

**REALIZING THE SOCIO-CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC CHALLENGES THAT
INTERNATIONAL COLLEGE STUDENTS HAVE IN THEIR PROGRAM STUDY, AND
EVIDENCE THAT THEY CAN SUCCEED.**

By

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CERTIFICATION OF THESIS/PROJECT CAPSTONE WORK

We, the undersigned, certify that this project entitled REALIZING THE SOCIO-CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC CHALLENGES THAT INTERNATIONAL COLLEGE STUDENTS HAVE IN THEIR PROGRAM STUDY, AND EVIDENCE THAT THEY CAN SUCCEED by XIAOMENG LIU, Candidate for the Degree of Master of Arts in Language and Learning, Teaching English to Speaker of Other Languages (TESOL), is acceptable in form and content and demonstrates a satisfactory knowledge of the field covered by this project.


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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the number of international students studying in the United States has been rapidly increasing (Fass-Holmes & Vaughn, 2015; Kim, 2013; Lee, 2009; Martirosyan, Hwang, & Wanjohi, 2015; Seo & Ljungberg, 2005; Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015). Due to distinct linguistic and socio-cultural backgrounds in which this student group has, international students thus may encounter a lot of differences and challenges during their academic study in higher education in the United States. Furthermore, when they get involved with their different focus of academic study in terms of majors, disciplines, even different classroom settings, the challenges become more complex and unique for individuals. Therefore, there is a need for realization and illustration of these challenges. Today, there are a number of studies that have demonstrated the challenges that international students have. Very few studies, however, have focused specifically on the difficulties encountered in terms of disciplines, and majors, which could be more in depth for illustration. The goal of the study is to illustrate the challenges that international students have especially in consideration of the problems that might be encountered in different fields of study and to demonstrate the coping strategies to come to their needs. The participants of this study include international students from East Asian countries and professors from different departments in a comprehensive university in Western New York. An online survey, as well as individual interviews, were implemented to collect data from both international students and faculty. The result illustrated the significant challenges that international students have in two perspectives: language and socio-culture. Besides, practical and constructive coping strategies

were suggested and recommended by both international students and professors. This study may serve as a basis for future research in this focus of the area.

Keywords: international students, East Asian, sociocultural and linguistics challenges

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Introduction

In recent years, the number of international students studying in the United States has been rapidly increasing (Fass-Holmes & Vaughn, 2015; Kim, 2013; Lee, 2009; Martirosyan, Hwang, & Wanjohi, 2015; Seo & Ljungberg, 2005; Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015). American higher education has long been an educational beacon attracting international students worldwide (Zhang & Rentz, 1996). Seo and Ljungberg (2005) reported that Asian students have outnumbered European students, who had composed the majority of international students in the United States during the past decades. The fact that international students from East Asian countries coming to the United States to pursue a further study has brought American higher education and institutions values in various ways. For instance, these groups of students bring cultural and linguistic exchange, which have enriched the learning environment and have globalized faculty and students' perspectives. Therefore, the values of embracing these groups of students should be highlighted as well as the importance of understanding their challenges to come to their needs and to help them better perform academically. This research will examine the socio-cultural and linguistic challenges that international students have been encountering during their study at a university in Western New York.

Problem

International students go to the United States to pursue further and high-quality study while the endeavors towards academic success in an entirely different educational system are challenging. According to previous research studies, sociocultural and linguistic challenges compose the main problems in which international students from East Asia countries have. Many studies have indicated that English proficiency plays a crucial role in affecting their academic achievement (Carrasquillo & Lee, 2006; Dao, et al., 2007; Kim, 2013; Lee, 2009). For example,

students may challenge with limited academic English proficiency demanded in classroom participation, oral communication, writing, class lectures, specialized knowledge in different areas. International students also have problems in distinguishing accents, keeping up with the pace of the class, as well as language preference. Although international students need to reach a standard score by taking specific language tests such as TOEFL or IELTS to be able to enter college study, they still cannot meet academic English proficiency requirement at college levels. In addition to English proficiency, socio-cultural differences are identified as another factor that contributes to international students' potential for academic success (Carrasquillo & Lee, 2006; Dao et al., 2007; Kim, 2013; Lee, 2009; Martirosyan et al., 2015; Seo & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005; Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2002; Valdez, 2015; Wu et al., 2015; Xie, 2009; Yan & Berliner, 2010; Yasin & Belanger, 2015; Yamaguchi & Wiseman, 2003; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006; Zhang & Rentz, 1996). For example, students may encounter problems regarding cultural difference, which has a significant impact on students' performance, especially in classroom settings. Because of their previous cultures of learning, distinct classroom norms formed learning and teaching styles, and different values, students fail to succeed in communicating with peer students and professors. Social isolation might happen among peers as well as a misunderstanding perception among professors (Dao, et al., 2007; Seo & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005; Wu et al., 2015; Yan & Berliner, 2011). Moreover, part of the principal reasons that form severe differences between East Asian students and local American students is the uniqueness of cultures in these East Asia countries such as China and Korea. Thus, cultures of learning are taken into account in this study. Due to the increasing body of international students from East Asian countries in the higher educational system of the United States, this population cannot be neglected as a force contributing to the future of American higher education in a political,

economical, cultural, and educational perspective. However, the coping strategies utilized by international students were still not sufficient to help them solve various and unique challenges that they have. For example, international students found it hard to have effective communication with faculty because of language barriers and cultural differences. A lot of international students did not take many advantages of going to faculty's office hours. Also, students go to the learning center to fix their grammar issues in their writing assignment. However, they were not aware of their insufficient academic English proficiency not solely concerning grammar, and also, they were unable to find effective ways to improve their academic English proficiency. The linguistic and socio-cultural challenges were somehow overlapped especially regarding understanding classroom norms, classroom lectures, as well as effective communication.

Purpose

Because of the problems stated above, it is the responsibility as educators to address such problems within the student group and to provide them a path towards successful academic experience in the United States. Thus, the study aims to find out the socio-cultural and linguistic challenges international students have during their various programs of study and thus to help educators realize and work out solutions to help their international students cope with such challenges. This research will be implemented at a State University in a rural area located in Western New York. Data will be collected through surveys and interviews with students from different countries on campus from a variety of programs such as Music, Math, and Business Communication. Professors who work with international students will also be interviewed to illustrate the problems as well as possible strategies.

Based on the statement above, my research questions are:

(a) What are the socio-cultural and linguistic challenges that international college students encounter in their study at a Western New York University?

(b) How do these international students cope with these challenges?

Significance

The significance of this study is that it emphasizes not only on knowing international students' problems studying in the United States in a general perspective but also beyond the current level of understanding as a whole, that is, what unique problems they might have that vary in specific courses and different fields of study. Notably, in their program studies, they might face different and complex academic situations where they might not be able to previously prepared. Through interviewing international students, and professors who are dedicated to international education in various courses and programs, the unique challenges in which international students have were illustrated from both perspectives of international students and professors to work collectively out with practical solutions and effective strategies that could be implemented in this university. The future study will be beneficial in looking at what specific academic linguistic challenges that international students have in particular course studies and programs studies, and what specific socio-cultural challenges that international students have in particular classroom settings and individual students. With a more in-depth perspective of these difficulties, more practical coping strategies were demonstrated towards different aspects, course, and areas.

Literature Review

International Students in the United States

In recent years, the number of international students studying in the United States has been rapidly increasing (Fass-Holmes & Vaughn, 2015; Kim, 2013; Lee, 2009; Martirosyan, Hwang, & Wanjohi, 2015; Seo & Ljungberg, 2005; Wu, Garza & Guzman, 2015). Especially during the past decades, the number of this population has soared (Yan & Berliner, 2011; Seo & Ljungberg, 2005). It is because of the ongoing trend of globalization and internationalization of our world, and demands of global environments that drive people to chase for a further education and experiences overseas (Kim, 2013; Martirosyan et al., 2015; Wu et al., 2015). Zhang and Rentz (1996) mentioned that American higher education has long been an educational bacon attracting international students worldwide. During the early decades of the twenty first century, a goal of an American undergraduate or graduate degree motivated a great number of people to leave their home countries, families and friends. According to the latest statistics, the United States has continually become the destination for a large population of Asian international students' overseas studies (Yan & Berliner, 2011).

Among the whole population of international students in the United States, statistics have shown a result that Asian countries such as mainland China, India, South Korea and Taiwan have composed the majority of international student body in the United States (Seo & Ljungberg, 2005; Wu et al., 2015). Seo and Ljungberg (2005) reported that these Asian students have outnumbered European students, who had composed the majority of international students in the United States during the past decades.

These international students in the United States are from a shared East Asian background such as China, South Korea, and Japan (Wu et al., 2015). Furthermore, Wang and

Mallinckrodt (2006) mentioned that among the East Asian composition of international students, most of them come from a country with a Chinese cultural heritage. Among these East Asian students who attend higher education in the U.S., mainland Chinese international students constitute the largest population, sending the largest group of international students to the United States for further studies (Valdez, 2015; Yan & Berliner, 2011). After a long period of isolation and the Cultural Revolution, Chinese government aggressively promoted modernization by encouraging and sending Chinese scholars and professionals for technology exchanges during the 1970s. Nowadays, China has been representing the majority of international students studying in the United States (Yan & Berliner, 2011). The second majority of East Asian international students in the United States are Korean; approximately 47% of Korean students in the U.S. are currently studying in higher educations (Kim, 2013; Lee, 2009). According to Seo and Ljungberg (2005), Korean students go abroad to pursue higher education and because of the serious unemployment and a financial crisis during the past decades, studying abroad has become an ideal choice. Thus, even now Korea's economic crisis has gradually gone, the number of Koreans going abroad is continuously increasing (Seo & Ljungberg, 2005). Also, Japanese students comprise another significant portion of international students studying in the United States, representing the top largest group of the international students population during the academic years of 1997 and 1998 (Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2002).

The value of embracing this huge population of international students from East Asian countries has become significantly crucial. Researchers found that the United States benefits from welcoming international students to higher educations in terms of academic prestige, cultural exchange, as well as financial benefits (Wu et al., 2015; Yan & Berliner, 2011).

Academically, according to Wu, Garza and Guzman (2015), international students enhance the

whole levels of academic excellence of the colleges and universities they entered, since most East Asian students coming to the United States for a further study are well-prepared academically. In addition, coming from a distinct educational background, these international students may bring new divergent ways of thinking and stimulating academic competition.

Culturally, international students enrich the cultural diversity and ethnic experiences with their home cultures that are significantly distinct from the American culture, promoting mutual understanding and a diverse worldview among faculty and peer students. The American faculty and students will be able to develop their cultural experiences and sensitivities in working with people from different cultural backgrounds. Economically, representing the biggest population of international students in the world, they make a significant contribution to the U.S. economy (Wu et al., 2015; Yan & Berliner, 2011). Wu, Garza and Guzman (2015) also mentioned international relations investment as an economic benefit contributing to American higher educational systems. Furthermore, Yan and Berliner (2011) found that international students, especially Chinese students, are impacting the U.S. economy as a continuous resource and value of “intelligence.” Chinese-born scientists and engineers are part of the U.S. technical labor force. Evaluating the factors given above, it is worth developing an in-depth understanding of these students (Yan & Berliner, 2011). Overall, the current trend and existing population is the best bridge for future international students that will continue this contributory process (Wu et al., 2015).

However, there are still a lot of questions being asked and a lot of problems being unsolved in this field. Few studies analyze East Asian students’ real and unique needs, numerous focuses of studies are generally at levels of knowing that there are some differences there. Not all higher educational institutions are prepared to meet the special and unique needs of this student

body (Seo & Ljungberg, 2005; Yan & Berliner, 2011). Kim (2013) stated that there is a trend of substantial number of students who are L2 English speakers choosing to study in the MBA programs in the United States, thus to have a prevision that more business communication courses are specifically with these group of students, is becoming significantly important. Wu, Garza and Guzman (2015) stated that international students should be provided possible options and supports such as counseling to assist them in their new life and study in the United States. Valdez (2015) also mentioned the importance of co-national mentoring which contributes to the transition from cultural divergence to a well-being adjustment situation.

Factors Contributing to Academic Achievement

Previous research has examined the factors contributing to academic achievement of students studying in higher education. In general, the factors fall into several dimensions: academic, psychological, linguistic and socio-cultural (Martirosyam et al., 2015; Mckenzie & Schweitzer, 2001). All these factors have been extensively examined by previous research.

Academic challenges. Among academic factors, firstly, prior academic achievement (Martirosyam et al., 2015; Mckenzie & Schweitzer, 2001; Ren & Hagedorn, 2012) is examined to be one of the elements that affect students' current academic achievement. International students, especially those who come from East Asian countries, are formerly high achievers in their academic history (Seo & Ljungberg, 2005; Valdez, 2015). However, the difference of changing circumstances and different sets of academic expectations result in internal and external conflicts among international students (Seo & Ljungberg, 2005). Valdez (2015) also mentioned that this gap falls significantly in classroom experiences. Students who were previously academically advanced quickly learned in their home universities with non-limited language ability to perform in the context where they are accustomed to the home language, may

consequently encounter big conflicts when experiencing classes in the United States where the language and socio-cultural context, as well as class rules and lectures are extremely distinct.

The second factor refers to the learning skills and habits gradually formed during previous and current studies (Martirosyam et al., 2015; Ren & Hagedorn, 2012). According to Ren and Hagedorn (2012), there seems to be a positive correlation between academic success and attitudes towards learning and study strategies. Carrasquillo and Lee (2006) illustrated the major cultural influence in Korean educational system, teaching and learning style is deep-rooted in the idealized and hierarchical rules influenced by Confucianism. Seo and Ljungberg (2005) stated that there are large differences in learning styles which makes it more difficult for Korean students to get used to and reach all of the expectations, such as critical thinking, and classroom discussion participation. Shi (2011) and Xie (2009) indicated that Chinese students are accustomed to non-participation and the teacher-centered format in formal schooling back in China. For example, students are required to wait to be called on, to listen to the teacher attentively, and not to initiate questions or challenge teachers in the middle of the class. Thus, Chinese students are categorized as “auditory style” of cognitive learning style. Consequently, they benefit more in engaging with the content of the interaction non-verbally.

Thirdly, in American academic settings, international students may face a lot of differences in terms of learning strategies and approaches (Carrasquillo & Lee, 2006; Martirosyam et al, 2015; Wu et al, 2015). As Carrasquillo and Lee (2006) concluded, the learning styles that Korean students are accustomed to are “different” from those experienced by American students. For example, American students are characterized as practical, critical, and direct in a reasoning learning style. Teachers expect them to solve problems using logical thinking, and promote independent learning and individual responsibility. On the other hand,

Korean teachers adopt the opposite approaches which impact Korean students in ways of looking at a problem and solving them. In fact, Korean students expect teachers to know everything since they are the “authority”. In addition, according to Yan and Berlin, (2010) and Kim (2013), American higher education aims at developing considerable self-management and self-discipline.

However, in most Asian countries, students receive strict direction and rigorous discipline in formal educational experiences in their home countries. For example, a Chinese sociology student described that in American campus he was not clear about what one exactly needed to do, and did not know how to proceed step by step to achieve academic goals. While in China, everything was specified and rigorous discipline was usually prevalent. In addition, the advisor gave unclear answers like “it is up to you”, which made him feel overwhelmed and lost because there were a lot of choices. Especially in the first semester, he wandered around aimlessly without any goal or direction. In fact, in American educational system, strict adherence to discipline is depreciated and self-directedness is encouraged. However, international students are not able to precisely adjust and figure out the difference (Yan & Berliner, 2010). Furthermore, Lee (2009) reported the importance of acquiring oral academic discourses, arguing that it is not a simple process of acquiring knowledge and skills; instead, it is a conflictual process of negotiation. Thus, international students from East Asian countries may encounter challenges related to these new academic experiences such as student-centered format, classroom participation, and discussions and self-contributions.

Psychological problems. International students may have problems regarding psychological factors. According to Yan and Berliner (2010), the motivation of Chinese students coming to the United States for further studies includes gaining prestige, intrinsic-personal attraction, and getting into a system perceived as more fair. In both Chinese and Korean

students' perspectives, in order to succeed in career life and to achieve higher social status, education from western developed countries like the United States is the foundation (Carrasquillo & Lee, 2006; Martirosyan et al., 2015; Seo & Ljungberg, 2005; Valdez, 2015; Yan & Berliner, 2010). Thus, the perceived importance of education in families is significantly associated with international students' academic performance (Ren & Hagedorn, 2012). However, due to enormous differences between the eastern and western cultures, it is hard for international students from East Asian countries to socially integrate into colleges and universities (Martirosyan et al., 2015; Seo & Ljungberg, 2005; Shi, 2011; Valdez, 2015; Yan & Berliner, 2010).

Valdez's (2015) study of a Chinese female student's experience in American classroom showed that the participant felt invisible and ignored by American students because of her silence. Seo and Ljungberg (2005) concluded that East Asian students, including Korean students, expressed a feeling that host students often had little or no interest in their classmates who came from a distinct culture. Thus, social interactions with American people are limited (Seo & Ljungberg, 2005; Valdez, 2015; Yan & Berliner, 2010). Shi (2011) found that social distinctions are produced and reproduced through the dynamic use of language and symbolic power. The power relations play a crucial role in social interactions between the dominant group, which is the host culture, and the home culture presented by English language learners (ELL). International students may be consequently reduced to silence since they are unable to match the proficiency in the dominant group. Because of this social isolation (Seo & Ljungberg, 2005; Xu, 2006; Yan & Berliner, 2010), international students experienced more anxiety during their academic study (Shi, 2011; Wu et al., 2015; Yan, & Berliner, 2010; Zhang, 1996). Moreover, international students would develop even stronger ties to the same ethnic group of students and

homes for their emotion support (Martirosyam et al., 2015; Yan & Berliner, 2010; Seo & Ljungberg, 2005). Wu, Garza, and Guzman (2015) indicated that the support which families and the society provide for international students have an influence on their academic success.

Linguistic and socio-cultural factors. Overall, many studies have indicated that English proficiency plays a crucial role in affecting their academic achievement (Carrasquillo & Lee, 2006; Dao et al., 2007; Kim, 2013; Lee, 2009; Martirosyam et al., 2015; Ren & Hagedorn, 2012; Shi, 2011; Valdez, 2015; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006; Wu et al., 2015; Xie, 2009; Yan & Berliner, 2010). In addition to English proficiency, socio-cultural challenges are identified as factors that contribute to international students' potential for academic success (Carrasquillo & Lee, 2006; Dao et al., 2007; Kim, 2013; Lee, 2009; Martirosyam et al., 2015; Seo & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005; Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2002; Valdez, 2015; Wu et al., 2015; Xie, 2009; Yan & Berliner, 2010; Yasin & Belanger, 2015; Yamaguchi & Wiseman, 2003; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006; Zhang & Rentz, 1996).

Linguistic challenges faced by international students. Previous studies investigated the relationship between English language proficiency and academic performance among different groups of international students by the measurement of the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) standardized test scores (Fass-Holmes & Vaughn, 2015; Martirosyan et al., 2015). For example, in a study conducted in the State University of New York at Albany, a positive correlation between TOEFL scores and grade point averages (GPA) was proved statistically. Martirosyan, Hwang and Wnjohi (2015) also concluded that during the years between 1987 and 2009, TOEFL was utilized as a measure of English proficiency, and GPA result as measures for academic performance.

However, nowadays more and more studies have indicated the evidence that TOEFL scores were not a sufficient measurement for international students' English language proficiency as well as a good predictor for international students' academic success (Kim, 2013; Lee, 2009; Martirosyan et al., 2015; Ren & Hagedorn, 2012; Yan & Berliner, 2009). Fass-Holmes and Vaughn (2015) and Ren and Hagedorn (2012) concluded that even though these standardized scores were used as admission in universities in the United States, these scores still have insufficient power to precisely predict and guarantee international students' future academic outcomes. Yan and Berliner (2009) mentioned that English training Chinese international students received in China was designed for them to gain the scores of the standardized tests such as TOEFL, or GRE, which is widely required for admission to graduate programs in the United States. This type of training failed to adequately help international students meet the demands of programs and other academic matters in their future study, as well as social interaction.

Furthermore, for undergraduate students who did not meet the requirement of scores, in ESL classes, Fass-Holmes, and Vaughn (2015) indicated that passing TOEFL scores was about the same in predicting academic achievement as a passing grade before entering mainstream courses of study. Researchers also found one of the changes under consideration in universities was an increase in the minimum TOEFL scores as the requirement for admission to universities in the United States. Fass-Holmes, and Vaughn (2015) indicated the underlying presumption behind the change in TOEFL requirement is that international students with higher scores are assumed to be more likely to succeed academically and have little struggle with English. An implied result is the rejection of some potential applicants who would actually succeed academically in the United States.

Except for the requirement of admission, researchers also found that TOEFL scores cannot measure other factors contributing to English ability. For example, adequate scores cannot measure international students' ability to organize and share ideas, understand lectures, take notes, read academic literature, and understand informal language in dynamic classroom situations in the United States (Kim, 2013; Ren & Hagedorn 2012; Lee, 2009). In addition, Lee (2009) also examined the relationship between TOEFL scores and their self-perceptions of discussion participation. Result showed international students' lack of language proficiency was the main factor which influenced their reticence in class, while the TOEFL scores could not measure that. Consequently, those important factors in terms of international students' perceived actual academic difficulty cannot be measured by TOEFL scores (Martirosyan et al., 2015; Ren & Hagedorn, 2012). Based on the problems revealed by research, Martirosyan, Hwang and Wnjohi (2015) further concluded that self-perceived English proficiency was a predictor for academic difficulty among international students. Therefore, there should be more investigations to explore other constructs in measuring English proficiency, as well as other important variables which might influence students' academic achievement in the United States (Martirosyan et al., 2015).

Studies have significantly proved that linguistic challenges faced by international students are considered one of the greatest factors in determining their academic success. These linguistic challenges are identified and described as "language barrier" (Dao et al., 2007; Seo & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005; Wu et al., 2015; Yan & Berliner, 2011), "language difficulty" (Dao et al., 2007; Wu et al., 2015), "lack of language ability" (Lee, 2009; Xie, 2009), and "limited language proficiency" (Martirosyan et al, 2015; Seo & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005; Xie, 2009; Yan & Berliner, 2011). Limited English proficiency could lead to low self-esteem (Seo & Koro-Ljungberg,

2005), miscommunication (Dao et al., 2007), isolation (Dao et al, 2007; Seo & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005; Wu et al., 2015; Yan & Berliner, 2011), foreign language learning anxiety (Lee, 2009; Wu et al., 2015) and a fear of using English in everyday life (Seo & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005), or even lead to international students being at risk of departing from the United States without gaining the degrees (Martirosyan et al., 2015). Many studies showed that international students consider English as a challenge even though they have studied English for several years as well as gained high academic achievement in their home countries (Wu et al., 2015; Seo & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005). For example, Yan and Berliner (2011) indicated that for Chinese students, limited English proficiency is the greatest barrier during their adjustment of academic process. The reason of it is that Chinese students are used to non-participation, teacher-center format of class instruction, and a lack of opportunity to use English for communicative purposes (Xie, 2009).

Linguistic difficulties which international students have are from various aspects such as accents (Wu et al., 2015), rate of speech (Wu et al., 2015), and pronunciation (Carrasquillo & Lee, 2007; Seo & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005; Wu et al., 2015). In classroom settings or in social life, international students are perceived to have poor oral communication (Carrasquillo & Lee, 2006; Kim 2013; Lee, 2009; Shi, 2011; Seo & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005). Carrasquillo and Lee (2006) concluded the result of interviews with professors that they did not seem to be bothered by Korean international students' problems of pronunciation. Instead, they were concerned about their lack of oral interaction and communication. As a result, this lack of mastery in English hinders international students' classroom achievement.

Lee (2009) stated that acquiring oral academic discourse is not a simple procedure as acquiring knowledge and skills. It is a complex and conflictual process of negotiations. Researchers also found the great difference between U.S. classroom practices and the ones in

international students' home countries, that discussions and communications are dominants of the class most of the time. (Lee, 2009; Kim, 2013; Ren & Hagedorn, 2012; Shi, 2011; Seo & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005; Valdez, 2015; Wu et al., 2015). Carrasquillo and Lee (2006) showed that most professors in the survey expressed that Asian students were inactive in their classroom discussions. For example, Korean students were most likely to be passive and inactive most of the time in class (Carrasquillo & Lee, 2006; Seo & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005). International students often perceived themselves as having negative English proficiency in participating in fast-paced and interactive class in the United States, even though they were well-prepared for the discussions by reading materials before class, and even though they understand the topics and questions that were being discussed (Lee, 2009). Valdez (2015) in her study concluded a case study of a Chinese female student about her feelings in group discussions in class. The participant felt ignored and isolated, and eventually she felt frustrated and negative in group discussions. Lee (2009) concluded one of the reasons was their perceived need to translate immediately back and forth between English and Korean or other home languages of international students.

The researchers also drew a conclusion that international students have inability to ask questions in English, especially negative ones. Due to limited English proficiency, as well as Asian students' shyness and passivity, international students are consequently hesitant to have public speaking (Seo & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005). Shi (2001) mentioned that because of the inadequate L2 communicative skills, international students label themselves as "incompetent", which means that they do not feel confident to be able to achieve the proficiency in the target language, and they consequently reduce to silence.

Some unique difficulties in relation to limited English proficiency faced by international students include difficulties understanding class lectures (Carrasquillo & Lee, 2006; Dao et al., 2007; Seo & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005), inability to understand idioms and American expressions (Seo & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005), and language preference (Carrasquillo & Lee, 2006).

Carrasquillo and Lee (2006) illustrated the perspectives of both professors and students.

Professors indicated that because of the linguistic and cultural differences, Korean students often do not completely understand the class lecture. Many Korean students also reported having difficulties in understanding idioms and culture-based expressions. In fact, spoken English is very cultural and regional, which could be reflected in aspects such as pronunciation and expressions (Seo & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005). From perceptions of the professors, Carrasquillo, and Lee (2006) also mentioned international students' tendency to group with co-national students and they speak in their home language during discussions instead of English.

Kim (2013), Lee (2009), and Ren and Hagedorn (2012) also mentioned the importance of the awareness of language skills requirements which vary in different programs and across disciplines. Ren and Hagedorn (2012) indicated that a stronger relationship was proved between academic performance and language skills for students who study in programs including humanities, fine arts, social sciences than natural science, math and business. Kim (2013) stated that for MBA students, their oral speaking skills are extremely important in most of their communication classes.

For international students, it is difficult to engage successfully in communications with American teachers and students due to language and cultural deficiencies (Yan & Berliner, 2010). The communication between students and professors is identified as very important to international students (Valdez, 2015; Yan & Berliner, 2010). Wu, Garza and Guzman (2015)

noted that international students expressed the importance of recognition for them since they are eager to have more accommodation from professors as well as classmates. Although international students achieved good academic knowledge and expertise in their home countries, they have difficulties in expressing, describing, and claiming in a clear and confident way when they talk to peers and instructors (Seo & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005; Wu et al., 2015). Wu, Garza and Guzman (2015) claimed that international students used “nice”, “professional”, and “approachable” to describe their professors. However, they noted some difficulties in communicating with them due to language barrier, which happen mostly in classroom. On the other hand, international students were also perceived negatively (Wu et al., 2015). The findings revealed that professors were not empathetic due to international student’s limited English proficiency. They would exclude international students from classroom activities by not asking them questions (Valdez, 2015). Professors sometimes questioned and criticized international students’ ability and for not taking responsibility of themselves. Moreover, a low English proficiency will lead to a negative perception of professors that these international students were not well-prepared (Wu et al., 2015).

Most of the studies showed that among peers, international students were perceived negatively (Dao et al., 2007; Seo & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005; Valdez, 2015; Wu et al., 2015; Yan & Berliner, 2010). The negative perception resulted mostly from problematic teamwork. For example, business students claimed that their teamwork was marked off with points because Chinese students did not have eye contact when they were giving public speaking in front of the class (Valdez, 2015). This misunderstanding made international students feel guilty because of their limited English language proficiency (Carrasquillo & Lee, 2006; Dao et al., 2007). They consequently failed to build up intercultural relationships with fellow American peers and tended

to retreat back to their own circles with co-national students (Dao et al., 2007; Yan & Berliner, 2010).

Socio-cultural challenges faced by international students. Coming from different cultural backgrounds, international students may face challenges which affect their academic expectations and perceptions of academic experience (Kim, 2013; Lee, 2009; Wu et al., 2015; Yasin & Belanger, 2015). Some studies discussed how important it is to give specific attention since their unique cultural values and heritage are considered special factors which may affect their academic achievement as well as everyday life (Carrasquillo & Lee, 2006; Kim, 2013; Seo & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005; Shi, 2011; Xie, 2009; Yan & Berliner, 2010; Zhang & Rentz, 1996). Xie (2009) concluded this field of study as “cultures of learning.” For example, Kim (2013) in her study showed the importance of valuing Korean socio-cultural values. Unlike the United States, Korea is single nation country (Seo & Koro-Ljungberg (2005). The Korean society has been developing its values and philosophy on the basis of Buddhism (i.e., mercy, salvation, and samsara) (Seo & Koro-Ljungberg (2005) and Confucianism (i.e. fidelity, loyalty, and authority) (Carrasquillo & Lee, 2006; Kim, 2013; Seo & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005). It was even proved that Korea was more influenced by Confucianism than Confucius origin, which is China. Confucianism remains in the modern society of Korea and has been characterized and defined as “Korean Confucianism” (Carrasquillo & Lee, 2006). In Korean society, class status is based on educational achievement, political position, economic power, and reputations in social activities (Carrasquillo & Lee, 2006; Kim, 2013; Seo & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005). Speaking of Chinese culture, researchers have defined Chinese cultures of learning as the central concern (Shi, 2011; Xie, 2009; Yan & Berliner, 2010). Likewise, Confucianism is deep-rooted in Chinese society. Values of modesty, collectivism, and face-saving strategy are some of the social rules (Shi, 2011;

Xie, 2009; Yan & Berliner, 2010). Like Korean society, influenced by Confucianism, scholars are considered to hold a high privilege and social status in the society, as well as people who work in political party and central government (Yan & Berliner, 2010). An academic achievement brings a feeling of self-esteem, and self-worth (Shi, 2011; Yan & Berliner, 2010). Therefore, socio-cultural challenge for international students in the United States is unavoidable (Yan & Berliner, 2010). Historically speaking, China is isolated from the outside world due to its unique socio-historical and socio-political reasons, so Chinese students may not have acquired much knowledge about the Western world in the old times before China opened up the boundary and became immersed internationally (Shi, 2011). Yan and Berliner (2010), concluded that international students who come from a Third-world country and/or Eastern country, students who come from a non-Western culture, suffered more stress in adjusting and living in the United States. Moreover, researchers proved that China has been identified as a maximum of cultural distance to Western culture. As a result, Chinese students may experience much more socio-cultural anxiety and frustration than students from other countries (Shi, 2011; Xie, 2009; Yan & Berliner, 2010).

Consequently, a large number of studies indicated that socio-cultural challenges of international students play a crucial role in their academic success (Lee, 2009; Shi, 2011; Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2002; Valdez, 2015; Yan & Berliner, 2010; Yasin & Belanger, 2015). Moreover, Lee (2009) explained that classroom participation is a complex issue influenced by various factors in terms of linguistic, sociocultural, cognitive, pedagogical, as well as affective aspects. Importantly, one of the most critical factors affecting international students' classroom performance was not regarding their language ability, but their socio-cultural differences.

Lee (2009) and Shi (2011) in their studies showed that there is great difference between Korean and U.S. classroom norms. Carrasquillo and Lee (2006) illustrated that the differences of classroom behaviors were affected by teaching and learning styles. When referring to teaching and learning styles, China and Korea are highly based on hierarchical rules, which affects the classroom behaviors directly (Carrasquillo & Lee, 2006; Kim, 2013). For example, the social rule of “respect”, called “Gun SA Bu IL Che” in Korean language, namely “King, teacher, and father are one body”, best illustrates the role of authority, played by educators and teachers in the society (Carrasquillo & Lee, 2006). The silence of Korean students is the social rule for showing respect to the teachers. Thus, when they encounter different situations in the U.S. classrooms, students, influenced by Confucian principles, would be accustomed to receiving the content passively (Kim, 2013; Carrasquillo & Lee, 2006). According to Kim (2013), discussions tend to be more functional and be expected with correct results and answers, rather than being fostered and extended to other topics. According to Carrasquillo and Lee (2006), open-ended discussions or other exploratory practices and learning tend to be bewildering for Korean students. Students are required to listen to the teacher intensively and take notes. The role of teachers is being knowledgeable than peers, and they are responsible for explaining all details and giving all the right answers (Carrasquillo & Lee, 2006; Kim, 2013; Lee, 2009; Shi, 2011; Valdez, 2015; Xie, 2009). Students ought to accept all instructions given by the instructors without any criticism (Seo & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005). Valdez (2015) concluded in her study on the differences of classroom experiences described by a participant, that teaching style in the United States is more discussion-based, while in China it is more like spoon-feeding. On the other hand, in American classrooms, students like to raise questions, which is perceived as unacceptable in their home countries. Shi (2011) found that unequal cultural competence exists in culturally incongruent

classrooms, where practices tend to prevent minority students from engaging effectively in teacher-planned activities. There are even more differences in terms of classroom norms that to some extent all cause the socio-cultural difference that blocks these students from getting used to the American classroom norms. For example, the large class sizes in most East Asian countries are too large to manage discussions that everyone gets a chance to talk in a class period. Furthermore, Lee (2009) and Ren and Hagedorn (2012) also stated one reason that American students and teachers assume international students know well about the American classroom practice and behaviors, which are related to a number of participation practices and discussion distribution. Consequently, cultural misunderstandings, frustration and isolations may occur and put international students' academic achievement at risk (Carrasquillo & Lee, 2006; Shi, 2011; Wu et al., 2015).

A great socio-cultural difference between Western and Eastern countries reflects in communicative styles. Ren, and Hagedorn (2012) and Shi (2011) stated that Chinese students' interaction styles tend to be deeply rooted in their ideological origins and cultural values, which reflects significant differences of the communicative norms when it is situated in American ethnolinguistic backgrounds and socio-cultural contexts. In Chinese language arts, there is a valuable saying called "Silence is golden", which reflects in many situations like in the classrooms where students tend to use a more indirect conversational style accompanied with silences, longer pauses, thus to avoid embarrassment or discomfort (Shi, 2011). Seo and Koro-Ljungberg (2005) mentioned the concept of "Chaemyon", representing the uniqueness of Korean cultural features. "Chaemyon" plays a crucial role in influencing Korean discourse practices. For example, in the classroom, the students remain quiet while other people talk. Even when they have different opinion, it is uncommon to negotiate. Researchers also explained that it is

important for international students to be able to understand and learn American body language, such as eye contact (Carrasquillo & Lee, 2006; Valdez, 2015). Carrasquillo and Lee (2006) indicated that the absence of eye contact during a conversation with Korean students caused frustration. On the other hand, in Asian culture, students tend to look down or aside so as to show respect.

Comparing to host national peers, however, international students experience difficulties not only in terms of every day classroom practices but also the structure of whole educational system (Carrasquillo & Lee, 2006; Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2002). As Carrasquillo and Lee (2007) concluded, there are significant differences between educational systems in Korea and the United States. Korean educational system stemmed from Confucianism while the American educational system was based on European tradition. Valuing the prestige of Confucianism, academic achievement is without a doubt one of the most important life goals and indicators of one's abilities and values (Seo & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005). For example, "Kwa-go" is the old state examination, which is used as the criterion for people who wanted to gain higher positions as official scholars in a particular professional field (Carrasquillo & Lee, 2006; Seo & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005). In addition, Korean people believe that successful life achievement is based on education, which should be developed in a linear manner, that is to say, age is defined as one important element for life decisions (Seo & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005). This belief is based on self-cultivation and hierarchical system in Confucianism, according to the researchers. American people's overall value of openness and individualism is mostly not accepted by Asian culture, since Asian people emphasize collectiveness and criticize self-centered behavior (Yan & Berliner, 2010; Yum, 1988).

Double consciousness was being discussed by several studies. (Lee, 2009; Valdez, 2015) Face-saving strategy is mentioned as one of the most important communicative norms in Chinese culture (Shi, 2011; Xie, 2009). According to the researchers, face is conceptualized in Chinese culture as the confidence of the society and the integrity of an individual's moral quality. Saving face is of importance in cultural and social life in China. In classroom settings, Chinese students protect their faces by remaining silence and refraining from speaking up when they do not agree with the identical options. Seo and Koro-Ljungberg (2005) mentioned the concept of "Chaemyon", representing the uniqueness of Korean cultural features. According to them, "Chaemyon" refers to face-saving strategy with respect to one's status. Valdez (2015) explained while the majority of international students preferred American education format over the ones back in their home countries such as China, their perceptions about the way American faculty and peers perceived them were conflicting. Kao and Gansneder (1995) reported some problems that participants have regarding double consciousness and indirect thinking such as "worrying my questions too shallow", or "worrying my comments/thoughts not important."

In addition, students' perceptions about sharing knowledge and examples from their home countries like China in the U.S. classrooms were also discussed. Valdez (2015) explained that half of the participants have had such experience in class, while most of them said it was either during a class with international focus or when the professor had experience related to their culture. Moreover, international students' lack of the knowledge of host culture may also cause them not to be able to engage in host students' conversations (Shi, 2011). Those given concerns were identified as negative culturally insensitive factors (Valdez, 2015). An example illustrated by Valdez (2005) was that a student experienced awkwardness when playing a game "Who Am I?" as the student had to figure out the name of the celebrity by asking questions.

Carrasquillo and Lee (2006) indicated that Korean students are more likely to identify the specific facts instead of asking questions directly. They are unable to be pragmatic, critical and direct, which is highly encouraged in American classroom. Seo and Koro-Ljungberg (2005) noted that Asian students reflected in the interviews that American students often had little interests in them who came from another culture. American students' lack of Asian culture knowledge to some extent had made international students feel responsible for the American students' negative perceptions (Valdez, 2015). For example, an American student said that Chinese students did not know the right time to cut people off and to jump in. Many international students reported experiencing prejudice and discrimination by American students (Wu et al., 2015).

Effective communication could also be challenging when there are not mutual understanding through socio-cultural perspectives. Because of the different relationship between professors and students, as well as the differences in different educational systems and norms, Yan and Berliner (2010) stated that Chinese students considered their advisors as the determiners of their future study and career. Moreover, a lot of international students were unsure about the norms of the relationship between students and professors when studying in the United States (Yan & Berliner, 2010). In their home countries, hierarchical system is strictly embedded in every aspect of society (Seo & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005). From perspective of professors, international students especially from East Asian countries are mostly "hardworking", which is what they see as the value of these students in American universities. Such perspectives somehow formed some assumptions towards international students from East Asian countries, some professors think that they are supposed to be good enough academically but ignored the differences they might have.

Coping With Socio-cultural and Linguistic Challenges

Numerous research related to international students' adjustment in the United States has been conducted (Dao et al., 2007; Martirosyam et al., 2015; Özturgut & Murphy, 2009; Seo & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005; Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2002; Valdez, 2015; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006; Wu et al., 2015; Yamaguchi & Wiseman, 2003; Yasin & Belanger, 2015; Zhang & Rentz, 1996). Seo and Koro-Ljungberg (2005) noted that Asian students are the group which in particular have been seriously struggling with the adjustment. It is because of the great differences between Eastern world and Western world, which reflects in fundamental differences of cultural values.

Numerous studies have showed that there is a lack of support for international students in either academic learning or social assistance (Dao et al., 2007; Martirosyam, et al., 2015; Özturgut & Murphy, 2009; Ren & Hagedorn, 2012; Seo & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005; Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2002; Wu et al., 2015; Yan & Berliner, 2010). For example, Wu, Garza and Guzman (2015) concluded that international students lack support in their academic learning, which results in more misunderstanding and stereotypes of international students. Özturgut and Murphy (2009) emphasized the role of personnel who are involved in international programs. The disconnect between the literature and reality reflects in a number of aspects, including the recruitment of institution of international programs or services, misunderstanding of faculty, the responsibility of educators, and international students themselves.

Utilization of school resources. Yasin and Belanger (2015) stated that universities play a major role in helping international students deal with academic challenges, social isolation, and cultural adjustment. According to Özturgut, and Murphy (2009), most institutions with international programs are studying research and are using it to guide practice. While in reality,

the “good things” they are doing are to establish and develop things such as “international nights” or to help international students with homework. However, this does not address the root of the problem expressed in the research. Yasin, and Belanger (2015) claimed that service providers ought to be more aligned with the expectations of international students for provisions of services, and highlight their real needs and draw on good practices to promote their levels of satisfaction. A lot of research mentioned the importance of building up the resources for international students to efficiently utilize. Özturgut, and Murphy (2009) mentioned that the real need of international students is not understanding cultural differences but is in application of what we already know. The university’s international student service center is the department that closely works with international students on campus (Ren & Hagedorn, 2012). According to Wu et al. (2015), school services are needed in international student’s academic adaption to U.S. higher education. Ren, and Hagedorn (2012) mentioned orientations and sessions for international students not only among undergraduate levels but also among graduate and doctoral students. Wu et al. (2015) recommended writing center, counseling center, recreation, and various student organizations and associations. Yasin, and Belanger (2015) mentioned that importance of university support on the psychological well-being of international students. What needs to pay attention is the Campus Counseling Service as an effective service provided for international students who may have much pressure due to different and complex reasons, but the reality is that few international students knew how helpful it would be by receiving assistance from Campus Counseling Service. For instance, Wu et al. (2015) mentioned that only one participant mentioned about receiving counseling service. She made several appointments with the consultant to talk about her feelings and challenges; the consultant provided her guidance and help to make her better adjust. Jin (2012) also mentioned that universities have the obligation to

determine the best ways to improve the quality of the student-support systems especially the counseling center in order to reduce international students' stress and psychological problems.

Social networking support. Several studies talked about some positive outcome from international students who used techniques to enhance their social networks as well as self-satisfaction (Özturgut, & Murphy, 2009; Park, Song, & Lee, 2014; Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2002). Özturgut, and Murphy (2009) mentioned the needs of developing faculty and staff, resource facilities, and student service offer mentoring opportunities for Asian students to help them better utilize existing social support networks. Likewise, Park, Song, and Lee (2014) indicated that students who use the social networking such as social networking site (SNS) and Facebook demonstrated a lower level of acculturative stress but a higher degree of psychological well-being compared to those who do not use it. With growing use and significance of interpersonal media, recent research has revealed that the role of interpersonal media affecting acculturation is huge. Moreover, interpersonal media use such as emailing and chatting is proved to affect international students' psychological, socio-cultural, and academic adaptations (Park et al. 2014). To draw a conclusion, in order to better understand international students' process of acculturation patterns, which is important since it directly affects their academic performance in the end, interpersonal media use should be taken into account. It is more notable that in particular for students from South Korea and China in U.S. higher education study, more use of such interpersonal media like Facebook is more likely to enhance the chance to be exposed to the host culture and to be able to communicate with host peers (Park et al. 2014). In addition to that, Suryani, Wadi, Rohazna, and Azim Zaleha (2014) emphasized developing the university websites for the readership of potential international students.

Extracurricular activities engagement. Toyokawa and Toyokawa (2002) made a contribution to the association between the engagement in extracurricular activities and students' adjustment levels among Japanese students. The study revealed several benefits gained by Japanese international students who have been engaging in extracurricular activities. Engagement in extracurricular activities help international students broaden their interests and views to the exposure of host culture; become more motivated to take courses and to gain knowledge and skills to be able to use in the classrooms; and enhance their social skills and social networking with more people from host culture (Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2002; Wu et al.,2015). Moreover, according to Toyokawa and Toyokawa (2002), international students are more likely to perceive benefits in participating in activities and taking courses if their personal interests and the content of the courses are matched. In addition, Wu et al. (2015) also noted that international students who feel at home, who are well-connected to American peers and faculty, and who take part in extracurricular activities are more likely to have a higher level of satisfaction and be able to succeed in academic study. According to Toyokawa and Toyokawa (2002), because of a different socio-cultural value of international students, international students from East Asia countries tend to emphasize more on academic goals. However, they also have non-academic goals and motivations such as the interests in making new friends from home culture and exploring new culture. Thus, through extracurricular activities such as cultural events and dinners with classmates, students gain more social skills. Özturgut, and Murphy (2009), and Wu et al. (2015) further recommended that it is beneficial for international students to engage in student association not only in their own culture, but of other cultures as well. It could facilitate the development of their social support networks and social competence.

Student organizations/ co-national mentoring. Some studies indicated that participating in some student organizations especially, those co-national student groups, help international students solve their psychological problems. For example, Valdez (2015) demonstrated the importance of co-national support as a main source of mentoring and cross-cultural reference. Yasin, and Belanger (2015) proved that support from co-national friends are showed to play a significant role in psychological adjustment and levels of satisfaction. Although it is important for international students to get involved in the host culture and life, they may have a process of transition from cultural divergence to the adjustment state. Thus co-national support really matters in this situation. In a case study, Valdez (2015) said that a Chinese student was on probation. Her Taiwanese friends helped her choose classes for her. In addition, Wu et al. (2015) also stated the important role in receiving help and support in student organizations. Peer communication is also promoted to a better mutual understanding in socio-cultural perspectives. In Wu et al. (2015)'s study, a number of participants benefit from joining such clubs and student organizations. From a linguistic perspective, they practice their speaking skills and from a socio-cultural perspective, they get to know more about the host culture.

ESL support. Dao et al. (2007) revealed that perceived social support levels are considered as significant predictors of psychological depressions. Wu et al. (2015) also claimed the necessity of providing language support because even though international students are admitted to American colleges and universities, they still have a lot of linguistic difficulties in written comprehension as well as oral speaking skills in academic setting. More importantly, when one studies in his or her program or major, the student is expected to have more language demands, thus need more supports. Based on the concerns, Kao and Gansneder (1995) pointed out that ESL classes in universities should emphasize improving students' academic language

proficiency including using academic language skills in classroom discussion. In particular, for graduate students, the highly intellectual dialogues may occur in class. In addition, Kao and Gansneder (1995) pointed out for those international students who come from a cultural background where asking questions is not encouraged, ESL classes should help them adjust to American oral communicative styles and classroom norms. Ren, and Hagedorn (2012), and Özturgut, and Murphy (2009) recommended support programs such as tutoring in that in most cases, tutoring is reserved only for undergraduate students but has ignored the high needs of graduate students. Wu et al. (2015) stated that there is a need of a particular support system for international students who newly arrive. Ren, and Hagedorn (2012), and Seo, and Koro-Ljungberg (2005) also said that a special service should be reserved for older college students who are returning to academic life. Last but not least, Özturgut, and Murphy (2009) highlighted the importance of offering international students ESL program service through their whole program of study but not only the first semester. Kao and Gansneder (1995) highlighted that ESL classes could also be focusing on helping international student build confidence and assertiveness in terms of speaking skills.

Language and multicultural workshop. Lee (2009) indicated that some universities have primarily focused on providing language trainings. For graduate students, they would offer speaking and writing classes. Considering students at graduate levels are mostly older English language learners and whose socio-cultural values may be more rooted based on their previous life experience in home countries, some classes are designed to introduce American culture to promote cross-cultural communication at a mutual understanding level. Such language training classes also emphasize classroom discourse skills as well as the classroom norms. For example, during the sessions of such trainings, typical classroom objectives are addressed to have

international students better understand how a class would go and to have them gain the most efficient study out of it. Expected participation roles will also be addressed to help international students enhance their academic language skills as well as communication skills in classroom discussions. Wu et al. (2015) stated that some international students have expectations of language supports not only in terms of writing but also in terms of speaking. Some participants would go to writing center to practice speaking skills. Thus such language support is also needed for international students. Kao and Gansneder (1995) mentioned that counselors at offices of international student affairs can offer support programs through forms of orientations and workshops to help them understand the conventions of American classroom practices. For example, teaching strategies could be enabling students to cope with class discussions. Kao and Gansneder (1995) also indicated that programs like workshops and orientations allow international students to discuss how their backgrounds are different from American culture and values.

Effective intercultural communication. Some studies have demonstrated the importance of developing an effective intercultural communication system (Özturgut & Murphy, 2009; Ren & Hagedorn, 2012). Firstly, effective communication with international students is progressively making them feel like they are a significant composition of the U.S. cultural mosaic. The reality is that none is making their educational experiences worthwhile. Özturgut, and Murphy (2009) concluded this gap in service is caused by the fact that it is not a solid requirement for the personnel involved in communicating with international students in U.S. higher education institutions to engage in relationships to make their experiences culturally, socially, and educationally worthwhile. Thus, effective intercultural communication should be enhanced to master international students' different former experience, cultural background, as

well as unique needs in that such former experience and background are what international students deeply formed and actively achieved before coming here (Özturgut, and Murphy (2009). Wu et al. (2015) suggested that it is wise to create programs to bridge international culture and American culture. Such opportunities of intercultural communication could be provided for both international students, American students and faculty to collectively promote a good multicultural environment. Through these communications, international students will enhance their communicative skills as well as know better about the host culture. Lee (2009) further pointed out that it is convincing that the opportunities for intercultural communication and connection will benefit all students and faculty, host and international.

Faculty development. Özturgut, and Murphy (2009) took an example of one of the most significant cultural differences that Chinese international students have; there is no solution to offer but the understanding of their culture is emphasized. Lee (2009) stated the importance for instructors to appreciate the diverse language and cultural backgrounds of the international students, to closely follow their learning process, and to offer helps when needed. Educators have the responsibility to guide the learning of international students instead of assuming they are proficient enough. It is their obligation to help international students develop English language skills that would allow them to effectively communicate and better performance academically. Likewise, Ren, and Hagedorn (2012) said that such strategies to assist these students are contributing not only to international students, but also to all students who work together with international students to better embrace diverse culture during their study. Lee (2009) pointed out that in linguistically and culturally diverse learning situations, instructors should ensure that the topics can present diverse cultures, not only call for implicit American culture. Instructors should also pay extra attention to the dynamics of group members. Arranging

smaller group discussions for them to feel more comfortable to talk and participate could be an effective and positive way. Furthermore, Ren, and Hagedorn (2012) mentioned avoiding slangs or culturally-related words and expression in class, helping find discussion groups, and providing more interaction opportunities after class with American students are all considered efficient teaching strategies. Özturgut, and Murphy (2009) thus indicated building up relationships between individual professors and international students and promoting friendship among colleagues and other friends is of great significance. Likewise, Jin (2012) also mentioned that faculty are expected to consider the best ways to build and maintain a good relationship with international students especially in the field of music in that there might be more private opportunities of communication between professors and individuals. According to Jin (2012), emotional stability is considered as another main factor that may influence international music students' academic success. Thus, professors need to be aware of that and utilize the opportunities in every private lesson to communicate with them and ensure that they are performing well. Faculty development including workshops can better enable classroom instructions to assist international students' learning difficulties and needs. Development including appropriate academic advisement and congruent teaching methods or strategies may prove to be beneficial (Ren & Hagedorn, 2012). In addition to the individual instructors, the recruitment of positions to work for international students should also be taken into account. For most entry and mid-level administration positions, requirements do not generally include knowledge of a second language or international living and studying experience. Multicultural and intercultural communication skills are not emphasized in most of the reviewed announcements. What is more threatening is that, almost none of the faculty jobs require skills and education in multicultural and intercultural communication. Thus, Jeong (2010) stated that

universities should better emphasize the work to better support research supervisors to become culturally responsive advisors. Moreover, Jin (2012) suggested that universities could offer opportunities sending more faculty members abroad for recruitment tours, which could enhance their understandings towards the knowledge of East Asian international students' cultural background.

Efforts made by programs or departments. There have been some studies that focused on what efforts could be done within majors, departments, and programs. Examples demonstrate the unique academic demands in the fields of music and clinical therapy. Jin (2012) concluded the unique needs of students in music majors, which are, for example, the good relationships with professors and good feedback from professors. Those concerns may directly influence the self-perceived academic success of international students from East Asian countries who study the field of music. A very unique academic situation in music majors is the private lesson settings. Thus Jin (2012) mentioned the importance of music students' conversational English skills, which in this case is much more important than writing skills. To make a good connection between music students' concerns and the unique academic setting, Jin (2012) suggested a consideration of music faculty using this opportunity of private lessons to build and maintain good relationships with East Asian international students as well as to give both verbal and non-verbal feedback. Furthermore, faculty also have the responsibilities to help international students promote their academic communicative skills and communicate with students in every lesson about their sense of accomplishment and emotion stability (Jin, 2012). As to the role which the professors in music programs play, Leong (2010) revealed that Chinese postgraduate students would like their supervisors to assume the roles of tutor, sponsor and supporter. Another study examined how Japanese international students learn clinical reasoning (Slingsby, Yamada, &

Greene, 2010). Socio-cultural and linguistic concerns were reflected as the main problems influencing the learning environment in classes like clinical reasoning. To help international students solve these problems, the study explored a teaching method called clinical reasoning workshop, which aimed to provide a different teaching environment via different sessions. Because of the very high demand of expertise in medical majors, and international students needing to face future clients as their career begins, Slingsby et al. (2010) suggested that such US-based workshops help international overcome socio-cultural differences and linguistic barriers. Participants in the study reported that under such authentic teaching environment, they actually used the differences to learn new things in a new way. An increase in confidence and collective motivation to overcome the cultural and linguistic hurdles of learning in US-based workshops allowed international students to reap the benefits gained in the workshop.

Methodology

The goal of this study was to better illustrate of the socio-cultural and linguistic challenges international students have during their various fields of study, and thus to help educators realize and work out practical strategies to help their international students better perform in their academic study. The study investigated the international student population in a comprehensive university in a rural area of Western New York. I chose to investigate this university due to the ethnic population feature in this university, which is not too large but has an uneven distribution in programs and countries of origins. Data collection was accomplished through both online surveys and individual interviews of international students and professors in different fields and departments. Data was then analyzed and conclusions were made based on the data. Implications and limitations for future research were then discussed to conclude the study.

Setting

This research took place in a state university in a rural area located in Western New York. This rural area was a small village which had a population of 11, 230 according to the 2010 census. In the university, the composition of international students were 2.6%. Its demographic statistics showed 78.3% White, 6.9% Hispanic, 6.9% Black/Non-Hispanic, 3.3% Asian, 2.2% multiple races, 0.5% American Indian, and 0.01% Hawaiian or Pacific islanders (University Fact book, 2014). Thus, Asian students represented the fourth largest population according to ethnic identity in this university. Also, the population breakdown showed 56.1% female undergraduates and 44% male undergraduate; likewise, female population at graduate level was 80.2%, higher than that of males, which was 25.6%. Overall, there was a trend that Asian students population has been increasing compared to the previous year of enrollment.

Samples

The initial sample population of this study include East Asian international students currently taking a full-time enrollment in either undergraduate or graduate programs. Both females and males were surveyed and interviewed. Professors who have had experience working with international students from such backgrounds were also interviewed. All of the participants were over the age of 18.

Participants

The participants of this study included students currently enrolled full-time in either undergraduate or graduate programs in this university and professors in different programs and departments. Of the international students, there were four students who participated in the individual interviews. One of the participants was graduate student and the rest of them were undergraduate students. One of the participants was male student and the rest of them were female students. Among the interviewees, the students' nationality composed a variety of East Asian countries. Students from China, Japan, Korea were all participate in the interviews. In addition, the variety of participants' majors of study were also considered. Participants came from fields in Music, Education, English, and Business. All of the participants were over the age of 18. Of the faculty, there were six professors who participated in the interviews. All of them had experience either working with international students or working and living overseas. All of the professors were male. Professors came from departments in Music, Psychology, Communication, and Business.

Data Collection

As previously stated, the research study employed a mixed-methods approach. The quantitative method was an online survey and the qualitative method was one-to-one interviews.

The former instrument was used to assess the demographic information, socio-cultural concerns, linguistic concerns, academic concerns, coping strategies of international students from East Asian countries. The latter instrument was used to better know about their unique experiences, personal perspectives, specific challenges in terms of language and socio-culture faced by international students, as well as opinions and suggestions for solutions.

Online survey. According to Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2015), survey refers to the instrument that designs questions for samples to answer and uses the collected data to represent a specific population. The survey consisted of twenty-five questions in terms of demographic information, socio-cultural concerns, linguistic concerns, academic concerns, coping strategies and were answered by thirty international students. In this study, survey was administered online with the assistance of International Student Service Office. The online survey questions were designed and picked out from previous studies. The major challenges that were discussed in the literature review was reflected in the survey. Questions were chosen based on three key factors that constitute the challenges that international students have and were discussed in previous studies. The first part of the survey included questions to assess their demographic information including their home countries, majors, length of staying in the U.S., and length of time studying English. The second part of the survey was the socio-cultural concerns in terms of social interaction, involvement of local life, understandings of host culture and values, encounters of cultural misunderstandings. The third part included questions to assess their academic and linguistic concerns in terms of understanding classroom lectures, academic rules and regulations, academic assignment difficulties, different learning styles, academic communications, and specialized language demands. The fourth part of the survey included coping strategies that this university already had, and assessed attitudes among participants towards those strategies that

they would choose to help themselves promote academic study. The last question was an open-ended question to have them write down their personal ideas and constructive suggestions. The survey questions were modified according to the reality of the university.

One-to-one interview. According to Fraenkel, Wallen and Hyun (2012), interviews are widely used as a qualitative approach. In this study, both international students and faculty participated in the individual interviews. Of the international students, there were four students who participated in the individual interviews. Of the faculty, there were six professors who participated in the interviews. Each interview lasted one hour or more. Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. There were solid designed interview questions in response to the research questions for all participants (students and professors' interview questions were accordingly different). The interview questions were designed based on three themes of the major challenges in which international students have discussed in the previous studies. Thus the interview was composed with four theme: personal backgrounds, linguistic challenges, socio-cultural challenges, and coping strategies. The purpose of doing one-to-one interviews for this study was to better understand the perspectives from both international students and professors, their unique experiences and current academic situations, and thus to foster unique points of views, which are more valuable to find out the problems and needs of them rather than making generalizations on the basis of statistics. Interviews were conducted in English; the pace of interview will be accordingly different based on participants' English proficiency and understandings. Checklists and notes were used at the same time during the interviews to ensure the entirety of the questions regarded (See Table 1).

Table 1

Survey Sections

| Sections | Questions |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Demographic information | 1,2,3,4,5 |
| Socio-cultural concerns | 6,7,8,9,10,11 |
| Academic and linguistic concerns | 12,13,14,15,16,17,18,19 |
| Coping strategies | 20,21,22,23,24 |

Procedure

The study was implemented in a comprehensive university located in a rural area in Western New York. The study involves international students from East Asian countries and professors in this university. The online-survey and responses from international students comprise the quantitative aspect; the individual interviews and responses comprise the qualitative aspect.

Getting student consent. The students were invited to participate in both online-surveys and individual interviews. Consent form was created by the author of the research study and was granted by the research institution at the college from which while the study was created (See Appendix A). Finally, with the approval and support of the International Student Services of this university. Then students were invited to participate in the online-surveys. All of the procedures were implemented online. By reading the first page and clicking to the next page, participants agreed to participate in the survey. The participants then completed the survey, answering only the questions that were required. The online-survey was opened for three weeks for participants to access and was closed after the regulated time. At the end of the online-survey, students were asked if they were interested in taking further participation in the research study as to take the

individual interviews. All of the procedures were taken voluntarily. Participants could either finish participation after taking online-surveys or accept interviews from the researchers. Participants who voluntarily accepted the second part of the research were given information so as to schedule dates and times to do the individual interviews. The consent form of the interview was sent along with the online-survey at the beginning of the data collection. If contact was made, interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the participants. At the scheduled interview, the participants first received a hard copy of the consent form which they had read in the emails and were asked to sign for the consent. The participants were then asked the interview questions from Appendix C. The interviews that took place were audio-recorded and then transcribed. The interviewee's responses were recorded on a portable recording device. After the interview was completed, the recorded interviews were then taken by the researcher and transcribed.

Getting professors consent. After initial approval was received from the department of the research study, regarding being able to conduct the study at their site, a consent form with the interview themes and questions was sent to the professors' email addresses, which was the recruitment for participants (See Appendix B & Appendix D). If the researchers got responses from the professors, by reading the consent form, the professors agreed to participate in the interviews. If contact was made, interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the participants. At the scheduled interview, the participants first received a hard copy of the consent form which they had read in the emails and were asked to sign for the consent. The participants were then asked the interview questions from Appendix D. The interviews that took place were audio-recorded and then transcribed. The interviewee's responses were recorded on a portable

recording device. After the interview was completed, the recorded interviews were then taken by the researcher and transcribed.

Results

Data Analysis

This research implemented a mixture of approaches, both qualitative, and quantitative methods, to find out the challenges in which international students from East Asian countries are encountering during their current study in this university. In the tables, the results are combined and added into two categories: Agree and not agree. Thirty international students participated in the online survey. In a conclusion of demographic information provided, there are sixteen international students who come from mainland China took this survey. One student from Hong Kong SAR, six students from Japan, and seven students from South Korea also completed the survey. Only one student did not take former education from his or her home country. The rest of participants all claimed their former education background in their home countries from elementary school to high school or undergraduate. According to their length of stay studying in this university and the time span of their English study before coming to the United States and studying at this university, most of the participants have been studying in this university for less than two years while on the other hand, nearly half of them have been studying English for more than five years (See Figure 1 & Figure 2).

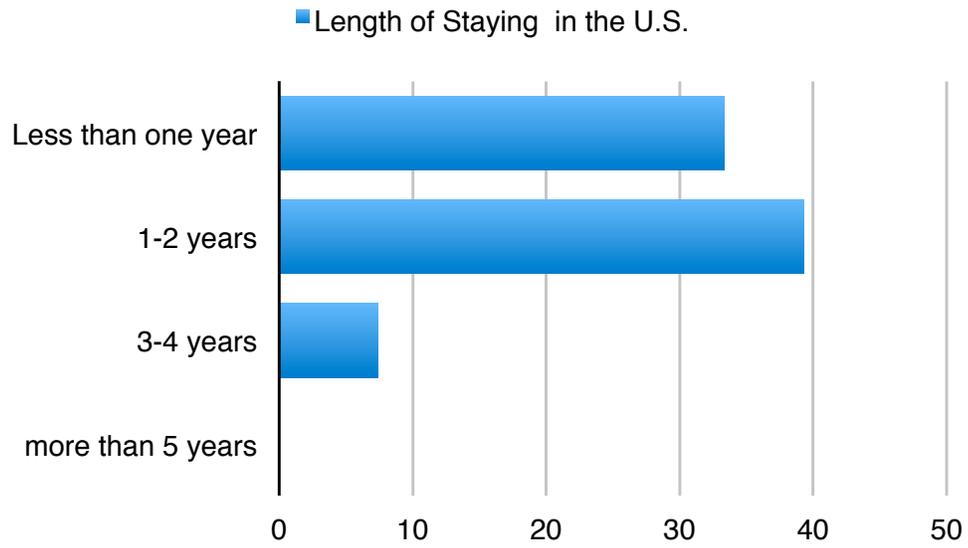


Figure 1. *Demographic Information 1*

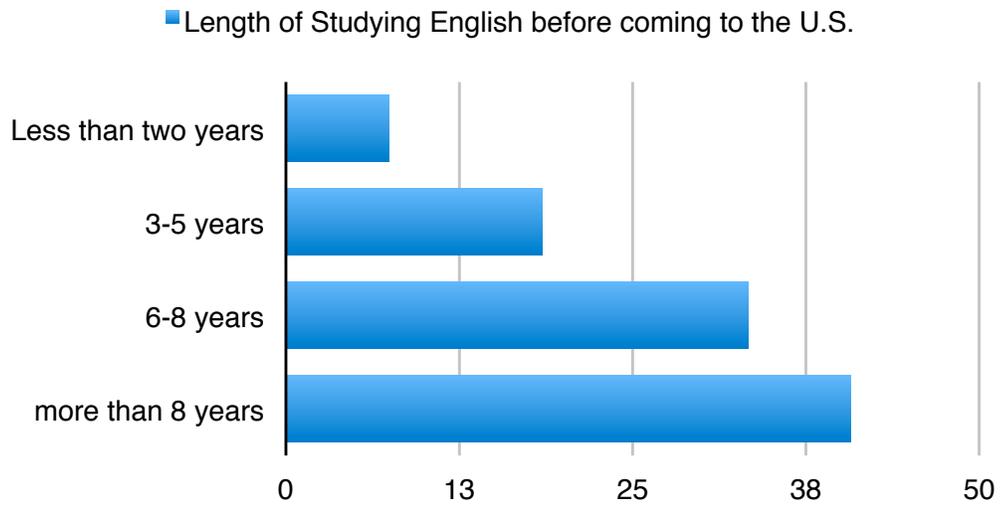


Figure 2. *Demographic Information 2*

The figure below (See Figure 3) demonstrated the portions of fields where international students who took the online survey are mostly scattered. The School of Music is estimated to have a very large population of international students who come from East Asian countries, following is the field of education, where the different concentrations are scattered through many subjects such as music, English language, English literature, early childhood, adolescents, etc.

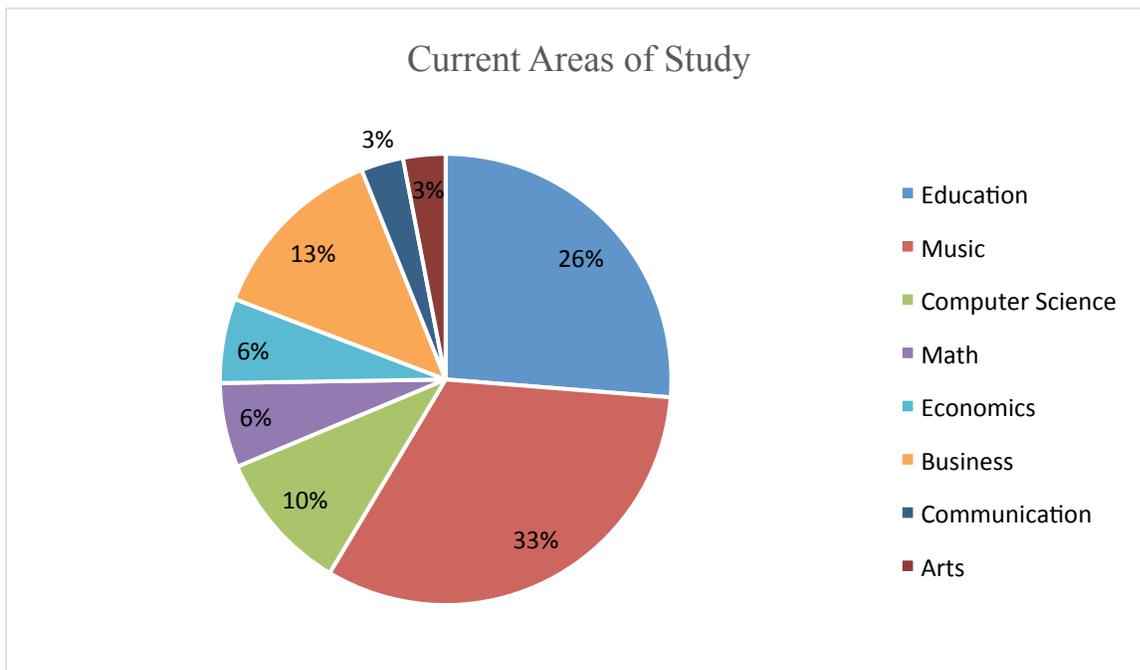


Figure 3. *Current areas of study*

However, looking at the specific majors of the participants, the result is more scattered into different concentrations. In Business area, for example, there are three participants who are all from different concentrations of Business. In addition, ten participants were involved in this survey while they come from different concentrations of Music such as Music Performance, Music Education, Music Therapy and Collaborative Piano. We could consequently draw a conclusion that the situations go more complex where international students are in their specialized concentrations and courses. Different and unique difficulties in terms of socio-cultural and linguistic factors may affect their academic studies in so many ways.

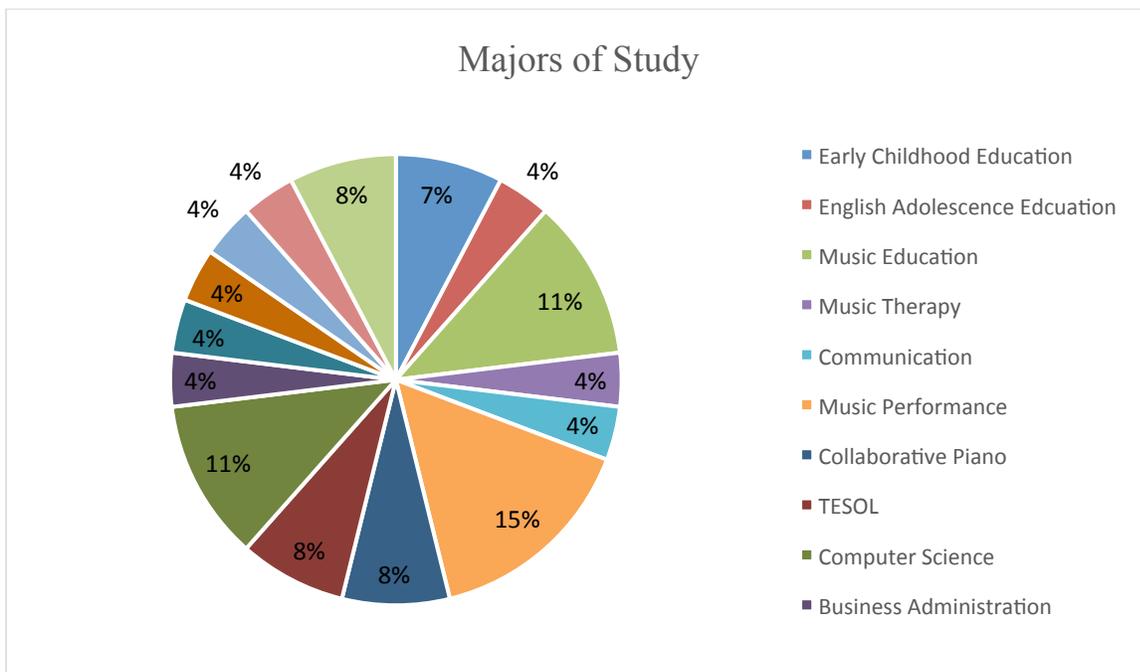


Figure 4. *Current majors of study*

Table 2

Socio-cultural Concerns

| Statement | Agree | Not Agree |
|--|-------|-----------|
| I rely more on friends from my home country. | 81.4% | 18.5% |
| I find it hard to make more friends with American students. | 62.9% | 37% |
| I find it hard to get involved in local life with local American friends. | 63% | 37% |
| I find it hard to understand American values and culture (e.g. individualism, privacy, etc.) | 33.3% | 66.6% |
| I find it hard to learn how to understand and respond to American behavior. | 33.3% | 66.6% |
| I encounter cultural misunderstandings with professors and/or students. | 51.8% | 48.1% |

Table 2 illustrates international students' attitudes towards some socio-cultural concerns stated in the survey. The majority of participants indicated that overall, they find it challenging to really get an involved local life and make American friends. Most participants stated their preference of making co-national friends. The emotion supports mainly fall on their families and friends back in their home countries. On the other hand, most participants indicated that it is not hard to understand the values and behaviors of Americans. However, while most participants did not indicate the difficulties understanding American culture, over half of them still encounter cultural misunderstandings with professors and American students.

In Table 3, participants show their different attitudes towards factors in terms of academy and language. In terms of language differences, over half of the participants claimed the difficulties of high demanding language in their different fields of study. During the academic study, writing is considered harder to successfully accomplish than reading. In average, participants think they can successfully understand class lectures and the academic rules and

follow the instructions towards their studies, yet the problems that they find hard is about the ability to participate in the class such as classroom discussions and group works. Over half of the participants think it is helpful to ask questions in front of class when they have questions and seek help from faculty when they encounter problems. In average, the statistics vary comparably equal in each statement.

Table 3

Academic and Linguistic Concerns

| Statement | Agree | Not Agree |
|--|-------|-----------|
| I find it hard to understand class lectures in here. | 48.1% | 51.8% |
| I find it hard to understand academic rules and regulations. | 25.9% | 74% |
| I find it hard to keep up with reading assignments. | 48.1% | 51.8% |
| I find it hard to keep up with writing assignments. | 51.8% | 48.1% |
| I find it hard to engage in group work or classroom discussions. | 55.5% | 44.4% |
| I find it hard to ask in front of class when I have questions. | 44.4% | 55.5% |
| I find it hard to ask from instructors, advisors, and/or other academic advising services when I have questions. | 33.3% | 66.6% |
| I find it hard to understand the textbooks and classes when the language is highly specialized in the field of my study. | 55.5% | 44.4% |

In Table 4, participants illustrated their ways of coping with the difficulties either in terms of language or in terms of culture. Most participants agree that taking part in extracurricular activities and workshops on campus help them get more engaged in the local life and culture. Most participants also find that they learn about American cultures and solve their confusions by talking with American friends. Over half of the participants consider the importance and necessity of solving academic problems by making appointments with professors. However, over half of the participants would not turn to seek help from learning

center, tutoring, or the provided services on campus when they encounter problems in their studies. Interestingly, most participants would use popular social networks to build up relationships with local friends.

Table 4

Coping Strategies

| Statement | Agree | Not Agree |
|--|-------|-----------|
| I participate a lot of extracurricular activities, volunteer activities, and workshops on campus to get more involved in the local life and culture. | 74.1% | 25.9% |
| I communicate with local students to know more about American cultures and to figure out my academic concerns. | 66.7% | 33.3% |
| I go to learning center, tutoring, and other provided services to help with my study. | 40.7% | 59.2% |
| I make appointments with my professors or academic advising services in my department when I have questions in my study. | 70.3% | 29.6% |
| I use Facebook/Instagram or other social media to connect with my friends and to know more about the community. | 81.5% | 18.5% |

For the purpose of this study, socio-cultural and linguistic challenges experienced by international students from East Asian countries are emphasized as main factors that affect their academic performance during their programs of study, and thus to help educators realize and work out solutions to help their international students cope with such challenges.

After analyzing the interviews, the following themes emerged to correspond to the main challenges in which international students have during their academic study: academic concerns, psychological concerns, linguistic challenges and socio-cultural challenges. There are also some problems regarding academic concerns and psychological adjustments.

Academic concerns. Firstly, in the interviews, some international students discussed their academic experience back in their home countries, which reflects a great difference in terms of the change of environment, different sets of academic expectations, etc. According to Valdez (2015), one of the biggest problems of the change of environment reflects in the gap that falls significantly in classroom experiences. A Chinese student made a comparison between her high school experience back in China and the experience here in the U.S.:

We don't really enjoy much freedom in school. We have tough schedules in everyday life, we go to bed at a regular time. In my high school, we usually worked the whole day. Before class, we have an hour to study. I always memorized the poems that were required to recite for the quiz. While here, there are a lot of dynamics going on between teachers and students in class and I found it intimidating at first because I was not used to be active in the classroom.

Participants mentioned the classroom experience they have had in their home countries and the classroom experience here was a shock to them, especially during their first class, first semester and even first academic year. One of the professors from Psychology department also claimed that it is nearly impossible to avoid such difficulties when being away from family, being in another culture, and experiencing differences in terms of university environments. In addition to that change of environments, the differences also reflect in aspects of academic expectations. According to the nationalities of all participants, they acquire The English language as a Foreign Language (EFL), which means the academic expectations of English language learning is different. For example, a Japanese student shared her experience learning English in Japan. She had five grammar books to start with, vocabulary as well as sentence structure would be the very first emphasized content to start with. She mentioned: "I remember I recite things

like ‘I, my, me, mine,’ ‘she, her, her, hers.’” In Japan and all other Asian countries which are in the Expanding Circle, the English instruction would emphasize more on grammar than practical skills such as speaking. This Japanese student mentioned that they started to have English subject in their middle school around the age of thirteen. They did not learn how to speak English until high school. In her high school, they had speaking class once every two weeks. There was a native English speaking teacher and she was the only teacher for them to learn English speaking. Moreover, besides the language learning aspect, the aspect of “what do the teachers want students to learn” was also discussed. A professor teaching Music History and Theory said that Chinese students have a hard problem giving their own opinions in their writing assignments: “I think this may be previously part of their training, but to be honest, they just never get to their opinions. There is something I assume they have been taught to the exams.” This was proved by a Chinese student studying Music here. She mentioned that there were a lot of “facts” that they needed to “know”. For example, in the exams of their theoretical classes such as History, they were required to recite things like “When was Beethoven born?” While here, she indicated that the teacher expected them to have more understandings of the content with critical thinking rather than the data.

Secondly, learning skills and habits were also discussed a lot by the participants. All of the professors in the interviews claimed the problem that international students do not speak up in classes is that their teaching styles in most Asian countries tend to be more teacher-centered with a teacher lecturing the class and students taking notes and listening respectfully and quietly. One of the professors who have been teaching in a Chinese university said in the interview that the students were so driven by the teacher just lecturing. During his very first class taught in China, he had to force his students to talk. Both professors and international students in the

interview stated that the critical thinking and discussions are the hardest part to keep up with the classes in the U.S. A participant said:

In my country, the teachers tend to lecture the students, somehow in a way this teaching style kills the creativity and the ability to bring up questions. I mean if you are in that kind of environment for twelve years, you do not know how to bring up a question, like in one minute, in one second, listening to another language other than your mother language? That is impossible.

Another participant also mentioned the “new word” and the new learning style she encountered in her first class in the U.S.:

When the teachers brought up the question or the discussion question, they said a word “brainstorm.” I had no idea what “brainstorm” was, I did not know how to brainstorm, nobody teaches me.

Moreover, a professor from School of Music encountered a problem in terms of the syllabus when he was trying to help a newly arrived international student. He concluded that international students do not understand the syllabus the way American students do:

It was the very first semester that she told me she had a problem with the class. So I let her bring the syllabus. After a few questions, I realized she had some problems in the syllabus she didn't understand. There are things on the syllabus that she was not doing.

Thirdly, new academic experiences allow international students to look at different aspects which they should value. For example, one professor in Communication department mentioned that Asian students value the collective cultures, so being part of the group is seen as important. Consequently, what happens to that is they will typically find a group of East Asian group who they identify with, and that will be their “core peer group.” Moreover, their language

preference will be affected and their English skills will never get improved. Based on the experience living overseas, some professors are able to stand in the perspectives of international students and to realize the negative influence of sticking in their own circles:

I lived in overseas with my wife in Austria, I know if I only hang out with my American friends, my German never gets stronger. So that is one of the challenges that East Asian students have and they have to realize that by themselves.

Psychological problems. International students all experience psychological adjustment, and the very first semester is regarded as the most important and difficult period of transition claimed by both international students and professors in the interviews. One professor in the Psychology department in the interview said that as faculty, they need to let international students know the necessity of coming to visit professors whenever they have questions. He claimed “The earlier, the better.” One case that he had was the international student had waited too long until he got two bad grades. Another professor in Communication department said: “I always tell international students that regardless of how smart they are, and how good their grades were, that the first semester or the first year is going to be very difficult, and there are no ways to avoid it.” It was echoed by the international students who in the interviews recalled their fresh memory during their life here in the very first beginning. A student said that she did not speak up in class at all through her first semester.

Motivation was also discussed by international students during their interviews. All of the motivations that international students have are regarded positively. No matter they go abroad for an experience studying in American higher education or for pursuing to get a diploma, it would be a “passing ticket” for a higher social status, determined by the importance of education in their home countries. A Japanese student shared her future goal by saying:

My major is Early Childhood Education, but I don't want to teach English, the language, to Japanese people. I don't think they need to “learn,” I want them to explore the culture. I want to use English. My future goal is to give every child education. There are a lot of children come from poor families, or orphans, I want to give them opportunities and to broaden their choices.

Social interactions among international students were concluded as a factor that affects their psychological adjustment. All of the international students in the interviews claimed that family and co-national friends are their emotional supports. A student said that when she was really depressed, she would call her best friend who is also Japanese studying in another state. Another student claimed that it is easier to make Japanese, Korean, and Chinese friends — international friends than American friends. Another participant said that she is so concerned about her GPA, and one time she broke down and cried on the phone talking with her parents. However, she considered no one in here was able to help her get out of the depression. Thus based on the research, when international students encounter depressions, they would develop stronger ties to an ethnic group of students or family for their emotional support (Shi, 2011; Wu et al., 2015; Yan, & Berliner, 2010; Zhang, 1996).

Linguistic challenges. All of the interviewees claimed language as the most difficult challenge faced by international students. The primary reason is that English is not their home language. Studying in another country, international students need to finish their academic process while learning the language.

As the requirement of entering higher education in the United States, all international students need to take the TOEFL or IELTS tests to reach a required score. As proved by recent research, TOEFL as a standardized language test for admission is perceived negatively. Fast-Holmes and Vaughn (2015) and Ren and Hagedorn (2012) demonstrated that these standardized scores used as an admission in universities in the U.S. still have insufficient power to precisely predict and guarantee international students' future academic outcome. Professors in the interviews proved this conclusion by sharing some solid examples:

We have once or twice sent some students over to EC English, students whose language skills were probably not at a level that shouldn't have been to begin with. That is fairly unusual because students come with basic TOEFL scores that they need at least to start with.

As a matter of fact, as Yan and Berliner (2009) claimed, the language training tended to be designed to gain scores of those tests. This tendency, to some extent, has made the language test more score-focused and has failed to lose its real meaning. Moreover, this language training and test fail to meet the demands of subject matters and other academic matters in their future study. A professor shared his experience knowing this when he was in China:

I had a friend's son who is working in the "TOEFL factory," he said that what he tells his customers is that he can produce fifteen or twenty points in creating their scores in a week to two just by understanding some strategies. So much happens there. The situation once my Chinese student told me in China is all about point-focused.

There is also a fact that the TOEFL scores failed to assess international students' English language ability, which was also proved by previous research. In particular, academic English proficiency in terms of writing is what almost all international students face. "Even some

students come with greater scores relatively, they still have serious problems, and it is not the thing that they get to overcome in a month over, but I don't have a solution for that,” said by one of the professors in graduate Music History and Theory department. Some other problems in terms of academic English proficiency stated by professors such as analyzing, organizing ideas, understanding lectures, could not be measured by a solid TOEFL score as well.

Various linguistic problems are reflected during the process of international students' study and are influencing their efficiency in their studies. It was proved that international students especially Japanese students have some concerns about their accents. For example, the Japanese student who was interviewed said that she had been worrying about her Japanese accent for a long time. She felt nervous when speaking to American friends because of her accent. The difference also reflects in pronunciation, that the intonation between the two languages is different even though numerous of vocabulary in Japanese are English borrowed words. A Chinese student also shared her experience of having a hard time figuring out the accents that international faculty has:

One of the literature classes I had was taught by a Turkish professor, so she's got a little accent, it was hard for me to understand. I had another class taught by a Chinese professor, and he has the accent, too, but I still don't understand.

In addition to accents and pronunciation, international students also claimed their concerns about the rate of speech. One of the Chinese students in Collaborative Piano major said that some professors speak too fast in class which makes her feel hard to understand. Another student said that she was unable to follow which sentence the professor was reading on the slides of Power Points. Even a normal speed was hard for her.

In general, professors' perspectives about the reason of challenges regarding oral communication tend to fall in aspects such as students' personalities as being shy, not being confident and comfortable, as well as limited language proficiency. Being able to speak up in classroom participations and discussions compose the second biggest problem that international students face. International students explained some reasons for not being able to speak up because of their long reacting time to produce an answer:

When a teacher asks a question, I need to translate the English into Chinese to understand, and then I need to translate the answer I had in my mind back to English, and then to organize the language, then the American students already spoke up or the topic was already moved on. Sometimes when the teacher asks a question, students talk about it, and sometimes one student give an opinion, another student will continue what the last student just said. But sometimes I could not even get what the last student said. It was so hard for me to take participation in class. At the first time, I did not know what teacher said. My listening was so bad, still bad.

Besides highly demanded oral communication in classrooms, speaking skill, which is reflected in presentations, composes one of the most common forms of performance and usually contains a big portion of the composition. Thus, it is considered one of the biggest challenges among international students to be able to give a speech in front of class. A Chinese student in Collaborative Piano major said that her method to "survive" in the presentations was to write down every sentence she will speak out on the paper and read it when she gives the presentation. A professor in Psychological department talked about speaking skills in the interview. He mentioned that he never got a chance to assess international students' English speaking skills, and he did not want to push them for doing that.

Consequently, limited English proficiency prevents students from keeping up with the dynamic fast-paced class discussion. Importantly, what international students explained as the reasons were not their unwillingness, but sometimes, their language ability. As a result, most of the professors in the interviews regarded them as being reluctant, shy, and not confident to speak up. None of them thought about this aspect: “Students are reluctant to speak up, so I try to make everybody speak up.”

None of the professors in the interviews thought about the factor of language ability.

From all the responses of the professors, we can draw a conclusion that academic English proficiency composes the biggest linguistic challenge faced by international students. In particular, writing is the biggest problem that they have. Some examples were provided by the professors. In terms of grammar, some Chinese students said that they have problems with articles in that in Chinese, there are no pronouns. Some Korean students claimed that they have problems in dealing with punctuations and prepositions. For example, a Korean student mentioned that “it is not ‘in Fredonia’, it’s ‘at Fredonia’.” In addition to grammar, the problems in writing also reflect in the usage of words, precise expressions, structures, and styles. A Chinese student studying Music mentioned that there were not so many essay writings during her undergraduate in China. While when she came here for graduate study, she found she needed to finish a number of writing assignments.

Firstly, the usage of words could affect the quality of academic writing. For example, one of the professors in Communication department said that he found Chinese students rely too much on the electronic dictionary. For instance, some of the words that international students found were not used anymore since the eighteenth century. Thus, he claimed that students cannot rely on this kind of supports especially when regarding writing. Secondly, one professor claimed

that the problem of structural writing is beyond grammar especially at graduate levels of academic writing:

For example, I gave an assignment like this ‘How are Beethoven’s symphonies romantic?’

Once we fixed the grammar, then we get to realize, “Wait a minute, why is the question asking this?” What I see my Chinese students doing is not worrying about what this whole sentence means, what they will do is to break into three sections: the biography of this musician, the introduction of their symphonies, and then there will be a little paragraph saying: I really like Beethoven.

Therefore, the structural writing was also considered crucial because international students are used to their previous structural writing format that tends to have a disconnection between the question asked and writing itself. Thirdly, proved by previous research, international students receive negative feedback regarding having no citations in their papers. The reason is that they did not have knowledge of that. Thus, style is also a very new and difficult area where international students have difficulties to adjust. For example, a Chinese student stated her trouble dealing with three styles of academic writing at the same time:

I had no idea what MLA was until I wrote my first paper, it was all messed up. While MLA is required in my English classes, Chicago is required in my social science classes, APA is required in my education classes. For one time, I need to learn three different writing styles at the same time, and there was not a typical class to teach me how to use those. They would introduce this to you in class, but eventually I need to check it up online, it’s like you are never being able to really master it.

Because writing composes the crucial part of students' academic performance, there are different attitudes from individual professors towards their criteria looking at international students' problems in terms of writing. All the professors in the interviews claimed that they are concerned more with the content. And most professors who have this attitude are those who have had international experience living in another country and learning another language in that country. Meanwhile, both professors and some international students claimed that not all professors would care about them as English Language Learners. A Chinese student said that one of her professors would mark off points when there were grammar mistakes, which was hard for her a music major student. As a matter of fact, a number of professors in the interviews discussed the struggle and considered this a tricky area to really figure it out:

Sometimes the paper I get from international students have quite a few grammar mistakes. If American students have such mistakes on their papers I would probably take a lot of points off; but in this situation, do I want to just say, well they are international students, I am not going to judge about their mistakes. On one hand, they really need to learn to become good writers, but on the other hand, I think I should not penalize them since it is their second language. I teach psychology, so I think some faculty in my department would say: is that my job? My job is not to teach English grammar.

Last but not least, one professor mentioned that it is hard for international students to precisely express what they think about to reflect in a second language. The professor illustrated this problem by showing the different literal meanings of "connotation" and "denotation". For example, a "cup" would have more meanings for a native English speaker, but for non-native English speakers, it is hard to illustrate the implied meanings and contexts of the word being used. Thus, the ability in expressing, describing, and claiming in a clear way using precise words

is difficult for international students, since they are still progressive English language learners, in their second language, even though one chooses the word that comes up in mind to speak or write, it does not mean that they are conveying exactly what they are thinking.

So when I talk to the students, she says well, I think this, but I know, she thinks about other stuff, but she's trying to find that English word. So it is hard for them and me to try to get their concepts out. You know the meanings of the words that they say, but you are trying to get out what they are thinking.

Due to limited English proficiency, international students also encounter common problems in terms of understanding the class lecture. One professor in Communication department said that he tried to keep an eye on the only one international student in his class just to make sure if she understands what is going on in the class. Almost all international students in the interviews claimed the difficulties in understanding classroom lectures at the first beginning of semester:

I still remember my first class here. It was sociology, it was an introductory class. The knowledge was so scattered and there were a lot of terms used in that class, I was totally lost. I did not get what the professor said at all, even for one word. It was a torture for that fifty minutes.

In addition to the high demand of language in lectures, some international students also have trouble dealing with the "management" of lectures:

When professors say something, and I am taking the notes, but I am just taking the notes, you know, I do not understand at the same time. Some Americans can paraphrase, they write in short sentences, but I have to write the whole sentence, which takes more time

and hard to follow up. Another problem is that if I keep taking notes, I cannot hear what the professor say. I cannot take notes and listen to the professor at the same time.

Some students said that slangs and American expressions were also a problem they have to deal with. The students claimed that Americans use slangs a lot. The professors who have had international experiences were aware of avoiding the usage of slangs and American expressions. One professor also mentioned that based on his experience overseas, he was able to talk in a slower and clearer way, but not all professors have this awareness, as he mentioned.

International students also have language preference for their home language due to limited English proficiency, which leads to a negative result preventing them from learning English. One case that a professor had was a student who had a very low English level when she was here. But she actually had experience studying in Boston for a master's degree. The reason was that she talked with her co-national friends and did not involve a lot in English conversations in her daily life. Another professor considered it as a difficult pedagogical situation in the class, that when there is only one international student, the international students and American students get to work together; but when there is more than one international student, they form a unit. The Same phenomenon was also mentioned by another Music professor:

So I went to class they are in, I was sitting back in the class. I noticed nobody even knew I was there, they did not see me when they came in, they just walked straight to their seats, I mean I am not a small person. They had each other, so that was what they saw and walked straight to their friends, there were people who they speak to. So the classroom was like this: these nice Chinese students sitting in the right part of the classroom, there was a Philippine student sitting in front of me, two Korean students

sitting next to each other in the middle, and the rest of the class right there was the American students. It was like a world map.

In terms of social interaction, communication will lead to ineffective result because of language preference. For example, a professor said:

Do you know Google Translate? I can tell that they are using Google Translate, there are still some, you know. In English we have some sayings, while in Korean and Chinese there are also some sayings, the sayings translate literally, and I know that there is no way that this was written, like they type in Google Translate, and they just copy the result and send it to me, and these are the students who have troubles with English.

Language preference also reflects in learning the content. Another example, a Japanese student claimed that she takes notes in both Japanese and English in order to maintain what she understands later on and to write in Japanese when she comes with some ideas so that she could understand. Language preference has two folds that it benefits international students' understanding while it does not help with English language learning and social interaction.

Limited language proficiency reflects in language skill requirement in various courses, programs, and fields, which play a vital role in affecting international students' academic performance. For example, in the Media Law class, there is a lot of Latin languages, which makes it hard for international students to understand. A psychology professor said that there is a class called Physiological Psychology which talks about different parts of the brain and how they are connected to psychological thinking. A communication professor said that in his Introduction to Mass Media class, the terms are specific to media. In music area, the specialized terms are mostly adopted from European languages, and students need to deal with that by understanding and being able to pronounce and to use at the same time. An education student expressed the

difficulty especially when she had to master these terms and to connect them with her practical teaching experience:

I have to go to field placements as full times, I have to make lesson plans for young children, like K-2, it was hard because of my language barrier, it was hard to teach them. I also need to use Common Core Standards in my lesson plans, which I have never heard about before I came here. And they don't lecture, teach the Common Core thing maybe at 200 level courses. There are a lot of terms that we need to use.

Moreover, graduate studies demonstrate an even harder language requirement in academic study. For example, a professor in graduate Music History and Theory department said:

All of the graduate students in School of Music would have class in Music History and Music Theory. The content of my class is very difficult for international students. In music, there is a distance between the academic study of the history and theory, and the applied, which is performance. So an undergraduate music performance student entering graduate school would find out that playing is only half of what they have to do. They have to take an academic course that is very hard. It is a hard part for Americans, too.

For international students, it is difficult to successfully engage in classroom participations and daily communications with professors and American students. The reasons could be a lot of factors such as cultural differences, personalities, and so on. However, limited English proficiency is perceived one of the most important factors. The perspectives from the professors and the international students are illustrated. First, many professors demonstrated the importance of communication between professors and international students. A professor in Communication department claimed that he thinks international students are afraid of English the language.

While all professors in the interviews stated the problem of students not speaking up, two professors stated that they tried, to be honest, to let them know the education philosophy here and tried to encourage them to speak up in classroom communication.

Except for classroom communication, many professors reported that international students do not come to see them during office hours and take full advantages of daily communication with professors which they could have. One professor stated that he used to make one of his Korean students visit him every week to go over the class content. Four professors from different departments claimed that the students do not go to professor's office hours. To solve that problem, they all stated the importance to make international students have the awareness of feeling free, comfortable, and important communicating with professors. They also explained that once they get comfortable with it, they will find it helpful. One example was illustrated by an international student. Later on, she found it as the most important part of academic life to be able to have communication with professors. She said:

The first book of our Roman class, it was a book of poem. There are a lot of lines repeating each other. I was not able to get the gist of the poems. So I went to her office, and she was very very helpful. She provided me another version of the translation. I got the chance to compare the two versions when I read, and that was very helpful. Professor and I become friends eventually and they are willing to see me. I keep revisiting them even though I don't have a problem.

Professors in the interviews considered this to be understandable because of their previous experience for more than twelve years of education in that relatively conservative environment. Professors who have had international experience were able to think in their perspectives as learning a second language in an academic environment:

Think about somebody whose English is not their first language, so they have to take that English, put it into their language, try to understand and keep up with everything like the English speakers do, it is hard.

However, some stereotypes were also mentioned by the interviewees if inefficient communication happens between the professors and the international students. Some professors seem not empathetic about the difficulties that international students have learning a second language, as reported by some international students during their interviews. Moreover, some professors also said that there is some faculty who knows some of the challenges international students have, but all of the faculty. Some international students claimed that they had been encountering some professors who tended to have some stereotypes of them. Some assumptions existed which included the fact that their English was supposed to be good enough not to have grammar mistakes, and their non-participation in class was perceived negatively and was marked off. A music international student stated that all professors would point out the places where she had grammar mistakes. Some would mark off points from that and some do not. There are also some assumptions mentioned by a Chinese student saying that some professors assume Asian students are all intelligent, diligent, and good enough to have extra help. Besides, due to the lack of international students' background as well as English proficiency, misunderstandings may occur. One professor said that he was nervous as well before meeting a newly arrived Chinese student because he had no idea about the English level of this student and was not sure if they could communicate successfully and was afraid that awkward things would happen. Again, those who have had international experience living or working in another country perceived the communication with international students positively as they were able to understand the

linguistic differences between the two different languages, or even in one language, which makes it hard for them to have daily communication successfully:

It was a challenge going shopping, doing daily things not knowing the language, it made me understand some people from another country coming to the U.S. which English is not their home language. So by me having that experience myself made me feel sympathetic to international students learning new things because English is not their first language.

However, from international students' perspectives, they illustrated their eagerness to have more accommodations with professors, which turned out to be opposite from what the professors perceived. One professor from School of Music said that 70% to 80% of the time he felt his students were eager to come to him and seek help from him. International students have the positive attitudes towards promoting communications with professors. However, they find too hard to really do that. A Japanese student shared her concerns about meeting the professors in their offices:

I know that professors are so nice, they always say don't be afraid, you can come to my office, don't be nervous, feel free. I really want to ask, but I don't know what I don't know.

Thus, although international students in the interviews all claimed their awareness of seeking help from professors, they still have difficulties for a lot of complex reasons regarding language barrier, for example. Having difficulty to be able to express in a clear and confident way communicating with professors seems to be hard for them to overcome really.

Peer communication plays another important part as discussed by the interviewees. Limited language proficiency or unfamiliarity of international students' English ability composes the reason of negative perceptions. One of the professors in Communication department

mentioned that American students felt a little scared and intimidated to approach international students and vice versa. For example, two international students in the interview said their negative experience communicating with American students:

I think it is a regular thing they do not know me and my culture since a lot of people were born and grew up here. But sometimes I feel like, for example, when we are talking in a small group, some girls don't look at me, and always talk to Americans. So I tried to say something, I talked to have their attention, but it is hard, you know. During my freshman year, I could not make any friends in my department.

A lot of professors wish that there would be more interactions between international students and American students. One of the professors also claimed the importance of having some social activities with American peer students. It seems to be a slight thing, but when it gets to happen regularly to become part of international students' campus life, their English will improve dramatically. However, the problem they claimed was that they were unable to tell them and make them do things since they perceive themselves as independent adults with their own choices. It was not allowed to be personal with international students to make them feel uncomfortable. Some professors also explained the perceptions of American students. The reasons why American students act like they do not communicate with international students were partly because they were fearful of being offensive before knowing their language ability and cultural backgrounds. One professor even stated that in fact, American students are eager to learn about international students and to make friends with them. During peer communication, socio-cultural factors are concluded as the biggest challenges.

Socio-cultural concerns. According to the survey result, we could draw a conclusion that most international students received their former education back in their home countries

before coming to the United States. Thus, socio-cultural challenges were the main difficulties that international students encounter. As previous research mentioned, international students who come from countries such as China, Korea, and Japan, have unique cultural values which have been permeating in their educational systems, personalities, as well as social behaviors (Kim, 2013; Shi, 2011; Xie, 2009; Yan & Berliner, 2010). Through some interviews, it is not hard to find that faculty in this university consider international students multicultural enrichment. Words such as “treasure”, “amaze”, “bravery” were used to describe their perceptions of welcoming international students in this university. A music professor said:

I went to recital during her sophomore; it was a lecture recital. She talked about Chinese classical music, so it was so amazing because no one ever brought that topic. It was such bravery for her, a Chinese student, standing up in the front holding a microphone and talking about Chinese music and playing. So I said to her teacher, I remember both of us said a lot of “wow”.

One professor from the Communication Department mentioned that “You know I like to say the word ‘cultural differences.’ When there is a situation where there are cultural differences, I would say ‘oh cultural differences.’ To some extent I broke down the barrier of cultures and made it easy and positive to be accepted”. An international student said that her professor often encouraged her by saying “you are such a treasure for us,” which made her feel more confident especially when she presented her identity and culture. Positive feedback from the interviews towards international students was that, interestingly, most international students stated that became more interested in their cultures and became more proud of their countries. The previous research reported that international students had negative perceptions of sharing knowledge and examples from their home culture. However, the cases in the interviews turned out to be a

contradictory. In fact, many international students shared their positive attitudes when their teachers ask them questions regarding their cultures, “I would love to be their ‘database,’” described by a Chinese student. This interaction not only promotes international students’ participation in the classroom but also offers American students a global perspective to look at the world situations. An education student expressed the same feeling throughout her study here in the United States:

After coming here, I feel like I'm more interested in Japanese culture, and I think I love my country more than before. I would feel so happy like: “oh they want to know my country?”

However, although the attitudes towards cultural differences are active, socio-cultural differences do form another primary challenge for international students to overcome during their academic study. Difficult socio-cultural challenges included different classroom norms, communication patterns, educational systems, value systems, double consciousness, and the lack of knowledge of each other.

The cultural differences are perceived positively and interestingly by the professors. All of the teachers in the interviews stated that they try to stand in international students’ perspectives and try to know what they need. However, for example, regarding classroom norms, 99% of the professors in the interviews concluded that international students were not able to speak up were partly because of the shyness that Asian cultures have. Only one teacher claimed that he knew the international students were being culturally respectful to the teachers and classmates. Their collective values make them not to bother the whole class by speaking up. Regarding classroom norms, all professors were aware of that in cultures of East Asian countries – that students tend to sit quietly, listen to the teachers respectfully. A professor in the interview

mentioned “power distance” in most Asian cultures, while in the United States, professors play a role more like a guide, other than a leader. The reason he considers the power distance was:

I think the reason that the teachers give a lot of respect for the students, so you don't want to contradict, or to give too much communication or disagreement here.

Connecting to what have been discussed about classroom discussions as one of the biggest portions of classroom norms, international students claimed that they had a hard time getting used to the different classrooms here in the United States. However, it is interesting to find that the classroom norms may be somehow varied by various disciplines, as well as majors. For example, an international student studying Music Performance said that she had not too many classes which were full of discussions. Another international student studying Education said that her biggest challenge was the classroom participation in classes.

In addition to classroom settings, being in the whole educational system in the United States, international students encounter differences especially in academic contexts. The differences of educational system also reflect in the academic study such as writing. For example, American education rewards creative thoughts and opinions. While in Chinese educational system, it prefers facts and data. One professor in the Psychological Department stated that it is important for teachers to understand what the education system is like in these other countries. Based on the results of the survey, the international students are not aware of the differences between the educational system and how these whole systematic circumstances would affect their academic performance. Their toughness during the first semester would be a perfect example to illustrate the difficult transition. But what international students perceive was mostly about the language problems. Moreover, the value system varies as well. For example, a psychology professor stated that American students' happiness is scattered externally, they value

what they own, such as the friendship. Chinese students value family as their first spiritual pillar. This concept was proved by a Chinese student saying that she had this tendency not to become Americanized. She claimed that family was her emotional support, and she would call them and asked about their life now and then. On the other hand, some international students also claimed that they had this tendency to become independent as what Americans value. This Chinese student said:

I am trying to combine the emphasis on my family and then myself as an independent person on that. It is about to keep your own values of your culture and yourself when you try to blend in.

Double consciousness, as well as indirect thinking, was considered one of the most important factors that influence international students' academic behavior. "Face-saving" strategy was mentioned by one professor who had an experience teaching in China. Shi (2011) and Xie (2009) reported "Face-saving" strategy as one of the most important communicative norms in Chinese culture. The professor also mentioned that the Korean students he taught had the same problem as well:

So every time I said to them is everything ok? They are like "yeah, yeah, everything is fine." There was a Korean student came last week for foundation course; she said things were fine, but the things were not fine. Some students came to me because we had class on Friday. They wanted to move the class, but they wouldn't tell. So I told them: "Tell me the truth." The truth was that they were all seniors, and my class was their only class on Friday. We worked out because they told me what was on their mind. Tell me what you need and I will do it.

As mentioned above, while international students think that their English was not good enough to be able to speak up and communicate, they considered the reason to be limited English proficiency, according to the result of the survey. As a matter of fact, the socio-cultural challenges were preventing them from speaking up as another factor overlapped with linguistic elements. As a professor claimed: "I never got a chance to assess their English-speaking skills, but once I do, it is not that you cannot understand, the fact is that they worry too much about it." It was proved by previous research as Kao and Gansneder (1995) mentioned, international students double consciousness concerning "worrying my question too shallow," "worrying my thoughts and comments not important." All international students described that they did not feel confident to speak with English speakers, as one of the international students said, "we do not attack, we just defense." Professors claimed that international students coming from East Asian cultural backgrounds tended to be more reserved; they show respect by not bothering and involving too many opinions. This double consciousness of international students also affects effective communication with professors and American students. A Chinese student claimed that she was always afraid of making mistakes. If she could not understand what Americans said, or Americans could not understand what she said, she would feel so embarrassed and the confidence would be cut half. Moreover, because of the socio-cultural differences, international students, were always unsure about the relationship between professors and students. International students are always unsure about the relationship between professors and students. For example, a Japanese described her concerns when writing emails to professors:

In Japanese, we use honorifics to older people. When I tried to send an email, like I felt it is too friendly to a professor. I felt like I cannot talk in that way to professors. But when I asked my American friends, they think it was too formal.

Due to their cultural backgrounds, which showing respect to professors is the way to communicate, international students find it hard to make this transition to consider teachers as friends rather than authority, a leader, reviewed by a professor. Furthermore, even international students know that it is beneficial to come to professors, they still do not take full advantage of it, as one professor said, “the culture of the relationship between faculty and students is different.”

International students and professors in the interviews and surveys also mentioned that being a lack of the knowledge of each other would lead to cultural misunderstandings and fewer communications between each other. For example, a professor who has been dedicated making efforts to international students towards their adjustments observed in a class where the group of students was in, he said that there was once, the teacher did a little warm up activity by talking about the “Buffalo Bills” game last night. The whole class was excited to talk about it while the international students were sitting there being so quiet because they did not know the sports and the team so well. A lot of times they had to overcome embarrassing moments like this. A professor in the Psychology Department claimed that there have been assumptions known as “the American culture” and “the Asian culture”. Even among American students, the differences exist regarding poor, rich, East Coast and West Coast. Another professor who has been studying on the stereotypes of people from different cultures concluded that both cultures have an image of another culture that is somewhere negative. Also, because of the location of this university, as one of the professors said, students are mostly from the County, which is a very rural area, American students have a limited approach to the outside world. A Chinese student shared her

experience going to the Learning Center, and some tutors tended to be not that friendly, she concluded that part of the reasons was that they never got the touch to another culture. Some international students think it was a normal thing that people do not know about their cultures since a lot of them were born and grew up here. A Communication professor also claimed the necessity of having local students understand what the rest of the world is, which is somewhat the problem American students have in general, “we ignore much of the world.” A Music professor expressed how he felt nervous before meeting the new coming student from China. So he said he would imagine how American students, as well as international students, felt before talking to each other. It seem beyond the acknowledgment of language levels, but also a more complicated reason in human communication.

The perspectives of professors towards international students are perceived as “hard working”. As one of the professors said, “I don't doubt that they are trying, and they are willing to try.” However, he claimed that because of a lot of challenges that international students have which have affected their academic performance, not all professors are aware of the fact that most international students are making a lot of efforts and energy to it. On the other hand, affected by previous deep-rooted socio-cultural and educational background, international students perceive their professors more as leaders and determiners.

The perceptions from each side of students determine whether they could break down the cultural differences and communicate successfully. “Even Chinese, Korean, and Japanese students have differences,” said by two professors in the Music Department. Peer communication, according to the result, the problem of which emphasizes more of socio-cultural factors. Some professors claimed the importance for each side of the student to get to know the cultures. A Music professor mentioned that there should be a process for international students

and American students to get finally closer to each other. For example, in the field of music, students play together, and the communication outside of the classroom, in their personal practices make them get to talk to each other, and by the end of the semester, they get along with each other. In the field of education, two international students also shared their experiences with local students:

During my freshman year, I could not make any friends in my department. Now I have done some field placements, and I have had different partners, and when we had discussions about lessons, we had a chance to talk to each other in person. Now when we meet in the hallways, we can say hello to each other. I realized I can talk like a friend to Americans. Maybe they thought we could not speak English before really knowing us.

Therefore, having conversations and cooperation outside of classroom settings could be concluded as the key for both sides of students to talk and to know each other. As most professors said, they wished there would be more interactions between American students and international students outside of classes. A Japanese student shared how she made one of her best American friends who is now learning Japanese from her:

I had the same class with an American girl, but we were in different sections, maybe she was in section A, I was in section B. Usually we have the same partner in the class, I was kind of like out of number, so she was my partner. We didn't meet in class; we met in person. So we could talk more, she could speak some Japanese, and it was very good. I know if I met her in class, this relationship would never happen.

Coping Strategies. During the interviews of the professors and students as well as suggestions made by the participants in the survey, faculty development becomes the very crucial concern contributing to assisting international students in overcoming linguistic and

socio-cultural challenges. In addition to faculty development, some other solutions and recommendations were also discussed.

Firstly, the school resources were widely considered. Some international students found it helpful to receive supports from international student service office on campus, especially for their very first couple days of arrangement. Secondly, there are some different attitudes towards learning center, that some professors suggest international students to go to the learning center for not only fixing grammar, but also finding a learning partner who is at their own age, and they can discuss the content knowledge as well as share their learning methods. It would also help socially. However, the feedback from international students was not that ideal. Most of the international students in the survey as well as interviews claimed that the learning center was not able to help them. Some students argued that they would only go to learning center when they have grammar issues. One student also mentioned that she had a bad experience in the learning center where the students there were not so good to international students. She never went back there afterward. A Music Chinese graduate student said that she found the learning center not helpful even it is within one major. She claimed that the students there were undergraduate and had no idea about the content knowledge in her Music History class. Thus, the development of learning center is considered important for this university. Some professors also said that the function of learning center should emphasize more on the content knowledge and learn strategies. More efforts should be made to better academic learning environments, especially to meet the needs of the international student group.

Secondly, extracurricular activities were also mentioned for different purposes. Professors with international experiences all recommended that there should be more exchange programs for American students. Also, a professor also suggested the idea of having host

families for international students. Moreover, faculty should be able to get involved in such programs to know more about their international students. For international students, there would be more contexts and more chances provided to them to practice English and to understand the culture better. Regarding exchange program, there is some faculty in different departments who are dedicated to making it realistic:

Students in St. Petersburg study and live in a big city, and students in Fredonia are from rural areas. The environment was so different, so they turned out to be so amazed. It was an eye-opening experience for both of the students to see what it is like in another culture. They became friends that last lifetime which is wonderful because, without this, they would never be able to know each other. If you don't know things about a country, you must make some certain ideas about it. But when you are there, you see what is really like, you break down the stereotypes... American students do not know about China since I have been to China, I could share my experience to American students, so they get a way to learn about China. It is kind of like a spread, more people will benefit from it, not only yourself.

Also, a professor also recommended social activities that should be attended more by international students. According to the result of the survey as well as the interviews, most international students tend to stay with their co-nation students. So extracurricular activities regarding social events could enhance their social skills, interaction skills, and social networking. It is seen as an excellent opportunity to build up a friendship with American students and meanwhile, mutual understanding of each culture will also be promoted. Another success example was given by a Chinese student studying English Literature. She is attending the literature panel during the month of literature in April. She said she is with great passion and

interests to be able to speak at the panel since the panel is closed to what she studies, she is able to gain knowledge and skills to be able to use in the classrooms. Moreover, such activities also make her more interested in the field, and when her interests and the courses get matched up, her academic performance will be motivated dramatically.

Thirdly, English as a Second Language (ESL) support was also highly recommended by the professors. As all professors illustrated the serious problems concerning language academic writing, they suggested that the language support and training should really be practical to help international students promote their academic performance. For example, the psychology professor suggested that English Department should make some efforts to offer English language courses to international students to deal with reading, writing, and speaking. The importance of academic English proficiency was highlighted as affecting international students' academic performance. Another professor in the Communication Department suggested that international students could find American study partners to help them proof-read. They are able to check for style, grammar, and spellings. Some international students claimed about the disconnection between their English language pre-class and their courses in majors. A Music student and an Education student collectively stated about their wishes to have more content being taught concerning their future program study. Moreover, a professor shared his own way of helping international students with their academic language demanded in music related contents. He concluded that international students ought to make good preparation in their fields of study as earlier as possible. To help new coming international students, he made a vocabulary list for international students and realized that there was more than expected for new entering students to acquire concerning very basic language use:

Students in EC English told me that they were just learning English about reading, writing, and speaking. It is not about learning music terms, or physics terms, or science terms, it was just about English. So I tried to start with fifty words to give it to the Music students, then I realized there were seven or fifty words, and there's a lot more. Those are just common words that we use all the time.

Fourthly, a lot of professors emphasized the importance of teaching international students about the American university cultures in terms of classroom norms, American culture, as well as the needs to have communication with professors. Forms such as orientations, workshops, even one-credit course were all mentioned and encouraged by the professors in the different department. One of the professors also considered this to be an excellent opportunity to develop the relationship between some American students and international students. It also allows international students to introduce their cultures and backgrounds. A professor who is in the graduate school also claimed the importance of such introductory contents of highly demanded academic requirement, particularly for graduate students. One of the professors said:

I think that when students come here, we could have an orientation for them, not just about they are at the registrar office, over here at the international services, now go to be a student, but more, what would be the American university like.

Besides, some professors recommended some workshops regarding English language learning, which would be helpful for international students to master better English as well. Furthermore, international students and professors all highlighted using forms of workshops to allow international students to discuss their backgrounds and cultures. It is seen as an excellent opportunity to have a mutual understanding. For example, two professors mentioned inviting some international students over to the faculty development day when there would be many

explosions and opportunities for international students to show their cultural backgrounds on that day.

Importantly, faculty development was mentioned by all professors as they considered themselves to have the responsibilities in helping international students better perform academically to finish their studies at this University. Some professors spoke about the responsibilities that faculty needs to have. For example, the professor in the Communication Department said that faculty needs to be aggressive, and co-active to make international students realize that they are willing to help. Another professor who has had rich experience living in other countries stated that faculty needs to realize that the university knowledge is about learning the world, different things, and to learn better ones' selves.

Culturally relevant pedagogy was also discussed, which plays a crucial role in affecting the promotions of the whole university's academic environment as well as the quality of education. Many professors mentioned the importance of cultural relevant pedagogical content in the class. For example, the professors discussed how their class instructions should be successfully presented under a culturally respected concentration. It is regarded as an imperative part of their education for today's classes where international students are becoming certain population. Thus having them understand the class and knowledge as well as considering them as a rich multicultural perspective were what the professors have been doing. A successful case was shared by a Music professor and an Education student:

I taught a course on Music History Pedagogy. One of the Chinese students was in that class. The final project was a paper and presentation. So about half way throughout the semester I told her: "what you are going to do is to write in your article about how music education practice might influence music in China." She was pleased with that when I

said: “and you are going to present it in the class.” She was terrified. So I pointed it out to her that the rest of the class do not understand education in China, and you are going to give them the basics. So at that day, she was terrified, she started to talk, and the PowerPoint. Five minutes, first hand raised. “What is this?” She answered. The next hand. The next hand. And all of a sudden they are going to be like: “Is it like this?” “Is it like that?” After class, they were all around her asking questions like: “Did you do this?” “Did you do that?” ... This was one of the successful pedagogical moment I would never forget.

In my education class, the teacher asked about poverty, because we were talking about how poverty ruins the educational system in the U.S. Some American students are not doing good works because the poverty rate is high, they cannot get books; they cannot get money. I was not so happy when I was reading that. I am from a developing country, and you, Americans, the greatest country in the world, are talking about poverty as having not good books. So I spoke up in the class, I said I am from a developing country, and you have no idea how poor those kids are living in the mountainous areas. Also, there are scholarships offered to these poor families, and they need to get proofed about their financial difficulty. And it is this group of students, coming from a desperate place of education, are the most hard working and successful people in the society, making efforts to the society. The American students were like “what” because they thought Chinese students are holding golden spoons. So I made them realize what more important is the attitude and perspectives towards poverty in this situation to change that.

Besides, the professors also highlighted the necessity of avoiding slangs. Some professors also mentioned that teachers need to speak in a slow and precise way to better ensure that international students understand them.

As noted above, professional development day is a particular date each semester for faculty to attend panels, talks, and workshops to develop the professional pedagogical education in this university. Since students know little about it, professors mentioned getting international student group involved in this development. Culturally relevant pedagogy is like to be more and more important in the classrooms nowadays. A professor further indicated that there is a need for not only faculty, but other staff on campus to join the development in that international students do not only communicate in class with teachers, but they may also encounter situations in everyday life everywhere. Also, a professor encouraged workshops regarding cultures and international students for professors and other faculties.

Moreover, the professors who have had international experiences highlighted the needs and encouragement for faculty to have experience exposed to another culture. As previous research stated, good practices understanding, cultures are somewhat beyond cultural nights, festival events, or dinners and food. "To understand a culture or a country, you need to involve in the day to day experience, which is good for me, that is how I learned China." said by a Psychology professor. A professor in Music major talked about his experiences visiting China. He indicated that he would never know things about China until he went there. This summer he applied for another seminar about how to better integrate Chinese students into our campus. What he dedicated to doing is not only for educational purposes, but knowing the cultures of China has become his biggest interests after visiting there.

Last but not least, efforts should also be made by instructors, programs, and departments. A professor in the School of Music also mentioned how it matters for international students to contact with students after their admission and before their arrivals:

I think it helps to get them to know here before they got here, and I was waiting for them, I was helping them because I knew it is different.

Besides, one-credit course relating to study demanding technique language of the fields was also mentioned by the professors in Music History and Psychology. In particular, the graduate students who might just retune to academic life would need this kind of program to know both the department and graduate program, as well as American university culture at the same time. Moreover, some professors mentioned that it was the responsibility of the instructors to offer some individual help to their international student. One student got help from her professors which made her speak up in the class. The professors provide her the question list the day before class, and the student was able to practice her answer and speaking. She was finally able to speak up in class confidently. The same example was provided by another professor:

In one of my class, I give reading assignments and at the beginning of every class, I can ask any student questions, but with international students, what I would do is to say, “okay for tomorrow, turn to page 220.” And they will read that page backward and forwards hold up to the mirror so that they can come in and I can look at them and go, “How many symphonies does he have?” They go like “Five.” Then I asked, “Which do you think is the most important one and why?” They are terrified. But at least, they are warmed up, that they could take the risk.

Discussion

The data from this research demonstrated many results. The analysis of the data led this study to a stage where it could draw a conclusion that international students' perceptions of their language ability, differences in socio-cultural values, academic concerns, individual differences, and experiences influence their academic study in many aspects. The results will be discussed in terms of academic factors, linguistic concerns, socio-cultural concerns, as well as coping strategies in an attempt to answer the two research questions. Furthermore, implications and limitations, as well as future study, will be further discussed.

Academic Concerns and Psychological Problems

To answer the research question, the two distinct factors commonly composed the two main challenges that international students encounter in their academic life. In addition to the linguistic and socio-cultural concerns, academic dimension and psychological problems were also discussed as other reasons that negatively affect international students academically. In the academic aspect, international students' previous experience, change of environment, and different sets of academic expectations were discussed as challenges for international students. Illustrated by the statistics of demographic information in the survey, we could draw a conclusion that the majority of international student group have been receiving English as Foreign Language education back in their home countries for more than eight years. They all have deep-rooted socio-cultural values and academic experience back in their country of origin for almost all their previous life. Thus, the challenges for them could be huge. Learning skills and habits were also discussed since those were deeply formed during their previous academic and cultural background.

Based on psychological aspects that international students presented, it is easy to draw a conclusion that the majority of international students have strong ties and emotional support from their co-national groups and family. Two folds were reflected that the intense needs for emotional support helped them to adjust psychologically. However, to some extent, it prevented them from learning the language, the host culture, which weakened their initial motivations coming to study in the United States. During the interviews, the first semester was discussed by most participants and was considered the most important and challenging period of transition academically, psychologically, and socially.

Linguistic Concerns

From the perspectives of the professors in the interviews, English ability was also considered as one of the most important factors that affect international students' effective study as well as communication. Within many linguistic concerns, academic language proficiency was highly discussed by the professors, which should be considered as the biggest challenge regarding language matters. A lot of common aspects such as grammar, word choices, styles, expressions, and specialized language were mentioned as problems of academic English proficiency in the interviews. The result illustrated the focus which both the international students and the professors should be looking at.

Linguistic challenges were widely discussed during the interviews and surveys. First, some professors apparently claimed the insufficient power of TOEFL as the standardized test for admission to American higher education. TOEFL scores were illustrated to fail to guarantee international students' academic English proficiency, language skills in their particular fields of study, as well as communication.

Problems of limited English proficiency faced by international students were concluded in several aspects: accent, rate of speech, pronunciation, oral communication, classroom participation, academic English proficiency (e.g. writing and reading), understanding of classroom lectures, understanding idioms and slangs, language preference, and language skill requirements in programs and disciplines. International students' concerns about language were emphasized in speaking skills and the ability to understand the language, such as accent, pronunciation, communication, classroom participation, as well as understanding lectures, slangs, and specific content in their fields. The professors were concerned about international students' academic language proficiency as well as their specialized academic language in their courses and programs of study.

Socio-cultural Concerns

It is hard to determine all factors in terms of linguistic concerns and socio-cultural concerns in which international students have in their academic life as well as campus life. And it is hard to determine what factors played a greater role than others in affecting international students' academic performance in that the linguistic and socio-cultural factors to some extent seemed to be intricately interwoven. While comparing to the two most important challenges, most of the international students seemed to be more concerned with limited English proficiency than cultural differences. We could draw a conclusion that from the surveys interviews with international students, language problems were considered more difficult which negatively affects their academic performance. However, participants were not able to realize that socio-cultural values were overlapping their language problems through analyzing the interviews and answers to the surveys.

In the aspect of socio-cultural concerns, the biggest problems were emphasized in terms of classroom norms, differences of educational systems, differences of socio-cultural values, double consciousness as well as the lack of mutual understandings. The challenges that international students encountered illustrated the socio-cultural differences between western culture and eastern culture. As one professor said, the cultural differences will never be broken down. Thus mutual understandings among faculty, international students, and American peer students were importantly discussed. Socio-Cultural challenges affect effective communication with professors and American students. For example, international students are unsure about the relationship with professors. According to the difference of the relationship with professors in their home countries, international students find it hard to make the change of perspectives. While based on previous research, sharing knowledge and examples of international students' home cultures were concluded negatively. However, all of the participants in the interviews demonstrated their positive attitudes towards sharing their home cultures. Peer communication was also discussed importantly in this factor as socio-cultural concerns were concluded as it weighs more in affecting effective communication. The main reason found was that both sides of students are a lack of each other's culture and knowledge.

Coping Strategies

Based on international students' academic experience in this university and the professors' experience working with international students, coping strategies were collectively discussed that contribute to a better development of the resources for assisting international students' academic outcomes. Firstly, the school resources were suggested to promote its functions to come to students' real needs especially international students. According to the survey (See Table 4), over half of the participants did not show a positive attitude towards the school resources such as

learning center and tutoring services. Based on the result, the promotion of such services is taken into consideration. For example, the learning center should better promote its practical meaning in helping international students with not only fixing the grammar but also their needs required in different fields and majors. Secondly, extracurricular activities were also suggested and considered positively within participants. Professors in the interviews suggested activities like host family programs which could promote a better mutual understanding between international students and faculty. Exchange programs were also recommended for American students to know better about the world thus to develop mutual understandings. Successful examples were also demonstrated by international students in the interview who attended extracurricular activities regarding her courses, which had enhanced her motivations of her academic study.

Professors also mentioned ESL support in the interviews. The majority of professors indicated the necessity of helping international students' academic English proficiency in terms of writing, reading, and speaking. Some professors mentioned the feasibility and interests of ESL programs of some faculty in English Department who had shown benefits in doing this.

Intercultural communication was highly recommended to be the critical part in promoting the multicultural academic environment. Orientations should be developed not only to introduce the services but also to introduce American university cultures. In particular, for graduate students who might be just returning to academic life, it is necessary to provide such orientations for them to adjust better culturally, academically, and socially at the same time. Workshops, panels and seminars were also mentioned to promote content such as language training, cultural exchange, etc. Some professors indicated that opportunities which allow international students to introduce themselves and their cultures would enhance their feeling being embraced and identified as multicultural enrichment.

Besides, the faculty development was considered as the most important aspect which contributes to promoting international students' study academically. First, it is the faculty's responsibility to have this awareness of embracing cultures from a global perspective. Culturally relevant pedagogy was discussed as one of the most important future education philosophy by professors. Successful cases were both mentioned by professors and international students in the classroom. Culturally relevant pedagogy not only showed the authentic and global learning environment for the general but also helped international students to build up their confidence and motivations psychologically. Study abroad programs were also recommended by some professors who have had benefits from such programs. Those professors who have had international experiences living and working in another culture enriched their perspectives by looking at international students' academic life here much more positively. In particular, the Professional Development Day in this university was mentioned by professors in the interviews. Professors recommended the participation of international students as speakers at panels and talks which allow them to introduce their cultures, educational backgrounds, as well as personal experiences. Based on some experiences that some participants in School of Music have, the participants recommended a representative of such professor who have been offering help in every aspect. It was also mentioned by a professor in the interview that an official representative in each department who is responsible for international student issues could be a real implementation.

Last but not least, efforts should also be made by instructors, programs, and departments. Some professors who have made some efforts had great feedback from international students which helped them overcome their particular problems eventually. Question list, vocabulary list,

getting contact with students after admission and before arrival were all recommended as successful cases done by the professors in this university.

Limitation

There were several limitations of this research study. The biggest deficiency of this study reflects the small size of participation. According to the response of surveys, the return rate for the student survey was very low and was not accurate to be able to represent the whole population of international students from East Asian countries in this university. Most of the participants were newly students in this University and had been studying for less than two years. Lower than the expectation of returns of the survey results, the research study is consequently less valid.

Another limitation is in regards to the types of participants in the interviews. For example, the gender composition of the interviews was not balanced, only one male student participated in the interviews as one of the international students. On the other hand, no female faculty was interviewed. Furthermore, the nationalities of international student composition in the interviews also reflect deficiency. Only one Korean student was interviewed while according to the population of the student body in this University, South Korean students compose the biggest population of international students. To increase the validity of the research study, the study could have included participants of more balanced nationalities, majors, genders, as well as levels of education. Also, unique differences among international students were reflected in the study, which is hard to generalize and concluded as a factor to answer the research questions. The validity of this study should be more emphasized.

The third limitation of this research study lies in the sample pool size. The research study only implemented in a university in Western New York. It is not valid to be able to represent the general situation of universities and higher education in the United States.

Implication

The research study was intended to realize and illustrate linguistic and socio-cultural challenges that international students have in this university. The research study accomplished finding out the challenges that international students have to answer the first research question by doing online surveys to international students and interviews with faculty and international students. Another goal of this study is to illustrate coping strategies and efforts that could be made which contributes to satisfactory academic performance among international students. The future study will be continuously finding out the challenges in which international students have in particular fields of study. More practical solutions will be provided in different areas if we make more efforts to help international students with their unique academic needs.

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*Appendix A***Student Consent Form**

Dear all,

My name is Xiaomeng Liu and I am a graduate student at SUNY Fredonia working on my Masters of science in Education in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) program. I am beginning the research for my Master's Thesis, and the purpose of my study is to examine the academic and socio-cultural challenges that international students have encountered during their academic study in various programs and fields in SUNY Fredonia.

You are invited to participate in this study, which consists of two parts. The first part of the study consists of 25-question, online survey, which should only take 5 minutes of your time (see the link below). This survey is designed to gather information about your former educational background, your study, and perceptions of academic and socio-cultural challenges.

The second part of the study is the individual interview. At the end of the survey, you will be asked if you are willing to participate in an individual interview with me, which will last about 40 minutes. The interview questions will be about you as an international student, your perspectives about academic and socio-cultural challenges and practical strategies to cope with the challenges. The interview will take place at a time and place that is convenient for you.

There are no risks to participants that take part in this study. All information is anonymous and confidential. The online survey will be used for research purposes only. I will be audio taping the interviews with your permission, but I will be transcribing the interview on paper afterwards and giving you a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity. All information will be destroyed after the research is completed.

Participation either in the online survey only or in both the survey and the interview is completely voluntary and you may drop out at any time with no penalty. Participants can simply exit the browser and stop the survey at any time. Participants also have the right to end the interview simply at any time.

If you choose to take part in the survey, simply click on the link below. By clicking that link you conform that you are at least eighteen years old, are aware of the voluntary aspect of this survey and are willing to participate in this survey.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact:

Xiaomeng Liu, TESOL graduate student, SUNY Fredonia
Phone: [REDACTED]; Email: liu0085@fredonia.edu

Dr. Sovicheth Boun, Visiting Assistant Professor, SUNY Fredonia
Phone: 716-673-4988; Email: sovicheth.boun@fredonia.edu

Link to access survey: <http://goo.gl/forms/oza2sWZznl>

*Appendix B***Professor Consent Form**

Dear Educators:

My name is Xiaomeng Liu and I am a graduate student at SUNY Fredonia working on my Masters of Science in Education in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) program. I am beginning the research for my Master's Thesis, and the purpose of my study is to examine the academic and socio-cultural challenges that international students have encountered during their academic study in various programs and fields in SUNY Fredonia.

You are invited to participate in an interview with me, which will last about 40 minutes. The interview questions will be about you as an educator, your experience and perspectives about the academic and socio-cultural factors that may influence international students in their process of study, and practical strategies that may help to address their challenges. The interview will take place at a time and place that is convenient for you.

All information will be kept confidential. I will audio record the interviews, only with your permission. I will be transcribing the interview on paper afterwards and giving you a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity. The recording will be destroyed after the interviews are transcribed.

Participation in this interview is completely voluntary and you may drop out at any time and with no penalty. At any time during the interview, you have the right to end it simply by saying so. If you choose to take part in this interview please sign below. By signing, you are confirming that you are at least eighteen years old, are aware of the voluntary aspect of this survey, and are willing to participate. If you prefer not to participate then you do not have to sign this.

I, _____, do hereby consent to participate in this research study and will allow the interviews to be digitally recorded. I acknowledge that I am 18 year of age or older. I understand that participation is voluntary; therefore, I have the right to withdraw at any time and with no penalty. I understand that all information gathered through the interviews will be coded, securely kept, and remain confidential.

Signature of Participant

Date

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact:

XiaomEng Liu, TESOL graduate student, SUNY Fredonia
 Phone: [REDACTED]; Email: liu0085@fredonia.edu

Dr. Sovicheth Boun, Visiting Assistant Professor, SUNY Fredonia
 Phone: 716-673-4988; Email: sovicheth.boun@fredonia.edu

*Appendix C***Interviews Questions for Students****Part 1. Self-introduction**Questions suggested:

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?
2. Did you have your high school/ undergraduate in your home country? Can you tell me a little bit about your former educational experience in your home country?
3. What was your favorite subject? Do you like your major? What do you want to do in the future?
4. Why do you want to come to the United States for further study? Why the U.S.?

Part 2. Life experienceQuestions suggested:

5. What do you think of this university? Does it provide everything you need and want?
6. Do you communicate with local students more often or with your friends who also come from your country?
7. Do you feel the environment is embracing students like you and your culture?

Part 3. Academic experience and challengesQuestions suggested:

8. What is your current major? Why did you choose this major? Did you like it?
9. Are there any international students in your program and in your class? Are there a lot of international students in a particular class?
10. What difficulties related to culture did you encounter during your academic study?
11. What difficulties related to language did you encounter during your academic study?
12. Can you tell me any experience you have had in coping with your difficulties?
13. Did you receive any personal help from any of your professors in the program? How did they help you with your study? How did they understand the cultural differences?
14. Did you receive any help from any of your local classmates? How did they help you with your study? How did they understand the cultural difference?
15. What do you think are the biggest differences comparing to your former educational experience back in your home country?
16. What are the advantages do you think you have comparing to others?
17. How are you satisfied with your current study?

Part 4. Comments, suggestions, and solutionsQuestion suggested:

18. How often do you seek to assistance in helping you with your study (e.g. learning center, tutoring)?
19. How much do you think it helps you in learning English?
20. What would be the possible ways/strategies that you think can help international students in their program study?
21. What would be the possible ways/strategies you think can help local students and professors in understanding your culture?

*Appendix D***Interview Questions for Professors****Part 1. Self-introduction**

Questions suggested:

1. What are your fields of expertise?
2. What **courses** are you currently teaching?
3. Have you ever had any **experience** working **with international students**? Where did/do they come from? **How many** international students are/were there in your classes?
4. Have you ever been to other countries or had any **experience working in other countries**?
5. What do you think of the different cultures that you ever experienced?

Part 2. Socio-cultural and linguistic perceptions

Questions suggested:

6. What are the academic situations of your international students in your class?
7. What are some of the **academic challenges** that your international students have?
8. What are some of the **cultural challenges** that your international students have?
9. Have you ever encountered any awkward situations that you think resulted from cultural misunderstandings?

Part 3. Comments, suggestions, and solutions

Question suggested:

10. What would be the possible ways that you think can help your international students improve their **English language proficiency**?
11. What are some of the **efforts** that you have made to help international students with their study?
12. What are some effective solutions and strategies that you think can be implemented in your **program** or on **campus** to assist international students?
13. Have you done anything to enhance your **understanding** of your international students' **cultures**? If yes, what have you done?