About the Journal

An interdisciplinary, peer reviewed publication, Journal of International Students (Print ISSN 2162-3104 & Online ISSN 2166-3750) is a professional journal that publishes narrative, theoretical and empirically-based research articles, student reflections, and book reviews relevant to international students and their cross cultural experiences and understanding. Published quarterly, the Journal encourages the submission of manuscripts from around the world, and from a wide range of academic fields, including comparative education, international education, student affairs, linguistics, psychology, religion, sociology, business, social work, philosophy, and culture studies.

Authors and Submissions

The Journal audience includes international and domestic students, faculty, administrators, and educators engaged in research and practice in international students in colleges and universities.

- **Peer-reviewed Article** - includes manuscripts that focus on the interpretation, implication, or significance of research work related to international students and scholars from various disciplines (between 4,500 to 7,500 words).
- **Research in Brief** – includes manuscripts that focus a specific topic or question using new data or conceptual framework that does not require a full-length manuscript; up to two figures/tables, and maximum 5-8 references (1,500-2,000 words).
- **Study Abroad/Reflection** - includes descriptions and perceptions from students and scholars concerning another culture, language, people and society from an insider or outsider perspective (between 1,000 to 2,500 words).
- **Book Review** - includes reviews and critiques of the written work of scholars from a number of disciplines related to international students (between 750 to 1,200 words).

Please e-mail your manuscript to the Editor, Dr. Krishna Bista at krishna.bista@gmail.com. Include your full address with email and telephone number. Follow APA 6th edition in your citation and references. Double space. Times New Roman with 12 font size.

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Dr. Krishna Bista
Editor-in-Chief/Founder – Journal of International Students
Walker Hall 2-31 School of Education
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Contents

Peer-Reviewed Articles

1. Nonresident Undergraduates’ Performance in English Writing Classes—Hierarchical Linear Modeling Analysis……………………………………………………………………………… pp. 319-333
Allison A. Vaughn, PhD, San Diego State University (USA); Matthew Bergman, PhD, and Barry Fass-Holmes, PhD, University of California, San Diego (USA)

2. International Students in American Pathway Programs: Learning English and Culture through Service-Learning. ................................................................. pp. 334-352
Julie Miller, MSW, Becca Berkey, PhD, Francis Griffin, MA, Northeastern University (USA)

3. Uneven Experiences: The Impact of Student-Faculty Interactions on International Students’ Sense of Belonging. ................................................................. pp. 353-367
Chris R. Glass, PhD; Elizabeth Kociolek, MSED; Rachawan Wongtrirat, PhD; R. Jason Lynch, MSED; and Summer Cong, MA, Old Dominion University (USA)

4. Exploring the Motivations, Expectations, and Experiences of Students Who Study in Global Settings. ................................................................. pp. 368-382
Vince Salyers, EdD; Cathy S. Carston, PhD; Yasmin Dean, PhD; and Chad London, PhD, Mount Royal University (Canada)

5. Cultural Demands of the Host-Nation: International Student Experience and the Public Diplomacy Consequences. ................................. pp. 383-394
Benjamin Triana (Doctoral Candidate) University of Kentucky (USA)

6. Culturally Responsive Education: Developing Lesson Plans for Vietnamese Students in the American Diaspora. ................................................................. pp. 395-404
Cynthia M. Douglas, PhD, St. John’s University (USA)

7. Taboo or Tabula Rasa: Cross-Racial/Cultural Dating Preferences amongst Chinese, Japanese, and Korean International Students in an American University......................... pp. 405-419
Zachary S. Ritter, PhD, University of Redlands (USA)

8. Kilimanjaro: A Case of Meaningful Adventure and Service Learning Abroad ................................................................. pp. 420-433
Cathy Cavanaugh, PhD, Microsoft Corporation (USA); Ewa Gajer, PhD, Higher Colleges of Technology (UAE); John Mayberry, PhD, University of the Pacific (USA); Brendan O’Connor, MEd, Higher Colleges of Technology (UAE); Jace Hargis, PhD, Chaminade University Honolulu (USA)

9. Tale of the Tape: International Teaching Assistant Noticing During Videotaped Classroom Observations. ................................................................. pp. 434-446
Gwendolyn M. Williams, PhD, University of West Florida (USA); Rod E. Case, PhD, University of Nevada, Reno (USA)
10. The Forgotten Half: Understanding the Unique Needs of International Student Partners

Danni Lei (Master’s Student), Jon D. Woodend (Doctoral Student), Sarah K. Nutter (Doctoral Student), Alyssa R. Ryan (Master’s Student), Sharon L. Cairns, PhD, University of Calgary (Canada)

11. Coming to America: Assessing the Patterns of Acculturation, Friendship Formation, and the Academic Experiences of International Students at a U.S. College

Pamela Leong, PhD, Salem State University (USA)

12. A Relational Approach to International Education Through Homestay Programs

Junko Kobayashi, Kansai Gaidai University (Japan); Linda Viswat, Otomen Gakuin University (Japan)

13. Knowledge, Education, and Attitudes of International Students to IELTS: A Case of Australia

Abe W Ata, PhD, Deakin University (Australia)


Adel M. Alharbi (Doctoral Candidate) University of Memphis (USA)

15. Are International Students Cash Cows? Examining the Relationship Between New International Undergraduate Enrollments and Institutional Revenue at Public Colleges and Universities in the US

Brendan Cantwell, PhD, Michigan State University (USA)

16. Cognitive Skills Development Among International Students at Research Universities in the United States

Young K. Kim, PhD, Azusa Pacific University (USA); David Edens, PhD, California State Polytechnic University, Pomona (USA); Michael F. Iorio, PhD, Loma Linda University (USA); Christie J. Curtis, PhD; Biola University (USA); Edwin Romero, PhD, Mt. San Antonio College (USA)

Reflection/Study Aboard

17. The Not-So-Easy Road of Overseas Study: Life like an Outsider

Yolanda Palmer, PhD, University of Saskatchewan (Canada)

Book Reviews

18. International Student in Japan

Kyle D. Warren (Doctoral Student) and Eunyoung Kim, PhD, Seton Hall University (USA)

19. International Student’s Guide to American Colleges

Marguerite J. Dennis, MJ Dennis Consulting (USA)

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Editorial

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

We are pleased to welcome you to our winter 2015 edition of the Journal of International Students in Higher Education! This edition of the Journal has included a variety of topics related to international students’ social and academic experiences, study abroad trends and social networks, student engagement and academic success, cross-cultural experiences, and teaching and learning practices in higher education in the United States and around the world. In this volume, 45 authors, who represented 31 institutions of higher education, have shared their perspectives and research findings (both quantitative and qualitative) based on their experiences in Australia, Canada, Japan, UAE, and the United States. Each article is rich in term of cross cultural perspectives of mobile students, their learning experiences, and campus diversity.

We believe that educators, policy makers, administrators, teachers, students and individuals interested in mobile student affairs, study abroad, cross-cultural studies and international education, from across the globe, can take advantages of reading these articles published in this volume!

Some updates:

Publication Frequency: Quarterly (Spring, Summer, Fall & Winter)
Indexed/Listed/Cited with: Major databases and journal abstracts including the Cabell’s Journal Directory, EBSCO Publishing, ProQuest, ERIC, OCLC/WorldCat, Australian Council for Educational Research
Editorial Board: Includes about 110 published authors as editors, assistant editors, and peer review board members from various institutions across the globe
Readers/Visitors: United States (39.55%); United Kingdom (23.07%); Australia (17.48%); Canada (14.68%); India (10.92%); Russian Federation (10.10%); Malaysia (9.72%); Germany, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Netherlands (about 4.5%); New Zealand, Indonesia, Viet Nam, Spain, Ireland and Nepal (about 2.5%) out of 117,828 views.

As in our previous volume, this current edition also includes a wide variety of articles written by faculty members and doctoral students from various institutions and countries. Altogether, we believe that scholarly articles of this volume from various disciplines will contribute positively to the field of international student studies. As in the past, we have continued our tradition of sharing free digital copies and print copies with students, faculty members and libraries in the United States and abroad. Finally, we would like to thank the reviewers, copy editors, assistant editors, and editors for their voluntary contributions to the Journal.

Happy reading!

Dr. Krishna Bista, Founder/Editor-in-Chief
Journal of International Students
School of Education, University of Louisiana at Monroe (USA)
Nonresident Undergraduates’ Performance in English Writing Classes—
Hierarchical Linear Modeling Analysis

Allison A. Vaughn, PhD
San Diego State University (USA)

Matthew Bergman and Barry Fass-Holmes, PhD
University of California, San Diego (USA)

Abstract

Do undergraduates whose native language is not English have writing deficiencies leading to academic struggles? The present study showed that the answer to this question was “no” at an American West Coast public university. This university’s nonresident undergraduates on average earned B- to B+ in their colleges’ English intensive-writing programs’ classes, C in community college English classes, and term grade point averages between 2.5 (C+ to B-) and 3.2 (B) in the fall term of the five most recent academic years. Hierarchical linear modeling analyses showed that the predictors with the largest effect sizes were English writing programs and class level; however, each predictor accounted for less than 25% of the total variance.

Keywords: Academic success, English as a second language, international undergraduates, permanent residents, TOEFL, writing

How can American universities maximize the academic success of their nonresident undergraduates whose native language is not English? This question has become increasingly important in recent years due to the dramatic increase in the nonimmigrant international undergraduate population attending American universities (Institute for International Education [IIE], 2013a). Universities’ admissions offices potentially could maximize the likelihood that admitted applicants will succeed academically by establishing appropriate entrance requirements.

One entrance requirement that many American universities have been using to predict applicants’ academic success is the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). Approximately 260 American universities require nonresident applicants whose native language is not English to submit TOEFL scores (American Exam Services, 2013); TOEFL scores are used as an indicator of English proficiency to predict future academic success (Andrade, 2006).

If English proficiency is a valid predictor of academic success for nonresident applicants who are not native English speakers (Andrade, 2006), then admitted applicants who subsequently
struggle with English—despite having acceptable TOEFL scores—might be expected to struggle academically. To the contrary, a recent study (Fass-Holmes & Vaughn, 2014) demonstrated that at one American university the majority of nonimmigrant international undergraduates succeeded academically (term grade point averages [GPA] above 2.0 [C]) despite showing evidence of struggling with English. The evidence was that a majority of these students failed the university’s mandatory English writing proficiency exam, and they were required to attend community college classes in English Composition and/or English as a Second Language (ESL).

Nonresident undergraduates’ English proficiency and academic success could be influenced by numerous variables, some of which are student-specific and readily accessible for statistical analysis (e.g., students’ citizenship country, class level, etc.), others are school-specific (e.g., classes which are taught in a particular academic term versus ones that span across several academic terms, majors within academic departments, colleges within universities, etc.), and others are unknown and/or cost-prohibitive to collect (e.g., parents’ English proficiency, parents’ highest level of education, etc.) (Osborne, 2000; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). Such variables need to be managed properly, and hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) offers many advantages in this regard. HLM analyzes data that are nested at multiple levels, computes an estimation of individual effects, partitions variance across levels, determines how much variance is accounted for at individual and group levels (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002), uses full-information maximum likelihood estimation to handle missing data (Little & Rubin, 2002) and avoids the need to use multiple imputations (Little & Rubin, 2002). This statistical technique is more advantageous than ordinary least squares (OLS) regression, another predictive statistical technique, because OLS regression assumes independence of observations; nested data rarely fulfill this key assumption (Ker, 2014; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). Consequently, OLS regression tends to underestimate level 2 effects (in the present study, individual level) whereas HLM does not (Osborne, 2000).

HLM analyses previously have shown that country of origin and major department were significant predictor variables for term GPAs of the aforementioned international undergraduates who succeeded academically despite failing an English proficiency exam (Fass-Holmes & Vaughn, 2014). Each of these variables accounted for less than 5% of the total variance—“small” effect sizes (Cohen, 1988; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002), indicating that they did not explain the students’ academic success in spite of English struggles. The present study took the opposite approach by using an indicator of English struggles (academic marks in required English intensive-writing classes) instead of an indicator of academic success (term GPAs) in HLM analyses.

If nonresident undergraduates with acceptable TOEFL scores do have English deficiencies, they might be expected to struggle in English intensive-writing classes. This hypothesis was tested in the present study. Specifically, this study’s goals were to evaluate the degree to which nonresident undergraduates attending a West Coast public university (hereafter referred to as “University”) struggled in English intensive-writing classes, and to use HLM for identifying what variables predict struggles in these classes.

The present study’s goals originated from a request by the University’s College Writing Programs’ directors for a longitudinal analysis of nonresident (nonimmigrant international, permanent resident [PR], and undocumented [OT]) undergraduates’ academic performance in the programs’ required English intensive-writing classes. The issue/concern which prompted the request was whether or not these students were progressing satisfactorily through these classes. The directors’ concern arose because of a generalization repeated by faculty, administrators, and advisors that the University’s undergraduates whose native language was not English, as a
whole, had deficient English skills which were inadequate to meet the University’s academic requirements. The University’s academic requirements, beyond the minimum TOEFL score for admission (83 or higher on the internet-based version), included the following:

- **Demonstrating a minimum level of English writing proficiency**—The University’s undergraduates (including domestic students) must fulfill this requirement during their freshman year by scoring above a specified level on various standardized college entrance exams or on the University’s proprietary writing exam, earning at least a C in a transferable college-level English composition class, or scoring above a specified level on an advanced placement English exam. Any undergraduate who fails this requirement must attend a writing program consisting of English Composition (EC) and ESL classes, earn a C or above, and pass an exit exam. These classes are taught on the University’s campus by instructors from a local community college.

- **Successfully complete College Writing Program classes**—After fulfilling the English writing proficiency requirement, the University’s undergraduates also must take two of the College Writing Programs’ classes. Each student belongs to one of the University’s colleges, each of which has its own unique writing program with distinctive number, content, and sequence of intensive writing classes. This is a graduation-related requirement.

### Literature Review

American universities have admitted an increasing number of international undergraduates in recent years. According to IIE’s annual Open Doors snapshot survey (IIE, 2013a), the total number of international students enrolled in fall 2013 (FA13) was higher than in fall 2012 (FA12) at 72% (274) of the American universities that participated in the survey. IIE’s Open Doors report for academic year (AY) 2012–13 showed an increase in the total number of international students in American higher education. This was the seventh consecutive year that the number increased. The 7.2% increase in new internationals who enrolled in AY2012–13 compared with 2011–12 was largely due to Chinese undergraduates studying in the United States. Enrollment of Chinese undergraduates increased 21% from AY2011–12 to 2012–13 (IIE, 2013b).

An increase in the number of international undergraduates also has occurred at the University that is the focus of the present study (IIE, 2013a,b). This University is located in a large city’s suburbs; it has more than 20,000 undergraduates; it has earned national recognition for academic and research excellence (*U.S. News and World Report*’s top ten); and it is one of 380 universities that participate in IIE’s Open Doors snapshot survey. Snapshot survey data show that the number of international undergraduates enrolled at the University increased 19.7% in FA13 compared to FA12, and enrollment increased 87.6% in FA12 compared to fall 2011 (FA11) (IIE, 2013a).

The University’s increase in international undergraduates has been accompanied by a campus-wide generalization that these students, as a whole, are struggling academically due to deficient English skills which are inadequate to meet the University’s academic requirements and challenges (cf. Bretag, 2007). If international undergraduates experience academic struggles which are due to deficient English skills, then one and the same internationals who struggle with English would be expected to struggle academically also. This expectation has some support in the research literature on the TOEFL. TOEFL scores not only have been used in making admissions
decisions (Oliver, Vanderford & Grote, 2012), but also in predicting English proficiency (Ling, Powers & Adler, 2014) and academic success (reviewed by Andrade, 2006; Graham, 1987; Stoynoff, 1997). For instance, Johnson (1988) found that international undergraduates whose TOEFL scores were below 500 earned significantly lower grades than counterparts whose TOEFL scores were at or above 500. Johnson concluded that the lower a student’s English proficiency (as reflected by the TOEFL score), the more important its role in academic success. Johnson (1988) also found that international undergraduates whose TOEFL score was at the low end of its range were more successful academically in courses that required a low level of English skills than in ones that required a high level. These findings suggest that international undergraduates’ English struggles (as indicated by low TOEFL scores) are associated with academic struggles (as indicated by low grades) at American universities.

Although the research literature provides some support for using TOEFL scores in predicting English proficiency and academic success (Ling, Powers & Adler, 2014), it also provides some contradictory evidence. Several studies have shown no correlation between TOEFL scores and international undergraduates’ GPA at American universities (Chen & Sun, 2006; Fass-Holmes & Vaughn, 2014; Wongtriatt, 2010). The absence of a correlation between TOEFL scores and academic success might signify that the scores meet admissions requirements due to non-native English speaking students’ having attended test preparation classes (Hamp-Lyons, 1998; Raimes, 1990) and/or cheating (Jung, 2013), but they do not reflect the students’ English proficiency. TOEFL scores therefore might have limited usefulness in resolving the question of whether international undergraduates’ English struggles are associated with academic struggles at American universities (Des Brisay, 1994; Fass-Holmes & Vaughn, 2014).

Instead of using TOEFL scores as an indicator of English proficiency that predicts academic success, a recent study (Fass-Holmes & Vaughn, 2014) compared the percentage of degree-seeking international freshmen who were required to take EC and/or ESL community college classes (i.e., struggling with English) with the percentage whose term GPAs during their first academic year were below 2.0 (struggling academically). More than one-third of the cohort that entered the University in FA09, almost one-half of the cohort that entered in FA10, and almost two-thirds of the cohort that entered in FA11 were required to take the community college classes. Five percent of the FA09 cohort, 10% of the FA10 cohort, and 42% of the FA11 cohort earned D or F (struggled) in these classes. However, these same students earned mean GPAs between 3.2 and 3.3 (succeeded academically) and less than 10% earned term GPAs below 2.0 (struggled academically) in their University classes. These findings therefore suggest that a majority of the international freshmen succeeded academically despite evidence of struggling with English.

Research Method

To fulfill the request by the College Writing Programs’ directors, demographic and academic achievement data for AY2009–10 through 2013–14, inclusive, were extracted from the University’s student information system using structured query language (SQL) programs (only fall terms’ results are reported below; other terms’ results are available from the authors upon request). The demographic data included academic status (good vs. not good; not good included probation, subject to dismissal, and dismissed), admit term (which was used to compute a calculated field enrollment history indicating whether each student was new or continuing), class level (freshman, sophomore, etc.), citizenship country, course title, department, major, subject
code (which was used to compute a calculated field English intensive-writing programs to distinguish students who attended College Writing Programs’ classes from students who attended the community college writing classes), and visa status (United States Department of State, n.d.). Academic achievement data included marks in the College Writing Programs’ (CWP) and community college’s (CC) English intensive-writing classes plus term GPAs. The SQL programs also extracted each undergraduate’s unique campus ID and first and last names to facilitate accurate organization (using IRB-approved procedures) of all data within records within data files. The extractions excluded only domestic students because of their lack of relevance to this study’s goals.

Descriptive statistical analyses were performed (using spreadsheet and PSPP software) on the data files to characterize the undergraduates and to determine the extent to which they struggled (earned marks below C) in the CWP or CC classes. HLM analyses were performed (using STATA 13 software; StataCorp, 2013) to evaluate the role of individual-level variables on academic marks. All of the present study’s models were run with one predictor at a time (or set of predictors, in the case of multiple groups like citizenship country or department). The outcome variable (academic marks) was nested within student; therefore, writing classes’ marks were level 1 whereas the students’ more stable traits (e.g., citizenship country) were level 2. Most of the categorical predictors were dummy-coded, including citizenship country (i.e., China vs. all others; South Korea vs. all others; these were the citizenship countries of the University’s two largest nonresident populations), English intensive-writing programs (i.e., CWP vs. CC classes), enrollment history (i.e., new student vs. continuing), immigration status (i.e., F-1 vs. all others; PR vs. all others; United States Department of State, n.d.), and major departments (i.e., Economics vs. all others; engineering vs. all others; science vs. all others; these specific major departments were chosen because of campus-wide generalizations that undergraduates whose native language was not English gravitated toward majors which were less sensitive to English weaknesses; cf. Johnson, 1988). Class level retained its ordinal form (i.e., freshman, sophomore, junior, senior).

Results

Descriptive Analyses—Demographics

The total number and demographic characteristics of nonresident undergraduates attending the CWP’s and CC’s English intensive-writing classes in the fall terms of AY2009–10 through 2013–14, inclusive, are shown in Table 1. Several noteworthy trends are evident. While PR accounted for about two-thirds of these undergraduates in FA09 and FA10, F-1 accounted for about two-thirds in FA12 and FA13. China was the citizenship country for less than 25% of the writing classes’ participants in FA09 and FA10, then it increased to almost 50% by FA13. Also in FA13, about one-third of the nonresident undergraduates attending writing classes were in the CC’s; this value was up from less than 20% in FA09. Engineering and science majors comprised approximately half of the undergraduates in the writing classes between FA09 and FA13, and less than 10% of participants in these classes were in bad academic status.

The annual change in numbers of nonresident undergraduates attending the English intensive-writing classes between FA09 and FA13, inclusive, is shown in Figure 1. Approximately the same number of these students attended in FA10 as in FA09. However, in FA11, participation in these writing classes increased by about 10%, then by almost a third in
FA12 and in FA13. These increases were largely attributable to year-over-year increases in the number of F-1 undergraduates attending these classes (Figure 2) and the number whose citizenship country was China (Figure 3).

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Nonresident Students in English Intensive-Writing Classes

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Abbreviations: FA09=fall 2009; FA10=fall 2010; FA11=fall 2011; FA12=fall 2012; FA13=fall 2013; N=number of nonresident undergraduates; F-1=degree-seeking internationals (United States Department of State, n.d.); OT=undocumented undergraduates; PR=permanent residents
Figure 1. The annual percentage change in the number of nonresident undergraduates attending the University’s English intensive-writing classes amounted to almost a third in each of the two most recent fall terms for which data were available at the time of this study. Values above each bar represent percentage change from the previous fall term. Abbreviations: FA09=fall 2009; FA10=fall 2010; FA11=fall 2011, FA12=fall 2012

Figure 2. The annual percentage change in the number of nonresident undergraduates attending the University’s English intensive-writing classes (Figure 1) was largely attributable to F-1 (degree-seeking, nonimmigrant) students. Values above or below each bar represent percentage change from the previous fall term. Abbreviations: FA09=fall 2009; FA10=fall 2010; FA11=fall 2011; FA12=fall 2012; OT=undocumented undergraduates; PR=permanent residents

Figure 3. The annual percentage change in the number of nonresident undergraduates attending the University’s English intensive-writing classes (Figure 1) is largely attributable to Chinese students. Values above each bar represent percentage change from the previous fall term. Abbreviations: FA09=fall 2009; FA10=fall 2010; FA11=fall 2011; FA12=fall 2012
Descriptive Analyses—Performance in English Intensive-Writing Classes

Figure 4 shows nonresident undergraduates’ academic marks in English intensive-writing classes for FA09 through FA13, inclusive. F-1, OT, and PR undergraduates’ average marks were at or above C+ in these classes (aggregated over all citizenship countries and writing programs). Nonresident undergraduates’ average marks were between B- and B in the CWP classes (aggregated over all citizenship countries and visa categories; United States Department of State, n.d.). However, their average marks ranged between C- and C+ in the CC classes (same aggregations), thus indicative of some struggles in EC and/or ESL. Chinese undergraduates’ average marks were between C+ and B-, while nonresidents from all other countries averaged between B- and B in the English intensive-writing classes (aggregated over all visa categories and writing programs).

Figure 4. Nondomestic undergraduates’ average academic marks in English intensive-writing classes between fall 2009 and fall 2013 (inclusive) are disaggregated by visa category in the top graph, by writing programs in the middle graph, and by citizenship country in the bottom graph. Only the average marks for the community college classes show evidence of struggling (below 2.0). Values above each bar represent average marks (A=4; B=3; C=2; D=1; F=0); values at the base of each bar represent counts and standard errors. Abbreviations: FA09=fall 2009, FA10=fall 2010, FA11=fall 2011, FA12=fall 2012, FA13=fall 2013; OT=undocumented; PR=permanent resident.
Frequency distributions of the nonresident undergraduates’ marks in the most recent fall term’s (FA13) English intensive-writing classes are shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5. The frequency distributions of academic marks which nonresident undergraduates earned in the College Writing Programs’ fall 2013 (FA13) English intensive-writing classes (upper graph) are skewed to the right with modal values between B and B+. By contrast, the corresponding frequency distribution for the community college program’s FA13 classes (lower graph) resembles a bell curve with a modal value of C.

Whereas the CWPs’ frequency distributions are skewed to the right, the CC program’s frequency distribution approximates a bell curve. Out of 1,033 marks issued by the FA13 CWPs’ classes, 87.6% were at or above C; the modal mark was B (N=222; 21.5% of the total). The corresponding values for the FA13 CC program’s classes were 698, 74.1%, and C (N=351; 50.3% of the total), respectively. Frequency distributions for the other academic years’ fall terms show a similar pattern and are available from the authors upon request.

Descriptive Analyses—GPAs

The University considers students with a term GPA below 2.0 (C) to be struggling academically. GPA analyses showed that nonresident undergraduates who participated in the English intensive-writing classes earned term GPAs which averaged between 2.7 (B-) and 3.2 (between B and B+) in FA09 through FA13, inclusive. Disaggregating the data by visa category, the fall average GPAs ranged from 2.98 to 3.17 for F-1, 2.55 to 2.93 for OT, and 2.92 to 3.01 for PR. Disaggregating by writing programs, the fall average GPAs ranged from 2.92 to 3.04 for nonresident undergraduates who participated in CWP classes (the University includes these classes’ academic marks in term GPAs), and 2.95 to 3.14 for participants in CC classes (the University excludes these classes’ academic marks from term GPAs). Chinese undergraduates’ fall average GPAs ranged from 3.13 to 3.25, South Koreans’ from 2.72 to 2.96, and other countries’ from 2.94 to 3.03. The corresponding fall average GPAs for Economics majors ranged from 2.79 to 2.97, for engineering majors from 3.00 to 3.07, for science majors from 3.06 to 3.21, and for other majors from 2.95 to 3.07. Tables and graphs of these data are available from the authors upon request.
HLM Analyses

The data extracted for the HLM analyses yielded 1,189 nonresident undergraduates’ records for AY2009–10 CWP and CC classes, and these undergraduates had a total of 2,331 writing classes’ marks used in the HLM analyses. On average, each undergraduate in AY0910 had about two writing classes’ marks (M = 1.9). The corresponding values for AY2010–11 were 1,254 nonresident undergraduates, 2,262 writing classes’ marks, and an average of almost two writing classes’ marks per student (M = 1.8). For AY2011–12, 1,366 nonresident undergraduates, 2,526 writing classes’ marks, and an average of almost two classes’ marks (M = 1.8) per student. For AY2012–13, 1,703 nonresident undergraduates, 3,514 writing classes’ marks, and an average of two classes’ marks per student (M = 2.1). Lastly, for AY2013–14, 2,150 nonresident undergraduates, 4,296 writing classes’ marks, and an average of two classes’ marks per student (M = 2.0).

In the current study, all of our models were run with one predictor (or set of predictors – in the case of dummy-coded predictors) at a time on two-level models. Writing classes’ marks (the outcome variable) are considered a lower level (level 1 or time-varying) variable, whereas the various predictors are considered higher level (level 2 or individual, stable) variables. These included citizenship country, class level, enrollment history, English intensive-writing programs, major department, and visa category (United States Department of State, n.d.). An example model is shown below.

Level 1: Grade = β_{0j} + r_{ij}
Level 2: β_{0j} = γ_{00} + γ_{01} (class level) + μ_{0j}

For each HLM model, only statistically significant results (p<.05) are presented in Table 2. This table shows that class level was a significant predictor of AY2009–10 writing classes’ marks—as class level increased, these marks also increased. Citizenship country, English intensive-writing programs, enrollment history, major department, and visa category all were significant predictors of writing classes’ marks—Chinese and South Koreans, CWP participants, and continuing nonresident undergraduates had higher writing classes’ marks compared to other nationalities, CC writing classes’ participants, and new nonresident undergraduates. Economics and engineering majors and F-1 undergraduates had lower writing classes’ marks compared to all other majors and visa categories. The HLM results for AY2010–11 writing classes’ marks were the same with one exception—only Economics majors had lower grades when compared to all other majors (engineering majors were not significantly different from the rest). The results for AY2011–12 were also the same as AY2009–10’s except that major department was not a significant predictor at all. AY2012–13’s results were similar to AY2010–11’s except that only Economics majors had lower marks in writing classes when compared to all other majors (engineering majors were not significantly different from the rest). AY2013–14’s HLM results were similar to AY2009–10’s with two exceptions—enrollment history was not a significant predictor and only Economics majors had lower marks when compared to all other majors (engineering majors were not significantly different from the rest).

Although the HLM analyses revealed that the aforementioned predictors were statistically significant, most of them accounted for only a small portion of the total variance (less than 6%; small effect sizes) in writing classes’ marks. However, two exceptions were notable—class level explained 3–18% (small effect size) of the total variance in writing classes’ marks, and English
intensive-writing programs (CC and CWP) explained 9–27% (small effect size) of the total variance in writing classes’ marks.

### Table 2: Statistically Significant Univariate Predictors of English Intensive-Writing Programs’ Grades (HLM Analyses)

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<th>Predictor</th>
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<th>SE β</th>
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<td>.005</td>
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<td>.015</td>
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### Discussion and Conclusions

The present study tested the hypothesis that if the University’s nonresident undergraduates had English deficiencies despite having a TOEFL score that was acceptable for admission, they might be expected to struggle (earn Ds or Fs) in English intensive-writing classes. To the contrary, this study showed that a sizable majority of these students earned C or better in AY2009–10 through 2013–14, inclusive.

One of the goals in testing this hypothesis was to evaluate the degree to which the University’s nonresident undergraduates struggle in English intensive-writing classes. The only evidence of English struggles in this study was the average academic marks in the CC program’s classes (EC and ESL) in FA11 and FA13. Otherwise, this study’s results indicate that, regardless of how the data were disaggregated, the University’s nonresident undergraduates earned at least C on average in the English intensive-writing classes; in many cases instead, these students’ average marks in the English intensive-writing classes were at or above B-.
This study’s other goal was to use HLM for identifying what variables predict struggles in the English intensive-writing classes. The HLM results showed that the predictor variable *English intensive-writing programs* was statistically significant and explained a larger percentage—9–27%—of the total variance in writing classes’ marks than any of the other significant predictor variables. While this predictor’s coefficient suggests a difference of about one letter grade (e.g., D vs. C; B vs. A), the percentage of the total variance that it explains is considered a small effect size (Cohen, 1988). It might be sufficiently compelling for use in decision making about implementing or changing policies and programs that target nonresident undergraduates at risk of bad academic status, but it might not be sufficiently compelling for nonresident undergraduates who are earning B or A. All of the other significant predictor variables in the HLM analyses explained even smaller percentages of the total variance and thus might not be sufficiently compelling (Kirk, 1996).

What accounts for the finding that nonresident undergraduates’ marks are significantly worse in CC classes than in CWP counterparts? CC and CWP classes are similar in that they all are taught on the same university campus. These classes are dissimilar, however, in that the former are administered and taught by CC instructors whereas the latter are administered and taught by the University’s faculty (cf. Callahan & Chumney, 2009). One possible explanation for the HLM results, then, is that CC instructors teach and/or grade English writing differently than the University’s faculty. Another possibility is that CC classes (EC and ESL) are focused more on fundamental English skills and those classes’ grades consequently are more reflective of struggles with English, whereas the CWP classes are more focused on writing in a particular field (e.g., humanities) and those classes’ grades consequently are less reflective of struggles with English. A third possibility is that students might invest less time and effort in CC classes than in CWP classes because the University excludes the former and includes the latter in GPA calculations. Further research will be necessary to evaluate these possibilities.

The present findings further refute campus generalizations that the University’s nonresident undergraduates collectively struggle academically, and that the academic struggles are due to English deficiencies (cf. Fass-Holmes & Vaughn, 2014). These generalizations of extensive academic struggles and English deficiencies cannot readily be attributed to insufficient assistance and/or support; the University historically has delivered a diverse range of programs and services—academic and immigration advising, intramural sports, mentoring and transition programs, one-on-one English tutoring, social and cultural events, student organizations, welcoming events, etc.—to promote its non-native English speaking undergraduates’ engagement, retention, and satisfaction. However, the present findings do not refute or address additional generalizations about nonresident undergraduates’ behaviors that violate academic integrity policies (e.g., cheating, collaboration, plagiarism, etc.). Further studies will be needed to determine the extent to which such behaviors account for nonresident undergraduates’ performance in English intensive-writing classes.

The present study’s findings additionally rule out two alternative explanations for alleged English deficiencies: (a) the struggling undergraduates include immigrant students (applicants for permanent residency, amnesty-seekers, asylees, refugees, OT, and/or PR) rather than or in addition to non-immigrant (international) students; and (b) continuing, rather than new, international undergraduates are the ones who struggle. This study showed that OT and PR undergraduates had *better* marks in the English intensive-writing classes than non-immigrant F-1 counterparts (Figure 4; Table 2), and that continuing nonresident undergraduates had *better* marks than new counterparts (Table 2). These findings are the opposite of what would be
expected if the above alternatives were correct. Instead, a recent study provided evidence that the University’s generalizations are more likely attributable to annual increases in international undergraduates entering the University. As international undergraduate enrollment has increased, the number of these students who struggle academically also has increased proportionally (Fass-Holmes & Vaughn, 2014).

In conclusion, only a minority of the University’s nonresident undergraduates has struggled in English intensive-writing classes and/or academically. This finding is contrary to expectations originating from campus-wide generalizations about nonresident undergraduates. Policies and programs intended to promote undergraduates’ academic success would be most cost effective if they focused on the specific students with demonstrable deficiencies rather than all who are not native English writers.

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**AUTHORS**

**ALLISON A. VAUGHN**, PhD, is an assistant professor of psychology. Her research interests include social relationships, mental health (anxiety, depression), physical health (cardiovascular functioning), and student achievement. Email: avaughn@mail.sdsu.edu

**MATTHEW BERGMAN** is a doctoral candidate in political science. His research interests include comparative institutions, comparative politics, international relations, and student achievement. Email: mebergma@ucsd.edu

**BARRY FASS-HOLMES**, PhD, is an analytical studies coordinator. His research focuses on international students’ academic achievement. We thank Lynn C. Anderson, Dulce Amor L. Dorado, and Dr. Kirk Simmons for their helpful suggestions. Email: bfholmes@ucsd.edu

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International Students in American Pathway Programs: Learning English and Culture through Service-Learning

Julie Miller, MSW
Becca Berkey, PhD
Francis Griffin, MA
Northeastern University (USA)

Abstract

As the number of international students studying in the United States continues to grow, the body of literature about service-learning in English Language Learning (ELL) curricula is growing in tandem. The primary goal of this paper is to explore how service-learning impacts the development and transition of pathway program students in the United States. Authors present recent demographic shifts in ELL student education, a concise introduction to pathway programs, an overview of literature about service-learning with international students, and theoretical and practical factors to consider for facilitators of Learning English and Culture through Service-Learning (LECSL) based on data from 250 students at Northeastern University.

Keywords: International Students, ESL, ELL, Service-Learning, Pathway Programs, Student Development, Transformative Learning

The number of international students studying in the United States has never been higher. This can be attributed, in part, to the growth of conditional acceptance programs (generally referred to as pathway programs or foundation years) designed for English Language Learning students (ELLs) to learn the language and cultural skills necessary for success in United States colleges and universities. This study seeks to contribute specifically to knowledge regarding the experiences of ELL students in pathway programs who participate in service-learning in the United States. Authors of this paper (2013) refer to this as “LECSL;” Learning English and Culture through Service-Learning (Authors, 2013).

This paper draws on relevant literature as well as lessons learned from a large-scale service-learning initiative for pathway program students at Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts. The primary goal of this paper is to explore how service-learning impacts the development and transition of students in pathway programs in the United States.
Questions addressed include:

- How does service-learning create transformative learning experiences that contribute to the development of ELL students in pathway programs?
- How does service-learning prepare pathway program students for subsequent cross-cultural collaborations with peers in their degree programs?
- How does service-learning prepare pathway program students for the English language proficiency needed for success in their degree programs?
- How does service-learning contribute to pathway program students’ sense of agency (i.e. organization, time management, and self-advocacy)?

As the authors of this paper are facilitators of service-learning, we also discuss theoretical and logistical factors for facilitators to bear in mind when integrating service-learning into pathway programs. Framing these concepts are lessons learned about partnership dynamics, as well as programmatic challenges and opportunities associated with integrating service-learning into pathway program curricula for ELLs.

Literature Review

International Pathway Program Students in the United States

The following information has been adapted from the 2013 Institute of International Education Open Doors Report. In the 2013/2014 academic year, approximately 900,000 international students were enrolled in colleges and universities in the United States. If the future is anything like the recent past, the growing trend of international students on American campuses shows no sign of slowing down (Institute of International Education, 2014). The fastest growing trend in international student education is the growth of non-degree programs, which includes pathway programs. The goal of pathway programs is to prepare international students, academically and linguistically, for undergraduate courses in the United States. The program model originated in Australia and the United Kingdom and eventually migrated to North America (Gillett, 2011; Fiocco, 2005; O’Hallron, 2004). Pathway programs are university-affiliated programs with a prescribed set of courses, all of which integrate intensive English language training and preparation for undergraduate and/or graduate courses.

Impact of Service-Learning on International Student Development

According to The National Service-Learning Clearinghouse (2005), service-learning is “a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities” (NSLC website, n.d.). The benefits associated with participating in service-learning have been documented extensively through longitudinal and multi-campus studies from the perspective of American university students engaging in service both inside and outside of the United States (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000; Engberg & Fox, 2011; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Novak, Markey, & Allen, 2007). These benefits pertain to personal, civic, cognitive, and academic outcomes.

United States-based service-learning with ELL students can be seen as a relevant-yet-distinct version of “international service-learning,” defined by Crabtree (2008) as “a variety of
experiences common in U.S. higher education today: faculty/staff-led co-curricular ‘mission’ and service trips, academic courses with international immersion that include service experiences, study-abroad programs with service components, and international programs with formal service-learning curricula” (2008, p. 18). ELL students engaging in service-learning in the United States are participating in the inverse of Crabtree’s conventionally-recognized idea of international service-learning.

Existing literature at the intersection of service-learning and international student education coincides with some aspects of traditional models of service-learning with domestic students in the areas of learning objectives, impact on student development, and its potentially transformative effects (Berman, 2006; Hartman & Rola, 2000; Kiely, 2004). Mezirow’s (1997) theory of transformative learning cuts across students’ experiences from a wide range of countries. This framework describes the potential of cognitive dissonance and disruptive dilemmas to spark attitudinal and behavioral change among service-learning students. However, the literature tends to diverge with aspects related to language acquisition and cultural considerations (Hutchinson, 2007; Wurr & Hellebrandt, 2007).

A growing body of research points to the many benefits that service-learning provides for ELLs. Scholars suggest that service-learning contributes to students’ language development (Heuser, 1999; Marlow, 2007; Minor, 2001; Spack, 2006; Wurr, 2002, 2009), intercultural awareness (Askildson, Cahill Kelly, & Snyder Mack, 2013), engagement in learning and in their local communities (Grassi, Hanley, & Liston, 2004; Russell, 2007), and linguistic self-confidence (Hummel, 2013). Other work suggests that service-learning leads to deepened understanding of social issues and civic engagement (Perren, Grove, & Thornton, 2013) and helps ELLs recognize that their academic work holds real-world value (Elwell & Bean, 2001).

While service-learning is becoming more popular in mainstream educational settings, it is utilized comparatively less with ELL service-learning students at the university or college level (Bippus & Eslami, 2013; Crossman & Kite, 2007; Fitzgerald, 2009). In fact, existing literature suggests that ELL students are more likely to be recipients of service-learning projects rather than providers of service themselves (Grassi, Hanley, & Liston, 2004; Hale & Whittig, 2006; Steinke, 2009).

**Research Method**

A phenomenological approach with an epistemological perspective drawing on social constructivism and critical theory was used for this study. Throughout, we embraced a social constructivist view that meaning is subjective and gained through interactions with others (Crotty, 1998; Lapan & Quattraroli, 2009). We used qualitative research methods that explored participants’ experiences and the meaning they make of them. Through this, the aim was to discover patterns of meaning among participant students, consistent with phenomenology (Seidman, 1998). It is worthwhile to note that the researchers are embedded in the program and course, one as the faculty member, one as an administrator of The American Classroom program, and one as the lead administrator of the service-learning program.

**Research Site**

Northeastern University is a research and teaching university in the heart of Boston, Massachusetts. Northeastern offers two distinct pathway programs for international students. One of these programs is called American Classroom, a program administered by the university...
and not by a private company. Beginning in the fall of 2012, Northeastern University’s American Classroom program in the College of Professional Studies has offered Global Experience; a leadership, social change, and cross-cultural communication course with a service-learning component. Note that the course was renamed Community Learning in the summer of 2014 and, as such, all subsequent literature about this course uses the Community Learning course title (Miller, 2014).

The American Classroom program at Northeastern University is designed for international students with varying degrees of oral and written English abilities. Most students are referred to the pathway program with conditional acceptance from the main university admissions office. This means that, after successful completion of credit-bearing courses (such as Advanced Reading & Writing, American History, Introduction to Philosophy, Calculus and/or Environmental Science, and Global Experience), and if the student has maintained a high GPA with an achieved score of 733 or above on the TOEFL exam, he/she is granted acceptance to the university with several transferrable credits from The American Classroom program.

While international students at the school remain the minority, the university has experienced a 447% increase in international student enrollment from the fall of 2006 compared to the fall of 2013 (Northeastern University Institutional Accomplishments, 2013). This growth is illustrative of ongoing tectonic shifts in higher education student enrollment not only at Northeastern University, but nationally.

Prior to the addition of a service-learning component to Global Experience, administrators of The American Classroom program learned from research findings that students were speaking English out of their classes an average of only one hour per week. Such findings motivated the administrators’ hope that the inclusion of ongoing and purposeful service-learning would a) complement students’ intensive English instruction, b) immerse students in various aspects of American culture through a lens of leadership and social change, and c) better prepare students for cooperative education, also known as co-op. While co-op is the flagship experiential education program at the school; undergraduate research, internships, service-learning, and study abroad programs have also grown in popularity over the years.

Global Experience was, and continues to be, the first service-learning program of its magnitude directed specifically to international students at Northeastern University. The program was piloted with ample support from the Center of Community Service at Northeastern University by way of evaluation measures, training, partnership development, and supervision of undergraduate Service-Learning Teaching Assistants.

Data included in this study begin from September of 2012. At the time of analysis Global Experience had been offered for five semesters across twenty-one sections of the course. Over 250 American Classroom students had participated in the course and its accompanying weekly service component by that time. Over the course of those semesters, Global Experience partnered with over 20 local non-profit organizations, all of whom hosted between 1 and 20 Global Experience students at any given point. Each semester, the sections met once per week and students engaged in 2-5 hours of service per week outside of class.

Data Collection Methods

This study focused on two-fold evaluative measures with students, all of which were administered online either in survey and/or narrative format for four semesters in total. These measures include post-semester evaluation data from 186 students administered by the Center of
Community Service, and student journals and blogs, which were the purview of the instructor. The Center-related student evaluations are administered prior to the beginning of service-learning and again at the end of each semester. Specifically regarding their work with their community partner, service-learning students were asked to assess their orientation to the organization, their training, the feedback they received throughout the duration of their service, their direct supervision on-site, and communication. In addition, students were asked about how service with their partner has helped with their skill development and connection to academic content of the course and their major.

**Data Analysis Methods**

Raw data sources from the online survey tools were used to form categories from the patterns that emerged in qualitative responses and information. Codes were assigned to data based upon the identification of patterns, and ultimately these patterns were matched with common themes from the literature as well as the research questions guiding the study. Data collection and analysis were interactive and iterative, an emergent methodological approach that relied on “inductive reasoning and a continual interplay between data and developing interpretation” (Suter, 2006, p. 362).

Selected portions of students’ weekly blogs and open-ended responses from surveys were synthesized using narrative summary, thematic analysis, and aspects of grounded theory. In traditional narrative summary form, the data analysis seeks to integrate qualitative and quantitative evidence through narrative juxtaposition (Dixon-Woods, Agarwal, Jones, Young, & Sutton, 2005). By utilizing thematic analysis, prominent themes from the data are structured and integrated with theory from traditional “international service-learning” literature (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Aspects of grounded theory were integrated in the data analysis stage, particularly in the later formulation of thematic groupings (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

**Reliability and Validity**

Rather than traditional notions of reliability and validity, qualitative findings are assessed by their trustworthiness. This is determined by the transferability, dependability, confirmability, and credibility of the results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Of these elements, transferability was ensured for this study through data collection strategies inclusive of several semesters of the course and multiple student participants. The analysis process utilized analytical premises as rooted in prior service-learning and international student research, and through the provision of social context and authentic narrative (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). Data source, investigator, and theory triangulation were utilized in this case study by examining multiple data sources, including several investigators studying the data, and by looking at the data from different viewpoints (Tellis, 1997).

**Limitations**

While this phenomenological study elucidates compelling findings indicating that the students are gaining a great deal that is influencing their development, acculturation, and their English-language speaking skills, it is limited to the four semesters for which data were analyzed. While the findings are not statistically generalizable, they are analytically useful when considering approaches to understanding the role of service-learning with international students.
in the United States (Tellis, 1997). Further, there is some bias inherent in the presentation of data and analysis because the co-authors of this study are currently engaged in the program. In addition, data were pulled from online survey tools and student assignments without the addition of in-depth qualitative tools for follow-up such as focus groups or interviews. Limitations of this study are consistent with those of phenomenological methodology.

Results

The four main questions of the study are addressed below, each with illustrative quotes from students and short explanations of the quotes. Discussion and implications of these findings follow in the next sections.

How does service-learning create transformative learning experiences that contribute to the development of international students in pathway programs?

Students reflected on their transformative learning experiences in a variety of different ways. Several student quotes below are illustrative of a) the transition in academic and civic engagement practices in students’ home countries versus in the service-learning classroom in the United States, b) the shift from mono-directional service provision to a more mutually-beneficial exchange between the student and the community, and c) service-learning-induced disruptive experiences leading to changes in attitudes and perceptions.

Students actively reflect on each of these themes in the end-of-term Service-Learning evaluations they are asked to complete. While students process their experiences differently, as would be expected, these evaluations indicate that each student is able to articulate his/her own development as influenced by service-learning. One such student reflects:

I think I better understand the American social background. Because of the cross-racism, the community is highly diverse in term of culture, tradition, religion and so on. So that requires people to be inclusive and respectful to each other. As an international student, I realized that I also is one of the diverse community. So, the S-L provided me a good way to approach the society especially people who is in need and help. Meanwhile, the problems I saw from the society through the org. gave me a opportunity to thinking critically and actively.

When asked through a blog prompt at the beginning of semester about thoughts/feelings gearing up for service-learning, a student from Korea describes the chasm he perceives between academic and civic engagement cultures in Korea versus the United States:

I have never done community services. In Korea, we spent too much time in studying. Korean education pay more attention teaching student how to solve questions in paper. So we do not have time to take part in social activities. When traditional Korean students face community service, they would feel strange. Before I came to America, I have short time to help people transport fruits in a market. I believe this class will be very interesting, because it is new for me.

In response to a blog prompt asking students how they believe cultural gaps play a helpful and/or harmful role in their service-learning experience, a student from China echoes this message in a
blog post about the shift in academic and civic engagement cultures: “In my country, there are only a few community services because all of us are always busy with homework, preparing for tests, interview & meetings, or working in companies. And people there are not used to helping others…”

Students also described their transition in initially perceiving service-learning as one-sided (where the student is serving and the community is benefiting) to eventually considering service-learning as mutually-beneficial. When asked through a blog if students would describe their service-learning experiences as mutually-beneficial for the student and the organization, one student from Venezuela writes:

The service-learning not only means we go and do something nice to help them, but also improve ourselves with the children we teach together during our service… For example, I learned some knowledge that I never heard before when I was teaching my students… And what’s better is my students sometimes can teach me many things that I didn’t know about Boston.

Another student, writing in retrospect after two semesters of engaging in service-learning agrees:

When I was still in August of 2012, my understanding for service is that I help others who need my help. I go the site, finish my work, and done. Global Experience taught me that I am also a service-learner at the same time. Or I should say I work with others. Because the goal for Global Experience is not just go out and help, but also learners learn from their experiences.

One student from China alludes to the shock waves that characterize transformative learning experiences in a final reflection paper at the end of the semester:

Seeing the Chinese immigrants at YMCA shock me in many ways. Many of them only came to the US for about 1 or 2 years. They might not necessarily know how to speak English, even if they [know] how to speak, it is obvious that their English is far behind the native speaker. A child told me he needs to wake up at 5 am every day to go to school, and by train… I am amazed by his effort, or the parents’ effort. I want to ask him or his parents: what makes you come to U.S? Why here? Isn’t it too hard? … That organizations like YMCA exist strike me, too. The organization connects the one who are willing to do help those who need help. I think it is a meaningful thing to do, and the influence for those organizations is incalculable.

When students were asked in a spring 2013 end-of-semester evaluation about the impact service-learning had on their future academic, professional, civic, and/or personal goals, one student writes, “In next four or five years, I still want to serve different community organizations. I wish I could discover more issues in the American society while think critically and actively.”

As we can see, service-learning for/with ELL students creates opportunities for transformative learning experiences. These experiences may collide with differing academic, social, and service-oriented cultures in their home countries, but, as we can see in student quotes, have the capacity to spark attitudinal and behavioral change.
How does service-learning prepare pathway program students for the English language proficiency needed for success in their degree programs?

A review of students’ reflections clearly pointed to one of the ways in which service-learning is uniquely-positioned in pathway programs— that is, as a complementary English-language-learning methodology for ELL students. Students discuss the sense of confidence that stems from increasing mastery of English. Writes a student from France:

At the beginning of last year, I was completely lost. In fact, college was something new and the obligation of speaking English quickly made me depressed. Here is where service-learning had an important role and kind of helped me to overcome these difficulties... I deeply believe that my site had a huge impact on my ability to speak English with Americans. Through the site and the students I worked with, I have come to realize that I was capable to talk in English without any fear of being judged based on my accent. Most of the students were originally foreigners, and therefore accepted my accents and me...

Another student writes:

S-L gives me confidence to interact with native speakers. Because my roommate is from Boston, sometimes I felt that I had a gap to communicate with him. Thanks to service, I have confidence to interact with him and sometimes to have a party with him and his friends.

Service-learning students acting in tutoring roles with youth make particular mention of the sociolinguistic impact of service-learning on their English skills. When asked through a blog about how sources of students’ anxiety and/or excitement leading up to service-learning aligned with the actually experience of serving, a student from China writes:

I need to teach the children how to do math homework. I found out that I could not even say words like add, minus, multiple, and divide correctly every time. I mixed them together. I asked the children and other tutors to explain them for me. Some students had a hard time adjusting to my accent, but they still work with me several times, I felt happy.

Another student writes:

I improved my English skills by expanding my vocabulary. When I help kids with their English homework, I have to know all the words’ meanings. And I always found out I don’t know many things. I can speak more native English and also good at tutoring kids.

In a fall 2012 end-of-semester survey, one student writes, “The service experience improves my English and makes me more confident.” Another student writes in a survey, “My service-learning experience has mainly improved my communication skills. So in the future, no matter what career path I follow, I can apply the skills that I have learnt during this experience.”

As student quotes illustrate, the transition in sense of confidence, flexibility, and even humor accompanying his/her evolving English fluency over the course of the semester of
service-learning can be dramatic. Several students describe their initial lack of sense of mastery of English to, later, an increased sense of linguistic competency.

**How does service-learning contribute to pathway program students’ sense of agency, including organization, time management, initiative, self-advocacy, and self-confidence?**

A review of reflections suggested students’ perceptions of links between service-learning and students’ sense of agency. The development of organizational skills, time management skills, and self-advocacy skills, are particularly important as pathway program students prepare to matriculate into undergraduate programs.

Students reflected on service-learning as a conduit for academic skill development and professional development in multiple spheres. One student from fall 2012 states on his end-of-semester Service-Learning evaluation, “I believe that this service experience has helped me in my professional goals by making me a more independent person.” A student from spring 2013 states that service-learning “made me responsible to divide my time.” When asked at the end of the semester how the students felt different than they did at the beginning of the semester in a blog, a student from China writes:

Global Experience has changed my attitude to the community. This class required us to do service-learning, before that I wouldn’t know how the world looks like. Before that I was a little girl who was always reliable on my parents. And I always shaped myself a princess. I never have a chance to take a look at the outside world... Doing service-learning increases my knowledge of the outside world and gaining a lot of experience before I go to work. I have met a lot of different people, went through a lot of obstacles. If time could fly back, I would choose to have this class and do service again.

A student from Taiwan reflects on the impact of service-learning on his sense of identity as a Northeastern student and his time management skills:

I feel proud of being a student of Northeastern University doing the service-learning. Because I am doing a really good work to help others. And I have a sense of belonging. Finally, I learned how to be a guy that never late. We should prepare for tomorrow’s work, especially the work that is early in the morning.

When asked at the end of the semester what students felt they “gained” from service-learning, one student from Korea writes in a blog post about the transformation she experienced regarding group work and confidence in giving presentations:

I have definitely known Boston better than ever. As one of the new Northeastern members in the Service-Learning, I found out Northeastern students collaborate very well together. Everyone is nice to each other. We do things as a group... I realize that I have learnt a lot better when I work with other people rather than work by myself. In addition, the presentation that I did in order to present where I work, has made me realize that I could be confident even though the presentation is in English.... Finally, GE class and more precisely my Service-learning helped me to figure out how to be prepared to teach, to manage my time in order to be on time without being stressed.
Another student responded to the same question by writing:

Service-Learning has a magic. To do service, in fact, doesn’t distract me from studying but help me to get a good grade. For the communication class, when I learn new skills, I could practice it with people in my work site. Once I had learnt that giving the thesis first during speaking was important, and I used this new skill to communicate with students. They all understood it quickly and clearly. For the history classes, when I had learnt lots of American stories, I could introduce and teach American culture to the new immigrant kids by telling those stories. For my calculus class, by tutoring basic mathematics, I could review myself, and think more deeply about the fundamentals. The whole process of S-L improves me fiercely in various areas. My English skills are improved. Then I communicate with the local people not only on campus but also in my work site, I have a pleasant transition to Boston.

As student reflections reveal, service-learning seems to have a mediating effect for some international students’ subsequent transitions into their target undergraduate degree programs. The time management skills, sense of belonging, organization, and overall sense of agency honed through service-learning ultimately equip pathway program students with crucial skills.

**How does service-learning prepare pathway program students for subsequent cross-cultural collaborations with peers in their degree programs?**

It became clear, through a review of students’ reflections, that service-learning can often confront and/or alter students’ attitudes and behaviors around cross-cultural collaborations with peers. This theme is particularly important to consider in context of the homogenous learning settings in which many pathway program students originate. One student writes:

I become braver than before. I learn how to communicate with my classmates as well. In the past, I was afraid to talk with people. In two semesters of Global Experience, we all have weekly classes to talk about how is our service-learning going on, what we learn from our service-learning and what issues we need to know in our society. Journals and blogs are about what we learn from each panel and some course materials, it provides the opportunity for us to share each other’s thought and write down what we learn from the class.

When an end-of-semester survey asked students about the impact service-learning had on his/her future academic, professional, civic and/or personal goals, one student writes, “it gained my confidence in working with different types of people.” Another student writes, “Since I experienced part of American culture, it is going to help me merge into the class, socialize with the American students.” A different student responds to this question with, “I meet many different kind of people there, from different races, countries… So I learned from their culture and we are just like family.” Collaborating across diversity became a prominent theme in evaluations, journals, and blogs. One student blogs specifically about the impact of diversity within the pathway program in which service-learning takes place through Global Experience:

I have seen so many different people from diverse backgrounds such as Indians, Mexicans, Koreans, Chinese, and French. I make a lot of friends throughout my
year… Our Global Experience class is a big class, everyone is so passionate about describing their own cultures, values, and status in their countries. It was very exciting when I get to meet so many people with diverse opinions and thoughts, but also sad because we will never have the chance like this class again, which is to share around every person’s views on life, knowledge, and abilities.

When asked how the students believed their home countries’ cultural landscape (including diversity of cultures, creeds, religions, within the country) affected his/her perceptions related to service-learning, one student from China writes:

> Because 95% Chinese belong to race Han, in most of time, I did not feel this strong atmosphere about race issue. Before I come to America, my friends told me American have discrimination to other racial people... China has racial problem, America also has it. But in the United States, people seem more care about racial problem.

As we see in student quotes, the pathway program and service-learning experience can often pose novel cross-cultural learning experiences for students. Students’ responses about the interplay of diversity within the pathway program and around the pathway program (by way of service-learning) are timely and important to consider in an increasingly-globalized university landscape.

**Discussion and Conclusions**

The results of this study point to several theoretical concepts. Results from the first question about transformative learning can be examined through a lens of Mezirow’s (1997) theory of transformative learning, in which he describes moments of cognitive dissonance students’ experiences as disruptive dilemmas and as fodder for deep learning. Kitchenham (2008) synthesizes this idea of transformative learning into four types: 1) elaborating existing frames of reference, 2) learning new frames of reference, 3) transforming habits of mind, 4) transforming points of view (p. 120). Like Mezirow, Bamber and Hankin (2011) state that ideal outcomes of service-learning should include “confrontation with information that disrupts an individual’s world view” and then serves as a ‘catalyst for change’” (p. 195).

As we can see in student quotes, it is not uncommon for international students to report participating in one-time service experiences if they have participated in service at all. More often than not, if students had volunteered in any capacity, they generally have done so in groups and were not tasked with carrying leadership roles as we conceive of them in the United States. Once students begin serving in more ongoing, front-facing capacities with community members, some may begin to regard their services sites as a home away from home. Some students may refer to the youth they tutor as younger siblings or the elders they visit as grandparents.

As student’s quotes illustrate, these connections do not come without conflict and often do serve as catalysts for attitudinal and perhaps behavioral change. Students write about the attitudinal and behavioral shift of moving from countries where they do not feel service-learning is conducive to the more prevalent culture of learning to moving to a classroom where service-learning is a driving force behind learning. Students also refer to the shift from a relatively-paternalistic view of service-learning of “I am serving others” to a more mutually-beneficial view of service-learning to “I am serving and learning.”
Results from the second question about how service-learning prepares students for the English language proficiency needed for their target degree program tie into the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach, which stresses the importance of interaction as both the means and the goal of learning a language (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). CLT is a learner centered approach that focuses on capturing the interests and needs of the learner. Students use the target language to interact and perform meaningful tasks. According to Spada (2007), “CLT is a meaning-based, learner-centered approach to L2 teaching where fluency is given priority over accuracy and the emphasis is on the comprehension and production of messages, not the teaching or correction of language form.” (p. 272).

As we see through student quotes, when ELL service-learners are at their sites, as they serve with native English speakers or in ESL-teaching roles, they are already being pushed to expand their English language horizons through assigned responsibilities. Though their precise language and grammar is not being assessed through service-learning, their fluency and confidence in English is constantly being challenged. While some linguists criticize communicative language teaching, which is utilized in the Global Experience course, for a lack of explicit grammar and structure instruction (Richards & Rodgers, 1986), it is important to note that the class is just one component of a comprehensive curriculum and that service-learning provides. Other classes, such as Advanced Writing and the English Language Workshop, give students explicit language instruction which, in turn, informs their fluency at their service site.

Results from the third question about how service-learning affects students’ sense of agency illustrate multiple theories at the intersection of identity, development, and cultural adaptation. As the literature shows, service-learning does not operate independently of the rest of a student’s life, but is, in fact, one part of many moving pieces for students as they begin college, particularly for students who are living across the globe from their families in a foreign environment (Steinke, 2009).

In addition to the fact that students are enduring the ups and downs of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000), the eustress and distress of college, and a major relocation across the globe, students in pathway programs are often experiencing culture shock, defined by Oberg as “an occupational disease of people who have been suddenly transplanted abroad” (Oberg, 2006, p.142). The symptoms of culture shock, along with periods of loneliness, homesickness, and subsequent feelings of invisibility are aspects of a phenomenon among international students studying at American universities (Hsieh, 2007).

International students’ reluctance towards and/or nervousness about associating with domestic students or other international students outside of their own culture (Hanassab and Tidwell, 2002; Gresham and Clayton, 2011) stems from a state of what Hale and Whittig (2006) call disempowered, which means English language learners feeling incompetent due to their non-native speaking skills living in a foreign environment. ELL students often encounter difficulties integrating into American society for various reasons (Hillyard, Reppen & Vasquez, 2007; Mullaney, 1999; Russell, 2007; Steinke, 2009; Warschauer & Cook, 1999).

As student quotes demonstrate, there are potentially-empowering and transformative effects of service-learning in pathway programs in building students’ sense of confidence and connections. It is possible that, through service-learning participation, ELL students have the opportunity to meet people they would not normally encounter and develop deeper relationships that might help to alleviate common feeling of isolation and loneliness experienced by many in this group, while simultaneously strengthening their confidence with the English language (Gresham & Clayton, 2011). When students write about undergoing shifts in identity through
entrance into the pathway program and the mediating effect service-learning has on this process, these concepts are certainly relevant.

The fourth and final question and how service-learning prepares pathway program students for multicultural classrooms with peers in target degree programs requires the acknowledgement that service-learning straddles out-of-class and in-class learning, a concept that can be counterintuitive and intimidatingly-shocking for ELL students hailing from around the world. Student quotes point to the shift from students-as-learners to students-as-learners-and-teachers. These quotes are illustrative of the shifts in learning styles often demanded through cross-cultural study, some of which are described by Zhang and Watkins (2001) vis-à-vis Perry (1970). Global Experience students were charged with meeting one of the steepest learning curves for students: in-class leadership and active participation. This teaching style is counterintuitive for many students, particularly for those coming from countries where rote lecture is standard and interactive discussion between students and instructors is rare.

Ladd & Ruby (1999) found that international students reported lectures as the most common mode of instruction in their home country, but that according to the Canfield Learning Styles Inventory their preferred learning approach was direct experience. Ladd & Ruby also found that students preferred to work alone. This supports the common perception that international students dislike group work (Sarkodie-Mensah, 1998). LECSL challenges students to adapt to a more interactive and team-based learning culture commonly found in classes utilizing service-learning.

Student quotes also point to the shift from learning in predominantly mono-cultural classrooms to entirely multicultural classrooms in the pathway program and beyond. For most Global Experience students, their pathway program is their first exposure to any form of a multicultural classroom in which they build ongoing relationships with peers. Through in-class interactions with peers from other countries/cultures and through students’ service experiences working with community members who are predominantly from other countries/cultures, students are able to enhance their knowledge of diversity and build skills in cross-cultural competencies. Research suggests that participation in service increases students’ knowledge of people of different cultures and races (Astin & Sax, 1998) and decreases negative stereotyping (Eyler & Giles, 1999). As internationalization continues to impact the composition and culture of college campuses, it is crucial to understand how campus diversity and multicultural connections within and around the university affect student learning experiences (Lee & Rice, 2007).

Implications

The following are three recommended best practices in incorporating service-learning in pathway programs in order to enhance learning outcomes.

1) Choose your partners wisely.

For many ELL students, service-learning may likely be their first formal volunteer experience in the United States, perhaps even their first volunteer experience in general. This may be the closest experience the students have had to date that resembles a professional job. Therefore, the learning curve can be steep for students, supervisors, community members, and faculty. Whether students’ service experiences take place in afterschool enrichment programs, schools, senior centers, community centers, or any variation of these settings, facilitators of
service-learning must communicate with supervisors and students very clearly about goals, objectives, and expectations of the semester-long partnership.

Within the same classroom, students in pathway programs may be operating with vastly different levels of English speaking skills and with equally different propensities toward shyness and/or outgoingness. Some students may read and/or write in English very well but their speaking and comprehension skills may be comparatively lower. Other students may experience the inverse. Some students may be gregarious and talkative and others may be more shy and withdrawn. The various combinations of these variables equate to some partner organizations being better fits for students and vice-versa. The process of matching students with host organizations should allow for a variety of students’ English language levels, cultural familiarity, skills/interests, and preferences for roles within an organization. By assessing these variables, chances of successful partnerships (and ideally, positive impact on the community and community organization) should be heightened.

2) Create ongoing opportunities for active citizenship and participatory reflection in diverse learning environments.

There is a common sentiment among educators that the service-learning experience is only as meaningful as the reflection (Bringle & Hatcher, 1999; Hartman, Kiely, Boettcher, & Friedrichs, 2012). In-class and out-of-class reflections synthesize students’ working knowledge of English and building theoretical knowledge while simultaneously rewarding active participation and critical questioning in class versus simple acceptance of given information. Online blogs are an excellent way of challenging students to reflect on their service-learning experiences while simultaneously having them practice skills gained their concurrent writing course(s). Blog prompts can be open-ended and opinion-based (i.e. “Share a story from your service-learning this past week that relates to last week’s course topic.”) or more pointed/ framed around an academic article or set of specific information-based questions.

In-class reflections should be embedded before, during, and after the students engage in service-learning so that students examine their pre-conceived notions of the communities/organizations in which they will serving and obtain logistical information necessary for a well-informed beginning of the semester. Throughout the semester, as students serve in their site, they should be engaging in interactive discussions connecting course content to their service experiences. What and how did the students learn through service-learning? What and how did the students contribute through service-learning?

3) Create cross-curricular connections for service-learning students in pathway programs.

Instructors working in a cohort academic model- where students are enrolled in the same courses and have a standardized curriculum- should attempt to work across courses to create integrated assignments. Pathway programs are, by nature, insular in that students are in classes with the same group of students and faculty members. This model creates opportunities and challenges in terms of building cross-curricular and interdisciplinary partnerships like these. A particularly successful example of a cross-curricular partnership is the final assignment students create for their Advanced Writing course. Students use their service-learning experiences to fuel their investigation of a social issue in the United States. A literature review, mixed with anecdotal and informal surveying and fact-finding within their host organization, ultimately contributes to an academic research paper. In this way, students are using their growing ELL
training, academic skills, and hands-on service-learning experiences to make connections and reinforce learning across the pathway program curriculum.

Facilitators of service-learning with pathway program students can also make a point of connecting pathway program students to non-pathway program students at the same university. This can happen through courses, events, and through on-campus centers such as Centers of Community Service. Some of the students may be serving in the same site, for different courses. If this is the case, they may be seeing each other and interacting every week already. If this is not the case, build partnerships by reaching out to faculty in affinity departments, perhaps with the assistance of the Center of Community Service. The more opportunities pathway program students have to connect to domestic students in undergraduate courses, the closer they will be to a) making domestic friends b) decreasing the aforementioned invisibility phenomena, and c) identifying more readily as a member of the campus community.

Areas for Future Research

A growing body of research about the implementation of service-learning with international students is formative to the topic of this paper, though there is a substantial need for credible data about pathway programs in the United States and the inclusion of service-learning in pathway program curricula. Best practices proposed as a result of this study suggest partnerships with community organizations based, in part, on sociolinguistic factors. Other recommendations call for participatory service-learning reflections with English Language Learning pedagogy to enhance learning, as well as cross-curricular and cross-campus partnership development.

In an effort to leverage service-learning as a mutually-beneficial campus-community partnership, future research is needed to focus on the experience of supervisors and community organizations hosting ELL service-learning students at their sites. Considering that the students in this study originate from countries where English is not the first language, more research is also needed about the impact of service-learning on the development and cultural adjustment of international students for whom English is their first language. Further research about academic and career trajectories for international students who have completed service-learning is also warranted for longitudinal research purposes.

As facilitators and supervisors of service-learning, it is important to recognize that Pathway program students’ service-learning experiences potentially manifest and take shape in the United States, but this is ideally only a launching point for further action in civil society around the globe.

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**AUTHORS**

**JULIE MILLER**, MSW, is a Lead Instructor and founding Service-Learning Coordinator in NU GLOBAL at Northeastern University. She is a Lecturer in the School of Public Policy and Urban Affairs at Northeastern University and is a Research Associate at the MIT AgeLab. Julie has practiced and published extensively at the intersection of intercultural and intergenerational service-learning with international students in the United States. E-mail: ju.miller@neu.edu

**BECCA BERKEY**, PhD, is the Director of Service-Learning in the Center of Community Service at Northeastern University. Before coming to Northeastern, she worked at several other institutions, focused at the crossroads of the curricular & extra-curricular student experiences. In addition to research and publications in the field of service-learning and experiential education, Becca is part of the Northeastern Environmental Justice Research Collaborative and has an active research partnership regarding worker and farmer justice with the Northeast Organic Farming Association. Email: r.berkey@neu.edu

**FRANCIS GRIFFIN**, MA, is the Director of Global Pathways at Kaplan International. He is a higher education administrator with a longstanding interest and commitment to international education, language study, intercultural relations, and cross-cultural studies. Francis has lived, studied, worked, and taught English as a Foreign Language in Suzhou, China and writes and speaks Mandarin Chinese. Email: francis.griffin@kaplan.com

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Uneven Experiences: The Impact of Student-Faculty Interactions on International Students’ Sense of Belonging

Chris R. Glass, PhD
Elizabeth Kociolek, MSED
Rachawan Wongtrirat, PhD
R. Jason Lynch, MSED
Summer Cong, MA
Old Dominion University (USA)

Abstract

This study examines student-faculty interactions in which U.S. professors signal social inclusion or exclusion, facilitating—or inhibiting—international students’ academic goal pursuits. It compares narratives of 40 international students from four purposefully sampled subgroups – academic preparedness (low, high) and financial resources (low, high). Overall, international students’ interactions with professors were marked by joy, trust, anticipation, and surprise. Nonetheless, the narratives exhibit two significant sources of variation: narratives from the low financial resources, high academic preparedness subgroup reflected widely-varied experiences interacting with professors, and narratives from the low financial, low academic preparedness subgroup lacked any descriptions of positive student-faculty interactions.

Keywords: international students; belonging; professors; faculty-student interactions; student success

Academic goals are among the most prominent motivational factors shaping international students’ desire to study abroad (Choudaha & Chang, 2012; Institute of International Education [IIE], 2011). Professors are likely among the most influential persons shaping an international student’s academic trajectory, and student-faculty relationships have been found to significantly affect students’ learning and motivation (Cole, 2010; O’Meara, Knudsen, & Jones, 2013). The effects of academic goals on interpersonal relationship formation and development – like all goal pursuits – is well-established in empirical research (Reis & Sprecher, 2009). The presence of friends, colleagues, romantic partners, and family members elicit strong and influential motivations – shaping a person’s goal achievement, as well as which goals the person pursues (Fitzsimons & Shah, 2008; Reis & Sprecher, 2009).
Research on international students' academic and social adjustment has primarily focused on international students’ relationships with co-national, international, and host country peers (Kashima & Loh, 2006); less is known about the motivational dynamics by which professors facilitate—or inhibit—international students’ academic goal pursuits. Two recent major reviews of research on international students’ psychosocial adjustment to life in the U.S. included no studies examining student-faculty relational processes (Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Zhang & Goodson, 2011). In this study, we examine the motivational dynamics of interactions between professors and international students that facilitate an international student’s academic goal pursuits. We take an in-depth, qualitative approach to illuminate the process by which international students make meaning of personal dispositions, attitudes, and behaviors of professors. Specifically, we explore interactions that international students perceive as having an educational and developmental impact on their sense of belonging.

Our study aims to extend a growing body of research that uses resilience-based models of acculturation to explore the lives of international students for whom academic success and positive cross-cultural interaction have been documented (Glass & Westmont-Campbell, 2014; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011; Pan, Wong, & Chan, 2007, Pan, Wong, Chan, & Joubert, 2008). Resilience-based models place particular emphasis on identifying factors that support international students’ resilience (Pan, 2011), including a student’s sense of belonging (Glass & Westmont-Campbell, 2014). Resilience is invariably affected by the social contexts (e.g., interactions with professors) and ecological contexts (e.g., classroom environments), which create opportunities for interpersonal relationship formation. Thus, resilience is not only an individual process, but also a dyadic process, context-bound, and mediated by student identities.

**Theoretical Framework**

In this study, we use sense of belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), as a theoretical framework to understand the motivational dynamics of interpersonal relationships between professors and international students. In their extensive analysis of empirical research in evolutionary psychology, social psychology, and cognitive psychology, Baumeister and Leary (1995) advance belonging as a fundamental human motivation. They define belongingness as “a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships” (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 497).

Belonging entails more than a need for social contact; frequent contact with non-supportive or indifferent others does little to satisfy a person’s need to belong. Social interactions that fulfill a person’s need to belong are marked by stable and enduring expressions of affective concern for each other’s welfare (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Reis, Collins, & Berscheid, 2000). Professors, in our conceptualization, are among those significant persons that have the potential to fulfill or thwart this fundamental human need. Due to the evolutionary roots of humans’ need to belong, studies across cultures indicate how social exclusion thwarts the need to belong, decreasing emotional well-being and academic performance, and increasing susceptibility to self-defeating behavioral patterns and social avoidance (Baumeister & Twenge, 2002; Twenge, Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Bartels, 2007). A meta-analysis of research across twenty-one countries (N=3,665) highlights considerable evidence that belonging mediates other self-processes in predicting subjective well-being (Sheldon, 2012; Sheldon, Cheng, & Hilpert, 2011). Mental health, in other words, arises from psychological need satisfaction (Ryan & Deci, 2011).
A sense of belonging influences a person’s emotional and cognitive patterns (Baumeister & Leary 1995; Osterman, 2000). Many emotions result from “real, anticipated, imagined, or recollected outcomes of social relationships” (Kemper, 1978, p. 32). Consequently, an actual or possible change in a person’s relationship status evokes powerful emotions, with social inclusion linked to positive affect (e.g., calm, anticipation, joy, and trust) and social exclusion linked to negative affect (e.g., grief, sadness, anger, and anxiety; see Plutchik, 2011 for a review).

Belonging, as a theoretical framework, has been employed in studies of diverse student populations, including first generation, Latino students, and LGBT students (Strayhorn, 2012). Mixed method studies of first year persistence identified five factors related to belonging: empathetic faculty, perceived peer support, perceived isolation, perceived faculty support and comfort, and perceived classroom comfort (Hoffman Richmond, Morrow, & Salomone, 2003). Hurtado and Carter (1997) applied structural equation modeling (SEM) in a longitudinal study of Latino college students’ academic and social adjustment to college. Results indicate that belonging exerted the largest effect on students’ persistence. Large, multi-institution SEM studies (n=2,520) suggest that stable and enduring student-faculty relationships have sizable effects on a student’s grade point average (Guiffrida, Lynch, Wall, & Abel, 2013). Qualitative studies comparing first-year students enrolled in a learning community with those not enrolled also identified the development of interpersonal ties with faculty members as an important factor in fostering students’ sense of belonging and intention to persist (Hoffman et al., 2003).

Belonging has only recently been extended to studies of international student psychosocial adjustment. Notably, a recent SEM analysis of the effects of belonging on international students’ academic success and cross-cultural interactions demonstrates large positive effects of belonging in mediating academic and social outcomes (Glass & Westmont-Campbell, 2014). A sense of belonging increased cross-cultural interaction between international and host country students, and it substantially enhanced international students’ academic performance (Glass, Gómez, & Urzua, 2014). A sense of belonging, therefore, has practical benefits for international students: belonging is one of the most frequently cited factors for college students’ academic success (Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007; Osterman, 2000), and belonging creates a secure base to explore cross-cultural relationships (Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006). Qualitative research on international students identifies the importance of student-faculty interactions. Trice (2003) conducted interviews with 23 faculty members in four academic departments to examine faculty attitudes towards international graduate students. Faculty recognized the academic and personal challenges, and the how language issues impact academic performance. Nonetheless, relatively few qualitative studies provide rich, thick descriptions of the motivational dynamics of international students’ interactions with professors.

The majority of international students studying in the U.S. are only somewhat satisfied or not satisfied with the quality of their friendships (Williams & Johnson, 2011), and students from East Asia have few or no American friends (Gareis, 2012). Students from Asia, the Middle East, and Africa report less social contact and more difficulties bridging cultural divides (Glass, Buus, & Braskamp, 2013; Glass, Gómez, & Urzua, 2014; Lee, 2010; Lee & Rice, 2007; Rienties, Beausaert, Grohnert, Niemantsverdriet, & Kommers, 2012; Trice, 2004). Numerous studies examining international students’ satisfaction with their social networks stress that the qualitative aspects of their relationships are more determinative of their well-being and academic performance than the size or makeup of their social network (Hendrickson, Rosen, & Aune, 2011; Kashima & Loh, 2006; Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland, & Ramia, 2007).
Research Method

We employed in-depth constructivist interviews in order to understand the motivational dynamics of international students’ interactions with professors that have an educational and developmental impact on their academic goal pursuits. Specifically, we wanted to explore instances of inclusion and exclusion that affected international students’ sense of belonging. Our primary data-gathering technique was semi-structured interviews. To maintain the confidentiality of study participants and institutions, participants and institutions are identified by pseudonyms.

Site and Participant Selection

The study occurred at a two major research universities: Tortuga State University (very high research activity) in the Midwestern region of the U.S. and Central City Metropolitan University (high research activity) in the Mid-Atlantic region of the U.S. Both institutions were selected due to large, diverse populations of international students, and procedures associated with the study were reviewed and approved by both universities’ Institutional Review Boards.

To identify study participants who would yield data related to the study’s purpose and major questions (Patton, 1999), we asked the Director of International Student Services for a list of international students who met the criteria for four subgroups based on a typology developed by Choudaha, Orosz, & Chang (2012). Due to the increasing variation in international students’ academic preparedness and financial resources, we purposefully selected students from four subgroups to yield a sample that allowed for a wide range of student voices and experiences to inform the analyses (Group 1: high academic preparedness, high financial resources; Group 2: high academic preparedness, low financial resources; Group 3: low academic preparedness, high financial resources; and Group 4: low academic preparedness, low financial resources). We also asked nominators to select students with varying levels of academic and social engagement to ensure we did not only interview highly engaged students. Based on nominations, we narrowed a list of 71 potential participants. Within this list, we made efforts to ensure representativeness of gender, major, and country of origin. We provided invitations to all eligible participants by email; the invitation provided a short description of the study and promised anonymity.

Data Collection

The data are composed of 40 in-depth interviews (60-90 minutes) with international students. The final sample included 20 females, 20 males; 17 undergraduates, 23 graduate students; and equal numbers of students in each of the four subgroups. Although this study was part of a larger project, interview questions pertinent to focus explored a student’s academic and professional goals, student-faculty relationships, and academic experiences at U.S. universities.

The richness of the data gained from constructivist interviews lends itself to the type of in-depth analysis necessary to explore the motivational dynamics of student-faculty interactions (Kvale, 2008; Rubin & Rubin, 2011). We used a four-part semi-structured interview protocol, asking open-ended questions that asked participants to share about their social and academic experiences. We asked similar sets of questions to each participant but allowed a natural dialogue to emerge between the participants and ourselves. The first segment invited students to share academic and professional goals related to the selection of their university. The second part invited students to share about meaningful academic experiences. The third part invited students
to discuss significant relationships with friends, family members, and significant others. The final part invited students to reflect back on their whole experience as an international student in the U.S. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

We organized our analytical process into three basic steps, using QDA Miner 4.0 to code and analyze the data. In the first step, we reviewed each transcript line-by-line. We assigned categorical codes and emotion codes whenever we found a meaningful segment of text, including keywords, phrases, and issues (Saldaña, 2012). We used categorical coding to identify segments of texts that involved interactions with a professor. We also coded segments of text where a student described a developmentally significant experience (King, Baxter Magolda, Barber, Brown, & Lindsay, 2009). We relied on students’ articulations of developmental impact in coding interviews, coding both the experience (e.g., “visiting a professor’s office hours”) and the results of such experiences (e.g., “reconsidering career interests”). Emotion coding was grounded in taxonomy of basic emotions developed by Plutchik (2011), using a list of 915 affective processes developed by Tausczik and Pennebaker (2009) to identify segments of text where students used affect-laden language. Emotional coding has been found to be an ideal method to uncover interpersonal experiences and actions (Saldaña, 2012).

In the second step, we began focused coding for larger segments of the data. In focused coding, we paid particular attention to identify differences and similarities between each student’s experiences interacting with professors. We paid close attention when individual cases did not “fit” within the patterns identified to capture variation as well as central themes of the data (Sturges & Klingner, 2005).

The final step involved reviewing interview transcripts and concept maps to examine the networks of relationships that had emerged from our data analysis. Major subgroup clusters were confirmed through correspondence analysis, a quantitative procedure in QDA Miner 4.0 that graphically represents the relationship between codes and participants in a two-dimensional map (Lebart, Salem, & Berry, 2010). Correspondence analysis statistics allowed us to validate relationships constructed through qualitative analysis using quantitative methods to examine visually complex relationships among codes, among participants, and between coding patterns and subgroups of participants. We strengthened the internal validity of the analysis by engaging in peer debriefing sessions with a senior administrator of International Student Services at a major public research university. Debriefing included detailed notes on how data were collected, how we derived thematic categories from coding and analysis (Sturges & Klingner, 2005).

Results

This study examined the motivational dynamics of interactions between professors and international students that facilitate an international student’s academic goal pursuits. We identified three dynamics that international students perceived as having an educational and developmental impact on their sense of belonging: participation and inclusion, personal ways of knowing, and possible selves. We elaborate major findings by theme then conclude by discussing variation among the four purposefully selected subgroups. All participants are identified by pseudonyms.
Student-Faculty Interactions That Impacted International Students’ Sense of Belonging

Participation and inclusion. The vast majority of international students that we interviewed described how professors found culturally sensitive ways to foster inclusion through expressions of appreciation, emphasis on the importance of a student’s contributions during class, and special attention given in one-on-one conversations before and after class. Several students recounted experiences where a professor’s personal, one-on-one expressions of affective concern led them to become more active and involved in class discussions. Jibran Abdul-Ghani Bitar, a female graduate student from Nepal studying business administration shared an example of one professor’s demonstration of cultural sensitivity in creating an inclusive classroom context:

I had one professor, he was American, but I just loved his class because he knew that I was afraid to talk, and he said, “If you have something and you are not able to say in class, come and talk to me, and maybe we can raise that in the next class, so that if I start the topic, then you might be able to contribute a lot.” That kind of stayed in my mind. In his class, I can speak. I can say what I see because he is okay with it. Little things like that even just giving a little bit of care.

Like Jibran, several students discussed the importance of care in creating a sense of belonging. Muslih Suhail Salib, a male undergraduate from Senegal studying business administration, for example, connected the moral and practical significance of his sense of a professor’s care with his academic success:

They seemed really concerned that...they were making the extra effort for us to succeed. Back home you don’t have this relationship between students and professors. The professor is on top of the map and then you’re the bottom and they just throw orders and instructions. They don’t really care that much. Yeah, he’s there. He shows you that I care about your success. I want you to succeed so I’m going to help you all the way. I’m going to do everything I can to make sure that you’re going to succeed, but you have to do your part.

The physical organization of student interaction in the classroom also communicated inclusion. Keira Frater, a female undergraduate from Hungary, shared about her concern the first day of class when the professor said students would “sit at different places every class”, thinking to herself: “No, I don’t want to do that! That’s going to suck.” By the end of the semester, the student had developed significant interpersonal relationship with students from other cultures, sharing “we really formed a cohesive group because of that. I love that. It makes me, again, a lot more open.” Several other students mentioned the social benefits, outside-of-class, of how professors organized class participation, even describing class as a social experience: “That is where I get the exposure, I socialize with people. I’m basically an introvert at the beginning; I don’t speak with people very freely. After the first and second meet, if I see them anywhere, we start having a long conversation” (Arif Abdul-Warith Boulos, a male graduate student from India studying engineering).

Although most participants recounted student-faculty interactions that created a sense of inclusion, negative experiences left lasting impressions. In contrast to the other narrative
accounts, Brahim Nahors, a male graduate student from Central Africa studying public administration, spoke extensively about one professor who refused to let him present in class and refused to give feedback on his writing assignments, even though the professor had provided feedback to other students. His interpretation of the professor’s behavior reinforced Brahim’s fears and communicated a painful message: “I was shocked. It was insulting for me. In other words, to say, ‘This is not your place. You don’t deserve to be here.’”

**Personal ways of knowing.** A variety of student-faculty interactions prompted students to develop more personal ways of knowing, in part because students observed professors as models and gained awareness of their own active role in constructing knowledge for themselves. About two-thirds of the students described developmentally meaningful experiences that involved a greater appreciation for the application of their personal experiences to real-world situations. Significant, meaningful relationships with professors promoted other positive outcomes, such as students’ confidence in their capacity to construct knowledge for themselves. Sana Yumna Gaber, a female undergraduate from Bangladesh studying business administration related how one professor fostered the development of her capacity to “build up” her own ideas:

> I would say this about the professor from my [class] and my other professor they actually give me confidence that I can actually do it… I am taking a class with her and when she was giving me this project, I was looking at her and she was like, ‘You know this, you can do it!’ …So, if you want to ask her a question, she will answer it, but she will first say, ‘Tell me what you think.’ And she will actually organize your ideas as you are talking, and she actually does this in the class and she will suddenly ask a student a question, and she will like build that inside her class, she will be like yeah - so where is this and why is this and she will build up your ideas.

Personal ways of knowing expressed in classroom discussion often included first-hand experiences with international or global issues that were mere academic abstractions to many of these student’s U.S. peers. Consequently, international students had to simultaneously negotiate multiple dimensions of their own social identities as they dealt with practical issues of language proficiency and variation in the culture of learning in the U.S. Although students discussed the challenges associated with negotiating these identities – and many mentioned racially insensitive comments of their U.S. peers – the narratives they shared discussed how these difficulties contributed to more complex understandings of the world, of themselves, and of their relationships with others. Pia Siciliani, a female undergraduate from Italy in international studies, for example, shared about her experience as a European, being taught by a African professor, in a class that involved discussion among her U.S. peers:

> I mean when I was talking about open your mind and see things in a different way. There was a specific situation when I took African culture last semester. The professor was amazing…. I was very different back then. I knew very little about African history. We were talking about the Dutch and Italians colonizing and destroying the country, and it was very deep inside me, and it wasn’t just you 'read the book,' it was a lot of discussion and there was a lot of like, you know - how, bitterness that would come out from his class which was understandable and
Muslih Attah shared a similar experience from his sophomore year and his struggles with negotiating a class discussion of female genital mutilation in West Africa. For his U.S. peers, the discussion involved an abstract ethical issue; however, for Muslih, the discussion required him to negotiate his own ethical disagreement with the practice alongside his understanding of the cultural context and meaning of the practice for many West Africans:

I was sophomore I believe, and they were talking about excision, the practice in some countries in West Africa. I’m not saying that I agree with that practice but I didn’t agree with the way that they were judging it. They sat there and said all these people are so stupid; this is criminal. I do not agree with excision, let me just be clear of it but then I don’t agree with people just judging mindlessly like that just based on your own standards. I wasn’t defending it but I was telling them that everybody does what they do for a good reason. You might do things here that people over there are going to find horrifying but for you it’s perfectly fine. It’s perfectly normal at the same time you’re doing the same thing to them.

We anticipated that his encounter with U.S. peers who failed to understand his experience would exert a deleterious effect on his well-being. To the contrary, although he characterized his U.S. peers perspective as “judging mindlessly,” a lack of curiosity, and simplistic understanding, he surprisingly shared how this mystifying experience affected him, contributing to his own ethical commitment to open-mindedness:

I have a whole different perspective, and I feel like I could live anywhere if you send me there…I have a much more open mind of other things. I’m not as quick as I used to be. I try not anymore to judge people because it’s very easy to sit there and say this is not good; you should do it this way.

Possible selves. A smaller but significant number of students described student-faculty interactions that affected their long-term career goals. Admired professors served as powerful role models who strongly motivated the student’s behavior. The distinguishing feature of students who mentioned possible selves, as opposed to merely personal ways of knowing, is that they projected how personal ways of knowing would affect their future and discussed their own sense of self. These students had wrestled with difficult and complex questions of whether they belonged at their institution, if they had remained authentic to their cultural heritage, and how their experience abroad had affected their goals and the possibilities they could now envision for themselves. Their narratives were more complex and open-ended, with self-reflections that involved a view of themselves as unfolding, multifaceted, and the capacity to guide their own development in shaping their life narrative. Keira Frater described how sharing her ideas with her professor and classmates influenced her career aspirations:
It’s not only knowledge; it’s just the people that I meet. They affect me a lot, and like I said it before, it just gives me a sort of direction, it shows me what I would like to pursue in my life by meeting with people. I would not be that way if my professor hasn’t influenced me. It’s because, as I’ve mentioned it before; I was really affected by my social inequality class. It pretty much defines who I am right now because that’s my main topic of conversation with some of my friends because we want to do something about it–we want to improve society. We would not be that way if our professor hadn’t influenced us. The people that I’ve met here really affected my personality and what I would like to do with my life.

Exploring possible selves, particularly for the graduate students in our study, resulted in the student identifying with a professor as mentor and modeling their anticipated professional practice. Viktor Ivanchuk, a male graduate student from Eastern Europe in international studies, described how the professors in his program were “never arrogant about knowledge” and welcomed his ideas and perspectives. He described how his identification with his professors formed his approach to teaching:

Based on the experience I have right now, that’s how I form my approach to teaching. If I had a professor that was always accessible, that was always there to help me that was never arrogant about knowledge. I think that’s how I want myself to be, towards my students. It’s just teaching is an important factor here. They teach not only their knowledge but also their approach towards students.

Viktor came to the U.S. with the goal of becoming a faculty member in his home country; however, his active involvement in respectful, collegial relationships with professors reconstructed the image he had of a professor’s relationship with students. Although many students identified specific faculty members as role models, Viktor described how interactions with a variety of professors motivated his desire to become a professor back home: “I think they are all very important to... they add something to the bigger picture.”

**Meaningful Variation by Demographics and Subgroups**

This study focused on the educational experiences that international students identify as making a positive contribution towards their learning and development. Despite this broad focus – and our use of open-ended questions – student-faculty interactions, specifically, were the most frequently cited educational experiences co-coded with an international students’ shift in perspective. Student-faculty relationships were more often mentioned in response to our open-ended questions than other meaningful, high-impact experiences. Student-faculty interactions surpassed other often-cited experiences, including cross-cultural co-curricular activities, leadership programs, and informal peer discussions. Moreover, professors were more frequently mentioned as sources of practical support than U.S. peers (e.g., sources of information to assist with practical matters related to navigating university procedures, providing advice on local services, sharing information that is useful for daily living, etc.); and they were mentioned just as frequently as same-culture international peers. All four subgroups expressed predominantly positive descriptions of student-faculty interactions. The most commonly used emotion codes co-coded with student-faculty interactions joy, trust, anticipation, and surprise. International
students used phrases such as “really amazing because give you the opportunity to participate, to express your opinion,” “they were making the extra effort for us to succeed,” and “some professors were really helpful – they were really good.”

Although these findings appear to provide, on the whole, an encouraging view of international student-faculty interactions, we were surprised to find meaningful variations between the four subgroups in our purposeful sample of international students. Two sources of variation stood out: student narratives from the low financial resources, high academic preparedness subgroup reflected widely-varied experiences interacting with professors and student narratives from the low financial, low academic preparedness subgroup lacked any descriptions of positive student-faculty interactions.

First, student narratives from the low financial resources, high academic preparedness subgroup reflected widely varied experiences interacting with professors. International students in the low financial subgroup more frequently mentioned student-faculty interactions, both positive and negative, than students in the high financial subgroup. Participants in the low financial resource subgroups more frequently expressed anxiety, surprise, and joy in their interactions with professors than students in the high financial resource subgroups. As the previous section illustrates, the range of emotions expressed does not equate to “good” and “bad” experiences; in fact, the greater range of experiences reflect more meaningful, personally impactful experiences.

Second, student narratives from the low financial, low academic preparedness subgroup lacked any descriptions of positive student-faculty interactions, and predominately described interactions centered around trust, using phrases such as feeling “different” needing “help” much more frequently than students in the other three subgroups. Trust was the most frequently coded emotion in student-faculty interactions, emphasizing the importance of the student-faculty relationship for this subgroup in particular.

I did feel like they are going to deport me, I had this feeling that, o my god, if I get these bad grades, they are going to send me back home and I was really, really disappointing… so when I got like a D, you know I was like - oh, my life is over … so kind of like that, so it was a bad time. (Sana)

Belonging, when applied to the narratives of the low financial, low academic preparedness subgroup, emphasizes an essential feature from their narratives: international students in this subgroup had to resolve that they indeed belonged at their institution before their could adequately engage in the rigorous and demanding academic workload required to attain a bachelor’s or master’s degree.

**Discussion and Implications**

This study extends a growing body research that focuses on factors that support international students’ resilience, including their sense of belonging (Glass & Westmont-Campbell, 2014; Pan, 2011). We examined the motivational dynamics by which professors signal social inclusion or exclusion, thus facilitating—or inhibiting—international students’ academic goal pursuits (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Moreover, given the increasingly varied academic backgrounds and financial circumstances of international students studying in the U.S. (Choudaha et al., 2012), we considered how interactions with professors varied for students by academic preparedness and
financial resources. Although it might be heartening that, in general, the number of accounts marked by positive emotional valence (e.g., joy, trust, and anticipation) outnumbered ones marked by negative emotional valence (e.g., sadness, anger, etc.), the findings exhibit a demonstrably significant inequality among students with varying financial resources.

First, the importance of social ties with other internationals, co-nationals, and host students in predicting persistence and a stronger sense of connection is well-established (Hendrickson et al., 2011; Kashima & Loh, 2006; Sawir et al., 2007); this study suggests that positive interactions with professors, characterized by affective concern, also matter in creating a inclusive campus climate for international students. The participants’ focus on relationships with professors in response to otherwise open-ended questions about their academic and social experiences highlights importance of professors and advisors as role models and gatekeepers to academic cultures (Trice, 2003; Trice & Yoo, 2007). Social and emotional cues from professors send strong signals of inclusion or exclusion (Fitzsimons & Shah, 2008; Reis & Sprecher, 2009), and professors strongly influence an international student’s academic trajectory. Many international students mentioned professors as their primary point of contact for academic and practical support, more frequently than U.S. peers. Courses were more than academic settings for mastering academic subject-matter; they were evocative social contexts and sources of significant intercultural relationships (Glass & Westmont-Campbell, 2014). International students interpreted simple, even otherwise unremarkable, acts of care and concern as strong signals of inclusion (Strayhorn, 2012). At pivotal moments, particularly in an international student’s transition to the university or when a student struggled, professors who responded with care and concern had transformative effects, both in terms of the students’ academic success but also in a long-term trajectory of their personal ways of knowing and sense of possible selves.

Second, the findings affirm that inclusive classroom practices and professors’ intercultural competence play a critical role in creating a positive campus climate for international students. Although social adjustment is often framed in terms of adjusting to student cultures of U.S. peers, this study highlights that international students may be more likely to embrace, and more influenced by, their perceptions of adjusting to the academic and disciplinary cultures in which they are socialized by professors. Professors who structured equitable classroom dialogue widened this sense of inclusion and fostered a sense of connection among students from diverse backgrounds (Glass, 2012). This study underscores research that demonstrates the importance of belonging in fostering cross-cultural interaction and enhancing academic performance (Glass & Westmont-Campbell, 2014).

Third, despite the positive contribution of professors to international students academic and social adjustment in general, a more complex and uneven image of international students’ experiences emerged when we examined each subgroup independently (cf. Lee, 2010). Negative encounters, while shared less frequently, were more concentrated among students with less financial resources; negative encounters were more vividly described, intense, and exerted long-lasting consequences. Moreover, the findings provide evidence that race, ethnicity, and gender have a pronounced impact on the interpretation of encounters with professors (Lee & Rice, 2007; Marginson, 2013; Rienties et al., 2012), as the contrasting narratives of Pia Siciliani and Muslih Attah illustrate. This underscores research that indicates international students from Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia rate the quality of their interactions with professors significantly lower than their peers from the North American and Southern Asia (Glass et al., 2013; Glass et al., 2014). The findings also illustrate distributing accounts of neo-racist attitudes by professors
that reflect larger geopolitical dynamics, and structural effects of racism shape these everyday relations (Lee & Rice, 2007; Lee, 2010).

Finally, this study extends previous research on student-faculty interactions (Trice, 2003) by illuminating the process by which international students make meaning of personal dispositions, attitudes, and behaviors of professors. Meaning making is always context bound and embedded in the complex dynamics of an international student’s ongoing identity formation (Marginson, 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2011). Accounts, both positive and negative, demonstrate the salience of personal and social identities in interpreting experiences and relationships. Lack of engagement may be interpreted by one student as the freedom to express oneself, as in the case of Sana Gaber, or as purposeful slight, as in the case of Brahim Nahors. Universities that expand international student enrollments by recruiting students from more varied financial circumstances risk significant consequences to the mental health of students. Universities have an ethical obligation to construct policies and practices that empower students to report inappropriate faculty behavior.

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**AUTHORS**

CHRIS R. GLASS, PhD, is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership at Old Dominion University. Email: crglass@odu.edu

ELIZABETH KOCIOLEK, MSED, is an Education Abroad Advisor in the UK Education Abroad office at the University of Kentucky. Email: ekociole@odu.edu

RACHA WONGTRIRAT, PhD, is the Assistant Director for International Initiatives in the Office of Intercultural Relations at Old Dominion University. Email: rwongtri@odu.edu

R. JASON LYNCH, MSED, is a graduate research assistant in the Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership at Old Dominion University. Email: rlyn009@odu.edu

SUMMER CONG, MA, is a graduate research assistant in the Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership at Old Dominion University. Email: ccong005@odu.edu

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Exploring the Motivations, Expectations, and Experiences of Students Who Study in Global Settings

Vince Salyers, EdD
Cathy S. Carston, PhD
Yasmin Dean, PhD
Chad London, PhD
Mount Royal University, Canada

Abstract

An increasing trend of universities is to provide students with opportunities to engage in global learning experiences (GLE) as part of their program of study. While there are numerous papers on the benefits of international and study abroad programs, there is little research on factors that impact GLE. This study evaluated the student perspective through qualitative and quantitative responses to surveys and questions posed during a period of three years. The results suggested that students’ motivation and expectations of the experiences were varied. Moreover, planning is critical for GLE experiences to have a positive impact on students.

Keywords: global education; student motivation; student expectations; experiences

Most universities around the world are providing increased opportunities for students to participate in education experiences across the globe (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009; Belyavina, Li, & Bhandari, 2013; Dwyer, 2004; Farrugia, Bhandari, & Chow, 2012; Gammonley, Rotabi, & Gamble, 2007; Salisbury, Paulsen & Pascarella, 2009). Studies have shown that university students who participate in study abroad programs may develop improved cultural sensitivity, language proficiency, personal growth, openness to diversity, and enhanced civic responsibility as the result of these experiences (Clarke, Flaherty, Wright, & McMillen, 2009; Ingraham & Peterson, 2005; Fry, Paige, Jon, Dillow, & Nam, 2009; Gilin & Young, 2009; Mapp, 2012; Mapp, McFarland, & Newell, 2007; Rhodes, Biscarra, Loberg & Roller, 2012).

Moreover, an emerging perspective from the literature emphasizes the importance of creating an experience that has reciprocal benefits for both the students and the international host agency (Alphonse, 2008; Hanson, Harms, & Plamondon, 2010; Heron, 2006; Lough, 2009; Memmot, Conoverston, Heise, Williams, Maughan, Kohl, & Palmer, 2010; Razack, 2002). In order to enhance the experiences of students and host agencies, global learning experiences...
(GLE) should emphasize meaningful role taking, support, and reflection (Deardorff, 2008). Critical activities such as reflection and critical analysis are not readily available in many current programs (Heron, 2006; Tiessen, 2008; Webbi, 2009).

At the university where this study was conducted, numerous consultation sessions occurred with students who are involved in GLE. As a result of these consultations, three key factors: motivations, expectations, and pre-departure preparation emerged as areas of exploration related to GLE. Although the benefits of study abroad and global education programs are many, there is scarce research on these three factors and their impact on GLE. This study provided important insights related to these factors and made evidence-informed recommendations to better structure and support GLE.

**Literature Review**

**Participation in GLE**

In the past ten years, minimal research was identified that determined reasons why students participated in GLE and their motivations for doing so (Chew & Croy, 2011; Daly, 2011; Goldstein & Kim, 2006; Salisbury, Paulsen & Pascarella, 2009; Schnusenberg & de Jong, 2012; Webbi, 2009). Researchers have concluded that students participate in GLE for a variety of reasons including personal dispositions, interest in other cultures, travel to other countries, language acquisition, and opportunities for career, professional development, and pleasure (Allen, 2010; Chew & Croy, 2011; Daly, 2011; He & Chen, 2010; Kuzma, Kuzma & Thiewes, 2012; Relyea, Cocchiara, & Studdard, 2008; Schnusenberg & de Long, 2012; Stroud, 2010; Toncar, Reid & Anderson, 2005; Trilokekar & Rasmi, 2011; Zemach-Bersin, 2009). Factors that result in non-participation in GLE include financial constraints, language constraints, and personal safety (Daly, 2011; Kuzma, Kuzma, & Thiewes, 2012; Trilokekar & Rasmi, 2011).

**Student Expectations**

Research has indicated that students who participate in GLE may find their expectations not fully fulfilled and are often different from what they originally anticipated. Among the many expectations students may hold prior to the GLE, foreign language acquisition, exposure and immersion to other cultures, application of classroom concepts, and enhanced employment opportunities are mentioned frequently (Amuzie & Winkle, 2009; Badstübner & Ecke, 2009; Brown & Aktas, 2012).

**Pre-Departure Planning**

Research on essential components of pre-departure planning for GLE is fairly limited. Linder and McGaha (2013) suggested that pre-departure planning should begin a minimum of one year in advance of travel; and recommended reconnaissance trips by faculty to explore global sites and establish relationships with host agencies. Moreover, they strongly encouraged well-defined recruitment strategies and the provision of a number of pre-departure meetings to prepare students for travel. Researchers have suggested that pre-departure sessions should prepare students for the practicalities of travel abroad (e.g. food, culture, personal safety, learning and traveling together) so that the sessions may better prepare them for their global learning experiences (Kruse & Brubaker, 2007; Schwieter & Kunert, 2012).

The purpose of this study is to inform and improve GLE practices. To guide the study, the following research questions were posed:
1. What are the motivations of students who engage in GLE?
2. What are the expectations of students who engage in GLE?
3. What impact does the pre-departure orientation process have on student experiences?

Institutional Context

This research was carried out in two phases within a mid-sized university in Western Canada, with a total enrollment of approximately 13,570 students. The researchers are faculty members from four departments and one school representing the disciplines of Child and Youth Studies, Nursing, Physical Education and Social Work. They share the common philosophical and inter-professional perspectives related to importance and need to provide GLE for students. Within this research team, researchers work closely with their deans on the GLE proposal and curricular content, while the Office of International Education supports budgeting, fee collection and risk management planning for faculty who lead these experiences and the students who participate. For the context of this study, GLE includes exchanges, field schools, practice and other experiential learning activities carried out in global settings.

Planning for GLE includes the development of learning activities and assessments, travel budgets, itineraries, communication with host agencies and partners, and completion of institutional risk management documentation. For most GLE at the university where this study was conducted there is a ratio of one faculty for ten students; when more than one faculty participated, up to 25 students are allowed to participate. For supervised practical coursework and experiential courses faculty to student ratios may be mandated by professional organizations and regulatory bodies.

Students are generally recruited for GLE at least 12 months in advance of travel and, in some instances, as many as two years prior to the initiative. Student recruitment and selection procedures consist of interviews, critical reflections regarding why s/he would like to participate, professor references and academic performance. Once students have been selected, the lead researcher meets with students regularly to begin preparations for the experience.

The Office of International Education oversees the collection of student fees, coordination of travel insurance and risk management documentation, and then conducts general pre-departure orientation sessions. Pre-departure orientation sessions for students include general information related to international travel, immunizations, and safety preparation. Faculty who lead a GLE provide course or discipline specific information.

Research Methods

This multi-phase, mixed methods study used a concurrent triangulation design to guide and facilitate data collection. In this approach, quantitative and qualitative data are collected at designated points and triangulated (Creswell, 2009; Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003). Data are compared in order to identify similarities, differences, gaps, and unanswered questions. Triangulation of the data increased trustworthiness (Creswell, 2009; Johnson & Waterfield, 2004; Li, 2004) and provided for a more robust and comprehensive understanding of the data that was obtained.
Participant Selection and Ethics

No inclusion or exclusion criteria were used in the study. All students who had participated in a GLE in 2012, 2013, and 2014 were invited to voluntarily participate. No risks or ethical concerns were identified as part of the ethics review process. Approval to conduct research with human subjects was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Board (HREB) prior to data collection.

Methods for Phase I

The first phase of this study explored the first two research questions using survey and active interviewing techniques with a small sample of students. The central themes explored were the participants’ experiences and motivations of their involvement with the GLE. Three sources of data were collected as part of this phase. Responses to online surveys distributed prior to departure (source # 1) and upon return from the international experience (source # 2) were collected. Demographic and qualitative data were collected through the survey process. Survey questions included the solicitation of information about the application, selection, orientation processes, as well as explored student motivations, learning goals and needs. During 2012, students (n=32; 24% response rate) traveling to Australia, England, India, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Qatar, and Sri Lanka received the online questionnaire prior to and immediately following their international study experience regarding their motivations, expectations and pre-travel preparation related to the GLE.

Additionally, all students were invited to participate in active interviews (source # 3), of which 11 participated upon their return. The active interview (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995) was carried out in the form of individual interviews and focus group sessions; exploring in greater depth responses received to questions that were posed in the survey.

Data Analysis

Initially, the data were sent to a statistician who used NVivo 9.0 to independently code all the data. Once the data were coded, themes and sub-themes were generated and forwarded to the researchers. Following this step and as part of a data triangulation process, each researcher reviewed focus group transcripts and online surveys independently and compared them to themes and sub-themes provided by the statistician to validate the data.

Utilizing a thematic process outlined by Miles & Huberman (1994), the data were analyzed by the researchers using a three-step approach: (1) data reduction, whereby participants’ responses were sorted into clusters of varying main themes; (2) data display, whereby participants’ responses were organized, compressed, and assembled into various tables and figures, which assured conclusions to be readily visible and easily drawn; and (3) conclusion drawing/verification, whereby conclusions were deemed trustworthy, credible and reliable through the use of repeated group readings of participants’ responses, multiple group discussions, and debate (Carter, Horrigan, & Hudyma, 2010).

Results - Phase I

To answer research questions # 1 and # 2, emerging themes identified by the researchers related to three research variables (motivations, expectations, and pre-travel preparation) are described in the following sections.
Motivations

Students reported practical motivations for participating in GLE. Their responses acknowledged opportunities for “hands on” career development, language, and cultural knowledge acquisition. These themes were consistent with those from the literature (Clarke, Flaherty, Wright, & McMillen, 2009; Ingraham & Peterson, 2005; Fry, Paige, Jon, Dillow, & Nam, 2009; Gilin & Young, 2009; Mapp, 2012; Mapp, McFarland, & Newell, 2007; Rhodes, Biscarra, Loberg & Roller, 2012) as reasons why students participate in GLE.

Students identified participation in GLE courses as a unique opportunity to combine first-time travel with study abroad and indicated this was a strong motivation for them to participate. Students believed they would not have been exposed to this type of experiential learning if the GLE had not been led by a faculty. As one participant stated, “I figured ...what are the chances of my ever getting an opportunity [like this] again? It is a learning experience, a cultural experience, there is a little bit of travelling – which I hadn’t had a chance to do”. Although many students with little or no experience with GLE may be highly motivated to participate, it is important to develop recruitment and selection processes that take this inexperience into consideration and balance it with their motivations to participate.

Encouragement and support from faculty, peer and family were also frequently mentioned as important reasons why students were motivated to apply and participate in GLE. Encouragement from professors and conversations and planning with other participating peers were noted as strong contributors to students’ motivation.

Students also agreed that emotional and financial support from their families was highly influential in making decisions to study in global settings. Moreover, students described how important these supports were to their success with a particular global experience. One student’s perspective was,

I am lucky that way, my family is very supportive. I still have to pay for the trip on my own, [although] my parents basically up-fronted [sic] the money for me and I can pay them back as I have money. I think that was definitely a big thing as it is very expensive …but I definitely think it was worth it.

Some students discussed the value of gaining course credits while also having the opportunity to travel as a strong motivator. Not only was this a hands-on experience, it would also reduce course loads in a subsequent term. The consensus from a number of students was that time was a stronger motivation factor for participation than the additional expense of travel. As one participant expressed, this was a great opportunity to “knock off a course or two”, therefore reducing her workload for the next term.

Expectations

Students described a range of expectations from the global experience in phase I of the study. This included excitement and some anxiety about not knowing what to expect. They anticipated concerns about physical and emotional discomforts, fear of the unknown related to potential language barriers, culture shock and group dynamics. They identified the need to “push oneself,” yet also seemed surprised when these expectations came to fruition. As one participant described, “I was expecting to be challenged emotionally, and I expected to be put outside my comfort zone. I knew that it would be hot – and it was – [but] I wasn’t expecting what that would do to my body”.

September/October 2015  http://jistudents.org  Volume 5 • Issue 4
Consistent with cited literature, (Clarke, Flaherty, Wright, & McMillen, 2009; Ingraham & Peterson, 2005; Fry, Paige, Jon, Dillow, & Nam, 2009; Gilin & Young, 2009; Mapp, 2012; Mapp, McFarland, & Newell, 2007; Rhodes, Biscarra, Loberg & Roller, 2012), students expected to develop personal and social awareness from their international experiences. Heron (2005) suggested “...analysis of personal experiences can enable students to consolidate a less self-centered perspective on their international placements and in the process integrate the experience into their conceptualization of social justice (p. 271)”. This included learning about group dynamics cultural sensitivity, risk-taking, negotiation, self-confidence, patience and tolerance. For example, one participant shared,

I have to say that I learned that ‘love’ is a need. I have heard it [before], and now I have learned it.... How fortunate we are that women are treated equally to men; that if you are born a girl, you can actually have a life and you are not put in a dumpster – literally – that you have an option for education.

Another student shared, “[I thought] they were not going to respect me because of my age,’ but...if you just put yourself out there, it pays off”. Numerous comments made by students reflect similar themes and perspectives and mirror the impact that experience and learning in global settings might provide. Some students, however, expressed high expectations and enthusiasm, envisioned a guided and safe travel experience facilitated by faculty, desired opportunities for networking, and broadened cultural sensitivity. These types of expectations seemed to be influenced by their prior experience (travel and discipline related) and pre-departure preparation experience.

**Pre-Departure Influences**

Students’ frequently mentioned the influence of their pre-travel preparation, both within the surveys and during the active interviews. At the university where the study was conducted, advisors, practicum coordinators, faculty, administrators, and financial assistants contributed to the pre-travel planning process. Students articulated the challenges with communication when numerous individuals were involved. While there are clear processes outlined for students related to GLE, invariably conflicting messages between students, faculty and others were frequently mentioned by students as problematic. There was a general agreement among students that a well-organized application and selection process that included fair and clear communication from the Office of International Education, the faculty leader, and other key individuals was required. As one participant described, “We had a lot of bumps and bruises along the way... communication ...was very bumpy and it kind of felt like we were out of the loop”. Further, students indicated that inconsistency of the communication and information exchanges impacted their learning and overall experience.

In many universities and institutions, pre-travel orientation sessions include the provision of general information regarding travel abroad, risk mitigation, immunization and vaccination requirements, finances, as well as other pertinent information related to global travel (Linder & McGaha, 2013). For students in this study the orientation experience proved to be the most critical factor associated with a successful GLE. When meetings or seminars with the faculty leader were held regularly prior to the trip, students responded very positively, indicating that they felt well-prepared. They also indicated that they had a good understanding of what was expected of them and began to develop a positive relationship with their classmates which had an overall influence on group dynamics. As one participant described,
Once a month, we had sessions to prepare us for what we were getting into. We had Skype chats [between] the director of the ashram and the university [where we talked] about project ideas. [These] group sessions [let us] know who we were travelling with, and so that was great!

At the institution where the study occurred, there are a number of recruitment and selection processes to determine whether or not students would participate in the GLE. Many authors describe the importance of choosing students who are good fit for an international placement and who will benefit educationally and professionally from such an experience (Lough, 2009; Memmot, et al. 2010; Razack, 2002). Memmot et al. (2010) emphasized the importance of selection criteria as part of the process by stating, “It is important to select students according to several criteria, namely adequate . . . knowledge and skills, interpersonal skills, cultural sensitivity, maturity and flexibility (p. 301)”.

In some universities, a student’s prior travel experience may be identified as highly desired criteria by which to make selection decisions. Selection criteria that consider previous travel experience may be one means for identifying which students may be a risk for an unsuccessful GLE and may mitigate some of the potential challenges they face. As an example, in some academic departments at the university where this study was undertaken, the qualified applicants are selected through a fairly expeditious process based on predetermined criteria such as grade point average and pre-screening of applications. In other departments, in addition to predetermined selection criteria, the applicant may be requested to write an essay and participate in an interview as part of the selection process. This process and decision can take up to several months.

Another shared expectation among the students was the need for consistent processes and the timely exchange of information. This, coupled with the need for a standardized orientation process that provides students with sufficient pre-travel information is essential for a high quality international learning experience. One student summarized the need for well-designed application, selection, and orientation processes by suggesting “we start making the [organizational] process a whole lot cleaner and more streamlined—much earlier [in the preparation phase].”

The opportunity to prepare students as much as possible regarding language, culture, and the academic and professional expectations upon arrival can be influential to their success during their GLE placement. It is also important that they reflect on their experience post departure (Birkbeck & Bava, 2007; Heron, 2006; Lough, 2009; Memmot et al. 2010; Razack, 2002). Students in this study concurred that a certain level of language proficiency when travelling in areas where their first language was not spoken was essential. For instance, a small group of students participated in a 10-week session to gain a greater understanding of the Malaysian culture and language. These students reported that although they studied some common words and phrases prior to travel, they would have learned more if they had greater language preparation prior to leaving. A consistent experience described by all students was the difficulty in finding time and financial resources to develop country-appropriate language skills. One student stated, “[Office of International Education] requires a level one Spanish course before you go to any Spanish speaking countries and that simply wasn’t possible for [us] given our current workload and course load”.
In another situation, some of the participants in this study traveled to India as part of a field school. While proficiency in the Hindi language might have facilitated aspects of the international experience, ultimately the learning experience was about being immersed in the culture and did not necessarily require that students spoke Hindi as part of course. While students may have difficulties in developing language proficiency for the reasons previously identified, the researchers believe, optimally, that some beginning language proficiency of some participants would be a helpful requirement in settings where English is not the first language. The authors do acknowledge, however, that this is not always possible. Table 1 summarizes student themes based on triangulation of responses to the three data sources.

Table 1. Student Themes from Phase I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivational Factors for Participating</th>
<th>Expectations for the Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Social</strong> (e.g. encouragement from faculty, peers and family, challenge self, explore values)</td>
<td>• <strong>Emotional</strong> challenges (e.g. group dynamics, culture shock, discomfort, awkwardness, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Professional</strong> (e.g. resume/career development)</td>
<td>• <strong>Education</strong> (e.g. hands-on and practical skills development; “real world” application of content beyond the classroom)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Educational</strong> (e.g. course credit, hands-on experience)</td>
<td>• <strong>Safe exploration</strong> (e.g. guided/facilitated instruction by a faculty person, step outside of personal comfort zones and push self-boundaries)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Cultural</strong> (e.g. language acquisition, different cultures &amp; perspectives)</td>
<td>• <strong>Cultural</strong> (e.g. language and cultural challenges)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Admission and Orientation Influences**

- The importance of **clear communication and preparation**
- The **value of language and cultural knowledge** prior to travel

**Methods for Phase II**

During Phase II the researchers explored a broader data set collected by the university’s Office of International Education and compared the data with those collected during Phase 1. In 2012, 2013, and 2014, a broader sample of pre and post-departure surveys were administered to students across the institution and their responses were collected. This particular survey asked students to reflect and respond to pre-departure planning, recruitment and selection processes, and satisfaction with the overall experience. Phase II of the study received additional ethics clearance to collect data from human subjects.

**Data Analysis**

A total of 28 Likert items (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree) and one binary (yes/no) question for years 2012, 2013 and 2014 were included in the data analysis. Because the destinations were different each year and the number of survey participants by destination varied substantially, it was not possible to analyze changes by destination. Overall frequencies and
percentages by year were calculated to examine the trend changes for each question during the 3-year period. A histogram was developed for the binary question.

**Results -- Phase II**

To answer research question # 3, responses to Likert items (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree) are reported in Figures 1-3. There were 15 destinations to which students traveled for the GLE. The destinations were Australia, India, Norway, Mexico, United States (Utah, Illinois, and Louisiana), the Mediterranean, Thailand, Peru, Moab, Brazil, Cook Islands, Ghana, Asia, Dominican Republic, and Honduras. In total, participants (n=161) from across the university responded to the pre and post-departure surveys. Overall, students indicated agreement or strong agreement with the statement “I was adequately prepared for the global learning experience”. Figure 1 represents percent agreement with the adequacy of pre-departure preparation.

**Figure 1. Adequacy of Preparation for the GLE**

Students were also asked to indicate their level of agreement with how relevant and helpful the orientation and pre-departure preparation was to their experience. A majority of the students indicated agreement or strong agreement that the survey provided at orientation to the GLE was relevant and helpful. Figure 2 represents their cumulative responses to this item.

**Figure 2. Relevance and Helpfulness of Pre-Departure Orientation**
Finally, students were asked to rate their overall satisfaction with the GLE. Across the 3-year period when data was collected the majority of students indicated overall satisfaction with the GLE. Figure 3 provides cumulative percent satisfaction responses.

**Figure 3. Overall Satisfaction with the GLE**

When asked whether they would recommend the GLE to students in the future, participants responded positively (e.g. that they would recommend the GLE). Figure 4 provides a visual representation of participant responses to this item.

**Figure 4. Positive Recommendation for the GLE in the Future**

**Discussion and Conclusions**

Overall results indicated that it is critical to ensure that students’ expectations are grounded and realistic. Developing realistic expectations might be accomplished through adequate student preparation as part of pre-departure activities and planning sessions. One way to facilitate this process is to hold a number of pre-departure sessions with students and have them reflect on and articulate their personal and course-based expectations and share them within the group. By identifying and discussing their expectations in advance, many potential challenges are addressed and mitigated. The researchers recommend holding frequent and regular discussions with key stakeholders to minimize the occurrence of miscommunication and to ensure clear communication exchanges.

Findings from this study conclude that pre-departure preparation, orientation, and planning should begin in advance (e.g. 12-18 months prior to travel) to improve the overall GLE. One way in which expectations can be met for students is to allow sufficient "down time" during
the GLE. This includes time to synthesize learning during the preparation phase as well as time within the GLE to rest from the rigors that accompany travel and experience in a foreign culture. Students suggested that itineraries that were completely "full" did not allow them the time to immerse themselves in the culture and "naturally" experience the GLE.

Another important consideration for faculty who would like to develop GLE is to determine whether language proficiency should be a pre-requisite for the experience. The decision to require minimum language proficiency is a complex one that requires fulsome discussion as decision makers establish selection and participation criteria. The authors recommend that whenever possible, faculty and/or student participants that are fluent in the predominant language of the host country destination participate in the GLE. Language fluency is an important consideration particularly in circumstances where safety might be a concern and where risk may need to be mitigated (e.g. there is a need to seek assistance if lost).

Group size for GLE is an oft-debated topic without clear consensus or recommendations supported in the literature. Findings in this study support smaller group size where possible to ensure that proper student supervision and individualized learning are accomplished. In many GLEs, a host organization will have specific limitations in the size of incoming cohorts to be accommodated. A relatively small group size can also enhance communication prior to and during travel. Findings suggest that the criticality of communication between students, faculty and staff who support GLE is crucial to its success.

Limitations

Students’ availability for active interviews and for response validation was an additional limitation of the study. In Phase I, students participated in GLE during the spring and summer months. In the months when they were not studying they frequently worked to earn money and this often precluded them from participating in this study. These work schedules made many students unavailable for interviews or to validate responses obtained during interviews. Additionally, when they returned to the university, students’ schedules often precluded them from easily participating in focus groups and completing surveys. The researchers found this to be the case and therefore made the decision to undertake individual as well as group interviews to facilitate greater participation. Due to the time constraints of students, member checking was not undertaken and might have strengthened validity of the study.

While the sample size for this study is not large, it represents a cross section of students across three years who participated in GLE. The authors believe that these responses are representative of responses obtained from students at other colleges and universities. Further, given the researchers’ previous or current experience with students in a particular program of study, it is not known whether responses were provided in order to be socially desirable. In order to decrease this possibility, identification and demographic information of participants such as gender, age, and professional discipline was deliberately omitted as part of the sample description. Additional studies that include larger samples of students across multiple institutions and varied academic programs could enhance understanding of student motivations, expectations and experiences of GLE.

Recommendations Based on Findings

This research evaluated student responses on surveys distributed prior to and immediately following an international experience in Phase I and then compared data to a broader sample in
Phase II. There are many potential and real obstacles that must be overcome when students are involved in GLE and strategies to mitigate them are emphasized in the next section. Based on findings from the two phases, the researchers propose the following key strategies:

1. Require that students critically reflect on their values, motivations, expectations and experiences at all junctures during study abroad. The opportunity for students to be guided through reflection and a critical analysis of the experience after the GLE may better support the transferability of skills and knowledge into practice in their home country (Heron 2006; Lough 2009).

2. It is also important for students who participate in GLE to share their experiences with students who did not participate because this can result in greater synthesis of learning for both groups of students.

3. Develop standardized application, recruitment, selection and orientation processes to ensure successful GLE. Selection criteria and the decision-making process must be well-presented and take into consideration the physical, emotional, and other requirements of the activity so that students are positioned for success. User-friendly templates outlining selection processes can be developed for use across multiple GLEs being offered at an institution.

4. Faculty and administrators should meet regularly for peer learning purposes in planning and delivering GLEs.

5. Provide clear, frequent, and transparent communication with students, faculty, and key stakeholders throughout the process. It is imperative that expectations for GLE that are grounded and realistic. Students should be provided with checklists as part of pre-departure planning.

6. Conduct well-organized pre-travel orientation sessions and post-travel debrief sessions that involve key stakeholders such as academic administrators, directors and managers of international education programs, students, and staff. Students should be prepared for serving their role as ambassadors of the university while representing it abroad as part of a GLE.

7. For post-secondary institutions to facilitate meaningful GLE that meet intended outcomes, institutions must ensure that sufficient resources and infrastructure are in place to support the GLE. Institutional buy-in and support for international education is crucial for sustainability of the GLE. Faculty who lead the GLE require appropriate support for developing, planning and integrating the GLE into program curricula and administrative staff must be prepared and trained for implementing pre-departure orientation programs and logistical supports.

Conclusion

While the benefits of global education and study abroad programs are many, there is limited research that identifies the motivations, expectations, and experiences of students undertaking these endeavors. Participants in the study reported here were clearly motivated to study in global settings and identified educational, social, professional, and the desire to know and understand cultures as influential factors in the decision-making process. Like most students, they expressed clear expectations for engaged, faculty-facilitated and safe learning experience in global settings.
Participants highlighted the need for well-designed pre-departure planning and orientation sessions in order to minimize the potential challenges associated with GLE. Findings from this study are consistent with those of researchers cited earlier in this paper.

Initiatives to provide students in colleges and universities with opportunities to engage in GLE as part of their program of study show no signs of slowing down. While this study identified motivational factors, expectations, and pre-departure experiences of students, more research that evaluates how these factors impact learning outcomes in global settings over time is crucial. Future research must inform the development of best practices for GLE, particularly as the global landscape rapidly changes.

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**AUTHORS**

**VINCENT SALYERS, EdD,** is the Interim Associate Vice President, Research at Mount Royal University. He has also been actively involved with international and service learning research in Ethiopia, Dominican Republic, Mexico, and Peru, as well research with vulnerable populations. Email: vsalyers@mtroyal.ca

**CATHY CARSON, PhD,** is the Chair of the Department of Child Studies and Social Work. She has actively supported faculty with the development of global learning experiences in Malaysia, New Zealand and Qatar. Email: ccarston@mtroyal.ca

**YASMIN DEAN, PhD,** is an associate professor of social work at Mount Royal University, Calgary, Canada. She leads a bi-annual field school to India and has also taken students on GEI's to China and the United Arab Emirates. The primary focus of her current research is on global service learning and cultural relevance in social work education. Email: ydean@mtroyal.ca

**CHAD LONDON, PhD,** is Dean of the Faculty of Health and Community Studies at Mount Royal University. He has developed global learning experiences for students in Mexico, Europe, USA and New Zealand. Email: clondon@mtroyal.ca

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Cultural Demands of the Host-Nation: International Student Experience and the Public Diplomacy Consequences

Benjamin Triana (Doctoral Candidate)
University of Kentucky (USA)

Abstract

Traditional approaches for hosting international students tend to focus on classroom achievement rather than on intercultural exchange and cultural immersion. Such approaches lessen the possibility of successful educational experiences which also hinders public diplomacy. Two case studies are presented that reveal how structural changes at a southeastern university could be modified in order to address the international student experience and (2) how the international student experience of former Egyptian president Mohamed Morsi illustrates the need for increased emphasis on intercultural exchange due to the likelihood of international students embarking on influential political and private careers.

Keywords: international student education, intercultural dialogue, cultural immersion, public diplomacy, international relations, Mohamed Morsi

After World War II, decisions concerning American international education, both for domestic students studying abroad and international students attending American institutions, possessed this underlying philosophy: International education was “a force for peace and mutual understanding and ultimately as the means through which the United States could build and maintain its influence in the world.” Through this influence, “world leaders trained in the United States would be more inclined to understand and sympathize with the United States when conducting their international affairs” (Pandit, 2009, p. 647). This ideology assumed that “peace and understanding” would also support foreign policy and security (de Witt, 2002). By the mid-twentieth century, international education had become a public diplomacy approach for managing national reputation and international relations (Wang, 2006).

Based on the growth of international education exchange, nations should be aware of its potential impact on international relations. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), there has been an increase from 3.4 million international students to 3.7 million from 2000 to 2009 (Chau, 2011). In 2010, international students attending colleges and universities in the United States increased three percent, with over thirty percent coming from China. In 2011, international student attendance jumped another 5.7 percent from the 2010 numbers (Fischer, 2010; McMurtie, 2012). With economic growth in developing
countries, the international student demographic has become an important population to consider for economic and public diplomacy considerations.

Bellamy and Weinberg (2008) and Fulton (2007) have called for a redefinition of public diplomacy and a reforming of the practice of public diplomacy in order to address changes in the world. Public diplomacy can be defined as the ways in which non-government diplomats influence and improve relations with another nation or culture. In support of these calls, this essay argues for a holistic approach to the international student experience at higher education institutions in the United States. A more holistic approach that includes outside of the classroom intercultural dialogue and cultural immersion has the potential to increase the likelihood of successful international student experiences, and these gains are not only educational gains, but also international relations’ gains.

Fulton (2007) suggested that international students that enroll in American universities are the ones in society that “make a difference” and have an “appetite for positive change” (p. 314). In the altruistic role education often plays, an improved education experience has the potential to influence the opinion international students have of the United States, and for those students that return to their home countries, these international students may influence the opinions of home country acquaintances. This reasoning is in alignment with the international relations role that both Senator J. William Fulbright and President Harry S. Truman believed international education could serve.

By considering the diplomacy role of international education, this perspective places more emphasis on intercultural exchange and cultural immersion as central components of the international education experience. Such an approach increases the likelihood of improving the international student experience as well as international relations. A review of the literature on the challenges facing international students and the characteristics of successful international student experience will highlight the cultural characteristics involved in the successful international student experiences. The literature review explicates how these challenges and characteristics parallel the cultural aspects of public diplomacy. The second half of the paper involves two case studies. The case studies are presented to provide empirical examples as to: 1.) How policy and structural changes at a southeastern university could improve the cultural exchange aspects of the international student experience, and 2.) How the international student experience of Mohamed Morsi demonstrates the importance of out-of-classroom cultural immersion in order to address issues of identity management as a result of international education exchange. The Morsi case study emphasizes the importance of positive international student experiences as international students possess a higher-than-normal potential for embarking on influential careers in government and in private business (Fulton, 2007).

**Conceptual Framework: Public Diplomacy and International Student Education**

Since the Fulbright Act of 1946, education has been a central component of international relations and public diplomacy. President Truman reinforced this relationship with his Commission on Higher Education which published the report, Higher Education for American Democracy (President’s Commission for American Democracy, 1948). From that moment, public diplomacy has been linked to higher education and international students.

Public diplomacy can be defined as the ways in which non-government diplomats of a nation, culture, or people influence and improve relations with another nation, culture, or people (Fulton, 2007). As a part of modern diplomacy and international relations, public diplomacy is
an essential, non-invasive attempt to influence the economic and political choices of international and intercultural cultures and nations through civic interaction. Public diplomacy is connected to the concept of soft power (Nye, 2004). Soft power is concerned with the efforts of the government or government agencies intended to influence other nations and cultures (Leonard, 2002). Through the Fulbright Act, United States’ public diplomacy and soft power were linked to post-secondary international education exchanges as a viable strategy for influencing other nations and cultures.

Internationalization and globalization have increased the importance of successful international student experience as an aspect of public diplomacy. Pandit (2009) recognized the importance of the international student experience and its relationship to globalized markets, cultures, and communities: “There is a growing societal recognition that our graduates will compete in a global labor market and need to develop the ability to work more effectively in international and multicultural settings” (p. 646). To work effectively, nations and their citizens must have beneficial relationships with other nations and their citizenries. With the increased connectivity of international economic markets and the propensity of international students to hold important positions in private business, the importance of cultivating productive international relations through international student education is essential.

The next section explores what makes for a successful international student experience. It establishes the need for a more holistic and culturally focused international-student-support infrastructure. A more holistic approach addresses the out-of-classroom challenges that inhibit positive international student experiences. The section also reinforces the beneficial relationship between international student success and improved international relations.

**Reasons for Choosing a Host Nation, Challenges to and Successes of International Students**

In order to improve the international student experience, one must ask “What makes for a positive international student experience?” This question led to a review of why students embark on an international education, the challenges to a successful experience, and the most successful characteristics of a positive international education.

**Reasons for choosing a Host Country and Host Institution**

The reasons international students choose a host country have a strong connection to the cultural interactions between two nations’ peoples. Reasons for choosing a specific host country and academic institution include (Mazzoral & Soutar, 2002):

1. Knowledge and awareness of the host country.
2. Recommendations from friends and relatives.
3. Cost Issues (local ethnic communities are believed to help with costs).
4. Social Links.
5. Geographic and/or cultural proximity.
6. An institution’s reputation for quality, including staff.
7. Alliances and partnerships between the institution and institutions familiar to the student.
8. Alumni base and word-of-mouth referral.

Almost all of the reasons on this list affect and are affected by intercultural interaction and ongoing diplomatic, economic, and cultural relations between the host country and an
international student’s country of origin. Recommendations from friends and relatives, social links, cultural proximity, alliances and partnerships, and alumni word-of-mouth are all dependent on positive exchanges between the populaces of two nations. Knowledge and awareness of an institution and an institution’s reputation for quality can also be improved via direct international student exchange. The rationale behind selecting a host nation is linked to the international exchange between two countries.

When viewed through this lens of cultural exchange, American academic institutions with regional reputations may have an advantage in recruiting international students. While Armstrong (2007) argued that a university, “trapped in its traditional place-based identity” is at a disadvantage in international education, a regional institution has the ability to offer a unique cultural experience that cannot be replicated at any other institution (p. 134). The historical place of a university creates an opportunity for significant, place-based cultural exchange which can improve understanding and intercultural interaction as international students discover the unique culture of a specific institution, town, and people. Regional institutions can take advantage of their placed-based identity through initiatives that celebrate an institution’s cultural connections that have the potential to encourage cultural immersion.

Challenges International Students Face and Secrets to Success

For institutions where the hosting of international students has only recently emerged as an aspect of their educational goals and responsibilities, identifying the challenges and the best practices for international student success is essential for establishing a successful international student program. Similar to the reasons for selecting a host institution, many of the challenges and the best practices identified in international student research is culturally-oriented.

Challenges to the international student experience have been researched extensively. Zhai (2002) found cultural differences, language adjustments, and the actual United States educational system as the most difficult obstacles to navigate. Ying and Liese (1994) reported homesickness as an important issue. In response, Tseng and Newton (2002) documented eight characteristics of a successful international student experience:

1. Knowing themselves and others.
2. Building relationships.
3. Expanding their worldview.
5. Developing cultural and social contacts.
6. Establishing relationships with advisors and instructors.
7. English proficiency.
8. Letting go of problems.

None of the eight characteristics could be isolated as in-classroom-only or curriculum associated approaches. Conversely, none of the characteristics could be considered entirely cultural. The importance is in recognizing the fluidity and relationship of out-of-classroom and cultural/intercultural aspects of the characteristics.

The research revealed that the challenges and characteristics of international student success address out-of-the-classroom issues, especially cultural understanding and intercultural exchange as well as the more traditional academic concerns. The conceptual framework and the review of the international student research led to the questions for the following case studies:
1. How are post-secondary institutions allocating resources dedicated to hosting international students?
2. How can the allocation of resources for the hosting of international students be improved?
3. Why do some international student experiences fail to generate positive public diplomacy effects?
4. Why is it essential to generate positive public diplomacy effects with international students?

**Research Method**

The two case studies should be considered individual case studies as they address different level effects and are of different design (Yin, 2014). The choice to include two case studies was in response to the multiple-level functioning of intercultural communication documented by Oetzel, Dhar, and Kirschbaum (2007).

In the first case study, a southeastern university’s resources and organizational structure were analyzed. The university can be classified under Armstrong’s (2007) description of a reputable university with a strong regional presence and sharing the common characteristics with a large number of regional, higher-educational institutions in the United States. The strategic plan analyzed can be considered a similar representation of how strategic plans are designed for the international student experience at similar institutions.

The first case study is informed by researcher observation of international students and interviews with individuals involved in international student support. The observations and interviews were conducted over a four-year period. A subsequent document analysis of the strategic plan was conducted to corroborate the interview analysis (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). The first case study is primarily concerned with research questions RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3.

In the second case study, a number of published accounts of Mohamed Morsi’s international student experience are analyzed to demonstrate the necessity of a more culturally-focused approach to the international student experience. Morsi’s experience demonstrates the importance of generating positive public diplomacy effects based on the likelihood of international students obtaining influential positions in their home nations (Bellamy & Weinberg, 2008; Fulton, 2007). The second case study can be considered an extreme, unusual, and critical case (Yin, 2014).

**Case study 1: A Southeastern University’s approach to International Students**

In 2012, a southeastern university announced that it had increased the number of international students accepted for the fall semester. Along with the increased enrollment, the institution announced the implementation of an international strategic plan in order to manage the increase in international student enrollment. The following description is a summary of the resources and strategic plan. The strategic plan is paraphrased in order to protect the institution’s confidentiality.

Over 1,600 international students enroll at this university each year, and enrollment is projected to increase for the foreseeable future. International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS) and Office of International Affairs (OIA) are the two main programs that offer services for international students. The ISSS provides the following services: immigration, travel
An additional service, the International Hospitality Program (IHP), focuses on adaptation, assimilation and intercultural relations-management for international students once they arrive. Along with IHP, the university offers a Cultural Coffee Hour, a cross-cultural workshop for undergraduates expecting to work for international companies, an international buddy program, and a multi-organizational Cultural Diversity Festival to increase cultural awareness. In support of these activities, the university also offers a listserv and an online calendar for students to remain informed on International Affairs’ sponsored events. The university also offers services for dependents. The university offers educational support for dependent children including a Japanese Saturday School and K-12 Educational Initiatives. There is an English as a Second Language Center for language reinforcement.

There are two other services that support the international student experience at this particular university. First, ESL instructors are involved in cultivating positive experiences for international students (University ESL instructor, personal communication, December 3, 2012; University ESL instructor, personal communication, December 4, 2012). ESL instructors encourage students to increase involvement in official university functions through extra credit opportunities and class curricula. Secondly, depending on the ethnic community and informal efforts, students are assigned mentors to help with culture shock and adaptation (University ESL instructor, personal communication, December 4, 2012).

Still, a lack of international student integration persists. International Student Council meetings and events are not attended by international or domestic students. This issue has led to concerns over the actual intercultural interaction and cultural exchange occurring between international and domestic students (ISC president, personal communication, October 15, 2012). The lack of participation implies that few students value a visible and formal relationship between the university and the international students.

Increasing international and domestic student engagement was one of the goals of the strategic plan. The university implemented a multi-faceted approach in order to improve the international focus of the university. However, a major oversight in the approach involved the areas concerning interaction between international and domestic students, local ethnic communities involved in international student support, and the evaluation and improvement of the individual international student experience outside of the classroom. The plan summary is included to emphasize the oversight:

In 2007, the [university name omitted] embarked on a two-year assessment of its international activity, encompassing student mobility, faculty research, global visibility, engagement, accessibility of information, the role of the Office of International Affairs, and [university name omitted] position vis-à-vis our aspirational benchmarks.

Two areas that scholars have identified as important for the international student experience, intercultural interaction and local cultural immersion, are omitted. Such an oversight limits the success of the strategic plan.

**Case study 1: Discussion.** Based upon the description of the services offered at this southeastern university, it is not the legal, institutional/structural resources, nor the classroom pedagogy that is in question. Instead, international and domestic student interaction is the
primary concern at the university. By encouraging increased interaction between international and domestic students, the cultural exchange can improve the academic experience of all students and simultaneously support public diplomacy.

However, encouraging intercultural student exchange can be difficult. Oftentimes, international students experience prejudice, negative stereotypes, and exclusion in and outside of the classroom. Likewise, domestic students express apprehension and reluctance when considering interacting with international students (Charles-Toussaint & Crowson, 2010; Pandit, 2009). This can cause a campus to remain segregated and homogenous even with a diverse student population (Volet & Ang, 1998; Petersen, Briggs, & Dreasher, 1999). The university in the aforementioned case study is representative of such a space. Domestic and international student interaction is limited, and as a result, defined spaces, such as areas close to international dormitories and local ethnic neighborhoods, are reserved for international students; whereas, traditional domestic university spaces are dominated by domestic students.

There are two specific strategies that have been identified as viable options for improving this situation. First, Frey and Roysircar (2006) recommended continued and increased counseling and outreach that encourages greater international student adaptation to the host country. The second strategy has been to alter the social environments and attitudes of domestic students and local communities (Charles-Toussaint & Crowson, 2010). Domestic students can also be at the center of host-nation, intercultural education exchange. Charles-Toussaint and Crowson (2010) recommended such a focus after their research found that two of the four types of threat perception predict prejudice and negative relationships between American and international students.

Case study 2: Mohamed Morsi

Mohamed Morsi was formerly the fifth president of Egypt, and the first democratically elected president. Morsi was sworn into office on June 30, 2012 and served as the president until July 3, 2013. His term ended when he was relieved of his duties by the Egyptian military after protests from the Egyptian population. Morsi is a member of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), a worldwide, social, political and religious (Islamic) organization with significant influence in the Arab world. He was the chairman of the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), the political arm of the MB in Egypt, before running for the presidency in the 2011 Egyptian elections.

Morsi was educated in the United States. He received a Ph.D. in materials science from the University of Southern California in 1982 and was an Assistant Professor at California State University until 1985. Before becoming heavily involved in Egyptian politics, he held a position as a professor and head of the engineering department at Zagazig University until 2010.

Morsi’s time spent in the United States offered the hope that the newly elected president would have some affinity for the United States’ interests in the region as well as for the values, laws, and institutions that coincide with America’s interpretation of democracy. As a result, some individuals believed that Morsi’s American experience would be impetus for resolving a number of issues that plagued Egypt during Hosni Mubarak’s rule, including human rights violations, repression of expression and religion, and issues of inequality (Blomfield, 2012). Morsi’s tenure did not progress as some hoped. He expanded executive powers without appropriate legal oversight and backed a questionable constitution that failed to guarantee and protect the rights of minorities and women. Both Western and Arab media outlets criticized the constitution’s failure to outline government organization, its functions, and policies (Al Jazeera,
A constant criticism of Morsi’s time in office concerned the justification of his questionable actions by claiming majority will and majority rule. While the American version of democracy may possess its limitations and outright failures, based on Morsi’s actions, he had not recognized the value in protecting the rights of minorities emphasized during the American civil rights movement nor the value and contributions of the United States diverse minority communities. Dissent and public political protests ensued until the Egyptian military intervened, unseating Morsi on July 3, 2013.

Case study 2: Discussion. There are many reasons for the current difficulties in Egypt that go well beyond public diplomacy. However, the tension, misunderstanding, and conflict experienced when interacting with a different culture can lead to identity issues. Identity concerns have been documented in both intercultural communication and international relations research, so their emergence should not come as much of a surprise in Morsi’s case (Zaharna, 2000). Morsi’s membership in the Muslim Brotherhood is one of the most significant issues. Scholars have described the MB as “an organization that sought nothing less than the transformation of society and the individual [in line with the tenets of Islam]” (Hamid, 2013, p. 3). Since altering a society to align more with Islam is not part of American international relations and diplomacy, an American and Morsi agreement on the direction of Egyptian democracy and governance was unlikely.

Trager (2013, 2011), outlined a number of additional reasons as to why an outcome favorable to American interests was unrealistic. First, the MB is a political organization focused on political uniformity, not compromise based upon political plurality. Secondly, there is a five to eight year initiation process before becoming a full-fledged MB member. This includes an oath to listen and obey. Ayman Nour of the secular Al Ghad party reiterated this point when discussing his parliamentary interactions with Morsi during Mubarak’s tenure. Parliamentary requests designed for Mubarak had to be submitted through Morsi, but when given to Morsi, he would hold onto the requests, “pocketing the documents instead of passing them on, explaining that he couldn’t sign until he’d gotten the opinions of all the Brotherhood’s representatives” (Hammer, 2012, p. 21). The above episodes demonstrate just how entrenched Morsi was in MB cultural and political practices.

Unfortunately, Morsi represents a fairly common story for many international, and even national, out-of-state students. When confronted with a new culture, an individual will have to re-examine his or her identity and community, decide if and how to acculturate, and what new perspectives are worth adopting. Hammer (2012) noted that Morsi did little to reassess his understanding of the United States:

Although he [Morsi] admired the American work ethic, he chose to insulate himself from American society, spending much of his time with a small circle of fellow students from Arab countries… by the time he returned to Egypt in 1985, he was “dedicated to the [Muslim Brotherhood], a changed man. (p. 19-20)

When he expressed disdain for the “naked restaurants” such as Hooters, acquaintances had recognized that he had already extricated himself from the larger American society (Hammer, 2012, p. 20). Intercultural dialogue is one of the primary ways of negotiating confusing cultural phenomenon such as “naked restaurants,” but within an insulated ethnic community, intercultural dialogue is difficult to conduct.

Another integral piece in Morsi’s experience was the demands and heavy influence of his home community. The potential for increased affinity with the values and beliefs associated
with American public diplomacy were substantially lowered in relationship to an integrated and culturally sophisticated home community organization. In an increasingly internationalized world, more and more individuals will rely upon their home community as an anchor when interacting abroad. In fact, similar reports about one of Egypt’s interim presidents, General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, have surfaced (see Kenner & Lubold, 2013). While at a Super Bowl party, Sisi was more attracted to the host’s collection of Islamic symbols and cultural artifacts than experiencing an American cultural phenomenon for the first time. This does not mean that Sisi will follow the same path as Morsi, but the reoccurring descriptions argue for the development of more well-researched strategies for international-education-public-diplomacy.

Increased intercultural integration and international conversations in American college and university settings could never offer a complete answer to the complex issues of concern in American and Egyptian relations. However, intercultural communication processes offer opportunities for the peaceful interaction of differing populations, especially in educational settings. Without an integrated and established cultural exchange, the beliefs and actions of individuals like Morsi and Sisi are understandable, if not predictable, and they serve as critical examples of the potential high stakes of international education.

In Morsi’s case, home community demands along with cultural isolation led to negative opinions of the United States. These outcomes highlight the importance of holistic international education support in order to avoid cultural misunderstanding. His case also identifies the need for identity management support that could be addressed through counseling, mental health, and wellness programs. Morsi’s international student experience highlights the importance of intercultural dialogue, cultural immersion, and wellness services as aspects of an international student experience.

The international student may become the president of a country vital to a nation’s international interests. In Morsi’s case, one of the most pressing concerns was his position on the 1979 peace treaty with Israel (Blomfield, 2012). Morsi recognized the treaty, which alleviated some international anxiety of a renewed conflict between Egypt and Israel. Still, the outcome remained unclear until the treaty was signed, and the uncertainty unsettled the region. As mentioned throughout this paper, international students have a higher likelihood of obtaining influential positions in their host nations (Fulton, 2007). Thus, the consequences are intensified.

**International Student Experience and Public Diplomacy Limitations**

The theory of public diplomacy hinges upon idealism. More specifically, public diplomacy presupposes that cultural, educational, and private business efforts will be recognized and appreciated by the involved nations and their publics. In practice, benefit to the host and/or the home nation is much harder to measure. Patricia de Stacy Harrison (2008) and Lindsay (1989) warned that the underlying value in an education may take ten or twenty years to recognize. Any international education changes must consider the time involved in long-range policy and relationship improvement.

This issue highlights a significant tension underlying the merging of education and public diplomacy. The assumption is that there is something culturally valuable in the sharing of information and knowledge, and that not only does higher education lead to economic prosperity, but as Harrison (2008) believes, higher education leads to good citizens that contribute to their societies.
Conclusion

The case studies presented in this paper raise a number of complicated and intertwined issues. First, while colleges and universities offer a wide array of resources and programs for international students, what needs are being met, how, and through what channels may not be accurately identified or employed. Furthermore, what characteristics and qualities international students find necessary for a successful experience at particular institutions may not be widely known or shared with the appropriate publics. The first case study reveals the importance of planning and resources dedicated to the outside-the-classroom elements that improve the international student experience, especially intercultural communication, interaction, and exchange. The second case study emphasizes the importance of intercultural dialogue, cultural immersion, and support for identity management for international students. Overall, the entire process of how to improve the international student experience would benefit from further macro-level, institutional, documentation, research, and initiatives.

There is no one certain way to improve the international student experience. What is most important is to acknowledge that the process “should be a comprehensive strategy that is built with input from the many stakeholders: faculty, students, alumni, and others” (Pandit, 2009, p. 654). A successful international student experience will most likely involve multiple strategies from different stakeholders. There is also a need for increased research into the cultural and intercultural aspects of international student education, and especially international student education as public diplomacy.

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**AUTHOR**

**BENJAMIN TRIANA** is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Communication at the University of Kentucky. His research interests include international and intercultural communication, cultural and media studies. Email: ben.triana0515@uky.edu

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Culturally Responsive Education: Developing Lesson Plans for Vietnamese Students in the American Diaspora

Cynthia M. Douglas, PhD
St. John’s University (USA)

Abstract

This article focuses on the application of the philosophical principles of John Dewey and Culturally Responsive Education in the creation of lesson plans for Vietnamese students in the American Diaspora. Through a Fulbright-Hayes Program a group of teachers from the New York City Public School System and Long Island spent six weeks in Vietnam studying the language and culture in order to develop lesson plans that would address the needs of Vietnamese students in their classrooms. This study demonstrates the importance of teachers connecting with their students through the incorporation of sociocultural elements that translate to a culturally responsive curriculum, not just for students in the Vietnamese Diaspora but for all students.

Keywords: Culturally Responsive Education, multiculturalism, diversity, language learners, identity

In the past couple of decades in the New York City Metro area, there has been a gradual increase in Vietnamese students in the public school system. It has been challenging for educators to develop lessons that are culturally responsive for this cohort. Educators must understand the background knowledge and histories of these students in order to develop lesson plans that succinctly connect to their lives in order to make what is being taught meaningful.

This article looks at the connection of Dewey's philosophical ideals about education and its linkage to culturally responsive lesson plans created by a group of New York City and Long Island educators. John Dewey, father of Pragmatism, stated that, “I believe that the only true education comes through the stimulation of a child’s powers by the demands of the social situations in which he finds himself…he is stimulated to act as a member of a unity” (Dewey, 1897, p. 1). He believed that education “concentrates on means in education, believing that it is the ability of the individual to question through experience that is most important for the human community” (Glassman, 2001, p. 3). In a culturally responsive classroom, the tools of instruction (i.e., books, teaching methods, and activities) are incompatible with, or worse marginalize, the
students’ cultural experiences, a dis-connect with school is likely (Irvine, 1992). In essence, the inability of students to succeed may be seen as underachieving or the total rejection to perform at all through attrition.

**Literature Review**

Educators must utilize methods of Culturally Responsive Education (CRE) in order to make learning an accessible and significant experience that advances the opportunities of their students in a global society. Gay (2000) describes culturally responsive teaching as having characteristics that acknowledge cultural heritage that in turn impact student dispositions and attitudes about their education; culturally responsive teaching is purposeful in connecting student experiences to school through varied strategies. CRE is not the trivial celebration of cultural elements/icons from a minority community. It goes beyond the thin social function of multiculturalism in the classroom that might materialize as a day or month long acknowledgment of a particular subgroup of American society. CRE relates to students’ linguistic and cultural elements so that the curriculum and classroom objectives are accessible.

Banks (2013, p. 3) states, “multicultural education incorporates the idea that all students – regardless of their gender; sexual orientation; social class; and ethnic, racial, or cultural characteristics- should have an equal opportunity in school.” Banks states that because of these characteristics some students will have more of an opportunity to learn and students identified in the “Other” category may be unfairly disadvantaged due to the present structure of the school. Bhabha (1995) disclosed the contradictions inherent in colonial discourse in order to highlight the colonizer’s ambivalence in respect to his position toward the colonized “Other”. For the purposes of this discussion, the status of “Other” in reference to the Vietnamese immigrants is utilized to show the positioning of this cohort as not being a part of the mainstream, dominant culture. Vietnamese students in the public education system are indirectly designated in the “Other” category and are in need of teachers taking the totality of what it means to be Vietnamese in America into account in their lesson plan development.

Culture is the “complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (Taylor, 1871, p. 246). Culture is a manner in which to link the realms of Self and Other because there are many shared elements between the two factions. Culture has direct repercussions for teaching and learning; culture determines educational attainment due to its sensitive connection to the idiosyncrasies of ethnicity. An ethnic group’s cultural traditions, socio-linguistic patterns and social structure are vital to their construction of educational systems.

For example, “teachers need to know (a) which ethnic groups give priority to communal living and cooperative problem solving and how these preferences affect educational motivation, aspiration, and task performance; (b) how different ethnic groups’ protocols of appropriate ways for children to interact with adults are exhibited in instructional settings; and (c) the implications of gender role socialization in different ethnic groups for implementing equity initiatives in classroom instruction” (Gay, 2000, p. 2). Ethnic groups and teacher familiarity are discussed further by Gold, Grant, and Rivlin (1977) and Takaki (1993).

Cultural diffusion is also critical to the development of CRE. Cultural diffusion is a selective process. “Whenever two cultures come into contact, each does not accept everything indiscriminately from the other. If they did, the vast cultural differences that exist today would have long since disappeared. Rather, items will be borrowed from another culture only if they
prove to be useful and/or compatible” (Spencer-Oatey, 2012, p. 14).

In the case of Vietnamese students in the American school system, cultural diffusion must be intricately interwoven into the lesson plans incorporating useful material from C1 (culture of origin) and C2 (present culture). Through this educational cultural diffusion, students are given the opportunity to relate what is being taught in the curriculum to their lived experiences—education becomes tangible almost automatically instead of waiting for the individual to assimilate (which has a negative connotation). Cultural diffusion in education essentially compels the educator to assess what items and elements are useful in a student’s education; cultural diffusion is critical to CRE.

CRE requires that teachers teach all students through differentiation. Differentiated instruction is a learner-centered teaching approach using individual learning styles, abilities, motivation and readiness levels (Bush, 2006). Differentiation signifies that the teacher knows the learner to the extent that all qualities of the student are scrutinized and noted. The curriculum is not diminished; it is relevant and challenging through tailoring it to the demographics of the classroom. According to Ladson-Billings (1995), CRE addresses the discontinuity that often exists between home and school environments. Culturally Responsive Education cannot be a superficial layer of cosmetic multiculturalism; it is not a limited celebration of ethnicity that obfuscates mainstream culture within its internal composition.

In essence, CRE directly relates to how Dewey sees the child as a free agent who achieves goals through her own interest in the activity. The practice of CRE coordinates with Dewey’s dogma in the sense that he understood the need to take into consideration cultural diversity, and that cognition should bring to light a common ground where dialogue between members of a society engage in cross-cultural knowledge. Dewey stated that education needs to inspire “personal interests in social relationships …which secures social change” (Dewey, 1938, p. 104). Social change and the implications of socially just schooling were of utmost importance to the teachers on this trip; they had to take into consideration what would bring the culture of Vietnam to life in the lesson plans they were about to create.

Research Method

I used participant observations and interviews to answer the research questions presented in this work. The artifacts and data that these teachers collected assisted them in the development of culturally responsive lessons for their Vietnamese students in the New York City area. The examination of research questions and analysis of observations allows us to conceptualize the formation of identity in Vietnam and subsequently how that identity exists in the Diaspora for Vietnamese students and specifically its relevance in their education in America.

Participants

In the summer of 2013 a group of teachers traveled to Vietnam for six weeks to experience the country's culture, language, and people. The teachers were required to create 4 lesson plans for the State Department via the Fulbright-Hayes Program as well as take Vietnamese language classes. The teachers were selected through an application process that involved an essay which addressed issues of multiculturalism and language learning in the classroom with English Language Learners. The teachers ranged in professional experience from pre-service to veteran status in both the public and private sectors of education in NYC and Long Island. They ranged
in age from 22 to 60 years of age; all but one had traveled outside of the United States prior to this trip. All of the teachers were certified in English as a Second Language instruction or in the process of receiving their certification in ESL. They were charged with developing lesson plans that related to Vietnamese culture in order to address Vietnamese students specifically, yet in a broader sense the lessons could be utilized to address the needs of diverse student populations beyond the Vietnamese population. The lesson plans could be a useful tool as a gateway to Vietnamese culture for a diverse range of learners, not just Vietnamese students. The lessons would also stand as examples of what a teacher can develop from a culture of origin (C1) and connect to a lesson plan that must adhere to given standards and curriculum in the present culture (C2) of the student. The teacher professional experience ranged from pre-service to twenty-five plus years in the field of education; only three of the teachers have Vietnamese or Vietnamese-American students in their home schools.

Teacher Responses

I collected responses composed by American teachers during their six week stay in Vietnam in response to baseline questions relating to culturally responsive teaching in their classrooms and the implications of CRE for their students. Initially I prepared a list of thirty questions relating to CRE which I narrowed down to sixteen (See Appendix A). I thought it was important to collect responses by teachers living and experiencing a new language and culture because it placed them within an experience that is similar to what their immigrant students must experience; it allowed them to develop empathy and understanding for immigrant students in their classrooms that could have never been gained through simply taking a course. The teacher responses are a window into their acquired knowledge about CRE as it was encountered and processed in Vietnam.

Observations

I observed all participants during their six week excursion in Vietnam in both the classroom learning Vietnamese and engaging in the local culture. I observed teachers learning Vietnamese Monday-Friday for three hours in the morning and one hour in the afternoon with a private tutor. The teachers were also observed engaging in the local cultures in Thai Nyguen City, Hanoi, Denang, Ho Chi Minh City, and various towns along the Mekong Delta. The observations were critical in collecting first-hand data on the experiences of teachers learning an L2 (second language) and experiencing another culture.

Data Limitations

The use of baseline questions to elicit participant responses may have guided the participants’ thinking in some way about CRE. My intention of having the participants respond and write about specifics may have unintentionally guided their thought processes. The issue may also be whether or not the words were “leading” in some way. An additional limitation is that taking a group of teachers on a trip to a foreign country in order to develop culturally responsive lessons for their students is not a realistic excursion for all educators.
Results

The analysis of the data collected in the form of teacher responses to a set of baseline questions about CRE resulted in three different overarching themes: Information was gleaned from the data that uncovered the distinct implications and impact of the idiosyncrasies of a student's culture in the classroom. The themes represent the significance of culture, as specified in three distinct realms in classrooms and students' lives.

Background Culture

The teacher responses collected showed the crucial nature of teachers understanding the historical culture of students in order for students to be successful in the classroom. Culture is a way of describing and categorizing all that life entails; historical culture for students is the fusion of those cultural points of origin that exist in their ethnic and linguistic communities of their ancestors. Teachers learned about the traditions and customs of the Vietnamese first-hand; they also were exposed to the tonal language of Vietnamese. The exposure allowed teachers to get both an emic and etic understanding of the Vietnamese worldview, this in turn assisted them in developing culturally responsive lessons for their Vietnamese students in the metro-NYC Diaspora. These educators learned about their students' histories in order to understand what needs to be included in the curriculum. Historical culture is vital to the knowledge an educator utilizes in lesson plan development so as to be properly informed of students’ backgrounds.

The following excerpts are from teacher interviews performed in Vietnam. These excerpts exemplify the importance of understanding the background cultures of students:

Julia: “CRE is understanding and responding to the different ways students of non-majority cultures learn so that they can achieve at the same high levels of majority students.

Jessie: “When you include other cultures in your lessons, students will learn.”

Christine: “When the child's environment does not encompass empathy for other cultures and does not support the child's multiculturalism earning is impeded.”

Culture of the Curriculum

The interviews revealed there is a culture embedded in curriculum development. Effective teaching must include the needs of the students; curriculum must conform to the student not the student conforming to the curriculum. The interviews demonstrated that teachers who have knowledge of the culture of origin of their students can effectively include meaningful resources; relevant cultural information sends a message that the student is valued. Curriculum that connects to the learner through culture motivates and encourages students to learn. Also, the interviews revealed that teachers must take into account how students are structured socially within the classroom. Teachers are powerful agents in determining what the curriculum contains that will prompt students to perform at their highest level.

Christine: “Virtual visuals to other countries, Skype lessons with classrooms around the world. Standards are standards but how those standards are achieved will not be along one continuum. All cultures do not learn that same way. Curriculum cannot be written in
simply one manner either.”

Isabella: “There should be an emphasis on how we are alike, things that we share. If I comprehend who are the students in my class then I have knowledge of what they need in the sense that I will more aptly be able to use cultural items they are familiar with and connect it to what I want to teach. Therefore, the curriculum that I am teaching makes education real and relevant.”

Julia: “I've learned about some of the socio-linguistic aspects of Vietnamese people such as how they address people with personal pronouns. This knowledge is important for understanding the communication styles of our students and their families. Also, just as important is the knowledge we have gained about Vietnamese traditions and customs so that we can create culturally appropriate lessons-in other words be able to better relate the curriculum to students’ backgrounds.”

Cultural Of Success

The interviews revealed there is a culture of success when it comes to creating lesson plans through culturally responsive teaching. The interviews demonstrated that the teachers who participated in the study feel their schools need to provide professional development in order for educators to be knowledgeable about how to develop culturally responsive lessons. The interviews illustrate that teachers need guidance in order to incorporate CRE; all teachers in the American school system cannot go on a trip abroad to learn about the cultures of all students in their classrooms. There must be basic professional development on how to relate curriculum to culture by teachers in order to make teaching relevant to the child. The data exposed the deficiencies regarding teacher preparedness for implementing culturally responsive lesson plans for diverse populations. The data told a story of the totality of mostly insufficient groundwork that is laid for American teachers to efficaciously implement CRE.

Lessons from Vietnam

The teachers received daily instruction in the Vietnamese language. It is through this exposure that they learned first-hand what it is like to be in a foreign land and immersed in the local culture and language. A participant said, “I would have to say that I was in shock, homesick, and basically felt lost. I couldn’t get the tones correct because it is a tonal language. I wanted to cry”. The teachers made school visits and met with Vietnamese educators also who were integral components of the overseas phase. Finally, in the post-travel portion of the trip they shared what they learned with their local school districts.

These teachers were given unique experiences visiting museums, world heritage sites, villages, parks, and much more in order to develop a sense of what Vietnam is ranging from the northern region to the southern region. The journey started in Thai Nguyen City north of Hanoi and in 6 week time the group had covered many regions, ending in Ho Chi Minh City. They attended many lectures by knowledgeable professionals at two different universities where teachers learned about such topics as education, economics; ethnic groups, history, and geography, to name a few.
Even though the teachers had a sound footing on what it takes to produce successful learners, not all had the background as admitted on their behalf to tackle the enormous job of developing lesson plans that were culturally responsive for Vietnamese students back in the NYC public school system. One teacher stated, “I really had no idea what my students go through until I came to Vietnam. I can't speak the language and I don't understand the culture; imagine what those kids coming into the American school system must be feeling” (personal communication, July 15, 2013). It was an eye-opening experience for many on the trip as they realized the full impact of what it means to learn a new language and adapt to new surroundings. A participant stated, “imagine the pressure American students are under in order to pass NYSESLAT need to define the Acronym and Regents exams in English. There is no way I could pass that kind of exam in Vietnamese.” The lesson plans are unique examples of teachers being students in order to fully grasp who their students are and what cultural artifacts are important to them in order to learn in the American school system.

**Summary of Data Analysis and Themes**

The themes of historical culture, culture of curriculum, and culture of success revolve around the significance of people who are both in the past and present as individuals and societies. These themes denote the importance of realizing tenets of culture in education if students are going to be productive and thriving members of the workforce and local and global society. The themes tell a story of the American student of today; it is not solely restricted to the discussion of Vietnamese immigrant students in the American Diaspora. The changing demographics of the American school system beg that teachers revisit how they create lesson plans in order to make what is being taught user-friendly for diverse student populations. The teachers who participated in this study learned about Vietnam first-hand which afforded them the opportunity to collect artifacts and gain exposure to the Vietnamese culture and language. The triangulated data resulted in the categorization of the aforementioned distinct themes. The themes are emblematic of what should guide CRE in order to transform education so as to connect to the lives of students and make learning a meaningful experience that translates into societal growth and improvement.

The experiences that these teachers acquired in Vietnam developed cross-cultural learning in that the teachers were forced to inspect and re-evaluate how they looked at schooling because they were temporarily placed in the situation of being the immigrants; they were the immigrants trying to learn the language and communicate with the local people and buy food in the market and go to school every day and expected to do well on the written and oral exams. The teachers were temporary immigrants; they had to read, write, and communicate in Vietnamese. They had to go to the local markets and shops using their limited L2 language skills. All of the teachers agreed that their structured learning experiences in the classrooms were most relevant when instructors/lecturers understood aspects of how to teach I accordance to their learning style and when instructors would clarify information in English.

The teachers developed an appreciation for what immigrant students experience when entering this country and expected to perform well and pass exams in America. Teachers developed cross-cultural learning when they are expected to do it; they develop cross-cultural learning when they are given the professional development. It isn't feasible for all teachers to go on excursions overseas in order to participate in schooling and basic daily living in order to gain cross-cultural awareness but American schools could do a much a better job in providing the
much needed professional development that would enlighten them on how to effectively instruct diverse populations. The information that can be gleaned from this research for US teachers, international students and scholars alike is that learning in the classroom is not the same experience for all students. Teachers need to know who their students are and make sure there is a connection.

The lesson plans were initially intended for Vietnamese students who are English language learners yet it became apparent that these lessons would be valuable for Vietnamese American students who want to reconnect with certain aspects of their Vietnamese heritage. In addition, the lessons could be a valuable tool in educating any students about the culture of Vietnam.

The excursion to Vietnam was meant to provide this cohort of teachers with experiences in order to probe their understanding of CRE and how to incorporate it into their lesson plan development for the Vietnamese students in their schools. All of the questions were developed with the basic tenets of Dewey in mind; Dewey's philosophy of education can be seen as a forerunner to CRE. The teachers used the template (See Appendix B) to guide them in lesson plan creation. They used all of their experiences in learning Vietnamese and being exposed to the local culture(s) and people to create these lessons for the children of Vietnam who have made their new homes in the United States.

CRE means the teacher must “find a way to take the standards based content or curriculum and make it accessible to students…. incorporating student’s daily life, prior knowledge, music, sports, language, and any other interests into the curriculum so that the student feels comfortable enough to try and learn the content because it appears easy to understand” (retrieved from: http://ghspacers.com/create/culture.html, February 22, 2014). Through the culturally responsive line of questioning and lesson plan development the importance of Dewey’s philosophy came to life, “we do not learn from experience...we learn from reflecting on experience.”

Discussion and Conclusions

Johns Dewey stated, “We do not learn from experience...we learn from reflecting on experience” (Dewey, 1916, p. 3). If given the opportunity to use their previous knowledge and experiences to try to help them learn what is being taught, students will make social connections, the points of significance that endure will make learning a real part of their existence. Dewey’s stated in his research on ethics and education “education is the totality which can be separated into different fields, or specific educational actions are summarized in education as a whole... defining education as a social function which exists within the structure and functionality of this society which it strengthens, reproduces and changes”(Karafillis, 2012). Social and cultural implications are a part of the foundation of a fortified education which in turn builds formidable minds.

The purpose of the Fulbright-Hayes trip was to immerse American teachers in the culture and language of Vietnam in order to better understand their Vietnamese students in the American Diaspora. The lesson plans are examples of how to engage in socio-cultural and linguistic activities in order to better understand what all English language learners experience in a new culture and language. The lesson plans that were created are exemplars for how to look at a culture and integrate such into curriculum; the practice of integrating culture into curriculum is what Dewey called making “education life itself” and this is the central idea of Culturally Responsive Education.

If we as educators want students to succeed in schools and ultimately build a strong,
erudite America society then the proper environment must exist for them in our classrooms. Dewey specifies the importance of environment. “He explicitly widens the scope of environment beyond location: the words —environment and —medium denote something more than surroundings that encompass an individual. They denote —the specific continuity of the surroundings with his own active tendencies: that is, the things that are noticeable to or important to a person” (Jayanandhan, 2009). If we as educators modify conditions in the classroom to meet the needs of diverse student populations and make our instruction culturally responsive through properly, well thought-out lesson plans everyone benefits: the school, the home, the society. Dewey's views on education are true to education being a reflection of life itself He thought education to be a communal experience that sourced its energy from its linkage to culture in all of its aspects. This basic precept of Dewey guided a group of teachers from metro-New York/Long Island on a trip through Vietnam, utilizing basic strategies of Culturally Responsive Education to create unique lessons to instruct the children of Vietnam in the Diaspora and hopefully to teach all those who wish to explore and experience an urbane example of cross-cultural learning. Society is changed for the better when the social function of the school is unified with the goals of humanity.

**Implications**

The implications of this research is that teachers who are charged with teaching English language learners will take the time to understand and learn about the backgrounds of their students. Teachers can accomplish two things simultaneously: promote Common Core aligned lesson plans and make their lessons culturally responsive; both elements are intricately connected to student success through making education real and relevant for students. As Dewey has taught us through his philosophical writings, education must be reflective of life itself. Further implications are that educators will realize that ELL students require assessments that are not just culturally responsive but what I would call culturally responsible. Testing of ELL students will not just be about entering and exiting ESL programs but about what the student actually has learned, through connecting the points of each students’ history and accomplishments to the English language and what education means for each individual. This article focused on making lesson plans culturally responsive for Vietnamese students in the American Diaspora by a group of American teachers is an opportunity for us all to visualize how important it is to acknowledge that English language learners come to the classroom with many experiences and the background knowledge to be successful; it is not just a piece of research about Vietnamese students in the American Diaspora, it is research that can help all English language learners in the American Diaspora.

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AUTHOR

CYNTHIA DOUGLAS, PhD, is a professor of education. Adjunct professor whose research interests are SIFE students, teacher training, curriculum development and the psychology of language and bilingualism. Email: douglac3@stjohns.edu

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Taboo or Tabula Rasa: Cross-Racial/Cultural Dating Preferences amongst Chinese, Japanese, and Korean International Students in an American University

Zachary S. Ritter, PhD
University of Redlands (USA)

Abstract

International students bring racial attitudes and group preferences that affect campus climates. Forty-seven Chinese, Japanese, and Korean college international students were interviewed, regarding their perceptions of race/ethnicity and nationality, when it comes to dating and romantic relationships on college campuses. Thirty-five out of forty-seven students interviewed said they would ideally want to date someone from their own cultural background, so that communication gaps would not occur, but when probed beyond language barriers, international students appeared to have a racial hierarchy when it came to dating. Students were not only influenced by parental approval of dating partners, but also US media images that helped create a racial hierarchy of dating and cultural capital. White Americans were the most desirable dating partner for Chinese, Japanese, and Korean international students; Asian-Americans were slightly below white Americans, while African-American, Latino, and Southeast Asian students were the least desirous.

Keywords: Interracial dating, Asian international students, Cross-cultural interactions, Racial attitudes, Stereotype reduction

Chinese, Japanese, and Korean international students bring with them racial stereotypes that affect who they choose to befriend and date (Ritter, 2013). These racial stereotypes often stem from a complex history of race relations, as illustrated by football player Hines Ward’s life. “I’m a half-Korean. I will do my best for the Korean community. My (Korean) mother’s blood flows in my body” (Ahn, 2013). Hines Ward, a mixed heritage African-American and Korean National Football League (NFL) player addressed a Korean audience, as he visited Korea, for the first time. His visit triggered a discussion of Korea’s troubled history of mixed-race relations, signaling a new awareness of racial politics in Korea (Ahn, 2013). His mother was a waitress and his father was an American soldier stationed in South Korea. They moved to America when Ward was one year old, because his mother’s family was ashamed of her marriage to a black
man. When the newly desegregated American military arrived in Korea, during the Korean War (1950-1953), Korean civilians were influenced by white GI’s racial attitudes of white superiority and black inferiority. The adoption of negative black stereotypes stemmed from Koreans’ fear of ‘regressing’ back into a perceived dark-skinned third world status, in a world composed of a black, white, and Asian global hierarchy (Russell, 1991).

Korean society’s embrace of Ward’s blackness (only on the grounds that he embraced his mother’s Koreanness more) illustrates the racial divides that still exist in transnational romantic relationships as well as the racism mixed heritage individuals often face in East Asia. Ward’s bloodline was always in question because of his dark skin; therefore, he had to prove his Koreanness by demonstrating that he ate kimchi, and that he had a close bond with his mother (whom he bought a mansion for and decorated it in a Korean style). Interethnic marriages comprised eleven percent of marriages in Korea in 2007, but many of these unions were Vietnamese and Filipina brides seeking better lives with Korean men, in the Korean countryside (Le, 2011). While intermarriage in East Asian cities continues to be somewhat taboo, American rates of intermarriage are increasing, albeit slowly.

In the 2012-2013 academic year, US college enrollment of international students rose to 819,644 students (Institute of International Education, 2013). As Chinese, Japanese, and Korean international students become a larger portion of the U.S. higher education landscape (194,029, 19,966, 72,295, respectively, studied in the U.S. in 2011/2012 academic year), there must be more research looking at all aspects of how international students are changing U.S. campus racial climates (Institute of International Education, 2013). As this population grows, researchers must take a closer look at racial attitudes of these students who will be future employers and will assume positions of power in both America and their home countries. Additionally, if higher education faculty and administrators hope to promote a democratic multicultural society (Gutmann, 1999) and a culture of racial tolerance (UC Diversity Mission Statement, 2014), we must understand international students’ perceptions toward interracial/interethnic romantic dating.

Racial and Status Hierarchy Theory

Racial and status hierarchies greatly affect Chinese, Japanese, and Korean international students’ romantic partner choice process (Ritter, 2013). Grant and Lee (2009) explain that many Korean immigrants view the American racial landscape in the frame of Bonilla-Silva’s (2004) Tri-Racial System. There are whites, honorary whites, and collective blacks in this schema, which resembles Latin or Caribbean-like racial orders. Whites occupy the highest standing and possess the largest cultural capital. Honorary whites are somewhat accepted by the white community and have gained this prestigious space in society through educational attainment, income, occupational level, and skin color. Honorary whites and collective blacks feud to gain access to the honorary white class. International students may gain access to the societal prestige, by learning English well, earning a degree from an American college, and befriending socially desirous out-group members (Grant & Lee, 2009). East Asian international students who study in the West, oftentimes, gain cultural, economic, and social capital by doing so, thus, improving their social standing in the US and abroad.

An unfortunate by-product of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean international students’ desire to improve their social status is the adoption of negative stereotypes that the American dominant social groups tend to perpetuate through media and other outlets. The collective black
group (which includes some Latinos, Southeast Asians, and other marginalized groups) is relegated to the bottom totem of the racial hierarchy, which is observed and internalized by international students. To compound this problem, Chinese, Japanese, and Korean international students often lack a deep understanding of racial apartheid, slavery, historical and modern institutional racism, which has led to the economic disenfranchisement of many African-Americans. Instead, some international students think that personal incompetence and misfortune have led to black incarceration and poverty (Grant & Lee, 2009). International students, when studying in the U.S, tend to distance themselves from collective blacks, in order to gain acceptance into the honorary white category (Bonilla-Silva, 2004), which can have deleterious effects for college campus climates and cross-cultural/racial understanding, as illustrated below in the literature review.

Literature Review

Interracial/International Dating and Marriage in China, Japan, and Korea

As China’s economy has become more globalized, mixed marriages have increased (Murphy, 2013), thus possibly influencing the racial attitudes Chinese international students bring with them to the U.S. A large number of Chinese youth have experienced conservative attitudes toward romantic relationships, but since 1990 (the opening of the modern Chinese economy), Western dating influences have resulted in a normalization of heterosexual relations at a younger age (Zheng, Zhou, Zhou, Liu, Li & Hesketh, 2011). One ethnographic study found that Shanghai women perceive relationships with western men as an opportunity for romantic and sexual experimentation outside of traditional Chinese gender roles and expectations, as well as a way to possibly garner transnational cultural capital (Carmel, 2004). In the 1980s Chinese women who dated foreign men could lose their jobs, be kicked out of university, or banished to the countryside (Farrer, 2010). But by 2000, many university administrators in Shanghai began turning a blind eye to the sexual behaviors of college students (Farrer, 2006). In 2012, there were 53,000 registered marriages in China, between Chinese and foreign nationals, indicating a drastic change from 1978, when there were zero (Murphy, 2013). White westerners (more commonly men) appear to be more desired by Chinese nationals, over poorer African immigrants, because they are viewed as having higher levels of education, do not have the racial stigma associated with blackness (Yeebo, 2013), and are believed to have greater wealth (Murphy, 2013).

In Korea, in 2005, marriages to foreigners accounted for 14 percent of all marriages in South Korea, up from 4 percent in 2000 (Onishi, 2007). A booming industry which finds Vietnamese and Filipino brides for rural Korean men have led to about 19,000 Vietnamese women immigrating as brides (Le, 2011). However, cross-cultural misunderstandings, feelings of ethnic superiority on the part of some Koreans, and mentally ill husbands have led to multiple cases of Southeast Asian brides being murdered by their spouses (Le, 2011); forcing Korean officials to look more seriously at issues of diversity and assimilation (Le, 2011). As illustrated in the study below, we find that a majority of Korean international students did view Southeast Asians and Africans/African-Americans as less desirous to date, which is closely tied with attitudes toward these two groups in Korea.

Japanese students, in the current study, proved to be the most liberal in their attitudes toward mixed marriages, which may be explained by the economic and cultural closeness Japan has had with the U.S since World War II. In Japan, the number of interracial marriages is
increasing more slowly compared to Korea, with 5 percent (40,154 interethnic marriages out of 735, 132) interracial marriages in 2006. As in rural Korea, we see predominantly Filipina (12,150) and female Chinese (12,131) brides coming to Japan for a better life, while only 1,474 marriages were between US men and Japanese women in 2006 (Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2006). In an effort to tackle the problem of declining birth rates and a larger population of immigrant workers, in 2010, Korea introduced a dual nationality law that grants citizenship to children born out of international unions. And in 2008, Japan passed a law allowing citizenship to a child born to a Japanese father and a foreign mother (Chung & Kim, 2012). While China, Japan, and Korea, have histories of racial superiority, racial purity myths, and xenophobia (Dikotter, 1997; Kim, 2008), modern trends of declining birth rates (in Japan), and a globalizing world, may be resulting in more liberal attitudes toward international and interracial marriages.

Romantic Dating Preferences Based on Race

Students from China, Japan, and Korea are influenced by the international trends in interracial dating, but they are affected by American trends as well. Fujino (1997) and Yancey (2002) found that interracial dating among Americans was more common when both identity group members had been exposed to each other’s out-group at a young age, either through schooling or common neighborhoods. Research of American youth, indicate that interracial and interethnic daters were more likely to have lower levels of prejudice toward racial out-groups and were more willing to befriend and live with racial out-groups (Mok, 1999). College students who exhibited lower levels of in-group favoritism, intergroup anxiety, and in-group identification before coming to college, were more likely to date racial out-groups during college (Levin, Taylor, & Claude, 2007). Parental approval also played a role in inter-racial dating, in so far as Asian-Americans, Latinos, and white American college students were more likely to date within their own ethnic group when they perceived that their parents, as well as the parents of their romantic partner, would approve of inter-group dating (Edmonds & Killen, 2009; Field, Kimuna, & Straus, 2013; Liu, Campbell, & Condie, 1995).

In Liu, Campbell, and Condie’s study (1995), Asian-American and Latino students rated opposite-sex whites as more attractive than members of their own in-group. Furthermore, Latinos and African-Americans rated whites and Asian-Americans as having a higher status, which was mostly defined as education and income. The perceived attractiveness and high status of Asian-American and white students illustrated that these two groups were perceived to be highest on a social and racial hierarchy (Feliciano, Robnett, & Komaie, 2009).

Research Method

Forty-seven semi-structured interviews (60-90 minutes in length) were conducted with twenty-three Chinese students, thirteen Japanese students, eight Korean students, two Hong Kong students, and one Taiwanese student. Each student who was interviewed was given a pseudonym to protect his/her identity. Data was analyzed through a constant comparative method (Glaser, 1965), whereby each coded theme was compared to the prior coded theme. In time, themes reached a point of saturation where additional ones did not add new insight to the analysis (Jones, Torres, & Armino, 2006). The researcher conducted three stages of coding: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).
## Table 1
Student Participants by Age, Gender, College Level, Time in the US and College Major

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Home</th>
<th>College Level</th>
<th>Time in US</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Living</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rex</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>3-4 years</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>On</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhun</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>1-3 years</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>Off</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rui</td>
<td>19</td>
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The study was conducted at University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), due to the ethnic and international diversity of the campus. It was part of a larger study that looked at racial stereotypes of East Asian international students in general, but the topic of interracial dating came to be quite significant. In the 2011/2012 academic year, UCLA was ranked sixth in the nation, when it came to international student populations, with 2,761 Chinese students, 1112 Korean students, and 322 Japanese students. Undergraduate and graduate international students made up six percent of the total UCLA population (40,675) (UCLA Open Doors Report, 2013). Graduate and undergraduate students were interviewed in order to get a variety of responses. The research question is as follows: How do racial/ethnic stereotypes of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean international students influence their perceptions of interracial/interethnic dating?

Students were recruited from the Dashew UCLA International Center, through a combination of purposeful and snowball sampling to participate in the semi-structured interviews (Babbie, 2007). The International Center has various American culture workshops, an international-domestic big buddy program, and language circles where international students teach their native language to domestic students.

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher using Microsoft Word and a hand held tape recorder. Interviews were all conducted in English by a Caucasian interviewer, which may have affected interviewee responses, however, similar responses were found in other studies that had Caucasian and Asian-American interviewers (Kim, 2008; Talbot, Geelhoed, & Ninggal, 1999). Memo-writing was conducted during and after interviews in order to capture thoughts, analytical leads, and assumptions (Charmaz, 2001).

In order to add a level of trustworthiness and validity to the study, the researcher utilized the technique of member checking. This involves reiterating information given by respondents in order to make sure the researcher understands his/her participants’ thoughts, feelings, and ideas (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Students were able to request the transcripts of their interview at any point and change their responses, if desired.

Findings

Asian International Students’ Attitudes Toward Dating White-Americans

The predominant view toward dating was that marrying within one’s own ethnicity was the most practical and comfortable (as also reported in Levin, Taylor, & Claude, 2007). But when considering dating outside one’s race/ethnicity, a majority interviewed, were interested in dating white people (similar to the findings in Feliciano, Robnett, & Komaie, 2009; Tsunokai, McGrath, & Kavanagh, 2013). Behao, a Chinese undergraduate economics major living in the U.S. for three months, explained that if a Chinese woman has a white husband, in China, that was considered “honorable.” Behao said it was closely linked to perceived status based on skin color and a Western archetype of beauty: “The first impression thing, when we see a white person we see well-educated, rich, and tall.” This snap judgment approach of associating whiteness with positive traits was expressed by thirty percent interviewed. The desire to want to date a white person was often based on global racial and economic hierarchy (Brown, 2000; Kim, 2011; Grant & Lee, 2003; Marginson, 2008; Marginson & Sawir, 2005).

All three students who dated white students, were comfortable with English, were well adjusted to life in America, had attended several years of high school in America, and planned to live in the US long-term. A Chinese graduate student, Han, was well acculturated to life in
America and also had a white girlfriend. He was a material science graduate student, living in the U.S. for three years. He explained that he was attracted to white women, not because they represented a position of high status in society, but because he liked their physical appearance and their open communication style. Asian women’s faces were too flat and round, in his opinion, but white women’s faces were “three-dimensional.” He clarified that all races and ethnicities could be attractive, but that he preferred white women. This was partly due to the media’s glamorization of white women, but it also had to do with ways of communicating within relationships: “White girls are more open. When there is something wrong they will tell you, but Chinese girls will hide their feelings.”

Han was representative of students who had been in America three years or more, who felt that they were becoming global citizens or more Asian-American. Thus, it was not exactly the act of being in a relationship with a white-American that made these students more open-minded and improved their English, rather they already had these traits prior to entering the relationship. Interestingly enough, these three students explained that they did not deliberately seek out white-American partners, but they said unconsciously that societal influences of beauty and status played into their romantic choice.

Asian International Students’ Attitudes Toward Dating African-Americans

This racial/status hierarchy and negative attitude toward dating African-Americans also affected Chinese international students’ views. Zhun, a Chinese graduate engineer living in the U.S. for three months explained what she perceived to be a dominant Chinese racial hierarchy:

I think in [Chinese] people’s minds there is a ranking where there are black boys, white boys, and Asian boys. Well, Chinese people think that Africa is comparatively poor and America is richer so it is better to have a white boyfriend. And Chinese people think that white is the most beautiful. Like if you are white there is a saying… that [being] white can cover up all your ugliness. So we think white is a beautiful color for girls. Boys like girls whose skin is white…So we buy products that make us more white.

Zhun’s explanation conflated African-American and African men. In her view, black skin was synonymous with poverty, whereas whiteness was associated with western industrialized nations and wealth. Zhun’s words reflected Bonilla-Silva’s (2004) racial hierarchy as well as a fear of slipping back into a Chinese third world status, which was connoted by blackness (Russell, 1991). Dating a black person was thought to lead someone to become part of the collective black group, and possibly lessen their social and cultural capital. Chinese students seemed to be more tolerant than Korean students, when it came to dating racial out-groups, but there was still a prevailing unease when it came to dating African-Americans amongst all Asian international students.

Himal, a Korean post-doc visiting scholar in the sciences, represents Korean international students who did not attend international schools and was not exposed to racial/cultural diversity growing up. She did not have much contact with African-American people and was heavily influenced by the film The Gods Must Be Crazy. This comedic film depicted African men as uneducated hunters from the rural areas of Africa. A majority of international students were influenced by media portrayals of Africans and African-Americans as being criminals, uneducated, athletes, or rap artists, which often led to social distancing. She commented that she
would not date or marry a black person not only because of her stereotypes, but because of the discrimination her child would face if he/she were half-black:

I would worry for my daughter’s future if she had dark skin. Korea would not accept her. If I think about [the] second generation, it does matter. If it was just me with some guy, it doesn’t matter, but thinking about the next generation, I wouldn’t marry.

Himal felt that raising a family with a black person meant that her child would be discriminated against in Korea, possibly like NFL player Hines Ward’s mother experienced. For Himal, skin color was closely linked with wealth, status, and class; therefore, having a black child would hinder her child’s chances of success in Korea. When asked if she would marry a Japanese or Chinese person, Himal explained that she would be open to it because historical animosities and Japanese colonization was a thing of the past. She explained that “nowadays, maybe Korea will become wealthier than Japan. Why should I hate Japanese people?” This response illustrated that economic status of countries was almost more important than ethnicity. Himal, and three other Korean students, spent a significant amount of time comparing different country’s gross domestic products (GDP) and explaining that Korea was surpassing other countries because of Korean people’s hard working culture and parental emphasis on education (Apple, 2000; Kim, 2011). Himal was forty-five-years-old and represented the three older international students in the study, who were less open to diversity, grew up in a less globalized Korea (Vandrick, 2011). Nonetheless, younger Korean students seemed to harbor the most negative views toward Latinos and African-Americans out of the three nationality groups interviewed.

Attitudes Toward Dating Latinos

Many international students interviewed knew very little about Latino people, but quickly learned from observations in everyday life and American media. Linzy, who had lived in the U.S. for 4 years, indicated that she was not interested in dating Latino men because they had a different lifestyle and culture than her own. When pressed as to what this really meant, she said she had seen white boys who had Korean girlfriends and they were really sweet and affectionate to them. But she never saw Latino men date her Korean friends (this behavior was not normalized in her mind), thus it was something that was taboo and unknown. She said she had negative stereotypes toward Latinos because whenever she went to restaurants, they were “the people washing dishes and doing all the dirty work, right? So I guess that is like how the country discriminates against them. Because most of them are illegal immigrants, right?” Here, it appears that dating outside of the Asian-white paradigm may be a status lowering activity (Apple, 2000; Kim, 2011).

Another Korean undergraduate student who had been in America for 3 months, Dae, said she was influenced by a film that portrayed Mexicans as illegal immigrants as well as her cousin’s words of caution that Mexican people were likely to break into her car and steal her belongings. These racial stereotypes were combined with a lack of understanding about American race relations and historical disparities between racial groups, as evidenced by a Korean humanities graduate student’s words. Jay, a Korean political science graduate student explained that: “…they don’t pay attention to education. Japanese, Chinese, and Korean society
has frenzy for higher education. But I was told that the Latino people are not so interested in pursuing higher education or studying hard.”

Jay compares the culture of East Asians as one of hard work ethic and educational attainment, which stands in stark contrast to his perceived cultural values of Latinos. International students knew little about this racial out-group, but quickly started putting information they gleaned from everyday life to understand this new racial landscape in the US. Students who had taken diversity courses (four graduate students) and had prolonged engagement with Latino classmates explained that they felt a connection with Latino students. They felt that both Latinos and Asian internationals had strong Christian morals, family values, and a strong work ethic. On the whole, Latinos occupied a liminal space on international students’ racial hierarchies below Asians, but above African-Americans as dating partners.

**Asian Internationals’ Attitudes Toward Dating Asians and Asian-Americans**

A majority of students indicated that they would be comfortable dating Asian-American students of their own ethnic background (Levin, Taylor, & Claude, 2007), but felt that Asian-American students did not want to date them because of the cultural divide between international and domestic students. Additionally, when it came to inter-Asian international dating, historical conflicts and parental messages were potent factors in the decision making process (Edmonds & Killen, 2009; Field, Kimuna, & Straus, 2013; Liu, Campbell, & Condie, 1995). Stereotypes of a given Asian international ethnic group were often conflated with an Asian-American ethnic group.

Amy, a Chinese humanities graduate student from Nanjing, explained that her parents would not be pleased if she dated a Japanese national or a Japanese-American person because members of her family were killed during the massacre of Nanjing during World War II. As Peng (2010) indicated, many Chinese citizens believed that Japanese were cruel, cunning, and mean, due to the massacres committed during World War II. Similarly, Takahashi, a Japanese humanities undergraduate living in America for three years, was open to dating American minority groups and white Americans, but knew that marrying a Korean-American or Chinese-American person would have detrimental effects for him in the future:

> Because a lot of Japanese people have a negative view toward [Chinese and Korean people], if I marry them, then my social status would go down, my reputation. ‘Oh he is marrying a Chinese or Korean, that is abnormal or unusual,’ people might think. But Black, Latino, or white, they don't have negative views of them, so I think it is ok to marry them.

Japanese students in the study tended to be more liberal toward dating domestic students than Chinese or Korean international students. Over half of the international students interviewed saw Asian-Americans as having a white middle-class American culture, with a mix of a national ethnic culture as well. This led to erroneous transnational ethnic stereotypes, wherein Asian international students applied their learned stereotypes of Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans from their home country, to Asian-Americans. International students, who were new to the country (lived here three months or less), and/or had little contact with Asian-Americans, were more likely to link an Asian national stereotype with that of an Asian-American ethnic group.
Even when it came to Asian-American and Asian international dating, status, wealth, and power dynamics came into play. Min, a Taiwanese humanities graduate student, living in the US for five years, explained why he felt Asian-American women were not interested in dating Asian internationals and more inclined to date American-born-Chinese men: Because they “want to pursue a higher status” partner.

Min attributed American born Chinese women’s lack of interest in dating Asian international students to status differences. He considered Asian-Americans to be part of the honorary whites’ group that held more social and cultural capital than Asian internationals (Bourdieu, 1986; Bonilla-Silva, 2004); therefore, he believed Chinese-American women may be more attracted to Asian-American men.

This dynamic of status also played a role in East Asian international students’ perceptions of dating Southeast Asians. Ally, a 19 year-old Hong Kong science undergraduate student who had several residential life leadership roles, explained that she would not date her Burmese-American co-worker because “a person from Manhattan would not date a Brooklyn person. Those uptown girls don't date Brooklyn guys.” There was a perceived economic difference, where she was the Manhattan, upper class woman, who would not dare think of dating a lower-class Brooklyn man. But thinly veiled, beneath this analogy was a long history of racial/ethnic superiority, colonialism, and a dark-light skin dichotomy between East Asians and Southeast Asians (Dikotter, 1997; He, 2005; Johnson, 2007; Liu, 2006). She conflated ethnicity and socio-economic status because she went on to say that Southeast Asians usually represented poverty and were involved with drugs. She said, “we want to date [someone from] a better social class. I would love to make friends with them, but when it comes to dating, it is totally another issue.” Ally went through diversity training with the office of residential life and she thought of herself as very tolerant of others. She explained that many of her friends were from various racial/ethnic backgrounds; however, Ally held prejudices toward Southeast Asians that could affect how she treats others in her role as a student leader.

Discussion

Thirty-five out of forty-seven students interviewed said they would ideally want to date someone from their own cultural background so that language and communication gaps would not occur. These students exhibited more in-group favoritism, thus they were less likely to date outside their nationality group (Levin, Taylor, & Claude, 2007). Almost all students in the study said they were accepting of other people dating interracially and that mixed heritage children, especially Caucasian and Asian children were beautiful. However, when asked if they would date someone who was African-American, Latino, or Southeast Asian, students were very hesitant to say they would date these groups because these three groups represented lower socio-economic status groups in American and their home countries (Feliciano, Robnett, & Komaie, 2009; Tsunokai, McGrath, & Kavanagh, 2013). Students explained that they did not want to appear racist and that they believed that all people should be treated equally. But racial socialization processes in their home countries and parental views toward culture and race were major factors that went into the dating decision making process (Edmonds & Killen, 2009; Field, Kimuna & Straus, 2013).

Japanese students were more open to Latino or African-American people, compared to Korean or Chinese students. This finding may be explained by the high English proficiency levels, socially liberal attitudes, Americanization of Japanese culture (Beck, Sznайдer, & Winter,
2003; Franz & Smulyan, 2012) and the larger presence of American ex-patriots in Japan. Korean students seemed to be the least open to interracial dating, which may be explained by the historical homogeneity of Korea (Kim, 2008). Chinese students were somewhere in the middle (between Japanese and Korean students), in their openness toward interracial dating, which may be a result of the rapid economic rise of China combined with an influx of foreign investors and various ethnic groups to China (Montalvo & Reynal-Querol, 2005).

Chinese, Japanese, and Korean international students indicated that Asian-American students were uninterested in dating Asian international students because of a perceived status difference. They considered Asian-Americans to be part of the honorary whites’ group that held more social and cultural capital than Asian internationals (Bourdieu, 1986; Bonilla-Silva, 2004). It appears as though Asian international students were striving to become part of the honorary white category (Bonilla-Silva, 2004), by earning a degree in America and befriending and dating students with perceived cultural capital (Asian-American and white students).

Of the three students who did date interracially, all expressed the importance interracial dating has in stereotype reduction. Gaertner and Dovidio (2000) Recategorization Model calls for out-group and in-group members to re-imagine their social groupings and to form new ones based on common in-group identities. These three interracial couples began to see their partners in a less racialized lens, making new categories for their romantic partners that went beyond race.

**Limitations**

A limitation in this study was the lack of deeper analysis regarding the heterogeneity that exists within the Chinese, Japanese, and Korean populations being studied. The literature review paints a historical picture of bias and racism, but this does not mean that the ideas expressed in the interviews were held by all East Asian international students. The study illustrated that some students from China, Japan, and Korea did have racist attitudes; however, this was only a qualitative study of 47 students. The study by no means seeks to indicate that all students from these countries hold negative attitudes toward American racial minority groups. In order to be more generalizable, there must be a quantitative study, with a larger population size, that includes more Asian countries.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

This research begs the question of whether these results would have been different if white-American students were asked similar questions regarding their stereotypes. Asian international students are not socialized in an American environment where the ghost of slavery and Jim Crow are taught in k-12 education, thus international students may not fully understand the troubled history of U.S. race relations and they may also not use politically correct language when discussing race. American college students may hold similar global racial hierarchies, but have been taught to speak in a politically correct manner, when talking about people with darker skin or non-white features (Norton, Sommers, Apfelbaum, Pura, & Ariely, 2006), whereas Asian international students may filter their speech less, when discussing racial biases. One way to ameliorate this issue is not to teach international students how to adopt a politically correct lexicon, but to teach classes that discuss racial politics and civil rights movements in America,
deconstruct Hollywood portrayals of racial groups, and teach inter-cultural communication skills.

UCLA International Center programs have been effective in exposing international students to racial diversity; however, there must be a more concerted effort to expose and educate East Asian International students about African-American and Latino heritage and history (Chang, 2002; Hurtado, Dey, Gurin, & Gurin, 2003). The Intergroup Dialogue Program created at the University of Michigan, encourages students to challenge their racial perceptions through experiential learning, talking about privilege and oppression and conducting community action projects that bring together disparate racial communities. UCLA International Center programs such as Global Siblings, which pairs international students with domestic student mentors should be expanded. Additionally, themed on-campus housing, where international students and domestic students have programs around mutual cultural learning can be effective at stereotype reduction. It would also be beneficial to have an American history/government requirement for international students, which discusses race relations in a US context (Lin & Yi, 1997). A stronger multicultural curriculum in the k-12 system in East Asian countries would also be beneficial.

Asian international students are coming to America with a racial hierarchy (Ritter & Roth, 2014), which may also perpetuate racial hierarchies and affect how and with whom they date. Student affairs officers and policy makers should discuss American racial stereotypes in orientation sessions, encourage international students to take diversity courses, create programs that allow international and domestic students to positively interact, and create housing accommodations that allow for cross-racial contact and prejudice reduction to take place.

REFERENCES


**AUTHOR**

**ZACHARY S. RITTER**, PhD, is an Associate Director of Campus Diversity and Inclusion and an Adjunct Professor in the School of Education, University of Redlands, CA. Email: zack_ritter@redlands.edu

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Kilimanjaro: A Case of Meaningful Adventure And Service Learning Abroad

Cathy Cavanaugh, PhD  
Microsoft Corporation (USA)  
Ewa Gajer, PhD  
Higher Colleges of Technology (UAE)  
John Mayberry, PhD  
University of the Pacific (USA)  
Brendan O’Connor, MEd  
Higher Colleges of Technology (UAE)  
Jace Hargis, PhD  
Chaminade University Honolulu (USA)

Abstract

This qualitative evaluation explored how female undergraduate students developed an understanding of themselves and the broader world as a result of an adventure and service learning experience in Tanzania, Africa. The project built upon theoretical frameworks regarding meaningful learning—active, constructive, intentional, and authentic—and applied activity theory as a framework for interpreting outcomes. The study included multi-faceted examination of student perceptions of the effects of the year-long experience that culminated in a ten day trip to Tanzania, including a climb to the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro. Students’ reflections on the impacts of the trip focused on wanting, doing, reflecting, and relating. Thus, the experience catalyzed change in students’ understanding of the world that strongly indicates a meaningful learning experience.

Keywords: Learning abroad, Adventure learning, Activity theory, Meaningful learning

Instilling the capacity in graduates for teamwork, problem-solving, intercultural understanding, and global awareness has been central among the goals of higher education as articulated by employers and government agencies in recent years (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2009; UNESCO, 2000; UAE MOHESR, 2007; AAC&U, 2011). Learning experiences provided by undergraduate colleges that have a liberal education approach align well with these goals. A liberal education prepares graduates to “deal with complexity, diversity, and change” (AAC&U,
2011, p.3) by integrating knowledge of the world and social responsibility into a field of study. These capacities must be developed in authentic contexts that counter the “natural habitat” of many urban college students: indoors, using devices, traveling in climate controlled transport through very little green space, and exercising in gyms (US Department of Labor, 2013). Stretching students outside of their comfort zone provides experiences that counteract “nature-deficit disorder” (Louv, 2005).

Structured educational travel experiences, including adventure learning trips, have become a strategy used in colleges and universities for developing valuable personal growth (Sterling, 2010). There are many benefits reported for student wilderness travel, such as increased awareness of one’s current group, surroundings, and the experience itself. It also leads to a mindfulness due to a focus on the experience as well as formation of supportive long-term bonds and results in increased college retention, improved self-awareness (Torsney, 2008), and raised global engagement (Paige, 2009).

Nine students from a women’s college in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) chose a climb of Mount Kilimanjaro to mark the 25th anniversary of their college, becoming the first team of Arab women to reach the summit. This article reports the impact of the adventure and service experience in Tanzania, Africa and how it impacted the personal transformation of the group of female Emirati undergraduate students. Qualitative analysis of interview data was used to explore how the team experienced personal transformation in their understanding of themselves and their world as a result of the climb and the associated service project at a Tanzanian school.

**Literature Review**

Adventure learning experiences may focus on personal growth and support the formal learning outcomes of the academic curriculum. In research, adventure learning participants have reported personal impacts from the challenging experiences in nature that comprise planned adventure learning in education (McKenzie, 2000; Marsh, 2008). For example, outcomes of an Outward Bound course included increased self-confidence, expanding personal limits, and increased respect for others (Martin & Leberman, 2005) as reported by participants.

Relevant to our women’s college, women’s adventure programs have been associated with increased personal growth, tolerance, self-esteem, confidence, as well as acquisition of technical skills and improved level of participation in leadership development (Stone & Petrick, 2013). In addition, girls who participated in a wilderness program gained a sense of strength and determination, and a feeling of accomplishment and pride (Whittington, 2006). Intensive short-term study abroad of two weeks or less includes adventure travel and has been found to result in similar or stronger educational and personal impacts on participants (Alexander, Bakir & Wickens, 2010). Expedition-based learning specifically has been shown to significantly increase measurable personal abilities, organizational skills, overall effectiveness, stress management, openness in thinking, time efficiency, and coping with change (Greffath, Meyer, Strydom & Ellis, 2011). The opportunities for growth generally benefit all students, regardless of income, although most international study travel participants are wealthy (Lewin, 2009). The documented effects of adventure learning align well with the college’s goals of preparing graduates through “learning by doing” for leadership, independent learning, global citizenship, and communication.

Participants in our adventure travel program were fully sponsored for travel expenses and specialized gear. The program combined both challenge-based and service components, the former involving an intensive climb to the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro, and the latter
involving a service project for the local community in Tanzania. The service learning component aligned with best practices identified for short-term learning abroad programs, which recommend connection with the local community (Spencer & Tuma, 2007), and was a central element to the trip in that it was an example of charitable giving (Zakat) pillar of students’ Islam faith. Service learning standards from the National Youth Leadership Council (2008) recommend that service learning: engage participants in meaningful and personally relevant service activities; meet learning goals; incorporate multiple challenging reflection activities that prompt deep thinking and analysis about oneself and one’s relationship to society; and promote understanding of diversity and mutual respect among all participants.

The theoretical framework for the evaluation study was based on the concept of meaningful learning proposed by Jonassen, Peck, and Wilson (1999). Recent advances in brain research have emphasized how students’ affective neural networks lead to determinations of importance regarding learning and thereby lead to motivation, engagement, and commitment to the learning process (Rose & Meyer, 2002). Such meaningful learning results in students who are capable and independent learners. In this challenge-based learning project, meaningful learning by college students was a means to the end result of developing professionals and citizens who can responsibly deal with complexity, diversity, and change.

Meaningful learning, as a construct within this study, refers to learning that is active, constructive, intentional, and authentic. It “includes reciprocal intention—action—reflection activities,” as proposed in Jonassen’s (2000, p. v) activity theory, and occurs when learners find meaning in the context of solving novel problems (Rose & Meyer, 2002). This includes the following four components:

1. Active learning engages learners in cognitive effort, facilitated by transactions (Merrill, 1992) designed to guide the learner toward acquisition of specific knowledge and skills. It occurs within an interpersonal, collaborative, learning community and depends on learner interactions with mentors, with resources, and with peers within the context of a meaningful task.

2. Constructive learning in college education requires the development of new skills through both reflection and metacognition for transfer to contexts beyond the classroom (Jonassen, Howland, Moore, & Marra, 2003). Adopting new skills, which may be unfamiliar and uncomfortable, is a process that leads to conceptual change. The role of the adventure experience is to accelerate that process through immersion in a novel and challenging situation.

3. For intentional learning, the goal is to support students as they embark on a path as lifelong learners and citizens who value continuous development. Lifelong learners acquire a level of self-regulation that enables them to identify goals and to plan experiences to fulfill those goals. Engaging challenges can help learners articulate an intentional learning purpose (Jonassen, 2000). Adventure learning is particularly useful in providing a rationale for learning and fostering the motivation needed to connect learning to personal goals.

4. Authentic learning recognizes that complex and ill-structured tasks require practice in meaningful, real-world situations. The inclusion of an adventure experience fits into the continuum of higher education by immersing students in situations away from home where they must persevere with appropriate scaffolding.
Our primary goal in this study was to address the following questions-

1. How do college adventure travel participants perceive and describe their trip-related experiences; and
2. What personal growth do participants report as a result of the adventure and service experiences?

Research Method

Setting

The recruitment and training of participants was conducted at a mid-sized, urban, women’s college in the Middle East. The challenge-based and service-learning portions of the project took place in Tanzania, and included a hike to the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro and a trip to a local government school. This comprised of both formal and informal settings, indoors and outdoors, and a variety of interactions with people, places and cultures.

The expedition lasted for ten days. The climb itself took eight days; a six day ascent and a two day decent. The participants, led by Tanzanian guides, camped each night in tents at designated sites, carried their own day packs, and had virtually no communication with the outside world. They experienced different climatic zones such as tropical rain forest, desert, and Arctic like conditions in the last two days of the climb.

After the climb, the participants were exposed to the local culture through a visit to a village, the Maasai market and a short safari. The students had raised $10,000 USD as a charitable gift and had an opportunity to visit a government school in Arusha, Tanzania where they met with the pupils, head teachers and other officials and decided how the money would be spent. They equipped the school with a chemistry lab and contributed to the furniture fund.

Participants

Participation in the project was voluntary and open to all students in the college. The project occurred in stages over an academic year. At the start of the academic year, in September, the college invited students to attend an informational session about the proposed climb of Mount Kilimanjaro and the associated service project. Promotional messages and videos were shown on screens around the campus. The library displayed material about the site, and lead faculty for the trip visited classes to discuss the trip with students. Initially, 90 students expressed interest, and about half that number attended information sessions with faculty and the adventure travel company that arranged the climb. As an Arab woman, the travel company founder was able to discuss the conditions of the trip, the preparation and commitment needed, and the cultural issues students might face. Students shared trip details with their families, including the requirements to participate in regular physical training, team meetings, and the service component. Following an overview meeting with families, faculty, college leaders, and the travel company leader, approximately 15 students returned documents for participation prior to the mid-year holidays. These students began weekly outdoor physical training both on and off campus. They also attended periodic meetings, including sessions focused on climbing gear. As the training became more rigorous, the student team reduced to ten members plus the three college staff. Prior to the trip, one student left the team due to family commitments, resulting in a student team of nine.
The nine students who comprised the team are described as:
- Muslim, native Arabic-speakers;
- Aged 19-32 with a median age of 21 years;
- Bachelor’s degree-seeking students in years one to four of their programs in media, business, information technology, and engineering;
- Mostly unmarried (8 unmarried, 1 married);
- Full time undergraduate students;
- Working (4 students) and not employed (5 students);
- Urban residents of the national capital city, population 600,000;
- Inexperienced in wilderness activities such as camping; and
- Eight of nine traveling to Africa for the first time (few had travelled outside of the Middle East)

Data Collection

The study employed a qualitative evaluation design (Patton, 2002) of narrative analysis based on interpretivist approaches proposing that the impact of an experience is directly related to how meaningful it is to the participants (Schwandt, 2003). The source of data about the students’ experiences as a result of the year-long adventure-learning experience was a collection of semi-structured interviews (Patton, 2002) conducted one month after the students returned from travel. These interviews explored how participants reflected on the adventure experience including dispositional development related to their ideas about the trip as an agent of change in their lives. Interviews were conducted with all student participants by the authors who organized and facilitated the trip, thereby helping students to feel comfortable in responding to the questions. All interviewees voluntarily participated in the trip and interview. Thirty-minute semi-structured interviews were used to ask participants a range of questions (see appendix) that fit into the following general categories.

1) What motivated them to go on the trip (Motivation)
2) How they prepared for the trip (Preparation)
3) How they felt about the service component of the trip (Charity)
4) How they felt about other members of the team (Team Dynamics)
5) How they perceived Tanzania (Impressions of Tanzania)
6) How they experienced the mountain climb (Climb)
7) Whether and how the experience had changed them (Reflections)

Data Analysis

Content analysis of combined transcripts from recorded interviews was performed using the software program nVivo, Version 10. A reduction and sense-making process (Patton, 2002) was used to code and recode similar responses into nodes until reoccurring themes and sub-themes began to emerge. This traditional procedure was initiated by performing a word frequency query (by context – including specializations) for frequently occurring items. Nodes were then created for the top 11 items in the query, which included all items with a weighted percentage of > 1% in the source documents. Subsequently, pairwise Jaccard correlations (Jaccard, 1912) were computed between nodes to use as weights in the computation of a cluster dendogram for the 11
nodes based on the complete-link algorithm (Defays, 1977). This process allowed the four primary themes to be identified within the 11 nodes. A similar algorithm was used to create an inter-question dendogram for the seven questions asked of participants. To identify sub-themes and obtain a more detailed model of growth related activities, question responses were further coded into 27 nodes based on sub-topics within each area of questioning. This list of nodes was cross-referenced with the four primary themes. This process allowed the 15 sub-themes within the four primary themes to be identified.

**Results**

Figures 1 and 2 show the word frequency cloud and corresponding dendogram of the most commonly occurring items in the analysis.

Figure 1 indicates by size the most frequently expressed words in the interviews. Figure 2 suggested four distinct (but not necessarily disjointed) themes in the source documents, listed here in increasing order of word frequency:

1. Wanting;
2. Reflecting (Thought);
3. Doing (Act, Active, Communicate, Change, Make); and
4. Relating (Whole, Group, Organizers, Personal).

**Figure 1.** Word frequency cloud for the combined interview transcripts

**Figure 2.** Word similarity dendogram for the top 11 items in the word frequency query shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 3.** Dendogram of word frequency usage between questions

Figure 3 illustrates the relationship between inter-question responses while Table 1 shows the five highest pairwise Jaccard correlations from this analysis. Charity had the least correlation with the other six questions, possibly indicating that the service project was similar in nature and motivation to previous service projects done by students, and thus represented less of a novel challenge to the students. When asked specifically if charity was a motivator, seven of them said it was, in keeping with the importance of giving as a pillar of their faith, but two added that it was “not as important a motivator as the personal challenge.”
It is interesting to note that the correlation between Motivation and Reflection was high, potentially indicating that participants were taking part in a meta-cognitive process of re-examining their early intentions while reflecting on the future impact of their experiences.

The climb appeared to inspire the deepest level of transformative reflection in participants and also exhibited the highest correlation with Team Dynamics.

Table 2 shows a breakdown of word occurrence in the four themes by question. Since Reflection contained the lengthiest responses, it makes sense that this topic should contribute the most to each theme. However, it is interesting to note that the contributions to wanting and reflecting are larger than the contributions to relating and doing. The latter two themes carry more weight in Team Dynamics and Preparation. Doing is also especially prevalent in Climb.

The organization of identified sub-themes is given below with the numbers in parentheses representing the number of participant references to the topic.

1. Wanting - The strong theme of wanting the adventure and service experience showed that students intentionally chose to work hard and to endure physical and mental discomfort to achieve immediate personal goals and to prepare for more challenging goals. The specific sub-themes identified within this category include the following.
   a. Trip motivation
      i. Personal challenges (3)
      ii. Do new things; experience new places and adventures (5)
      iii. Show strength of UAE; make family/country proud (4)
      iv. Charity; help people in Africa (7)
   b. Rest and Reprieve
      i. Coping with fatigue, shortness of breath, and pain on the climb; “wanting to give up” (11)
      ii. Coping with cold and rainy weather (7)
      iii. Coping with difficult living conditions (4)
   c. Future adventures

Table 1: Top five correlations between questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question A</th>
<th>Question B</th>
<th>Jaccard Correlation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reflections</td>
<td>Climb</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflections</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Dynamics</td>
<td>Climb</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Dynamics</td>
<td>Reflections</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:
The percentages are contributions to column total. For example 10% of all “Doing” word occurrences were seen in the Charity section.
i. Participation in trips, climbs, hikes and camping experiences (10)
   ii. Returning to Tanzania (4)

d. Leadership
   i. Encouraging others to try new things, experience new cultures; “Go for it!” (15)
   ii. Sharing experiences and achievements (5)

2. Doing - The theme of doing demonstrates the vigor with which students actively engaged in the challenges of the experience and the reward they felt for their efforts. This included the following sub-themes.
   a. Perseverance
      i. “Pushing through” difficulties on climb (4)
      ii. Pride in accomplishment; making it to the summit (5)
      iii. Unfamiliarity with equipment led to increased preparation (9)
   b. Self-Confidence; “if you want to do it, you can” (7)
   c. Life balance
      i. Struggles in training (4)
      ii. Better time management; punctuality (3)

3. Relating - Relating in many forms is a core authentic human trait, and the evolution of the students’ relationships showed that they derived a transcendent authentic learning experience from intense real-world situations. Relational growth was identified in five sub-areas.
   a. Relating to peers
      i. Initial reservations; “weird and mean”, difficult to talk to, misunderstandings (5)
      ii. Learning to resolve conflict; roommate challenges (4)
      iii. Coming to care for one another, respect differences, becoming “like family” (12)
      iv. Developing a strong sense of responsibility for the group (4)
   b. Relating to guides
      i. Initial suspicion, uneasiness, and distrust of guides (6)
      ii. Increased respect through training; “they prepared us well” (4)
      iii. Increased levels of comfort (6)
      iv. Support and encouragement: pushed students to succeed in climb, “Would not have made it without them” (6)
      v. Development of cross-cultural relationships and discussion; “still friends on Facebook”; respect for non-Muslims (9)
   c. Relating to the people of Tanzania
      i. Initial fear (3)
      ii. Observing positive qualities; kindness of residents (3); strength and independence (2); open-mindedness (2); beauty of country (4)
      iii. Respecting differences in gender roles and relations (4)
   d. Relating to the needy
      i. Emotional reactions to children; “felt like crying” (7)
      ii. Recognition of social inequality; “we have so much compared with them” (6)
      iii. Consideration of others’ feelings (2)
   e. Relating to friends and family
      i. Initial safety concerns, worry; refusal to allow participation (5)
      ii. Skepticism about student abilities (3)
iii. Collecting donations (9); “difficult to explain reasons” (2)
iv. Pride in students; increased confidence in student abilities (6)

4. Reflecting - Reflecting as a theme shows the ways that students constructed meaning from their experience and began to transfer their learning to their lives. We identified two primary sub-themes of reflective thinking.

a. Appreciation
   i. Of education (1)
   ii. Of opportunities (1)
   iii. Of the UAE standard of living; “more than enough”; can be happy in poverty; stop complaining about what they don’t have (12).
   iv. Of different cultures; “it doesn’t matter where people are from” (12)

b. Expanded Worldviews
   i. “More to life” than previously thought (3)
   ii. Importance of charity, “regardless of religion” (4)
   iii. Challenge gender perceptions; demonstrate strength of women (6)

Discussion

Developing as individuals and contributors to society requires college students to develop leadership and teamwork skills, to challenge themselves so that they become confident and capable, to participate in shared experiences in places different from their homes, and to engage with diverse communities. In this study, students engaged in the physical, mental, emotional, and social development needed to reach the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro as a team and to give to the nearby community in a meaningful way. Activity theory with an emphasis on meaningful learning provides a useful lens through which to describe how these experiences influenced student growth and transformation.

Regarding the study’s first research question, “How do college adventure travel participants perceive and describe their trip-related experiences?” the four primary themes revealed by the content analysis described above correspond closely with the Jonassen’s (2000, p. v) four attributes of meaningful learning: wanting is intentional, doing is active, reflecting is constructive, and relating is authentic. The students wanted the accomplishments of reaching the summit and helping the surrounding community, and they accepted the challenges by working together to cope, thus intentionally committing to a path of physical and interpersonal development. They viewed themselves outwardly as doers at all stages of the experience, actively engaging with each other, their guides, members of the community and the environment. They approached the experience inwardly through reflecting on the implications of the activities for themselves in the many roles they have in their lives, as well as for their families, college, and country, thus constructing layers of meaning and their own narratives. They evolved in the relationships in which they engaged through the experience, relating differently as their experience grew, thus identifying themselves in a growing community to have an authentic, real world learning experience.

The sub-themes identified in this analysis provide further insights into how students’ perceptions changed as a result of the experience, demonstrating a move from naïve to nuanced conceptualizations of their own capabilities and their understanding of the world beyond their community. The students admitted they made a pact before the trip: ‘We decided we would stick together and not interact with the African men unless we had to.’
### Table 3: Growth related activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Change</th>
<th>Initial Stance</th>
<th>Catalyst(s)</th>
<th>Developed Stance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with guides</td>
<td>Unease, distrust, &quot;would not let them touch bags&quot;</td>
<td>Training sessions; encouragement during climb</td>
<td>Friendship, respect, gratitude, &quot;would not have made it without them&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impression of Tanzania</td>
<td>Fear, misunderstanding, judged people by looks</td>
<td>Interaction with residents; discussions with guides.</td>
<td>Admiration for kindness and strength, appreciation for culture (&quot;African Hugs&quot;), judge people by actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perseverance</td>
<td>Not capable of enduring physical hardship, prepared for failure (&quot;return after two days&quot;), &quot;ask mom to do everything&quot;</td>
<td>Summit experience; observations of Tanzanians</td>
<td>Can do what they put their minds to, succeed at difficult tasks, experience new things, push through physical pain and discomfort, not give up too easily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family beliefs</td>
<td>Concern for student safety, skepticism about student abilities</td>
<td>Students' return</td>
<td>Pride in student accomplishment, confidence in student abilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with other students</td>
<td>Viewed as &quot;weird&quot;, difficult to talk to, more focused on personal challenges</td>
<td>Training; shared experiences</td>
<td>&quot;Like family&quot;, shared responsibility for group success, cared for each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspectives on possessions</td>
<td>Complained about not getting what they want, needed possessions to be content, took education for granted</td>
<td>Visit to government school</td>
<td>&quot;We have so much compared to them&quot;, there is &quot;more to life than shopping&quot;, can be happy in poverty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time management</td>
<td>Struggled with school/life balance, strained by training, unorganized, not punctual</td>
<td>Organization of trip; “Suzanne” trip leader</td>
<td>Punctual, organized, more active without strain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of adventure</td>
<td>Excited, but timid; fearful of new food, people, and places</td>
<td>Climb; time in Tanzania</td>
<td>Seek new camping trips, climbs, visits to other places; encourage others to take part in experiences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the climb, they developed a strong culture of inclusiveness irrespective of gender, religion and ethnicity. Student E said: ‘I learnt from the guides to help others without expecting anything back,’ and Student A admitted: ‘We would have never succeeded without them.’

The students had the basic knowledge of the dos and don’ts of the Tanzanian culture as they attended an information session. However, more could have been done to improve their general knowledge of the place which was quite poor. For example, they were worried about
encountering lions during the climb. They also had religious concerns about being disrespected by Tanzanian men. This should have been addressed before the trip by inter-cultural training. They thought the country was generally backward and, other than the climb, they did not expect to find much of value there. A chance meeting with Maasai shepherds on the first day in Tanzania made them realize they were entering a rich culture which began to fascinate them. A visit to the traditional market reinforced their interest. They also learnt that they themselves could be accused of disrespect when an elderly local woman became upset by having a photo of her taken without permission. The climb itself showed them tremendous hospitality not only of the guides but of local population as well. The Wagumu (Sherpas) and the support staff who came from various ethnic groups, such as Maasai and Chaga, were friendly and supportive.

There were two pivotal moments of the trip. Naturally, reaching the Uhuru peak was one of them. A visit to the local government school became an eye opening moment for many of the students. Seeing the overcrowded conditions of the school and the eagerness of the Tanzanian children to learn, made students reflect on how fortunate they were in their country. They became aware of their wastefulness and how that could be perceived by people of a country with limited financial resources. Taking a sip of a soft drink and abandoning it because you preferred a different flavor became a shameful act. Interaction with local community should be an integral element of any trip to this region of the world.

Table 3 highlights several examples of self-reported transformations which were facilitated by trip related catalysts, addressing the study’s research question, “What personal growth do participants report as a result of the adventure and service experiences?”

These examples show that participation in both components of this study increased students’ individual sense of empowerment regarding their own capabilities as well as their influence on peers, and their ability to make a positive difference where need exists in the world. They now have the eyes with which to see unmet needs in their community more broadly, as well as tools with which they might begin to serve those needs. Indeed, their engagement in the project bridged the geographic and cultural divides on many levels. It was a complex and rich experience with long-term possibilities for their growth as women and engaged citizens. Upon their return from the climb, the students demonstrated this potential by acting on their learning in several ways-

a) They collected additional funds for the school.

b) They sent new boots to a guide whose boots were in disrepair.

c) They sent a new laptop to a guide in training for her college study.

d) They met with the UAE sponsor to describe the Kilimanjaro adventure and to express their goal to climb Fujiyama next.

This eagerness has generated increased interest amongst other students at the college in planning and participating in the next learning abroad opportunity.

**Conclusion and Limitations**

This project built upon theoretical frameworks regarding meaningful learning—learning that is active, constructive, intentional, and authentic – to create a challenge-based, service-learning adventure experience for nine female participants. Qualitative narrative analysis of post-trip interview transcripts illustrated the success of this project in achieving these desired outcomes by identifying four major themes closely corresponding to the four facets of meaningful learning. This analysis also revealed a complete transformation of student attitudes in regard to their
personal abilities and their role in the world. Over the course of the project, participants moved from identities as timid and isolated students towards identities as literal and figurative trailblazers. For some of them, the learning curve was quite steep. While some of the students doubted their capabilities, others were overconfident. Those tended to ignore the chief guide’s nutrition and clothing advice. It was not until they encountered a hail storm that they realized how weak and poorly dressed they were. Student F said: ‘Thank God one of the teachers gave me gloves and a jumper. I realized then that to succeed I really needed to follow the leader’s instructions and cooperate with the guides.’ By the conclusion of the trip, students developed the ability to construct and articulate their concepts of themselves as mountain climbers and citizens of the world, to reflect on their goals and act intentionally to achieve them, to situate their learning within a complex, authentic challenge, and to take on leadership roles in their local school community, which in turn has encouraged other women in the UAE to “go for it” and experience similar growth filled adventures.

These findings correspond to recent representations of study abroad as an experiential and developmental process, characterized by shifting cultural perspectives from experiences that push students beyond their habitual ways of living (Vande Berg, Paige, & Lou, 2012). These are the changes that our students’ college and country expect of them as they develop their leadership, communication, independence and global citizenship.

One limitation of our study is the scope of inference. The population of individuals from which this study drew was relatively homogeneous, consisting only of women at an urban school in the Middle East. Future studies may wish to address the extent to which the gains from adventure learning experiences can be transferred to other populations of college students. In addition, the small sample size of nine students who participated in the study limits our ability to generalize claims even within the school. Further studies may seek to address the impact of subsequent trips and track the progression of gains in learning outcomes over time. Researchers may also wish to perform several phases of interviews, before and during the experience, to track progression of student attitudes over time.

Acknowledgements
The trip was sponsored by the UAE-based Fatima Bint Mubarak Ladies Sports Academy, Abu Dhabi, UAE.

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**AUTHORS**

**CATHY CAVANAUGH**, PhD, is Director of Teaching and Learning in Worldwide Education at Microsoft. Cathy’s research and publications focus on technology-empowered teaching and learning. She has held faculty and leadership appointments in the US and the Middle East, and was a Fulbright Senior Scholar in Nepal. She also directed professional development centers in the US, and was a teacher in the US and Caribbean. Email: cathy.cavanaugh@microsoft.com

**EWA GAJER**, PhD, is a professor of education. She holds a degree in Australian literature from the University of New England in Australia. Previously, she worked with the Migrant Education Program at the Southbank Institute of TAFE in Brisbane, Australia. She has authored a bibliography: *Australian Women Short Story Writers* and literary reviews. She is currently teaching Intercultural Studies and Research Methods at Abu Dhabi Women’s College. Email: egajer@hct.ac.ae

**JOHN MAYBERRY**, PhD, is an Assistant Professor of Mathematics at the University of the Pacific. He received his B.A. in Mathematics from California State University, Fullerton in 2003 and his PhD in Applied Mathematics from the University of Southern California in 2008. After completing his doctoral work, he spent two years as a Postdoctoral Fellow and Visiting Assistant Professor at Cornell University before starting his current position. His research interests are applying probability models and statistics in multidisciplinary collaborations including mathematical biology, education, and water polo analytics. Email: jmayberry@pacific.edu

**BRENDAN O'CONNOR**, is a professor of education. He completed his B.A in International Development Studies from Saint Mary’s University in 2003 and his M. Ed in TESL/Curriculum Studies from Saint Mary’s University and Mount St. Vincent University, in Halifax, Nova Scotia in 2009. He has taught ESL/EFL at various levels in Korea, Syria, Canada and the United Arab Emirates. At Abu Dhabi Women’s College he is currently teaching English for Academic Purposes and Global Studies courses. Email: boconnor@hct.ac.ae

**JACE HARGIS**, PhD, is the Associate Provost of Faculty Development, Assessment and Research and Professor at Chaminade University Honolulu. Previously, he was a College Director in the UAE; an Assistant Provost and Associate Professor at the University of the Pacific; and a Director of Faculty Development and Assistant Professor at the University of North Florida. He has authored a textbook, an anthology and published over 100 academic articles as well as offered hundreds of academic presentations. Email: jace.hargis@gmail.com

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Tale of the Tape: International Teaching Assistant Noticing During Videotaped Classroom Observations

Gwendolyn M. Williams, PhD
University of West Florida (USA)

Rod E. Case, PhD
University of Nevada, Reno (USA)

Abstract

International teaching assistants face challenges in learning the norms for teaching in American universities. In order to address this learning curve this article describes a qualitative study of twenty international teaching assistants that examined how these participants viewed observations as part of their professional development. The study explored the noticing practices of international teaching assistants who participated in an initial interview, followed by a classroom observation so that the ITAs could notice their own teaching practices in the classroom. After examining the ITAs’ noticing of events during observations, the article will conclude with general recommendations for effective use of observations as part of the training of international instructors.

Keywords: International teaching assistants, videotaped teaching observations, teacher noticing

The demographics of U.S. higher education continue to shift toward increasing numbers of internationals and non-native speakers of English in the teaching force. Since many foreign students are ineligible for federal grant or loan programs, they often seek assistantships to help defray educational expenses. Predominantly, many undergraduate science and math courses at research universities are taught by international teaching assistants (ITAs) (Gorsuch, 2013). Much research has been devoted to helping the ITAs to improve their language intelligibility (Chiang, 2009, 2011; Li, Mazer & Ju, 2011) and fostering the ITAs’ acculturation into the teaching norms at American universities (Chae, Lim & Fisher, 2009; Gorsuch, 2012).

Literature Review

International instructors who are learning to teach in a new culture have a significant learning curve to master as they learn the new cultural norms that are expected in their new context. For many, the cultural norms of teaching are an implicit knowledge set that is learned through the
participation in a schooling system as a child (Chappell, 2007). ITAs face the additional challenges of often having little or no teaching experience in any culture (LeGros & Faez, 2012). They must master the cultural norms of schooling in American universities that are often quite different from the norms from their native culture. Accordingly, the American norms of cooperative learning and student centered teaching can be quite challenging for them to learn (Gorsuch, 2012; Chae et al. 2009; Boman, 2013). Earlier research highlighted such cultural teaching skills that ITAs need to master such as questioning and responding to questions (Chiang, 2011; Chiang & Mi, 2011; Reinhardt, 2010), rapport building (Boman, 2013), and non-verbal communication (Gorsuch, 2012; Lazaraton & Ishihara, 2005). Learning these cultural norms of teaching will help the ITA to offer culturally appropriate instruction for their students.

Although many universities teach ITAs the cultural pedagogical skills that are needed in order to successfully teach in the classroom, the acquisition of separate skills will not lead to overall teaching expertise until the ITA is able to evaluate their own performance for the purpose of refining their teaching skills. For many international instructors, the practice of noticing is an unfamiliar practice (Chae et al. 2009). Sherin and Van Es (2005, p. 476) describe noticing as “a new way of seeing what is happening in [the] classroom.” Much of the earlier research included discussions after ITAs interacted with undergraduate students (Staples, Kang & Wittner, 2014), but such research does not explore how ITAs notice events in their teaching. Without a video of the class as a foundation for the discussion, recall bias can affect the historical veracity of an event. A videotaped observation is especially important to ITAs who often do not have previous experience teaching or an awareness of how they appear in the classroom (LeGros & Faez, 2012). For the purposes of this research, we were interested in how the ITAs noticed their interactions with students in an actual college classroom. This study examined how ITAs engaged in noticing aspects of their teaching through the examination of their videotaped lesson.

**Noticing**

Even though numerous methodologies for studying video in teacher education as well as its definition have been proposed (e.g., van Es & Sherin, 2002; Seidel, Blomberg, & Stürmer, 2010), Sherin and van Es (2005) propose a three-part definition of noticing that is common in many studies. First, noticing is complicated by the fact that it takes place in the classroom—a complex and interactive environment. Second, successful noticing requires the teacher to move from theory to practice in order to make connections between the larger theories which guide teaching and learning and the specific kinds of classroom practice that they must carry out every day. Finally, noticing requires teachers to make sense of how the details of their own teaching situation, e.g., age level of students, content of the course, school setting, and, of course, the teachers’ cultural and social background, relate to instruction and learning.

**Noticing and Video**

Video has been acknowledged as a highly effective medium for improving instructional skills in its own right (Whitehead & Fitzgerald, 2007). It represents a tool for to encourage teachers to reflect on a lesson from multiple perspectives (Spiro, Collins & Ramchandra, 2007), a means to evaluate one’s teaching outside of the pressure of the classroom (Sherin, 2004), and a powerful means of motivating self-evaluation (Roth, 2007) in a way that fosters the development of a careful and directed analysis of a lesson (e.g., van Es & Sherin, 2002). The bulk of the research has drawn on pre- and in-service teacher population (e.g. Masats & Dooley, 2011; Welsch & Devlin, 2007) with fewer examples among college instructors (e.g., Chappell, 2007;
Hall & Smotrova, 2013). To date, research on the use of videotaped teaching observations with the ITA population is limited (e.g., LeGros & Faez, 2012; Lazaraton & Ishihara, 2005; Salomone, 1998). Drawing on research from both pre-service teacher education (e.g., Masats & Dooly, 2011; Welsch & Devlin, 2007) and the adult population (e.g., Chappell, 2007; Hall & Smotrova, 2013), a review of the findings most relevant to the ITA population is presented below.

An ongoing theme within the use of video and noticing suggests that watching a videotape of one’s teaching influences what teachers notice about their instruction (e.g., van Es & Sherin, 2002). Early research by Sherin and van Es (2005) found that the nature of observations varied between pre- and in-service teachers. Both groups, however, changed over time. Pre-service teachers moved from simply giving a recount of their instruction to identifying significant interactions with cooperating teachers while in-service teachers commented less on what the teacher was doing in the classroom to how the students were responding. Both groups began offering more evidence to support their assertion and changed from giving nearly all evaluative comments on the videos to offering interpretations of the events.

In a similar study, Borko, Jacobs, Eiteljorg, and Pittman (2008) used video data collected from the classrooms of 15 middle-school algebra teachers over the course of two years. Data were collected during a series of three workshops which Borko et al. (2008) titled the “Problem Solving Cycle.” In the first workshop, teachers were given a mathematical task to solve and then, after solving the problem, considered how they would teach it to their students. This mathematical task was then taught and videotaped in their middle school classrooms. Workshops two and three involved the teachers in watching and discussing videos of their own classroom instruction. Facilitators framed the viewing of the second workshop around the actions of the teacher. Topics included how the teachers introduced new tasks and concepts and handled classroom discussion. In workshop three, teachers discussed students’ comments and conversations about mathematics. Findings showed that teachers doubled the number of observations that they made from the time that they began workshop one to the time that they completed workshop three. Like participants in Sherin and van Es (2009), the teachers’ comments also changed from descriptions and recounts of their teaching to interpretations and analyses of their students’ comments and actions.

More recently, Sherin and van Es (2009) studied the influence of video clubs on what teachers notice in their instruction but also the extent to which video clubs influence teachers’ instruction. Data included interviews and written samples from a group of middle-school and elementary school teachers collected over the course of a year. Findings showed notable similarities among the two groups: moving from simply giving a recount of their students’ actions and comments in class to identifying ways in which the students were using mathematical thinking. The viewing and discussion of video also appeared to influence their practice. Post interviews and observations revealed that teachers were more likely to notice and act on examples of their students’ mathematical thinking during instruction after participating in the video club than before.

Past research on the use of videotapes with ITAs offered findings that are simply the starting point for this research area. Salomone’s (1998) study had the ITAs writing critiques of their videotaped observation after watching the tape. Additional data sources for this study were surveys, interviews, group interviews, and teaching journals. This particular study did not facilitate the watching of the video, so ITAs were left to notice elements of the lesson on their own. Although LeGros and Faez (2012) did use videotaped teaching observations as a basis for
reflection, their ITAs’ classroom audiences were comprised of their master’s level classmates in microteaching assignment, which provides an artificial environment instead of an authentic undergraduate class. Nonetheless, the ITAs were asked to evaluate their videotape according to a teacher behavior inventory. The researchers also used the TBI to critique the videotapes. Findings from this study indicated that ITAs often overrated their teaching at the beginning of the semester but underrated their teaching at the end of the term. Additionally, Lazaraton’s and Ishihara’s 2005 study was a case study that explored how one ITA analyzed the use of non-verbal communication and discourse strategies as seen in her videotaped classes. Eröz-Tuğsa’s (2013) research utilized videotaped observations as part of an ESL teaching practicum; however, the videos were used as an evaluation tool which the university supervisor discussed with the participants as part of a voluntary extension of class requirements. In that particular study, student teachers were paired up with a peer student and a university supervisor who each evaluated the student teacher’s videotaped lesson before the students teachers had a lesson that was formally evaluated for a grade. Results from this study found that the experience helped the student teacher to notice more elements of the lesson and to become more confident in the classroom.

The above research establishes that the use of video in teacher training provides a conduit to both increase the amount of conversation (Borko et al. 2008) as well as redirects teachers comments from a recount of their practice to an interpretation of their students’ thinking (e.g., van Es & Sherin, 2002). Although research has taken place with both pre- and in-service groups (e.g., Masats & Dooley, 2011; Welsch & Devlin, 2007) which suggests that there are differences across groups (e.g., van Es & Sherin, 2002), not enough is known about the contribution that the ITA population can make to an understanding of video in teacher education. Moreover, the methods used in past research (e.g., LeGros & Faez, 2012) have relied on simulated classroom settings and not on the actual classrooms where the ITAs teach. In order to understand the ways in which noticing and video interact in the classrooms of ITAs, more research needs to be carried out which is sensitive the unique strengths and backgrounds that ITAs bring to the classroom.

The research question for this study was “What do international teaching assistants notice about their teaching in videotaped teaching observations?”

Research Method

Participants

This study included twenty different participants (ten males and ten females), who represented thirteen different teaching fields, and fourteen different nationalities. The recruitment at a large research university in the southeastern United States was aimed at former students of the ITA training courses, as well as at departments that had a large proportion of ITAs through the process of snowball sampling. Most of the subjects had worked as ITAs for an average of three years and had resided in the United States for an average of almost five years. All but four of the participants had taught previously before coming to the United States. Generally, the ITAs who were teaching languages were responsible for two sections of the same course and the math and science students were responsible for one section of a classroom course or a science lab. Throughout the course of the study, students were identified by pseudonyms at all times.

Data Collection

Participants took part in individual interviews where they discussed their experiences of learning to teach in an American university.
The purpose of the first interview was to gain information about the background of the students in order to understand the participant’s cultural and educational background as the origin for their current educational practices and beliefs. Typical topics for the first interview included previous educational background, language learning experiences, prior teaching experiences and cross-cultural comparisons of the roles of teachers and students in the U.S. and their native cultures.

After the initial interview, each of the twenty participants was recorded teaching in the classroom for one complete class period, which ranged from fifty minutes to three hours depending on the nature of their particular teaching responsibility. The procedure for videotaping was explained beforehand so that the ITAs knew what to expect. The videotape was used to help participants to recall the segment of the lesson that the researcher wanted to discuss (Baecher, Kung, Jewkes & Rosalia, 2013) as well as to study how the opinions in the interviews translated into classroom practice.

Predominantly, the second interview focused on clarifying information from the earlier interview and events from the observations. As the participants watched the video, the interviewer used “stopping points” to pause the tape and elicit further descriptions or clarifications about what was happening in the video (Jacobs & Morita, 2002). Each question was designed to elicit participants to notice different elements of their teaching or to provide more information so that the researcher had a fuller understanding of the lesson. Some sample questions from the second interview were as follows: “When you said Brazilian teachers focus more on teaching you something, can you tell me more what you meant? For an introductory level, how does your students’ lack of prior knowledge influence the way that you teach?” The participants’ explanations of the taped observation were especially important in foreign language classrooms when the interviewer did not understand the language of instruction.

**Data Analysis**

The interview transcripts and videotaped observations were analyzed through narrative analysis in order to see how the participants positioned themselves as they told the stories of their teacher development as they watched the videos (Barkhuizen, 2011). As the participants viewed themselves teaching in the classroom, they were able to connect what they saw on tape to either what they were feeling or what they were intending to do in the classroom. These teachers’ narratives were valuable sources of information because the stories provided the backstory on what was occurring on the videotape that might not have been apparent to the interviewer who

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**Table 1**

Demographic Chart of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Shanti</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Ravi</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Dikembe</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Cameroon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Ivan</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Hai</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Lena</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Min</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>S. Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Soo</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>S. Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Cheng</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Ryoko</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Rosa</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Spain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Carlos</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Spain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Lupe</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Spain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Ibrahim</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Daniela</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Jacques</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Haiti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Isabel</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Peru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Eva</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Romania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Hashim</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Tanzania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Hans</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Austria</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
watched the tape. Although the narratives served as critical sources for this study, the stories also proved to be beneficial to the participants because it provided an avenue for the participants to notice and interpret different elements of their classroom practices. Furthermore, member checking was used to clarify areas of the transcripts that were unclear. Through the interviewing process, the participant worked with the interviewer to co-construct a narrative in order to address the unique needs of a particular context. This cooperative effort enabled the participant to discuss aspects of his or her teaching that had not been considered previously. The narratives were then coded to identify the overarching themes across the different interviews to represent a collective experience (Barkhuizen, 2011). Common themes in this study were self-awareness, validation of instructional decisions, and self-evaluation.

**Results**

**Self-awareness**

For many of the ITAs in the study, the observations enabled them to gain a self-awareness of how they appeared in the classrooms. This paralleled earlier studies that found that video could be used as a tool to reflect from multiple perspectives (Spiro et al. 2007). However, many of the participants remarked that they had never seen themselves on videotape as they were teaching. The new experience of being videotaped while they were teaching made many of the participants nervous. For instance, Hai, an ITA from China, acknowledged the pull between the expected norms and his behavior by commenting, “I’m kind of nervous I’m not a like, you know, actor type of person...don’t know how to behave in front of a camera that’s the thing. Besides that I, I had fun.” While nervousness was a common emotion for many of the participants, this experience was an important moment in self-awareness as in the case of Ibrahim, an ITA from Burkina Faso, who commented, “It’s bizarre to watch yourself talking.” Specifically, the process of videotaping clearly distinguishes the discrepancy between instructors’ self-perceived behavior and their performance that the students or supervisor see in the classroom (Baecher et al. 2013). For instance, Carlos, an ITA from Spain, found the experience of watching himself to be entertaining. During the videotaped lesson, he had made the Twilight Zone sounds for his students, so he remarked, “I entertain myself, it’s great! I’ve never seen myself like this.” In this case, the use of videotaped noticing heightened the self-awareness of the participant, which in turn led to greater monitoring of their instructional performance (Baecher et al. 2013). This awareness reaffirmed his earlier statement that “one of my mottoes is, if there has to be a clown in the class that’s going to be me.” The process of noticing an event in a videotape enabled the participant to focus on a specific event that may have gone unnoticed when teaching in the classroom (Seidel, Stürmer, Blomberg, Kobarg & Schwindt, 2011). Reviewing an incident allowed the ITA to move from recount to analysis through focusing more on interpreting student behavior because they already knew their own mindset as the teacher. Noticing was particularly important for ITAs so that they could view their teaching in the context of the cultural norms of the American university classroom.

**Validation of Instructional Choices**

Others went further to explain how the videotape validated the personal choices that they had made in their teaching as they sought to explain their instructional decisions for the interviewer (Schoenfeld, 2013). These eureka moments offered the participants insight into teaching practices where the value of incidental comprehension that was not anticipated.
Mindfulness of how they appear to their students allows the ITAs to make conscious decisions about their teaching. With the benefit of viewing the videotape of their teaching performance the participants were able to articulate their pedagogical choices, thus facilitating noticing about their own teacher development (Tripp & Rich, 2012). For instance, Ravi, a TA from India, stated,

> When I’m writing something on the board I don’t like standing in front of things which I’m writing, so normally I’m over on the side cause you’ve also seen me I’m walking front, up front in case I’m not um paying any attention on the things which I’ve written on the board and it’s kind of announcement or conclusion or summarization.

This statement demonstrated that he had given deliberate consideration to the way that he physically positioned himself in the classroom in order to improve his teaching strategies. Videotaping allowed the instructors to study their own gestures and unconscious mannerisms in teaching in order to understand what may be distracting to students (Eröz-Tuğ, 2013). Another participant, Dikembe commented on his deliberate movement in the classroom by explaining, “Only half of them raise their hand, I come and help them so… I’m moving around to see what they, what they’re facing, ‘cause is most, most of the time new for them.” Such a focus was supported by Hall and Smotrova (2013) who argued that the body was more than a physiological being; it was an integral part of the education process that could facilitate classroom management.

Self-Evaluation

Other participants used the videotape as an impetus to change their teaching practices as a result of their own self-evaluation (van Es & Sherin, 2007). After seeing themselves on tape, they resolved to consciously work on improving various aspects of their teaching practices. Some TAs who had taken formal TA training courses were more comfortable with videotaping their teaching to analyze their own teaching performances. One participant, Ibrahim, an ITA from Burkina Faso, remarked, “Oh thank you for reflecting you know teaching, reflect on your own teaching by watching it you know… you can improve on yourself you know?” By establishing a baseline of his current performance practices, he was able to identify areas that he wanted to improve on and then make changes. Such sentiment was also expressed by Jacques, an ITA from Haiti who commented, “If you record your own teaching, and you see later on, you know, but not based on apparent knowledge.” This quote indicated that videotaping allowed him to notice different things about his teaching which he may not have noticed at the time that he was teaching. Such thoughts were echoed by Min, an ITA from South Korea who explained,

> I don’t know if you really noticed or not, but I had a hard time finding my own stuff. (Chuckle) I put things up here and then I forgot about it. I realized that later. And I should have taught a little bit of acoustic parts without doing the pronunciation, which I didn’t.

The videotape provided her with some perspective to analyze her teaching practices, whereby she was able to offer alternate ways of handling the situation. Some of the participants wanted to use video as a means for self-evaluation to improve their teaching. Hans, an ITA from Austria, remarked, “Sometimes I want to watch myself teaching to see if it is correct.” This quote revealed that Hans had an internal notion of what pedagogy was expected in this context so that
he could compare what he saw in the videotape with what he thought should have been the appropriate action in the classroom. As seen in these examples, when teachers are able to evaluate their own teaching, it promotes more of a self-empowering role in their own teacher development (Baecher et al. 2012).

Some participants were unaware that their teaching beliefs were incongruous with their teaching practices until they watched themselves on video. For example, one participant described himself as “not a teacher that lets his students go without caring.” However, in the videotape, he taught most of the time with his back to the class so that he could write on the board or calculate math problems on the computer screen. When asked about his use of the blackboard, he responded, “Here’s like a, show them the way, do this, do that, and they do it by themselves. The eye contact is not very crucial here, it’s not very crucial.” His narrative further described his interpretation of the student behavior that he had noticed, but he evaluated it as not being critical to his teaching. Other participants, such as Soo, an ITA from Korea, discussed using videotaping as part of course requirements, but she had not previously used it as a personal method of teacher development. Accordingly, the act of videotaping in itself did not always show that participants understood how videotaping could be used to promote personal professional growth (Seidel et al. 2011). However, this experience had raised the awareness of doing video-based analysis in the future as a means of teacher development for these participants.

Other ITAs engaged in noticing during the viewing of the videotape by explaining their internal thoughts to the interviewer. They recognized that as a teacher they could not always voice their opinions to the class. This inner speech of the participants revealed a different dimension to the narratives as they narrated their inner thoughts behind their outward classroom behavior. For example, Ryoko, an ITA from Japan, described her thoughts about one of her students who did not write any answers on the quiz during the observation. She explained,

I was like, “Well, look, I mean you can’t…” I mean in my mind I was like, “You can’t be in my class like this,” but of course I would say it in a nicer way. (Laughter) Americans! (Laughter) I’m sorry.

Even though her inner thoughts labeled the student’s actions as unacceptable, she represented her thoughts in a more genteel manner and tried to get the student to try to fill in some of the blanks on his test paper. Viewing the video enabled Ryoko to verbalize her thought processes that were not necessarily visible within the video itself. She was able to share her self-talk with the interviewer in order to analyze her situation and explain how she mediated the situation in order to achieve a desirable outcome (Hall & Smotrova, 2013).

Watching the videotape with an interviewer enabled the ITA to receive cultural clarification of events that happened in the classroom. The lack of cultural knowledge was often an issue that impeded the ITAs’ instruction (LeGros & Faez, 2012). This was clearly exemplified by Daniela, an ITA from Brazil. On the videotape Daniela’s class was reading a story about Fabio. Her students began to tease her because they were thinking of the famous model, Fabio. Daniela turned to the interviewer while viewing the tape and stated, “I don’t know the person, who’s the person?” After the researcher provided a brief description of Fabio, Daniela was more able to understand her students’ reactions in the videotape because she did not understand the cultural reference in real time. Several of the participants in this study used the process of viewing the videotape to ask the interviewer questions about how to explain things in English
after they noticed that their explanation in the videotaped class was not fully understood by their students. One such example was Isabella, an ITA from Peru, who was trying to describe a common meal in Peru, but she couldn’t name it in English. She said,

We are talking according to the reading, um about food, and so can you imagine the difference, Peruvian food and American food? Even I mention there de coi, de coi is the piggy, the little animal, the piggy, (snaps fingers) I cannot remember that name.

After a few negotiations of the word “piggy” the interviewer was finally able to determine that the participant was referring to a guinea pig, and the ITA was able to go on with her analysis of this class incident. These examples illustrated that analyzing videotaped teaching observations could be enhanced when the ITA had an informant to provide background cultural and linguistic knowledge.

Beyond the realm of informant some participants wanted their mentor to provide external feedback of the videotaped teaching performance (Sherin, 2004). Videotaping differed from other types of evaluation in that it recorded the exact events that occurred in the classroom so that teachers could actually see how they appeared in the classroom (Tripp & Rich, 2012). Some participants suggested video-taped observations could be evaluated by various stakeholders. Rosa, an ITA from Spain, remarked that “Yeah, with the camera you, you judge me” so she associated the video with the act of evaluation which had been common in established teacher education research (Hatzpinagos & Lygo-Baker, 2006). While some participants had negative connotations about videotaping, other participants embraced the evaluation of the videotape as a way to encourage teacher growth. Eva, an ITA from Romania, explained that she wanted to use videotapes to document her teaching practice for her supervisor.

I don’t want just only to participate in a passive even that my supervisor told me, you can evaluate until then, and I wanted to do something different! Why not? Just to record it and to present it to my supervisor

She viewed videotaped observations as a means of seeking outside evaluation. Getting peer feedback from others provided the participant with an element of accountability so that there was more motivation to improve their teaching practice (Tripp & Rich, 2012). Even within the context of this particular observation she asked the interviewer to evaluate the videotape, but the interviewer explained that this was not the purpose of the interview study so the request was politely declined. Later Eva inquired, “Did you have the impression that I spoke very much little bit?” Many of the participants tried to elicit the interviewer’s evaluation of the observation, most likely because feedback had been a prominent feature of previous teaching observations that they had experienced (Hatzpinagos & Lygo-Baker, 2006). She later explained that she asked for feedback because, “Now it just uh because I don’t see the students you know I only saw ((laughs)) myself so that also one has something to do you know?” Even though this participant admitted that multiple perspectives of noticing could provide her with more feedback (Spiro et al. 2007) such information would interfere with the participant’s ability to analyze his or her own teaching.
Discussion and Conclusions

While research into how video can contribute to noticing in the classroom among in- and pre-service teachers (e.g., Masats & Dooly, 2011; Welsch & Devlin, 2007) as well as college instructors (e.g., Chappell, 2007; Hall & Smotrova, 2013) has been well established, not enough is known about the unique contributions that ITAs might make this body of research. This study contributed three findings to the body of research into video and noticing by examining how the process of noticing contributed the professional growth of ITAs.

Methodological Contributions

The first contribution was methodological. Past research into noticing and video relied on simulated teaching rather than drawing on actual students in the classrooms of students, for instance by LeGros and Faez (2012). This study went a step beyond the LeGros and Faez’s (2012) study to use videotaped observations in an actual classroom instead of using a mock classroom. The use of authentic classrooms enabled the ITAs to observe various aspects of the classroom interaction that might not have occurred in a fabricated classroom of peers. Secondly having the ITAs teach within their own content area rather than an assigned random topic increased their investment to improve because they saw the immediate relevance of the videotaped observation experience, such as in the case of Hans and Jacques among others, who wanted to evaluate the video to improve their own teaching. The context of a regularly scheduled undergraduate class also provided the ITAs with exposure to spontaneous authentic classroom events in order to build their teaching expertise of responding to students.

The Role of Mentors in the Observation Process

A second finding revealed how incorporating mentors into the video viewing process intersects with the cultural backgrounds of the ITAs’ and their comprehension of the teaching observation process. While prior studies used mentors to discuss an evaluation of the video (Eröz-Tü̈ğa, 2013; Baecher et al. 2013), this study used the mentor to facilitate the ITA’s comprehension and analysis of the events that occurred in a videotaped lesson without offering evaluative comments. Many of the ITAs, like Daniela and Isabella, needed cultural and linguistic background in order to have a full understanding of an incident from the tape. Learning the cultural expectations of teaching was of a primary concern to many of the participants as they sought to meet the projected norms of an American college classroom. Several of the participants, like Eva, expressed the desire to record future observations to share with their university supervisors to facilitate their own professional growth. Discussing incidents of the tape with an informant enabled the ITAs, such as in the case of Ryoko, to talk through their thought processes thereby providing a space for extended analysis of events that they noticed in their teaching.

The Role of Cultural Differences in Noticing

The third and final finding demonstrated that ITAs shared many of the same experiences with noticing, e.g., being nervous while being videotaped and noticing their own gestures and unconscious mannerisms as a result of watching themselves teach, that are documented in the research (e.g., Masats & Dooly, 2011; Welsch & Devlin, 2007), but unlike their native speaking counterparts, ITAs linked the source of their noticing to their cultural background and not
necessarily to their lack of teaching experience. This link to cultural differences distinguished ITAs as a unique group within the research on noticing and video.

**Implications**

Although this was just a preliminary study, future research in this area could contribute significantly this field. First, a study could expand on the use of videotaped observations in order to see if the initial videotaped observation and debriefing actually contributed to a change in a second videotaped observation. Additionally, the perspective of the videotape could be narrowed to focus on specific issues, such as cultural differences in interactions norms or pronunciation in the delivery of instruction to direct the noticing to certain aspects within ITAs’ instruction in the university classroom. Videotaping could be implemented within an ITA pedagogy class to examine how the ITA applies pedagogical content, such as using visuals, that is learned within the ITA class to move the knowledge from theory to practice. Videotaping as part of a departmental mentoring program could provide meaningful information for discipline specific practices.

Based on these findings, we recommend that videotapes be used as a basis for future teacher training for ITAs. We believe that ITAs should watch and discuss the tape with a mentor so that the ITA is able to have guidance in noticing without evaluation since it may be an unfamiliar practice. The videotape could be watched multiple times in order to focus the ITA on a particular feature of the lesson for each specific viewing. Beyond the methodology of this study, we submit that two videotaped classes would provide more information about measuring the potential growth in pedagogical practice over time. With a second videotaped class, the ITA would be able to make strategic goals to aim for in the second videotape and to gain confidence in front of the camera. We would also suggest that videotaping should occur within actual college classrooms instead of a mock classroom so that ITAs could view themselves in an authentic teaching context.

**REFERENCES**


**AUTHORS**

GWENDOLYN M. WILLIAMS, PhD, is an assistant professor of ESOL Education. Her research interests include teacher education and second language writing. Email: eslresearcher@gmail.com

ROD E. CASE, Ph.D., is an associate professor of TESOL. His research interests include applied linguistics and second language pragmatics. Email: rcase@unr.edu
The Forgotten Half: Understanding the Unique Needs of International Student Partners

Danni Lei (Master’s Student)
Jon D. Woodend (Doctoral Student)
Sarah K. Nutter (Doctoral Student)
Alyssa R. Ryan (Master’s Student)
Sharon L. Cairns, PhD
University of Calgary (Canada)

Abstract

With the increasing enrollment of international students in North American universities, the need to support the adjustment of international students has also increased. One factor consistently identified as essential to successful student adjustment is having a strong support network, including familial support. Previous research investigating the needs of international students’ partners is limited and has suggested that partners may face greater barriers to adjustment than international students. The current study was conducted to better understand the needs of partners as well as potential barriers they face when attempting to access services. Although limited by sample size, the results suggested that partners are interested in increased support in helping their transition to local living and mainstream culture.

Keywords: international students; international spouses; needs assessment; cross-cultural adjustment

Amid the recent trend of international movement and globalization, a growing number of students have crossed national boundaries to seek education, with many attending Western universities (Institute of International Education, 2009). At the same time, post-secondary institutions across Canada have pushed to increase the enrolment of international students. Consequently, there has been a push for universities to support students’ adjustment (Institute of International Education, 2009). Upon arrival, students are immersed within a new culture and are forced to navigate a new cultural context while retaining a sense of their heritage, a process known as acculturation (Li & Gasser, 2005).

Research investigating the cross-cultural adjustment of international students has identified challenges in acculturating (Li & Gasser, 2005). The influence of cultural adjustment on international students’ often results in difficulties including language barriers, lack of support, and lack of familiarity with the school system (Andrade, 2006). These difficulties may lead to persistent feelings of isolation, inadequacy, depression, and anxiety (Rosenthal, Russell, &
Thomson, 2007). One factor consistently identified as essential to successful student adjustment is having a strong support network, including familial support (Kwon, 2009). With an increasing number of partners accompanying international students to Western, English-speaking countries it is important to understand the unique needs and well-being of these partners due to the potential impact on international student adjustment (Martens & Grant, 2008).

**Literature Review**

The presence of a partner in a new country may lessen the effects of stressful events for international students and provide a sense of social connectedness (Martens & Grant, 2008). However, research on the experiences of international students’ partners is limited. Previous research has stressed that students’ accompanying partners may face even greater barriers to adjustment than the student (Martens & Grant, 2008). Transitioning to a new country disrupts established social support networks and presents the challenge of developing new ones (Misra, Crist, & Burant, 2003). Such changes may be especially stressful for partners and can cause difficulties in adjustment due to family responsibilities, social isolation, socio-political constraints, and changes in social and/or work status (Copeland & Norell, 2002; Zhang, Smith, Swisher, Fu, & Fogarty, 2011). Unlike international students who are immersed in academic culture, partners may have limited opportunities to interact with others and to learn about the host culture (Cho, Lee, & Jezewski, 2005). With these challenges in mind, partners have begun to believe that academic institutions have a responsibility to provide them with support (Teshome & Osei-Kofi, 2011).

Research has suggested that student partners experience unique difficulties such as the inability to seek employment due to visa type, loss of established roles and lifestyles, and lack of social connectedness (Copeland & Norell, 2002; Kim, 2006). Such difficulties may impact student partners’ emotional and mental well-being, leading to feelings of invisibility and marginalization (Teshome & Osei-Kofi, 2011). Understanding their needs is essential to providing appropriate support and fostering a sense of belonging. A previous needs assessment on female spouses of international students identified three important needs: (a) the opportunity to take part in professional development opportunities through the university, (b) the availability of adequate childcare in order to participate in programs, and (c) the opportunity to become involved in the development and delivery of programs aimed towards student partners (Martens & Grant, 2008). Further, research conducted on an existing program suggested that partners viewed such programs as a source of support (Teshome & Osei-Kofi, 2011). However, some partners felt English language proficiency was not taken into account, highlighting the importance of developing programs based on specific needs and specific contexts of the student partners (Teshome & Osei-Kofi, 2011).

**The Current Study**

Although previous research has been conducted investigating the experiences and needs of partners of international students (e.g. Martens & Grant, 2008; Zhang et al., 2011), further research is necessary to establish a foundation of knowledge to inform program development. Such an understanding can inform university programming that aims to provide support for this population, which highlights the necessity of an evaluation of the circumstances, needs and requirements of international student partners for successful adjustment. In addition, the majority of the research on partners of international students has focused only on female
partners. Further research needs to be conducted in order to understand the needs of both female and male partners.

The current study was conducted at a large Canadian university in partnership with the university’s international student center’s director, who requested the researchers investigate ways in which the center’s preexisting program could be improved in order to boost attendance and participation. The director identified previous attempts to run a partner support program at the university with varying success. Specifically, while few participants attended the scheduled events, the director continued to hear from students, partners, other university staff, and national conferences that there was a need for such services.

In response to this request, a needs assessment was conducted via online survey in order to help identify the needs of international students’ partners and gaps in pre-existing services (Royse, Thyer, & Padgett, 2010). A generally accepted practice in conducting needs assessments is to construct a logic model, which may serve as a theoretical framework to guide the study. Specifically, it identifies the various components (i.e., resources) that go into the short-term, mid-term, and long-term goals, and the desired outcomes of the program (Royse et al., 2010). The logic model for this study was developed in consultation with the direct stakeholders, including the director of the international services office as well as referencing previous research. See Table 1 for the detailed logic model. This logic model provided the specific research questions used in this study as well as informing the analyses and discussion.

**Research Method**

A mixed-method was chosen to best address the overarching evaluation questions. Specifically there were four research questions in the current study:

1. How do social connection, acculturation, and English language usage relate to current life satisfaction in partners of international students?
2. What services do partners identify as being potentially helpful and why?
3. What barriers do partners experience? and
4. What might help enable partners to access services?

**Participants**

Due to difficulty with directly contacting partners of international students, the survey was distributed to the international students themselves. Making contact with international students allowed for an examination of the demographics of the international students with partners. A self-selected sample of 39 international students (24 females, 11 males, 4 undisclosed) responded to the survey invitation. The majority of international students were at the graduate level (25 graduate students, 10 undergraduate students, 4 undisclosed). Nineteen international students indicated having partners, fifteen of who were currently lived together. Three of these fifteen students reported having children.

Although 15 international students (14 graduates, 1 undergraduate) indicated that their partner was currently living with them, only 11 partners (7 males, 4 females) chose to participate in the study. Although 11 partners completed the demographic portion of the survey, only 9 partners (6 females, 3 males) elected to continue with the survey and complete the remaining quantitative and qualitative sections. All of the 9 partners fully answered all questions.
Table 1: Logic Model for Constructing International Student Partner Support Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Resources</th>
<th>Program Activities</th>
<th>Output Measures</th>
<th>Desired Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staff</strong> (Director and advisor)</td>
<td>Orientation (Twice yearly)</td>
<td>Orientation (Record number of attendees)</td>
<td>Increase familiarity with local culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Funding</strong> (International Students Services central operating)</td>
<td>Monthly meetings</td>
<td>Meetings (Record number of attendees)</td>
<td>Increase awareness of concrete resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ideas</strong> (Other post-secondary institutions)</td>
<td>Email (All/ ListServ)</td>
<td>Advising (Record number of individual meetings)</td>
<td>Mediate concerns with culture-shock and transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual advising</td>
<td>Activities (Record number of attendees)</td>
<td>Reduce language barriers and increase English skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social events</td>
<td></td>
<td>Disseminate knowledge across Canadian post-secondary institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provide childcare at meetings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Desired Outcomes</strong></td>
<td><strong>Short-Term</strong></td>
<td><strong>Intermediate</strong></td>
<td><strong>Long-term</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increase campus and community involvement</td>
<td>Increase social inter-connectedness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Facilitate acculturation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increase well-being and academic performance of international students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Instrumentation**

**Bicultural identity.** The Bicultural Self-Efficacy Scale (David, Okazaki, & Saw, 2009) is a 26-item measure, which assesses an individual’s perceived bicultural self-efficacy. Items are rated in a Likert type response format, with the scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 9 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating a greater degree of perceived bicultural self-efficacy. The scale consists of six subscales; social groundedness, communication ability, positive attitudes, knowledge, role repertoire, and bicultural beliefs. An example item is, “I can communicate my ideas effectively to both mainstream Canadians and people from the same heritage culture as myself.” Internal consistency for the subscales range from good to excellent, \( \alpha = .69 \text{ to } \alpha = .91 \), and two-week test-retest reliabilities for the subscales range from fair to good, \( r = .58 \text{ to } r = .78 \). The Bicultural Self-Efficacy Scale has been established as an acceptable tool for measuring acculturation and is positively associated with psychological adjustment (Chen, Benet-Martinez, Wu, Lam, & Bond, 2013).
English language usage. The English Language Acculturation Scale (Salamonson, Everett, Koch, Andrew, & Davidson, 2008) is a five-item measure, which was designed to serve as an indicator of an individual’s English language usage (Salamonson, Attwood, Everett, Weavers, & Glew, 2013). Items are rated in a Likert type response format, with the scale ranging from 1 (only non-English language(s)) to 5 (only English) with higher scores indicating greater English language usage. An example item is, “what language(s) do you speak?” Internal consistency for the English Language Acculturation Scale was excellent at $\alpha = .94$. It was also found to have a moderate and significant correlation with length of stay in host country, $r = .53$ (Salamonson et al., 2013).

Social connectedness. The Social Connectedness Scale (Lee & Robbins, 1995) is an eight-item measure assessing the degree to which individuals feel socially disconnected and detached. Items are rated in a Likert type response format, with the scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree) with higher scores indicating greater feelings of social disconnectedness. An example item is, “I feel disconnected from the world around me.” Internal consistency for the Social Connectedness Scale was excellent at $\alpha = .91$, and two-week test-retest reliability was also excellent at $r = .96$.

Satisfaction with life. The Temporal Satisfaction with Life Scale (Pavot, Diener, & Suh, 1998) is a 15-item measure assessing an individual’s past, present and anticipated future life satisfaction and subjective well-being. Items are rated in a Likert type response format, with the scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) with higher scores indicating greater satisfaction with life. An example item is, “I would change nothing about my current life.” The Temporal Satisfaction with Life Scale had an excellent internal consistency at $\alpha = .92$, and a very good four-week test-retest reliability of $r = .83$. For the purposes of the current research, only the five items from the current life satisfaction subscale were used.

Qualitative survey. Directed and summative content analysis was used throughout the qualitative portion of the survey. Directed content analysis allows researchers to use preexisting literature to inform choice options for each question or theme examined (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005); while summative content analysis counts the number of times each choice option is identified by participants (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Lichtman, 2013). The qualitative portion of the survey was divided into three sections, and consisted of six questions. Each question included potential answers gathered from the literature and from consulting with the International Student Centre, in order to ease answering in light of potential language barriers. Participants were also able to include their own unique answers. The first section of questions sought to identify services regarded as helpful by partners; accordingly, participants were asked about programs and services they had previously accessed, and how these services had helped them. Next, participants were asked about programs and services they had not accessed, and how these services could be helpful to them in the future. Finally, participants were asked about barriers to accessing services and what would potentially assist them in accessing services.

Procedure

International student participants were recruited through the international student email newsletter, the Graduate Student Association newsletter, and posters placed around the university campus. Recruitment and data collection took place between January and April 2014.
After providing demographic information, student participants indicated whether or not they have a partner who is currently living with them. If students indicated they do have a partner, the survey requested the student to have their partner complete the rest of the survey. Partners were then invited to complete the remaining demographic questions, quantitative measures, and qualitative questions. Full completion of the survey took approximately 30 to 45 minutes.

**Results**

**Demographics**

Partners had an average age of 32.82 years ($SD = 8.97$), had been in Canada an average 69.56 months ($SD = 44.73$), and had been in a relationship with their student partner for an average of 42.00 months ($SD = 51.60$).

**Table 2: Home Countries of Partners of International Students**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Partners were from a variety of home countries (see Table 2) and self-reported as being fluent in a variety of languages (see Table 3). Two partners identified as Canadian-born. Accordingly, their lengths of time in Canada were excluded from the average. However, their remaining responses were included in the aggregate data because they also represent partners of international students.

**Table 3: Self-reported Fluent Languages by Partners**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farsi</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hebrew</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovak</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Due to the lack of current demographic information about international students who come to university with partners, an additional analysis was conducted to investigate the unsubstantiated assumption that graduate students are more likely than undergraduate students to have a partner who accompanies them. To do this, a chi square analysis, which consists of an odds ratio, was conducted to compare the number of graduate international students with partners to undergraduate international students with partners. The chi square analysis was significant, $\chi^2 (1) = 6.43$, $p = .01$, with the odds ratio suggesting that, in the current sample, graduate students were 23 times more likely to have a partner than undergraduate students.

**Quantitative Questionnaires**

Given that only nine partners completed the quantitative and qualitative portion of the survey, descriptive statistics were used to examine scores on the quantitative questionnaires (Table 4). Participants’ scores for degree of acculturation and current life satisfaction were high, which indicated that participants were generally satisfied with their current life and believed they were well-adjusted to navigating Canadian culture. Scores for English language acculturation indicated that participants equally use both English and non-English languages in day-to-day life. Despite these scores, scores for social connectedness were low, indicating that participants felt
socially isolated. Correlational analyses revealed that higher reported English language acculturation was associated with both higher reports of social connection and current life satisfaction.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for Partner Quantitative Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social connectedness</td>
<td>8-38</td>
<td>15.89</td>
<td>9.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acculturation</td>
<td>136-230</td>
<td>183.56</td>
<td>35.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English language usage</td>
<td>5-25</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current life satisfaction</td>
<td>11-35</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>8.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As well, lower reports of perceived social connectedness were associated with lower reports of current life satisfaction. See Table 5 for correlation coefficients.

Table 5: Intercorrelations among the Quantitative Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Acculturation</th>
<th>English Usage</th>
<th>Social Connectedness</th>
<th>Current Life Satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acculturation</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>-0.58</td>
<td>-0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Usage</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-0.71*</td>
<td>0.71*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Connectedness</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-0.80**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Life Satisfaction</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *p < .05; **p < .01

Services Identified as being Potentially Helpful

When asked what programs and services partners have used in the past, five participants indicated that obtaining information about the transit and healthcare systems was helpful. Further, three participants indicated having volunteer opportunities, information about day-to-day activities, and receiving help getting a job in Canada were helpful services. Finally, two participants felt that having English classes and professional development workshops had been helpful. See Table 6 for frequency counts of all items included in the program and service list.

Participants also indicated how these programs and services had helped them. Of the participants who had accessed services, five indicated that these services had helped them to become more comfortable with Canadian culture. Four participants indicated that services reduced loneliness, reduced stress, and helped them to meet new people. Three participants indicated these services helped them to navigate the city, to reduce financial strain, and to improve English abilities.

When asked what programs and services partners have not used in the past, but which they feel would be helpful, four participants indicated information about the healthcare system, having social events (with other international students/partners as well as mixed events with Canadian students/partners), and professional development workshops would be helpful. Three participants identified help getting a job and English classes would be beneficial and two participants indicated they would have liked to receive information about the transit system.

Finally, partners were asked how programs and services they had not accessed could be helpful to them. Five participants indicated that these services could help to reduce loneliness and improve English. Three indicated these services would be helpful to increase time with spouse, help with the completion of necessary tasks (e.g., grocery shopping), help participants
meet people, help participants become more comfortable in Canadian culture, and help learn more about Canadian culture.

Table 6: Services Identified as Previously Helpful or Potentially Helpful by Partners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programs/Services</th>
<th>Previously Helpful</th>
<th>Potentially Helpful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information about transit system</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information about health care system</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information about day-to-day activities</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer opportunities</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help getting a job</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English classes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development workshops</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooking classes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First aid/CPR</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs for children</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information and connections to volunteer opportunities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social events with international students</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed social events with Canadian students</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer training</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise classes</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Barriers Identified to Accessing Services

Participants were asked about the barriers they have experienced in accessing needed services. Three participants indicated not understanding spoken English and having trouble speaking English as significant barriers, as well as not knowing where these services can be accessed. Two of the three participants with children indicated that not having access to childcare and the cost of childcare as barriers to accessing potentially beneficial services. Difficulty understanding the transit system and having time constraints were also both identified by one participant as barriers.

Aids Identified as Enabling Access to Services

Finally, participants were asked what might help to enable them in accessing needed programs and services. In contrast to the responses on the previous qualitative questions, only one or two participants endorsed each of the items for this question. Two participants indicated that having access to a translator or information in their primary language would be helpful, and that they would also benefit from the aid of a mentor who could help them become more familiar with how things work in Canada. In addition, two participants indicated that they would be interested in volunteer opportunities to help plan services for other partners at the university. Finally, the two participants who identified as having children specified that having childcare would be helpful.
Discussion

The purpose of the current study was to identify the unique needs of partners of international students, to identify the barriers partners experience when attempting to access needed services, and aids that may enable them to access needed services in the future. In line with the findings of research conducted by Martens and Grant (2008), the results suggest that partner participants want: (a) to be involved in professional development, (b) aid with accessing childcare, (c) to participate in programming for partners of international students, and (d) to improve their English abilities.

Partner participants in this needs assessment identified that learning more about Canadian culture and becoming more comfortable with navigating Canadian culture would be helpful and desired. Previous research has suggested that the longer the time spent in Canada, the less likely partners are to express the need for opportunities to increase Canadian cultural awareness (Copeland & Norell, 2002). In our sample, however, even though partners reported being in Canada for over a year on average, partners still reported a desire to increase their comfort with Canadian culture. This may suggest that partners experience a lack of opportunities or resources to learn about Canadian culture.

In both the quantitative and qualitative portions of the survey partner participants reported experiencing low social connectedness. More than half of the participants endorsed “reduce loneliness” as a reason for why services would be helpful. This suggests that partners do experience loneliness and feelings of isolation, and also recognize that reducing this loneliness could improve their overall day-to-day experience. This was supported in the current study as partners who indicated feeling more socially disconnected also reported lower life satisfaction. These findings are consistent with the position of Misra and colleagues (2003), who asserted that people transitioning to a new country face the challenge of developing new social networks. For partners of international students, this may be more difficult because they are often isolated due to a lack of involvement in education, work, or the community (Copeland & Norell, 2002; Teshome & Osei-Kofi, 2012).

Concerning barriers to accessing services, the most endorsed barriers that partner participants identified were related to English skills as well as not knowing where services are provided. With regard to English skills, this finding contrasts the result from the English Language Acculturation Scale, which suggested that participants generally use English about half the time and possibly indicates some proficiency. A potential explanation for this discrepancy may be that, although participants find they use English, they still wish to improve their skill level, which may help increase feelings of adjustment as well as allow partners to interact with greater ease with individuals from mainstream culture (Yeh & Inose, 2003). The current study did find that increased English language usage was related to increased life satisfaction and social connectedness. Language acquisition has previously been identified as critical to successful adjustment for international student spouses (Martens & Grant, 2008). This is consistent with the findings from the current study, which suggest that participants view English classes as potentially helpful and that difficulty with understanding spoken English is a potential barrier.

A unique finding was that the majority of graduate students were female with male partners. Previous research investigating the needs of international students’ partners has been conducted only with female partners (Martens & Grant, 2008; Teshome & Osei-Kofi, 2012). The results of the current study may suggest that the number of female international students...
with male partners is increasing or has been higher than previously assumed. The potentially unique needs of male partners may be important to explore in future research. Finally, two partner participants indicated originating from Canada, which highlights an incorrect assumption that international student partners are only foreign nationals. These Canadian-born partners may have different needs and may possess different resources than foreign-born partners, which may have impacted the average scores on self-reported social connectedness found in this study.

**Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

Given the small sample size in this study, it is clear that follow up research needs to be conducted with a larger and more diverse sample in order to better understand the unique needs of international student partners. The experience of the nine partners who responded to the survey may not be generalizable to the experiences and needs of other partners of international students. Future research should investigate further the demographics of the international students and their partners. Specifically, it would be helpful to identify if students and their partners originate from the same or different countries as mixed groups may have unique needs.

In addition, it is important to acknowledge that the current study took place in the Canadian context, which may be quite different in terms of services rendered and service objectives, when compared to the context in the United States. As such, further research is needed within the Canadian context, as well as within the United States, to provide a stronger foundation for studies on international student partners.

English proficiency was required to understand and complete the survey. Although 15 student participants identified having a partner in Canada only nine partners fully completed the survey. A potential explanation for this discrepancy may be that the responses gathered represent partners with greater English abilities, which would be consistent with previous research (Salamonson et al., 2008). It is also possible that the partners who completed the survey lack the language skills to further express their experiences. This may have contributed to the fact that few participants wrote responses outside of those provided in the qualitative questions. This is important when considering the key findings as it is unknown to what degree the partners were able to fully comprehend the questions being presented and if their responses are an appropriate reflection of their experience. Despite these limitations, the current study adds unique findings to the limited literature investigating the needs of international student partners.

As a result of the low response to an online survey, it is recommended that future research utilize alternative data collection methods, such as focus groups. In addition, a previous needs assessment conducted by Martens and Grant (2008) offered translated surveys, which may aid in data collection as well as provide partners with reduced English language ability with the increased opportunity to engage in the survey.

**Conclusion**

This needs assessment had findings that will be valuable to explore in future research. More specifically, the results of the current research suggest that partners of international students primarily struggle with social isolation and may benefit from the opportunity to take English classes, engage in conversational English clubs, and volunteer opportunities in addition to receiving information about the local healthcare and transit systems. Affordable childcare is a concern for the partners with children. Further, the results tentatively suggest that the proportion...
of male partners of female international students may be increasing or higher than previously expected. By exploring the unique needs of both male and female partners of international students, researchers and service providers may be better equipped to serve international students and their partners and to assist them in successfully integrating into the campus community and society at-large.

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**AUTHORS**

**DANNI LEI**, BSc, is an MSc Counselling Psychology student at the University of Calgary. Danni’s research interests include immigrant transitions, career development, multiculturalism, and social justice. Email: dlei@ucalgary.ca

**JON WOODEND**, MSc, is a PhD Counselling Psychology student at the University of Calgary. Jon’s research interests include international career transitions, multiculturalism, immigration, and social justice. Email: jdwooden@ucalgary.ca

**SARAH NUTTER**, MSc, is a PhD counselling psychology student at the University of Calgary. Sarah’s research interests include weight bias and its sociocultural correlates, and social justice. Email: snutter@ucalgary.ca

**ALYSSA RYAN**, BA, is an MSc Counselling Psychology student at the University of Calgary. Alyssa’s research interests include resiliency, individuals and families with child welfare involvement, and social justice. Email: arryan@ucalgary.ca

**SHARON CAIRNS**, PhD, is an Associate Professor in Counselling Psychology at the University of Calgary. Dr. Cairns research interests include post-secondary counselling, student mental health, and resiliency. Email: scairns@ucalgary.ca

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Coming to America: Assessing the Patterns of Acculturation, Friendship Formation, and the Academic Experiences of International Students at a U.S. College

Pamela Leong, PhD
Salem State University (USA)

Abstract

Using interview data from 11 international students, this paper compares international students’ experiences at a single American university, and the acculturation issues that they encountered. The students assessed their experiences at the university, both positive and negative, and discussed their perceptions of American ways of doing things. The findings suggest that, when compared to students from other countries, students from China face considerable more difficulties both academically and socially, given the formidable language and cultural barriers. These challenges remain regardless of whether the students self-segregate with co-nationals or associate primarily with Americans. While individual-level factors (e.g., language fluency and coping ability) affect the international students’ lived experiences and perceived satisfaction level while studying in the United States, this paper argues that environmental factors (e.g., the culture and reception of the host society) may be more important in shaping the experiences of international students, whether for better or worse.

Keywords: international students, American colleges, acculturation, language and cultural barriers

In the 2012/2013 academic year, the number of international students in colleges and universities in the United States was at an all-time high, at 819,644. The top sending countries were China, India, and South Korea, which represented the countries of origin of nearly 50% of all international students in the United States (Institute of International Education, 2013).

The increased representation of international students in U.S. colleges and universities has proven to have significant effects. For one, the international students contribute positively to the U.S economy, to individual state economies, and to their host institution’s economic health. The presence of international students also has social consequences, contributing to the cultural diversity of nation, state, and local areas. The international students’ intellectual and creative contributions also are felt in American research and in developments in science and technology, and other disciplines. Finally, the international community in American colleges and universities has implications regarding global relationships, whether that is between nation-states, or global business and economic communities. For all of these reasons, it is important that we consider
the experiences of international college students in the United States. This current study attempts to do just this, with a special focus on students from China, the top sending country.

**Literature Review**

Studies of international college students from Asia in American colleges vary in focus and scope. Li and Bray (2007) assessed push-pull factors that influence mainland Chinese students’ decision to study abroad in Hong Kong and Macau. Other studies underscored the role of English fluency on international students’ academic performance in American colleges (Light, Xu, & Mossop, 1987; Spinks & Yo, 1984).

The literatures that examine how international students adjust to their new social environment typically conclude that the factors that influence acculturation include: country of origin; English fluency; and social support (Nasirudeen, Josephine, Adeline, Seng, & Ling, 2014; Yeh & Inose, 2003). These factors may help explain the differences in experiences and overall satisfaction level among international students. Generally, students with familiarity and knowledge of the English language and with American ways of doing things were more prepared to handle both institutional and societal-wide demands and expectations. They also developed more friendships. European students, who have greater English fluency and familiarity with American customs, also face greater social support and higher satisfaction levels once in the United States, when compared to students from non-European countries (Yeh & Inose, 2003).

Asian students, in contrast, experience more acculturative stress than their European counterparts, and the Asian students who socialize primarily with co-ethnics experience higher levels of acculturative stress (Poyrazli, Kavanaugh, Baker, & Al-Timimi, 2004; Yan & Berliner, 2013). In fact, Yan and Berliner concluded that life in the United States was not only not easy for the Chinese students, but that Chinese students faced considerable and multifaceted life stresses that included both personal concerns (e.g., job opportunities, visa problems, and dating issues) and sociocultural concerns (e.g., the experience of culture shock and difficulties adjusting to the host culture).

The stress associated with acculturation will affect international students’ overall satisfaction in the host country. Sam’s (2001) study revealed that international students in Norway on the whole reported overall life satisfaction, but that their life satisfaction levels varied depending on country of origin. Students from Europe and North America were more satisfied than students from Asian or Africa. In Sam’s study, factors that affected international students’ self-perceived life satisfaction levels included: number of friends, satisfaction with finances, perceived discrimination, and the adequacy of the information received prior to studying abroad. Interestingly, neither language proficiency nor having a host national friend affected life satisfaction significantly.

Al-Sharideh and Goe (1998) indirectly measured the satisfaction level of international college students by measuring international students’ “personal adjustment,” which they defined as “the maintenance or achievement of high self-esteem by an international student within the context of an American university (Al-Sharideh and Goe, 1998, p. 709). They explicitly assumed that international students who were able to “more extensively assimilate American culture and learn to effectively interact with Americans will be more successful in avoiding personal problems, meeting life needs, and fulfilling academic demands” (Al-Sharideh and Goe, 1998, p. 700)—outcomes that likely shape international students’ perceived satisfaction of their study-abroad experiences in the United States. In Al-Sharideh and Goe’s study, key to
international students’ successful assimilation were their social ties—specifically, having ties to co-ethnics (people with a similar cultural background or nationality). In fact, the number of strong ties with co-ethnics was found to have the strongest relationship with self-esteem, but only to a certain degree. Beyond the threshold point of 32 people, additional co-ethnic ties became negatively associated with self-esteem (Al-Sharideh and Goe, 1998, p. 720).

Thus, having a very strong co-ethnic tie or having only co-ethnic ties exclusively does not buffer international students from problems associated with cultural adjustment. But no matter the size of their co-ethnic ties, international students cannot avoid interacting with Americans, both within and outside of the university context. Thus, Al Sharideh and Goe (1998) suggested that, independent of the strength and size of their co-ethnic ties, international students’ self-esteem ability to develop strong ties with Americans will positively affect their self-esteem (p. 722).

Baba and Hosoda’s (2014) more recent study also confirmed the importance of social support to international students’ adjustment issues, finding a direct and positive relationship between social support and cross-cultural adjustment. Their findings, however, did not specify whether the form of social support was co-ethnic support or local support (support by the host members).

International students’ satisfaction level also may be inferred through the level of racial or ethnic discrimination experienced. This area is one in which Lee and Rice (2007) explored when they examined the experiences of 24 international students from 15 countries who were studying at a research university in the American Southwest. The international students in their study encountered difficulties that went beyond mere assimilation challenges; there were brushes with inhospitable behaviors, cultural intolerance, and racial and ethnic confrontation.

While literatures that examine the experiences of international college students are well-documented, many of the literatures focus on international students’ experiences at large research universities. My study departs from this trend by examining the experiences of international students at a regional, teaching-intensive university. In addition, the current study provides a more holistic treatment of the full college experience; I assess not only the effects of language and cultural barriers on international students’ academic success, but also compare the outcomes of other rites of passage for college students, including friendship formation and dating experiences. Lastly, the current study uses interview data, rather than survey data. The use of interview data allows for a deeper understanding of how the international students make sense of the new world around them, in ways that survey data disallow.

The main research question that organizes this study is: What factors facilitate or impede the academic and social experiences of international students at American colleges and universities, and do they vary by country of origin?

**Methods**

Data were collected at a single American university through face-to-face interviews. The interviews were semi-structured, face-to-face, and one-on-one. Each interview took approximately two hours and occurred on campus. The interviews were conducted in English. Participants were asked a series of open-ended questions about their background and about adjustment issues related to the college campus, the region, and the United States in general. Participants also were asked about their social relationships in the United States, and their perceptions of American culture.
### Table 1. Respondent Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRY OF ORIGIN</th>
<th>GENDER</th>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>ACADEMIC MAJOR</th>
<th>LENGTH OF STAY IN THE U.S.</th>
<th>LENGTH OF STAY AT THE HOST INSTITUTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>2 years, 9 months</td>
<td>2 years, 5 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cote d’ Ivoire</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>economics</td>
<td>2 years, 11 months</td>
<td>2 years, 2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>psychology</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>1.5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>international business</td>
<td>1 year, 2 months</td>
<td>1.5 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>male #1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>management accounting</td>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>male #2</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>accounting</td>
<td>1 year, 2 months</td>
<td>1 year, 2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>male #3</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>finance</td>
<td>1 year, 3 months</td>
<td>1 year, 3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>male #4</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>athletic training</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>male #5</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>computer science</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>female #1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>international business</td>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>female #2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>international business</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Sampling

At the time of this study, the interview respondents were enrolled full-time at an east-coast, regional university that is located in a small city on the eastern seaboard of the United States. Less than a quarter of the city’s population is non-White. This teaching-intensive university is a medium-sized, four-year university with some master’s level programs. As of 2013, 206 (2.7%) of the undergraduates are international students. The university serves many disadvantaged students, including low-income students and first-generation students.

As a monolingual sociology faculty who is an American-born female of Chinese (Taiwanese and Malaysian) descent, I originally recruited international students at the university through the assistance of the director and staff at the Center for International Education (CIE). Faculty colleagues also helped in the recruitment. Additional recruitment occurred through the posting of flyers around campus. Finally, upon the completion of an interview, a respondent might refer a fellow international student to me. Hence, the sampling strategy used a combination of convenience, snowball, and purposive sampling. Chinese students were purposefully oversampled.

With the permission of the respondents, I audiotaped the interviews. I transcribed verbatim all interviews, and assessed for patterns across the interview data, both within national groups and across national groups. The study received approval from the Institutional Review Board.
Board. To protect the identities of the respondents, in this paper I refer to the respondents only by their nationality, sex, and age.

Sample Characteristics

I interviewed 11 international students during the fall 2013 semester. The interviews lasted, on average, two hours each. All students were undergraduate students. Of the 11 international students that I interviewed, seven were from China, one from Sweden, one from Nepal, one from Cote d’Ivoire, and one from Afghanistan. Eight interview respondents were male, and three were female. The respondents’ ages ranged from 20 to 35, with a mean age of 22.8 years. Table 1 provides a summary of the respondent characteristics.

Student Criteria for Selecting the American College

For two of the 11 international students, affordability was the deciding factor in selecting Regional State University (this is a pseudonym, abbreviated as RSU). The Afghani male had started out at a college in a southern state, but the English-as-a-Second-Language classes there were too expensive. He searched on the internet and found that RSU was among the least costly. For the Nepalese female, foremost, too, was affordability, which is why she chose RSU over other colleges in the area. But she also chose RSU because she felt the school was gaining in popularity. Third, she already had friends at RSU, and these friends referred her to the university.

The Ivorian male selected RSU because of his family connection at the school. He had a cousin who was attending RSU at the time he applied. This cousin helped him with his application materials and later helped him negotiate the campus, local life, and American society in general.

The Swedish male was already a student at a community college in upstate New York when a RSU athletic coach recruited him. In addition, the Swedish student had friends at an area university who had described the area to him. The area surrounding RSU “sounded beautiful,” so he felt it was “right” to attend RSU.

All of the Chinese students I interviewed were in a “one-to-one program,” which is a partnership between certain American colleges and certain Chinese colleges. The Chinese students begin their first year of college in China, then spend the next two years in an American college, then complete their fourth and final year back at their Chinese college. The students are able to select from a list of American colleges to attend, including RSU.

For the Chinese students I interviewed, the location of the college usually was the deciding factor. All of the Chinese students I interviewed selected RSU foremost because of its proximity to a known metropolitan area. Chinese male #5 specifically wanted to be near a big city, but also wanted to be near New York City, and near the ocean. The city in which RSU is located satisfied these three requirements, leading to his selection of the campus.

Before Chinese male #2 came to the United States, he was not very acquainted with the expansive choices of American colleges, but the presence of well-known, elite universities in the region suggested that attending college in this area of the United States was a good choice in terms of quality education. Chinese male #2 therefore selected RSU because of its proximity to a metropolitan area and because of the reputation of the area colleges and universities.
Results

Language Barriers Experienced

A language barrier was the biggest challenge that the international students faced, leading to other adjustment issues. A lack of full fluency of American English undermined the students’ ability to communicate with peers and others, occasionally leading to miscommunication and misunderstandings, as well as the inability to form friendships. The language barrier also affected some of the students’ academic success.

As Chinese male #2 put it: “When I came here, I could not understand what others were saying, and I could not say something I want clearly. Like others could not understand what I was saying. That’s a big challenge for me when I just came here.” Chinese male #4 concurred, noting that when he talks to Americans, “I talk like a new baby.” Chinese female #1 indicated that her ability to study at RSU was hampered by a language difference. As she explained, sometimes she tried to study with her American peers, but was unable to explain her thoughts cogently. This inability to articulate her thoughts into understandable American English also affected her ability to make friends. Similarly, language was the biggest challenge for the Ivorian male, who noted that sometimes he did not fully understand what Americans were saying; meanwhile, some Americans also were unable to understand his line of thought, but pretended to understand him by smiling and nodding.

The language barrier also may affect international students’ academic success and everyday communication. For Chinese male #1, the language barrier meant needing to put in double time to complete his homework assignments. For other Chinese students, the use of a translation dictionary was necessitated at times, while on other occasions, they sought the help of their friends, both co-national friends and American friends. As Chinese male #4 put it, because of the language barrier, he became less social and more socially isolated, which affected his confidence level in terms of communicating and interacting with Americans.

Cultural Differences and Cultural Misunderstandings

Chinese male #2 described an event involving a cultural misunderstanding. His roommate had baked a lot of pizza and Chinese male #2 had helped himself to a piece, because he assumed the food was to be shared, as was customary in China, and also because of the sheer quantity of pizza available. His roommate, however, reprimanded him and told him that “You should ask [first].” Realizing his error, Chinese male #2 was really embarrassed.

In other cases, Americans might misinterpret the behaviors of international students. Chinese female #1 explained, for instance, that there were different connotations associated with hand-holding among girls and young women. In the U.S., she explained, girls holding hands might signify a lesbian relationship. In China, however, handholding among girls is common, indicating that two girls are good friends who enjoy spending time with each other. Hence, Chinese girls may be seen holding hands or linking arms but the relationship is purely platonic.

Food. Food represented a major cultural change for Chinese students in particular. Chinese students seemed to have more difficulty getting used to American food and especially American junk food. Furthermore, the Chinese food that is available in the area surrounding campus, or even in city, tend not to be authentically Chinese; rather, Chinese food in the U.S., according to the Chinese students, tend to be Americanized: The dishes are loaded with sugar, salt, and preservatives. This point was mentioned by Chinese males #1, #2, and #5, Chinese
females #1 and #2. The Swedish male also observed the ubiquity of American fast food and the general unhealthy nature of American food.

Food was not an issue for some of the respondents, however. The Ivorian male, for instance, while yearning for food from his country of origin, noted that he was able to obtain most of the ingredients (or similar ingredients) he needed to prepare Ivorian meals, as most of the ingredients were readily available in mainstream American grocery stores. On occasions, though, the ingredients were not available in the mainstream grocery stores, which then required visits to specialized grocery stores.

Food also was not an issue for Chinese male #3, who, in contrast to some of his co-national counterparts, expressed his fondness for American food. He also appreciated how, in this part of the United States, cuisines from different cultures were so readily available, unlike in China, where “Chinese people only eat Chinese food.” His peer, Chinese male #4, also enjoyed American fast food, at least initially. But then he confessed how he gained almost 15 pounds from the American diet.

**Pedagogical Differences.** There are noticeable differences in teaching methods and expectations across institutions within a country, and across nations. Chinese male #2 suggested that, at RSU, students were required to take greater responsibility for their education, as they were required to work more independently. In contrast, at the Chinese colleges, professors and classmates regularly reminded students of assignments, due dates, and possible grade penalties. These reminders were largely facilitated because Chinese college students take the same courses with the same set of peers, who tend to keep each other on task. In contrast, at RSU and most other American colleges, the student constitution in each class may differ, so that students may see a different set of students (comprising both within and outside of one’s major) in each class.

In addition, in China, course grades are dependent on students’ performance on one or two exams only. In contrast, at RSU the course grade typically is not determined by a single exam, but multiple exams, homework assignments, and even participation and attendance. Such a difference in grading expectations was surprising to the Chinese students, who seemed to prefer RSU’s method.

The Swedish male student felt that college education in the United States and Sweden was comparable, with some minor differences. One of the biggest differences, he stated, was that in Sweden, there are no homework assignments; instead, there are two major exams for each class, very much like the Chinese system. Hence, a student’s course grade depends on his or her performance on those exams. And very much like the Chinese system, class attendance is not mandatory. All that is required is that students perform well on the exams.

The Swedish student, very much like some of the Chinese students, preferred the system at RSU, where a student’s course grade was determined by various elements, and not just a single or even two exams. As the Swedish student put it:

I don’t think you should put that pressure on a student. Think about if you have to take five different classes. You have five mid-terms in one week. That’s going to be kind of hard to remember all those parts, you know?

In terms of class size, the Swedish student noted that RSU classes were larger than classes in Sweden. The Chinese students in this study, in contrast, pointed out that classes in China were much larger, with up to 150 students or so in a class.
Faculty-Student Relations. The Afghani male observed there was greater faculty-student communication both in class and outside of class at RSU. He further observed that students could email their professors anytime outside of class.

The Swedish male felt that American professors were more formal, compared to their Swedish counterparts. In Sweden, he explained, “You can say whatever you want.” And according to his friends back home, the professors in Sweden were not like parents, but more like friends. Chinese male #2, in contrast to the Swede, felt that American college professors were more like friends, when compared to Chinese college professors. As he described it, in the U.S., “You can talk about anything. You can call the professor’s name and easily they don’t mind, but in China, you will never call the professor’s name. You can only call him or her ‘Professor’ or ‘teacher.’” Chinese male #2 felt that there was a difference in the respect accorded to the professors, with more respect given to Chinese professors.

Chinese male #2 felt the difference in faculty-student relationships had much to do with the institutional culture. He observed the more informal relationships between faculty and students at RSU. In China, he stated that a professor simply lectures and “nothing else.” In contrast, he felt that the professors at RSU engaged in small talk and would converse with students about non-academic topics, such as the latest sporting event, so discussions did not merely center around class materials.

Three of the Chinese male students believed that the professors in China were not as strict as American professors. Their perception was based on a comparison of the quantity of assignments: Very little homework was assigned in their colleges in China. Second, Chinese professors were not as likely as American professors to reprimand students when the students were playing around on their cell phones. For Chinese male #3, American college professors also had more requirements, while for Chinese male #4 it was the American professors’ practice of taking class attendance daily that hinted to their strictness.

Differentials in Academic Resources. For the Afghani male, the most striking difference between the school systems in Afghanistan, Iran, and the United States had to do with the sheer disparity in resources, particularly access to up-to-date information and materials, which schools in Iran tend not to have. In addition, the Afghani student observed that a lot of the academic materials in both Afghanistan and Iran actually come from the United States or other western societies, but the materials were not often translated into Iranian or Afghani languages.

Iran poses a special challenge, according to the Afghani male, who described social problems as rampant in Iran and the political structure as “a dictator regime.” As a result, in Iran, the origins and extent of societal problems such as poverty, violence, and drug abuse are concealed. Updated statistics and literatures about crime, for instance, are not issued. And when statistics are released, they are distorted statistics. The absence of accurate information, thus, poses a challenge to not just academics and students, but to the general public.

Social Concerns

The Roommate Situation. The Afghani male, Ivorian male, and Nepalese female always have lived off campus. The Swedish male and all the Chinese students live on campus, although second-year Chinese students typically choose to live off campus, in their own apartments. For the students who live off campus, the primary reason had to do with the cost. A second reason was that the dormitories at RSU close during holidays and breaks, which means that residential students would need to find temporary housing during that period, a requirement that proved to
be either impossible or frustrating for the international students, who may not have family or close friends nearby.

During their first year at RSU, the Chinese students are required to live on campus, in dormitories. Roommates are assigned to them, rather than self-selected. Thus, in some cases, a Chinese student may be the single international student in a suite; in other cases, s/he may room with co-nationals (other Chinese students).

For the Chinese students who live on campus, there were special challenges, although not all the challenges were specific to their international student status. Personality and lifestyle differences among roommates proved to be a challenge. Chinese male #4’s roommates were all American. While he got along very well with his roommates, they regularly held parties in their suite at 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning. For Chinese male #1, one roommate, also from China, had a reverse schedule in which he slept most of the day, rather than at night, and spent most of his time playing video games rather than studying.

The permissiveness of American culture also proved to be problematic at times for the Chinese students. In fact, some of the Chinese students I interviewed specifically pointed out the sexual permissiveness and overt sexual expressions that they observed among American college student, and among Americans in general. This included regularly bringing back to the dormitories sexual partners (e.g., girlfriends), which made at least one Chinese student uncomfortable. Although the Chinese student spoke to his American roommate about this issue, his roommate continued to bring his girlfriend to his room. In the end, the Chinese student avoided his own living quarters; instead, he would study in the hallways of his dormitory, and would return to his room only when it was time for bed.

Chinese female #1 pointed out that one of her current roommates, a student from China, previously had all American roommates. As the sole international student (and the sole Chinese student) in a suite with all American women, the Chinese student felt very lonely. Although the American roommates and the Chinese roommate would converse, in the end the Chinese roommate never felt at ease in a sea of Americans.

In spite of some of these challenges, all of the Chinese students I interviewed seemed to have very good relationships with their roommates, even if there were personality and lifestyle differences. Chinese female #2’s roommates were all American, five in all. She enjoyed her experience and described her roommates as “awesome.” One of her American roommates even invited her over to her family home for Thanksgiving. Chinese male #5 enjoyed residential life so much that he decided to remain on campus in his second year. In his first year at RSU, he had four American roommates and a co-national roommate, and they were all “tight.” The Swedish student also indicated that he had excellent relationships with all of his roommates, all of whom are American.

**Friendship Formation.** For the Swedish male, the biggest challenge was forming friendships in the absence of co-national peers. He described this as “probably the hardest part,” but understood that friendship formation could take weeks or longer to establish. While the Swedish student expressed some initial challenges to friendship formation, forming friendships was especially troublesome for non-European students. In this study, the Chinese students expressed the greatest difficulty in forming friendships with American peers. But cultural differences also may hamper social relationships. Chinese male #4 pointed out how, for instance, the individualistic orientation of Americans makes friendship formation more difficult. In China, because people engage in the same activities and the same line of work, they have
shared interests and common things to talk about, which facilitate friendship formation. In the United States, however, Chinese male #4 felt that people simply did their own thing. Chinese male #4 further pointed out that Americans are more confident, but the over-confidence may mean that Americans may be less receptive to accepting new people, particularly foreigners.

**Self-Segregation.** Chinese male #4 observed that many students from China self-segregate. This is largely in part due to familiarity and comfort, as it is easier to communicate (especially for the women, Chinese male #4 noted). On the other hand, the self-segregation is not entirely volitional. If there is a language barrier and a cultural barrier that make interactions between American students and Chinese students challenging, that will impede communication and friendship formation. Hence, some Chinese students may have little choice but to self-segregate, as that may be the few means to maintain some sort of social network.

On the other hand, self-segregation may impede assimilation. Chinese female #2 observed how some of the Chinese students would self-segregate, associating with only other Chinese co-nationals. This behavior was problematic, she pointed out, because “if you stop talking to foreign people, your English skill[s] will [diminish].”

Chinese male #5 also observed the tendency for Chinese students to self-segregate. He pointed out the importance of interacting with members of the host country, however, but understood the difficulties of forming and sustaining friendships with Americans. As he stated:

> In the beginning, because I didn’t really want to hang out with all Chinese [students]. They just play [interact and communicate] with each other. They didn’t want to go outside. They just want to live in their own [co-ethnic] circle. I didn’t want to at first. [As a result,] I missed some [things], because I don’t hang out with Chinese friends, and my English is bad, so I couldn’t meet any American friends. So at that time, I was so lonely.

Acknowledging that it is easier to self-segregate given that immigrants “understand each other more and we have the same topics to talk about and we are going through the same problems,” the Nepalese female analyzed her social situation:

> I really would like to make friends with people from all over the world. It’s not that I don’t want to. It’s like how you get along with [them]? It’s hard to get assimilated with them, not because they hate you or you hate them. Because you grew up in a different culture, you grew up in different circumstances.

Chinese male #2 has many friends, both international friends and American friends, but primarily associates with fellow co-nationals. He expressed how difficult it was to make American friends.

> In class, your classmates, you cannot even make friends, because you don’t just have one the same class [with all of the same people]. They came before the class starts and leave right after class ends, so you don’t even have a chance to talk to them, so it’s very hard to make friends in class with your classmates. Like roommates, sometimes you have a lot of chance to talk, [so] you can make friends with them, unlike your classmates.
Chinese male #5 described associating primarily with Americans, but he also was close to some of his Chinese co-national peers. He indicated that he preferred to make friends with Americans, since “that’s why I come here [to the U.S.]....I came here because I want to have some different experience[s] here.” It was Chinese male #5’s opinion that some of his co-national peers ought to be more open to Americans. As he put it, while there initially might be some distance between Chinese students and American students, the Chinese students themselves have some responsibility to make an effort with Americans. Friendships can then form out of the connections. In other words, Chinese male #5 was suggesting that foreigners need to make an effort with the hosts. He elaborated by stating:

I think Americans, they…when you are not friends, they treat you like an asshole, but once you become friends, you understand. So it’s like every American, when you are not friends, they may be like don’t talk to you and don’t say hi to you, but once you become friends, you we can then play together or do something we like, but you have to make some conversation or communicate.

The Afghani student primarily associated with international students from his ESL classes but they are not co-nationals. The Ivorian student associated with fellow co-nationals, but also has a few American friends. The Nepalese student’s friendships were with fellow co-nationals primarily, and the Swedes’ friends were either Americans on or off campus, or fellow co-nationals outside of campus.

Among the seven Chinese students I interviewed, three were friends with fellow co-nationals primarily, although they may also have friendships with Americans and other international students. Two of the Chinese respondents associate primarily with Americans, and two associate with both Americans and co-nationals relatively equally.

Dating. The relationship status of the respondents varied. Chinese female #1 has not dated since arriving in the United States, but she has only been in the United States for two months at the time of the interview. Chinese female #2 and the Afghani male also have not dated since their arrival in the U.S. over two years ago. The Ivorian male has dated an American woman, although they are no longer together. The Nepalese female dated a fellow student at the American college from which she previously transferred. The Swedish male has a girlfriend back home, so avoids any romantic connections in the U.S. Chinese male #1 also has a girlfriend back home. Chinese male #2 has a co-national girlfriend who is a fellow student at the host institution. Chinese male #3 also has a girlfriend at the same institution, and she also is a fellow co-National. Chinese male #4 has not dated since coming to the U.S., although he has attempted to do so. Chinese male #5 is in a noncommittal relationship with a fellow co-national at the host institution.

Three of the respondents, all Chinese males, indicated frustration with dating in a foreign country. Chinese male #3 indicated that he has tried to date American women, but voiced how difficult it was for him to do so, because of the language barrier. He indicated that he is unable to fully express affection and endearments articulately to American women. Chinese male #5 expressed a similar sentiment. He has a desire to date American women and to be in a committed relationship, but just has not taken the initiative of doing so. He cited language and cultural differences as major hurdles that have led to a diminishing of his confidence level. His low confidence level, shaped by his foreigner status, in turn, has made it difficult for him to
communicate, and secure dates, with American women. Chinese male #4, while acknowledging challenges with dating in the U.S., has yet to lose hope.

Chinese male #4 observed that in dating relationships, Americans appear to be very direct, including in the expression of affections. In contrast, in China even the relatively benign gesture of hand holding may take a long time to achieve for a couple. Chinese male #1 also observed that Americans are far more direct and open in terms of sexual expressions. He described instances in which American roommates would bring back into the dorms their dates, or significant others, where sexual activity would ensue.

Financial Challenges

While students who are able to study overseas tend to come from more affluent backgrounds, they, too, face financial challenges while studying abroad. In this study, there were four main sources of financial challenges: 1) high cost of living; 2) lack of job opportunities; 3) rising tuition; and 4) high textbook prices.

Some of the international students experienced a “sticker shock” when coming to the United States. Chinese male #1 observed that the cost of living in the area in which the host institution was located was higher than what he was accustomed to in China; indeed, the area was part of one of the most expensive geographic areas in the United States, where even the price of very simple meals might be prohibitively expensive. The student from the Ivory Coast concurred with this assessment.

Linked to the high cost of living was a lack of job opportunities, a point underscored by the Afghani student in particular. After multiple attempts, the Afghani male remained unsuccessful in securing an on-campus job, although he acknowledged that this was in large part because of his international student status. He therefore was forced to obtain a low-paying off-campus job as a kitchen aide. At the prior school he attended in the southern part of the United States, however, the job prospects were more optimistic; he described receiving campus emails for job opportunities quite regularly. In contrast, at RSU, the Career Center kept providing him with assurances of “Okay, next month. Next month. Or next semester.” These empty promises went on for two years.

As job opportunities on campus continued to be sparse, the tuition seemed to increase exponentially. The Ivorian male emphasized that this sharp increase in tuition was definitely problematic. He pointed out the noticeable tuition increase that occurred in the short span of only two years. While he acknowledged that RSU was growing and that the school needed funding, he cautioned against any additional increases in student tuition, predicting that both the overall student enrollment and international student enrollment would decline because of the rising tuition.

But as the cost of tuition kept rising, so did the cost of textbooks. In fact, the Ivorian male also took issue of the costly textbooks. A single textbook for a music class cost him $200. He felt the cost of textbooks was a waste of money, especially for textbooks used in classes that were outside of his major. The Swedish male was in agreement, noting that colleges in Sweden provide students with books, rather than requiring that students purchase textbooks out of pocket.

Appreciating the Offerings

In spite of encountering quite formidable challenges while studying in the United States, the international students offered praises when evaluating their experiences and host environment. The Afghani male, for one, appreciated the relatively low cost of RSU. “It’s
cheap,” he said succinctly. The Nepalese female, however, was unsure what she liked best about her host institution. Chinese male #5, on the other hand, could not rank what he liked the best, indicating that he liked “everything” about his study abroad.

Chinese female #1 focused on environmental, rather than campus, elements, highlighting “the sky” as the best part about RSU. She described the sky as beautiful, and the “air is so clean and you can see a lot of stars at night. And the beach is very beautiful.” The Swedish male also held the school location and surrounding area in high regard. He especially appreciated the proximity to the ocean and the overall beauty of the area.

Chinese male #3 appreciated the quietness of the small city in which he temporarily was residing, and the friendly nature of the residents there. He observed that Americans often greeted strangers, even in the morning. Chinese male #4 also acknowledged that it was the people that made the difference. In fact, it was his opinion that the best thing about RSU was “the people.” Although he acknowledged that difficulties could arise, for the most part even these difficulties were “not bad things.” Chinese male #4 found meeting new people and experiencing a new culture to be “most exciting.”

When assessing the quality of their education, the students I interviewed had high praises for RSU. Chinese male #1 liked his professors, whom he described as “very patient.” He also appreciated the small class size at RSU. Chinese male #2 enjoyed the freedom of class selections, noting that students could select classes based on who the professors were, and whether their friends were also taking the class. In addition, students could take classes based on time of day, which meant that those students who tend to sleep in late could choose late morning or afternoon classes. Finally, Chinese male #2 also appreciated the amenities that were offered to the students. This includes the use of the campus gym and the swimming pool.

The Ivorian male had high praises for the opportunities, resources, and overall education he has received at RSU. The Swedish male liked his professors and enjoyed life on campus. In fact, he stated that RSU “feels like home basically for me.” Chinese female #2 seemed to concur with these sentiments when she expressed her liking for “the people” at RSU. Her roommates have been especially good to her, and her professors have offered their help.

The students I interviewed also expressed their gratitude to the staff at the Center for International Education for helping them negotiate a new campus, a new region, and a new country, and for providing much assistance with housing, academic issues, and social issues. A few of the interview respondents singled out the director, as well as specific staff at the center, while other respondents expressed appreciation to the “seniors,” or the second-year students in the one-to-one program.

Discussion

Cultural adjustment is a complex process. Certainly, individual-level factors such as language fluency and coping ability affect international students’ lived experiences and satisfaction levels in their host environment. But arguably even more important are the culture and reception level of the host institution, host region, and host nation. That is to say, the level and quality of emotional, material, informational, and social support provided by the host institution, as well as by members of the local area and host nation, greatly facilitate, or else impede, international students’ adjustment and outcomes (Ramsay, Jones, & Barker, 2007).

All international students, regardless of country of origin, experience a disorientation (or “culture shock”) upon their arrival to the United States, whether in terms of language, food,
customs, weather and climate, or something else. Within the academic institution, there is a further disorientation, as international students experience new teaching and learning styles, new disciplines and content areas, and as they socialize with American classmates (Kumi-Yeboah, 2014). East Asian students, however, have an especially difficult time adjusting to both academic life in American colleges, and to social life, given the pronounced language and cultural barriers. This is because East Asian culture and language are far more dissimilar from American culture and the English language than the cultures and languages of Europeans, South Americans, Africans, and South Asians.

In this study, Chinese students reported that they may not participate in class, instead opting for silence, because of their embarrassment associated with their limited English fluency. Unable to speak English fluently, Chinese students may become isolated, both individually and as a group. Unable to speak to Americans and other English-speaking individuals, Chinese students may self-segregate, but this separation may lead to feelings of loneliness and anxiety. The lack of English fluency, further, may lead to discrimination by members of the host country.

In addition to the language barriers, the cultural differences between American culture and the culture of the student’s country of origin are especially pronounced for East Asian students. The much greater permissiveness in American culture, for instance, is both a source of freedom and a challenge for East Asian students, particularly with respect to sexual expressions and overt sexual displays. Cultural orientations and values also sharply differ for East Asian students in the United States. The United States stresses individualism and individualistic pursuits. In contrast, in China and many other East Asian nations, collectivism is prioritized. Such a difference may be overwhelming, if not unsettling, to Chinese students seeking an education in the U.S.

While language fluency and individual coping mechanisms shape international students’ lived experiences in the host environment, environmental factors seem to play larger roles. In particular, the host institution’s and host members’ reception of the international students, and their respective levels of support, inevitably shape international students’ experiences. Specifically, supportive social interactions with members of the host institution, host region, and host nation enable international students to feel more well-integrated into their new surroundings, leading to a sense of membership in their new communities.

Why does it matter that Chinese students have greater difficulty acculturating and assimilating? For one, there are psychological effects. Chinese students may feel inadequate, misunderstood, and dejected, leading to feelings of confusion, frustration, alienation, loneliness, anxiety, and depression. Indeed, Heikinheimo and Shute (1986) found that Chinese students experienced poorer mental and physical health when compared to other international students, and that Chinese students tended to interact less with students of the host country than other international students.

It also makes sense to keep international students happy, as the host institution, state, and host country benefit from their presence. International students contribute to the U.S. economy, the state economies, and the financial health of the academic institution in which they enroll; indeed, international students are a major source of revenue for various programs’ survival in many colleges and universities (Hegarty, 2014). They also greatly contribute to the cultural diversity of their academic institution and local region.

International students also are important because when they return to their country of origin, they become sources of good will for the United States (Hegarty, 2014). This good will promotes more cooperative relationships between the United States and China, for instance. The
international exchange program, hence, is very beneficial to the U.S. both economically and politically.

This study included interviews of only 11 international students, and they all are enrolled at a single university. Given the small sample size, findings from this study are not generalizable. Nonetheless, findings from this study may shed light on the specific challenges that international students encounter in American colleges, and may provide guidance on how institutions of higher learning might help better facilitate international students’ entry into, and overall experience, at their host institution.

**Recommendations**

Because of the cultural differences that exist between students from the United States and those from China, it is crucial that American institutions of higher learning develop better ways to help these students avoid communication difficulties, and help foster more positive and cooperative relationships between individuals from two vastly different cultures. So how might institutions of higher learning such as Regional State University better address international students’ needs, especially those from China and other East Asian countries?

It appears that Regional State University already practices all of the above and, according to the respondent narratives, has done quite well. But some of the respondent narratives seem to suggest there might be a bit more balance in terms of the roommate situation. On the one hand, being the sole Chinese student among a suite of American students may be disconcerting. On the other hand, housing with students who are all co-nationals may impede acculturation into American society. This might be one area in which Regional State University can step in and remedy.

But there is a burden on the international students themselves. The individual students themselves must also contribute to the acculturation process. Immersing oneself in the host culture and spending more time with American peers can help Chinese students learn the English language quicker and become better acquainted with American ways of doing things.

Finally, there also should be some burden on members of the host country--here, fellow American students--who ought to extend a welcoming hand to international students, teach them about American ways of doing things, and also learn about the traditions and practices of international students. In other words, the learning process should not be one-sided; it should be somewhat reciprocal.

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**AUTHOR**

PAMELA LEONG, Ph.D. is an assistant professor of sociology at Salem State University in Salem, Massachusetts, USA. Her research interests are varied, but her current scholarship focuses on American culture and inequalities in higher education. Email: pleong@salemstate.edu

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A Relational Approach to International Education Through Homestay Programs

Junko Kobayashi  
Kansai Gaidai University (Japan)  
Linda Viswat  
Otemon Gakuin University (Japan)

Abstract

This paper identifies and analyzes intercultural problems through surveys of homestay programs with Japanese students and American host mothers. Given that participants need to go beyond their cognitive knowledge to interact effectively with people from other cultures, a relational approach may be more effective than traditional intercultural training models in international education. In terms of the relational approach, one incident of intercultural problems is composed of various interpretations and plural options for managing differences. By becoming familiar with this relational approach, participants can make more appropriate behavioral choices and make their global experience more meaningful. Also, instructors or faculty members can develop educational programs more effectively by applying the survey results to international education.

Keywords: relational approach, international education, homestay programs, intercultural problems, Japanese and Americans, behavioral choices

With globalization, we have more opportunities to encounter people who have different cultural backgrounds. To cope with this reality, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (2013) states that many educational programs for nurturing Japanese students who will become active in the global community have been offered: introducing foreign language activities from elementary school through high school, inviting assistant language teachers from foreign countries, and encouraging overseas school excursions. Also, Japan accepted 135,519 international students in 2013, and is expected to accept 300,000 international students per year by 2020.

In order to make homestay programs successful, both parties (the host and the guest) need to understand different notions of hospitality, which is considered an important element in successful homestay programs. While in general hospitality means to entertain guests graciously in both cultures, Japanese hospitality requires hosts and guests to acknowledge superior-inferior relationships and behave accordingly, recognizing their respective positions (Hattori, 2008; Takahata, 2005). The Western version of hospitality on the other hand, influenced by Judeo-
Christian traditions, was considered a sacred process of receiving outsiders and changing them from strangers to guests (Foster, 2013). As people settled in the United States, the spirit of helping others was retained but additional value was placed on self-reliance. As a result, culturally-based norms of hospitality were modified so that guests were given equal status and expected to help themselves as well as offer to help out with chores. Also, when grasping self, culture divides self into independent and interdependent construals (Triandis, 1989, 1995). In the American independent construal, the autonomy of the individual is paramount (Lusting & Koester, 2010; Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). In the Japanese interdependent construal, however, the self is connected to others, and restraint over the inner self is highly valued (Haga, 2013; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). This cultural difference may also affect the notion of good hospitality. Even though the definition of hospitality between Japanese and Americans is similar in the sense that hosts try to make their guests’ sojourn comfortable, the differences in cultural expectations of how hosts and guests should behave are assumed to cause misunderstandings in homestay programs. What specific problems did people who engaged in homestay programs actually encounter? The purpose of this paper is to identify problems arising from differences in cultural expectations of hospitality, explore ways to manage the problems more effectively and apply them to international education. As part of international education, English ability should be improved. In English education it has been pointed out that the focus should be shifted from inputting information unilaterally from foreign countries to sharing information on Japan with non-Japanese people by outputting information on Japan overseas. However, specific plans for implementing such education have not been worked out (Watanabe, 2004; Yamada, 2005), and still remain unsettled. When we regard homestay programs as an opportunity to improve participants’ English ability with the focus on outputting information on Japan, we can expect better results also in the development of English language ability.

Literature Review

To cope with intercultural problems, intercultural training models have been developed; for instance, the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity by Bennett (1993) and the intercultural development inventory by Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman (2003). While intercultural training can enhance knowledge and satisfaction, it does not necessarily change behavior and attitudes (Mendenhall et al. 2004). This position was verified by the results of an independent assessment of high school students using the above models (Hammer, 2014). The results of a research study of students participating in an AFS study abroad experience indicated that the program has a significant impact on students who begin the program at the more ethnocentric stages of the Bennett model, but that it has less of an impact on those students who are at more interculturally-developed stages. Also, although these models assume that individuals will become more interculturally sensitive in a linear progression, this assumption has not yet been proven (Perry & Southwell, 2011).

A relational view to intercultural education offers an opportunity to mitigate these weaknesses since the approach makes it possible for participants to go beyond their cognitive knowledge of other cultural values and make appropriate behavioral choices (Arnett & Nakagawa, 1983; Broome, 1991; Stewart, 1983). It contrasts with a psychological view of understanding which focuses on the listener’s reproducing the meaning as originally created by the speaker. The pre-eminent characteristic of the relational approach is that it is co-directional.
because participants in interpersonal encounters seek to create common meaning for the purpose of moving toward understanding (Broome, 1991).

In this paper, we would like to demonstrate how it is possible to implement effective educational outcomes by using homestay programs as an example.

**Research Method**

Two questionnaires were distributed to Japanese students and American host mothers. Respondents were asked three questions: to define good hospitality, to answer whether or not they found their host family hospitable or they found their experience as a host family rewarding, and state intercultural problems they encountered that may have been caused by differences in expectations of hospitality. Japanese students were asked to fill in the questionnaire because most Japanese are not so good at expressing themselves orally. American host mothers had a choice of answering questions either in writing or verbally depending on the amount of time they had available.

**Participants**

The surveys were collected from 64 Japanese university students who had experience staying with a native English-speaking family, and 24 American families who had experience hosting Japanese student(s) in the U.S. Fifty two students (81.3%) stayed with American families, while 12 (18.7%) stayed with Canadian, Australian, New Zealander or British families. In all, there were 43 females (67.2%) and 21 males (32.8%) whose ages were between 18 to 21. All of them were university students who had either had a homestay experience in their high school days or had studied abroad during a university semester break or in a semester/year-abroad program. The period of stay ranged from 3 days to 2 years.

**Analyses of the Surveys**

The surveys were qualitatively analyzed using Berry’s acculturation framework (1980, 1995). Berry categorized acculturation modes into four groups: assimilation, integration, separation and marginalization. In the assimilation mode individuals attempt to be part of the host culture without maintaining their cultural identity. In the integration mode, however, individuals try to adjust themselves to the host culture while maintaining their own cultural identity. Separation is the mode where individuals hardly try to interact with people in the host culture and separate themselves from the host culture while marginalization represents the mode where individuals suffer from cultural loss arising from failure of assimilation and feel marginalized or excluded from the host culture. While the participants in homestay programs are expected to aim at reaching the integration mode, in reality 45 participants (70.3%) unintentionally remained at the separation acculturation mode where they were not interacting effectively with their host family. Two participants (3.1%) experienced marginalization. The rest of 17 participants (26.6%) seemed to move toward the integration mode with the help of their host family or because of their attitude toward trying something new.

**Results**

The surveys indicate that Japanese students and native English-speaking families had various problems. Japanese responses to a question on whether they found their host family hospitable,
and American responses to a question on whether they found the experience as a host family rewarding were frequently negative. Areas of discontent concerned meals, social hierarchy, communication patterns, and some other problems. Given that most of the students stayed with American families and the host family respondents were American, the main focus of this paper is on how Japanese and Americans understand the concept of hospitality and how differences in this understanding contribute to less than optimal homestay experiences for students and host families.

**Areas of Discontent**

*The Role of Meals in Japanese Hospitality*

Specific incidents reported by respondents reveal differences in cultural expectations of hospitality between Japanese and Americans. Japanese students often mentioned meals. This seems to be closely related to the definition of hospitality often found in Japanese dictionaries as entertaining guests by serving elaborate dishes. Japanese people expect hosts to serve their guests while Americans generally prefer a more casual approach to dining at home where typically food is put out on the table and guests are told to “help themselves” to the foods. A comment reflective of those made by several Japanese students was: “I was told by the host mother, ‘You’re a member of my family, so you can have anything you like in the refrigerator.’ It was different from what I had expected; that is, serving me various American meals.” Even if the American host mothers’ intention was to respect the other person’s freedom, a value highly regarded in American culture (Samovar & Porter, 2001; Stewart & Bennett, 1991), the host mothers’ words may have sounded cold to those students who were used to being served. The Japanese students most likely hesitated to open the host family’s refrigerator and select foods on their own because they were brought up in a culture where people are expected to know their position and behave modestly (Hattori, 2008; Ueda, 2011). This arises from a strong sense of *enryo* that most Japanese have; that is, holding back so as not to presume too much on the others’ good will (Doi, 1971; Haga, 2013).

Another common complaint voiced by Japanese students was “The host family had just fast food like hamburgers every day.” Whereas the Japanese students expected their host family to provide them with special dishes, the host families offered ordinary home cooking to the students.

*The Role of People with Equal vs. Vertical Relationships*

Consistent with a representative American cultural characteristic of conferring equal status on others (Samovar & Porter, 2001; Stewart & Bennett, 1991), some host families expected the Japanese students to help out with simple chores, such as dishwashing. A typical American response was: “I try to make the students feel welcome, but they have to make an effort, too. Just because they are guests doesn’t mean they do not have responsibilities.” This reflects a commonly held American belief that even guests are expected to offer to help out with chores so as to really display equal status.

The difference in expectations of equal relationships was pointed out also by Japanese students. “The host mother first asked me, ‘Where do you want to go?’ or ‘What would you like to have for dinner?’ I always answered out of Japanese reserve, ‘Any place is fine’ or ‘Anything is fine’ and agreed with any suggestions she made because I didn’t want to cause her trouble. Then, she didn’t ask for my opinions anymore.” In Japanese culture where vertical relationships...
are the norm, it would be desirable to accept suggestions from the host mothers as often as possible since the mother role is a higher status position in the family. In American culture where equal status is preferable, responses such as “Any place is fine” or “Anything is fine” are not appropriate because both parties should be involved in making a decision.

*The Role of Verbal Communication in American Hospitality*

Just as serving elaborate dishes plays an important role in Japanese hospitality, entertaining others through verbal communication plays a key role in the American version of hospitality. From ancient times, Westerners have tended to celebrate talk and rhetoric. Americans usually hold that expressing one’s opinion as openly and forcefully as possible is an admirable trait (Giles et al., 1992; Samovar & Porter, 2001). On the other hand, in many East Asian cultures, the primary function of talk is the maintenance of social harmony (Kim, 2002; Markus & Kitayama, 2001). This reticence when sharing one’s opinions is pointed out as one possible problem in interactions with Westerners (for instance, Lopez and Bui, 2014), and was also identified in this survey. The difference in expectations of verbal communication was expressed by several Japanese students. “At first the host family spoke to me actively, but I answered only with short words. Then, they spoke to me less;” and “The host mother showed me a picture of her son who lived away from their home, and said, ‘I’m proud of my son.’ However, I didn’t ask any questions. She looked sad.” These remarks coincided with common American responses: “Japanese students only gave us short answers, and they didn’t try to initiate the conversation;” and “The students were lacking in English ability. One of the goals of the program is to exchange cultural information, and they should have been better able to talk about their own culture.”

*Other Areas of Discontent*

There were several other incidents in which one party’s actions or behavior fell short of the other’s expectations and even displeased the other party to some extent. While people in such situations have to come up with solutions appropriate to the situation, some incidents included problems arising from cultural differences. A typical example was: “A student I hosted had two packages sent from Japan containing food. I thought that if students were coming to the United States to experience American culture, they should make an effort to get used to American food.” Although another host mother might have reacted differently to the student’s receiving packages of food from home, the student’s actions after receiving the packages seemed to displease the host mother.

A second example illustrates that the way in which one introduces one’s family members to others is greatly affected by culture. Japanese culture clearly distinguishes insiders from outsiders, referred to as *uchi* and *soto* (Doi, 1971; Lebra, 1976) and expects people to refrain from making statements in which one appears to be boasting about one’s family members. In American culture where each family member should be respected as an independent being (Samovar & Porter, 2001; Stewart & Bennett, 1991), the host families couldn’t understand the implications of the Japanese student’s seemingly negative remarks about a family member. The specific incident was: “When introducing my younger brother, I said with a smile, ‘My younger brother is always doing something stupid. He is a helpless fool.’ Then, I was scolded by my host mother with the words: ‘Why are you saying such a terrible thing? You don’t like your brother?’”
A third example reflects the difference between Japanese culture where self-constraint and emotional control are nurtured (Doi, 1971; Haga, 2013) and American culture where self-assertiveness and emotional expression are encouraged (Samovar & Porter, 2001; Stewart & Bennett, 1991). The specific example was: “The host family loved a dog. Although I didn’t like him, I didn’t tell them. When the dog was beside me, the host mother interpreted it to mean that I was playing with the dog, and left home.” Unless the student expressed her inner discontent, the host mother couldn’t perceive it.

Universal Problems related to the Content of the Homestay Program

Common complaints regarding the content of the homestay program voiced by American host families were: “The students wanted to socialize with each other more than participate in planned events. I think the university should discourage this more;” and “Japanese students spent a lot of time playing volleyball. There was less of cultural exchange.” An apparent expectation on the part of the host families was that the students would choose activities where they would be able to learn more about American culture and build their English proficiency skills. On the other hand, some Japanese students had a different expectation such as “I had a good time playing beach volleyball. That impressed me the most;” and “The host family took me to places I wanted to go to. The amusement parks impressed me the most.”

Discussion

A Relational Approach to the above Problems

Conflict is inevitable in any human relationship, and it has been discussed in many books and articles. In the U.S. culture it is frequently defined as an expressed struggle (Adler & Rodman, 1985), but in Asian cultures it is often covert (Ohbuchi & Takahashi, 1994; Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). The outcome of this survey indicates that while many Japanese students were inwardly dissatisfied or unhappy with some circumstances of their homestay experience, they didn’t express their discontent to their host family.

Among five models conceptualized as conflict styles by researchers (competition, avoidance, accommodation, compromise and collaboration) (for instance, Thomas & Kilmann, 1974; Rahim, 1983) accommodation and avoidance styles were frequently employed by Japanese students because maintaining harmony is of prime importance in Japanese culture (Kim, 2002; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). However, these strategies were not considered effective by the host families because Americans tend to take a more confrontational approach to conflict and are more apt to express their discontent directly so as to “clear the air” (Samovar & Porter, 2001; Stewart & Bennett, 1991). On the other hand, American host families expressed their discontent, but they could not take effective action perhaps because of a limitation of sympathy. It has been pointed out that sympathy is based on one’s own standard of appropriate behavior and is often misleading in intercultural encounters (Bennett, 1979; Howell, 1982), and the host mothers could not relate fully to the student’s cultural perspective. In order to make homestay programs mutually beneficial, both parties need to adopt an integrative or collaborative approach to conflict.

The steps toward doing so would be to analyze the above problems using a relational approach, and then to have participants learn empathy which “relies on the ability to temporarily set aside one’s own perception of the world and assume an alternative perspective” (Stewart &
Bennett, 1991, p.152). Given that an overseas sojourn can improve intercultural capabilities only if students actually interact with local people (Williams, 2005), it is considered especially important to acquire empathy which will lead to participants’ deeper understanding of another culture and result in changes in their behavior or attitudes.

**Basic Preparation for Japanese Students**

First, it is important for instructors to have Japanese students recognize that verbal communication plays a vital role in American hospitality and they need to improve their verbal communication skills. When asked, for instance, “How was school?” or “How was your day?” Japanese students often answered just “Good” or “Fine.” The students need to be led to understand how the host family might interpret these responses as representing a lack of interest on the part of the students. Instructors can explain that the host families expect longer answers from the students. Following the explanation, instructors need to have Japanese students actually practice organizing their ideas by describing what was good or how something was especially enjoyable. If some students have difficulty coming up with answers right away, instructors can help the students by asking more specific questions like, “What class did you enjoy most?” or “What activity did you enjoy with your classmates?” However, instructors need to emphasize afterward that in American culture where self is expected to stand out and express its own unique characteristics (Triandis, 1989; 1995), students can feel free to give personal comments.

When asked about the typical daily life of young Japanese, many students answered that they were at a loss for how to answer because it was difficult to generalize. Silence is considered meaningful in Japanese culture but viewed negatively in American culture (Ishii & Bruneau, 1994; Samovar & Porter, 2001). It is necessary for instructors to state that Americans generally prefer an immediate and simple response to their questions, and that the students should respond as quickly as possible rather than pondering the question in order to give completely accurate information. Students interested in video games might say something like, “Many people in Japan are interested in video games. Are many Americans interested in video games, too?” After offering a specific example, instructors need to have Japanese students prepare their own responses based on their individual preferences and interests.

Also, when the host mothers praised their children by saying “I’m proud of my son/daughter,” Japanese students kept silent. They were unsure about how to respond or what kind of comment would be appropriate since in Japan modesty dictates that one does not boast about oneself or members of one’s family (Kim 2002; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Instructors can introduce how to show an interest in these kinds of comments by responding with a question such as, “Your son/daughter is an excellent student, isn’t s/he? What is s/he going to do after graduating from university?” or “Your son/daughter has a talent for music or sports. How did he/she acquire those skills?” After giving some examples, instructors need to have Japanese students come up with their own comments.

Some students mentioned, “When I couldn’t catch what the host family said, I looked down. They must be puzzled. They said, ‘Look at me.’” It is important for instructors to explain that neither keeping silent nor making a vague request such as ‘Would you say that again?’ would be effective when they were unable to understand. The students need to clarify what they were and weren’t able to understand; for instance, “Would you repeat the last part?” or “What does the last expression mean?” After the explanation, instructors need to have Japanese students practice how to ask specific questions while remembering to look the other person in the eye, an important means of nonverbal communication in American culture. When students face
problems, they can treat the problems as opportunities to explain their own culture. When told, “Look at me,” students can explain that direct gaze is considered rude or disrespectful by Japanese although eye contact is regarded as a measure of trust and honesty by Americans (Lustig & Koester, 2010; Samovar & Porter, 2001).

When asked about their personal preferences, Japanese students frequently answered, “Any place is fine” or “Anything is fine.” To Japanese students this response means that they don’t want to cause their host mothers trouble. What do such responses mean to the host mothers? Instructors first need to lead students to recognize that one possible interpretation of this response by host mothers is that the students can’t express their opinions clearly. Another interpretation might be that the students have no opinions. Instructors then can help the students to empathize with the host mothers’ reaction by explaining that the host mothers may even have felt that their good intentions of offering the Japanese students choices were being ignored or dismissed. The next step would be to have Japanese students practice expressing personal preferences; for instance, “I’d like to go to an art gallery” or “I’d like to go shopping.” Once the students are able to state their personal preferences clearly, instructors can proceed to a more advanced level by having the students express their interests and wishes while also making it clear that they don’t want to cause their host mothers any trouble. Using the students’ personal preferences, instructors can offer some examples such as: “I like art. If you’re interested in art, and if you could take me to an art gallery, I would be grateful;” and “I like shopping. Next time you go shopping, if you could take me to a shopping mall, I would be happy.”

At the same time, it is important for instructors to remind students that what is appropriate and effective depends on the context. For instance, when asked about their personal preferences in American culture, Japanese students need to express their own opinions at once without a long pause. However, if they were to adopt that way in a Japanese context, they would likely be labeled as impudent or self-centered. Individual horizons should be expanded, not abandoned. It is desirable that students acquire flexible approaches to dealing with other people, recognizing that they can be Japanese and global depending on the circumstances. In some situations they should continue to know their position as Japanese, keeping vertical relationships in mind, while in other contexts they should change the way they interact with others understanding that vertical relationships are not universal. Instructors need to emphasize that what is appropriate and effective is context-based.

**Preparation for the Unexpected**

In a relational approach, people are expected not only to be willing to open themselves up to new meanings but also to constantly respond to the demands emanating from a new situation (Broome, 1991). For instance, although some students expected their host mothers to serve them various American meals, they were told, “You can have any food in the refrigerator at any time.” Even after understanding that the host mothers’ intention is to respect individual freedom, students may still feel reluctant to open the refrigerator. In this case they need to express their aversion to doing so verbally. They could say, “I don’t feel comfortable opening the refrigerator when you’re out.” After that, they could explain the underlying Japanese cultural value of self-restraint. The host mothers might then be able to provide an alternative that would be more comfortable for the students. Even if the host mothers adopt the attitude of “When in Rome, do as the Romans do,” the students could take a middle position by informing the host mother of
their plan to make use of some ingredients in the refrigerator, thus alleviating some of their discomfort about doing so.

Similarly, regarding household chores, each family has different expectations. Japanese students need to ask in advance, “What can I do to help?” and then adapt to the situation by paying attention to the reaction of the host mother. For example, if the host mother asks the student to help with the dishes, the student can observe whether the host mother expects the student to communicate while washing the dishes together. This would be a good opportunity for the student to have a conversation with the host mother by showing an interest in American culture, such as, “I’d really like to learn to cook an American dish. Can I help you prepare dinner sometime?” or “I’m very interested in American education. What do you like best about American education?”

Some students reported that when they started to wash the dishes, their host mothers didn’t look happy. In such a situation, a student might ask, “Is anything wrong?” The host mother has an opportunity to tell the student, for example, that he/she is using too much water for rinsing plates and cups or that he/she isn’t washing dishes the way the host mother normally does. From such interactions students can acquire knowledge such as that because of drought situations in some parts of the world, people need to save as much water as possible or they can learn that there is more than one way to do something.

In situations where the host mothers seemed to misinterpret the students’ remarks, for instance, “My younger brother is always doing something stupid. He is a helpless fool” with a smile to mean that he was making a disparaging remark about his brother, the student could rephrase the message in a more positive manner such as “He often says funny things. That makes other people happy.” And he could add, “I really like my younger brother.” Then, the host mother could gain some insight into Japanese communication styles; that is, people don’t openly praise their family members, and nonverbal communication such as a smile plays an important role in Japanese culture. The host mother might become familiar with differing holistic views while paying more attention to nonverbal cues.

Also, if a student recognizes that the host mother is displeased with his/her receiving packages sent from Japan containing food, the student could suggest that the host family try the food, emphasizing that Japanese food is popular with people who like low-calorie and healthy foods. If the student could share Japanese food with the host family while giving a detailed explanation about the food, he/she could create an opportunity for them to get better acquainted with each other.

Support from Other People around Students

In order to make homestay programs successful, support from people around students is indispensable. Sullivan and Kashubeck-West (2015) point out that stress caused in the process of acculturation could be mitigated by developing more diverse social networks and developing ties with the local community.

Recommendations for Host Families

Needless to say, the role of host families is vital in productive homestay programs. How could host families play a more effective role in a relational approach? When Japanese students have language problems, the host families can offer to help the students with English. If the students have trouble communicating verbally, they can suggest that the students try communicating in writing, as some Americans pointed out.
When students don’t express their personal preferences clearly by saying, “Any place is fine” or “Anything is fine,” the host families can ask questions in a different way such as “When you’re in Japan, how do you spend your free time?” or “What do you usually have for dinner in Japan?” so that the students can answer without feeling an emotional burden.

When students are unable to give an immediate reply to a question such as “What activities are popular among young Japanese?” the host families can help the students by describing the typical activities of young Americans, and then ask about popular trends among young Japanese. Another way might be to give some examples such as personal computers, cell phones, TV games, music and animations and let the students choose what they think are popular.

Regarding household chores, as the host mothers who found the experience as a host family rewarding pointed out, it would be better to “ask the students to help with simple family chores like washing the dishes so that they can feel a part of our family if they don’t volunteer themselves” or “make a list of the housework on the wall.”

Recommendations for Japanese University Program Coordinators

Ting-Toomey and Oetzel (2001) state that third-party help involving using an outsider to mediate the conflict is necessary in some conflict situations. They also point out that conflict competence has four criteria: appropriateness, effectiveness, satisfaction and productivity, and that productivity is closely related to outcome factors. Regarding the goals of the homestay program, the coordinators’ assistance is essential. It is important for coordinators to let American host families, Japanese students and parents know beforehand the specific goals of the homestay program. Students may want to spend some free time with their Japanese friends, for example, playing beach volleyball or basketball, but those activities are not so appropriate and productive in terms of cultural exchange. The coordinators should make it clear to students that what matters most is to utilize the opportunity of staying with an American family to learn as much as possible about the host culture.

Recommendations for Homestay Placement Coordinators

It is important to gather as much information as possible about each student before the placement is made in order to maximize compatibility, especially as related to areas such as food preferences, activities, and likes and dislikes about such things as animals. If Japanese students like animals, pets might be a perfect way to help the student feel relaxed. If they don’t like animals or haven’t had much experience around animals in the home, however, pets might be considered a nuisance. One host mother stated: “I put my animals in another room so they aren’t annoying unless I know the guests really like animals.” This could be one solution if host mothers have a lot of space in their house. However, a more common solution would be to survey the students beforehand to ascertain if they have strong reactions toward some kinds of pets, and to assign those students to homes where there are no pets.

Implications

One characteristic of positive outcomes was when participants showed an interest in the other culture. Likewise, American host families mentioned a similar positive response to students’ demonstrating an interest in American culture. A second characteristic of constructive outcomes was when participants devised ways to bridge psychological and cultural distances. A third characteristic was that participants focused on the merits of the other culture. Stewart (1983)
states that in the relational view, understanding comes from a fusion of horizons, implying that individual horizons expand to include the horizon of the other. In intercultural encounters it is possible to accept the merits of another culture, and broaden our views. Although some aspects of cultural differences, such as showing emotional expressions openly or controlling them, are irreconcilable, it is still possible to accept these differences. Japanese students mentioned: “The host family held a welcome party for me. They welcomed me with rich facial expressions;” and “When I gave a present to the host mother, she was glad with a strong intonation, ‘What a beautiful ornament it is!’ When I talked about Japanese culture, she replied by saying, ‘That’s interesting.’” American host mothers wrote: “Japanese students are always so thankful. American students often take things for granted—you’re going to do this for me, though;” and “Japanese students are polite. I have hosted students from other cultures. They came home very late without calling, monopolized the conversation or interrupted to express their view in the middle of another person’s story. These kinds of behavior never happened with Japanese students.”

Conclusion

This paper discusses how through homestay programs, participants can personally experience different points of view; for instance, serving elaborate dishes as a form of hospitality is important in one culture while verbal communication plays a vital role in another culture. What is considered appropriate differs depending on cultural values such as the difference in vertical as opposed to equal relationships. Also, this paper demonstrates that when we analyze problems using a relational approach, we can realize that one incident of intercultural problems is composed of various interpretations and that plural options are available for managing the problems. By becoming familiar with the relational approach, participants can go beyond their cognitive knowledge of other cultural values and make more appropriate behavioral choices from the various options available.

Future research should be conducted with students who have had a pre-departure preparation program and should identify how they were able to manage problems by utilizing the program even when unexpected things happened to them. Also, future research should be implemented with more Japanese students who have stayed in English-speaking communities other than the United States, and with other host families other than Americans in order to find out how the cultural expectations of those cultures are similar to or different from those of American culture.

While globalization has advanced, it is questionable whether most people have really acquired a deeper understanding of other cultures because they are often unable to go beyond their cognitive level of understanding. If instructors become familiar with the above relational approach, and develop educational programs by utilizing the results of homestay programs, they can expect their students to move forward to the next step; that is, to the behavioral level. Grass-roots interactions such as those experienced in homestay programs can contribute greatly to the promotion of true intercultural understanding.

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AUTHORS

JUNKO KOBAYASHI is an associate professor at Kansai Gaidai University, Japan. She is the author of 12 English textbooks on intercultural communication. E-mail: kjunko@kansaigaidai.ac.jp

LINDA VISWAT is a professor at Otemon Gakuin University, Japan where she teaches courses in intercultural communication. Her research has focused on sojourner adjustment, learning strategies of Japanese university students, motivation, and the development of a learning community. E-mail: viswat@res.otemon.ac.jp

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Peer-Reviewed Article

ISSN: 2162-3104 Print/ ISSN: 2166-3750 Online
© Journal of International Students
http://jistudents.org

Knowledge, Education, and Attitudes of International Students to IELTS: A Case of Australia

Abe W Ata, PhD
Deakin University (Australia)

Abstract

The main objective of this study is to determine the knowledge, education and attitudes of Chinese, Indian and Arab speaking students in Australia towards the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) test. A questionnaire was administered to 200 students at six university language centers to investigate their overall response towards the four components of the IELTS test i.e. listening, reading, writing, and speaking. It was hypothesized that having positive or negative attitudes toward a certain language can exert considerable effect on the learners’ performance on a language test. The effect of variables such as testing environment, test rubric, and broader demographic factors on attitudes of the three national groups were investigated. Significant differences were found on students’ misconceptions of language learning, motivation and the degree to which it may have hindered their progress in attaining language skills.

Keywords: International students; IELTS test; Language and education; language attitudes

Although it is widely debated that students’ attitudes towards a certain language proficiency test may affect their performance on that test, research on attitudes of these groups towards International English Language Testing System (IELTS) is still absent. And crucially, how such attitudes might affect their overall band score in a standardized test such as IELTS is lacking. The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between Chinese, Indian and Arab IELTS candidates’ knowledge, education and attitudes and their performance on IELTS and address significant gaps in this area of research study.

Much has been written about the IELTS methods of operations, validity of assessing the candidate readiness to move to higher education, and its contribution to the learning process in university environments (Coleman, Starfield, & Hagaen, 2003). The current study extends the research further to focus on the benefits and drawbacks as perceived by three national groups: Chinese, Indian and Arab (Gulf region) candidates. Chinese and Gulf Arab learners are now the fastest growing group of international students in Australia (Marginson, 2011). Population increases, rapid economic growth, and strong aspirations of studying have all contributed to such
an upsurge in studying IELTS in preparation for enrollments at accredited universities in both countries. Other reasons such as flexibility, affordability, reputation and accessibility to courses clearly play additional roles in attracting them to Australia (Marginson, 2011; Lo Bianco, 2005).

Holmes (1992) states that if people feel positive toward those who use the language, they would be more successful and also more highly motivated toward learning it. Van Lier (1996) claims that working with interesting and meaningful manifestations of language enhances motivation and positive attitudes to language and language learning.

Consequently, one could assume that if second language learners initiate their language learning while they have negative attitudes towards the target language and the people using that language, they are not expected to make considerable progress in their process of language learning. This assumption was held as far back as 1995 when Truitt (1995) hypothesized that students’ beliefs and attitudes about language learning may vary based on cultural background and previous experiences. Thus, it can be argued that positive or negative attitudes do not develop accidentally but have some reason for their emergence. Malallaha (2000) investigated the attitudes of Arab learners towards English and discovered that they have positive attitudes toward the English language and their proficiency in tests was positively related to their positive attitude to English. Hence, it can be argued that having positive or negative attitudes towards a certain language can exert considerable effect on the learners’ performance on a language test.

Other studies on the relationships of causality summarized below are equally crucial. One study focuses on the relationship between IELTS preparation programs and candidates’ performance in the actual IELTS test. Read and Hayes (2003) for instance, investigated the impact of IELTS preparation programs on international students’ academic performance on tertiary study in New Zealand. Their study revealed that there were a number of substantial differences between the performance of the group which had undergone preparation programs and the group which had not. In 2007, Lewthwaite found, amongst UAE IELTS candidates, that the nature and type of activities used to prepare for their test was a major determinant of the balance of positive and negative attitudes. Others, like Elder and O’Loughlin (2003) investigated the relationship between intensive English language study and band score gain on IELTS. The results of their study revealed that students made variable progress in English during the three month period with an average gain of about half a band overall.

Attitudes that have been explored in relation to language learning range from anxiety about the language and the learning situation to attitudes towards speakers of the second language the country in which it is spoken, the classroom, the teacher, other learners, the nature of language learning, particular elements in the learning activities, tests and beliefs about learning in general (Johnson & Johnson, 1998). According to Brown (2000), second language learners of English benefit from positive attitudes; negative attitudes may lead to decreased motivation. Nevertheless, he believes negative attitudes can be changed, often by exposure to reality – for example, by encounters with actual persons from other cultures.

Rasti (2009) found that candidates who have positive attitude towards IELTS do not differ from other groups in their performance on the test. Rasti concludes that merely having a high attitude towards this test does not guarantee gaining a good score and no formal study has shown this either. She notes that candidates should go through learning effective strategies to approach the test and attending IELTS preparation programs can be a good and effective step.

While students saw the benefits of having a speaking component to the exam, both felt high anxiety. This finding contrasted with those of Read and Hayes (2003) who report overall ‘positive attitudes about IELTS amongst teachers and strong motivation amongst learners’.
Merrylees (2003) conducted a study to investigate two IELTS user take groups: candidates who take the test for immigration purposes and candidates who sit the test for secondary education purposes. He believed that with the increase in candidature of both user groups, there is an increasing need to investigate and analyze how each group is performing on the test in terms of nationality, age, gender and other factors, instead of making a broad comparative analysis. Ata (2010) found that poor lexical or specific cultural knowledge of English by Arab-speaking students can cause several negative interferences. His study produces a significant recommendation – one which implies that IELTS preparation materials should include more texts and tasks that would contribute to the social and academic acculturation of students. Morgan Terry (2003) claims that the strong motivation and serious purposes of IELTS candidates is taken for granted. However, he believes that publishers need to respond more to the growing market for IELTS preparation and to start investing in colorful, attractive, motivating publications that can help promote learning for IELTS candidates in the way they have for students preparing for other exams.

The aims of this study are: to seek viewpoints of Chinese, Indian and Arab (Gulf) students in critically evaluating their attitudes, perceptions and knowledge of IELTS; and to reveal the effects of positive attitudes, or their-lack of, on the overall test results. Students at large have positive or negative attitudes towards the language they want to learn and the people who speak it. Having a positive attitude toward tests is also claimed to be one of the reasons why students perform better on the test (Malallaha, 2000). Studies that investigated the relationships between attitudes and proficiency in the language clearly show that attitudes and other affective variables are as important as aptitude for language achievement (see, Bayliss & Ingram, 2006; Malallaha 2000; Coleman et al. 2003).

Since IELTS exams are now taken by candidates from over 170 countries, the rubric or the exam questions/essays should be as culture-free and as international as possible; and that where possible, culturally nuanced ‘situated’ contexts should be adapted to many IELTS rubrics. Lethwaite (2007), for example, found a strong overlap between what the IELTS writing tasks required and what UAE students and staff thought was needed in a writing course and that those who are really motivated and interested will read more widely. It might not be that the exam “encourages” such reading, he stressed, but it might mediate it or at least facilitate it. As regards the nature of the questions inviting personal opinion, some personal reflection on and prior assessment of various issues inevitably precede formulating a good written response.

This paper presents relevant evidence to support or refute these premises and fill in much needed gaps in the overall discussion about students’ attitudes to IELTS. One of these premises is that IELTS developers engage in a research agenda that explores a range of international English language issues such as specific lexical or cultural knowledge that might disadvantage test takers. Another premise is that IELTS is not only a proficiency test to evaluate linguistic competence but it is also a comprehensive test which measures other components such as communicative competence.

Research Method

The unit of analysis was pre-test and post-test IELTS candidates. A structured questionnaire was administered to 200 Chinese, Arab and Indian students at the Monash, Melbourne and Deakin university language centers. The demographic information of participants includes: gender—male (134), female (106); religion orientation – Muslim (82), Hindu (4), Sikh (4), Buddhist (36),
Christina (12), Other (102); origin of birth – Gulf (76), China (88), India (76); experience of living/studying in English speaking country – yes (88), no (152); languages spoken at home – Arabic (56), Chinese (92), and other (92).

A structured questionnaire collects data underpinning the following themes: Appropriateness of taking the test; Demographic attributes of respondents; Areas of knowledge; Comparative effectiveness of IELTS versus other English tests; Attitudes to IELTS purpose and value; and Perceptions of test demands and outcome. The format of the questionnaire was largely, though not exclusively, adapted to Likert scale, as the candidates were asked to indicate their attitudes by choosing one of the three alternatives: Agree, Undecided, Disagree. Statistical methods included factor analysis with vairmax rotation, anova, analysis of variance, t-test, cross tabulation and Pearson’s correlation.

Findings and Discussion

The findings show that with the exception of the variable “the surroundings such as lighting, temperature, floor, desks that affected my performance,” variations in the response by the three cohorts were highly significant with the exception of the variable “the surroundings such as lighting, temperature, floor, desks that affected my performance.” It is also shown that Chinese students exhibit the strongest expression on all the variables except the following two for which Arabs students from the Gulf Region took the lead. These were:

- I prefer IELTS to other English Language tests
- I found the announcements and administration of the text itself distracting

Figure 1. General attitudes to IELTS
General attitudes to IELTS: statements and significance (computation includes non-response adjustment)

perform = Fear of taking the IELTS test affected my performance
\( X^2 (9, N = 240) = 19.15, p = .024 \)

Surround = The surroundings such as lighting, temperature, floor, desks affected my performance
\( X^2 (9, N = 240) = 19.15, p = .443 \)

time = The time of taking the IELTS test affected my performance
\( X^2 (9, N = 240) = 19.15, p = .013 \)

Families = Being familiar with the place where I took the IELTS test helped my performance
\( X^2 (9, N = 240) = 19.15, p = .00 \)

familiar = Being familiar with the design, structure and format of the test helped my performance
\( X^2 (9, N = 240) = 19.15, p = .005 \)

attit = My attitude to IELTS test is largely positive
\( X^2 (9, N = 240) = 19.15, p = .004 \)

Pref = I prefer IELTS to other English Language tests
\( X^2 (9, N = 240) = 19.15, p = .042 \)

Distract = I found the announcements and administration of the test itself distracting
\( X^2 (9, N = 240) = 19.15, p = .026 \)

Limit = In my country our socio-cultural experience such as the freedom of the press, limits my ability in performing well in the IELTS tests.
\( X^2 (9, N = 240) = 19.15, p = .018 \)

Critical = In my country students are not encouraged to develop critical thinking as in Australia.
\( X^2 (9, N = 240) = 19.15, p = .016 \)

Chinese cohort indicated a positive feel in performing well. They registered the highest response in not being encouraged to develop critical thinking in Australia, and their ability to perform well is hampered by the socio-cultural experience in their own country. Arab students indicated the lowest response in the following items: My attitude to IELTS test is largely positive; Being familiar with the place where I took the IELTS test helped my performance; In my country our socio-cultural experience such as the freedom of the press; limits my ability in performing well in the IELTS tests; In my country students are not encouraged to develop critical thinking as in Australia.

Indian cohort participants indicated the lowest dislike in the following items: Fear of taking the IELTS test affected my performance; The surroundings such as lighting, temperature, floor, desks affected my performance; The time of taking the IELTS test affected my performance; Being familiar with the design, structure and format of the test helped my performance; I prefer IELTS to other English Language tests; In my country our socio-cultural experience such as the freedom of the press; limits my ability in performing well in the IELTS tests; In my country students are not encouraged to develop critical thinking as in Australia.

The negative association between gender and the response to these two statements was not significant. The suggestion being that both male and female international students are equally impacted in terms of showing a better performance.

Listening Section

Figure 2 present responses to what Chinese students disliked about the Listening section of IELTS: Tempo or speed (60%); Responding at the same time while listening (44%); Performance deteriorated as the test moved forward (54%); Not enough time for the answers to be transferred to the answer sheet from the question booklet (47%); Test does not really evaluate listening comprehension (45%); the test being not useful for their future studies” (11%).
It is not possible to make a conclusive statement explaining this variation. One may reason that being socialized in a traditional society may have contributed to being more restrained in mixing with genders of other nationalities – English speaking or otherwise. Frequenting movies and other Australian cultural-social events, eateries and the like, particularly in evening hours provide a wider exposure and accessibility to spoken English. Another factor is related to international students from the same background tend to live together in preference to renting in family households where they are less likely to communicate in English.

Figure 2. Attitudes to the Listening Section

**Attitudes to the Listening Section: Statements and significance (computation includes non-response adjustment)**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ldislike</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>$X^2$ (9, $N=240$)</th>
<th>$p$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ldislike1</td>
<td>Non-familiarity Australian accent</td>
<td>$X^2(9, N=240)=19.15$</td>
<td>$p=.070$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ldislike2</td>
<td>tempo or speed</td>
<td>$X^2(9,N=240)=19.15$</td>
<td>$p=.038$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ldislike3</td>
<td>lack of opportunity to wear headphones</td>
<td>$X^2(9,N=240)=19.15$</td>
<td>$p=.000$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ldislike4</td>
<td>poor quality of the voice</td>
<td>$X^2(9,N=240)=19.15$</td>
<td>$p=.0379$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ldislike5</td>
<td>Responding at the same time whilst listening</td>
<td>$X^2(9,N=240)=19.15$</td>
<td>$p=.726$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ldislike6</td>
<td>Performance deteriorated as the test moved forward</td>
<td>$X^2(9,N=240)=19.15$</td>
<td>$p=.357$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ldislike7</td>
<td>Not enough time for the answers to be transferred to the answer sheet from the question booklet</td>
<td>$X^2(9,N=240)=19.15$</td>
<td>$p=.226$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ldislike8</td>
<td>Test does not really evaluate listening comprehension</td>
<td>$X^2(9,N=240)=19.15$</td>
<td>$p=.640$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ldislike9</td>
<td>Test is not useful for my future studies</td>
<td>$X^2(9,N=240)=19.15$</td>
<td>$p=.003$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Reading Section**

Students showed mixed feelings recognizing that their reading section pushed them hard but it was not accurate in mirroring their study of being relevant to their study needs in the future. The statement “Test is not useful for my future studies” drew the lowest response from the three cohort groups combined, with Chinese students scoring the lowest response at 11%, followed by the Arab group at 28% and Indians at 35%.
A higher percentage of 50% for the Chinese and Arab speaking and 70% for “Other” did not see any benefits in “reading a lot of English texts before the exam”. These largely mixed negative feelings arising from working hard but not accurate mirroring their study needs (Spratt, 2005).

Figure 3. Attitudes to the Reading Section

**Attitudes to the Reading Section: Statements and significance (computation includes non-response adjustment)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Degree of Dislike</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading is immediately after listening</td>
<td>Rd dislike1</td>
<td>$\chi^2 (9, N=240) = 19.15, p = 0.111$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disliked the variety of question types</td>
<td>Rd dislike2</td>
<td>$\chi^2 (9, N=240) = 19.15, p = 0.258$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lengthy passages</td>
<td>Rd dislike3</td>
<td>$\chi^2 (9, N=240) = 19.15, p = 0.084$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test is not useful for my future studies</td>
<td>Rd dislike4</td>
<td>$\chi^2 (9, N=240) = 19.15, p = 0.214$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texts became more difficult towards the end of the reading section</td>
<td>Rd dislike5</td>
<td>$\chi^2 (9, N=240) = 19.15, p = 0.367$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of vocabulary and grammar is not important</td>
<td>Rd dislike6</td>
<td>$\chi^2 (9, N=240) = 19.15, p = 0.016$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading a lot of English texts before the exam</td>
<td>Rd dislike7</td>
<td>$\chi^2 (9, N=240) = 19.15, p = 0.001$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Writing Section**

Several variables were introduced to assess the reasons and degree behind the dislike for the Writing Section. The two main groups who recorded the highest dislike to the first four variables are the Chinese and Arabic speaking. The limitation or lack of knowledge of the world or information related to a given topic (variable Dislike4) clearly shows that different
dimensions of assessment of literacy may need to be prioritized a) for different disciplines, such as language testing, where knowledge of what it means to know and use a language is surely essential, b) within particular academic and professional domains, where language requirements may vary, and c) with particular users such as students, parents, school administrators, teachers, or test developers whose needs for and uses of information are highly diverse depending the nature and the level of their involvement in the assessment process (Taylor, 2009).

None of the variables in this section were significant with the exception of Wdislike5 = being given more than one task (sig. .0013).

This greater focus on assessment brings with it the need for assessment literacy, defined variously as having the skills needed for test development and validation, the knowledge required to make informed and principled score-based decision-making, and the ability to read and make sense of assessment-related research data (Newfields, 2006).

Other language educators like Lewthwaite believe that the writing task is “non-academic” in the sense that a personal opinion was asked for and respondents are not able to, and not expected to, draw upon empirical evidence, statistical data or the academic expertise of published material. (2007, p. 8). This would explain why Arabic speaking candidates in
particular scored highest (65%) on the variable ‘Wdislike4’ that there was ‘not enough knowledge of the world or information related to the given topic’ – a common observation made about school curriculum and rote learning styles in schools in the Middle Eastern countries.

As Lewthwaite’s (2007) experience in teaching IELTS to UAE students shows, ‘IELTS tests had more limited rhetorical functions (an emphasis on hortatory at the expense of other functions such as explanation, comparison, summarization) and focused much more on ‘real world’ contexts compared with the greater emphasis on abstract ideas in university tasks. Although written in 1999, an article by Moore and Morton suggested that Task 2 ‘may be more akin to public non-academic genres (newspapers, magazines) than characteristic of university assignments’ (see also Lewthwaite (2007).

Several students mentioned the unrealistic time limit of (recommended) 20 minutes for the exam task cause difficulty on concentrating on lengthy topics (Figure 4, variable Wdislike2). This reaction was corroborated by 60% of Arabic speaking and Chinese candidates and 50% ‘Other’. The response of these groups to being given more than one task in a short time was almost the same (Figure 4, Wdislike5). While it might reflect one type of university writing – writing exams under time constraints – it was unclear whether this was helpful to another major form of university writing, that of research activity,

**Speaking Section**

The direction of the results for the Speaking part is more pronounced than the Writing part. That is, feedback about difficulties experience in the Speaking section was stronger, varied and more pronounced than the Writing part. The Chinese cohort in particular ranked highest on the following three statements:

- (Sdislike4) *Having stress or lacking confidence at the time of interview.* (75%)
- (Sdislike5) *Being asked too many questions in rather a short time* (48%)
- (Sdislike3) *Interviewer’s accent* (67%).

The Indian group ranked lower and the Arab candidates ranked the lowest on these statements.

![Figure 5. Attitudes to the Speaking Section](http://jistudents.org)
Attitudes to the Speaking Section: Statements and significance (computation includes non-response adjustment)

Sdislike1 = The examiner’s gender affected their performance. $\chi^2 (9, N=240)=19.15, p=0.056$
Sdislike2 = Test examines one’s listening ability, not one’s speaking ability. $\chi^2 (9, N=240)=19.15, p=0.268$
Sdislike3 = Interviewer’s accent $\chi^2 (9, N=240)=19.15, p=0.005$
Sdislike4 = Having stress or lacking confidence at the time of interview. $\chi^2 (9, N=240)=19.15, p=0.000$
Sdislike5 = Being asked too many questions in rather a short time. $\chi^2 (9, N=240)=19.15, p=0.064$
Sdislike6 = Being recorded would add to their test anxiety $\chi^2 (9, N=240)=19.15, p=0.228$
Sdislike7 = The questions in this section were not related to each other. $\chi^2 (9, N=240)=19.15, p=0.061$
Sdislike8 = The test is not useful for my future studies $\chi^2 (9, N=240)=19.15, p=0.080$

Another difference that affected performance amongst the three groups relates to the gender of the examiner with 50% Arabs, 48% Chinese and 29% Indians indicating agreement that the examiner’s gender affected their performance. Such a relatively high response in an exam environment is not easy to explain notwithstanding calculation for a level of significance. One linguist surmised that “the teacher, male and female alike, “is placed in the driver’s seat – a position of primary influence in terms of the teacher beliefs, attitudes, educational level and experience, and personalities” (Spratt, 2005, p. 17-23).

Other factors that may contribute to this finding are: lack of motivation, so if the learners do not want to interact, they will not; and insufficient language, so if the learners do not have enough English language, it will be difficult for them to interact (Howarth, 2006).

Conclusions

While the above findings are preliminary, there appears to be two broad attitudes underpinning these findings: the first is widespread acceptance of the quality of the language tests used for selection as well as satisfaction with and trust in the information provided.

Several variables were introduced to assess the reasons and degree behind disliking the Writing Section. The two main groups who recorded the highest dislike to the first four variables are the Chinese and Arabic speaking. The limitation or lack of knowledge of the world or information related to a given topic (variable Dislike4) clearly shows that different dimensions of assessment of literacy may need to be prioritized a) for different disciplines, such as language testing, where knowledge of what it means to know and use a language is surely essential, b) within particular academic and professional domains, where language requirements may vary, and c) with particular users such as students, parents, school administrators, teachers

It has been proposed that Learning contexts and familiarity information and issues lead to a greater fluency and accuracy in performing English Language tests (Mehnert, 1998). If that premise holds true then writings task related to women’s issues, questioning parental attitudes, organ donation, freedom of thinking and rote memory learning at school and the like would disadvantage students from traditional cultures. The constrains of how the spontaneity of addressing these task mirror task requirements later on in tertiary institutions requires further
investigation. The direction of the results for the Speaking part is more pronounced than the Writing part. That is, feedback about difficulties experienced in the Speaking section was stronger, varied and more pronounced than the Writing part.

Students showed mixed feelings recognizing that the Reading section pushed them hard but it was not accurate in mirroring their study of being relevant to their study needs in the future. The statement the “Test is not useful for my future studies” drew the lowest response from the three cohort groups combined, with Chinese students scoring the lowest response at 11%, followed by the Arab group at 28% and Indian at 35%.

As regards the unfavorable attitudes to the listening section, one may reason that being socialized in a traditional society may have contributed to being more restrained in mixing with genders of other nationalities – English speaking or otherwise. Frequenting movies and other Australian cultural-social events, eateries and the like particularly in evening hours provide a wider exposure and accessibility to spoken English. Another factor is related to international students from the same background to live together in preference to renting in family households where they are less likely to communicate in English.

This survey has raised a number of questions aimed at areas that require further probing. Of significance are the following: Is there a principled basis for the setting of minimum entry standards and whether the current cut off scores are appropriate? Is there a need to address the lack of systematic data collection to evaluate their [entry standards] appropriateness and, by extension the rationale of determining that language test scores are the basis for selection decisions? Why do IELTS stakeholder continue to make little reference to other relevant factors which might have a bearing on students’ chances of academic success? And, does achieving the specified minimum IELTS score imply that students’ English proficiency is sufficient to successfully complete rather than commence their courses?

On the basis of the overall response for this section, one could safely surmise that the relative acceptance and trust in what benefits students will gain as a consequence are not to be underestimated. This, however, does not translate into a general understanding of or interest in language proficiency test content, scoring procedures, cut-off scores and cross-test equivalences or associated validity evidence, as perceived by the respondents to meet their needs.

The broader response to several questions relating to core issues surrounding IELTS remains inconclusive. Questions relating to bilingual and English language learning by international students have been raised by numerous researcher including Dooey (2010) and Lasagabasete, (2008).

There is a deep division, for example, in the view as to whether current cut off scores are appropriate. Others raise questions behind the principled basis for the setting of minimum entry standards; and why is there an overemphasis on language test scores as the basis for selection decisions based on language test scores without reference to other relevant factors which might have a bearing on students’ chances of academic success? And lastly “does achieving the specified minimum IELTS score imply that students’ English proficiency is sufficient to successfully complete rather than commence their courses!”

These conclusions are largely subject to a number of caveats. The findings, for example, apply to particular cohort groups in a particular learning social context – one where to extent of its applicability to other groups in other contexts is unknown. Another obvious limitation shows that self-reporting almost always becomes embedded in the analysis of the data itself. It also seems important to test for the degree to which the developers of language tests may
communicate complacency about their own levels of expertise and understanding about the qualities of tests, the meaning of test scores and the informational needs in these contexts.

In order to test for a high predictive validity of the nature of IELTS test score in relation to university requirements of acceptable language proficiency, this study needs to be extended further to include perception of teachers themselves. How the two groups, educators and students differ in their attitudes, would accurately indicate the relationship between the language skills reflected in IELTS scores and abilities required by the universities to succeed.

The chasm between how staff and students may differ in their perception of predictive nature of IELTS test scores in determining the languages abilities at tertiary institutions was widely demonstrated in one of the IELTS Research Reports by Coleman and others (2003).

NOTE -This research was supported by Deakin University and William Angliss Charitable Fund (Victoria)

REFERENCES


**AUTHOR**

**ABE W. ATA** was born in Bethlehem. He graduated in social psychology at the American University and was soon nominated as a delegate to the United Nations’ World Youth Assembly. He gained his doctorate at the University of Melbourne in 1980 and has since been teaching and researching at several Australian, American, Jordanian, West Bank (Al-Quds) and Danish universities. He has worked at the Australian Catholic University for several years. His publications span 114 journal articles and 16 books including *International education and cultural-linguistic experiences of international students in Australia* (Australian Academic Press, June 2015); *Education Integration Challenges: The case of Australian Muslims* (Dec.2013); *Us and Them* (Australian Academic Press) which was nominated for the Prime Minister Book Awards in 2009; and Christian-Muslim Intermarriage in Australia (2003) Dr. Ata contributed several articles to the *Encyclopedia of Australian Religions* (2009); *Encyclopedia of the Australian People* (2001) and *The Encyclopedia of Melbourne* (2005). He was nominated as Australian of the Year in 2015 and 2011. Dr. Ata is currently an Honorary Fellow at Deakin University.

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Building Vocabulary for Language Learning: Approach for ESL Learners to Study New Vocabulary

Adel M. Alharbi (Doctoral Candidate)
University of Memphis (USA)

Abstract
This project investigated Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLSs) English Language Learners used; and strategies they thought were effective to them in terms of language proficiency. Using an online survey, 121 participants responded to statements regarding their usage of VLSs. Participants have been divided into two groups: (1) learners with low English proficiency level and (2) learners with high English proficiency level to measure the significance between them in response to the VLS questionnaire. The analysis measured five sets of vocabulary knowledge: building synonyms network, learning definition(s) with contexts, pronunciation process, bookmark word search, and remembering strategy for writing. This project determined that the group with high language proficiency agreed more on the items selected than those with low language proficiency.

Keywords: Second Language Acquisition, Vocabulary Learning Strategy, Language learning strategies, English Language Learners

There have been a large number of studies in the field of language learning strategies in the last twenty years (e.g. Lan and Oxford, 2003; Macaro, 2001) (Tseng, Dörnyei, & Schmitt, 2006). For instance, studies done in the 1970s focused on language learning strategies in general (e.g. Rubin, 1987; Skehan, 1989). However, from a vocabulary acquisition perspective, researchers during that time neglected vocabulary learning as its own subfield of learning strategies (Meara, 1980; Schmitt, 1997). Hence, there is no doubt that vocabulary knowledge is a fundamental aspect of language learning and language use (Nation, 1990, 2001). Adolph and Schmitt (2003) have stated that language learners need to master, at least, 3,000 word families to communicate and understand 95 percent of the language communicated by native speakers. As a consequence, to master new words means that language learners have to fully comprehend vocabulary knowledge of each word they encounter. According to Schmitt, (2010) “form-meaning linkage is the most basic vocabulary knowledge possible” (p. 30). To accept this definition means that language learners need to master both spoken and written forms of vocabulary and distinguish its meaning to craft successful meaningful connections socially and mentally. Also in regard to the vocabulary knowledge, Nation and Waring (1997) described that vocabulary knowledge is a
gradual process. For English Language Learners (ELLs), building vocabulary is a highly demanding process. Laufer (1998), for instance, stated that lexical competence is the main difference between language learners and native speakers of the target language. To this end, this paper sought to examine the strategies/methods that ELLs and/or language learners thought were most effective for their vocabulary learning. Additionally, this paper mainly focuses on the learning process more than the teaching process when vocabulary acquisition is at stake.

**Literature Review**

Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLSs) have been examined from two main strands: (1) from a cognitive psychological viewpoint, and (2) from a Second Language Acquisition (SLA) perspective (Kudo, 1999). The scope of this paper focuses on the latter. The term *learning strategy* has been defined as any "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferrable to new situation" (Oxford, 1990; p. 8). The research on vocabulary learning and/or acquisition has not received the primary attention until the early 1980s. To most applied linguists, vocabulary learning was known "as a 'neglected aspect of language learning' " as noted by Meara (1980), who criticized and characterized its negligence in SLA research (Meara, 1980; p. 1; Lightbown, & Spada, 2006, p. 96). Meara (1980) argued that there were no clear theories on vocabulary acquisition until the late 1970s. Researchers of vocabulary learning, such as Nation (1990), Laufer (1986), and Schmitt (1998), have come to agree that more research is needed to investigate in this area, which has been the focus of several SLA researchers for the last three decades.

ELLs acquire different amounts of vocabulary than native speakers. On the one hand, a recent study showed that the volume of vocabulary acquired by native English speakers is 1,000 words annually before college level, which then becomes 2,000 words per year (Peregoy & Boyle, 2013). On the other hand, for language learners, the studying time for vocabulary acquisition and/or learning must be doubled especially for academic purposes. In addition to that, most recent research and studies on teaching vocabulary have focused on the necessity to expose ELLs to new words through oral and written resources from several contexts within the curriculum (Peregoy & Boyle, 2013). Accordingly, in order to capture the global and functional meaning of new vocabulary, language learners are highly encouraged to be exposed to the word knowledge explicitly. For instance, Nation (1990) has claimed that language learners need at least 5-16 times the exposure to master new words. Far from curriculum-based instruction in learning vocabulary, language learners spend an estimated hundreds of hours each week studying or communicating by themselves in which they are exposed to a huge amount of vocabulary per day. Like first language acquisition, second language acquisition is maintained gradually by the learning environment that surrounds ELLs and language learners of a particular language. However, ELLs usually develop vocabulary incidentally through conversation as they network socially with English speakers inside school and out (Peregoy & Boyle, 2013). In doing so, learners must select the right strategy to reach a better understanding of the new texts they read or study. Hence, it becomes important to know how ELLs study vocabulary and which strategies they follow. It is also important to know which of these strategies are more effective. These are the core questions that guided my research to identify vocabulary learning strategy. There are several VLS introduced in language learning studies. For instance, Peregoy and Boyle (2013), have introduced several vocabulary learning strategies, such as *Total Physical Response* (TPR),...
Webtools for learning vocabulary, Read-Alouds, Word Cards, Word Wall Dictionary, and list-group-label for beginners up to the self-assessment vocabulary strategies to guide teachers and learners to use these strategies. However, these VLS and others may or may not be presented to ELLs at early stages as needed. Also, Schmitt (1997) stated that language learners typically use different vocabulary learning strategies (Schmitt, 2010). Due to the fact that every learner has their own style of learning vocabulary, some strategies appeared to be more of a practical solution to study new words. Certainly, Oxford (1990) and Hedge (2000), for instance, have emphasized that most learners prefer cognitive or mental strategies to learn new words, understand the basic meaning, categorize them, and put them in groups. This research is based on the researcher’s own personal experiences as an ELL using a set of thematically related strategies, which are important for ELLs to have in developing and learning more vocabulary.

**VLS Background**

VLS has been one of the most interesting topics for researchers in the last two decades (Gu, 2010). Lexical competence requires rigorous activities in order to master vocabulary knowledge and to assist in language usage. Any plan to use a particular strategy for learning another language must be continuous so L2 learners who are at the beginning can build upon their knowledge of vocabulary and language. Learning strategies, on the other hand, focus more attention on how language learners, whether they are first or second learners, utilize their language learning in specific. Moreover, Weinstein and Mayer (1986, p. 315) defined learning strategies as ‘the behaviours and thoughts that a learner engages in during learning that are intended to influence the learner’s encoding process’ (cited in Tseng et al., 2006). Then, Weinstein, Husman, and Dierking, (2000, p. 727) came to redefine learning strategies as ‘any thoughts, behaviours, beliefs, or emotions that facilitate the acquisition, understanding, or later transfer of new knowledge and skills’. Conversely, Nation (2001) has suggested that it would be better to ensure the four applications of any strategy that really need high attention from teachers to apply them in learning new vocabulary rather than looking for a clear definition of learning strategy. He suggested that a strategy must inclusively: (1) involve choice, (2) be complex, (3) gain knowledge about the strategy and advantage from training, and (4) expand the effectiveness of learning new vocabulary and vocabulary use (Nation, 2001).

From SLA perspective, the study of VLS has been seen and researched in two facets: (a) of mental activities by L2 learners and (b) of social and interactional forms in which L2 learners practice their ability to study new words (Kudo, 1999). After introducing and shifting the focus from teaching-oriented era to the learners' behavioral strategy to learn the language in late 1970s, several studies on how a learner maintains and controls language learning then cascaded to open the research theories and practices in favor of vocabulary learning strategies. For instance, Rubin(1987), Skehan (1989), and Oxford (1990) are among those who established great works in language learning strategies (Schmitt, 1997). However, one of the most comprehensive publications on the taxonomy of language learning strategy published by Oxford (1990) explored the learning strategy by dividing it into direct and indirect strategies. Oxford classifies the direct or mental strategy into three sub-categories: (1) Cognitive Strategy, (2) Memory Strategy, and (3) Compensation Strategy. In this group, L2 learners demonstrate and exercise mental access to study vocabulary. In the second group; indirect strategy, L2 learners study vocabulary through (a) Meta-Cognitive Strategy, (b) Affective Strategy, and (c) Social Strategy. Others, as Nation (2001), developed taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies by categorizing learning strategies...
into: Planning, Sources, and Processes. In the first category, L2 learners must plan ahead for their vocabulary learning. After planning for vocabulary learning, L2 learners can explore the sources of the new words, which is how and where to find information about the new words. In the third strategy, process is the stage to establish vocabulary knowledge based on the previous two strategies. Nation explored the vocabulary learning widely by crafting the most theories and questions about this study matter. Also, Schmitt’s VLS work (1997) grouped the strategies of learning new words into Determination Strategy, Social Strategy, Memory Strategy, Cognitive Strategy, and Meta-Cognitive Strategy. Some other researchers, such as Gu and Johnson (1996), have developed taxonomy of VLS that is very close to Oxford's 1990 and Schmitt's 1997 (for more details see Gu & Johnson, 1996). Additionally, a recent study by Angelini, García-Carbonell, and Watts, (2014) tested the telematic simulation and gaming for 31 EFL students and showed a high positive vocabulary acquisition experience. What is more, the perception about the telematic simulation increased the students’ motivation to learn English and gain a larger vocabulary through communicative teaching and learning. Finally, this brief history provides a background about the common schemes of VLS in second language learning; hence, this paper aims to present an overview of them. The discussion about the learning strategies to learn new words will be discussed in the results and discussion section of this paper.

Research Method

A Likert-scale questionnaire (online) has been used to analyze and interpret how sequentially second language learners look up new words following the five steps continuum as follows: Building synonyms network → Learning definition(s) with contexts → Listening and pronunciation process → Remembering strategy for writing → Bookmark word search. Hence, the researcher aimed to explore which of the five sets L2 learners use. Adding to the scope of this research, the questionnaire elicited from participants a response to the five sets of strategies mentioned above in order to rearrange their sequence in which learners look up new words. There were 27 items in the questionnaire with 20 items covering the VLS and seven items seeking information related to L1 background, language level, educational level, visiting English speaking countries, and job position. There were five Likert-scale options to choose from, ranging from (1) Strongly Agree to (5) Strongly Disagree. The reliability score Cronbach’s Alpha for this project was ($\alpha=.852$) ($N=121$) and one case was excluded for incompletion.

Participants

A total of 120 participants have completed the online survey. The majority of participants in the study were college students learning a second language. Fourteen participants were from the language center at the U.S. regional university in which this study took place. The participants' L1 background included Arabic, Chinese, Croatian, English, German, Hindi, Japanese, Malay, Spanish, Swedish, Urdu, Vietnamese, Persian, Telugu, and Portuguese, respectively. Furthermore, participants have been divided into two groups: learners with high proficiency level and learners with low proficiency level. Their proficiency level was determined by self-identifying selection from the survey options given.
Table 1: Vocab-Backup Strategy Description

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Sub-strategy</th>
<th>Assist learners to…</th>
<th>LSS*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cognitive Strategy</strong></td>
<td>Synonyms</td>
<td>• Check synonyms first for new words.</td>
<td>• Expands vocabulary size in the brain.</td>
<td>R, W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relations</td>
<td>• Use semantic map for each word.</td>
<td>• To learn and remember easier.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Synonyms mean more words.</td>
<td>• Develop strong connection for word relations and usages.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Build up global knowledge of new words by knowing synonyms.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Experience different contexts of new words.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meta-cognitive &amp; Social Strategies</strong></td>
<td>Learning definition/s with contexts</td>
<td>• Guess the meaning from context before knowing the meaning.</td>
<td>• Proper use of the new words.</td>
<td>R, W,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Check words' context in dictionaries.</td>
<td>• Apply previous knowledge to guess the meaning.</td>
<td>L, S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Apply different contexts of a word in speaking &amp; writing.</td>
<td>• Differentiate specific contexts of new words.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Check the meaning that fits the new words' context.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Strategy</strong></td>
<td>Listening &amp; Pronunciation strategy</td>
<td>• Listening is the best practice of all (people, media, etc).</td>
<td>• Engage in conversations.</td>
<td>L, S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Syllable is for sound.</td>
<td>• Enhances listening skills.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Private Speech has it all.</td>
<td>• Develop confidence in speaking skill.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Set up a vocabulary notebook.</td>
<td>• Improve speaking skill.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Check new words daily and weekly.</td>
<td>• Remember new words.</td>
<td>R, W,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Repetition &amp; retention practices.</td>
<td>• Evoke memory to use new words in speaking &amp; writing.</td>
<td>L, S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Deliberate vocabulary learning.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Regularly look up new words in dictionary.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meta-cognitive Strategy; Dictionary Strategies</strong></td>
<td>Bookmark strategy</td>
<td>• If I write them, I will keep them in my mind.</td>
<td>• Keep vocabulary learning updated.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Picture your word /visualize new words.</td>
<td>• Endorse both speaking &amp; writing skills.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Use them in writing.</td>
<td>• Enhances long-term memory practices.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Check syllable for spelling practices.</td>
<td>• Increase writing comprehension.</td>
<td>W, R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Memory strategy for writing</td>
<td>• Increase vocabulary size by visualizing new words.</td>
<td>• Evoke learning vocabulary by writing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Language Skills Scale: R-reading, W-writing, L-listening, S-speaking.
Results

The results in general yielded significant interconnections between the five strategies, namely: Building synonyms network → Learning definition(s) with contexts → Listening and pronunciation process → Bookmark word search → Remembering strategy for writing. The themes of VLS items in the questionnaire were created based on the five VLS strategies established for the purpose of this research. Hence, the argument for this strategy came after a close relation with the study of vocabulary from an ESL perspective as a learner and teacher to apply them into different learning levels during language development. What's more, it’s the researcher's intimacy to bring this issue and pay a closer look on how ELLs practice the VLS during language development. The introduction of the five strategies was developed by the author of this project. They represent memory and cognitive strategies, social and meta-cognitive strategies, and dictionary strategies. To understand the segment parts of this paper, an illustration of the five strategies will be discussed later.

Results Based on the Two Groups

There are two primary scopes of this paper. The first scope looks at the significance between those with high level of English language and those with the low level in responding to the study questionnaire. The second scope rearranges the Vocab-Backup Strategy (VBS) sequence based on the reliability score of the five sets of strategies presented in this paper (see Table 1). This section, details the first scope, and the following section details the second scope. This study reported the result that ELLs with high language proficiency agreed more on the items presented in the survey than those with low language proficiency.

The mean score for the first group is ($M=2.04$) versus ($M=2.23$) for the second group (see Table 2 for more details). This means that L2 learners with high language proficiency attempted to use and follow the five-step strategies more when encountering new words. The division of the two groups is presented in Table 2 and the $M$ has been calculated for each group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the group</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>$n$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learners with low language proficiency</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learners with high language proficiency</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Result Discussion for the Five Sets of VBS

The following subsections will discuss the results of the five strategies and their arrangement based on the reliability score for each step. The VBS five steps continuum is described as follows: Building synonyms network → Learning definition(s) with contexts → Listening and pronunciation process → Bookmark word search → Remembering strategy for writing.

Building Synonyms Network/Synonyms Relations

Surprisingly, before and after data collection, synonyms relations strategies remained as proposed in the first step as preferred by most ELLs and/or L2 learners in general. However, the significant change is how much ELLs look for synonyms at the first stage when they encounter new words. This has been the focus of this paper to see whether ESL students pay attention to
synonyms or rely on other information, such as definitions, contexts of the word, or part of speech. The purpose here is to explore the global theme of the new words before going into deep information and not losing the word's meaning connections. Therefore, there are four variables in this step and each one assists ELLs learning new words by focusing on synonyms of that particular word. The first variable is to look for synonyms upon first sight of searching or seeking information. The second variable is forming a semantic map for the new words by drawing upon the most known synonyms around the new word. In this variable, the vocabulary knowledge increases in size in the brain by collecting the most related words to match the new one. The third variable is to see if ELLs recheck new words' synonyms to help in understanding its meaning. This process works as an assisted strategy to gain confidence about the word’s meaning and knowing the theme better. The fourth is generalizing the importance of synonyms for vocabulary search as preferred method to comprehend the meaning of new words. These variables were selected based on the researcher’s belief upon using them as the first stage of exploring new vocabulary. The mean score for all items related to Using Synonyms to search for new words is $M = 2.62$. Table 3 shows the mean for each item in this category. Additionally, in order to place the strategies in order, the reliability statistics were analyzed using synonyms' items scored ($\alpha = .73$), which has been placed as the highest mark of the five strategies.

**Table 3: Statistical Analysis for Using Synonyms Items ($n = 120$)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Items</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rely on synonyms to build word in groups</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lookup synonyms first to know meaning of new words</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recheck synonyms if new words were not understood</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synonyms is more important than meaning alone</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Meaning vs. Context**

In the continuum of the five sets, *learning definition with context* was used, but is referred to here as *meaning vs. context* to emphasize the confusion between them among ELLs. In this strategy, ELLs record the importance of the meaning and/or the context to help them study for new words. In other words, most ELLs look for meaning of new words without considering the context in which the new word appeared.

**Table 4: Statistical Analysis for Meaning vs. Context Items ($n = 120$)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Items</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guess the meaning from the contexts</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See new word in examples for better learning it</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visualize new words</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>1.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memorize words context to remember its meaning</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check new word while reading to know different context of it</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I distinguish between definitions and contexts of new words</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>1.95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Due to some confusion between which context fits the word's particular meaning among ELLs, this strategy process helps determine the context of the new word and connect the right meaning or definition to it. This strategy has six variables in the questionnaire and their mean
with the details are shown in Table 4. The calculated mean for all the items related to this strategy is \( M = 2.12 \). Moreover, the reliability score for this category is \( \alpha = .72 \), which remained in the second process as proposed.

**Listening and Pronunciation Strategy**

There are four variables for this step to examine the process of practicing the sound system of the new words and learning how to pronounce them. They range from checking new words' syllables, listening to real conversation and media, and using these new words in speaking. The mean score for all the items related to this step is \( M = 2.27 \) (See Table 5 for more details). The reliability score for this set of strategies reached \( \alpha = .60 \), which is lower than the previous step.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Items</th>
<th>( M )</th>
<th>( SD )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learn pronunciation of new words by checking its syllables</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen to people how they use words in different context</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to media to learn pronunciation of new words</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use new words in speaking and writing to best remember them</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Bookmark Strategy**

This strategy was placed earlier on the last process of learning new vocabulary. However, after analyzing the data, it has been moved as the fourth strategy with the reliability score of \( \alpha = .48 \). There are four variables in this strategy and the mean score for all the items is \( M = 2.17 \). This approach aimed to guide ELLs to a better vocabulary retention and repetition practices using vocabulary notebook, rechecking new words, reviewing a vocabulary list, and checking an online dictionary. Bookmark strategy usually assists ELLs and/or L2 learners to remember new words for long-term memory practices and evoke their usage in the current situation for best vocabulary practices. Table 6 shows the \( M \) and \( SD \) for the items of this strategy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Items</th>
<th>( M )</th>
<th>( SD )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use variety of strategies to keep track of new words</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>1.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recheck new words for better understanding</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer to use online dictionaries</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use vocabulary list for new words</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Remembering Strategy for Writing**

Finally, writing strategies take several processes depending on how much focus L2 learners need in order to obtain particular vocabulary, especially for academic purposes. This strategy has three variables and participants have agreed on all the variables. The \( M \) score for this strategy is \( M = 2.29 \). Table 7 illustrates the \( M \) and \( SD \) for *Remembering Strategy for Writing* for each item. Despite the fact that writing process is a crucial step in language learning in general and particularly in vocabulary learning, it has been placed as the fifth strategy among the five
based on the reliability score of \( \alpha = .40 \). However, this does not mean that writing new words is not necessary for language learning. The writing process came as the last frequency in which L2 learners need to master the graphic art of the target language. The three variables checked if ELLs look for specific information in helping them write new words, such as parts of speech, syllables, and use in writing tasks.

Table 7: Statistical Analysis for Remembering Strategy for Writing Items \((n = 120)\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Items</th>
<th>( M )</th>
<th>( SD )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Check part of speech before meaning</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use new words in speaking and writing to best remember them</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I check syllables of new words to learn its spelling</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>1.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion and Conclusions**

This paper investigates VLS for ELLs and introduced a vocabulary learning strategy named *Vocab-Backup Strategy*. The participants of this study were mainly undergraduate and graduate students. They have been divided into two groups. Furthermore, the main purpose was to investigate the difference between the two groups of ELLs based on their L2 proficiency level in response to the learning strategy items in the questionnaire. The examination of this paper looked at sets of five strategies proposed by the author. These sets are (1) *Building synonyms network*, (2) *Learning definition(s) with contexts*, (3) *Listening and pronunciation process*, (4) *Bookmark word search*, and (5) *Remembering strategy for writing*. It has been concluded that VLS is a sequential process that ELLs need to practice in learning new words. However, based on the analysis of the data gathered, the group with high language proficiency agreed more on the items selected than those with low language proficiency. Also, as proposed in this paper, the five-step strategies remained in the same sequence except for *Remembering Strategy for Writing*; which has been moved to the last step and *Bookmark Word Search* has been placed at number four in this category. The rearrangement of the VBS was based on the reliability score for each set of the sub-strategies presented in the questionnaire. The exception scope of this paper was by looking at VLS from the five steps of strategies orderly to gain confidence in vocabulary knowledge from ESL perspective. After conducting this project, it suggests that VLS should explicitly and continuously be introduced to ELLs from the early stages of language learning and during vocabulary learning practices as well. These strategies should be introduced by teachers and facilitators who work with ESL students on a regular basis. Another suggestion is to introduce these strategies to students and allow them to share their own methods of learning new vocabulary with peers. This method could save time for teachers explaining what and how to look up new words. As a self-regulation matter, vocabulary learning must be included in any new lesson or topic to help integrate mental and social development for ELLs during language learning process. Finally, this work attempts to contribute to in-classroom research on how to better acquire vocabulary and expressions, thus the results are mere orientations to carry out further investigations.

**Implications**

Due to the complexity and importance of vocabulary for ELLs, a great emphasis on teaching VLS is required to improve their proficiency compared to their counterpart English speakers at
the same level. Hence, VLS is highly significant to assist ELLs maintain their skills to build intact relationship with vocabulary during language development. It is to be suggested to offer and expose ELLs to different VLSs in order to sustain their self-regulation practices in the classroom.

Also general examples of the taxonomy of VLS have to be introduced to teachers and students to support and develop vocabulary learning strategies awareness in the classroom. This includes open conversations and practices between students and their peers to exchange some experiences and skills among them. Finally, VLS can increase the level of language development if introduced early in the language acquisition process.

REFERENCES


**Acknowledgment** - This research would have not been possible without the great assistantship from professor Amer, M. at West Chester University of PA who devoted so much time to guide my project by his theoretical, practical and statistical advices.

**AUTHOR**

ADEL M. ALHARBI, (PhD candidate at Department of English at University of Memphis), is holding MA in Applied Linguistics. He is interested in Second Language Acquisition studies, Sociocultural Theory, TESOL, ESL teaching, Language studies, Cultures and Intercultural studies as well. He has been teaching ESL and EFL students for over five years in Saudi Arabia and in U.S. as a volunteer. Email: adlism1@hotmail.com

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Are International Students Cash Cows?
Examining the Relationship Between New International Undergraduate Enrollments and Institutional Revenue at Public Colleges and Universities in the US

Brendan Cantwell, PhD
Michigan State University (USA)

Abstract

There has been growing interest in the business of international education. It is often assumed that universities seek international students as a means of generating revenue. The broad purpose of this study was to understand the effects of increased international student enrollment on net tuition revenue. Informed by resource dependency and academic capitalism theory, this study used panel regression techniques to estimate the effect of enrolling an international undergraduate student on tuition revenue among public colleges and universities in the United States. Findings show some but not all institutions are able to generate additional income by enrolling additional international students.

Keywords: international students, resource dependence, academic capitalism, regression

User, or tuition, fees have been on the rise in higher education systems around the world. Fees have recently been increased in many countries and newly implemented in a number of systems where students previously did not pay tuition. In some countries, such as the United Kingdom (UK), fee increases reflect explicit government policy while in others, like the United States (US), higher education institutions (HEIs) have increased fees without explicit changes in government policy designed to increase fees. In both cases, fees have been charged in order to share the cost of providing higher education between the state and the students (and their families) who consume education (Johnstone, 2004; Johnstone & Marcucci, 2010). However, some fee schemes have extended beyond cost sharing. HEIs, especially in Anglo-Saxon countries, have become increasingly entrepreneurial and seek revenue through market-like competition (Bok, 2003; Clark, 1998; Marginson & Considine, 2000; Morphew & Eckel, 2009; Slaughter & Cantwell, 2012; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). Competition for fee-paying students has been one prominent way in which HEIs compete for additional income (Brown, 2010; McBurnie & Ziguras, 2003; Marginson, 2007; Slaughter & Cantwell, 2012).

Internationally mobile students constitute a large group of potential fee-paying students. The international student market has been large and growing, with over 4 million students now...
studying outside of their home country (see Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2013, p. 306). International students, especially those at the undergraduate level, have been especially attractive as a source of revenue. International undergraduate students have sometimes been charged fees by countries where there are no fees for national students, such as in Sweden. In countries where domestic students share some of the costs but also enjoy a state subsidy, international students have often been charged fee premiums (Johnstone & Marcucci, 2010, pp. 119-120), such as in the UK and Australia. Indeed, HEIs in some Anglophone countries, especially Australia and the UK, have leveraged international student fees as a means of financing their operations (Ziguras, 2011). For example, Australia positioned itself as a major exporter of education and some Australian HEIs collect nearly one-quarter of their total revenue from overseas student fees (Marginson, 2007). Even in Finland, which has a strong egalitarian tradition and expectation for the social provision of higher education, HEIs now have the option of charging fees to non-European Union (EU) students in some programs (Kauppinen & Kaidesoja, 2014). While cost sharing has undoubtedly been a consideration, the implementation of overseas tuition fees has also been part of general policy shift in many countries towards a more market based and entrepreneurial higher education system (Slaughter & Cantwell, 2012).

A number of countries including China (McCafferty, 2013), France (Marshall, 2013), Japan (Shao, 2012), and the United Kingdom (UK) (Buchanan, 2013) have recently announced plans to attract more international students at the undergraduate level. Although rationales for attracting more international students vary, the potential for economic gain is a common, although not universal, motivation (Lee, Maldonado-Maldonado, & Rhoades, 2006). As cost sharing schemes have become more extensive, and as universities have become more enterprising, the impulse to attract international undergraduate students in order to generate revenue may have increased in many countries. Both the popular press and academic literature has been replete with accounts of how individual HEIs or national systems have generated income through international student recruitment. However, there has been little systemic research into the relationship between enrolling additional international students and institutional revenue. To put it another way, it has been unclear how much additional revenue HEIs stand to gain on average by recruiting additional international students.

The broad purpose of this study was to understand the effects of increased international student enrollment on net tuition revenue. Net tuition revenue is the total amount of money a HEI collects in study fees, minus any scholarships, grants, tuition discounts, or stipends an HEI offers to students. Net tuition revenue is the income a HEI generates from tuition that can use to support its operations. Because there is great heterogeneity in the way higher education is financed and because there are not good nationally comparable higher education enrollment and financial data, this study aimed to provide some insight into the relationship between enrolling fee-paying international students through a single-country analysis. Using panel regression techniques, the effect of enrolling an international undergraduate student on net tuition revenue among public colleges and universities in the United States (US) is estimated. While the findings of this study cannot be applied to other national contexts the implications are situated in the broader international environment in which many more students are crossing borders and in which HEIs seek additional revenue from students and other sources. A goal of this study was to determine if public institutions, on average, have been generating net tuition revenue by enrolling additional international students. Further, the study sought to identify which types of intuitions have seen net revenue increases and how much the average gain has been.
Literature Review

International education has come to be understood as an export industry (Ziguras, 2011). Understanding international education as an export industry brings national economies into focus. For example, the Institute for International Education (IIE, 2014) calculated that international students added over $27 billion to the US economy over the 2013/2014 academic year. Others have made the more general argument that in addition to direct tuition payments international students bring skills and creativity that contribute to innovation and economic growth (Florida, 2007; Tremblay, 2005). Although research into national-level economic contributions of international students has been frequently cited, this work has said relatively little about the effect of enrolling international students on HEI finances. This is to say, while organizations like the IIE have demonstrated the aggregate financial benefits of international students in the US, research has not established the expected return associated with enrolling international students for individual HEIs in the US. HEIs in several countries, perhaps most notably Australia and the UK, have positioned themselves as providers of cross-border education and seek to derive revenue from enrolling students from abroad (Marginson, 2007). Competition in international education markets has recently been seen by HEIs and governments as a strategy not only to promote national economic interests but also to boost HEI balance sheets (Douglass & Edelstein, 2009; Slaughter & Cantwell, 2012).

During the 2013-2014 academic year, US colleges and universities enrolled over 886,000 international students, which accounted for approximately 4% of all tertiary enrollments in the country. The majority (65%) of all international students in the US were self-financed. Top countries of origin included China, India, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, and Canada. International students were enrolled in all institutional types but these students tended to congregate in large and well-known universities. Six of the top ten institutions in terms of international student enrollments were large public research universities. Approximately 50% of all international students were enrolled in business and management, engineering, or math and computer science programs. Degree seeking undergraduate students made up approximately one-third of all international students enrolled at HEIs in the US (IIE, 2014). Of particular note was the trend towards increased enrollment of international undergraduate students. The number of international undergraduate students enrolled at US HEIs increased by 55% from 2004/5 to 2013/4 academic years (IIE, 2014).

Observers of international education noted that the trend of growing international undergraduate enrollments in the US appeared especially prominent at public HEIs (e.g., Choudaha, 2011). Anecdotal evidence supported this observation. Take for example the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UI). In September 2006, UI enrolled 350 new international undergraduate students, accounting for 4.9% of all new undergraduate enrollments (University of Illinois, 2012). By September, 2012 UI enrolled 910 new international undergraduates, totaling 13.1% of all new undergraduate enrollments (University of Illinois, 2012).

What accounted for the recent increase in international undergraduate students at public colleges and universities in the US? Overall expansion of international student mobility was one possible explanation. Another plausible explanation was that international undergraduate students were sought by HEIs because they yielded income from tuition fees. The need to generate additional revenue from tuition was especially keen at public HEIs because public funding had declined considerably in recent years (Ehrenberg, 2012). As public HEIs became
more dependent on tuition revenues, they have turned to full-fee paying students to generate revenue (Desrochers, Lenihan, & Wellman, 2010; Heller, 2011). Undergraduate students have been attractive targets in the pursuit of tuition revenue because they nearly all pay tuition. Hence, public HEIs in the US may have sought to enroll additional international undergraduate students in order to generate additional revenue.

The claim that US colleges and universities have enrolled more international undergraduate students in order generate additional revenue has been gaining popular traction. Recent news reports asserted that public colleges and universities recruited international students in order to replace income lost by state budget cuts (Choudaha, 2011; Fischer, 2011; Lewin, 2012). These stories suggested that financial interests drove the decision to enroll more international students. As Reisberg (2012) from Boston College’s Center for International Higher Education explained, efforts to recruit international students felt “ ... a lot like a business transaction with the expectation of a good ROI (return on investment) ...” (para., 3). The idea that international student revenues were used to fund university activities was consistent both with the expansion of cost-sharing schemes and with the rise of entrepreneurship and marketization among colleges and universities. While anecdotal evidence supported claims that HEIs were cashing in on international student markets such claims had not been investigated systematically.

**Theoretical Framework**

Cost sharing helped to explain how fees could be used to control public expenditures by sharing the costs of provision with those who participate in higher education. However, cost sharing concepts have been best used to understand policy and have not been best suited to explain individual HEI behavior and finances. Hence, this study drew from theory that was developed to explain organizational behavior. The logic used to claim US public HEIs seek international undergraduate students was formalized utilizing resource dependence and academic capitalism theories.

Resource dependence theory indicates that organizational structure and behavior reflects the resource environment (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). In other words, when organizations are dependent upon resources derived externally, organizational form and activities become consistent with the demands of the resource environment. When the resource environment changes, HEIs have adapted to fit the new environment (Tolbert, 1985), although some institutions have been able to respond more effectively than have others (Taylor, Cantwell, & Slaughter, 2013). Public colleges and universities in the United States face a long-term trend of reduced state appropriations as a share of their total operating expenses. This trend was exacerbated by the recent recession (Ehrenberg, 2012). As state appropriations decline, public colleges and universities have become more dependent on revenue from out-of-state students (Jaquette & Curs, 2015). Similarly, and following resource dependence theory, it is likely that public colleges and universities become dependent upon revenue derived from international student enrollment as state appropriations decline.

Academic capitalism shares resource dependence theory’s focus on the resource environment but highlights endemic marketization. The theory of academic capitalism assumed that HEIs responded to globalization and neoliberal policy regimes by becoming more entrepreneurial, and competing intensely for resources and market shares (Slaughter & Cantwell, 2012). Academic capitalism indicated that HEIs had become increasingly market-oriented organizations that aggressively competed for income. HEIs have competed for income in part to
secure market-based resources in the face of declining public support (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997) and, in part because they have increasingly adopted the norms of business firms and view students as customers (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Academic capitalism theory predicts that HEIs are likely to increasingly view international students as fee-paying customers and seek to aggressively compete for revenue from these students (Lee, Maldonado-Maldonado, & Rhoades, 2006; Slaughter & Cantwell, 2012). This is to say that academic capitalism theory predicts HEIs will seek to generate revenue from international students even when all other financial conditions are constant.

Research Method

This study assessed the relationship between international student enrollment and revenue at public HEIs in the US. Therefore the sample was limited to public (four-year) colleges and universities that award at least bachelor degrees. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (CFAT) provided a basic classification scheme that categorizes HEIs based on their programmatic offerings and research activity. Categories relevant to this study included “research universities,” “doctoral universities,” “master’s colleges and universities,” and “baccalaureate [bachelor] colleges” (CFAT, 2012).

Two separate analyses were conducted – one for research and doctoral universities, and one for master’s and baccalaureate colleges. Three considerations underpinned the decision to separate research and doctoral universities from bachelor and master’s granting HEIs. First, the missions of these different institutional types made direct comparison problematic. Second, these institutions were differentially resourced. Research and doctoral universities, on average, charged higher tuition and enjoyed higher per-student state appropriations than did bachelor and master’s colleges, whereas tuition income accounted for a higher share of all revenue at master’s and bachelor institutions (Wellman, Desroches, & Lenihan, 2008). Third, research and doctoral universities tended to enroll greater numbers of international students than did bachelor and master’s colleges (IIE, 2012b).

There were 177 public research and doctoral universities in the US (CFAT, 2012). The sample included 151 of these universities, or 88% of the population. There were 405 bachelor and master’s colleges in the US (CFAT, 2012). The sample included 329 of these institutions, or 81% of the population. The sample is somewhat smaller than the population because there was not 100% data coverage for all variables and HEIs missing data for one or more variable were dropped from the analysis.

Data

The data analyzed covered the period 2000 through 2009. During this period, the number of international undergraduate students enrolled at US public institutions had increased substantially (IIE, 2014). Data were drawn from two sources. Most variables were collected from the Delta Project on Postsecondary Education Costs, Productivity, and Accountability. This source standardizes finance, enrollment, and other figures collected annually by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The number of newly enrolled international undergraduate students was collected from NCES’s Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). Since the year 2000, IPEDS has annually collected the number of new international students enrolled by all colleges and universities in the US.

IPEDS data were used, as opposed to other well-known sources (e.g, OECD, IIE), for two reasons. First, IPEDS disaggregated data by institution, academic level, and enrollment
status (first-time enrollments), which facilitated institutional-level panel analysis. Second, IPEDS data offered the additional advantage of being gathered using the same process and definitions as the other variables used in the analysis.

Analysis concluded at the academic year ending in 2009 because this the most recent year for which all data were available. All financial variables were held in constant 2009 US dollars. Count (such as the number of students) and financial variables are log-transformed. Count variables were logged under the assumption that the return on enrolling an additional student is non-linear. In other words, adding an additional student if an institution enrolled 1,000 students is different from adding an additional student if an institution enrolled 10,000 students. Similarly, financial variables were logged because it was assumed colleges and universities spent their first dollar differently than they spent their last dollar.

Analytic Strategy

This study investigated the relationship between new international undergraduate enrollments and institutional revenue. In testing this relationship, logged net revenue, derived from student paid tuition and fees, was set as the dependent variable. The logged count of new international students enrolled at the undergraduate level was the independent variable of interest. Following resource dependence theory that predicts that revenue generated from international students, will be sought to preplace state funding, state appropriations are included in the model. Following academic capitalism that predicts HEIs will increasing compete for revenue derived from international students (as well as other sources), a log-linear time trend is included in order to control for increased revenue seeking behavior during the period of study. Several control variables, including counts of student enrollment (graduate and undergraduate) and faculty members, were also included.

Analysis was conducted using linear regression with time-series cross-sectional, or panel, data. The dataset includes multiple observations of a single unit over time. In such datasets, variation resides both within a particular unit (observed over time) and between multiple units (observed at the same point in time). This analysis focused on the variation within units (HEIs) because it is the individual HEI that enrolls a student that stands to enjoy the fee revenue derived from that student. Fixed effects estimates, as opposed to random effects estimates, were used in the regression model. Fixed effects estimates consider only within-HEI variance, and minimize bias in coefficient estimates by providing an arithmetic control for time-invariant unobserved university-level characteristics (Zhang, 2010).

Fixed institutional-level effects do not vary over time. Therefore, institution-level characteristics that are time-invariant, such as geographic location, were not included in the models. Because the fixed effects controlled for all between-university variance, estimated coefficients could be interpreted as predicted changes at a particular institution. Although fixed institutional-level effects provide robust control for time-invariant characteristics and variation between units, it was important to include additional controls for characteristics of HEIs that did vary over time.

All undergraduate students typically pay tuition at US colleges and universities. At public institutions, in-state students tend to pay lower tuition fees than out-of-state students pay. Therefore the log count of all in-state and out-of-state undergraduate students was included. While many graduate students are supported by grants, fellowships, and teaching assistantships (Stephan, 2012), some graduate students did pay tuition fees. Therefore the logged count of graduate students was added as a control in the research and doctoral university model. This variable was omitted from the bachelor and master’s institutions because these institutions
enrolled relatively few graduate students and because preliminary analysis showed that inclusion did not improve model fit but did result in the loss of observations.

HEIs in the United States use institutional scholarships and grants as a means of persuading students to attend their institutions. Use of institutional scholarships and grants to drive enrollment is known as tuition discounting (McPherson & Schapiro, 1998). Therefore the log of total institutional scholarships and grants was included as a control. The model also controlled for institutional size by including the log count of faculty members employed. Because public institutions enjoy state support the model for the log of state appropriations. International student enrollments are part of broader internationalization processes that has likely increased over time (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Indeed, IIE (2014) data showed increased enrollment of international students at HEIs in the United States nearly every year during the study period. Therefore, a log-linear time trend was included to account for change over time, which is also theoretically important because academic capitalism theory predicts that HEIs will increasingly engage in revenue generating activities (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Research has shown that international students chose HEIs abroad at least in part based on rankings and reputation for academic quality (Lee, 2008). However, HEIs ranking scores were not including in the model because this study did seek to predict international undergraduate student enrollment but rather the effect of enrollment on net tuition revenue. Additionally, because ranking positions change very little (Bowman & Bastedo, 2011), these variables are virtually time-invariant and therefore not appropriate for inclusion in a model that employs fixed effects. Finally, as a safeguard to ensure the reliability of the estimates standard errors were clustered by HEI.

It is worth offering a note on how to interpret the results of the regression models. Because logarithmic transformations were used, coefficients could be interpreted as elasticities. In other words, estimated coefficients represented the predicted percentage increase in the dependent characteristic of a particular institution, net of other variables, for a 1% increase in an independent characteristic at that institution.

Limitations
There were important limitations related to the sample and temporal frame included in this study. First, the period of study ended in 2009. If institutions substantially increased their efforts to recruit international undergraduates as sources of revenue following the 2008 financial crisis, the full extent of these activities may not have appeared in the findings. Second, this study focused on public colleges and universities in the United States. As such, the findings could not be extended to all US higher education institutions but are instead limited to the public four-year sector. Third, the tuition pricing system in the US is difficult to extrapolate to other national contexts. Higher education financing in the US has been distinguished by cost sharing at high levels (Johnstone, 2004), hierarchical differentiation among institutions (Slaughter & Cantwell, 2012), and individual-level tuition discounting (McPherson & Schapiro, 1998).

Results
Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for all variables in the years 2000 and 2009. The first column reports sampled research and doctoral universities and the second columns reports sampled bachelor and master’s institutions. Mean values are reported for each variable, followed by median values, and standard deviations. Table 1 shows considerable differences between mean and median values, as well as large standard deviations for most of the selected variables.
Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Research and Doctoral Universities (N=151)</th>
<th>Bac. and Master's Institutions (N=329)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Median</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New International Undergraduates</td>
<td>59.5</td>
<td>32.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net Tuition Revenue, ’000 US$</td>
<td>85896.8</td>
<td>57745.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Tuition Grants, ’000 US$</td>
<td>7600.1</td>
<td>3497.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Appropriations, ’000 US$</td>
<td>146147.7</td>
<td>102909.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-State Undergraduate Cohort</td>
<td>1464.9</td>
<td>1036.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out-of-State Undergraduate Cohort</td>
<td>338.2</td>
<td>117.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Graduate Student Enrollment</td>
<td>3031.5</td>
<td>1397.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New International Undergraduates</td>
<td>91.8</td>
<td>48.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net Tuition Revenue, ’000 US$</td>
<td>182678.8</td>
<td>131316.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Tuition Grants, ’000 US$</td>
<td>176000.0</td>
<td>7270.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Appropriations, ’000 US$</td>
<td>186018.5</td>
<td>137463.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-State Undergraduate Cohort</td>
<td>2974.4</td>
<td>2657.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out-of-State Undergraduate Cohort</td>
<td>719.7</td>
<td>456.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Graduate Student Enrollment</td>
<td>3087.8</td>
<td>1987.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These observations indicated that these variables were widely distributed. In such cases, median values may offer a more accurate indication of the central tendency within the distribution.

Median net tuition fees and state appropriations increased between 2000 and 2009 at both institutional types. At research and doctoral universities median net tuition revenue rose from approximately $58 million dollars in 2000 to approximately $131 million in 2009. At bachelor and master’s institutions median net tuition revenue rose from approximately $10 million to approximately $22 million over the same period. Similarly, from 2000 to 2009 median state appropriations increased from approximately $103 million to approximately $137 million at research and doctoral universities, and from approximately $77 million to approximately $116 million at bachelor and master’s institutions. The median number of new international students enrolled increased from 32 to 48 at research and doctoral universities during the study period, but ticked up only slightly from 9 to 10 at bachelor and master’s institutions.

Figure 1. Average number of new international students

Figure 1 shows change in the average (mean) number of new international students enrolled at sampled research and doctoral universities and bachelor and master’s institutions. On average, research and doctoral universities witnessed a modest decline in the number of new international undergraduate enrollments after 2001 but experienced robust growth thereafter. The average number of new international undergraduate enrollments remained flat over the period at bachelor and master’s institutions.
To summarize, research and doctoral universities enrolled more new international undergraduates, enjoyed greater net tuition revenue, and state appropriations than did their bachelor and master’s counterparts. Moreover, the number of new international undergraduate students grew much faster at research and doctoral universities than it did at bachelor and master’s institutions. These differences supported conducting separate analysis for these two groups. Large standard deviations showed there was substantial variation within subsamples, which supported regression analysis with fixed effects because this approach controlled for between unit variance.

Table 2: Panel Regression Results with Fixed Effects Between International Student Enrollment and Net Tuition Revenue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Research and Doctoral Model</th>
<th>Bachelor and Master's Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Log count of New International Undergraduate Students</td>
<td>0.040** (0.0114)</td>
<td>0.0109 (0.019)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log of Institutional Scholarships and Grants</td>
<td>0.006 (0.091)</td>
<td>-0.004 (0.0138)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log of State Appropriations</td>
<td>-0.034 (0.0411)</td>
<td>0.013 (0.0868)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log Count of Graduate Students</td>
<td>0.369** (0.1026)</td>
<td>0.0777* (0.0222)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log Count of In-State Students</td>
<td>0.053* (0.0194)</td>
<td>0.0777* (0.0222)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log Count of Out-of-State Students</td>
<td>0.0271 (0.0634)</td>
<td>0.3031* (0.1264)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log Count of Faculty Members</td>
<td>0.332 ** (0.0119)</td>
<td>0.370** (0.0186)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>1209</td>
<td>2104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Institutions</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-Squared</td>
<td>0.665</td>
<td>0.401</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Robust standard errors in parentheses.

**p<0.01, *p<0.05

Table 2 reports the results of fixed effects regression using panel data from 2000 to 2009. Results for sampled research and doctoral universities are reported in the first column and results for sampled bachelor and master’s institutions are reported in the second column. As predicted, there was a positive and statistically significant association between newly enrolled international undergraduate students and net tuition revenue at sampled research and doctoral universities. Holding other variables constant, a 1% increase in newly enrolled international undergraduates at a particular research or doctoral university predicted a 0.04% increase in net tuition revenue. Enrolling additional international undergraduate students yielded additional revenue when holding constant the number of all national (in-state and out-of-state) students enrolled. Some control variables were also significant predictors of net tuition revenue at sampled doctoral and research universities. The logged count of graduate students, logged count of in-state and out-of-state domestic students, and the log-linear time trend all predicted increased net tuition revenue when holding all other variables constant. These findings were not surprising. Tuition at public colleges and universities had increased substantially over the study period, so both increased enrollments and the passage of time were likely predictors of net tuition revenue. A reader may be surprised to notice smaller beta coefficients for international and out-of-state students than for in-state students. The surprise comes from the fact that international and out-of-state students tend to pay higher tuition than do in-state students. However, is important to
remember that findings are interpreted as elasticities (see the discussion above) that estimate the predicted percentage increase in the dependent characteristic (net-tuition revenue) of a particular institution, net of other variables. At most public HEIs in-state students account for a majority of all students. Hence, a 1% increase in in-state enrollment if in-state students represents a much larger number of individual students than a 1% increase in the number of out-of-state or international students.

Only the logged count of faculty members and the passage of time predicted the log of net tuition revenue at sampled public bachelor and master’s institutions. Unlike their research and doctoral counterparts, the log count of new international undergraduate enrollments did not predict logged net tuition revenue at these institutions. In other words, bachelor and master’s colleges and universities did not appear to net additional tuition income from enrolling additional new international students when holding total enrollments constant. For sampled bachelor and master’s institutions, no student enrollment variables predicted increased tuition revenue.

**Discussion and Conclusions**

This paper empirically assessed the possibility that public colleges and universities in the US generate net revenue by enrolling international undergraduate students. Findings indicated that sampled research and doctoral universities did realize net gains in tuition revenue by enrolling new international undergraduate students. Sampled bachelor and master’s institutions, by contrast, did not accrue net revenue returns from enrolling additional new international undergraduate students.

Results from this study indicate that tuition paying international undergraduate students may generate additional revenue for some public universities in the US. However, the ability to generate income appears to have been limited to doctoral and research institutions. What is more, the revenue generated by enrolling additional international undergraduates is modest compared to overall tuition revenue. One might add that there is considerable heterogeneity among the research and doctoral university sub-sample in terms of the number of new international students enrolled, suggesting that all universities of this type may not realize the average within unit effect. In other words, while some universities appear to be able boost revenue by enrolling international students, international students may not be cash cows for all universities in the US. It may be that only research and doctoral universities saw increased net revenue from international student enrollments because internationally mobile students seek well-known and prestigious institutions when selecting colleges and universities in the US (Lee, 2008). To put it another way, research and doctoral universities may be able to generate revenue from international student enrollment simply because relatively large numbers of students elect to attend these institutions. The finding of differential returns from participating in the international student market is consistent with research showing that some institutions are better able than others to respond to market, or quasi-market, conditions (Taylor et al., 2013). Public research and doctoral universities appear to enjoy a revenue stream from international education that is unavailable to bachelor and master’s institutions.

Gains in net tuition revenue associated with enrolling additional international undergraduate students were estimated at research and doctoral universities when holding constant the number of other students enrolled. This suggests, but does not prove, public research and doctoral universities seek additional tuition revenue not just by growing enrollments, but
also by changing the composition of their students. Findings indicate that universities may generate additional tuition revenue by shifting the composition of their student body to be more international without expanding the overall number of students enrolled. This finding is consistent with academic capitalism (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004), which predicts that universities will move into areas that lead to greater market return.

Implications

While it is plausible that revenue generation is one motivation behind international student recruitment, universities enroll international students for a variety of reasons. The fact that public research and doctoral universities accrue increased net tuition revenue by enrolling additional international undergraduate students does not necessary mean that revenue potential is the primary these HEIs enroll students from abroad. Previous research has demonstrated that HEIs enroll international students for a variety of reasons (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Verbik & Lasanowski, 2007) and the findings of this study should not be interpreted to suggest that HEIs internationalize only to generate revenue.

Moreover, policymakers and administrators should approach efforts to recruit international undergraduate students as a means of generating income cautiously. Findings from this study suggest that only HEIs that can attract large numbers of students from abroad stand to generate substantial revenue from international student fees. While it may be tempting to cash in on international education, the results of this study suggest that such efforts may not yield a large return for the many HEIs that do not have the visibility, prestige, or programmatic offerings to attract large numbers of students from abroad (Lee, 2008). It is plausible that colleges and universities that are not already well known outside of their home country may even incur net losses if their efforts to recruit international students are more costly than the income generated from tuition paid by these students. As Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) point out, efforts at academic capitalism are often financial failures. With an uncertain payoff some institutions may be wise to enter the market with caution.

To summarize, international student mobility has implications for HEIs in the US and possible implications for HEIs elsewhere. It is commonly assumed and is demonstrated by the findings of this study, there are potential financial gains for individual institutions in the US and findings from the study partly confirm this assumption. Yet, as the findings of this study also demonstrate, only some public HEIs appear to have enjoyed net revenue gains from international student enrollment. The potential for financial gain does not mean that every university that recruits students from abroad will profit.

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**AUTHOR**

**BRENDAN CANTWELL**, PhD, is an assistant professor of higher education. His research addresses the political economy of higher education and often takes a comparative and international approach. Email: brendanc@msu.edu

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Cognitive Skills Development Among International Students at Research Universities in the United States

Young K. Kim, PhD
Azusa Pacific University (USA)
David Edens, PhD
California State Polytechnic University, Pomona (USA)
Michael F. Iorio, PhD
Loma Linda University (USA)
Christie J. Curtis, PhD
Biola University (USA)
Edwin Romero, PhD
Mt. San Antonio College (USA)

Abstract

Set in the context of a statewide research university system, this study attempted to improve our understanding of cognitive skills development among international students. Specifically, this study examined how the patterns and predictors of cognitive skills development among this population differ from their domestic counterparts. The study utilized data from the 2010 University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES). This study identified unique patterns in both cognitive skills development and college experiences among international students. Findings also suggest that some college experiences, such as research engagement with faculty and satisfaction with advising, can possibly facilitate greater gains in cognitive skills among international students. The study discusses the theoretical and practical implications of the findings.

Keywords: International students, Cognitive skills development, College experience

Colleges and universities in the United States are enrolling international students at an increasing rate. In the 2011-2012 academic year, there were 31% more international students enrolled in U.S. higher education institutions than a decade ago (Open Doors, 2012). Despite the criticism that international students drain resources and capital from domestic student services and occupy seats that could be filled by domestic students, international higher education is valued in the United States for a number of reasons. First, international student recruitment has proven to be a lucrative source for admission dollars. International students contribute more than $22.7 billion to the U.S. economy each year (Open Doors, 2012). Also, international students “contribute to the host nation’s global competitiveness by swelling the numbers of highly trained
people in key disciplines” (Altbach, 2004, p. 20). Furthermore, international students add to the structural and cultural diversity of the campus population (Lee & Rice, 2007) and provide an opportunity for increased cultural awareness and diverse experiences that enrich the campus experience for all students (Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, & Van Horn, 2002).

Considering these benefits associated with the presence of international students on campuses, college and university leaders acknowledge the importance of providing the necessary college experiences to meet the academic expectations of international students (Altbach, 1989; Cole & Ahmadi, 2003; Grey, 2002; Lee & Rice, 2007; Misra, Crist, & Burant, 2003; Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005). While there is an adequate body of research in higher education on international student population, they tend to mostly focus on either characteristics of successful international students or their retention/persistence (e.g., Bista & Foster, 2011; Grey, 2002; Lee, 2010; Lee & Rice, 2007, Mamiseishvili, 2010; Pedersen, 1991), relatively ignoring the examination of their actual “development” or “growth” during the college years and college experiences that contribute to such development or growth. In a methodological sense, most of the studies have also used data from a single institution. As an attempt to address these research gaps, this study examines patterns in and predictors of cognitive skills development among international students, utilizing a large, statewide college student dataset.

The purpose of this study is to improve the understanding of international students, by identifying background characteristics, precollege experiences, and college experiences that contribute to their cognitive skills development. Moreover, this study also examines how such factors as well as patterns in cognitive skills development among international students differ from their domestic counterparts. Set in the context of a statewide research university system, this study pursues the following three research questions: (1) Do international students differ in their cognitive skills development as well as in their background characteristics, precollege experiences, and college experiences from their domestic counterparts? (2) What student background characteristics, precollege experiences, and college experiences contribute to cognitive skills development among international students? (3) How do the predictors of cognitive skills development among international students differ from those among domestic students?

Literature Review

Cognitive Skills Development in College

Among other skills development (e.g., social, emotional, physical), cognitive skills development refers to “the acquisition of general intellectual or cognitive competencies and skills, which if they are not so directly tied to a particular curriculum or course of study, are nevertheless thought to be salient outcomes of postsecondary education” (Jones, 1994, as cited in Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 155). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) acknowledge that these cognitive skills receive many names: “critical thinking, reflective judgment, epistemological development, and so on” (p. 155). Moreover, cognitive skills development includes a variety of constructs and approaches such as intelligence, scientific problem-solving, metacognition, motivation to learn, and learning styles (King, 2009). While each of those terms differs slightly in concept and application, it seems clear that cognitive skills development is among important college student outcomes given its “applicability and utility across a wide range of different content areas” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 155).
While there are some mixed findings depending on the type of measures, researchers agree that college attendance generally facilitates students’ cognitive skills development, including better critical thinking, more skillful pursuit of answers to difficult questions, and greater flexibility in understanding opinions other than their own (Doyle, Edison, & Pascarella, 1998; Mines, King, Hood, & Wood, 1990; Pascarella, Bohr, Nora, & Terenzini, 1996; Rykiel, 1995). Studies also identified some specific college experiences that might contribute to gains or growth in students’ cognitive skills: academic involvement/effort (Astin, 1993; Carini & Kuh, 2003; Volkwein, Valle, Parmely, Blose, & Zhou, 2000; Whitmire, 1998), peer interaction (Astin, 1993; Kitchener, Wood, & Jensen, 2000; Twale & Sanders, 1999; Whitt, Edison, Pascarella, Nora, & Terenzini, 1999), student-faculty interaction (Ishiyama, 2002; Kim & Sax, 2009, 2011; Kuh, 1995), service involvement (Astin & Sax, 1998; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Vogelgesang & Astin, 2000), and diversity engagement (Kitchener, Wood, & Jensen, 2000; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996). These conclusions stand today and can be reasonably associated with international students as well.

Cognitive Skills Development Among International Students in the United States

The existing literature generally supports cognitive skills growth in domestic students during their postsecondary years, and the implication is that cognitive skills growth occurs in international students as well. Even though very few studies specifically examined cognitive skills development among students whose home country is not the United States, some understanding of the differences in cognitive skills development between international students and their domestic counterparts may be derived from some studies on cognitive skills development among different racial/ethnic groups. Kugelmass and Ready (2011) identified disparities in the cognitive skills development among racial/ethnic groups prior to college entry and after their collegiate experience. Similarly, Arum and Roksa (2008) reported that the cognitive skills gap between African American and White students widens during the first two years of college. After controlling for socio-demographic variables, the African-White disparity in academic growth was 22% (as cited in Kuglemass & Ready, 2011). Given the findings that significant differences exist in cognitive skills development depending on students’ racial/ethnic or cultural background, it might be assumed that there are differences in cognitive skills development among international students and their domestic peers. Indeed, Kugelmass and Ready (2011) indicated that international students in the United States tend to report greater gains in cognitive skills compared to their domestic counterparts. While these previous studies examined the differences in cognitive or intellectual development across different racial groups within domestic college student population, Zhao, Kuh, and Carini (2005) found similar types of racial/ethnic differences within international student population.

On the other hand, international students seem to face some challenges that inhibit their cognitive skills development in colleges and universities in the United States. For example, Al-Sharideh and Goe (1998) identified the loneliness experienced by international students as a challenge. They argued that these students feel isolated from their family and friends in their home country, and the loneliness adversely affects their cognitive skills development during college years. Hechanova-Alampay, Buehr, Christiansen, and Van Horn (2002) added intense feelings of anxiety and confusion as additional obstacles for international students to overcome. Moreover, research suggests that international students find American customs unfamiliar and interaction with Americans challenging. Lee and Rice (2007) found that international students perceive a lack of desire in Americans to understand a culture other than their own and that many
international students lose social privilege in their native countries when they arrive in U.S. college campuses. Lee (2010) also identified cultural and language differences as other challenges international students face during their college years in the U.S.

While international students are not alone in the challenges that they face during their postsecondary years, the challenges or problems tend to be more exaggerated for international students compared to domestic students given their unique situation (e.g., they are away from their home environment/culture). This unique situation often leads international students to utilize different coping strategies to overcome their challenges than their domestic counterparts. For example, domestic students participate in more campus activities and seek a psychological sense of belonging to improve their cognitive skills development and personal growth (Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005). In contrast, finding an affinity group is elusive for many international students, which discourages them from participating in campus activities or events. This lack of social connection may interfere with the degree of cognitive skills development among international students in college. Zhao et al. (2005) also found that academic achievement seems to become a coping mechanism for international students to manage the stress associated with their college experiences. In other words, they argue that international students tend to heavily focus on their academic efforts to compensate for other aspects of their college experiences with which they feel dissatisfied.

Studies have also documented some college experiences that meaningfully contribute to cognitive skills development and other college outcomes among international students. Grayson (2008) found that active involvement in class activities and having no problem in making friends positively influence intellectual development among international students in the United States. However, Grayson (2007) also found that international students tend to be less involved in class activities compared to their domestic peers and spend more time in the library or in studying than domestic students. Similarly, Mamiseishvili (2012) and Zhao, Kuh, and Carini (2005) indicated that international students in the United States are more likely to be engaged in educationally purposeful activities including student-faculty interactions than their domestic peers. Other studies also found that language proficiency and the level of resiliency are significantly related to international students’ academic success and other college outcomes (Andrade, 2009; Mamiseishvili, 2012; Stoynoff, 1997).

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework used to guide this study is based on three theories: Astin’s (1993) Input-Environment-Output model, Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman’s (1995) Transition Theory, and Love and Guthrie’s (1999) theory on the cultural differences in cognitive development. Using Astin’s (1993) Input-Environment-Output (IEO) model as a conceptual framework of the study, this study attempts to investigate the unique effect of college experiences on college students’ cognitive skills development by minimizing the confounding effects of student inputs.

Also, the current study assumes that international students have a unique set of college experiences that impact their cognitive skills development. Particularly, it is hypothesized that international students are transitioning into a new country and a new culture, as well as their new college environment; the degree to which an individual can cope with transitions is dependent upon the resources available and the individual’s utilization of those resources. In this study, Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman’s (1995) transition theory is used to explain the possible
impact of transitions on international students’ college experiences and outcomes. Furthermore, this study considers the role played by cultural differences on cognitive skills development among international students by utilizing Love and Guthrie’s (1999) theory.

Method

Data Source and Sample
This study utilized the 2010 University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES), a biannual statewide survey administered to all undergraduate students on 10 University of California (UC) campuses. This survey is administered by the Office of Student Research at the University of California Berkeley, and is managed by the University of California Office of the President.

Given that this study is interested in measuring actual “development” or “growth” in cognitive skills among international students after they were fully exposed to actual college experiences, the study sample was limited to junior and senior undergraduate students (n = 32,426). The final analytical sample included 3% international students, 58% female students, and 54% first-generation students. The racial/ethnic composition of the sample was as follows: 34% White, 39% Asian-American, 14% Latino, and 3% African-American.

Variables
Overall, this study utilized 19 variables for data analysis, 11 of which were factor scales (see Appendix A for the description of factor scale structures). The dependent variable of the study was college students’ cognitive skills in their junior or senior year. To measure the cognitive skills, a factor scale ($\alpha = .85$) was developed using five survey items assessing students’ self-rating on their abilities to: (1) think analytically and critically, (2) write clearly and effectively, (3) read and comprehend academic material, (4) speak clearly and effectively in English, and (5) understand a specific field of study major.

According to Astin’s I-E-O model (1993), independent variables of this study were organized in temporal order as follows: (1) student background characteristics, (2) pre-college experiences, and (3) college experiences. Student background characteristics included student gender, first-generation status, social class, and English speaking status, while pre-college characteristics included pretest measure (students’ cognitive skills when they started the college) and high school GPA. College experiences included a broad range of variables thought to be associated with students’ cognitive skills development, such as research engagement with faculty, satisfaction with major, satisfaction with advising, course engagement, and extracurricular engagement.

Analysis
After screening and cleaning the data based on recommendations from Tabachnick and Fidell (2007), the statistical analyses were conducted utilizing IBM SPSS Statistics version 20.0. First, we conducted multiple sets of t-tests, cross-tabulations with Chi-square tests, and ANOVAs to examine the differences in cognitive skills development, background characteristics, precollege experiences, and college experiences between international and domestic college students. Then, a series of hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted to identify the predictors of college students’ cognitive skills development and examine how the predictors differ across international and domestic students.
Results

Differences in Cognitive Skills Development

The results showed that both domestic and international students exhibited statistically significant positive change (i.e., growth or development) in cognitive skills during their college years (see Table 1), while domestic students reported a relatively larger growth than their international peers.

When it comes to individual items of cognitive skills factor scale, domestic students and international students had similar mean scores for changes in critical thinking skills. In contrast, differences between the two groups were evident when evaluating changes in both the speaking and writing abilities. Results showed that international students’ gains in cognitive skills development during college years were mostly related to development in language-related abilities. International students reported a substantially greater development in the ability to speak clearly and effectively than their domestic counterparts. Growth in clear and effective writing skills was also greater for international students than for domestic students. On the other hand, domestic students showed larger gains than international students in reading comprehension skills and ability to understand academic major.

Differences in Background Characteristics, Pre-College Experiences, and College Experiences

Table 2 presents the differences in student background characteristics, pre-college experiences, and college experiences between domestic and international students. In general, both populations reported their socioeconomic status as middle class. As expected, the international student population learned to speak English later in life, whereas the domestic students were mostly native English speakers.
Table 2: Differences in Background Characteristics, Pre-College Experiences, and College Experiences between Domestic and International Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Domestic</th>
<th>International</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
<th>$F$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>58.35%</td>
<td>51.39%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>41.65%</td>
<td>48.61%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>High School GPA</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.01-2.00</td>
<td>0.01%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.01-3.00</td>
<td>5.99%</td>
<td>1.86%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.01-4.00</td>
<td>94.00%</td>
<td>98.14%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>First Generation Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not First Generation</td>
<td>45.91%</td>
<td>58.16%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Generation</td>
<td>54.09%</td>
<td>41.84%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Class</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-income</td>
<td>11.93%</td>
<td>1.67%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Class</td>
<td>24.11%</td>
<td>14.84%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Class</td>
<td>39.52%</td>
<td>48.72%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Middle</td>
<td>23.21%</td>
<td>31.15%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wealthy</td>
<td>1.23%</td>
<td>3.59%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>When Learned to Speak English</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Speaker</td>
<td>67.11%</td>
<td>5.75%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before Age 10</td>
<td>27.64%</td>
<td>46.41%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After Age 10</td>
<td>5.25%</td>
<td>47.84%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research Engagement with Faculty Scale</strong></td>
<td>0.32 (.47)</td>
<td>0.33 (.47)</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Satisfaction with Quality of Instruction and Major Courses</strong></td>
<td>5.05 (1.76)</td>
<td>4.60 (1.83)</td>
<td>46.60***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Satisfaction with Advising</strong></td>
<td>4.70 (1.80)</td>
<td>4.06 (1.73)</td>
<td>93.54***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Satisfaction with Library Support</strong></td>
<td>5.40 (1.27)</td>
<td>5.27 (1.39)</td>
<td>6.84**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Course Engagement Scale</strong></td>
<td>3.17 (1.05)</td>
<td>2.96 (1.02)</td>
<td>29.63***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Critical Reasoning and Assessment of Reasoning</strong></td>
<td>4.90 (1.98)</td>
<td>4.44 (2.00)</td>
<td>39.31***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Elevated Academic Effort</strong></td>
<td>4.93 (1.88)</td>
<td>5.02 (1.87)</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Extracurricular Engagement</strong></td>
<td>5.22 (1.58)</td>
<td>5.30 (1.62)</td>
<td>1.99</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time Employed</strong></td>
<td>4.78 (1.74)</td>
<td>4.27 (1.72)</td>
<td>68.78***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time Allocation: Study and Academic Activities Outside of Class</strong></td>
<td>3.90 (1.59)</td>
<td>4.07 (1.72)</td>
<td>11.28**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

One noticeable difference between the two populations was their level of satisfaction with college. International students were generally less satisfied with their college experience, as
compared to domestic students. International students reported significantly lower levels of satisfaction with the quality of instruction and courses in the major, advising, and library support. The lower level of satisfaction is noteworthy because satisfaction is a significant predictor of cognitive skills development for international students, which will be discuss later in this paper.

Finally, an interesting pattern was observed in classroom engagement versus engagement with activities outside the classroom among international students. International students in this study were less engaged in the classroom environment, whereas they invested more time in academic activities and effort outside of class.

**Differences in the Predictors of Cognitive Skills Development**

Table 3 presents the results of multiple regression analyses on cognitive skills development.

**Table 3: Results of Regression Analyses Predicting Cognitive Skills Development for International and Domestic Students**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>International Students (N=532)</th>
<th>Domestic Students (N=22,512)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$B$</td>
<td>$SE_B$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Background</td>
<td>0.09***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-3.80</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-generation status</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social class</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age when learned to speak English</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-college Experiences</td>
<td>0.44***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretest: Cognitive skills</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS GPA</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Experiences</td>
<td>0.60***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research engagement with faculty scale</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with quality of instruction and courses in the major</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with advising</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with library Support</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course engagement scale</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical reasoning and assessment of reasoning</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elevated academic effort</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extracurricular engagement</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time employed</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time allocation: Study and other academic activities outside of class</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001
The regression model estimating the cognitive skills development among international students explained 60% of the variation in cognitive skills development ($F(16, 531) = 50.42, p < .001$), while the regression model for domestic students explained 51% of the variation in cognitive skills development ($F(16, 22,495) = 1,457.36, p < .001$).

Each block in the regression analyses was statistically significant for both populations. All but two of the variables (research engagement with faculty and time allocation to studies and academic activities outside of class) were significant predictors of cognitive skills development for domestic students. For international students, however, research engagement with faculty, satisfaction with the quality of instruction and courses in the major, satisfaction with advising, course engagement, critical reasoning and assessment of learning, and extracurricular engagement were significant predictors of cognitive skills development.

**Limitations**

While findings of this study contribute to the existing literature about cognitive skills development among international students, this study is limited in several aspects. First, this study utilized survey data from a public, highly selective research university system on the West Coast; hence, the findings from the present study may not be equivalently applicable to other types of institutions (e.g., private, non-doctoral/research universities). Also, given that international students were severely underrepresented (3.0% of the full sample) in the data, the current study was unable to disaggregate these students by racial/ethnic subgroups. Thus, this study is limited in the ability to fully address the unique patterns of cognitive skills development by racial/ethnic subgroups within international students. Another limitation is that the use of a secondary dataset limited the selection of variables for the analysis. Finally, it is also important to acknowledge that due to the difference in the number of cases between international and domestic students, the statistical reliability of the findings tend to be more robust for domestic students than that of international students.

**Discussion and Implications**

Using a statewide college student dataset, this study attempted to improve the understanding of the patterns and predictors of cognitive skills development among international undergraduate students in the United States. This study not only demonstrates significant differences in the level of cognitive skills development between international and domestic undergraduate students in the United States but also reveals both similarities and distinctions in the predictors of cognitive skills development across the two groups. Taken together, the findings of the study provide some meaningful insights to higher education research and practice.

First, the findings suggest that cognitive skills development seems to occur through different mechanisms for international students in the United States, as compared to their domestic peers. The gains in cognitive skills among international students tend to be related to their language skills growth. The results showed that international students experienced significant growth in speaking as well as writing abilities over the college years, which in turn related to their overall cognitive skills development. In other words, the findings suggest that international students tend to experience greater development in their cognitive skills as they are becoming more immersed in their new language and cultural environment. Knowing that the
mechanism for cognitive skills development differs for international students as compared to domestic students, a suggestion for institutions of higher education that enroll international students is to provide specific services to support the language skills development of these students. International students are learning both the skills and information they need for their major, as well as the language in which they are being taught. It seems clear from the findings that supporting language growth is directly related to overall cognitive growth for international students.

Another key finding is that international students are generally less satisfied with their college experience and less engaged in the classroom when compared to their domestic counterparts. This finding is particularly interesting when considering the other findings of this study that international students were more engaged in academic activities outside of the classroom. The corollary of this finding is that there may be a relationship between engagement (both inside and outside of classroom) and satisfaction that needs further research within the international student population. This finding is particularly true considering that researchers examining traditional student populations have noted a link between engagement and satisfaction (Edens, 2012; Schreiner & Louis, 2006; Schreiner & Louis, 2008).

Finally, it is interesting to find that international students seem to benefit less from educationally meaningful college experiences than their domestic counterparts do. For example, both satisfactions with instruction/advising and course engagement are significant and positive predictors of cognitive skills development among international students. However, this research suggests that international students are generally less satisfied with the college experience and are less engaged in the classroom than their domestic peers. As a result, it is important for administrators serving international student populations to acknowledge the positive link between these college experiences and cognitive skills development when developing the policies, systems, and practices to support the development of this population.

Implications for Research and Practice

First, this study supports existing theories regarding classroom engagement and the cognitive skills development of international students. Grayson (2008) found that engagement in the classroom is the strongest predictor of intellectual development for international students. Findings of the present study are consistent with Grayson’s and other previous findings (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005), demonstrating the positive relationship between international students’ classroom engagement and their cognitive skills development. However, this study took a step further by suggesting that this relationship seems to be true regardless of the culture of origin. In other words, students who more frequently ask insightful questions, incorporate learning from other courses, and contribute to class discussions tend to obtain greater gains in cognitive skills than those who do not or do so less frequently; this finding holds across groups—international and domestic college students.

This study is also informative when considering the effect of culture on students’ cognitive skills development. Love and Guthrie (1999) theorized that cognitive development is impacted by culture and that the culture in which a student develops will affect the manner of knowledge acquirement. This current study found that international students’ research engagement with faculty is positively associated with their cognitive skills development. However, this was not the case for domestic students. This difference may be attributed to the cultures of origin, thus confirming Love and Guthrie’s theory. Further research is required to
examine both why research engagement with faculty improves cognitive skills development for international students while it does not for domestic students and what aspects of cultures of the two groups explain this difference.

Furthermore, the findings on research engagement with faculty have several practical implications with regard to the role that faculty play in the cognitive skills development of international students. The findings suggest that faculty members should understand the educational benefits of their collaboration with international students and provide multiple channels through which international students can be involved in their research to facilitate cognitive skills development among this population. In addition, faculty who serve as academic advisors to international students should play an important role in their cognitive skills development. Lee and Rice (2007) found that international students need additional support with navigation of educational resources in comparison to domestic students. In this study, satisfaction with advising was the strongest positive predictor of cognitive skills development among international students. Thus, the extra support that international students receive from academic advising likely correlates with their cognitive skills development. Advisors working with international students should be granted additional time and resources to direct international students, which in turn will enhance their cognitive skills development.

It is also important to note that being a first-generation college student is a negative predictor of cognitive development for international students, but not for domestic students. This difference is likely due to the existence of established and effective support systems for domestic first-generation college students. International student support services should model the support efforts provided to domestic first-generation college students in order to assure their cognitive skills development, while being sensitive to the cultural and developmental differences of the international student.

Finally, the present study provides some insights into the recruitment of international students in the U.S. higher education institutions. To successfully recruit international students, institutions and their members should understand which college experiences lead to the success of international students. Institutions should also be able to demonstrate that appropriate support services exist to help international students meet their goals once they arrive. Academic achievement is the most important facet of the college experience for international students, based on the amount of time these students spend in academic activities in comparison to domestic students. Therefore, it is important to establish advising programs and faculty research partnerships for international students in order to best recruit and support these students in their development.

**Conclusion**

International students consider academic achievement as an important factor when choosing to study in the United States (Grey, 2002; Heggins & Jackson, 2003; Lee & Rice, 2007; Mamiseishvili, 2010; Misra, Crist, & Burant, 2003). More specifically, international students expect positive changes (i.e., growth or development) in their college outcomes (Arkoudis, 2009; Grey, 2002; Heggins & Jackson, 2003; Mamiseishvili, 2010; Misra, et al) when studying abroad. Therefore, cognitive skills development is an aspect of international student development that warrants considerable attention (King, 2009). Considering there has been little research that examines the relationship between college experiences and educational outcomes for international students (Grey, 2002; Misra, et al., 2003), the findings from this study meaningfully
contributes to this body of research. Findings from this study should assist college and university professionals in understanding international students on their campuses and strategizing interventions to facilitate learning and development of this population.

Moreover, much of the earlier research concerning international students has utilized a single-institution dataset (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Arnone, 2004; Bista & Foster, 2011; Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, & Van Horn, 2002; Heggins & Jackson, 2003; Lee, 2010; Li & Kaye, 1998). This study, however, utilized data collected at multiple institutions within a large, statewide university system. As a result, not only did the exploration of cognitive skills development add to the understanding of academic achievement among international students during the college years, but also these findings from multiple-institutions data provide additional knowledge in some areas that have already been explored at single institutions.

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**NOTE** - The authors presented an earlier version of this paper at the annual meeting of the American Educational Researcher Association, Philadelphia, PA, in April 2014.

**AUTHORS**

**YOUNG K. KIM, Ph.D.**, is an associate professor in the Department of Higher Education at Azusa Pacific University. She received her Ph.D. in Higher Education at the University of California, Los Angeles. Her research interests include college student development, conditional effects of college experience, and diversity and educational equity in higher education. Dr. Kim has published in prestigious peer reviewed journals in the field of higher education, including *Research in Higher Education* and *The Review of Higher Education*. Email: YKKim@apu.edu

**DAVID EDENS, Ph.D.**, is a lecturer in the Human Nutrition and Food Science at Cal Poly Pomona. He received his Ph.D. in Higher Education at Azusa Pacific University. His research has focused on student success and learning among diverse student populations including international students, non-traditional students, and students attending for-profit colleges and universities. Dr. Edens has presented at conferences such as AERA and CSRDE, as well as published for Noel-Levitz and in the *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education*. Email: Dredens@cpp.edu

**MICHAEL F. IORIO** is an assistant professor in the Department of Radiation Technology at Loma Linda University; he is a Ph.D. candidate in higher education at Azusa Pacific University. His research interests include college student and faculty development, diversity and equity in higher education, and educational patterns among first-generation college students. Email: Miorio@llu.edu

**CHRISTIE J. CURTIS, Ph.D.**, is Graduate Chair and TPA Mentor of the School of Education at Biola University. She received her Ph.D. in Higher Education at Azusa Pacific University. Her research interests include the challenges and benefits associated with international students, the importance of writing proficiency among domestic and international students, and the spirituality characteristics of educators teaching in other countries. Dr. Curtis has authored five levels of *Grammar and Writing* (Houghton-Mifflin) that has resulted in sales in excess of 1.5 million dollars. Email: Christie.j.curtis@biola.edu

**EDWIN ROMERO** coordinates student activities at Mt. San Antonio College. He is a doctoral candidate at Azusa Pacific University in the Ph.D. in Higher Education program. His research interests include student-faculty interaction, pathways to success for community college students, psychological engagement, and educational equity in higher education. Edwin has published in peer reviewed journals in the field of higher education, most recently in the *Journal of Applied Research in the Community College*. Email: Eromero44@mtsac.edu
The Not-So-Easy Road of Overseas Study: Life like an Outsider

Yolanda Palmer, PhD
University of Saskatchewan (Canada)

Abstract
Contemplating my graduate student experience overseas, I constantly viewed myself as an isolate, one who did not belong in the new community of practice. I encountered numerous lingua-cultural, academic and social challenges which led to my lack of community and belonging. This paper is a reflection of my experiences as an international graduate student in a Canadian university. Through this reflection, I explore some of my most potent experiences and how these influenced me as I sojourned through the not-so-easy road of study overseas. This paper also describes the processes I used that enabled me to successfully maneuver and negotiate my journey on the not-so-easy-road of studying in a post-secondary institution overseas.

Keywords: International students, community of practice, sense of belonging and community

As I ruminate on my international student experience the lyrics of Buju Banton’s song “Not an easy road” come readily to my mind: It is not an easy road..., but who feels it knows... Lord help me sustain these blows... Obstacles in your way to overcome first... (1995) became my daily chant as I faced each new day in the university. These words constantly reminded me of my journey as an international graduate student setting out my quest to study abroad. The road is never easy but I had to learn the ways of the new community and be successful in my academic pursuits.

The social nature of learning (Bourdieu, 1986; Vygotsky, 1988) predicates that students should experience a sense of community within learning environments. McMillan and Chavis (1986) defined sense of community as a “feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together” (p. 9). Lave and Wenger (1991) stressed the importance of belonging and participating in the community of practice. For Lave and Wenger, belonging and fitting in enhances the learning opportunities and successes of individuals. Also important in achieving a sense of community is a sense of place—being comfortable in the physical environment—in which they study.

My First Day as an International Student
As I engaged my program of study as an international student, in 2011, I felt like an isolate in the community of practice—groups of people who share a common concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly—and lacking a sense of belonging. I immediately thought, “I am a long way from home.” As a Jamaican scholar, I was aware of the imminent journey upon which I was embarking. Entering the Canadian post-secondary institution from a rich cultural, linguistic and academic background, I was highly
aware of the differences between “here” and “there.” My approach to studies and daily life contrasted starkly to the way things were done at the university.

Clearly etched in my mind are the conflicting feelings I experienced on my first day on the not-so-easy road of international studentship. I approached the class with masked feelings of excitement and nervousness. I had the uneasy feeling of being in a foreign institution and found myself wondering: What was I thinking? I began questioning my position in the new academy, What am I doing here? Do I really belong here? During the process of the customary introductions it became clear to me that I was the “other” amidst the group. My Jamaican accent was pronounced and obviously different. To make matters worse, I did not understand nor could I react to the banter of other members of the class. As I attended university functions and even got involved in church and community activities, I struggled with my position among the groups. I constantly reflected on my life back home and the varied academic, social and cultural differences within the new communities of practice.

As an Outsider: My Attempts at Belonging
Our cultural identities differ one from the other and determine the way we respond to stimuli around us; it fuels how we perform verbally and nonverbally (Bonvillian, 2000). Being a Jamaican female largely dictates how I act in certain situations, how I learn and how I appropriate myself within the learning institution. My ideas, ways of thinking and doing things never seemed to align with those of the new environment. These experiences and feelings reminded me of the work of bell hooks (1988), who in her book Talking back, writes about the isolation and bewilderment she felt as she studied in a predominantly white college. A particular area of her story that resonated with me was the fact that as a minority student she felt she did not fit into the university and classes she attended, but was determined not to be a failure. I too understood that I was different and possessed diverse skills and was determined to do what it took to be successful.

My background as a teacher and scholar predisposed me to certain deep-rooted notions of schooling and the expectations of being a student. I had mastered my roles of being both a teacher and a student in Jamaica. So when I decided to engage in studies as an international student, I thought I was ready for the journey; after all, I had significant experiences as a student. After my experience as an international student, I realized that the two experiences significantly differed, and the cultural ethos of the university and its surrounding community was not similar to that with which I had become accustomed in Jamaica. Further, this was exasperated by my lack of the cultural, social and sometimes economic capital which would have increased my chances of gaining a sense of belonging within my new community of practice.

In my home country, Jamaica, I learned to show respect to elders and people in authority. Respect in this regard meant that I learned to address people the “proper way” by adorning them with their corresponding accolades when greeting and or communicating with them. The trend of addressing professors at my new institution by their first names, rather than the customary acknowledgement of “doctor” or “professor” was strange to me. Furthermore, the academic culture, rhetoric and protocols used and expected of me were foreign to me. Words, terminologies and protocols in my previous studentship with which I had become accustomed were sometimes unrecognized in the new academy. Added to this, the language that permeated the academic and general local milieu was unfamiliar to me and other foreign students. Academic culture in my previous studentship, in regard to written presentations, was marked by strict rules and guidelines regarding how papers were to be written. Owing to the perceived
neutrality of academic writing the use of the first person in writing tasks was often highlighted and identified as inappropriate. Entering into this new institution the culture of writing was characteristically different. Evident to me, in the host academy, is the use of critical thought and a more relaxed atmosphere in the production of assigned coursework. I was accustomed to writing to structured questions that outlined exactly, on point, what I needed to write and what my professor hoped to read. I soon learned that this was not the culture of the particular department of which I was a part. Free thought and critical thinking were encouraged and students were allowed to write about their own interests.

As I reflect, I realized that not only was I faced with a lack of belonging and community but also suffered from a lack of sense of place. I am from Jamaica, which is physically and geographically located within the tropical zone. Hence, as a people we experience higher temperatures year-round. I have never before experienced such bone-chilling cold, nor was I accustomed to seeing and feeling the white fluffy snow that forms part of the Canadian physical landscape for prolonged periods. As I permeated the path to scholarship, I struggled with the shifting temperatures and especially with the low temperatures during the winter period.

**Negotiating the New Academic Culture**

As I progressed on the journey from being an international graduate student to becoming a scholar, I realized that I entered the environment from a country with a rich colonial history steeped in hegemony that had Anglicized my perspectives. These viewpoints fostered expectations and assumptions about my culture and cultures globally. I accepted and realized that I was in a new community of practice and I did not particularly feel that I fit in. As a learner, I understood that learning is transformational and that if I were to be transformed I had to take responsibility for my own learning and journey in the university and anticipate my role as a scholar and educator to assist others in finding their ways. Essentially, I had to engage the community in which I found myself and through situated learning move inward from being a peripheral learner into the community of practice through my earned capital. This recognition and the motivation I had to accomplish my goal of successful completion of my graduate studies helped me to begin to critically reflect on my role as a student and individual. Who I am and what I hoped to accomplish were “put through the wringer,” and from this process of contemplation I was able to look past the issues I perceived and encountered.

Kim (2001) argued that for international students to become insiders they must participate in academic, cultural and social activities within the new environment. Participation in these activities, according to Kim, provides these individuals the requisite knowledge, skills, sensitivities and behaviors that will allow them to function as members of the group. For me, acquiring these skills was difficult because I had entered the community of practice already acculturated in my Jamaican culture and ethnic behaviors. However, through a multilayered practice of observing, listening, speaking, reading and writing I became engaged in self-praxis. Praxis involves “critical reflection—and action upon—a situation of some degree shared by persons with common interests and common needs” (Greene, 1978, p. 100). Essentially, I needed to take ownership of my life and its trajectory so I became an active participant in my learning and through this I began to strengthen and interweave strands of language, literacy and content learning (Zwiers, 2008).

As I reflected on my experiences, I came to the understanding that my strength was evinced through my becoming more participatory in academic discussions, as I learned increasingly challenging concepts and developed the language abilities to act accordingly. I
realized that which caused me to “bounce back” came through my religious beliefs. When faced with challenges I reflected on and channeled my energies through these beliefs. Realizing and accepting my situation in the social world of the academy, I was able to gain access to sources of understanding through a growing involvement within the social practice of the classroom community. Through peripheral participation and practice, I have been transformed from a state of powerlessness and dependence to one of empowerment, self-reliance and independence.

**Continuing on the Journey: Making the Trek Easier**

After more than two years as a full-time graduate student in Canada, I have come to recognize and appreciate my position. I often felt like an invader in the spaces and places of local students. As a newcomer, I struggled with being in a different social, lingua-cultural and academic environment. I felt the pangs of nostalgia while glaring into wild isolation. I battled the harsh weather conditions and contemplated and overcame dire economic odds.

Yet, as I grew to appreciate the ethos of the institution my conversations and interactions with local and international students as well as faculty and other staff within the University continually left me with mixed feelings. I was torn between “there” and “here”: my country of origin, Jamaica, and Canada, my country of temporary settlement. I wandered between the two worlds because I knew I had to return to my homeland and regain my life after completion of my studies. Yet, I had to live and fit into the Canadian culture and lifestyle. I was always conscious of my outsider position; this kept me grounded and focused on being successful. It was not an easy road but through participation, praxis and practice it got easier as the days progressed.

**REFERENCES**


**AUTHOR**

**YOLANDA PALMER** is a sessional lecturer in the college of education at the University of Saskatchewan, Canada. Her areas of interest and research include transcultural academic literacies, multilingual and multicultural education, ecology of languages, pedagogies of language, triple learning and lingua-cultural identities. Email: yolanda.palmer@usask.ca
Since 1983, the Japanese government has worked to implement various reforms to make higher education in Japan more attractive to international students (Horie, 2002). Verbik and Lasanowski (2007) have identified Japan as an “evolving destination” (p. 14) in international mobility with a growing number of international students choosing to study in Japan.

In the book titled, Having a Fulfilling Life as an International Student in Japan, Chinthaka Premachandra presents readers with a guide to succeeding in the classroom and navigating other areas of the international student experience in Japan. In the first chapter, Premachandra discusses the importance of international students’ Japanese language proficiency leading up to their studies. The author mentions that while there are some Japanese universities that use English as a medium of instruction in some classes, English speakers still need to focus on learning Japanese in order to be comfortable and successful during their time in Japan. In chapter 2, the author stresses the importance of learning the Japanese language during his discussion of enrollment into the six levels of study including Japanese Language School, Junior College, College of Technology, Professional Training College, University, and Graduate School.

Chapter 3 provides information for those who have an interest in continuing their education to the next level of study while in Japan. The author explains that the admissions process consists of an interview and either a written examination or a transfer by recommendation. As the interview is standard, Premachandra provides tips for a successful interview experience, including receiving feedback from professors and peers. In chapter 4, the author addresses classroom work and other academic concerns. He discusses the importance of registering for the correct courses, as many international students are not proficient with the Japanese language. The author warns that even those who attend Japanese Language School will likely have difficulty fully understanding the language and knowing the meaning of the many technical terms. Therefore, it is important for international students to follow up on lessons with classmates and professors to be sure that they understand important concepts.

Chapter 5 proves to be particularly informative as it introduces readers to research expectations at each level of study. The author highlights the expectation that students will conduct research at all levels, beginning with undergraduate study and possibly continuing
research on the same topics as they progress to masters and doctoral studies. International students who enter Japan at the graduate level generally must spend time gaining research experience prior to being fully enrolled in a graduate program. In chapter 6, Premachandra provides information on the job search process that students might begin after completing studies at each level. He states that there are generally two ways to attain employment after completing one’s studies: school recommendation and free application. Premachandra reiterates the importance of achieving excellent marks in school and highlights the critical role that Japanese language skills play in gaining employment because academic standing weighs heavily in the hiring process. After explaining the costs that are associated with education and job searching in Japan, the author dedicates chapter 7 to sharing introductory information on attaining scholarships. He notes several types of scholarships, including foreign government scholarships, Japanese government scholarships, scholarships provided by Japanese universities, and scholarships offered by private non-government organizations within Japan. Many of these scholarships are acquired through school recommendation, and there is a particular emphasis on academic excellence.

In chapter 8, the author answers questions about the type of housing available to international students as well as the process of obtaining housing while in Japan. The author shares information on school dormitories and regional international student halls that are embedded in cities. In addition, he mentions dormitories managed by private companies and the option of a homestay with a Japanese family, which can provide an international student with the opportunity to learn Japanese culture and norms. In the final substantive chapter, Premachandra discusses the processes associated with part-time work. He cautions that international students need to balance learning the language and completing course work and, therefore, should not attempt to work more than part-time and only if necessary. Premachandra continues to emphasize the importance of learning Japanese, reminding readers that language ability is also necessary for finding part-time employment.

In Having a Fulfilling Life as an International Student in Japan, based on his experience studying and working in Japan, Premachandra presents a guidebook that is brief, easy to read, and offers prefatory and practical information for international students at all postsecondary levels. While the intention of this brief manual is to assist students from all places and at all levels, this work would be strengthened significantly by focusing on one audience (e.g., international students at the graduate level). In less than 100 pages, the author attempts to cover many topics for many audiences. This means offering very little detail on any one specific issue and giving readers only brief and rudimentary information on topics related to their situations. The suggested audience for this book would include undergraduate students who are at the beginning stages of considering study abroad in Japan.

References


International Student’s Guide to American Colleges


Reviewed by Marguerite J. Dennis, MJ Dennis Consulting (USA)

In the opening pages of *The International Student’s Guide to American Colleges*, the author lays out in a clear and organized way the purpose of the book, which is to assist international students in figuring out the type of American college or university that is best for them and to provide the tools needed to build their college lists.

The author promises that by the end of the book, prospective international college students will be able to identify the characteristics of the 176 profiled schools that match their preferences and will be able to compile a list of 8 to 12 schools that will meet their future academic needs. The author assists students in cutting through the confusion and anxiety often associated with applying to American colleges and universities and financing an American degree.

The College Match Profile Method instructs prospective students on how to build a list of preferences when selecting schools and how to determine the reasons for attending school in the United States. The author explains that for some students, that means the prestige factor associated with U.S. colleges and universities. For others, it is the academic structure of American schools and for many other students it is the perceived unique educational experience offered by U.S. colleges and universities.

The book is organized into three sections with a useful list of resources and glossary of terms at the end of the publication.

**Section 1** focuses on the different aspects of the college experience, including the differences between colleges and universities, public schools vs. private schools, campus structures, location, size, academic philosophies, curriculum type, selectivity, financial aid, prestige and the various aspects of the residential experience. The author lists 31 specific designations that make colleges distinctive.

**Section 2** guides the reader through the college admission process, including the nuts and bolts of filing an application. The author lists admission criteria and the importance of high school grades, test scores, awards and honors, extracurricular activities, recommendations and
personal qualities. The author continues, in this section, to define the Common Application and its competitor, the Universal College Application, as well as the differences between early decision, early action, single choice early action and rolling admission. The section on deadlines and timetables is especially useful.

Section 3 instructs the reader to identify the preferences listed in Section 1 and to match those preferences with the 176 schools listed in the book. The reader is guided to go back to the categories listed in Section 1 and review the characteristics that were circled with the College Match Profile Chart and then build a college list of between 8 to 12 schools.

The International Student’s Guide to American Colleges is a comprehensive and useful guide for prospective international students to read when considering studying in the United States. The author provides the reader with a step-by-step approach to determine the best schools to consider for application and admission.

However, the author does not take into account other important criteria, including transfer rates for international students for each of the schools listed, international student progression from first to second year and graduation, graduate and professional school acceptances, as well as job placement of after graduation. I believe The International Student’s Guide to American Colleges will appeal to a specific cohort of prospective international students. One runs the risk of generalizing, but I believe prospective students from wealthy families would be most interested in following the guidelines outlined in the book. International students who apply to community colleges would not, in my opinion, benefit from all of the guidelines and suggestions outlined in the book. Most of the 176 profiled schools are not appropriate for this group of students.

In my opinion, the role of social media was not adequately covered. Few international students, for example, have the financial resources to visit several U.S. colleges and universities. The use of Skype calls and virtual tours is useful to students who cannot visit U.S. colleges and universities, but the author does not include suggestions as to how social media can assist prospective international students and how it should be part of the college application process. If one looks back to the introductory part of the book, it is clear that The International Student’s Guide to American Colleges accomplishes its goals of helping prospective international students narrow their options and make informed choices of the best schools for application. The book is both informative and instructive. The reader is left with a clear path to discover why an American college degree is valuable and how prospective applicants can successfully navigate the application, admission and financial aid processes.

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“Through its online presence the journal draws together a globally distributed network of academics and students who ensure that the journal presents much more than a singularly ‘western’ perspective with contributions from all over the globe, including Taiwan, Nepal, Finland, Turkey and the UK, to name but a few. It is definitely worth a read!”

-Dr. Catherine Montgomery, University of Hull (UK)
Author, Understanding the International Student Experience

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-Dr. Milton D. Cox, Professor (Miami University, USA), Editor-in-Chief, Journal on Excellence in College Teaching
Contributors of this volume ~

Abe W Ata, PhD, Deakin University
Adel M. Alharbi (Doctoral Candidate) University of Memphis
Allison A. Vaughn, PhD, San Diego State University
Alyssa R. Ryan (Master’s Student), University of Calgary
Barry Fass-Holmes, PhD, University of California, San Diego
Becca Berkey, PhD, Northeastern University
Benjamin Triana, Doctoral Candidate, University of Kentucky
Brendan Cantwell, PhD, Michigan State University
Brendan O’Connor, MEd, Higher Colleges of Technology
Cathy Cavanaugh, PhD, Microsoft Corporation
Cathy S. Carston, PhD, Mount Royal University
Chad London, PhD, Mount Royal University
Chris R. Glass, PhD, Old Dominion University
Christie J. Curtis, PhD; Biola University
Cynthia M. Douglas, PhD, St. John’s University
Danni Lei (Master’s Student), University of Calgary
David Edens, PhD, California State Polytechnic University
Edwin Romero, PhD, Mt. San Antonio College
Elizabeth Kociolek, MSED, Old Dominion University
Eunyoung Kim, PhD, Seton Hall University
Ewa Gajer, PhD, Higher Colleges of Technology
Francis Griffin, MA, Northeastern University
Gwendolyn M. Williams, PhD, University of West Florida

John Mayberry, PhD, University of the Pacific
Jon D. Woodend (Doctoral Student), University of Calgary
Julie Miller, MSW, Northeastern University
Junko Kobayashi, Kansai Gaidai University
Kyle D. Warren (Doctoral Student) Seton Hall University
Linda Viswat, Otemon Gakuin University
Marguerite J. Dennis, MJ Dennis Consulting
Matthew Bergman, PhD, University of California, San Diego
Michael F. Iorio, PhD, Loma Linda University
Pamela Leong, PhD, Salem State University
R. Jason Lynch, MSED, Old Dominion University
Rachawan Wongtrirat, PhD, Old Dominion University
Rod E. Case, PhD, University of Nevada, Reno
Sarah K. Nutter (Doctoral Student), University of Calgary
Sharon L. Cairns, PhD, University of Calgary
Summer Cong, MA, Old Dominion University
Vince Salyers, EdD, Mount Royal University
Yasmin Dean, PhD, Mount Royal University
Yolanda Palmer, PhD, University of Saskatchewan
Young K. Kim, PhD, Azusa Pacific University
Zachary S. Ritter, PhD, University of Redlands

Editor/Founder – Krishna Bista, EdD, University of Louisiana at Monroe

Published with the support of

University of Louisiana at Monroe

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