation in leisure activities—important factors in achieving adaptation and intercultural friendships—than other international students (Gareis, 2012; Glass et al., 2014).

Professors' use of complex sentences and colloquial expressions, and the fast pace of speech cause difficulties with Chinese students' academic listening (Huang, 2004). In Wang (2002), Chinese students identified four factors as reasons for language problems: (a) influence of Chinese language and the use of "Chinglish" expressions; (b) lack of cultural background knowledge; (c) inadequate previous

language training; and (d) limited opportunities to practice English with native speakers. Chinese students on some campuses create ethnic enclaves, or co-national networks, that help new Chinese students adjust and accrue cultural and academic capital (Chen & Ross, 2015; Glass et al., 2015). However, while these enclaves provide a safe harbor, they can become a place to hide from the local culture, and the process of withdrawal and separation from the host culture can accelerate (Storti, 2001). Additionally, participation in these enclaves is often viewed by others as unwillingness to integrate, and Chinese students are more likely to resort to speaking Chinese, reducing the opportunity to practice English (Dooney, 2010).

Considering learning within a cultural context, almost all Chinese students share common Confucian orientations that involve “effort-focused conceptions of learning, pragmatic orientations to learning, and acceptance of behavioral reform as an academic goal” (Tweed & Lehman, 2002, p. 93). Chinese students may experience challenges in Western academic settings, which tend to be Socratic-oriented, involving “overt and private questioning, expression of personal hypotheses, and a desire for self-directed tasks” (Tweed & Lehman, 2002, p. 93) and which emphasize individualism, assertiveness, and self-sufficiency over interdependence and relatedness (Mori, 2000; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Learning styles can contribute to individual variation in academic performance, due not to ability but to how individuals use their abilities (L.-F. Zhang & Sternberg, 2000). Asian international students have shown a preference for collaborative, social learning styles and strategies, whereas other international student groups have shown a preference for metacognitive strategies (Hong Nam & Leavell, 2006; Ramburuth & McCormick, 2001). Results from a study into learning styles of international students indicated that Chinese students face initial problems in terms of confronting different learning and teaching styles, but that they are highly adaptive (Wong, 2004). The longer students study, the more likely they are to adapt to the style of teaching and learning, hinting that learning styles are contextual, not culturally based (Wong, 2004).

It is important to note that the classification of Chinese students in this and other studies invites us to see this group as homogeneous, and their needs and responses as determined by their cultural background. However, each province has distinctive histories, cultures, and even languages. Moreover, the backgrounds, goals, and motivations of students and instructors, and the setting for the interactions, are also influential (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2006; Tait, 2010).

Intensive English Programs

The search for relevant research on IEPs yielded few results, as listings did not fit the type of program of interest to this paper or focused on a teaching method or teacher knowledge wherein the IEP was just the research site.

One reason for the lack of specific research could be the widely ranging structures of IEPs, making research complex. U.S. universities started establishing ESL programs in the 1950s, after World War II when international students increasingly began to study in the United States, but these programs were created without forward planning, and no agreement on how the needs of international students should be met (Kaplan, 1997). Another reason is the “unfortunate

phenomenon of the marginalization of these programs in the university setting” (Thompson, 2013, p. 213). IEPs are often not a part of an academic unit, and IEP professionals usually have different academic roles, and IEP students are often given limited student status on their campuses (Thompson, 2013). Some IEPs are even marginalized geographically on campus, often placed in older buildings on the edges of campus (personal observation).

IEPs can be broadly categorized into three groups: independent U.S. English language institutions; those operating outside the United States; and those with direct reporting within university administration. Most IEP students are enrolled in full-time, non-credit English classes, but some have programs to earn university credit while receiving ESL support. With IEPs increasingly serving as a pathway into higher education for international students, understanding of IEP students’ difficulties with language, capital, and culture shock, and strategies to help students overcome those difficulties, is invaluable for IEPs and universities alike (Kaktiņš, 2013).

The literature shows three major international student adjustment issues: language, capital, and culture shock. These themes are inseparable in understanding the variable outcomes of international students’ adjustment.

METHOD

Qualitative case study research was the main methodology to collect data in understanding the transition experiences of international students from China to the United States. For this case study, I employed a constructivist epistemology, which maintains that individuals construct their own understanding through the interaction of what they already believe and the ideas with which they come into contact (Ültanır, 2012). I looked at data through the theoretical lens of social and cultural capital theories.

Research Site

The research site is referred to here as the University of the Great Plains, or UGP (a pseudonym). UGP hosts over 1,300 international students from more than 100 different countries. Depending on TOEFL or IELTS scores, students may be unconditionally admitted, begin with the CEAP program, or start in the noncredit IEP.

Upon institutional review board approval in late 2016, I recruited the study participants from select freshman composition classes. These classes were ideal because they comprised international students, most from China, who had earned similar scores on an English proficiency exam. Accessing students in similar composition class provided a degree of control over the participants’ academic environment. Because participants were all from mainland China, a small degree of control over cultural background was achieved.

Sample Selection

Criterion-based selection (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993) was used in choosing potential participants. The essential criteria were that participants were formerly in

the IEP or CEAP, and currently in their first or second semester in their program of study. From this, convenience sampling provided the basis for selecting participants (Merriam, 2009), taking those who were available and willing. The participants in this study were four Chinese students in their first year at UGP after completing at least one semester of the university IEP or CEAP. All participation was voluntary, and participants' confidentiality was protected using pseudonyms.

Table 1: Characteristics of Participants

Pseudonyms	Age	Gender	IEP/CEAP
Lee	20	Male	1 semester IEP
Amy	21	Female	1 semester IEP
Kay	20	Female	1 semester IEP, 1 semester CEAP
Eric	22	Male	1 semester CEAP

Note. IEP = intensive English program; CEAP = Credit English for Academic Purposes.

Data Collection

Case studies were created using in-depth data collection, utilizing information from multiple sources, such as observations, interviews, and documents (Creswell, 2007). In case studies, triangulation is important to ensure results that reflect participants' experiences as accurately as possible (Yin, 2009). In addition, triangulation, member checks, and peer review are strategies followed to be ethical and trustworthy (Merriam, 2009). Because this case study focused on participants' meaning-making, interviewing was chosen as the primary data collection method. The data were enhanced with two additional points: document data and participant observation/shadowing.

Interview Data

Interviewing is necessary in discovering participants' "feelings or how [they] interpret the world around them" (Merriam, 2009, p. 88). Through one-on-one interviews with participants, I investigated their verbal interpretations of their experiences transitioning to UGP. I collected data until redundancy was reached (Merriam, 2009). To this end, three interviews per participant were held at a location of each participant's choosing.

Participants were asked a uniform set of open-ended questions to obtain information on (a) demographics, (b) previous experiences with American culture and English, (c) participants' experiences and perceptions of the IEP and/or CEAP programs, (d) participants' experiences and perceptions transitioning to their program of study, and (e) participants' advice for future students and program administrators. Open-ended questions were used throughout to encourage participants to respond freely and openly (Esterberg, 2002). Probing and/or follow-up questions were used as necessary to elicit elaboration or clarification of responses (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Written Data

Interviews were the primary data collection method. However, essays or blog entries from participants on topics related to their adjustment were also analyzed. Merriam (2009) conceded that document data is highly subjective, but it allows the participant to “select what he or she considers important to record” (p. 143), which is pertinent to this case study. Document review can also clarify or substantiate participants’ interview statements and provide thicker description of the case (Esterberg, 2002; Merriam, 2009). I collected one reflection blog entry, one reading response paper, and two essays; all were on topics related to students’ experiences transitioning to UGP. This document data was collected from the participants’ instructors, with the students’ permission; the assignments were already a part of the course requirements and not additional work for this study.

Observation Data

Participant observations can be used to increase the validity of a study, giving researchers fuller understanding of the phenomenon under examination (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002). Schensul et al. (1999) listed relevant reasons for using participant observation in this proposed research:

- to help the researcher get a feel for how people interrelate, and what the cultural parameters are;
- to show the researcher what the participants deem to be important in manners, leadership, and social interaction; and
- to provide the researcher with a source of questions to be addressed with participants.

I followed the process of selective observation, in which I focused on different types of activities to delineate the differences in those activities (Angrosino & Mays DePerez, 2000). Researchers look at the interactions in the setting, including who talks to whom, how decisions are made, and where participants sit or stand (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002). To this end, I shadowed each participant during a “typical” week day, in and out of classrooms. On the day of observations, each participant had two to three lecture classes with at least one block outside of class lasting an hour or more. During these observations, I particularly noted each participant’s conversations inside and outside of class.

Using multiple sources of data collection methods to confirm findings helps ensure the goodness, reliability, and ethical nature of the research, and strengthens the validity and reliability of this study.

Data Analysis

There is continuous interaction between data collection and data analysis in qualitative research studies, so I began analyzing data after the first interview to start identifying themes and patterns, and to facilitate subsequent data collection and

analysis. I analyzed the interview transcripts, document data, and observation data following a constant comparative, step-by-step process of analysis, based on the development of grounded theory suggested by Corbin and Strauss (2015).

Researcher Positioning

A researcher's "reflexivity," or positioning, is the process by which the researcher puts forth their biases, assumptions, and experiences (Merriam, 2009, p. 219). This helps readers of qualitative research to evaluate the validity of conclusions that the researcher pulls from the data. Therefore, it is essential that I position myself as a U.S.-born, middle-class White Anglophone in her mid-40s.

I previously worked as an instructor in an IEP for 5 years and was involved with an extracurricular group to try and further facilitate IEP students' adjustment to the university, community, and larger national culture. I have been the director of an IEP for the past 5 years. With these experiences, I have become familiar with the context of IEP students' experiences before their transition to their programs of study. The relationship I have had with the university's IEP population (including former IEP students) could potentially affect my data analysis; therefore, I will conduct member checks during the analysis process. It is my hope that my interest and work as an IEP instructor, director, and advocate will allow me to better understand the complexities for each student's experience, thus strengthening the data analysis.

RESULTS

This section summarizes participant stories about coming to the United States, their adjustment experiences, and reflections on the English programs' impact on that adjustment. The participants' names have been changed to provide anonymity. However, with so many Chinese students studying in the United States, the participants were comfortable preserving their gender identification, home province, and academic majors in their narratives.

Participant One: "Lee"

Lee was a 20-year-old finance major from a city near the Hunan province capital. He lived in an off-campus apartment with two Chinese roommates, but said of himself: "Personally speaking, I consider myself inclusive person. I'm willing to accept all the new things instead of just deny it." Indeed, he did interact with his American neighbors, and opted to sit next to non-Chinese students in classes.

Lee arrived to UGP in the fall of 2015 and spent the first semester in the IEP. Family members who had spent time in the United Kingdom helped him to brace himself for culture shock, and he was pleased to discover that the people are friendly, and the community is safe.

Lee thought his language improved in the IEP, and he learned about how UGP functions and tips for university work, but mostly he valued the time to adjust before beginning his degree program. His advice for the program in the future was more interaction with native speakers, through partnerships. Lee's advice to other students

was to expect the transition difficulties, study vocabulary, and use other Chinese students as resources. Most importantly, he stressed that students remain open to new ways, ideas, and friends.

Lee spoke about being open-minded, noting and learning from differences, and adopting new ways; this shows that he was finding his “middle way,” synthesizing Chinese values with aspects of Western norms (Durkin, 2008; Yan & Berliner, 2011).

Participant Two: “Amy”

Amy was 21 years old and was from the capital of Shaanxi province. Amy had planned to come to the United States for graduate school, but after 2 years at a Chinese university, her uncle convinced her to come to the United States earlier and she began in the IEP in the fall of 2015. Amy thought the time at her Chinese university was beneficial in terms of living and working with others and forming study habits.

Amy was pleased to realize that the campus was safe, and she found Americans to be friendly. Still, she had difficulty making American friends and relied on co-national students at UGP for much of her social support. She credited the IEP for the time it afforded her to learn about the university system and surroundings and appreciated the more relaxed semester it gave her upon arrival. Amy wanted to reassure future international students to not be worried about making mistakes in speaking, because she has found that Americans can understand her despite mistakes.

Amy exhibited a positive attitude overall toward her current experience and future outcome at UGP. Though Amy may not have been actively seeking new connections to the host community, she was content, comfortable, and confident within that culture.

Participant Three: “Kay”

Kay was 20 years old, from the Guanxi Autonomous Region of China. She had campus jobs working at a food science lab and in a dining hall. Despite these out-of-class activities, Kay found it hard to socialize with other people. She said, “I don’t know how to start a conversation, I don’t know what I should talk to them. Sometimes I really want to have some domestic student friends but I don’t know how to do that.” She was trying to overcome her shyness and said that was part of her motivation for participating in this study.

Kay attended English camps in the United Kingdom and the United States in middle and high school and had traveled to other countries in which English was the lingua franca. Kay spent one semester in the IEP followed by one semester in the CEAP. Given the choice, she recommended the CEAP for its academic focus and inclusion of community outings in the course requirements.

Even though Kay admitted that she did not participate voluntarily in many activities or clubs, she recommended that new international students arrive early, try to have confidence, and attend activities and events. She also credited IEP and CEAP instructors for helping her gain speaking confidence through presentation assignments. It is also confidence that she thought was most essential for other international students coming to the United States to study.

Kay was the only participant who had previously traveled to the United States. This might have given her a more accurate perception of aspects of the U.S. life, as she was not as surprised by differences when she arrived at UGP. However, her previous time here did not shield her from experiencing many of the same difficulties in adjusting to academic life. Overall, Kay found a comfortable place for herself within UGP.

Participant Four: “Eric”

Eric was 22 years old and from a city in the Zhejiang province. Eric noted that difficulties are a normal part of the transition process:

I am a student since I came to the US except [besides] the college, I traveled many cities... I viewed the beautiful landscape of American; I learned the great culture of American; I faced many troubles and things; I suffered pain, loneliness, homesickness, and I grow up. All in all, it's not easy to live in a foreign country, but you will be happy when you overcome the problem every time. For me, that's enough.

Eric started at UGP with a CEAP semester. He had family already studying in the United States, so he knew to expect shock, and wanted a semester to better adapt. After completion, he looked back at CEAP as a “soft landing” and was glad he did it.

Eric thought the CEAP helped in terms of time to adjust and practice the language, and an opportunity to learn functions of the university and community. He believed that the IEP and CEAP programs have too many Chinese students, and that the CEAP would be stronger with more contact with domestic students. For other students, Eric recommended they still try to include time at the beginning of their sojourn to “go easily” and gain experience being in the United States and making friends.

Eric exhibited strong motivation to adapt to the host culture, evidenced by his participation in extracurricular activities, outings, and programs, and his embrace of the challenges that come with adjusting to a new culture and place. Unlike the other three participants, Eric regularly participated in extracurricular programming, and as a result was partnered with an American peer who became, and remains, his roommate. The additional efforts that Eric has made to see other parts of the United States and interact with more Americans indicates he was using strategies in dealing with his adjustment.

DISCUSSION

Each participant had slightly different experiences and opinions, but the narratives are grouped under subheadings that correspond to themes that emerged from the data, then considered per the themes identified in the literature review. This section will review these themes, then further draw together those common themes through the lens of the research questions.

Language Problems

Lee, Amy, and Eric all wished the IEP had afforded more opportunities to interact with native speakers, consistent with findings in the literature (Copland & Garton, 2011). Other international students have reported that their difficulties in forging friendships with local students was due to poor English language proficiency or cultural shyness (Gareis, 2012), which was how Amy and Kay felt. However, Eric supported findings indicating that international students' satisfaction increased and homesickness decreased with more host country friendships (Hendrickson et al., 2011). Lee and Amy reported difficulties following academic lectures, and Lee, Amy, and Eric mentioned troubles communicating in group work with Americans, which is also consistent with reports from other international students (Gebhard, 2012; Major, 2005). Despite the difficulties the participants experienced in transitioning to their degree programs, all felt that the IEP/CEAP helped them improve English language skills.

Forms of Capital

Kay was the only participant who had previously visited the United States, and she was the only who did not feel misinformed by the media before arriving. The other three had relatives who had been to the United States or the United Kingdom, and to varying degrees had awareness of cultural differences they would face in the United States. Eric had cousins studying in the United States, and conversations with them imparted ideas of social and cultural capital to Eric. They helped convince him that UGP would be a safe place.

Both Eric and Amy had already attended 2 years of college in China before coming to UGP. Amy noted that this experience was helpful in showing her she needed to be responsible for her own studying. She also felt she benefitted from the social skills she learned by living in a dormitory. These are aspects of college life, or academic capital, that are also important in a U.S. academic environment, so Amy benefitted by already having these skills.

Lee had perhaps the weakest direct ties to U.S. culture before arriving. However, his perspective on his experiences shows he understood language proficiency is more than grammar and vocabulary, that "you have to learn how THEY speaking, not how you yourself speaking." He also hinted at his understanding of social and cultural capital concepts in saying, "Accept the nuances of the culture... like how they act, how they speak, or how they—how they do things. Uh, it definitely gonna have very difference. Definitely gonna surprise you but embrace it."

At the time of this study, only Eric had a close American friend, and Eric believed this relationship benefited him in gaining U.S. cultural knowledge. The others made most social capital investments with other international students, and mostly other Chinese students—consistent with findings from other studies (Neri & Ville, 2007; Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2013; R. A. Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Lee, Amy, and Eric referenced the Chinese ethnic enclave (Chen & Ross, 2015) that provided support and advice, though Eric expressed his desire to use UGP resources instead of the ethnic enclave. All participants expressed that they gained knowledge of the U.S.

academic system and academic skills, which indicates an accrual of U.S. cultural capital (Longhofer & Winchester, 2016). Additionally, all four students expressed motivation to overcome difficulties; this personal growth initiative is a predictor of adjustment (Yakunina et al., 2013).

Culture Shock

The participants expressed surprises and difficulties endured after arrival to the United States. Three participants spoke about it being part of the process and feeling empowered to overcome difficulties. Eric said, "It's not easy to live in a foreign country, but you will be happy when you overcome the problem every time," and Amy remarked, "Everybody has a tough time...it looks like you cannot pass, but when you pass it you feel like, 'Okay'!"

Participants shared that time in the IEP/CEAP was beneficial, allowing them to work through challenges in a more supportive environment. Even for international students whose English proficiency scores are high enough for direct entry into a U.S. university, participants' recommendation was to consider arriving early. Kay said, "I think you need ... some time to adapt yourself, adapt to the new life." All participants indicated coping styles and social supports indicative of a positive sociocultural adjustment (J. Zhang & Goodson, 2011).

How do these Chinese International Students Describe their Transition?

The participants' initial experiences transitioning to the United States are not surprising, as they reflect the major themes from the literature review: problems with language, forms of capital, and culture shock. Kay and Amy referenced difficulties in making host country friends, and partially attributed their struggles as being related to their own shyness and/or fears about their limited proficiency. Lee referenced linguistic capital, stating that students not only need English language skills, but also need to know "how THEY (Americans) speaking."

Do the Participants Refer to Social Networks and Cultural Knowledge?

Eric, Amy, and Kay specifically referenced the advantages and disadvantages of the Chinese co-national network at UGP. Consistent with the findings of the Chen and Ross (2015) study into ethnic enclaves, these participants found assistance through the existing network of Chinese students, as well as an extended enclave of other international students. Chinese upperclassmen were a resource in learning about the university and community, and in explaining aspects of the host culture. Chinese and other international students provided a safer, more comfortable space to speak English freely, without fears of making mistakes or giving offense. However, too many Chinese students also meant that it was easy to fall into a comfort zone wherein some participants did not feel they needed to try to make new friends, and in Eric's case, he could not always mix with domestic students in class group work.

Lee, Amy, and Kay mentioned difficulties in group work that included Americans; this further illustrates findings in studies on Asian students in Western

learning contexts (Mori, 2000; Tweed & Lehman, 2002; Yeh & Inose, 2003). All four students mentioned the need for the IEP and CEAP to arrange classes and activities that brought in host country students, so the international students could experience and adapt to the communication differences earlier, in preparation for their academic courses.

Through a program for international students, Eric was partnered with an American student who later became his roommate. He recognized this as an asset to acquiring increased language proficiency and cultural knowledge. This is verification of what studies cited in N. J. Smith and Khawaja (2011) found on programs pairing international and domestic students that resulted in improvements to international students in the areas of social adjustment and support, among other benefits. Eric also credited student outings as helpful in increasing his cultural and linguistic knowledge, stating, "Every experience I feel like my speaking, my knowledge will 'boom'! Like, oh wow, this is American."

Regarding culture shock, all encountered surprises and had difficulties in the first semester. Kay reflected on a conversation activity as a time and place to talk with others about "challenges and difficulties." Eric looked back at his experience as a journey to becoming an adult, saying, "I faced many troubles and things; I suffered pain, loneliness, homesickness, and I grow up." Lee anticipated the difficulties, and stated that others should "accept it, just embrace it."

Do the Descriptions Differ from those of other International Students?

This study did not include participants who did not previously attend the IEP or CEAP, but comparisons can be drawn based on the existing literature on international students at U.S. universities, as well as the participants' perceptions. The main difference for these students is that difficulties occurred during their time in the non-credit IEP or sheltered environment of the CEAP, which the participants viewed as an easier entry to the university: a "soft landing, like butter," as Eric put it. For example, Chinese students in a different study attributed their academic problems to their unfamiliarity with American formal academic environments and teaching methods (J. Huang, 2005). The participants of the present study, however, reported that they acquired study habits, knowledge of the university system and services, increased language proficiency and confidence, and a gained social network during their time in the IEP or CEAP. They all reflected on the time spent in those programs as valuable in allowing for adjustment to UGP and the surrounding community before starting their program of study.

All the participants reflected on their time in the IEP as beneficial to their transition process into their university programs, for the time it afforded them to practice academic skills, gain confidence, and simply become accustomed to the environment.

CONCLUSION

Language Problems

The research on language difficulties has indicated that students without skills for casual and service encounters will have difficulties with some basic living essentials. Without language skills for social encounters, students cannot establish social relationships outside of co-national students. Academic encounters require additional language skills for students to understand and be understood within the classroom (Copland & Garland, 2011). Other researchers have synthesized findings to identify major principles critical to international students' successful adaptation and learning: (a) feelings of belonging; (b) being valued as knowledgeable; and (c) ability to communicate effectively and with confidence (Guo & Chase, 2011). Pre-sessional programs (like IEPs) could give instruction on scripts common to service encounters, possible permutations, and techniques to use to ask for clarification (Copland & Garton, 2011). For the language skills needed for casual, social, and academic encounters, however, the participants of this study all advised that IEPs create more structured opportunities for interactions with host country nationals, and research backs them up.

Studies have shown that simply arranging contact between students is an ineffective solution to the problem (Woods et al., 2013). This was supported by McKenzie and Baldassar (2016), who found an assumption among local students that friendships between local and international students would "emerge organically and freely" (p. 12) from simply facilitating spaces and initiatives for communication. However, the same local students reported that they had not formed friendships with international students due to the local students' social realities, and both parties' understandings of friendship (McKenzie & Baldassar, 2016). The researchers' conclusion was that temporary interactions did not suffice. One suggestion was mentoring programs that are connected to students' coursework, allowing both local and international students to benefit (McKenzie & Baldassar, 2016; Woods et al., 2013).

A major implication for instructors and administrators of IEPs and CEAPs is how to integrate native speakers into their programs; perhaps more specifically, how to recruit and retain native speakers to participate. Some universities with TESL certificate or endorsement programs have created partnerships with students in those programs and students studying English in the IEPs. Many universities, however, do not have TESL or similar programs.

Participants Lee and Amy mentioned the need for such partnerships to be mandatory or part of a class, as even many international students also will not attend optional activities despite their desire for more interaction with native speakers. Kay lamented that she wanted to be friends with domestic students, but she did not know how to initiate conversations. Compulsory participation is one way to ensure participation from students, with the hope that repeated, regular, "forced" interaction will eventually lead to organic and optional interaction across the groups. A problem in setting up partnerships with academic courses and IEPs is the marginalization that many IEPs face. Since IEPs are not always part of an academic unit, instructors are

not tenured faculty, and the larger campus community might have limited awareness of the existence of the IEP. These teaching professionals can have a hard time finding inroads to initiate partnerships.

In Ernst et al. (2015), a college achieved social and academic objectives by creating a learning community. It developed a curriculum for a critical reading project with cohorts of IEP students and native English-speaking students. Along with positive academic outcomes in communication skills, academic research skills, and historical consciousness, the project reduced IEP students' feelings of social isolation, and fostered increased global awareness among the U.S. students. Follow-up surveys of the project showed "overwhelmingly positive feedback from both U.S. native English speakers and IEP student populations, and 94% of participants indicated that the project should be repeated" (Ernst et al., 2015, p. 15).

Forms of Capital

A common thread in the participant narratives was the value of time before starting fully in an academic program, not only adjust to hearing and using English much more frequently, but learning the way in which Americans talk, getting acquainted with the environment, and acquiring community life skills.

Current newcomer sessions are overloaded with verbal, visual, and printed materials that students are largely expected to work through themselves. This practice is a manifestation of the American self-help and self-reliance lifestyle. Instead, international students need more individual guidance in forging a relationship with advisors, and selecting, adding, or dropping courses (Major, 2005). Considering all of this with the current study warrants an exploration into short-term pre-sessional program options for new international students, perhaps coupled with ongoing orientation throughout the first semester(s) of students' degree programs. Another suggestion is a semester-long orientation focused on academic culture with co-national mentors as peer advisors, to minimize the risk of academic failure and maximize the level of academic and sociocultural adjustment (Major, 2005). Barriers to this type of programming are convincing international students to invest more time and money, and the logistics of accommodating students on campus or with host families during this pre-sessional period.

Negotiating new forms of capital does not need to come only from students. It is "international students' own communication that is most salient to their classroom experiences" (Wadsworth et al., 2008, p. 80), so classroom interactions could be structured such that international students may communicate in ways that might not match the dominant group's linguistic capital, thereby placing value on nonmajority forms of capital. An internationalist perspective sees that "the host community does not hold a monopoly on social resources and opportunities, but rather has as much to gain from the social capital of the international student community as it has to offer them in return" (Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2013, p. 427).

Culture Shock

The participants were fortunate to have a network of Chinese students. For most international students, this type of support system helps absorb the initial shock (Major, 2005). Within the co-national group, new students do not feel labeled as linguistically or academically deficient, and these groups can help newcomers identify useful academic and social resources. Participants Lee, Amy, and Eric all referenced support they received from other Chinese students. Additionally, social capital attained from co-national networks can be converted into other forms of capital, as evidenced by a study on a Chinese ethnic enclave (Chen & Ross, 2015). Continued reliance on these segregated groups, however, can hinder adaptation (Brown & Holloway, 2008). This indicates that while co-national support is beneficial in moving through the early stages of culture shock, it should only be used as a scaffold, gradually augmented by additional supports.

Institutions often focus efforts on helping international students adapt to their U.S. college classrooms; they should also focus on helping faculty foster cultural sensitivities toward non-U.S. students (Glass et al., 2015). Faculty should possess an understanding of the initial difficulties that international students face with culture shock, different learning approaches and thinking styles, and provide support when needed (Wong, 2004; L.-F. Zhang & Sternberg, 2000). The site of the Chen and Ross (2015) study has started offering workshops for faculty with the aim of improving classroom learning environments for Chinese students and encouraging student organizations to include international and domestic students before and during the students' programs of studies. Several scholars have also recommended group-oriented approaches to increase student support, reduce cultural isolation, and normalize culture shock challenges (Yakunina et al., 2011). Findings from studies on programs that pair international students with domestic students indicate improvements with international students' social adjustment and support, academic achievement, and utilization of university student services (J. P. Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

Limitations

There were limitations to this study. This qualitative case study was limited by participant selection and the timing of primary research. Students from UGP were purposefully selected because they were enrolled in a freshmen English course at one university. As such, assumptions that the results would be like those of another course or site cannot be made. Observations, interviews, and document data were collected during the students' first year of taking university courses after completing at least one semester of the IEP or CEAP. Similar data collected during an earlier or later time in students' degree programs could yield different results.

Also, the scope of this study was limited to four Chinese students at one university in the United States, so results should not be broadly applied to similar contexts. Another limitation concerned the data collection process. Interview data were dependent on participants and their willingness to share, and that information is further limited by their own perspectives. Patton (2002) stated that perceptual data

are in the eye of the beholder. However, this study's triangulation of data helped to verify results, and helped support the themes that emerged from document and interview data.

Through the student narratives, we gained insight into experiences of four Chinese students who transitioned from China to an IEP/CEAP, and to a degree program. The results provide us with a better understanding of these students' lived experiences regarding their sociocultural and academic transitions. The findings also provide a foundation for more studies into pre-sessional programs and the students who utilize them as a stepping stone to their university degrees.

REFERENCES

- Angrosino, M. V., & Mays dePerez, K. A. (2000). Rethinking observation: From method to context. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp.673–702). SAGE.
- Bastien, G., Seifen-Adkins, T., & Johnson, L. R. (2018). Striving for success: Academic adjustment of international students in the U.S. *Journal of International Students*, 8(2), 1198–1219.
- Belford, N. (2017). International students from Melbourne describing their cross-cultural transitions experiences: Culture shock, social interaction, and friendship development. *Journal of International Students*, 7(3), 499–521.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgment of taste* (R. Nice, Trans.). Harvard University Press. (Original work published 1979)
- Bourdieu, P. (2011). The forms of capital. In A. R. Sadovnik (Ed.), *Sociology of education: A critical reader* (2nd ed., pp. 83–95). Routledge. (Original work published 1986)
- Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J. C. (1977). *Reproduction in education, society and culture*. SAGE.
- Brown, L., & Holloway, I. (2008). The adjustment journey of international postgraduate students at an English university: An ethnographic study. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 7(2), 232–249.
- Chen, Y., & Ross, H. (2015). “Creating a home away from home”: Chinese undergraduate student enclaves in US higher education. *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, 44(3), 155–181.
- Corbin, J. M., & Strauss, A. L. (2015). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (4th ed.). SAGE.
- Copland, F., & Garton, S. (2011). “I felt that I do live in the UK now”: International students' self-reports of their English language speaking experiences on a pre-sessional programme. *Language and Education*, 25(3), 241–255.
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design* (2nd ed.). SAGE.
- Cross, R., & O'Loughlin, K. (2013). Continuous assessment frameworks within university English pathway programs: Realizing formative assessment within high-stakes contexts. *Studies in Higher Education*, 38(4), 584–594.
- Demes, K. A., & Geeraert, N. (2014). Measures matter: Scales for adaptation, cultural distance, and acculturation revisited. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 45(1), 91–109.

- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2003). *The landscape of qualitative research: Theories and issues* (2nd ed.). SAGE.
- DeWalt, K. M., & DeWalt, B. R. (2002). *Participant observation: A guide for fieldworkers*. AltaMira Press.
- Doocy, P. (2010). Students' perspectives of an EAP pathway program. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 9(3), 184–197.
- Durkin, K. (2008). The middle way: East Asian master's students' perceptions of critical argumentation in UK universities. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 12(1), 38–55.
- Elturki, E., Liu, Y., Hjeltness, J., & Hellmann, K. (2019). Needs, expectations, and experiences of international students in pathway program in the United States. *Journal of International Students*, 9(1), 192–210.
- Ernst, B. K., Wonder, K., & Adler, J. (2015). Developing a university learning community of critical readers and writers: The story of a liberal arts and IEP partnership. *TESOL Journal*, 7(1), 67–97.
- Esterberg, K. G. (2002). *Qualitative methods in social research*. McGraw-Hill.
- Gareis, E. (2012). Intercultural friendship: Effects of home and host region. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, 5(4), 309–328.
- Gebhard, J. G. (2012). International students' adjustment problems and behaviors. *Journal of International Students*, 2(2), 184–193.
- Glass, C. R., Gómez, E., & Urzua, A. (2014). Recreation, intercultural friendship, and international students' adaptation to college by region of origin. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 42, 104–117.
- Glass, C. R., Wongtrirat, R., & Buus, S. (2015). *International student engagement: Strategies for creating inclusive, connected, and purposeful campus environments*. Stylus.
- Gu, Q., & Schweisfurth M. (2006). Who adapts? Beyond cultural models of 'the Chinese learner.' *Language, Culture, and Curriculum*, 19(1), 74–89.
- Guo, S., & Chase, M. (2011). Internationalisation of higher education: Integrating international students into Canadian academic environment. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 16(3), 305–318.
- Hawthorne, L. (2010). Demography, migration and demand for international students. In C. Findlay & W. G. Tierney (Eds.), *Globalisation and tertiary education in the Asia-Pacific: The changing nature of a dynamic market* (pp. 93–119). World Scientific.
- Hendrickson, B., Rosen, D., & Aune, R. K. (2011). An analysis of friendship networks, social connectedness, homesickness, and satisfaction levels of international students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35(3), 281–295.
- Hong Nam, K., & Leavell, A.G. (2006). Language learning strategy use of ESL students in an intensive English learning context. *An International Journal of Educational Technology and Applied Linguistics*, 34(3), 399–415.
- Huang, J. (2004). Voices from Chinese students: Professors' use of English affects academic listening. *College Student Journal*, 38(2), 212–223.
- Huang, J. (2005). Challenges of academic listening in English: Reports by Chinese students. *College Student Journal*, 39(3), 553–569.

- Institute of International Education. (2019). *Open Doors Fast Facts* [Data file]. Retrieved June 10, 2019 from <http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors>
- Kaktiņš, L. (2013). Who do you think you are? Profile of international students in a private HE provider pathway program: Implications for international education. *The ACPET Journal for Private Higher Education*, 2(1), 45–53.
- Kaplan, R. B. (1997). An IEP is a many-splendored thing. In M. A. Christison & F. L. Stoller (Eds.), *A handbook for language program administrators* (pp. 3–19). Alta Book Center.
- Kim, S., & Egan, T. (2011). Establishing a formal cross-cultural mentoring organization and program: A case study of international student mentor association in a higher education context. *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 35(1), 89–105.
- Lacina, J. G. (2002). Preparing international students for a successful social experience in higher education. *New Directions for Higher Education*, 2002(117), 21–28.
- LeCompte, M. D., & Preissle, J. (1993). *Ethnography and qualitative design in educational research* (2nd ed.). Academic Press.
- Lee, J. J., & Rice, C. (2007). Welcome to America? International student perceptions of discrimination. *Higher Education*, 53, 381–409.
- Lin, J. (2008). *Transferring cultural capital: Narratives of international students' transition into an Australian university* [Paper presentation]. Australian Association for Research in Education Conference, Brisbane, Australia.
- Longhofer, W., & Winchester, D. (2016). *Social theory re-wired: New connections to classical and contemporary perspectives*. Routledge.
- Major, E. M. (2005). Co-national support, cultural therapy, and the adjustment of Asian students to an English-speaking university culture. *International Education Journal*, 6(1), 84–95.
- McGowan, S., & Porter, L. (2008). The implications of the Chinese learner for the internationalisation of the curriculum: The Australian perspective. *Critical Perspectives in Accounting*, 19(2), 181–198.
- McKenzie, L., & Baladassar, L. (2016). Missing friendships: Understanding the absent relationships of local and international students at an Australian university. *High Education*, 74, 701–715. doi:10.1007/s10734-016-0073-1
- Melles, G., Millar, G., Morton, J., & Fegan, S. (2005). Credit-based discipline specific English for academic purposes programmes in higher education: Revitalizing the profession. *Arts & Humanities in Higher Education*, 4(3), 283–303.
- Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. Jossey-Bass.
- Mori, S. (2000). Addressing the mental health concerns of international students. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 78, 137–144.
- Neri, F., & Ville, S. (2007). Social capital renewal and the academic performance of international students in Australia. *The Journal of Socio-Economics*, 37(4), 1515–1538.

- Oberg, K. (1960). Culture shock: Adjustment to new cultural environment. *Practical Anthropologist*, 7, 177–182.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). SAGE.
- Peterson, D. M., Briggs, P., Dreasher, L., Hornder, D. D., & Nelson, T. (1999). Contributions of international students and programs to campus diversity. *New Directions for Student Services*, 86, 67–77.
- Ramburuth, P., & McCormick, J. (2001). Learning diversity in higher education: A comparative study of Asian international and Australian students. *Higher Education*, 42, 333–350.
- Rose-Redwood, C. R., & Rose-Redwood, R. S. (2013). Self-segregation or global mixing? Social interactions and the international student experience. *Journal of College Student Development*, 54(4), 413–429.
- Ruble, R. A., & Zhang, Y. B. (2013). Stereotypes of Chinese international students held by Americans. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 37, 202–211.
- Samovar, L. A., & Porter, R. E. (1997). *Intercultural communication: A reader* (8th ed.). Wadsworth.
- Schensul, S. L., Schensul, J. J., & LeCompte, M. D. (1999). *Essential ethnographic methods: Observations, interviews, and questionnaires* (Book 2 in Ethnographer's Toolkit). AltaMira Press.
- Sharifian, F. (2009). Cultural conceptualizations in English as an international Language. In F. Sharifian (Ed.), *English as an international language: perspectives and pedagogical issues* (pp. 242–253). Multilingual Matters.
- Sherry, C., Bhat, R., Beaver, B., & Ling, A. (2004). Students as customers: The expectations and perceptions of local and international students. In *Research and development in higher education: Transforming knowledge into wisdom holistic approaches to teaching and learning* (Vol. 27). Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia.
- Smith, J. P., & Naylor, R. A. (2001). Dropping out of university: A statistical analysis of the probability of withdrawal for UK university students. *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society, Series A*, 164(2), 389–405.
- Smith, R. A., & Khawaja, N. G. (2011). A review of the acculturation experiences of international students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35, 699–713.
- Storti, C. (2001). *The art of crossing cultures* (2nd ed.). Intercultural Press.
- Tait, C. (2010). Chinese students' perceptions of the effects of western university examination formats on their learning. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 64(3), 261–275.
- Thompson, A. S. (2013). Intensive English programs in the United States: An overview of structure and mentoring. *TESOL Journal*, 4(2), 211–232.
- Touchstone, E. E., Koslow, S., Shamdasani, P. N., & D'Alessandro, S. (2017). The linguistic servicescape: Speaking their language may not be enough. *Journal of Business Research*, 72, 147–157.
- Tweed, R. G., & Lehman, D. R. (2002). Learning considered within a cultural context. *American Psychologist*, 57(2), 89–99.

- Ültanır, E. (2012). An epistemological glance at the constructivist approach: Constructivist learning in Dewey, Piaget, and Montessori. *International Journal of Instruction, 5*(2), 195–212.
- Wadsworth, B. C., Hecht, M. L., & Jung, E. (2008). The role of identity gaps, discrimination, and acculturation in international students' educational satisfaction in American classrooms. *Communication Education, 57*(1), 64–87.
- Wang, Y. (2002). *The contextual knowledge of language and culture: Exploring the American academic experiences of Chinese graduate students* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. The University of Southern Mississippi.
- Wong, J. K.-K. (2004). Are the learning styles of Asian international students culturally or contextually based? *International Education Journal, 4*(4), 154–166.
- Woods, P., Poropat, A., Barker, M., Hills, R., Hibbing, R., & Borbasic, S. (2013). Building friendships through a cross-cultural mentoring program. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 37*(5), 523–535.
- Yakunina, E. S., Weigold, I. K., & McCarthy, A. S. (2011). Group counseling with international students: Practical, ethical, and cultural considerations. *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy, 25*(1), 67–78.
- Yakunina, E. S., Weigold, I. K., Hercegovac, S., & Elsayed, N. (2013). International students' personal and multicultural strengths: Reducing acculturative stress and promoting adjustment. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 91*, 216–223.
- Yan, K., & Berliner, D. C. (2009). Chinese international students' academic stressors in the United States. *College Student Journal, 43*(4), 939–960.
- Yan, K., & Berliner, D. C. (2011). An examination of individual level factors in stress and coping processes: Perspectives of Chinese international students in the United States. *Journal of College Student Development, 52*(5), 523–542.
- Yeh, C. J., & Inose, M. (2003). International students' reported English fluency, social support satisfaction, and social connectedness as predictors of acculturative stress. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly, 2003*, 15–28.
- Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods* (4th ed., Vol. 5: Applied Research Method Series). SAGE.
- Yoon, E., & Portman, T. A. A. (2004). Critical issues of literature on counseling international students. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development, 32*, 33–44.
- Zhang, J., & Goodson, P. (2011). Predictors of international students' psychosocial adjustment to life in the United States: A systematic review. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 35*, 139–162.
- Zhang, L.-F., & Sternberg, R. J. (2000). Are learning approaches and thinking styles related? A study in two Chinese populations. *The Journal of Psychology, 134*(5), 469–489.
- Zhao, C., Kuh, G. D., & Carini, R. M. (2005). A comparison of international student and American student engagement in effective educational practices. *The Journal of Higher Education, 76*(2), 209–231.
- Zhou, Y., Jindal-Snape, D., Topping, K., & Todman, J. (2008). Theoretical models of culture shock and adaptation in international students in higher education. *Studies in Higher Education, 33*(1), 63–75.

JILL FOX, PhD, is the Director of the Intensive English Language Institute at Creighton University. Her major research interests lie in the areas of intensive English programs, social and cultural capital in U.S. higher education, and multiculturalism. Email: jillfox@creighton.edu

Insights into Saudi Female International Students: Transition Experiences

Alia Arafah
University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, USA

ABSTRACT

This study explored the transition experiences of 10 Saudi female international students when they made the decision to study and live in the United States. The transition theory provided the theoretical foundation for understanding how Saudi female sophomore students progressed through moving to a Midwestern university. Ten in-depth individual interviews followed by a focus group interview with four of the participants elicited their reflections about their transition experiences evolving over time and the coping strategies they employed to facilitate their transition. The themes that emerged from data analysis emphasized the positive experiences of Saudi females in the United States, the importance of fathers' support, desire to go back to Saudi Arabia upon graduation, and the several resources Saudi females sought other than campus support.

Keywords: coping resources, Saudi female international students, transition experiences, transition theory

INTRODUCTION

Recruitment of international students on American campuses has become part of many American higher academic institutions' internationalization plans (Pandit, 2013). Having international students help to prepare domestic students to become global citizens (Bevis & Lucas, 2007). Therefore, the number of international students in the United States exceeded one million in the academic year 2018-2019 (Institute of International Education, 2019). These students arrive from cultural backgrounds that are, in most cases, different from the American culture which creates additional challenges for them (Pandit, 2013). The considerable increase of

Saudi international students on U.S. campuses in the last two decades created different challenges from their counterparts due to the vast cultural and religious differences. Arriving from a conservative country presents extra challenges for them, especially the female Saudi international students. Being labeled as terrorists, misunderstanding of Islam and the Arabs are among other difficulties (Arafah, 2018). Moreover, the terrorists attacks that occurred in different parts of the world increased hatred toward Muslims (Siemaszko, 2015).

The Institute of Economics and Peace's Global Terrorism Index asserted that terrorist attacks would not end even after 15 years of the "War on Terror" declared by former U.S. President George W. Bush (Friedman, 2016; The Global Terrorism Index, 2015).

Moreover, the U.S. presidential rhetoric against Muslims has contributed to increase the hateful sentiments toward Arabs and Muslims in the United States (Sarsour, 2018). In a study by Eissner (2016), researchers from Adelphi University in New York distributed a survey to explore the impact of Islamophobia during the 2016 presidential election campaign. More than 500 Muslim participants responded to the survey questions. The survey results revealed that 93% reported experiencing "some" or "extreme" negative impact from the campaign. Forty-seven percent reported feeling "somewhat safe" as a Muslim in the United States, whereas, 53% reported feeling "very" or "extremely" unsafe. The survey results implied that hate sentiments not only have a negative impact on Muslims who were either born or raised in the United States, but also on all Muslims who enter the United States for various reasons such as business and education.

Much of previous research on international students has focused on the students' academic challenges, language barriers, and nonacademic challenges such as acculturation difficulties, alienation, and discrimination. The few studies that addressed the specific experiences of Saudi female international students emphasized the social and academic challenges they encountered in the United States (Davis & McGovern, 2015; Abo Rabia, 2015). None of these studies explored the transition experiences of these females who arrive from a conservative culture where women's rights are very limited, to an open free society that adopts different perspectives, opinions, and beliefs about women.

Therefore, it becomes essential to understand the transition experiences of Saudi female international students who arrive from a conventional society, and how they cope with the challenges and adversities throughout their residence in the United States. It is also important to understand the coping strategies they acclimate to assist them with their academic and social lives in a culture that is completely different from their homeland.

International Students in the United States

International students in the United States arrive from more than 200 countries. Fifty-eight percent of them arrive from China, India, South Korea, and Saudi Arabia (Institute for International Education [IIE], 2019). According to the *Open Doors Report* released by IIE, the number of international students in the United States has increased from 565,039 in the 2004–2005 academic year to 1,095,299 in the 2018–

2019 academic year (IIE, 2019). Saudi Arabia ranks fourth after China, India, and South Korea in the number of students sent to earn their higher education degrees in U.S. academic institutions (IIE, 2019).

Saudi International Students

In Saudi Arabia, the term “Saudization” is used to describe the initiative to replace nonnational employees with nationals in almost all sectors in the country. The number of foreign workers who entered Saudi Arabia on work visas has increased since the oil advent in 1938. Some of these employees take leadership positions because of the lack of equivalent qualified Saudi nationals (Al Asfour & Khan, 2014). Therefore, the Saudi government started to offer a number of full scholarships to Saudi students in the 1970s to encourage them to pursue their higher education in western countries, to replace the foreign workforce (Al Asfour & Khan, 2014).

Consequently, the number of international students arriving from Saudi Arabia to study at U.S. colleges and universities has consistently increased. For example, in the academic year 1997–1998 there were 4,571 Saudi students in the United States. However, this number sharply declined after the terrorist attacks of 9/11 to become 3,035 in the academic year 2004–2005. The number started to increase again after an agreement between late King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and the former U.S. president George W. Bush, which launched the King Abdullah Scholarship Program in 2005. The King Abdullah Scholarship Program offers thousands of full scholarships to Saudi youth to pursue their higher education in the United States and other countries. The Program aims to create harmony bridge the gap between the East and the West and foster peace and solidarity (King Abdullah Scholarship Program, SACM, 2016).

Table 1: Saudi Students Studying at U.S. Campuses

Year	Number of Saudi students	% of previous year
1997–1998	4,571	-
1998–1999	4,931	7.9%
1999–2000	5,156	4.6%
2000–2001	5,273	2.3%
2001–2002	5,579	5.8%
2002–2003	4,175	-25.2%
2003–2004	3,521	-15.7%
2004–2005	3,035	-13.6%
2006–2007	7,886	128.7%
2007–2008	9,873	25.2%
2008–2009	12,661	28.2%
2010–2011	22,704	43.6%
2011–2012	34,139	50.4%

Note. Adapted from Ministry of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia (2013)

In the academic year 2016–2017, the number of Saudi students on U.S. campuses increased to 52,611 (IIE, 2018).

Female International Students from Saudi Arabia

This research focuses on Saudi female international students who arrive from a country where most women do not enjoy freedom to travel and get higher education abroad (Le Renard, 2014). Recently, few changes occurred to the Saudi law that allowed women to drive, vote and be nominated of the Saudi parliament for the first time since the establishment of the Saudi Kingdom (BBC News, 2015). In 2017, the Saudi government sanctioned a decree that gave a permission to women to drive their own cars starting from June 2018. This law marks an end of oppression of Saudi women who experienced numerous social and cultural inequalities (BBC News, 2015).

Transition Theory

The transition theory introduced by Schlossberg (1983) elucidates the challenges adults encounter when moving out from their comfort zones where they need to adapt to a new environment. According to Goodman, Schlossberg and Anderson (2006) there are two types of transition, anticipated such as moving to another country, having a baby, getting a new job and marriage. While the non-anticipated transition comprises consequences of car accidents, sickness and death. Building on Schlossberg’s theory, Goodman et al. identified situation, support, self, and strategies—also known as the Four S’s—to understand how adults experience transition and how they implement these resources to adjust to the new environment (Figure 1).

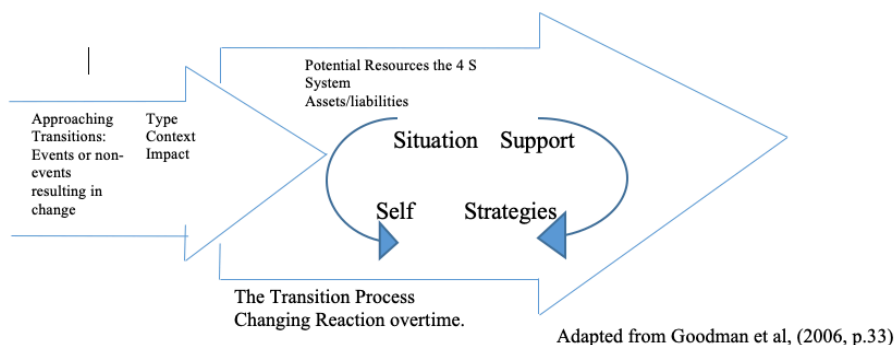


Figure 1: Schlossberg’s Transition Model Reflecting Individual Transition

Goodman et al. (2006) described *situation* as the time and place where the event occur. *Support* might be financial, social or psychological that help individuals adapt to the new phase of their lives. *Self* explains the impact of transition on the

individual's personality and beliefs. *Strategies* are the tools that an individual use to acclimatize to the new event, place, etc.

The application of the transition theory on the Saudi female international students projected to understand the impact of moving to the United States, the challenges they faced, and how they were able to succeed using Schlossberg's 4 Ss, situation, support, self and strategies (Al Remailh, 2016). In addition, the four coping resources that Goodman et al. (2006) implemented to understand the adult transition, can provide insight into the Saudi female transition experiences of the moving in, moving through, and moving on phases.

Saudi Female International Students' Transition

The transition theory that Schlossberg (1983) first presented to understand adult transition can be applied to international students because they experience similar stages to what Schlossberg introduced in her theory (Al Remailh, 2016). In addition, the four coping aspects that Goodman et al. (2006) implemented to understand the Adult transition, can provide insight into the Saudi female transition experiences of the moving in, moving through, and moving on phases. Therefore, for this article, my approach is to understand the role of the Four S's in four different stages (Figure 2).

Stage One: Moving In

The first stage started from Saudi Arabia when these women decided to study in the United States. Their motivation to study abroad reflects their strength to prove themselves as successful women in their conservative society. These women arrived from different areas in Saudi Arabia where women do not enjoy several rights. However, their decision was supported by their family members, specifically males, who believed in their abilities to succeed. The support they received from their families was both psychological and financial.

Stage Two: Moving Through

Part One

This stage started when these women arrived in the United States for the first time in their lives. According to Pedersen (1995), this stage is the most challenging for international students when they feel happy and anxious at the same time. Happy because they achieved their dream to study abroad, and anxious about their lives and future in the foreign country. These mixed feelings might lead to lack of self-confidence (Ting-Toomey, 1999). However, they can reduce these feelings when they get support from their campus represented by the office of international students, and the association of international students that offer help and support to all international students (Shapiro et al.2014).

Part Two

In this part, Saudi female students are more acquainted with campus services and the academic programs that help them navigate several choices and facilities (Ting-Toomy, 1999). This stage usually starts during the second semester of their first academic year. Being aware of the campus culture helps them seek support from their professors, academic departments and friends. The support they receive usually has a positive impact on their self-confidence.

Moving On

The first semester of the second academic year marks a difference in these Saudi female students' lives. Most of them had the opportunity to travel to their home country, Saudi Arabia in summer. Their experiences and feelings during the summer vacation are different from when they first took the decision to study in the United States. Therefore, it is important to focus on the changes that happened to these students back home after spending one year in the United States.

According to Wayt (2012), it is a great achievement for college students to persist college life for the second year. The support these students receive from their campus and families is fundamental to their persistence. Ting-Toomy (1999) emphasized that international students in the second academic year become more independent and adaptable to both college and social lives.

Research Questions

This research sought to answer the main question: How do Saudi female international students navigate their transitional experiences to study and live during their first 2 academic years on a Midwest university campus? The guiding questions for this research were:

- How do Saudi females navigate challenges in their home country as they make the decision to study and live in the United States?
- How do Saudi females cope with the transition to living and learning on a U.S. campus during the first 6 weeks?
- How do Saudi females meet the transition challenges regarding academic and social lives?

METHOD

To understand Saudi female international students' experiences on a U.S. campus, a qualitative research methodology was used because it provided a large platform to describe, reflect, and interpret data collected (Patton, 2015). The focus was to understand the essence of transition of this small group of Saudi female international students through listening to their life stories by conducting individual interviews. In addition, using a hermeneutic phenomenology approach, the focus

group provided insight into their collective essence of experiences (Crowther et al. 2016).

Participants

The participants of this study were 10 sophomore Saudi female international students who volunteered to participate, comprising approximately 60% of the population of Saudi female sophomore students attending a Midwestern university campus. The university where I conducted my study is situated in the most diverse city in the Midwest (Kent & Frohich, 2015). I received Institutional Review Board approval before conducting the individual and the focus group interviews. The Saudi female students were from different areas in Saudi Arabia: the capital city Riyadh, Jeddah, the East, and the West areas. Nine participants studied health care-related majors, and one student studied political science. Four out of the 10 students participated in the focus group. All Saudi females in this research voluntarily participated without getting any incentives or extra credits.

Data Collection

The aim of the individual and the focus group interviews was to understand the transition experiences of these Saudi female students, the resources they used to cope with the various hardships they faced in the United States, and how they were successful to overcome many academic and cultural hindrances.

In order to encourage Saudi females to share their lived experiences, it was important to build rapport with them through introducing the purpose of the study, the reason for conducting the interviews, and the benefits other might gain when the results of the study were published.

The individual interview questions addressed the five time periods of these females' transition experiences. Each time incorporated questions on the role of the Four S's in facilitating their transition: making the decision to study in the United States, the support they received, their feelings about themselves, and the strategies they implemented to overcome various obstacles. All Saudi females answered all questions without any reservations. The amount of information they shared revealed the level of comfort they felt when sharing their experiences.

The focus group interview took place after analyzing the individual interviews. I sent a Doodle Poll to arrange time and venue (www.doodle.com). Four students were able to join the focus group interview. Conducting focus group interviews assists with getting a variety of collaboration with the participants (Morgan, 1997). Therefore, the focus group was a unique opportunity to share their insights about several topics. I asked for permission to record the interviews, and all students agreed. The group discussion motivated me to share their experiences, agreements, and disagreements and get their feedback. All participants used Arabic to

communicate in which they felt more comfortable to reveal their experiences. Later, I translated the interviews into English for analysis.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the Individual Interviews

The Saudi participants preferred to use Arabic in their individual and focus group interviews. The translation and transcribing were done immediately after each interview to stay focused and engaged. I adapted the three-cycle coding based on Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014). I added line numbers to each interview transcript to refer easily to the students' quotes. The transcripts were all in an Excel sheet to make it easier to number the lines, elicit quotes, and refer to the appropriate data. I added the students' pseudonyms to maintain the privacy of their interviews. Then, the excel sheet was divided into sections based on the stages that these students experienced starting from making the decision to study in the United States, until the second semester of their sophomore year. The coping resources, situation, self, support, and strategies were also added to understand how these students implemented them to overcome several challenges.

Analysis of the Focus Group Interview

After translating and transcribing the focus group interview, I carefully read the transcription for the initial coding so it became easier to generate themes and integrate them in the analysis of the individual interviews. Writing memos throughout the process helped me track the expressions used, participants' reflections on the issues and the subjects discussed, and participants' level of engagement and enthusiasm for the initial findings of the individual interviews. The second stage of analysis involved categorizing the common themes and patterns, and noting where and whether there were similarities with the themes emerging from the individual interviews. I also noted expressions that reflected the participants' interpretations of various incidents and issues, and the terms they used to describe situations and events.

Integration of Findings

After analyzing both the individual interviews and the focus group interview, the visual integration of findings helped me understand the phenomena, similarities, and differences between both results. Lambert and Loisel (2008) asserted that integration of individual interviews and focus group interview results guide the exploration of the phenomena that a research aims to investigate. For example, when I asked the females in the individual interviews about their American friends, they did not give a detailed account of the nature of the relationship with domestic students. They only mentioned that they met some of them in their classes. However, in the focus group, they gave more details about the nature of their friendships with American students. They were also able to identify American

students of different backgrounds. For example, one of the students mentioned that she had an American roommate from Latin America, another shared her experience with her African American friend, and a third one mentioned her White American friend.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Through the in-depth examination of the individual interviews and the focus group interview grounded in the hermeneutic phenomenological approach and transition theory, I derived five main findings from my study.

All the Saudi females who participated in this study described primarily positive feelings about their experiences during the five stages of their transition to live and study in the United States. They agreed that life in the United States helped them become more mature, responsible, confident, and independent. Being in a free open society enhanced their self-esteem and self-confidence. Enjoying a large spectrum of freedom helped them become more appreciative to the American culture where women enjoy equal rights with males. Furthermore, during individual interviews, two students described their experiences in the United States as “positive culture shock.” Ghada, 23, Health Sciences, emphasized:

I am able to use the public transportations and go places wherever and whenever I want. In Saudi Arabia, we do not have public transportation, and if I want to go out, I have to get a permission from my father or brother. I cannot drive, and I cannot take a taxi by myself. Here, nobody treated me as a different person. They respected me as I am. For me it is a positive culture shock.

In contrast, previous research on international students at U.S. higher academic institutions highlighted the culture shock theory that most international students experience because of the several cultural and social differences from their home country and the United States (Davis, 2014; Hendrickson et al., 2011; Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013; Presbitero, 2016).

An apparent strong relationship between support from their fathers and the Saudi females' ever-growing self-confidence helped them face several challenges and persist with their studies in the United States. Nine Saudi females confirmed that their fathers had a powerful impact on their decision to study abroad. The 10th girl's father passed away years ago. Lana, 22, Chemistry, conferred:

My father was the main source of support for me. My father used to tell me that whenever I finish my classes and I have a break, I can travel to Saudi Arabia, so there is no need for me to cry or feel upset.

Almost all Saudi females who participated in this study expressed their desires to go back to Saudi Arabia upon graduation to create positive changes in their country. Freedom of mobility, independence, and successfully upholding several responsibilities in the United States augmented the Saudi females' sense of

competence. They indicated that they wanted to apply what they learned in the United States in their home country and to become part of the positive changes they believed they could help make happen in Saudi Arabia. They also wanted to inspire other Saudi females to seek their higher education in the United States and be part of the future changes.

The constant increase in the numbers of educated Saudi women is expected to create positive changes in Saudi Arabia in the future (Alferahy, 2016). Well educated women usually criticize the restrictions and laws that confine their freedom and regulate their activities.

The interrelationship between the four coping resources, situation, support, self, and strategies fostered the emergence of *self* as a primary asset. To illustrate, the situation in both Saudi Arabia and in the United States played key roles in the growth of these females' self-confidence. The support they received increased their confidence. The strategies they implemented in both Saudi Arabia and the United States indicated the amount of self-confidence they had even before they came to the United States, which helped them meet various challenges once they arrived in the United States. They also started to acknowledge their aptitudes and potentials that had been difficult to explore while in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, their identity as college students developed and they became more mature in the United States. The situation, support, and strategies collaborated to foster an even stronger and more positive sense of personal identity that they hoped would encourage them to be a source of inspiration for other Saudi females back home. Dalia, 24, Political Science, asserted:

I adapted to a lifestyle that is difficult to change. For example, I depend on myself, I control my life and I do whatever I want but I feel that when I go back to Saudi Arabia, I feel that people will control my life and I will lose the privileges that I am enjoying here in the US, but of course, I want to graduate and go back to Saudi Arabia.

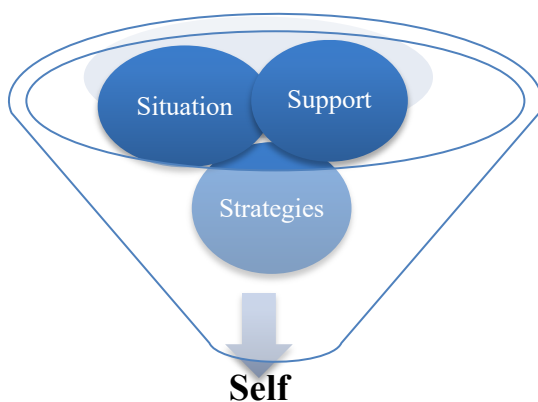


Figure 2: The Integration of the Four Coping Aspects of Transition

Therefore, as shown in Figure 2, these coping aspects were blended together as a metaphorical ice cream cone with three different flavored balls (situation, support, and strategies) that fostered the emerging of essence of a stronger self, or identity, as the result of their integration.

The transition process incorporates interactions between the Saudi females and both college and social environments. Self-confidence that had been reinforced since their arrival in the United States, as well growing independence and responsibility, contributed to their identity development. In addition, their interactions with their contexts, or situations, in both Saudi Arabia and the United States played a key role in fostering their identity development as they transitioned to live and study in the United States through the first semester of their sophomore year (Evans et al., 2010).

Although there is ample research on college student identity development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans et al., 2010; Jones & Abes, 2013; Kramer, 2007), there is still a need for research that explores identity development of female college students who arrive from segregated cultures such as the Saudi culture. Kim (2012) attempted to develop a new conceptual framework, the International Student Identity model, that addressed international students. However, this model did not fit the Saudi female identity development in this study when participants lived and studied in the United States. Kim (2012) suggested six stages that international students experience in the host country. However, when I tried to match her theory to my study, I found several discrepancies that did not match with the Saudi female experiences.

Campus support was inadequate to address the needs of first year Saudi females, so they sought support from other sources. All Saudi females who participated in this study conveyed that campus support upon arrival was almost absent as they did not know what to do and who to ask. Because all females I interviewed were able to succeed to their sophomore year, I was curious to understand the type of campus support they received that helped them persist. All girls indicated, however, that they received minimal campus support during their first few months at the Midwestern university. Instead, campus support created more complications for these students, such as when a couple of the participants were provided incorrect guidance by academic advising services. Manal, 22, Biomedical Engineering, stated:

I took a very difficult class that my advisors registered for me. Later, I realized that there was an easier class that I should take before that class as a prerequisite and my advisor did not tell me about that class. So, I did not get good scores in that class. I felt I was lost.

None of the Saudi females mentioned any significant campus support upon arrival. The mandatory orientation session did not satisfy their needs, as it only covered minor services such as getting a bus permit and health insurance. In addition, they were frustrated by the unprofessional academic advising they received as they ended up taking either unrequired courses, or difficult courses that required a prerequisite they had not yet completed. Their academic advisors did not help them select the right courses for their programs.

Research on international student advising services showed that appropriate advising for international students contributes to international students' retention (Shapiro et al., 2014). However, inappropriate advising leads to several complications and stresses for international students that encourages them to change their academic advisors or programs. A woman described how her academic advisor suggested taking four core courses in the same semester, which created a lot of anxiety for her. When she moved to her sophomore year, she did not consult her advisor, but her friend, who she considered more knowledgeable than her academic advisor. This example illustrates how, even though campuses services were inadequate, the participants in this study were resilient enough to begin to seek help they wanted from other sources.

Limitations of the Study

The small sample of the Saudi females, 10 sophomore participants, might not represent the whole population of Saudi female students on other U.S. campuses, even though the sample represents more than half the population of Saudi sophomore students at the Midwestern university. In addition, because this study addressed the transition experiences of sophomore Saudi female international students, their perspectives might be different from those of juniors, seniors, and graduate Saudi females. Moreover, this study addressed the transition experiences of Saudi female students whose experiences might be different from their male counterparts who enjoy a larger space of freedom from social, cultural, and religious standpoints.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the lived experiences of 10 sophomore Saudi female students who studied on a Midwest campus. They revealed through the individual and focus group interviews the tremendous positive changes they experienced while studying and living in the United States. The freedom of mobility and speech they enjoyed had a huge impact on their way of living and thinking. All participants mentioned their strong desire to transfer the positive American cultural attributes to their home country, and to encourage their peer females to travel to the United States to pursue their education. Moreover, all participants expressed their strong desire to go back to their home country where they can be active members in their society and work hard to better change the social and cultural situations. This study also revealed that Saudi women are strong and able to encounter several challenges and succeed in a foreign country that is extremely different from where they were born and raised.

Implications for Future Research

This research on the transition experiences of the Saudi female international students at a Midwest campus suggested two themes for further exploration. Future research should explore the transition experiences of Saudi female students when they go back to their home country upon completion of their academic programs to improve understanding of how they experience repatriated life in Saudi Arabia. More

research is also needed about domestic students' perceptions of international students particularly, Muslim students.

The timing of this study coincided with the tension between the United States and the Middle East, which increased opportunities for American students to understand and learn from international students particularly from the Middle East.

REFERENCES

- Abo Rabia, H. (2015). *Arab international students' experiences in a U.S. university* (Publication No. 10016577) [Doctoral dissertation, University of Hartford]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.
- Al Asfour, A., & Khan, S. (2014). Workforce localization in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Issues and challenges. *Human Resources Development International, 17*(4), 243–253.
- Al Remailh, D. (2016). *Social and academic challenges facing Saudi female students in the United States of America* (Publication No. 10130059) [Doctoral dissertation, The Claremont Graduate University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.
- Alfaraehy, R. (2016). *My right to drive: Women rights in Saudi Arabia explored through the lens of religion* (Publication No. 10189308) [Master's thesis, The George Washington University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.
- Arafah, A. (2018, May). I dreamt, I achieved: Insights into Saudi female students on an American campus. *NAFSA Research Symposium Series*, Vol. (2). American University, Washington DC.
- BBC News. (2015, December 12). *Saudi Arabia's women voted for elections for the first time*. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35075702>
- Bevis, T., & Lucas, C. (2007). *International students in American colleges and universities: A history*. New York: Palgrave.
- Bhandari, R., & Bluementhal, P. (Eds). (2011). *International students and global mobility in higher education: National trends and new directions*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Charles-Toussaint, G., Crowson, M. (2010). Prejudice against international students: The role of threat perceptions and authoritarian disposition in U.S. students. *The Journal of Psychology, 144*(5), 413–428.
- Chickering, A., & Reisser, L. (1993). *Education and identity*. Jossey-Bass.
- Crowther, S., Ironside, P., Spenser, D., & Smythe, L. (2016). Crafting stories in hermeneutic phenomenological research: A methodological device. *Qualitative Health Research, 27*(6), 826–835. doi:10.1177/1049732316656161
- Davis, E. M. (2014). *Saudi women international students in the United States: A qualitative examination of cultural adjustment* (Publication No. 3632085) [Doctoral dissertation, Ball State University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.
- Davis, E., & McGovern K. (2015). The cultural adjustment of Saudi women international students: A qualitative examination. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 46*(3), 406–434.

- Eissner, B. (2016). The impact of the presidential election on American Muslims. <https://www.adelphi.edu/news/the-impact-of-the-presidential-election-on-american-muslims/>
- Evans, N., Forney, D., Guido, F., Patton, L., & Renn, K. (2010). *Student development in college: Theory, research, and practice*. Jossey-Bass.
- Friedman, G. (2016, December 3). *We must set Muslims against ISIS*. Newsmax Finance. <http://www.newsmax.com/Finance/GeorgeFriedman/muslims-isis-trump-terrorism/2016/12/03/id/762009/>
- Goodman, J., Schlossberg, N., & Anderson, M. (2006). *Counseling adults in transition*. Springer.
- Guillen, P., & Ji, D. (2011). Trust, discrimination, and acculturation: Experimental evidence on Asian international and domestic Australian domestic university students. *Journal of Socio-Economics*, 40(5), 594–608.
- Hakami, S. (2012). *Applying the Rasch model to measure acculturation challenges faced by Saudi female students in the United States* (Publication No. 3550102) [Doctoral dissertation, University of Northern Colorado]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.
- Hendrickson, B., Rosen, D., & Aune, R. (2011). An analysis of friendship networks, social connectedness, homesickness and satisfaction levels of international students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35(3), 281–295.
- Hotta, J., & Ting-Toomey, S. (2013). Intercultural adjustment and friendship dialectical in international students: A qualitative study. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 37(5), 550–566.
- Institute of International Education (IIE). (November, 18, 2019). Number of International Students in the United States Hits All-Time High. Retrieved May 29, 2020, from <https://www.iie.org/Why-IIE/Announcements/2019/11/Number-of-International-Students-in-the-United-States-Hits-All-Time-High>
- Jones, S., & Abes, E. (2013). *Identity development of college students: Advancing frameworks for multiple dimensions of identity*. Jossey-Bass.
- Kent, A., & Frohlich, T. (2015). *The 9 most segregated cities in America*. The Huffington Post. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/the-9-most-segregated-cities-in-america_us_55df53e9e4b0e7117ba92d7f
- Kim, E. (2012). An alternative theoretical model: Examining psychosocial identity development of international students in the United States. *College Student Journal*, 46(1), 99–113.
- King Abdullah Scholarship Program. (2016). Retrieved from <https://www.sacm.org/>
- Lambert, S. D., & Loiselle, C. (2008). Combining individual interviews and focus groups to enhance data richness. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 62(2), 228-237.
- Le Renard, A. (2014). *A society of young women*. Stanford University Press.
- Miles, M., Huberman, M., & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods Sourcebook*. Sage.
- Ministry of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia (2020). Retrieved from <https://www.moe.gov.sa/en/HigherEducation/governmenthighereducation/Pages/default.aspx>

- Morgan, D. L. (1997). *Qualitative research methods series, Vol. 16. Focus groups as qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Sage. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412984287>
- Nawar, I. (2007). *Portraying women in the western and Arab media, general remarks*. http://www.iemed.org/publicacions/quaderns/8/q8_095.pdf
- Pandit K. (2013) International Students and Diversity. In: Alberts H.C., Hazen H.D. (eds) *International Students and Scholars in the United States*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137024473_7
- Patton, M. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice*. Sage.
- Pedersen, P. (1995). *The five stages of culture shock: Critical incidents around the world*. Greenwood Press.
- Presbitero, A. (2016). Culture shock and reverse culture shock: The moderating role of cultural intelligence in international students' adaptation. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 53, 28–38.
- Ramos, M., Cassidy, C., Reicher, S., & Haslam, A. (2016). A longitudinal study of the effects of discrimination on the acculturation strategies of international students. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 47(3), 401–420.
- Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission. (2016). *Saudi Cultural Mission to the United States*. http://www.sacm.org/ArabicSACM/pdf/education_web.pdf
- Sarsour, L. (2018, January 30). *Linda Sarsour: Trump's anti-Muslim rhetoric helps united America against him*. Time. <http://time.com/5124920/president-trump-anti-muslim-policies/>
- Schlossberg, N. (1983). *Counseling adults in transition*. Springer.
- Shapiro, S., Farrelly, R., & Tomas, Z. (2014). *Fostering international student success in higher education*. TESOL International Association.
- Siemaszko, C. (2015). *Hate attacks on Muslims in U.S. spike after recent acts of terrorism*. NBC News. <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/hate-attacks-muslims-u-s-spike-after-recent-acts-terrorism-n482456>
- Sullivan, K., Izadi, E., & Bailey, S. (2015). *After Paris and California attacks, U.S. Muslims feeling tense backlash*. The Washington Post. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/after-paris-and-california-attacks-us-muslims-feel-intense-backlash/2015/12/03/bcf8e480-9a09-11e5-94f0-9eeaff906ef3_story.html
- Taylor, C. & Albasri, W. (2014). The impact of Saudi Arabia King Abdullah's scholarship program in the U.S. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 109-118. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/276419788_The_Impact_of_Saudi_Arabia_King_Abdullah%27s_Scholarship_Program_in_the_US
- The Global Terrorism Index. (2015). <http://economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Global-Terrorism-Index-2015.pdf>
- Ting-Toomey, S. (1999). *Communicating across cultures*. Guilford Press.
- Wayt, L. (2012). *The impact of students' academic and social relationships on college student persistence* [Master's thesis, University of Nebraska, Lincoln]. DigitalCommons. <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1108&context=cehsedaddiss>

ALIA ARAFEH, PhD, is an Adjunct Professor at the Administrative Leadership Department at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee. Research interests include international students, internationalization of higher education, multiculturalism, globalization, and minority students in higher education institutions. Email: aliaarafeh2014@gmail.com

© *Journal of International Students*
Volume 10, Issue 4 (2020), pp. 1103-1109
ISSN: 2162-3104 (Print), 2166-3750 (Online)
Doi: 10.32674/jis.v10i4.1442
ojed.org/jis

Ethics Acculturation of International Counseling Students

Dan Li
University of North Texas, USA

Yang Ai
University of Redlands, USA

ABSTRACT

Counseling ethics is a complex discipline; it is more than the acquisition of ethical principles, codes of ethics, and standards of practice. To disentangle the intricacies of ethics education, we use the acculturation model to conceptualize students' learning of counseling ethics, particularly international students who experience acculturation in the general sense and the acculturation of ethics in the counseling profession specifically. A case study is presented to illustrate the four acculturation strategies that students may adopt in ethical decision-making. Implications for counselor education, practice, and research are provided.

Keywords: acculturation, counseling ethics, ethics education, international students

Ethics is a complex discipline (Kitchener, 1986) because it “attempts to describe the innate complexity of constantly changing and constantly negotiated human relationships” (Hill, 2004, p. 183). Ethics education is more than the acquisition of ethical principles, codes of ethics, and standards of practice (Ametrano, 2014; Bashe et al., 2007; Handelsman et al., 2005). Handelsman et al. (2005) created an analogy between becoming an ethical psychologist and the acculturation process of immigrants. Similarly, the counseling profession has its own history, traditions, and values that shape its distinctive way of establishing and implementing ethical standards. As such, growing into an ethical counselor is a journey of developing a professional ethical identity as one experiences acculturation in counseling.

The four primary strategies that immigrants typically use (e.g., Berry, 1997)—separation, assimilation, marginalization, and integration—are readily transferrable to students' learning. If students place more value on their preexisting knowledge system (separation), students may experience greater difficulties in the acquisition of new knowledge. On the contrary, if they identify more with the new knowledge (assimilation), the old knowledge may be easily forgotten. When either the new or old is not welcomed by students (marginalization), it may produce the least learning productivity. However, if students are open to integrating and weaving both systems into a greater unit (integration), the resulting knowledge repertoire can be far richer. Extending the general acculturation model to specific discipline domains can assist educators in identifying students' acculturation strategies and making developmentally appropriate plans to meet students' needs, particularly for international students who experience acculturation both in the general sense and specifically within the subject area.

Three components play crucial roles in international students' counseling ethics acculturation: U.S. counseling ethics, students' home cultures as related to counseling ethics, and students' personal values and beliefs. Domestic counselors-in-training are mostly socialized in the U.S. culture wherein the ethics of the counseling profession is inherently imbedded. As such, the distance between U.S. counseling ethics and domestic students stems notably from individual differences, such as professional education, training experience, self-awareness, self-reflection, and growth environment (see Figure 1). For international students, an additional dimension (cross-cultural differences) may extend this distance if students' home cultures as related to counseling ethics are strikingly different than U.S. counseling ethics.

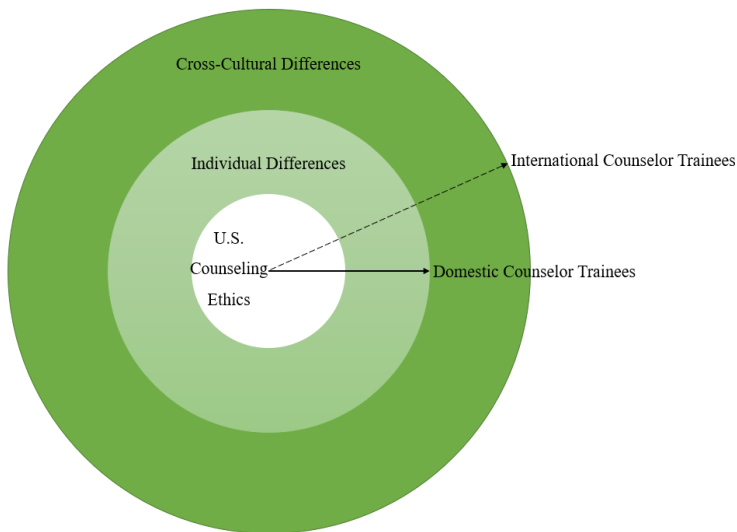


Figure 1. Two Student Groups with Varying Distances to U.S. Counseling Ethics

APPLYING THE ACCULTURATION MODEL: A CASE STUDY

Provided the same ethical dilemma, the ethical decision-making process can vary drastically based on the acculturation strategy that is adopted. We will walk you through the four acculturation strategies in addressing an ethical dilemma that is adapted from a real situation. All identifiable personal information is removed. The order that these strategies are presented does not predicate or predict the actual acculturation process that each counselor-in-training may experience.

Wei is an international student from China and is pursuing a master's degree in school counseling in the United States. This fall semester, Wei works on his counseling practicum in a local elementary school. He provides weekly individual counseling to Jason who is a first grader originally referred to Wei by the student's teacher for social skills development. Jason is from a Hispanic family. In a regular psychoeducational session, Jason shared with Wei that he and his siblings were often hit by a belt and threatened with harm by their mother's previous boyfriend before they moved to the current state 2 years ago. But Jason emphasized that he and his siblings felt safe and happy in their current home with their mother and stepfather. After hearing this story, Wei had several competing voices in his mind. Different acculturation strategies could lead to different courses of action.

A person's acculturation strategy derives from a dynamic interfacing of two fundamental variables: the degree to which people preserve the values, beliefs, and norms from their cultures of origin and the degree to which they adopt the values, beliefs, and norms in the new host culture (Gottlieb et al., 2008; Handelsman et al., 2005). Depending on the extent to which Wei identifies with these two variables, respectively, Wei may resonate with one or some of the following strategies more than the other.

Marginalization

Upon hearing Jason's story about his past, Wei's first reaction may be that "hitting with a belt" and "threatening with harm" clearly signal child abuse. Based on the professional training he received through his coursework, he knows school counselors and educators are mandated to report child abuse. However, Wei does not have any evidence about these incidents that occurred 2 years ago in another state. Meanwhile, Wei may become aware that these incidents could be alternatively interpreted as parental discipline in the form of physical punishment, which may not need to be reported. Given the conflicting interpretations, Wei may not be able to come to terms with this issue very well. Wei then reports this ethical dilemma to his site supervisor. If Wei expects that his site supervisor will give him a direct answer, without thinking further about what could be done in the best interest of Jason, Wei would be going through the marginalization process. On the one hand, Wei would not identify with either U.S. counseling ethics or with his own personal ethics based on his original culture due to the conflicting conceptualizations. On the other hand, Wei would avoid professional consultation and expect his site supervisor to take responsibility in making an ethical decision.

Separation

If Wei mostly identifies with his culture of origin with inadequate consideration about the counseling ethics in the United States, he may mentally debate more about whether “hitting with a belt” and “threatening with harm” should be defined as corporal punishment or physical abuse. In an international study of parents’ perspectives on corporal punishment with children across nine countries, 17% of parents held the belief that it was necessary to use corporal punishment to raise the child (Lansford et al., 2010). In this same sample, 36% of mothers and 33% of fathers from China believed that it was necessary to use corporal punishment with boys, as opposed to 14% and 20%, respectively, with girls. Given the relatively high acceptance rate of corporal punishment with boys by parents in Chinese culture, Wei’s cognitive dissonance may lie mainly in defining the boundary between corporal punishment and physical abuse.

Assimilation

If Wei mostly identifies with the new counseling ethics culture, he would first probably consult with his site supervisor. Then, he would explore ways to define and identify child abuse. If this case warrants reporting, there would be several questions to think through. First, who should be the reporter? Second, who should be informed about this report? If Jason is deemed to be notified about this report, how should Wei address the issue of breaking confidentiality? If Jason’s mother is to be notified, how could Wei start the conversation with her? Third, what information is needed to file this report? Additional parameters may further complicate this situation as well. For instance, what if Wei and his site supervisor have differed in opinion regarding whether reporting it is necessary? What if Jason and his mother do not feel comfortable to report this issue? In a word, the real-world environment translates the ethics language into tangible ethical dilemmas. If appropriately worked through, these dilemmas can potentially provoke growth in ethics-language learners, professionally and personally.

Integration

The integration strategy entails that Wei identifies with both his original and professional ethics cultures. Wei may have the multicultural sensitivity that “hitting with a belt” could still fall within the physical punishment realm in some cultures. However, the possibility that his student client encountered physical abuse cannot be overlooked. It is not unusual that there is an ambiguous boundary across different culture systems. Thus, it is important to reconcile one’s personal values and professional values (Ametrano, 2014). The “bracketing” strategy (Kaplan & Martz, 2014) upheld by the U.S. counseling profession is helpful in this integration process. To bracket does not mean to give up or to change a counselor’s personal values; it makes a counselor become aware of their personal values and set those values aside when they are in conflict with values of the counseling profession (Kaplan & Martz, 2014). To have this self-awareness for a counselor is to refrain from imposing

personal values onto the client; the counselor would then be sensitive to the impact that their personal values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors may have on the client.

IMPLICATIONS

Conceptualizing ethics education as an acculturation process may help mitigate the stigma associated with inadequate learning (Handelsman et al., 2005), particularly among international students whose cross-cultural learning is tinted with difficulties and challenges (Li et al., 2018; Li & Liu, 2020). In addition, exploring the gap between the new and previous ethics cultures acknowledges the existence of trainees' personhood and the culture that they bring to the counseling profession, which may be more conducive to trainees' integration (Handelsman et al., 2005).

As the gatekeepers of the counseling profession, counselor educators need to be clear with counselor trainees that ethical standards are expected from every single member of the counseling profession, regardless of any preexisting values, beliefs, and customs that trainees may have. Accordingly, this same expectation would be applicable to international students who intend to pursue a counseling degree and to become a member of the counseling profession in the United States. Before prospective students are admitted to the counseling program, counselor educators should be explicit about the importance of abiding by and upholding the ethical standards of the counseling profession through various means (e.g., program advertisement and interviews). If students do not agree with the mission statement, ethics codes, and/or practice standards of the counseling program or profession, they have the autonomy to not be part of it.

Many international students grow up in cultures that are strikingly distinct from the U.S. culture. Thus, it is of great importance for counselor educators to be able to identify and address potential challenges should they arise during these students' ethics acculturation process. Ethics autobiography and reflection papers are great ways for students to voice their concerns and challenges (Bashe et al., 2007). One way to quickly identify students' needs is to expose students to various aspects of ethics at the beginning of a semester. Next, students can be encouraged to reflect on what stands out to them, thereby necessitating more attention. Later, instructors can collect students' feedback and reorganize the syllabi, if necessary, to ensure that students' needs will be addressed. Additionally, the instructor may facilitate critiques or debates of ethics codes (e.g., 2014 ACA Code of Ethics), which allow for juxtaposing differing opinions originating from both or more cultures so as to advance integration (Handelsman et al., 2005).

We have introduced the acculturation model to the counseling field, which sets the stage for further exploration about how this model can be applied to counseling ethics education. This calls for at least three directions in future research endeavors. First, future research can target the conceptual scaffolding of the ethics acculturation model in counseling. Second, researchers can use qualitative studies to examine international students' lived experiences of counseling ethics acculturation. Specifically, researchers may target international students' perceived factors that may assist or impede their acquisition of counseling ethics as related to their personal values and beliefs as well as those coming from their cultures of origin. Third,

measures can be developed to assess different strategies that counselor trainees use in ethics acculturation. These measures will help understand different socialization processes of counseling ethics, if any, among counselor trainees across cultures.

The study of counseling ethics is more than the learning experience within a class; it is a lifelong learning journey. Counseling programs can instill ethics training across the curricula, in addition to a single ethics class, to ensure that students are exposed to counseling ethics discussions, develop their professional and ethical identities as counselors, and be engaged in ethical thinking that will benefit their entire professional lifespan.

REFERENCES

- Ametrano, I. M. (2014). Teaching ethical decision making: Helping students reconcile personal and professional values. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 92*(2), 154–161. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.2014.00143.x>
- Bashe, A., Anderson, S. K., Handelsman, M. M., & Klevansky, R. (2007). An acculturation model for ethics training: The ethics autobiography and beyond. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 38*(1), 60–67. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0735-7028.38.1.60>
- Berry, J. W. (1997). Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation. *Applied Psychology, 46*(1), 5–34. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.1997.tb01087.x>
- Gottlieb, M. C., Handelsman, M. M., & Knapp, S. (2008). Some principles for ethics education: Implementing the acculturation model. *Training and Education in Professional Psychology, 2*(3), 123–128. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1931-3918.2.3.123>
- Handelsman, M. M., Gottlieb, M. C., & Knapp, S. (2005). Training ethical psychologists: An acculturation model. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 36*(1), 59–65. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0735-7028.36.1.59>
- Hill, A. L. (2004). Ethics education: Recommendations for an evolving discipline. *Counseling and Values, 48*(3), 183–203. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-007X.2004.tb00245.x>
- Kaplan, D., & Martz, E. (2014). Raising the bar for counselor educators. *Counseling Today, 57*(5), 26–27. https://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/ethics/ethics_nov_2014.pdf?sfvrsn=2
- Kitchener, K. S. (1986). Teaching applied ethics in counselor education: An integration of psychological processes and philosophical analysis. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 64*(5), 306–310. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.1986.tb01117.x>
- Li, D., & Liu, Y. (2020). International counseling doctoral students' teaching preparation: A phenomenological study. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 59*(3). <https://doi.org/10.1002/ceas.12184>
- Li, D., Liu, Y., & Lee, I. (2018). Supervising Asian international counseling students: Using the integrative developmental model (IDM). *Journal of International Students, 8*(2), 1129–1151. <https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v8i2.137>

Lansford, J. E., Alampay, L. P., Al-Hassan, S., Bacchini, D., Bombi, A. S., Bornstein, M. H., Chang, L., Deater-Deckard, K., Giunta, L. D., Dodge, K. A., Oburu, P., Pastorelli, C., Runyan, D. K., Skinner, A. T., Sorbring, E., Tapanya, S., Tirado, L. M. U., & Zelli, A. (2010). Corporal punishment of children in nine countries as a function of child gender and parent gender. *International Journal of Pediatrics*, 2010, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2010/672780>

DAN LI, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor of Counseling in the Department of Counseling and Higher Education at the University of North Texas. Her major research interests lie in the area of international counseling students and faculty, clinical supervision, and online or remote teaching and learning. Email: Dan.Li@unt.edu.

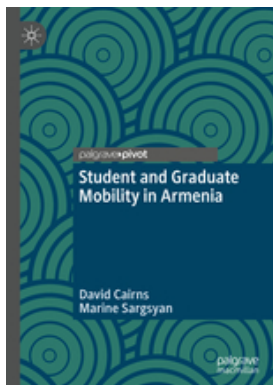
YANG AI, M.Ed., M.A., is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Counseling and Human Services at the University of Redlands, California. His main research interests lie in the area of counselor education and supervision, career counseling and development, and school counseling. Email: yang_ai@redlands.edu.

© *Journal of International Students*
Volume 10, Issue 4 (2020), pp. 1110-1113
ISSN: 2162-3104 (Print), 2166-3750 (Online)
Doi: 10.32674/jis.v10i4.2348
ojed.org/jis

Student and Graduate Mobility in Armenia

D. Cairns & M. Sargsyan, 2019. Palgrave Macmillan: ISBN 978-3-030-19613-4

Reviewed by Natalie Cruz, *Old Dominion University, USA*



The book *Student and Graduate Mobility in Armenia* by David Cairns and Marine Sargsyan makes several important contributions to the rapidly proliferating global student mobility research field. Cairns and Sargsyan focus on the individualized journeys of mobile Armenians through lesser researched perspectives, like the spatial context, postgraduate lens, and other theoretical frameworks. Readers may be quick to assume this book is not widely applicable because of its specialized focus on Armenia, a small eastern European country that does not send or receive large numbers of students. That would be a mistake, however, as this book undoubtedly provides its readers with fresh perspectives

that can be applied in a variety of international higher education contexts. Researchers and practitioners worldwide—including those in education, sociology, political science, psychology, career development, and international relations—who desire to understand the employment pathways and internal and external mobility motivations of international students throughout the academic life cycle will find this book to be particularly insightful and valuable.

Cairns and Sargsyan examine highly skilled graduate and student mobility with three unique approaches: (a) the rarely studied spatial and geographical context of Armenia, (b) the theoretical lens of reflexive mobility, and (c) a focus on postgraduate mobility. Any one of these approaches would be a novel take on the current mobility literature, but the combination of these three make their work particularly significant. Their book is informed by 51 individual interviews as part of a qualitative research study with Armenian people who were living or studying abroad or had been mobile at some point in their recent adult life.

The authors make a strong case for Armenia as the research context because mobility in Armenia is severely underresearched, is outside the European Union, and highlights voices and trends from underdeveloped areas. Researchers working in non-Anglophone, medium income, or postcolonial countries may find the results from their study and this book particularly helpful.

The authors also introduce a theoretical lens they describe as reflexive mobility, which is “the idea that decision-making can be conceptualized as a reflective process” (p. 13). The book demonstrates the participants’ use of reflexive thinking as they make their mobility choices based on internal and external reasons. The authors also argue that reflexive mobility individualizes the decisions of participants, and pushes back against the notion that the impetus for mobility is primarily economically motivated. In particular, Cairns and Sargsyan problematize much quantitative research that has been conducted in the past to understand the phenomenon of global student mobility. In their view, large scale, survey, or secondary data studies “describe rather than explain mobility, using secondary statistics to chart recent trends and administrative data to assess the impact of stays abroad upon their completion, with fieldwork involving conveniently located research subjects such as incoming student migrants and exchange visitors” (p. 14). Their book attempts to explain, not simply describe, mobility by highlighting students and graduates from Armenia through rich personal decisions and pathways shaped by individual experiences.

Student and Graduate Mobility in Armenia is a quick read and accomplishes a great deal in less than 100 pages. The first two chapters set up the context and theoretical framework of the book; Chapters 3, 4, and 5 highlight the main findings of the study; and Chapter 6 offers a conclusion and follow-up on developments from a recent political revolution.

Chapter 1, “Armenia in Context,” explains their reasons for focusing on Armenia, problematizes prior mobility studies and theoretical approaches, and discusses the research questions and methodology. Most of the interviews with the 51 participants were conducted in Yerevan, Armenia, between July and September 2018.

Chapter 2, “Reflexive Mobility,” explains the theoretical framework for the book. Inspired by the work of sociologist Margaret Archer, internal and external dialogue is hypothesized as critically important for participants’ mobility decisions. The authors argue that agency and social networks are vital for the prospect of outward mobility. Additionally, they suggest that globally mobile individuals plan their outward ventures with a long-term view, often carefully considering how their decision will impact their life and help achieve their goals. This chapter also introduces a few of the participants’ perspectives and uses extended examples from two people to demonstrate how mobility decisions can be complex, ambiguous, and much different than they appear to outsiders.

Chapter 3, “Spatial Pathways to Work,” outlines and explains the three most common pathways where mobile Armenians choose to work and enroll in university education: Russia, the United States, and the European Union. One provocative suggestion the authors make based on their research and other studies is that students who studied in the United States do not seem to increase their employability or intercultural skills like those that study through the Erasmus program. Highlighted

participants explain the main issues in the Armenian workplace that contribute to people leaving, which includes challenges around power, money, and patriarchy.

Chapter 4, “Working Inside and Outside Armenia,” discusses the type of employment opportunities and challenges that the research participants have in Armenia and other countries. This chapter raises the important consideration that educated Armenians with academic capital have higher expectations and often take longer to find gainful employment. Many of the employment issues in the Armenian context are quite universal, but corruption is one major challenge that is perhaps unique to the post-Soviet world. For example, one interviewee who was a recent graduate of Yerevan State University described how Armenians often had to pay large fees to an agency to obtain a mediocre-paying job. She shared: “I see no sense or point in paying 3000 USD for a position in a school where the salary is about 140–150 USD and besides, I didn’t study and pay fees for six years to then pay for an appointment. People get positions through connections, and they may not have good qualifications, but connections and the bribe come first.” Rich participant examples such as these are woven throughout the book.

Chapter 5, “Mobility in Transition,” discusses the Velvet Revolution and highlights participants’ thoughts and feelings about how the recent political micro-revolution impacts their plans and thought processes about mobility. Chapter 6, “Postscript,” follows up several months after the data collection, the occurrence of the Velvet Revolution, and the installment of a new president. The final chapter offers three conclusions from the analysis of 51 interviews: (a) Armenian mobility overwhelmingly follows three predictable pathways of the United States, Russia, and the European Union; (b) the ability to be mobile is often important to find gainful employment; and (c) Armenians face many difficulties throughout their spatial circulation endeavors.

The participants’ voices are the lynchpin of the book, and the authors highlight, not diminish, the unique elements of each person’s situation. Participant examples and quotes are teeming with examples of agency through mobility, and they challenge us to consider every student’s mobility journey as a story of grit, determination, and purpose. As opposed to viewing mobile Armenians as primarily reacting to the negative circumstances in their own country, or pulled toward more viable situations in other countries, they explain the complicated reasons that people may choose to go abroad (or not) in spite of their potential options. In one particular example, we hear from one participant about their choice to stay in Armenia: “I applied for a vacancy, passed the exams, went through all the stages, and got the position. I work now at the same place, having achieved a lot in regard to my career in banking. [...] At one stage of my career, I was considering and thinking about working or studying abroad, more specifically in the US, but I found myself staying in Armenia” (p. 53). These types of stories where students forego economic potential to stay in their home country are not often shared in student mobility research.

In a crowded field of undertheorized journal articles, books, and practitioner pontifications about student mobility, *Student and Graduate Mobility in Armenia* pushes the field of global student—or more accurately postgraduate—mobility forward. The work of Cairns and Sargsyan should encourage other researchers and

readers of this book to expand the field by highlighting postgraduates' experiences from emerging countries and contexts.

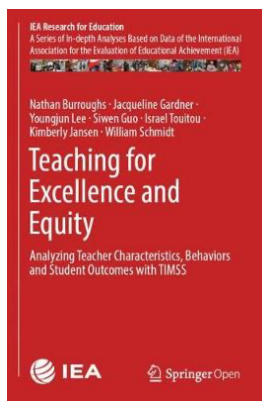
NATALIE CRUZ is a current PhD candidate studying higher education at Old Dominion University. Her research is focused on changing modes of global student mobility, the importance of entrepreneurialism for international education leaders, and other transnational education issues. E-mail: ncruz004@odu.edu

© *Journal of International Students*
Volume 10, Issue 4 (2020), pp. 1114-1116
ISSN: 2162-3104 (Print), 2166-3750 (Online)
Doi: 10.32674/jis.v10i4.2758
ojed.org/jis

Teaching for Excellence and Equity: Analyzing Teacher Characteristics, Behaviors, and Student Outcomes with TIMSS

N. Burroughs, J. Gardner, Y. Lee, S. Guo, I. Touitou, K. Jansen, & W. Schmidt, 2019. Springer: ISBN-13 978-3-030-16151-4

Reviewed by Muhammad Younas & Uzma Noor, *Soochow University China*



This book encompasses the relationship between teachers' effectiveness and students' outcomes, including an emphasis on educational equity. *Teaching for Excellence and Equity* is a comprehensive volume in the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) series that imparts knowledge and provides high-quality data about education systems worldwide. The publication carries the very purpose of the IEA series by supporting educational reforms to lead to a better teaching and learning environment in schools. Specifically, it considers teachers as a vital and integral source and a key to understanding the "black box" of education.

The main source of data that *Teaching for Excellence and Equity* draws upon is 20 years of data collected by the IEA from 1995 to 2015, with deep contextual information used to connect characteristics of teachers, behaviors, and professional development to student outcomes. The book is divided into eight easy-to-read sections. A variety of methods, such as regression and fixed-effects analyses, structural equation modeling, and the evolution of associations over time are described. The initial chapters contain an overall critique of the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). The authors discuss the difficulty of measuring teacher quality in cross-cultural educational settings, which is relevant as TIMSS collects extensive information about teachers of different countries like Qatar, Israel, Hong Kong, Canada, the United States, and many others

to examine instructional techniques, educational equity, and the link between characteristics and behaviors of teacher and student outcomes. Teachers play a significant role in shaping students' communication, analytical, and judgmental skills, but at the same time, it is very complicated to define the features or qualities of an effective teacher. According to the comparative research among countries, measures including teachers' experience, professional knowledge, self-preparation, and opportunity to learn are significant for students' achievement.

The third and fourth chapters offer substantive insights into crucial variables. These diverse variables and new tools for TIMSS include student self-efficacy, the instructional position of teachers, and learners' self-reported emotional response toward the subject of mathematics. A multimodal strategy and intricate sampling design applied to analyze data of relevant surveys and different relationships were tested. The results indicate that teacher effectiveness can be separated from the quality of the overall national educational system; the detailed results drawn from IEA trends over 20 years provide an overall image of variation. Further, the findings of Chapters 3 and 4 are that there is not an alignment among the instructional content determined by the individual teacher and coverage of expected or prescribed national content in mathematics. The participating countries' data shows increases in student achievement on TIMMS based on teachers' years of experience, level of qualification, and classroom time. These chapters suggest that teachers should take significant steps regarding classroom time in order to teach effectively.

Chapters 5 to 7 discuss several practical analysis and equity issues. IEA's trends reflect questions about any given teacher's role in manipulating students' outcomes, indicating a focus on possible corruption or "test fixing." A fixed-effects analysis is also explored. Similarly, the effect of different cultural contexts on students, size variation, and directional indicators between cycles raises severe concerns regarding possible impact on teachers and students. The results suggest that student performance and also the quality of the teacher can be measured by differentiating high and low socioeconomic-status classrooms, indicating that relative wealth of the country and region have a strong role to play in student success as measured by TIMMS. Policymakers should carefully draw lessons from one system to another; equity is a vital concern, and an exclusive reliance on spending more instructional time on mathematics to reduce inequalities cannot be the only approach taken.

The final chapter draws attention toward the central aim to investigate what cross-national assessments reveal about teachers' roles in influencing student outcomes, and employs chain analyses to find potential trends in the quality teacher instructional metrics. However, no definite proof linking teacher efficiency and student results is found. On the positive side, many countries see a rise in student TIMMS scores over the 20 years assessed by the IEA in this volume. Perhaps the main finding of the study is that dedicating more time to the teaching of mathematics does seem to improve student performance on TIMMS across borders, while there are inconsistent findings on the impact of teacher quality. The results show that teachers with the same traits may produce different results across distinct national settings, indicating the importance of national and cultural context.

In conclusion, the book develops with eloquent arguments analyses of teacher characteristics and student outcomes. It provides valuable resources to researchers

and it offers sufficient knowledge about teacher quality, education systems, student outcomes, and equity issues. It is also an authentic source to do higher level research of Grades 8 to 12 in the future, and additionally has implications for teacher training programs at the higher education level. Being educational researchers, we find this book essential for both current teachers and students of the teaching field.

MUHAMMAD YOUNAS is a PhD scholar of higher education in the School of Education at Soochow University, China. His research interests include higher education, teacher training/education, and language teaching. E-mail: younaskherani@stu.suda.edu.cn

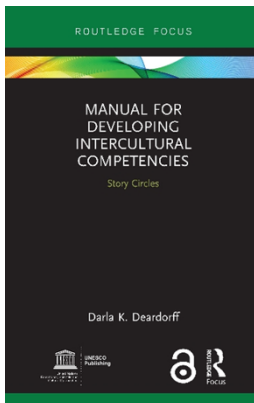
UZMA NOOR is a Ph.D. scholar of higher education in the School of Education at Soochow University, China. Her research interests include Gender and Education, Higher Education, Teacher Training/Education, and Language teaching. Email: uzmakhan3545@gmail.com

© *Journal of International Students*
Volume 10, Issue 4 (2020), pp. 1117-1119
ISSN: 2162-3104 (Print), 2166-3750 (Online)
Doi: 10.32674/jis.v10i4.2729
ojed.org/jis

Manual for Developing Intercultural Competencies: Story Circles

Darla K. Deardorff, 2020. UNESCO: ISBN-13 978-92-3-100331-8

Reviewed by Jean Baptiste Diatta, *Boston College Center for International Higher Education, Massachusetts, USA.*



The *Manual for Developing Intercultural Competencies: Story Circles*, written by Darla K. Deardorff, offers a brief overview of approaches and tools for fostering intercultural competencies. Perhaps most importantly, she provides a detailed presentation of a tool called Story Circles, which can be used in different contexts and situations around the world for the development of intercultural competencies. The Story Circle methodology was adapted for the purpose of developing a human right-centered approach to intercultural competencies. Story Circles put the emphasis on “fundamental elements of intercultural competencies development, including respect, listening, curiosity, self- and other awareness, reflection, sharing, empathy, and relationship building” (p. 13).

The manual is divided into three main parts. The first part, entitled “Background,” provides the context from which this manual emerges: the quest for peace in general, more specifically, UNESCO’s work to empower learners of all ages by helping them to develop a sense of empathy and solidarity, and to act as global citizens “in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular the Sustainable Development Goals 4 (on education) and 16 (to promote just, peaceful, and inclusive societies)” (p. 2). This section also describes the publication as putting into effect the UNESCO 2013 publication, *Intercultural Competencies: Conceptual and Operational Framework*, which addressed the importance of developing capacity to manage cultural diversity and clarifies related concepts. Additionally, the first part offers a rich survey of different conceptions of intercultural competences, as well as

tools and approaches aimed at fostering them. This culminates with an attempt at summarizing different conceptions of intercultural competences as follows: intercultural competences are “about improving human interactions across difference, whether within a society (differences due to age, gender, religion, socio-economic status, political affiliation, ethnicity, and so on) or across borders” (p. 5).

The second section, “Story Circles,” presents the intercultural tool designed for the development of relevant competencies. It is meant to be used in different contexts, for different groups of people, and in formal or informal instructional settings. Moreover, this tool is designed to function even in situations that have limited resources. The tool can be efficiently managed by “those who may not have a strong background in intercultural knowledge and theory” (p. 13).

Part II also specifies the different contexts in which Story Circles can be useful for the development of intercultural competencies. These include teacher education, international projects, community development, intercultural dialogue, healthcare training, and police training. Further, the key assumptions that undergird Story Circles are presented, concluding with the assertion that Story Circles rest on two values: respect and openness. Two related assumptions underlay Story Circles practices: first, that human persons are all interconnected through human rights, and second, each person has an inherent dignity and worth.

After presenting the philosophical–moral foundation of the Story Circles, Part II addresses practicalities related to their implementation. These include the determination of guidelines for the use of Story Circles, the role and training of the facilitator, and the content and organization of the Story Circles. An extensive list of material related to the facilitation of Story Circles, as well as the development of intercultural competences, is also offered. A number of intercultural communication issues that might arise in Story Circle practices are discussed, as well as mitigation techniques.

Part III, “Supporting Material,” can be regarded as an addendum. It presents the different materials alluded to in Part II needed for the facilitation of Story Circles. Among them are the UNESCO Story Circles Information Sheet, a general handout (for small groups), Story Circles prompts (along with criteria for developing/adapting intercultural prompts), and finally guidelines for facilitators. These guidelines include, among other things, suggestions on debriefing and concluding Story Circles, some guidelines on how to use Story Circles with children and youth, and how to create a safe space. Additionally, Part III offers a general train-the-trainers outline, a list of frequently asked questions, and the UNESCO evaluation form.

Three key features constitute the strength of the manual: a solid philosophical and moral foundation, accessibility, and practicability. In fact, the philosophical foundation of the Story Circles practice is the interconnectedness of human persons (through human rights) and the inherent dignity and worth that any person has by the simple fact of being a human person. Thus two moral imperatives follow, respect and openness to others (e.g., to learn from them). Intercultural competences are intrinsically bound to those two values. Moreover, the interrelatedness of the two philosophical assumptions, the two moral imperatives, and the concept of intercultural competences must be emphasized.

The manual's simplicity makes it readily accessible. In fact, it does not require a background in or extensive knowledge of intercultural competence or communication in order to be able to understand the concepts and experience it proposes. Moreover, the language, as well as the detailed guidance offered throughout the manual, make it accessible to everyone.

The practicability of the manual stems mainly from the fact that it sets realistic goals. It does not require many resources; it is not lengthy; and the methodology it proposes can be adapted in different settings. Anticipating the intercultural communication challenges that might arise in a context of intercultural interaction, and tips on how to prevent them or mitigate them if they arise, add to the manual's usefulness—which should characterize any manual worth of its name.

Despite the author's laudable intent to make the manual universally useful, the methodology/tool suggested might not work for all contexts, given its emphasis on the constitution of diverse groups (gender, experience, social status). In fact, in cultural contexts with rigid castes, class structures, or pronounced gender divides, conversation could be easily blocked, which would compromise the experience.

Another issue is the affirmation that "we are all interconnected through human rights" (p. 17). The interconnectedness of human beings is an ontological fact that precedes any articulation of human rights. Of course, I understand the intent of tying Story Circles to human rights, but the way it is done, and the place given to human rights in this context is, at least philosophically, problematic. Simply said, our connectedness owes nothing to human rights. It suffices to underscore that there is no agreement on what human rights are and what they should entail. Thus, there is little to gain, but much to lose in erecting human rights as the locus of our connectedness.

The Manual for Developing Intercultural Competencies: Story Circles is a book worth reading for people working to promote intercultural dialogue or competences in the context of youth and professional development. Of course, the manual could also be useful to academics (students, faculty, and administrators) interested in study abroad experiences or international students. It is a valuable contribution to the effort of helping people acquire intercultural competences, which are needed for meaningful and effective navigation in today's globalized world.

JEAN BAPTISTE DIATTA, PhD candidate, is a Research Assistant in the Center for International Higher Education at Boston College. His major research interests lie in the area of quality assurance in higher education, learning outcomes design and assessment, internationalization of higher education, and intercultural competences. Email: jeanbaptiste.diatta@bc.edu
