THE IMPACTS OF STUDYING IN A DIFFERENT CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT:
GRADUATE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Dr. John Fischer, Advisor

Stories reveal that people raised in a particular culture have always journeyed to other cultures/places with the aim of trading, learning, teaching, or converting others. Even though, in the olden days, the ability to travel more than a few miles from an individual's place of origin was not common and considered a special opportunity, over time, this has evolved (Bochner, 2006). Technological advancements, legal regulation changes, and rise in natural/ human-made disasters have contributed to the constant growth in the ability for individuals to migrate from their national/ethnic boundaries (Bochner, 2006) making cross-cultural contact a global experience. In this present society, individuals have experienced various levels of cultural impact by being temporary residents or members of a society that receives temporary residents. Although cross-cultural contact is dominant in the society, it does not make it easy to deal with (Sumer, 2009). In other words, coping and adjusting to new a new cultural learning environment is challenging for international students.

The purpose of this research was to review, analyze and qualitatively investigate how graduate international students perceive the impacts of studying in a different cultural learning environment. The research question this study attempts to answer is how do graduate international students perceive studying in a different cultural environment impacts them?

The participants in this study were graduate international students attending a Midwest American University. These students originated from different countries, cultures and backgrounds. The method of qualitative research that was utilized in this study is

phenomenology. This research was conducted by administering an electronic demographic survey and scheduling interviews with a small subset of participants based on their responses to the survey so as to acquire enough qualitative data. The data was analyzed using thick descriptions and quotes to explain participants' perceptions about the phenomenon.

Findings of the study revealed that graduate international students perceive that cultural differences, differences in learning environments and the host environment are the impacts of studying in a different cultural environment. In conclusion, recommendations for future research and implications were provided. Additionally, other areas of future research may include having a larger population sample and utilizing other research methods which accommodate the collection of more data.

Dedicated to:

The Almighty, My Family, Friends and Every Teacher that made an impact in my life.

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harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

Jeremiah 29:11

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Background

Imagine leaving everything you have ever known and going into an unfamiliar territory where everything seems different and you are struggling to grasp and understand how everything works. All you are comfortable with and certain of become uncertain and it seems like you are in the sea and the waves keep washing over you. You are struggling to swim but the storm and waves are so fierce. Everything seems scary and overwhelming and you feel like you are drowning and not sure of what to do. The fear of the unknown creeps in and you are not sure of what to expect because it seems like you have so many challenges and hurdles to face. This was how I felt, and I am sure it is an example of how international students may feel when leaving their home countries for the first time and travelling for a period of time to study in a different cultural environment.

There are multiple reasons for one to go overseas to obtain a higher degree. First, many developing countries do not have an adequate higher education infrastructure to support their growing educational need and they encourage students with the means to seek degrees elsewhere (Trice, 2001; Sumer, 2009). Second, in order to meet personal needs of academic and professional fulfillment, people choose to go abroad. Third, cultural exchange and learning a different language also serve to internationalize higher education as students increasingly go abroad to gain richer life experiences (Lin, 2012). Historically, graduate international students have gravitated to the United States to attain advanced degrees and make substantial contributions to our society through the creation of new and applied knowledge (Committee on Science, Engineering, and Public Policy, 2005).

An international student pursuing a higher degree in America can be overwhelming and culturally difficult (Lin, 2012). It is believed that international students experience greater difficulties than their American counterparts, as they adapt to a wide range of social and academic situations within the American academic community (Carr, Koyama, & Thiagarajan, 2003; Curry & Copeman, 2005; Myles & Cheng, 2003; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007), regardless of their high educational aspirations and academic skills (Zhai, 2002). Chief among the cultural differences experienced by international students in America is language (Wang & Frank, 2002). Most international students have to deal with language barriers, and at the same time, face challenges academically, culturally and emotionally (Arthur, 2004; Myles & Cheng, 2003). Zhai (2002) noted that most of the language difficulties were due to differences in accent, slang and use of special words. For that reason, the non-native speakers' academic work was affected by their language problems (Tucker, 2003). In addition to changes associated with language barrier and academic concerns, international students also face social and cultural changes (Arthur, 2004; Myles & Cheng, 2003). These researchers indicated how transitioning from the familiar to the unfamiliar could be overwhelming for international students.

Significance of the Study

I recently arrived in the United States to study in the Masters in Curriculum and Teaching program and I can testify that studying in a different cultural environment is not an easy task. One of the questions that I constantly ask myself is "What are the challenges international students face?" The findings from this research will be useful to:

- Teachers because they would be able to better empathize with their international students.
- Counselors because they would be more knowledgeable in knowing what situations are most likely to crop up with international students and can plan to address these situations.

- Research Psychologists so as to know more about students' behavior and attitude and how the environment could affect them.

- International students because it would serve as a means of reflection for them. It would also help them remember that they are not alone in the challenges they may have faced or have had to face.

Statement of Problem

The purpose of this study was to investigate how international graduate students perceive the impacts of studying in a different cultural environment. The information gathered will help understand the ways in which a new cultural environment impacts them. By doing this study, I am hoping to shed more light and raise awareness among the university community on their perceptions of these impacts and provide suggestions on the basis of the information that will be gathered to continue to help graduate international students be more comfortable studying in a different cultural environment.

Research Question

The research question for this study is:

- How do graduate international students perceive studying in a different cultural environment impacts them?

Summary of Chapters

Chapter I served as the introduction to this thesis. Chapter I consists of introduction, significance of the study, statement of the problem, research questions and summary of chapters. Chapter II reviewed past and current literature to better understand the topic. Literature was reviewed on international students, culture, cultural differences, cultural capital, self-efficacy, types of self-efficacy, importance of self-efficacy, psychological changes and learning

environments to explain challenges international students face. Chapter III explained the research methods utilized to analyze this study. The description of the research method used, the conceptual framework, a description of the setting and participants, a detailed explanation of data collection, data analysis and limitations of the study. Chapter IV provided a thick description of the phenomenon and the analysis of raw data collected. The findings will answer the research question in the summary of the chapter. In conclusion, Chapter V provided a detailed conclusion of the research, implications and, suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Studying in a different cultural environment is a difficult task. The challenges faced could be somewhat similar or vary amongst international students (Arthur, 2004; Myles & Cheng, 2003). These challenges occasionally have impacts on international students' attitudes and behavior in diverse ways because each person is coming from a different cultural learning environment. In this section, existing literature was reviewed on international students, acculturation issues, empathy and diversity, definition of culture, cultural differences, cultural capital and international students, self-efficacy, types of self-efficacy, importance of self-efficacy, psychological changes and learning environments.

International Students

The number of international students studying abroad rapidly increases yearly and according to Lipson (2008), each year, over 700,000 students from around the world come to the U.S. and Canada to study. However, the number of international students lowered over a two year period (2001-2003) because of the stringent security measures imposed by the U.S. government in reaction to the September 11, 2001 tragedy (Singaravelu, 2007). The number eventually stabilized in 2006 at roughly 564,766, representing several nations, and increased to a record high of 623,805 in 2008, by the 2010/2011 session, the number had increased to 723,249 and presently, it has increased to 764,495 (Institute of International Education, Open Doors; IIE, 2012; Marklein, 2012). This increase was propelled primarily by the continued increase of students from China and Saudi Arabia (Marklein, 2012). International students come from various countries like China, India, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Canada, Japan, Taiwan, Nigeria, Vietnam, Russia, Turkey, Tanzania, France etc. (Institute of International Education, Open

Doors; IIE, 2012). According to Bowling Green State University's office of institutional research, the number of international students in fall 2011 recorded a total of 633 students and in fall 2012 the number of international students increased to a total of 639 from various continents ranging from Africa, Asia, Middle East and Europe.

The U.S. benefits from the enrollment of international students on the U.S. campuses for several reasons. Foreign students help their American classmates broaden their world perspective and they add cultural diversity and facilitate international understanding (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994). They also contribute to the economy where they live. The Department of Commerce reports that "international students contribute $22.7 billion to the U.S. economy in money spent on tuition, living expenses, and related costs" (Institute of International Education, 2012). Furthermore, international students can help develop positive relations between their home countries and the U. S. (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994).

Acculturation Issues

Acculturation has been a major topic when addressing international students. According to Berry (1997), acculturation has the tendency to influence change in an individual or a group of culturally different individuals (psychologically/culturally) based on intercultural contact. In spite of the differences in language and cultural backgrounds, all international students share the challenges of acculturation (Lipson, 2008; Thomas & Althen, 1989). In other words, to comprehend international students better, it is essential to recognize that being an international student is a representation of a common minority identity in the U.S. (Schmitt, Spears, & Branscombe, 2003). Their experiences differ from those of refugees, immigrants, and ethnic minorities within the U.S., mainly as a result of immigration issues, the temporary nature of their stay in the U.S., the need to succeed in the U.S. academic system, and the need to rapidly learn to

negotiate the demands of everyday living, communication, and behavior (Johnson & Sandhu, 2007; Misra & Castillo, 2004; Mori, 2000; Sumer, 2009).

Aside from differences in language and cultural backgrounds, other problems that international students can encounter upon their arrival to the U.S. as they adjust to new surroundings include academic demands, homesickness, loss of social support and status, decreased self-esteem, lack of study skills and lack of assertiveness (Pederson, 1991; Poyrazli, Arbona, Nora, McPherson, & Pisecco, 2002). International students also experience unique adjustment issues and a sense of isolation as a result of studying in the U.S. (Singaravelu, 2007). Hence, it is expected that some international students will experience psychological distress (Berry, 1997).

Furthermore, international students undergo unique and diverse psychological problems with special concerns (Mori, 2000). Campus counselors should be aware that international students come from a myriad of cultural backgrounds and "make a mosaic of unique cultural experiences" (Sandhu, 1994, p. 237). However, a lot of counseling services provided on campus do not include enough cultural sensitivity (Mori, 2000).

Additionally, research findings suggest that once international students adapt to the new demands and roles of the new culture, international students are likely to have better academic performance and better psychological stability (Pedersen, 1995).

Empathy and Diversity

There is diversity all around the world. Sometimes it could be diverse opinions based on personal beliefs. There could be varied experiences based on different backgrounds like culture, language, environment, learning, teaching, etc. (Chan, 2004). This situation is likened to how students from different cultural learning environments could be perceived, which Chan (2004)

contends is more pronounced in higher education in recent times. Chan (2004) also expressed that the higher education student population are transforming through global change and becoming more diverse. In other words, embracing cultural diversity and enhancing students' environment is essential to helping international students (Chan, 2004). As an educator, addressing cultural diversity issues, thinking of strategies to create an inclusive learning environment helps international students be comfortable in a new learning environment (Chan, 2004).

Likewise, as educators, there are factors that should be considered when dealing with students coming from different cultural learning environments. The major factor is trying to understand the previous learning environment from the perspective of students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, encouraging classroom relations/ extracurricular activities which help them feel more at home and comfortable (Hurtardo, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen & Allen, 1999). Adjusting to a different cultural learning environment could be challenging and varies individually.

According to multicultural educators and cross-cultural psychologists, international students adjust to a new environment differently depending on geographical distance and psychological backgrounds. Hung (2006) gave an example regarding international students from East Asian cultures, influenced by Confucius tradition and collectivism and with linguistic structures unrelated to Indo-European languages, tend to experience greater challenges adjusting to the Western academic system. Educators have to understand these, help them feel at ease and settle down in their new learning environment.

Definition of Culture

The Nigerian Yorùbá culture and tradition is deeply entrenched in beliefs (personal, cultural, traditional, etc.) and plays an important role in one's life. In view of this as a Nigerian, I subscribe to defining belief before culture. According to the Merriam Webster online dictionary, belief refers "to a conviction of the truth of some statement or the reality of some being or phenomenon especially when based on examination of evidence." In considering international students, it is important to discuss the various definitions of culture because it plays a major role in the lives of the students and those they come into contact with in their new environment. This section reviews the various definitions of culture and some impacts of cultural differences on international students.

"Culture, is a whole way of life" (Williams, 1958 p. xvi.). For this reason it is complex, hard to teach and learn (Mead, 1937; Tylor, 1871; Williams, 1958). To properly learn culture, one has to really study this phenomenon, which may involve living with the customs of the culture and language (Geertz, 1973; Mead, 1937). For years, there have been opinions and arguments on the definition of culture and what it entails (Benedict, 1934; Geertz, 1973; Hall, 1997; Kluckhohn, 1944; Mead; 1937; Shweder, 1991; Tylor, 1958 & Williams, 1958)

According to Geertz (1973, p.4), Kluckhohn (1944) defined culture in eleven ways:

(1) "the total way of life of a people"; (2) "the social legacy the individual acquires from his group"; (3) "a way of thinking feeling and believing"; (4) "an abstraction from behavior"; (5) "a theory on the part of the anthropologist about the way a group of people in fact behave"; (6) "a store house of pooled learning"; (7) a set of standardized orientations to recurrent problems"; (8) "learned behavior"; (9) "a mechanism for the normative regulation of

behavior"; (10) "a set of techniques for adjusting both to the external environment and to other men"; (11) "a precipitate of history…."

Also, Geertz (1973, p. 5) agrees with Weber that:

"Culture has to do with man being an animal suspended in webs of significance that he himself has spun which entails a researcher doing analysis on culture in an interpretive way (in search of meaning)."

Building on the above definitions of culture, Li and Karakowsky (2001, p.501) defined culture as a

"cumulative deposit of knowledge, beliefs, values, attitudes, religion, hierarchies, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual group…" Likewise, they explained that,

Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other hand as conditioning influences upon further action. (p. 501).

Based on these definitions, it is evidenced that "culture is a whole way of life" (Williams, 1958 p. xvi.) and is essential information for international students to acquire when transitioning in a new environment. Creation of this awareness is vital for international students because culture in any society provides individuals with normative information about its values and offers guides for behavior and thoughts (Sumer, 2009). Following this, Bochner (2006)

suggested that international students are an important group of sojourners, and culture contact is an essential part of their sojourn. Sojourners, such as tourists, refugees, immigrants, and international students, at first, experience a lack of such normative information and guidance regarding how to think and behave in that culture. This lack of information tends to result in a lot of anxiety (Sumer, 2009). Yang and Clum (1994) suggested that the level of stress might even increase depending on the dissimilarity between the culture of an individual and the new culture.

Cultural Differences

There are different types of cultural differences that international students struggle with in a new cultural learning environment. One common example of a cultural difference amongst international students is assertiveness. Assertiveness is the ability to express what an individual thinks and feels (Lee & Bradley, 2002) and is regarded as an important avenue for an individual to affirm his or her identity and succeed in the individualistic and competitive Western societies (Niikura, 1999). Assertiveness has been considered desirable for mental health and has been reported as critical for self-esteem, reduced anxiety, and enhanced feelings of personal power or internal control (Alberti, 1977; Williams & Stout, 1985).

Furthermore, collectivism is another common cultural difference that international students deal with because a majority of international students come from collectivist societies where interpersonal harmony is highly valued, such that self-restraint and passivity are encouraged among members (Lee & Bradley, 2002). For example, many research findings have reported that Asian international students are passive and less assertive than their Caucasian counterparts (Lee & Bradley, 2002). Asian students have been reported to have more acculturative stress than other groups of international students (Lee & Bradley, 2002). Also, in Nigeria, especially amongst the Yorùbás, one is perceived to lack respect when speaking with an

elder and looking them in the eye (Adéoyè, 1979). Likewise, the method used in teaching is lecture so there is no room for class discussions which makes them less assertive and passive in class (Abimbade, 1999). In summary, passivity can have a negative effect on relationships with international students and their teachers, peers or advisors in American culture (Poyrazli, Arbona, Nora, McPherson, & Pisecco, 2002). Therefore, understanding international students' cultural background helps educators comprehend international students better.

Finally, coping with cultural differences is challenging (Arthur, 2004; Myles & Cheng, 2003) and with the evidence of the definitions above, it is obvious that culture is complex (Mead, 1937; Geertz, 1973 & Tylor, 1958). It also shows that it is hard to learn norms and challenging to adapt to them (Sumer, 2009). This makes it difficult for anyone in a new cultural environment to adjust to a specific culture because every culture varies. Campbell (2012) suggested that conducting a buddy project between international students and community students will foster intercultural contact, give social support and help international students transition in their new cultural environment. In addition, Guo & Chase (2011) proposed the use of programs organized by colleges which focus on student integration, cross-cultural communication and effective teaching strategies.

Cultural Capital and International Students

Bourdieu's (1986) concept of cultural capital can be referred to as assets which are inherent in an individual's abilities, proficiencies or competencies that promote cultural mobility. Using Bourdieu's theory to analyze international students' accumulation of cultural capital, contributes to educational practices in a multicultural setting and this analysis will provide a useful lens for grappling with students' wider experience overseas and help in settling international students down in a different cultural environment (Morosanu, 2010).

Bourdieu's theory (1986) has had an echo in the sociology of education particularly with respect to the performance of students from different class backgrounds (Grayson, 2010; Sullivan 2001). Cultural capital has been "interpreted as highbrow culture rather than general human skills, although scholars have increasingly expanded this narrow focus" (Lareau & Weininger 2003, p. 569) to include, for example, 'any values and dispositions that may predispose individuals to successful navigation of the educational system' (Grayson 2010, p. 5). Furthermore, Curry (2008) defined cultural capital as "competences of being a doing student." (p. 280). In other words, a student's performance entails how actively involved they are in the different ways. McCarthy and Vickers (2012) suggested that students actively involved in their learning acquire knowledge in different ways through their experiences, analysis or application of ideas.

Utilizing Bourdieu's theory (1986) in analyzing international students' performance in a different cultural learning environment may be helpful because there have been debates that claim that the comprehension of international students' experiences is majorly focused on the academic aspects alone rather than the combination of the academic and non-academic aspects. The debate is on internationalization which is mainly focused on the institutional pedagogic context (academic aspect only) which should encompass other non-academic aspects (adjustments) because it is suggested that international students have accumulated and diversified cultural capital (Morosanu, 2010). This competence, be it their language fluency, social or other skills, may be converted into institutional cultural capital (degrees) and economic returns (jobs and income) (Sin, 2009). In other words, internationalization should not be focused on only international students' pedagogy but other skills they may have which help them adjust to the host environment and is useful after studying and getting into the labor market.

Similarly, Curry (2008) used Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital and develops four competences (spatial, participation, curricular and institutional) to negotiate new pedagogical practices in ESOL classrooms in the United States. Students used their educational attainments and had a better chance to move on to their future goals. During the classroom interactions, students' used spatial competence which is the choice made to be physically accessible to teachers' instruction in class. Participation competence was also utilized and is the competence to engage with the instruction and curriculum. Curricular competence was demonstrated in students' capacities to make links between classroom activities and pedagogical purposes. In addition, institutional competence was used and it is the ability to make use of institutional resources. In total, these four competences are what educational institutions look for or value in good students (Curry, 2008).

Finally, international students' conscious attempts at maximizing their cultural capital through participation in a multiplicity of activities in their host environment that are not strictly academic are a strong reminder that these constitute essential sites for understanding and improving their learning experience (Morosanu, 2010). Based on the above research, utilizing this avenue contributes effectively to international students' transition in a new learning environment. Narrowing the focus to only the academic aspects prevents the non-academic aspects from being visible and reproduces a compartmentalized view of learning that is segregated from the wider social situation (Morosanu, 2010).

Self-Efficacy

I subscribe to the concept of self-efficacy as it is seen through the lens of Bandura's social cognitive theory (1986). His theory emphasizes the role of observational learning, social experience, and reciprocal determinism in the development of personality. According to Bandura

(1977), a person's attitudes, abilities, and cognitive skills comprise what is known as the self-system. This system plays a major role in how we perceive situations and how we behave in response to different situations. Self-efficacy plays an essential role of this self-system.

Self-efficacy has been defined in various ways based on how it is interpreted by various researchers. Bandura (1997) refers to it as one's beliefs in his or her ability to perform at a designated level. Tyler & Boelter (2008) also defined self-efficacy as the "self" perceived ability to learn and carry out a task or set of behaviors at an identified, optimal level of performance. Self-efficacy is the belief that one is competent to handle a situation that one considers to be essential; an underlying determinant of motivation to put forth effort in the face of obstacles (Matheson, 1995). Self-efficacy is an "individual's confidence in their ability to organize and execute a given course of action to solve a problem or accomplish a task" (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002, p. 110).

Furthermore, self-efficacy beliefs are made up of mechanisms for efficacy expectations and outcome expectations that underlie all behaviors. According to Bandura (1977), efficacy expectations can be defined as one's belief in being able to manage a behavior required for attaining certain results in a successful manner and on the other hand, outcome expectations are defined as predicting that a particular behavior will result in certain consequences. In the same manner, Bandura (1986) explained that a strong sense of self-efficacy about one's ability and competence will help individuals with emotional adjustment. A strong sense of self-efficacy also helps individuals deal with challenging situations without feeling overwhelmed and confused. According to Schwarzer (1992), a perceived self-efficacy reflects an optimistic self-belief. This positive self-belief can help an individual perform new and challenging tasks and overcome hardships. Perceived self-efficacy tends to assist an individual to facilitate goal-setting, effort

investment, persistence in face of barriers, recovery from setbacks and emotional adaptiveness

(Schwazer, 1992; Poyrazli et al., 2002).

Types of Self-Efficacy. Academic self-efficacy refers to the individual's beliefs that they

can successfully perform given academic tasks at designated levels (Schunk, 1991). It also refers

to an individual's conviction that they can successfully achieve at a designated level on an

academic task or attain a specific academic goal (Bandura, 1997; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002;

Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002; Schunk & Pajares, 2002). Academic self-efficacy is grounded in

self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977). Academic self-efficacy may vary in strength as a function

of task difficulty—some individuals may believe they are most efficacious on difficult tasks,

while others only on easier tasks. Some students have to adjust academically which definitely

changes the way they think, express themselves, relate with classmates, establish a network of

support, handle financial stability, master language and cultural differences (Tidwell &

Hanassab, 2007).

Social self-efficacy refers to individuals' beliefs that they are capable of initiating social

contact and developing new friendships (Gecas, 1989). It depends on how individuals either

succeed or fail at dynamic interactions within groups and promotes the development of

individual emotional and practical skills as well as accurate perception of self and acceptance of

others (Gecas, 1989). Cohn & Cowan (2011) explained that a day in the life of a student at

school is filled with different connections like friendships with peers; relationships with teachers

and everyone are something constant. An example of this could be when students tend to keep up

with their peers and find some way to fit in or belong which leads them to behave in a certain

way or have a certain attitude (Cohn & Cowan, 2011). Social self-efficacy should be encouraged

during this situation. In general, students should believe that they are capable of initiating

contacts and cultivating friendships regardless of the challenges they might face because studying in a familiar/unfamiliar environment is challenging but more challenging for international students (Gecas, 1989).

Importance of Self-Efficacy Beliefs. Based on the literature above, self-efficacy beliefs are essential in an individual's life. According to Bandura, (1997) self-efficacy beliefs are important for an individual's progress (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002; Schunk & Pajares, 2002). Likewise, self-efficacy beliefs are important to international students adjusting to a new cultural learning environment (Jerusalem & Mittag, 1995). Hence, during the stressful adaptation to a different culture, self-efficacy plays a critical role as a personal resource that can protect against negative experiences and emotions, and health impairment (Jerusalem & Mittag, 1995).

Additionally, self-efficacy has emerged as an effective predictor of students' motivation and learning. Likewise, self-efficacy beliefs have been found to be sensitive to subtle changes in students' performance context, to interact with self-regulated learning processes, and to mediate students' academic achievement (Zimmerman, 2000). Also, "researchers have trained students with learning and motivational deficiencies by modeling specific self-regulatory techniques, describing their form, and providing enactive feedback regarding their impact." (Zimmerman, 2000, p. 88) For instance, children that observed an adult modeled the use of a cognitive strategy that had increasingly higher levels of perceived efficacy and academic skills than young ones who received didactic instruction (Schunk, 1981). In other words, by allowing students to be responsible for setting short-term goals, strengthens self-efficacy and skill development more effectively than asking them to set long-term goals because the short-term goals provided evidence of growing capability and commitment to achieving goals (Bandura & Schunk, 1981).

As evidenced in the research above, the importance of self-efficacy beliefs to students most especially, international students cannot be over emphasized because of its benefits.

Psychological Changes

Another major challenge that international students have to face is dealing with psychological changes (Boonchum, 2009). This is inherent in the lives of international students because as they try to adapt to a new environment, their behavior/attitude changes (Boonchum, 2009). There are different psychological changes/ psychosocial adjustments that international students have to face. According to research, international students' behavioral changes are mostly positive but there are times that it could be negative based on individual differences (Sumer, 2009; Thurber &Walton, 2012). This section reviewed some of these changes and provided some suggestions.

Firstly, Thurber and Walton (2012) expressed that for international university students, intense homesickness is particularly problematic. It can exacerbate preexisting mood and anxiety disorders, precipitate new mental and physical health problems, and sometimes lead to withdrawal from school. It could also lead to depression and loneliness. There is also the fear of failure which puts a lot of pressure on them to perform well in their academics and when they do not, it causes disappointment, shame, regret which could also lead to depression (Thurber &Walton, 2012). In other words, if international students do not handle the adjustments well, the host environment will have to deal with these problems.

Secondly, attitudinal changes play a huge role in the lives of international students and it may be difficult for their teachers to handle the changes (Whaples & Ryden, 1975). According to Ryan (2011), many of the difficulties experienced by instructors and students are generally known but addressing curriculum, pedagogical and assessment practices needs much work.

According to Ryan, the essence of addressing the above difficulty is to examine

underlying attitudes, values and systems that may give rise to complications for both staff

and students. In view of this, "A new approach is needed that positions international students not

as "problems" to be solved but as "assets" to internationalization and the generation of new

knowledge and new ways of working in the academy" (Ryan, 2011, p. 631). As an educator, one

has to try to seek ways to improve their curriculum which includes international students and

ushers in multicultural education.

Thirdly, social and cultural tensions also contribute to attitudinal changes in international

students. Therefore, international students have a tough time adjusting to a new social and

cultural environment. Tarry, (2011) expressed this by saying,

> Thai students still see real advantages to studying at higher education institutions in the
>
> United Kingdom. However, as a result of studying overseas in the United Kingdom, Thai
>
> students experience and have to resolve various social and cultural tensions"…. they have
>
> become more individualistic in their attitudes and opinions, which are at odds with the
>
> traditional collectivist values, held by their families, and deeply entrenched in Thai
>
> society" (p. 69). In other words, international students have challenges in handling this
>
> issue which is similar to acculturation.

Finally, Gu, Schweisfurth and Day (2010) explored how complications

of international students' transitional experiences impact their lives both in terms of their

maturation and human development and their intercultural adaptation within a different

educational environment and a different culture and society. Hence, these transitions have

influenced the nature and process of students' change and development over time. Their research

pointed to the presence of a complex set of shifting associations between language mastery,

social interaction, personal development and academic outcomes. Following this thought, it is the handling of these associations that results in intercultural adaptation and the successful reconfiguration of international students' identity. Similarly, Gu, Schweisfurth and Day (2010), also suggested that it could be that personal, pedagogical and psychological factors are as important as organizational and social cultures in influencing students' adaptation, identity change and ultimate success. Even though international students have psychological changes to face and react to these challenges differently, nevertheless, the host community should not see international students as liabilities but as assets (Ryan, 2011). In summary, the extent and nature of successful change and development can be restricted by the availability of support and the conditions of contact within the environments in which international students are engaged.

Learning Environments

The host learning environment is another factor that plays a major role in international students' adjustments and acculturation (Kissil, & Davey, 2012). In other words, the host learning environment could make or mar international students' experiences. Therefore, literature on learning environments, components of learning environments and examples of learning environments are reviewed in this section.

The definition of learning environment has evolved in recent times. For instance, learning environment refers to the sum total of internal and external influences surrounding a school (Alabi, Oduwaiye, & Fasasi, 2009). Furthermore, according to the Imperial College London, (e-learning glossary, p.3), "a learning environment can be defined as a physical or virtual setting in which learning takes place." In the same vein, "it also refers to the place where learning occurs which is not limited to a physical classroom and includes the features of the setting" (e-learning

glossary, p.3). Likewise, learning environments involve both the people and the space in which students learn and develop.

Meanwhile, Highland Schools (2000) suggested that creating and maintaining stimulating learning environments can be achieved through adequate provision of relevant resources, effective classroom organization, interactive and whole school displays and a climate of innovation. In order to provide the above resources and establish a positive learning environment, there are several factors to be considered. Alabi, Oduwaiye and Fasasi (2009) described the components of a positive learning environment which is the combination of the physical, emotional, cultural/social and academic environments.

Based on the listed components of a positive learning environment, an appropriate physical environment is one in which students feel safe, cared for and relaxed, with the support of adequate and relevant infrastructural facilities such as buildings, seats, playing ground and necessary equipments (Alabi, Oduwaiye, & Fasasi, 2009). While an emotional environment refers to an environment where students are in the continuous care of responsible and knowledgeable adults (teachers, parents, etc.) who the students trust and who are responsive to their needs and interests (Alabi, Oduwaiye, & Fasasi, 2009). An example of this environment is when an educator influences a student's self-confidence by providing supportive feedback like words of encouragement, acknowledging successes, etc. Providing negative feedback only crushes students' self-confidence (Jensen & Dabney, 2000). Therefore, educators have to be careful and strive to have positive learning environments not just for international students but for students in general.

A cultural/social environment is the third component which signifies an atmosphere where students have the opportunities to learn cultural and socially acceptable behaviors as well

as make friends and develop relationships. The academic environment encompasses all resources – physical, human and material and programs and opportunities for students to use these resources creatively and imaginatively to learn and develop their potentials (Alabi, Oduwaiye, & Fasasi, 2009). For instance, when educators foster positive interaction amongst students by introducing a meet and greet system in the class, the educator uses a strategy that is the combination of the academic and cultural/social environment. This method is an example of an authentic learning activity because it fosters respect, celebration/ appreciation of similarities amongst students (McLoughlin, 2000). It is also a contributing factor in helping international students transition into a different cultural learning environment.

Learning environments can vary even within a country, so comparing these environments with another country's makes the variance wide (Alabi, Oduwaiye, & Fasasi, 2009). For instance, in some countries, the mode of instruction is the teacher centered approach where the teacher is seen as the fountain of knowledge. The students are mostly passive and are not required to say much or anything in the class. There is also not much technology being used or there is the absence of technology incorporation in the classrooms (Abimbade, 1999). In most cases, the teacher centered approach is not even structured which does not afford a student the opportunity to think critically, be creative or innovative in their environment which is extremely different from studying in the United States (Alabi, Oduwaiye, & Fasasi, 2009).

Based on the differences between learning environments in different countries, the transitions for international students can be challenging. In view of this, Baron (2012) suggested that there are three (two of which are common) different types of learning environments that international students have to adapt to when they study in the United States. The first is the traditional face-to-face classrooms that are located on college and university campuses. The

second is distance education in which teachers and students do not meet each other face-to-face. The third is international locations in which US colleges and university courses are offered through branches. Having to adapt to these different types of learning environments for international students, tends to be overwhelming and sometimes intimidating. For instance, in Nigeria, not all students participate in class because the classes are not as small as the classes in the United States. The class size makes it hard for the instructor to give all the students attention or monitor what they are doing in the class (Abimbade, 1999). In sum, being patient with international students adjusting to a different cultural environment helps them transition easily.

Furthermore, Huang & Brown (2009) explained that some international students have problems trying to adapt to classroom behavior, the focus on discussion rather than lecture, emphasis on group work and trouble when the instructor does not follow the text. These problems are as a result of how much they are used to their previous learning environments which have more of fixed and rigid rules. They will be dealing with inner conflicts for a while until they eventually adapt to the new learning environment.

Summary

There has been a great deal of research on international students and their adjustment/ transitioning into a new cultural environment. For some, adjusting is easy and for others, it is difficult. As noted, recent studies have identified attitudinal and behavioral changes students are susceptible to encounter in a new cultural environment. Healthy adjustment is essential for maximizing the educational and social benefits of the experience. As evidenced above, international students come with diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences.

Moreover, there are many factors that should be put into consideration when handling international students' transition issues. These factors include adjusting to and coping with a new

learning environment (academic pressure, homesickness, language barriers, weather, socializing etc.) which could in turn affect their behavior/attitude either negatively or positively. Hence, teachers, counselors and psychologists really need to understand their backgrounds to be able to help them transition and be comfortable in the unfamiliar learning environment.

With the constant increase in the number of international students studying in the U.S., and to better accommodate and maintain recruitment of these students, it is essential to comprehend the factors influencing these students' transition in the U.S. and ways they cope with the process of studying in a different cultural environment (Sumer, 2009). Research geared to this purpose would be helpful in providing professionals with guidelines for creating culturally appropriate services and programs for international students.

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHODS

Introduction

This chapter contains a description of the research design, participants, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis and summary of the study. This study utilized the qualitative research method of phenomenology. A detailed description of qualitative research and phenomenology is provided based on the literature and my consideration for the context of this research. The research question of the study has been included here once more to establish the basis of this research.

The research question for this study is:

- How do graduate international students perceive studying in a different cultural environment impacts them?

Research Design

The research design that this study used was qualitative research. Qualitative research is a unique way of presenting and explaining one's findings of a study. It seeks to explain not just the "how" of a situation/phenomenon, but also the "why". Qualitative data provides insights to people's opinions, experiences and the workings of the mind. Geertz (1973) describes qualitative research as providing rich or thick descriptive accounts of the phenomenon under investigation. "Qualitative research involves collecting data in the form of naturalistic verbal reports- for example, interview transcripts or written accounts- and the analysis conducted on these is textual." (Smith, 2003, p. 2). In other words, qualitative research analysis uses quoted responses or texts. There are different approaches in conducting qualitative research and the most common are: ethnography, phenomenology, case study, grounded theory and narrative research (Smith, et al., 2003). Each approach has their system of data collection.

Phenomenology. This study was informed by the utilization of "phenomenological perspectives which has a long history in several social research disciplines including psychology and sociology as established by Husserl and some European philosophers like Sartre, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty who advocated for phenomenological studies of existence." (Okome, 2011, p. 8). Phenomenological research, aims to clarify situations lived through persons in everyday life. Rather than attempting to reduce a phenomenon to a convenient number of identifiable variables and control the context in which the phenomenon will be studied, phenomenology aims to remain as faithful as possible to the phenomenon and to the context in which it appears to the world (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). In order to study a phenomenon, a situation has to be presented in which people with first-hand experiences describe the experiences they have had in their lives (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003).

The knowledge I gained from the above literature and the nature of my research is what propelled me to adopt the phenomenological research for this study. Phenomenological research has been known to give insights into the human mind and meanings being lived by persons that can be highly revealing (Manen, 1984 & Okome, 2011).

Researcher Subjectivity

My personal experiences as a graduate international student is what influenced the conduction of this study. Since this study has its roots in qualitative research, I had to be constantly aware of my subjectivity so that my data collection and analysis outcome would not be biased. Peshkin (1988) suggested researchers should systematically seek out their subjectivity not when data has been collected and analysis is complete but during the course of their research work. Subjectivity is a not a medal that we proudly show off or brag about (Peshkin, 1988). Even

though being aware of my subjectivity is an advantage, I will not try to get rid of it (Peshkin, 1988).

Setting and Participants

The demographic survey (first part of this research) participants for this study include 11 graduate international students studying at a Mid-West university. Owing to the extended and multiple contacts that phenomenology requires with participants, for the interviews, my study limited the number of participants to 6 out of the 11 graduate international students that participated in the demographic survey. Additionally, the study conducted by Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) guided my reasoning for the number of participants. During the Guest study, the researchers conducted 60 in-depth interviews with women in two West African countries. Their study found that saturation occurred in the first 12 interviews, and meta-themes were notable after the first 6 interviews (Guest et al., 2006). It is important to note the use of pseudonyms have been employed to protect the privacy and confidentiality of these students and their university throughout this research.

The 11 survey participants originate from Ghana, China, Kuwait, Kenya, Philippines and Nigeria. The participants were four PhD and seven Masters students and they include 4 Ghanians, 2 Chinese, 2 Kenyans, 1 Nigerian, 1 Kuwaiti and 1 Filipino. Building on the range of views that participants had written on their survey responses, I selected 6 out of these participants for interviewing because their survey responses seemed to be intriguing and unique. The participants interviewed originate from Kenya, Philippines, China, Nigeria, Ghana and Kuwait and their names (pseudonyms not their real names) are Marley, Marcia, Queen, Eloise, Conrad and Nimota. Below are their names (pseudonyms) and some information about them.

Marley is a young graduate student and is from Kenya. He seemed to be a smart and intelligent person because of the way he answered the questions he was asked. He is in his mid-twenties and has lived in the United States for over three years. Marcia was born and raised in the Philippines. She is in her late twenties. She is perceived to be a self-confident and determined young woman because she had her first degree and Masters from the Philippines before she arrived in the United States for another Masters degree and presently a PhD with which she hopes to use to acquire a teaching position in the future. Queen is from China and constantly keeps in touch with her family. She has experiences studying in China, Japan and the United States which suggests that Queen is self-confident and highly knowledgeable.

Eloise is from Nigeria. She grew up and studied in the South Western part of Nigeria before coming to the United States to study. Owing to the way she gave explanations to the questions directed to her and her behavior throughout the interview, she seemed to be full of energy. She is very determined in completing her course of study and plans to work in an international organization in the future. Conrad is in mid-twenties and he is from Ghana. His the oldest child of his family and has always had the responsibility of making sure that he is a role model to his siblings which explains his drive to succeed when confronted with any challenging situation. Finally, Nimota is a young graduate student from Kuwait. She seemed to be an easy going person because she was soft spoken throughout the interview. She is very new to the American culture and has had a difficult time adjusting to cultural differences. She hopes to complete her PhD in the nearest future.

Survey and Interview Questions

The materials that were used in this study include: demographic survey and interview questions.

Survey. The rationale for the use of survey as one of the materials for data collection in this study is because survey is the process by which we gather information from a (sample of) entities for the purpose of describing the attributes of the larger population of which the entities are members (Groves et al., 2004). In other words, surveys can help develop a picture of the participants' background. As suggested in the previous chapter, international students come from societies where they are mostly passive and are just adjusting to being assertive. Assertiveness is the ability to express what an individual thinks and feels (Lee & Bradley, 2002) and is regarded as an important avenue for an individual to affirm his or her identity and succeed in the individualistic and competitive Western societies (Niikura, 1999). If graduate international students are not comfortable with a topic there is the tendency that they do not speak. This realization and the knowledge that I acquired from the literature review was what helped me in developing the simple questions (about their background) that participants answered during the survey. A copy of the demographic survey questions can be found in Appendix C.

Interview. The use of open-ended interviews for this study is based on Glesne's (1999) three-tiered interview protocol. According to Glesne (1999), the first step is acquiring a well defined topic; the second is developing questions that are linked to the topic and lastly, asking these questions with skill and also ensuring there is enough time for participants to give knowledgeable answers. The sub-headings (cultural differences, acculturation issues, learning environments, psychological changes, self-efficacy, etc.) that were discussed in the previous chapter were what helped me develop questions I asked participants for the interviews. An example of one cultural difference mentioned was collectivism. According to Lee and Bradley (2002) collectivism is another common cultural difference that international students deal with because a majority of international students come from collectivist societies where interpersonal

harmony is highly valued, such that self-restraint and passivity are encouraged among members. In addition, Bandura's (1986) theory on self-efficacy was another contributor in helping me develop the interview questions. A copy of the interview questions can be found in Appendix D.

Triangulation

According to Glesne (1999) and Creswell (1998), interviews, observation, document collection and open ended surveys can be utilized during a study to ensure reliability and validity. The investigator's position, including the basis for selecting participants and an audit trail consisting of field notes, interview tapes and transcriptions will be utilized to ensure the validity of this research (Flick, 2006). Member checking will be used and the in-depth interview and the open-ended survey of this study will be applied (Denzin, 1986). Based on the above literature, I ensured that I used (survey answers, interview recordings and transcriptions) to ensure the validity of this study. I did member checking after I analyzed the data and discussed the research findings. A copy of the member check questions can be found in Appendix E.

Procedures

According to Manen (1984, p. 2-3), phenomenological research may be seen as a dynamic interplay among the following four procedural activities. The first step is "turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world. That is, orienting to the phenomenon, formulating the phenomenological question and explicating assumptions and pre-understandings." I identified my interest in the nature of the phenomenon, familiarized myself with past articles that had been written on the study and formulated phenomenological questions. I made explicit my understanding, biases, beliefs and assumptions about the study.

The second step is "investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it. Obtaining data through experiential descriptions from subjects and locating experiential

descriptions in literature, art or other forms." I wrote an extensive review of literature on the study. I utilized the snowballing sampling technique by speaking with friends of friends so as to generate a list of graduate international students and I administered the demographic survey to these students through email. 11 participants filled the survey however, before filling the survey, the participants were asked to give their consent electronically. A copy of the online consent form can be found in Appendix A. After reviewing the survey, I purposely selected six students whom I conducted interviews with and had them sign consent forms before they were interviewed. A copy of the interview consent form can be found in Appendix B.

The third step is "reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon. That is, uncovering thematic aspects in lifeworld descriptions, isolating thematic statements and determining essential themes." I analyzed the phenomenon by uncovering the essential themes (coding) using the "highlighting approach" based on the raw data I had.

Also, it is "describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting. It consists of attending to the speaking of language, varying examples, writing and rewriting." I wrote a thick description of my findings (Erickson, 1986), did a member check by showing the interviewees my findings as a means of getting feedback from them (Denzin, 1986).

Finally, I concluded the research with a final review of the themes and understandings of the phenomenon which were evidenced in the data analysis in chapter four and discussion of findings in chapter five.

Data Collection

The types of data collected for the purpose of this research include: open ended interviews, observation during interviews and the survey which is in line with the qualitative research method of phenomenology. The demographic survey was administered and analyzed to

select participants for the interview based on the range of views in the survey results. After the survey was analyzed and participants had been selected, open ended interviews was scheduled with participants.

Data Analysis

The data analysis used for this study is the descriptive phenomenological analysis. The importance of descriptive research is not just to acquire knowledge about the object of study, but to avoid bringing about any changes in the focus or object (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). Moreover, since what drives the analysis of the descriptive data more than anything else is the search for psychological meaning as lived by the participant, the description of what it was like for the participant is an excellent database (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). Thus there is harmony among the raw data that is obtained, the method of analysis and the outcomes that are sought (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). Data was also organized into categories and connective themes identified, that is, data was analyzed using the process of transcription, categorization, highlighting and coding of main ideas to generate common themes leading to the description of the themes within the text (Manen, 1984). Actual quotes from the participants served as the evidence of the results.

Participants' response to the demographic survey was used in selecting a subset of six participants for the interviews. The method used in selecting these participants was based on a range of views that appeared across the survey on the participants experiences both in their home country and their host environment. In addition, the open-ended question interviewing method was used to help uncover the reality beneath the surface. Patton (2002) explained that the quotes from interviews discloses respondents' levels of emotion, the way in which they have organized the world; their thoughts about what is happening, their experiences and their basic perceptions. The demographic survey participants took also helped in getting a better understanding of the

phenomenon. In this research, taped in-depth interviews were transcribed verbatim and field notes were reviewed regularly (Flick, 2006).

Limitations

The participants of the first part of this research (demographic survey), were 11 graduate international students. For the interviews, my study limited the number of participants to 6 out of the 11 survey participants. In addition, the range of countries and cultures represented was reduced to a small sample size. Also, the limited time frame was another factor that was considered in the course of the data collection.

Summary

Chapter III provided a description of the research design, the participants, instrumentation, the data collection and the data analysis of the study. This research utilized the qualitative method of phenomenology. The purpose of this study was to find out how graduate international students perceive the effects of studying in a different cultural environment. I wanted to know the kind of challenges they are facing or have had to face and how they overcame challenges. Phenomenology was the ideal qualitative research method for this study because it gave me the opportunity to interact with different international students who have different/similar experiences and who react differently to situations they may have had to face.

CHAPTER IV: DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine and qualitatively analyze graduate international students perceptions of the effects of studying in a different cultural environment. Research has shown that studying in a different cultural environment is a difficult task and the challenges faced could be somewhat similar or quite different amongst international students (Arthur, 2004; Myles & Cheng, 2003). This research aimed to provide a descriptive phenomenological analysis of the results of the study. This chapter provided detailed data analysis and answered the research question based on findings. In answering the research question, demographic survey, interviews and member checking techniques were used.

Findings of Analyzed Data

As part of the data analysis, three sources were utilized. These data sources included field notes, interviews and survey transcripts. Additionally, I did member check with the participants as a means of getting feedback from them. During the member check discussion with each participant, I shared my findings. The participants found it interesting that even though their experiences where somewhat similar, there were still some differences. However, they agreed with my findings. The research question for this study was:

How do graduate international students perceive studying in a different cultural environment impacts them?

Demographic Survey

The first part of the survey requested the participants to answer simple questions about their names, major, country of origin, length of stay in the United States and frequency of communication with their families and future plans upon completion of their degrees. The table

below shows the participants' names (pseudonyms), countries of origination, their length of stay

in the United States, and the frequency of communication with their families.

Table 1

Names (Pseudonyms)	Countries	Length of stay in the US	Frequency of Family Communication
Queen	China	Over 3 years	2-3 times a month
Carlos	Ghana	Between 6 months and a year	Once a week
Nimota	Kuwait	1 to 2 years	Daily
Darcy	Ghana	Over 3 years	Once a week
Peggy	Ghana	Between 2 and 3 years	2-3 times a month
Marley	Kenya	Over 3 years	Daily
Nancy	China	Between 6 months and a year	2-3 times a week
Marcia	Philippines	Over 3 years	2-3 times a week
Elyssa	Kenya	Over 3 years	2-3 times a week
Eloise	Nigeria	Between 2 and 3 years	Once a week
Conrad	Ghana	Between 6 months and a year	2-3 times a month

The table above showed a division among the participants. 5 of the participants frequently

communicate with their families while 6 participants limit their communication to once a week

or 2-3 times a month.

Participants provided similar responses when asked about their future plans after acquiring their degrees. Queen, Carlos, Darcy, Peggy, Nancy, Marcia, Elyssa and Eloise said that they would like to get jobs after completing their programs. For example, Queen wrote "I am not sure. Due to my age, most likely I'll try to find a husband and a job here in the US. It's mainly because there's more agism [*sic*] in China now I believe." Nimota and Conrad expressed that they would like to complete their PhDs. In view of these responses, it is evident that most of the participants would like to obtain a PhD, get a job either in the United States or in their countries. However, Marley was the only one who gave a different response mentioning that he was undecided about what to do. He explained "I have several options and not firmly decided which one to take." Meanwhile, the second part of the survey requested participants to answer open-ended questions.

Interviews

Building on the range of views that participants had written on their survey responses and the data analysis, I selected six out of these participants for interviewing because the responses they presented to the questions asked above seemed to be intriguing and unique. The six participants scheduled a convenient time to meet for the recorded interviews which took place over a period of two weeks. The participants interviewed originate from Kenya, Philippines, China, Nigeria, Ghana and Kuwait and their names (pseudonyms not their real names) are Marley, Marcia, Queen, Eloise, Conrad and Nimota. They are all graduate international students studying at a Midwestern university.

Analysis

The data was analyzed using the highlighting approach as suggested by Manen (1984) to explain the phenomenon based on their various experiences. The data analysis of participants

demographic survey and interview responses support and provide answers to the research question. Below are the themes that were generated during the data analysis of the survey and interviews:

Cultural Differences

Based on the range of views across the survey and interviews, the participants' description of what they miss most about their country depicted the cultural differences their countries and the host country have. Some of the examples of these differences they mentioned are, the importance of their family closeness/relationships, their friendships, language differences, the food they miss, the confidence of familiar expectations, etc.

Family Closeness/ Friendships/Food. For instance, Queen explained, "I miss most the caring by the family and friends. I think their unconditional caring is something that I miss. It is also hard to find genuine and pure friendship in the US. For international students, people are either coming and leaving or are in different age/schedules etc. As for US students, it is just hard to befriend with them to a level that's close enough. I am not sure why but they are pretty hard to be good friends with." She explained further, I actually appreciate the fact that compared to US friendship; the friendships I built in the college in my country are more valuable and pure. People truly care more there and I feel that the independent culture here and racist/exclusive atmosphere is quite uncomfortable at times." Additionally, Marley explained "Being home. Home being a place where most day to day things like food, local media and people's expectations are familiar." Peggy agreed with some of the points above, she said she missed "The closeness (social interactions), the understanding, the food, the dust, the people." Likewise, Conrad also explained that he missed his family, best friends and favorite food- banku.

Some other aspects of cultural differences that participants mentioned are the mutual relationships between professors and students, accents/the language, and eating/bringing snacks to class.

Mutual Relationships between professors/ students. For example, Eloise talked about how she struggled to understand the mutual relationship between professors/students and people's accents she explained,

the first few classes that I had, I had difficulty coping with the way students relate with professors here you know; student telling professors "you get what I'm saying?" and one is sitting down and stretching the leg on the other chair, another one…you know the seating position, the carriage, the language you know; everything was so different for me and I'm like is that your professor you're relating with? But you know; with time, I got to understand that you know, here is more of mutual relationship like friendships are always encouraged among professors and students so that's that in school.

Language/ Accents. Eloise further elaborated on how she struggled with understanding the different American accents she recounted,

Yeah, I also struggled with you know; accents different accents for African Americans and White Americans and that's a big thing for me because I thought American speaks a single language and I was coming in with the hope of hearing the same the English language but it's so amazing when this person speaks and you can't even understand anything and another person speaks and it's totally different. That's another thing I had to struggle with. You know; coming here I've always seen myself as similar to African Americans but when I got in, the dynamics of race, class and gender in America is so

amazing that it's something that took me a whole year to actually understand and be able to deal with psychologically.

Bringing/ eating snacks. Marley also mentioned how he was amazed to find students bringing and eating snacks in class. He said, "You don't bring food to class where I come from. In the U.S., you can be munching away while the professor is teaching plus the professor himself came with his mug of coffee so everybody is having this environment of yeah…its relaxed, but you know let's learn. Those are things you don't do in my country."

Cultural differences are a broad term that has other branches that stems from it. As evidenced in the participants' statements, the variance in the cultural differences between their countries and the U.S. takes a while to adjust to because graduate international students' previous culture is something they have been used to for years. For this reason, it is hard for them to maintain a balance between both cultures.

Differences in Learning Environments

This was the second theme that emerged from the analysis of the survey and interviews. Under this theme, participants mentioned differences in the style of teaching, limited resources, weekly assignments, mode of assessments and the strengthening of their academic self-efficacy.

Teaching Styles. Marley explained the differences between the teaching style in Kenya and the U.S. he explained,

The Kenyan style compared to the American style. The Kenyan way of teaching is I think what is common in the British system where the teacher is the king, the teacher dictates everything that you read, the teacher, the test is…you're expected to reproduce what the teacher said. The American system on the other hand, my thinking, is that the teacher plays more of a guiding role where they tell you this is the way you should be going so

kind of they point the direction for you to go and encourage you to go the rest of the way without really dictating a lot of you know, what you need to do.…the Kenyan style is this is what I say, this is what you need to reproduce in the exam. There isn't much discussion, participation I think student participation is very, very high in the US. Emphasis I think is also laid on understanding principles and there's also emphasis on kind of what you'll find in the real world. If you look at the Kenyan style, it is how much you can put in your memory and how much you can get out of your memory so it's more of working from memory and that's what you'll find in Kenya you'll never find an open book exam. Why? Because you're supposed to be working from the memory.

Marcia agreed with Marley. She said,

…what's the difference here is that in the Philippines, there is not much interaction, it's not more student oriented and sometimes we just get to listen to the teacher and even if we don't interact or participate so it's like copy, listen and copy on what's written on the board. And yeah unlike here in America where they have also a lot of tutoring centers, there we don't. I don't know if there is. I didn't hear any. So we rely on what the teacher tell us, what the handouts are so we just listen, take notes and then study from there.

Furthermore, Queen recounted how she struggled when she was asked to critique texts to help her become a critical thinker. She elaborated "But in general, at least I remember when I first came to the US, it was a struggle to…to feel like well I can you know, I was supposed to challenge the author, how can I do that? Like this is supposed to be right so something so it's … a huge of mind set that like we were almost taught in the US….Like in China it's really rarely say like we should critique the authors but here's more like critiquing everything."

Limited Resources. Additionally, participants also talked about how the learning environment in their countries had limited resources. For example, Darcy said,

> It was more challenging studying at a university in my home country because we have limited resources and faculty members. Peer-reviewed research articles were not easily available for us to make reference to, and we didn't have the opportunity to present at academic conferences and publish in journals. Education in my country is more about the theoretical aspect with limited practical applications.

Similarly, Marcia said,

> Tough because there is not so much resources unlike here where books (online and in school), articles, high speed internet are available. And in my time, I don't get to use online that much. Because actually in the Philippines when I graduated my masters, it was like maybe 10 years ago so the online thing is not really that bloom or it's not popular yet so at that time we don't use online resources.

Likewise, Eloise explained "It was tasking but fun. Professors are small gods and students are expected to be at their best given the limited resources at their disposal. It's a game of survival but for those who survive in Nigerian educational system, they've passed the test of adaptation to any other academic environment."

Weekly Assignments/ Revision Week. Conrad gave an example of when he was shocked to find out that the new cultural learning environment gave weekly assignments and did not have revision the week before students were scheduled to have exams. He elaborated,

> Learning in a new environment and all kinds of things, learning the culture, the people, learning the environment, trying to cope with the winter and stuff like that have been really awesome. The only thing that I found very er…I don't know whether weird if I

should say or a little bit of a challenge is the fact that they don't have what we used to call revision week, like you finish your exams, you have one full week to revise your notes and then take your exams and even taking the exams at the college level, you'll be given…most of the time, you'll be given a minimum of two weeks to finish up your exams so you don't use just one week and then you'll be taking two, three papers a day. In my college, sometimes it happens, you could take two papers, two exams on a particular day but usually, your examinations are spread over. Take exams on Monday and maybe Tuesday, you'll have no paper, take it again on Wednesday and continue that way so it's more like a gradual system and then you have all the time to really prepare. Unlike BGSU, you finish your class on Friday and then the following Monday, you are taking exams and within that week, everyone is supposed to finish up the exams it's not that way in my country. We're not also used to numerous assignments. You'll be given assignments almost every week and you have something to do. In my country it's not like that, you have maybe you have two or three assignments throughout the whole semester and then you take a mid-term exam for most disciplines, only one mid-term so few take two mid-term exams and then your final exams. So your final exams, you have the revision week with your professor in class, and then the following week is the revision week on your own. You'll only meet with the professor if you have maybe further questions and stuff to ask. Otherwise, there will be no classes, there will be no teaching, there will be nothing.

Assessments. Differences in the mode of assessments are another sub-topic participants mentioned. Eloise remembered her experience when confronted with the differences in assessments between Nigeria and the United States she stated,

I would say that over there, exams are more difficult than they are here partly because there are limited resources and partly because the expectations are higher over there you know; because most of our professors were taught by early Europeans that went in to Nigeria so their expectations are still based on education in the 1960s so they put so much pressure on us and you know that encourage us to learn but with little outcomes but here it's so easy to get a 100 out of 100, in Nigeria, if you get 70 out of 100, you'll be dancing to your father's house.

Academic Self-Efficacy. According to the participants, differences in their learning environments were also able to help strengthen their academic self-efficacy. For example, Eloise said,

…that's one big leap for me you know; coming to the United States.…I didn't have access to a computer system until…towards the end of my first year in college and then my parents were able to buy me a desktop computer without internet facility so all I could do was just to type in the few times that we had electricity and then save on the disk and take it somewhere else to print which was pretty expensive so it was kind of struggles. I had to sleep over at the cybercafé you know; to surf the internet and get few materials and then the school wasn't you know buoyant enough to subscribe to so many of the online resources like I remember Jstor was one database that I really wanted to have access to because it's so rich in database but UI wasn't able to you know; subscribe with Jstor until I left college maybe now they are able to but it's really difficult you know; you know I remember there were times I slept over at the cyber café and you know one hour into the mid…after midnight, the electricity went off, the generator will misbehave and I'll just have to sleep there you know; with mosquito bites and everything so it made

learning really challenging but the good thing is surviving that kind of environment really

prepared us for the worst of the situation like I do say that any student that is able to get a

degree from Nigeria no matter the grade, can excel in any part of the globe, that is one

big thing because of what we've survived over there…

Likewise Marcia explained "…I can easily adapt. I'm a student who can easily adapt to the

environment and especially that I am a student who er…usually follows instructions and all, I'm

really er… a kind of student that's er…how do you call that…diligent so I study a lot and

so…and with the other help of the resources with the tutoring and all, I think I'm good…"

Additionally, Nimota said,

…writing is a new skill that I got in the United States. Like in my country, we don't

write. If we are writing, we will write just two paragraphs, yeah and we….I haven't

written in my life, all my life, like writing ten pages. This is my first step of writing but

now, I notice that when I want to do my homework, I start to write two to three pages

sometimes, before I cannot finish one page but now, you know, I just start going. I had

the writing phobia. I think it's difficult but we will practice, we'll get better. There's

nothing we can do. That's the big difference.

The participants were able to thrive and excel despite the learning conditions in their

previous cultural learning environment which was the mindset that they had when they came to

the United States to study. Although the participants had challenges when they came to the

United States to study, they were focused. As evidenced in their survey and interviews, studying

in the former cultural learning environment has contributed in influencing their academic self-

efficacy. Bandura (1986) suggested that having a strong sense of self-efficacy about one's ability

and competence will help individuals adjust emotionally. Going through these challenges in the

previous cultural learning environment helped them adapt to the style of teaching, the mode of assessments, utilizing resources, weekly assignments which in turn strengthened their academic self-efficacy.

Host Environment

The host environment is the third theme that emerged based on the participants' responses on the survey and interviews. Under this theme, sub-topics like diversity, handling acculturation, empathy/support emerged.

Diversity. According to participants, if the host environment embraces diversity, then it helps them transition better. For example, Eloise said,

> …although here students have limited exposure to international students so there are
>
> students that still look at you and be like yeah, why is your skin brown? But there are
>
> those that are really, really that appreciate the diversity and they are willing to learn from
>
> you, they want to know where you're from. They are always hoping to hear you out and
>
> to help in their limited ways.

Additionally, Nimota expressed "Ohio state have a good environment for international students because I found the community very acceptable for other cultures." Likewise, Elyssa explained, "BGSU has a warm and welcoming environment. My program is diverse, 50% of the program is made up of international students.

According to the participants, if the host environment is not open to diversity, then it makes transitioning difficult for them. Queen had a challenging experience she explained,

> I felt like the faculty at least a couple of faculty are pretty closed minded like they don't
>
> like diverse view points and so sometimes when you have different opinions, you started
>
> [*sic*] to feel like it's not a safe environment to share in class and people you can observe

that and see like others are so careful about what they say and just very closed off

environment.…like in different culture also in the US, some people are more open

minded and they welcome diversity, diverse challenge or perspective some are not…and

it's just so much pressure when in a program doesn't know how to appreciate culture.

They wouldn't say like oh! we really want to train a Chinese instead you do exactly the

same they expect you to be exactly the same as native speaker, doesn't value the part you

bring in as much the diverse part, then it make my life really difficult I think.

Similarly, Eloise stated,

It is challenging! Relating with the BGSU students who mostly have limited international

exposure, especially to black immigrants, is depressing. Few professors are cognizant of

the differences in their students' bodies but majority completely ignore the specific

challenges that international students confront and so offer inadequate or no support or

special consideration.

As evidenced in participants' responses, if the host environment encourages and embraces

diversity, it helps them feel included and they transition better.

Acculturation. The participants perceive that the host environment influences how they

handle acculturation issues. The participants mention various ways that they were able to deal

with acculturation. For instance, Conrad elaborated,

…the fact that in exams, students here don't want to take…spend too much time with

their examination papers. You give them 2 hour paper, 2 hour exams to take and they'll

finish it within 30 minutes. The first time I got that I was like wow! These guys are really

brilliant, they should be smart guys but after grading, I realized that no, it's not all. Some

are really smart but majority just won't spend them with their exams so that's also a

shock. One time I was even pleading with them not to finish on time because they were

not doing well and they never listen to me so now I'm used to it. So when I give it to

them in 30 minutes, if I give them 2 hour exams and they finish in 20 minutes, well I

don't care. At first, I will be like no, no, no, go over your work, revise it, go through it

before you submit it. But now, I don't care because I realized most of them are just like

that, they don't want to spend time with their exam.

Furthermore, Marley also said,

…one of the things that I do, if I can't change something, I avoid it. If I go outdoors and I

find that I don't like being in the outdoors then I'll not go outdoors. If I come to the US

and I find that the food tastes very different, I will try and keep off American food as

much as I can and especially the ones that I don't like. Yeah if I don't like maybe the way

people interact in gatherings and stuff like that, I'll avoid them. Avoidance was one of

my best coping mechanisms at those very initial stages so all the things that I was culture

shocked about, I tried to avoid exposure to those things as much as possible until I you

know, could learn. And I also found things that I liked or forced myself to like. I love

American football and some American sports so I hide behind those things to compensate

for you know the things that are not familiar." Additionally, Marcia stated the following,

I just actually miss home though I have my family I've been….I recall I've been crying

like a week and my husband was kind of laughing because he said "why do you have a

boyfriend left in the Philippines?" I said "no, I don't know why I just, I just feel

something, I just feel lonely you know?" But because they're with me my daughter and

my husband, I'm kind of okay but yeah…I feel kind of maybe just missing my sisters and

the environment where you can always see your neighbors, friends all over but here

there's no people that you can see here anywhere you know so I was kind of oh so lonely okay especially that was summer when we came so I said, that was my feeling I'm just…but after maybe a month or so and then those Filipinos supporting us also even from Toledo, they came to support us and help us with our needs so that was kind of okay. So in other words, we were….we have a family that like…we have a support group that helped us here so everything was okay.

Based on the above statements, the participants were able to hold on to their cultural identity (although they had to shed some aspects that were not useful in the new learning environment) and utilized aspects of American culture when they handled situations in the United States. According to Berry (1997), as he says, they were able to decide on a strategic way of acculturating in the United States.

Empathy/ Support. The host environment has to be able to support and empathize with graduate international students. The participants explain reasons why they perceive that is vital.

Eloise recounted how challenging it was studying and coping with adjustment based on her experience. She said,

…Having to travel miles to access traditional food stuff makes learning less enjoyable, let alone other special needs like access [*sic*] African salon, medications, and the likes. Initially, communication may prove somewhat difficult and having to repeat every first sentence demands special coping mechanism. BGSU also exposes internatinal [*sic*] students to mandatory fees like exorbitant health insurance fee, annual international students' fee and other payments that are not common in other institutions and this elevates the financial burdens of these students. Transportation is inadequate in BGSU and this affects international students more because while the majority do not get to

purchase cars in the course of their short stay in the school, the ones with cars go through

"hell" to get driving license, even if they were driving at home.

Professors (who are the closest to students) need to take international students into consideration when speaking in the class. For instance, Eloise said,

…I remember my first classroom experience, I was in the class for about 3 hours and I couldn't hear a single word from the professor, the professor spoke too fast for my likeness and it was so different. British English is really different from American English so I was just watching the professor and it was amazing that she actually gave them assignment that day but because I couldn't hear anything, I went home and the second class the following week or something she came into the class requesting for assignment and I'm like did you give us assignment and she said yes and I'm like I didn't hear you…

Also, according to participants, if the host environment has a supportive system in place, it helps them in transitioning. For example, Eloise said,

I appreciate the fact that I went to a different school before coming to Bowling Green State University. My former school is a place that I am always short of words to describe you know; what the school offered to me. It's a place I call home away from home. The supportive environment was there. All my professors really, really encouraged me you know; to continue in my educational career. Up till now, the three people on my thesis committee they still call me, they still encourage me, they send messages, they…it so amazing like they keep up with my studies with my grades my assignments any time I'm undergoing any difficulties, they are always willing to help you know; one of them went all the way to even provide me with a car to make learning in the US and living in the US more comfortable for me which I always appreciate. I mean it's been amazing.

Similarly, Nancy said, "like most U.S. professors, my professors in BGSU encouraged me to speak out, to have my own opinions. They are willing to listen to me on each word. My classmates are also super nice. All of these made things easier than I thought." Furthermore, Elyssa stated "The professors have been supportive and passionate about what they teach. It has been an enjoyable experience in BGSU." Marcia attested to this point, she wrote "Everything has been very nice, with regards to course resources are available and faculty are [*sic*] very helpful in our department."

Building from the statements above, according to the participants, having empathy, accepting diversity and providing an inclusive environment where they are not considered different because of the countries they come from helps them with adjustment in a new cultural learning environment.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to qualitatively examine graduate international students perceptions of the effects of studying in a different cultural environment. This chapter provided the results of the research coupled with participants' perception of the phenomenon. These participants are different in outlook, behavior, dressing and attitude and have been raised in different cultural settings and are used to those cultural environments. The tie that binds them together is that they are studying in the United States experiencing a new cultural learning environment. Although their experiences in this new environment vary, the participants' statements above reveal that they have similar perceptions on the effects of studying in a different cultural environment.

CHAPTER V: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

This study attempted to contribute to further research by interviewing, analyzing and combining graduate international students perceptions on the impacts of studying in a different cultural environment. The research question for this study was how do graduate international students perceive that studying in a different cultural environment impacts them? In the previous chapter, the data sources I utilized included interviews and survey transcripts. The combination of the data sources was used to answer the research question of this study enabled me to discuss the findings of the analyzed data. During the course of my data collection, I attempted to ask participants' questions that evolved around their experiences in both the previous and present cultural learning environment as evidenced in Appendix C. and D. As a result, I was able to gain a better understanding of their perceptions of the impacts of studying in a new cultural learning environment.
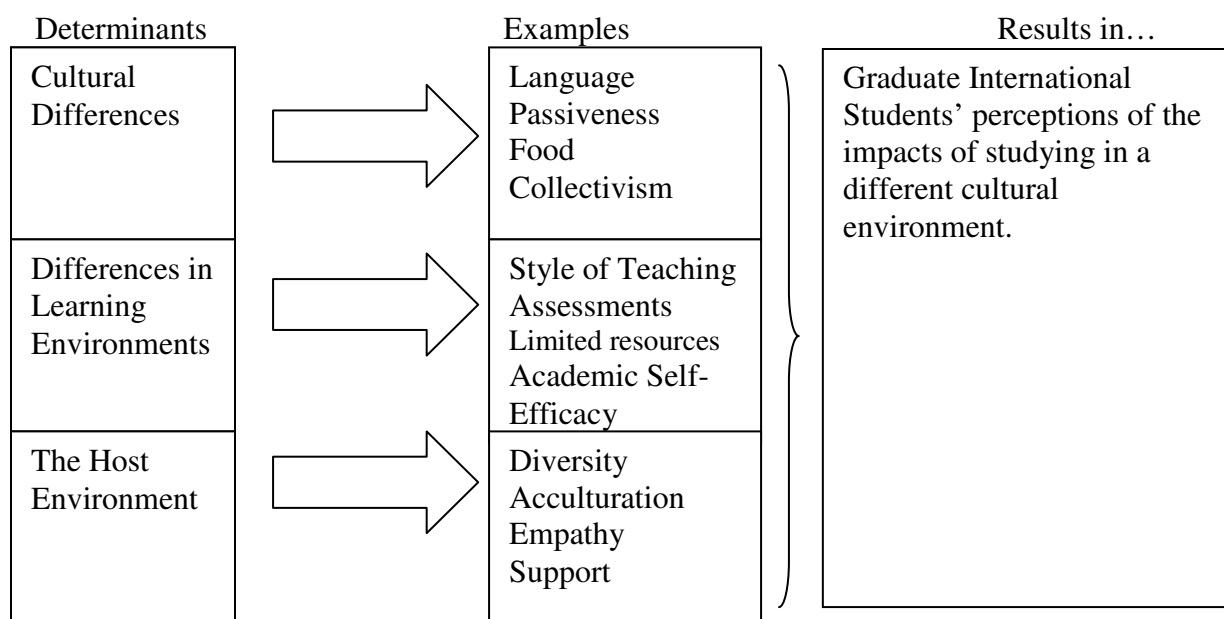
This research attempted to give more insights to the topic by providing answers to research question which in turn helps create awareness among the university community on the impacts of studying in a different cultural environment. In the same vein, this study provided suggestions on the basis of the information that was gathered to continue to help graduate international students be more comfortable studying in a different cultural environment.

The aim of this study was to provide a descriptive analysis of these perceptions based on the participants' experiences. The aim of this chapter was to summarize and discuss details of the results of the previous chapter. Additionally, conclusions of the study and recommendations for future research are provided.

Discussion of Findings

In chapter four, after I analyzed the data, I shared the findings. The image below showed the summary of the data analysis:

Figure 1. Impacts of Studying in a Different Cultural Environment

Determinants	Examples	Results in…
Cultural Differences	Language Passiveness Food Collectivism	Graduate International Students' perceptions of the impacts of studying in a different cultural environment.
Differences in Learning Environments	Style of Teaching Assessments Limited resources Academic Self-Efficacy	
The Host Environment	Diversity Acculturation Empathy Support	

The figure above showed the graduate international students' perceptions on the impacts of studying in a different cultural learning environment. During the data analysis, the three determinants (cultural differences, differences in learning environments and the host environment) were the major themes that emerged. The participants were able to provide descriptive examples of these determinants based on their experiences. The combination of the determinants and examples are what resulted in the perceptions that graduate international students have on the impacts of studying in a different cultural environment.

In the same vein, the findings and data analysis showed that the perceptions graduate international students have of the impacts of studying in a different cultural learning environment include that this experience contributes to strengthening their self-efficacy beliefs. They believe

this results from previous cultural learning environment experiences, cultural differences, differences in learning environments and the host environment. These determinants give reasons for the importance of having a supportive host environment, a sense of how graduate international students develop self-efficacy beliefs and handle acculturation/psychological issues. Berry (1997) suggested that acculturation has the tendency to influence change in an individual or a group of culturally different individuals (psychologically/culturally) based on intercultural contact. Likewise, previous research findings suggested that once international students adapt to the new demands and roles of the new culture, international students are likely to have better academic performance and better psychological stability (Pedersen, 1995). As evidenced in this study, the host environment partially determines how well graduate international students cope with acculturation challenges and adapt in a new cultural learning environment.

Another theme to be discussed as a result of the data analysis is the issue of diversity. Diversity is varied experiences based on different backgrounds like culture, language, environment, learning, teaching, etc and is inherent globally. Similarly, Chan (2004) expressed that higher education student population are transforming through global change and becoming more diverse. Chan (2004) elaborated that embracing cultural diversity and enhancing students' environment is essential to helping international students. In other words, if the host community is not open to diversity, then graduate international students will have challenges with transitioning in a new cultural learning environment. This was seen by Queen when she experienced an unsupportive environment and discovered that her department did not embrace diversity.

Cultural differences are another theme that was generated in this study's analysis which aligned with the previous review of literature. Being familiar with one culture for many years

and dealing with a different one for a few months/years is challenging and hard to adjust to. One of the major cultural differences that were evident in this study was participant's challenges with adjusting to individualism in the United States. Lee and Bradley (2002) suggested that, collectivism is a common cultural difference that international students deal with because a majority of international students come from collectivist societies where interpersonal harmony is highly valued, such that self-restraint and passivity are encouraged among members.

Another common example of the cultural differences that international students deal with is assertiveness. Assertiveness is the ability to express what an individual thinks and feels and is regarded as an important avenue for an individual to affirm his or her identity and succeed in the individualistic and competitive Western societies (Niikura, 1999; Lee & Bradley, 2000). As evidenced in the data analysis from this study, participants described the above mentioned cultural differences. For instance, Marley, Eloise and Marcia explained how their country's style of teaching is more teacher-centered than student-centered, hence not making them less assertive and passive in class (Abimbade, 1999). Other cultural differences that the participants mentioned include mutual relationships between professors and students, differences in assessments, attaching importance to academics, differences in language/accents, weekly assignments, no revision week before finals and bringing/eating snacks in class, which was never part of their former cultural learning environment. According to participants, they had a hard time learning to adjust to the cultural differences in both countries (Arthur, 2004; Myles & Cheng, 2003; Sumer, 2009). During the course of conducting this research and based on the results and statements above, I am convinced that according to Williams, (1958 p. xvi), "Culture, is a whole way of life".

Finally, the results of this study emphasize the role, development and importance of self-efficacy in graduate international students. The differences in both countries learning environments these students encountered have been able to help achieve this. In other words, their academic self-efficacy has been strengthened owing to experiences in their previous cultural learning environment. Self-efficacy as seen through the lens of Bandura's social cognitive theory emphasizes the role of observational learning, social experience, and reciprocal determinism in the development of personality (Bandura, 1986). Furthermore, existing literature showed that during the stressful adaptation to a different culture, self-efficacy plays a critical role as a personal resource that can protect against negative experiences and emotions, and health impairment (Jerusalem & Mittag, 1995). On the other hand, self-efficacy has emerged as an effective predictor of students' motivation and learning.

As mentioned in chapter two, there are different types of self-efficacy (academic and social). Academic self-efficacy refers to the individual's beliefs that they can successfully perform given academic tasks at designated levels (Schunk, 1991). It also refers to an individual's conviction that they can successfully achieve at a designated level on an academic task or attain a specific academic goal (Bandura, 1997; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002; Schunk & Pajares, 2002). Academic self-efficacy is grounded in self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977). Likewise, academic self-efficacy has been found to be sensitive to subtle changes in students' performance context, to interact with self-regulated learning processes, and to mediate students' academic achievement (Zimmerman, 2000). For example in this study, Eloise and Conrad explained the challenges that they had to face in their home countries and how those challenges have made them tough and assured them that they could survive in any cultural learning environment. This explanation confirmed what the review of literature in chapter two

said about students having a perceived academic self-efficacy. According to Schwarzer (1992), a

perceived self-efficacy reflects an optimistic self-belief. This positive self-belief can help an

individual perform new and challenging tasks and overcome hardships. Perceived self-efficacy

tends to assist an individual to facilitate goal-setting, effort investment, persistence in face of

barriers, recovery from setbacks and emotional adaptiveness (Schwazer, 1992; Poyrazli et al.,

2002). Building on the above quotes and the results of this research, it is evident that cultural

differences, empathy/diversity, having a supportive host environment and the importance of

academic self-efficacy, cannot be overemphasized because they are contributors in helping

graduate international students deal with transitioning in a new cultural environment.

Implications

There are various implications that have resulted during the course of this study. As

mentioned earlier, the results of this study emphasize the importance of having a supportive

learning environment that requires the community to embrace cultural diversity and show

empathy by understanding that graduate international students are struggling with cultural

differences, differences in learning environments, acculturation issues and psychological

adjustments.

Educators. Educators are the closest to these students, so it is essential that they show

empathy by trying to understand graduate international students and their backgrounds.

Educators cannot assume that graduate international students already understand the American

system and treat them the same way American students are treated from the first day of class.

Educators have to support graduate international students by allaying their fears about

coursework requirements. Educators should also encourage graduate international students by

giving them enough time to adjust and understand the new cultural environment.

In addition to the above statements, discussing cultural diversity issues, thinking of strategies to create an inclusive learning environment as an educator, helps international students feel at ease in a new cultural learning environment. For instance during a class activity, an educator can divide students into groups and ensure that American students are in these groups with graduate international students. By doing this, the students have the opportunity to learn more from one another which ushers in appreciation of diversity and encourages lasting friendships.

University Communities. International students' services in an educational community can help graduate international students by trying to organize inclusive programs that ease their transitioning on campus. Also, this department should try to create more awareness about international student groups that graduate international students can join. Most graduate international students do not even know that student groups exist on their campuses. This will help them meet other students and international students which in turn, will help them be comfortable and realize that they are not alone in the challenges they may be facing.

Personally. If I were in a future position that allows me to help international students, I would try to organize "a study/teach abroad buddy project" where I would connect American students (who plan to study/ teach abroad) to graduate international students from the countries where these American students plan to go. Utilizing this means will be beneficial to both students because they will be able to learn from each other about their cultures. Also, I will lay emphasis for graduate international students on the importance of asking questions especially when issues arise in a new cultural learning environment and they are not sure of how to handle them. The rationale behind this is because a lot of graduate international students come from societies where asking questions can be seen as a sign of not being knowledgeable. This cultural

difference makes a lot of graduate international students figure things out themselves in the familiar cultural learning environment, it helps them sometimes. However, based on personal experience, utilizing this method mostly fails in a new cultural learning environment. Finally, I have learned that the use of stories based on personal experience to motivate students is essential especially, when teaching international students. Hence, I would introduce them to other graduate international students (mentors) who have been successful in acquiring similar degrees so that they can encourage and motivate them.

Recommendations of Future Research

I will suggest that host environments should organize more supportive and inclusive programs that help international students transition in a new cultural learning environment like pairing them with an American "buddy" which could be a classmate. When these programs have been fully established, I would recommend that for future research, that these programs be reviewed to confirm if they are effective or not so that the host environment can seek ways of improving or re-organizing programs to assist international students. The host environment has to be able to seek ways to reach this important group on campuses because they are valuable assets and a lot can be learned from them based on their experiences and input.

I never realized the importance of self-efficacy beliefs until I started this study. I noticed that there has not been a lot of research done on the development of self-efficacy beliefs in international students. This is another topic that I would recommend that future research be conducted on because I believe that it will be beneficial in helping graduate international students and the education community (e.g. educators, counselors, psychologists) to understand them better. I would suggest a larger sampling size and that the research should review how international students develop self-efficacy beliefs and what factors help them in strengthening

their self-efficacy beliefs. Some of the research questions that should be considered are: How is self-efficacy developed in graduate international students? Do all graduate international students have self-efficacy at some level? Why do some graduate international students fare better than others in a new cultural learning environment? How can we help graduate international students who struggle with adjustment develop their own self-efficacy? The rationale for this is because graduate international students constantly wrestle with questioning their sense of self and their status as internationals in a different cultural environment. Hence, further research on this topic would help them redefine and reinforce their identities and help educators empathize with them better.

Summary

Imagine leaving everything you have ever known and going into an unfamiliar territory where everything seems different and you are struggling to grasp and understand how everything works. Based on the results of this study, this scenario depicts participants' perceptions of the effects of studying in a different cultural learning environment. The purpose of this research was to qualitatively analyze graduate international students perceptions of the effects of studying in a different cultural learning environment. The research question this study attempted to answer how graduate international students perceive studying in a different cultural environment affects them? The answers provided a window into the lived experiences of these students from 6 different countries and help us learn how to better serve them while learning in collaboration.

The qualitative research method used during the course of this study was phenomenology. The data sources that were used as part of data analysis included interviews and survey transcripts. This study had 11 survey participants. A small subset of 6 out of these 11 participants was selected for interviews based on the unique explanations they made in their

survey responses. The data (survey and interviews) was analyzed through the use of highlighted quotes to support established themes. Evidence to support each theme as discussed in this chapter illustrated graduate international students perceptions of the effects of studying in a new cultural learning environment.

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APPENDIX A.

Online Consent Form

BGSU®

BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY

School of Teaching and Learning

Online Consent Form

Dear Graduate International Student:

My name is Morayo Akinkugbe and I am a graduate international student at Bowling Green State University. I am guided in this research by Dr. John Fischer in the College of Education and Human Development at Bowling Green State University.

You are being invited to take part in a research study titled: The Effects of Studying in a Different Cultural Environment: Graduate International Students' Perceptions. You are being invited to participate in this research study because you are a graduate international student at Bowling Green State University.

The purpose of this study is to investigate how international graduate students perceive the affects of studying in a different cultural environment. The information gathered will help understand the ways in which a new cultural environment affects them. By doing this study, I am hoping to bring your voice to the center of the discourse to raise awareness among the university community on the importance of this group on campus. I am also hoping to be able to provide suggestions on the basis of the information that is gathered to continue to help graduate international students be more comfortable studying in a different cultural environment.

Participation in this research includes taking a 10 question demographic online survey which would last approximately 20 minutes. After completing the survey, a small subset of participants will be chosen to complete an interview. A request and consent letter will be sent at that time. If you agree to participate in a recorded interview to elaborate on aspects of the survey and other questions that will take approximately 30 minutes and follow-up interview questions will take approximately 10 minutes. A 10 minute member check discussion on research findings will also be conducted so as to get feedback from you. If you agree to participate, I will contact you by phone or email to schedule an interview, whichever way you prefer. You may withdraw from participation at any time.

The first step of this study is filling the online survey. Specifically, this survey will contain several demographic questions about yourself/ family, your home country, transitioning in the United States, your future plans and if you will be willing to participate in a recorded interview process. A check box has been placed below to secure your consent.

Your completion and submission of this survey electronically will serve as your consent to participate. E-mail correspondence is not 100% secure. However, your participation will remain as confidential as possible and no specific data related to your identity will be connected with your responses. Upon completion of the survey, please clear your internet browser and page history.

If you have any questions, you can contact me at 347-596-5891 or email me at amorayo@bgsu.edu. Dr. Fischer (my advisor) can be reached at 419-372-7342 or by email at jfisch@bgsu.edu. You may also contact the Human Subjects Review Board at Bowling Green State University at 419-372-7716 or hsrb@bgsu.edu if you have any questions or concerns about your rights in research studies.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not have any effect on your grades, academic standing or impact any relationship you may have with Bowling Green State University.

☐ Check this box, if you will be interested in participating in the interviews.

To access the survey, please click here.

APPENDIX B.

Interview Consent Form

BGSU

BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY

School of Teaching and Learning

Interview Consent Form

Dear Graduate International Student:

You are being invited to take part in a research study titled: The Effects of Studying in a Different Cultural Environment: Graduate International Students' Perceptions. You are being invited to participate in this research study because you are a graduate international student at Bowling Green State University.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not have any effect on your grades, academic standing or impact any relationship you may have with Bowling Green State University. Risks during this interview will be no greater than in daily life.

The purpose of this study is to investigate how international graduate students perceive the affects of studying in a different cultural environment. The information gathered will help understand the ways in which a new cultural environment affects them. By doing this study, I am hoping to bring your voice to the center of the discourse to raise awareness among the university community on the importance of this group on campus. I am also hoping to be able to provide suggestions on the basis of the information that is gathered to continue to help graduate international students be more comfortable studying in a different cultural environment.

The research will be done at Bowling Green State University. This study requests each participant, to partake in a 30 minute recorded interview to elaborate on questions of the survey completed earlier. A 10 minute follow-up interview will also occur and a follow-up member check discussion (feedback from participants on the study's findings) will be done lasting 10 minutes focused on research findings. Interview questions will ask participants to reflect on their past, present, and future experiences as students. I will contact you to schedule an interview at a mutually agreed upon location.

You are encouraged to ask questions now, and at any time during the study. You can reach me, Morayo Akinkugbe, at 347-596-5891 or email me at amorayo@bgsu.edu. Dr. Fischer (my advisor) can be reached at 419-372-7342 or by email at jfisch@bgsu.edu. You may withdraw from this project at any time.

CERTIFICATION

I have read and have been informed of this consent document. I have been informed of the purpose of the research project and what I will be asked to do. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and they have been answered satisfactorily. I have been informed that I may stop my participation in this research study at any time and that I can refuse to answer any question(s) that I would like. I have been informed that my name will not appear on the interviews; meetings; and that I will not be identified in reports on this research. Data will be stored in a locked cabinet in Morayo Akinkugbe's home, and no one but Ms. Akinkugbe will have access to this cabinet.   I have received a signed copy of this consent document for my personal reference. I hereby give my informed and free consent to be a participant in this study.

Signatures:

_____   _____
Date   Consent Signature of Participant
                            _____
                                      Print Name of Participant

\

APPENDIX C.

Demographic Survey Questions

Demographic Survey Questions

The demographic survey was intended to gain trust and gather background information from

participants.

1) Please enter your name and major

   First Name ……………

   Last Name …………….

   Major   …………….

2) Choose the response that applies to you

   ☐ Undergraduate

   ☐ Graduate Student

   ☐ PhD

3) What country were you born in?

4) How long have you been in the United States?

   ☐ 6 months or less

   ☐ Between 6 months and 1year

   ☐ 1 to 2 years

   ☐ Between 2 and 3 years

   ☐ Over 3 years

5) Which best describes your frequency of communication with your family?

   ☐ Daily

   ☐ 2-3 Times a Week

   ☐ Once a Month

   ☐ Less than Once a Month

☐ Never

6) What do you miss most about your country?

7) What was it like to study at a university in your country?

8) Why did you decide to study at BGSU?

9) What is it like studying in BGSU?

10) What will you do when you complete your degree?

APPENDIX D.

Interview Questions

Interview Questions

1) Tell me about your educational background. The schools you attended etc.

2) Can you describe the educational system in your country?

3) Describe the learning environment in your country.

4) How has studying in BGSU been so far?

5) Are there differences between your former learning environment and BGSU?

6) Are there similarities between your former learning environment and BGSU?

7) How would you describe your overall academic experience in the US so far?

8) Did you have any form of culture shock? How did you handle it?

APPENDIX E.

Member Check Questions

Follow-up Discussion on Research Findings (Member Check)

1) What are your thoughts on these research findings?

2) Do you agree with the research findings? If not, why?

3) Was there anything that you found fascinating about the findings?

4) Is there anything else you will like to add?

5) Do you have any final thoughts or reflections?