International students: Culture shock and adaptation to the U.S. culture

Stefanie Theresia Baier
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS:
CULTURE SHOCK AND ADAPTATION TO THE U.S. CULTURE

by

Stefanie Theresia Baier

Thesis

Submitted to the Teacher Education Department
Eastern Michigan University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
in
Educational Psychology with a concentration in Personality Development

Thesis Committee:
Pat Pokay, PhD, Chair
Robert Carpenter, PhD
Joe Bishop, PhD
Ethan Lowenstein, PhD

November 15, 2005
Ypsilanti, Michigan
DEDICATION

This Thesis is dedicated to all my international friends who I have had many conversations with about facing the challenges of living and studying in the United States and adjusting to its culture.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank all my professors who have helped me with writing my thesis. I want to thank Dr. Ethan Lowenstein for encouraging me to put my ideas into a framework and write this thesis; I am thankful to Dr. Pat Pokay and Dr. Joe Bishop for all their support and help with my work and that they were always there for me when I had questions. I especially want to thank Dr. Robert Carpenter for his patience and flexibility working with me many hours on the statistical analysis for my thesis and for his spontaneous help for whenever I needed anything. I also want to thank John Brender for constantly challenging my thinking regarding the study. All of you have been a wonderful team and without your help this thesis would not have come into existence.

I thank my friends for cheering me up and keeping me calm when things got stressful, especially Ruth and Marta. Thanks to my host family and everyone who has hung in there with me in the last few months of completing my thesis.
ABSTRACT

Annually thousands of international students attend US colleges and universities which requires them to adjust to a new environment, often accompanied by a culture shock experience.

This study analyzes to what degree cultural background, gender differences, language proficiency, self-confidence/self-efficacy, and social support networks impact the adjustment process of international students to the US culture.

Forty-five international students attending a Michigan community college were surveyed and interviewed to assess the relationship among self-confidence/self-efficacy, cultural background, gender and social support networks. Western students reported more positive cultural adjustment ($M=29.0$) than non-western students ($M=29.0$). Males adjusted better ($M=29.4$) than their female peers ($M=25.4$). A significant positive correlation was found between cultural adjustment and the experience of culture shock symptoms. English usage of English as a primary language in the students’ home countries accounted for a stronger social support network.

These results have implications for college and university personnel in working with international students.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION ........................................................................................................ iii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .................................................................................... iii

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................... iv

CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND OF STUDY ....................................................... 1

  Introduction ........................................................................................................ 1
  Definitions .......................................................................................................... 1
  Purpose of the Study ......................................................................................... 2
  Rationale .......................................................................................................... 3
  Statement of Problem ....................................................................................... 4
  Guiding Questions ........................................................................................... 4

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE ....................................................... 6

  Culture .............................................................................................................. 7
  Language .......................................................................................................... 12
  Religion ........................................................................................................... 13
  Personality ........................................................................................................ 14

    Self-Confidence/Self-Efficacy and the Experience of a New Culture .......... 15

       Defining Self-Esteem/Self-Confidence and Self-Efficacy ......................... 16

       Impact of Self-Confidence and Self-Efficacy on Cultural Adjustment .... 19

       Self-Confidence and Cultural Adjustment ................................................. 19

       Self-Efficacy and Cultural Adjustment ....................................................... 21

  Culture Shock .................................................................................................. 22

    What is Cultural Shock? – Definition ........................................................... 22
Stages and Symptoms of Cultural Shock ................................................................. 23
Symptoms of Culture Shock .................................................................................. 26
Attempts to Managing Culture Shock ................................................................... 29
International Students and Their Adjustment to the U.S. Culture ......................... 31
Cultural Differences and International Students .................................................. 34
Personality of International Students and Cultural Adjustment ........................... 37
Language Difficulties of International Students .................................................. 38
Social Support Network of International Students ................................................. 39
Summary .................................................................................................................... 40
The Current Study ..................................................................................................... 40

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS ................................................................................. 42
Design of the Study ................................................................................................. 42
Instruments ............................................................................................................... 42
Questionnaire .......................................................................................................... 42
Sections of Questionnaire ......................................................................................... 43
Reliability and Validity of Questionnaire ............................................................... 46
Interviews ............................................................................................................... 46
Procedure .................................................................................................................. 47
Survey Procedure ..................................................................................................... 47
Interview Procedure ................................................................................................. 48
Participants ................................................................................................................. 48
Survey Participants ................................................................................................ 49
Interview Participants .............................................................................................. 51
Opportunities. .................................................................................................................. 84

Theme 5: Difficult Times and Experiences ................................................................. 86

Living Through the Stages of Culture Shock ............................................................ 87

Students’ Suggestions for Dealing with Cultural Differences and Problems. 91

Summary ......................................................................................................................... 92

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION ..................................................................................... 94

Cultural Adjustment and Symptoms of Culture Shock ............................................. 94

Adjustment Differences between Western and Non-Western Students ............... 95

Gender Differences and Adjustment ....................................................................... 97

Self-Confidence and Self-Efficacy .......................................................................... 98

Usage of English and Adjustment .......................................................................... 99

Culture Shock Phenomenon in the Experience of International Students .......... 100

Difficult and Pleasant Experiences ....................................................................... 101

Summary ....................................................................................................................... 102

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSIONS .................................................................................. 103

Significance of Current Study ................................................................................... 103

Implications ................................................................................................................. 104

Limitations and Future Research ............................................................................ 106

APPENDICES ............................................................................................................. 114

APPENDIX A .............................................................................................................. 115

APPENDIX B .............................................................................................................. 120

APPENDIX C .............................................................................................................. 125
LIST OF TABLES

1. Demographic Information on International Students (N = 45) ........................................52
2. Pearson Correlations among Totals of Social Network, Cultural Adjustment, Cultural Match, and Self-Efficacy (n= 45) .................................................................57
3. Descriptives for Totals of Self-Confidence/Self-Efficacy, Cultural Adjustment, Cultural Match, and Social Network ..................................................58
4. Descriptives for Self-Efficacy, Cultural Adjustment, Cultural Match and Social Support by Cultural Groups .................................................................59
5. One-Way Analysis of Variance Summary for Cultural Adjustment by Cultural Groups .................................................................60
6. Descriptives for Cultural Adjustment by Gender ........................................61
7. Analysis of Variance for Cultural Adjustment by Gender ...................62
8. Descriptives for Language Groups .................................................................63
9. One-Way Analysis of Variance for Social Network by Language .................64

LIST OF FIGURES

1. Layers of Culture (adapted from Hofstede, 2001) ........................................9
CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Introduction

This study examines the adaptation process and culture shock experience of international students in the USA by looking at similarities and differences among international students at a community college in the Midwestern United States. More specifically, it compares students from western and non-western backgrounds, which will be defined below. The guiding questions in the study will be as follows: (1) What is the impact of culture and language, personality, and social network on the adaptation of international students to the U.S. culture? and (2) What are the personal experiences of international students with adaptation to the U.S. culture and culture shock? This chapter provides definitions necessary for the study, purpose of the study, rationale, statement of the problem, and guiding questions.

Definitions

Culture Shock: conceptualized by Oberg (1960), culture shock in this study is defined as the consequence of strain and anxiety resulting from contact with a new culture and the feelings of loss, confusion, and impotence, which are due to loss of accustomed cultural cues and social rules.

Western countries: countries with individualistic features emphasizing individuals’ independence, working towards their own goals (Triandis, 1989; Kaplan, 2004).

Non-western countries: countries with features emphasizing relation to and dependence on others; personal goals cannot be separated from collective goals. Asian, Eastern
European, Middle-Eastern, and Latin American countries are usually characterized as collectivist cultures (Triandis, 1989; Kaplan, 2004).

Self-efficacy: This study uses Bandura’s (1977) definition, which describes self-efficacy as a person’s belief about his/her capability to produce desired results.


Academic self-efficacy: the desire to approach academically challenging situations without hesitation or fear of not being able to handle them (Bandura 1977; Poyrazli et al., 2002).

Social self-efficacy: confidence in one’s ability to engage in social interaction, which is necessary not only to initiate but also to maintain interpersonal relationships in life (Bandura 1977; Anderson 2001).


Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the culture shock experience of international students in order to get a better understanding of the issues involved in this process and to be able to find ways to respond to the needs of those affected. This study will analyze how level of self-confidence/self-efficacy, social network, and cultural background influence international students’ acclimatization to the U.S. culture. It will also look at gender differences and language proficiency level to determine whether different student groups have more difficulties in adjusting than others. Individual interviews will be analyzed in order to find themes that need special attention when
trying to help international students and to make suggestions to help minimize the impact of culture shock and enable a positive adjustment to the U.S. culture.

Rationale

The USA annually hosts about half a million international students from 186 nations who attend more than 2,500 institutions of higher learning (Bikos & Furry, 1999). Coming from all over the world, these students may contribute to a tolerant multicultural society and to mutual understanding of cultures, which has become a very important aspect of acknowledging the challenges of world affairs (http://cultureconnect.state.gov).

According to the Report of International Educational Exchange by Open Doors from 2004, international students constituted 4.3 percent of the total enrollment in 2003/2004 (International student enrollment, 2004). In the interest of international relations, academic enrichment, and economic advancement, it is important for college and university personnel to become acquainted with the international students and their unique challenges.

Students going abroad for at least one year encounter an enormous load of new information, unfamiliar places, situations, and people – a whole new culture. This experience results in a phenomenon the literature defines as culture shock (Oberg, 1960). Newcomers to a new culture may experience both physical and psychological reactions involving physiological, emotional, interpersonal, cognitive, and social components, as well as effects resulting from changes in socio-cultural relations, cognitive fatigue, role stress, and identity loss (Oberg, 1960; Winkelman, 1994). The degree to which people are affected by culture shock depends on their previous familiarity with other cultures, their expectations and amount of preparation for the cultural change, the availability of support
systems, the grade of difference between the native culture and the new one, and
differences in the individual personality characteristics (Oberg, 1960; Winkelman, 1994;
Yost & Lucas, 2002). Among these personality traits are assertiveness, introversion,
extroversion, self-confidence, and self-efficacy. Social and academic self-efficacy are
important, as they influence the confidence of people to approach or avoid academic
challenges and making contact with others. How crucial these variables are for the
positive adjustment of international students has not been sufficiently researched. Also
the impact of the proficiency in the host culture’s language on the adjustment process
needs more attention, as it is crucial for relating and communicating with American
students (Poyrazli, McPherson, Arbona, Pisecco, Nora, 2002; Rajapaksa & Dundes,
2003).

Statement of Problem

Even though it is known that those living in a different culture for an extended
period of time go through a culture shock experience, there is still insufficient research
that acknowledges the connections of belonging to a larger cultural group, gender
differences, level of proficiency in the language of the host country, differences in social
network, and the personality variables self-confidence/self-efficacy and their impact on
the adjustment problems of international students to the U.S. culture.

Guiding Questions

1) What is the impact of culture and language, personality, and social network on the
adaptation of international students to the U.S. culture?

   a) Is there a relation between perception of cultural differences (adjustment) and
      experience of culture shock (cultural match)?
b) Do non-western students have a more difficult time adjusting to the U.S. culture than western students?

c) Are there gender differences in the adjustment process?

d) Do levels of self-confidence/self-efficacy affect adaptation?

e) Do language proficiency and social support network affect the adjustment?

2) What are the personal experiences of international students with adaptation to the U.S. culture and culture shock?
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Each of us is a unique cultural being as a result of our upbringing and our immediate culture (Swartz-Kulstad & Martin, 1999). Ethnicity, religion, language, child-rearing practices and norms of cultural subgroups within our larger culture shape us and our perception of those outside of our defined culture. Strong connections to our own traditions and customs within our groups clearly distinguish us from other cultures, and an encounter with a new culture causes reactions that may affect us in many ways. Foreign students coming to the USA to pursue degrees at U.S. colleges and universities go through a new cultural experience that can cause what the literature calls culture shock, which involves more or less severe symptoms depending on how well these students are able to adapt to the culture and cope with accompanying difficulties. Understanding the culture shock experiences and adaptation processes of international students and the ways they are affected by a range of variables influenced by western or non-western cultural background and how international students perceive them will be discussed here.

First, culture and its prominent descriptors, including the meaning of language in the context of culture, will be defined. Second, prevalent personality features influenced by culture will be analyzed and discussed. Third, interactions between individual characteristics and culture will be scrutinized. Last but not least, the influence of personality and cultural differences on stages and symptoms of culture shock and the adaptation process of international students to the U.S. culture will be explored to help anticipate ways of managing this complex phenomenon. This examination of literature will develop the basis for the actual study, which will scrutinize the personality variable
self-confidence/self-efficacy, cultural differences, and the make-up of social support
network, and how they interact as well as influence international students’ adaptation and
cultural shock experience in the USA.

Culture

Many attempts have been made to define culture, indicating that culture is a
multifaceted construct that cannot easily be scrutinized, as it includes many variables
such as history, religion, language, values, common traditions, customs, and more. These
variables vary in the degree to which they contribute to people’s cultural make-up and in
the way they are connected. Different cultures adhere to different rules that are passed on
from previous generations and are manifested in the ways people interact and make
decisions, as well as in their child-rearing practices and their uses of symbols and

Hofstede (1984) identifies culture as “collective programming of the mind [...] reserved for describing entire societies” (p. 13). In a more recent definition, Hofstede
(2001) uses “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of
one group or category of people from another” to identify culture (p. 9). He suggests that
culture patterns are rooted in the value systems of major groups of the population
stabilized over long periods in history (Hofstede, 1984; 2001). A culture’s values are not
always evident but manifest in behaviors and visible elements such as symbols, heroes,
and rituals. As symbols we recognize words, gestures, pictures, and objects (e.g. verbal
and facial expressions, dress, etc.) that are shared by a certain culture. Heroes are
persons and characters, dead or alive, real or imaginary (legends, cartoon characters,
accomplished people), that are commonly known and valued in one culture (legends,
cartoon characters, accomplished people) and not in another. Collective activities such as ways of greeting, ceremonies of social and religious nature, and ways of going about business are just some of the rituals with a certain meaning to one culture and a different meaning to another. People from another culture are able to recognize a culture’s values in their practices (Hofstede, 2001). Hofstede (2001) developed the model in which he depicts the different aspects of culture as layers of an onion. He located values at the core and depending placed rituals, heroes, and symbols around the values. The order of the different layers depends on how strongly the different aspects are connected to the core. All the layers of culture contribute to the development of particular practices of groups of people with different backgrounds (Hofstede, 2001). See Figure 1.
In an attempt to determine elements of culture, Hofstede (1984) uses four dimensions: Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Masculinity, and Individualism. All four dimensions contribute to the understanding of culture and its manifestation in cultural groups. Power Distance refers to people’s relationships to authority, such as children’s relationship to their parents, students’ to their teachers, and employees’ to their employers. Some cultures show more distance to authority than others. Uncertainty Avoidance signifies people’s fear of or comfort with approaching tasks that do not offer security but rather uncertainty. The Masculinity dimension can be explained as a culture’s acceptance of male dominance. More traditional cultures usually adhere to
systems of male dominance, whereas more industrially developed cultures are more inclined to equality of gender roles. Individualism is one of the most frequently used descriptors of culture and implies the degree of a culture’s orientation towards individual interests versus group interest (Hofstede, 1984; Brender, 2005). Hofstede also refers to Tönnie’s distinction of Gemeinschaft characterized by low individualism and Gesellschaft by high individualism, which can be understood as “community” versus “society.” Most researchers identify the USA as a country with high individualism and, therefore, a tendency toward “Gesellschaft,” characterized by a people who emphasize personal accomplishments over group interest with little connection among group members.

Since literature commonly distinguishes between collectivist and individualist cultures, pointing out certain characteristics associated with those larger cultural groups, Tavris & Wade (2000) have developed a list of distinctive features for each of the two identified groups:

**Individualist Cultures**

- Emphasis is on autonomous individuality and needs of the self
- Personal goals take priority over group goals; competitiveness
- Independence and self-fulfillment are valued highly
- Relationships are established/maintained for individuals’ advantages

**Collectivist Cultures**

- Self cannot be defined as separate from the group
- One’s own needs yield to the goals of the group
Fulfilling of duties and obligations is important in order to live in harmony.
Relationships are seen as beneficial if they are positive for the group.

In the current study, the researcher distinguishes between “western” and “non-western” countries and identifies “western” countries as those with individualistic features emphasizing individuals’ independence, working towards their own goals (Triandis, 1989; Kaplan, 2004). These characteristics are more likely to be found in Western European cultures. People from non-western countries often see themselves in relation to and with dependence on others, and their personal goals cannot be separated from collective goals. Asian, Eastern European, Middle-Eastern, and Latin American are usually characterized as collectivist cultures (Triandis; Kaplan).

This distinction can be better understood when we recognize the close relationship of individualism and collectivism to factors such as economic and technological development, level of income, and availability of education and jobs for highly educated people. Cultural studies reveal that western countries are technologically and economically more advanced than non-western and characterized by individualism. For non-western cultures, the opposite is true with few exceptions because even people from collectivist countries do not completely ignore individuals and western cultures do not totally neglect group belonging (Brislin, 2000; Kaplan, 2004). For example, countries in Eastern Europe, which have not yet been highly technologically developed - even though they have become members of the European Union - do not enjoy an equivalent standard of living or income level and advanced economy as Western European
countries, the USA, Canada, or Australia. Therefore, it can be suggested that the economic situation is often a factor co-determining whether a country/culture is collectivist or individualist. Hofstede (1984) shares this concept, concluding from his extensive studies that the distinction between individualism and collectivism “relates most closely to a country’s level of economic development” (p. 151).

Language

Individualism and collectivism are very common descriptors of culture, but so is the role of language as part and medium of culture. Hofstede (1984) posits that, “language is the most clearly recognizable part of culture” (p. 27). Language and culture are undoubtedly very closely connected, and thought, which is certainly rooted in our cultural upbringing, is delivered by language. Thus, communication across cultures is difficult when certain words and concepts in one language find direct translation in another language but do not necessarily carry the same meaning. Direct translation does not consider cultural tint and the context words normally used in within a culture’s language. This fact needs to be acknowledged not only in communication with people from different cultural and language backgrounds but also by those in the field of research. Many researchers have identified language and translation as sources of error in cross-cultural research. For example, the difficulty can be encountered when questionnaires are translated for certain participants and then the results again translated back into the original language. To note the role of language in both communication and understanding of cultures is relevant in order to avoid ethnocentrism and bias in the explanation and interpretation of findings and drawing conclusions (Hofstede, 1984).
Entering and living for a period of time in a new culture that differs from one’s own and having to communicate in another language is a challenge and results in a cultural shock experience with different levels of adaptation to a previously unknown culture (Oberg, 1960), which will be discussed in a later section.

Religion

When discussing culture, religion is also an important element (Ember & Ember, 1990; Lacina, 2002). Religion can be defined as “any set of attitudes, beliefs, and practices pertaining to supernatural power” (Ember & Ember). Sociological theories see religion deriving from societal needs of communities held together by social norms and communal rituals. From a psychological standpoint, religious practices are seen as a response to anxieties, threats, unpredictable risks, and uncertainties that have an effect on individuals and their social groups (Ember & Ember, 1990).

Not all cultures/countries are as strongly influenced by their major religions as others. At the same time, many cultures’ traditions, customs, and practices are derived from their religious heritage and may be an integral part of their lives and define them. If religion takes a priority in people’s lives, they may feel offended when others are not accepting of their beliefs. Religion is not only often a part of a culture’s group identity, but also a way of cultures viewing their beliefs as right and good. When religious beliefs and practices are ridiculed or not tolerated by others, people from different backgrounds may feel suspicious of others, which can be an obstacle to adaptation to and integration into a new culture. People from different countries who are entering a new culture may feel compelled to look for ethnic communities, in which they are able to live their home
cultural groups people in their ways of thinking, feeling about, and reacting to the environment based on values that manifest in rituals, heroes, and symbols used by them. Groups consist of individuals and their personalities; therefore, we also need to look at individual features of people to understand their reactions to a new setting. When defining personality, Wade and Tavris (2000) refer to personality as a “distinctive pattern of behavior, thoughts, motives, and emotions that characterize an individual over time” (p. 457). Humans all around the world are from the same species and, therefore, are similar in their psychological development across societies. However, people’s personalities are not only a result of genetic inheritance but also of life experiences, the influence of family and upbringing, and culture (Ember & Ember, 1990). Wade and Tavris (2000) identify specific personality traits such as habitual ways of behaving, thinking, and feeling, which are characterized by shyness, braveness, reliability, friendliness, hostility, confidence, and so on. Various psychologists focus on different traits. Personality traits that are central in interacting with people, behaving in certain ways, and dealing with new situations are of interest when entering new cultures. Some of these traits are results of characteristics of self-concept, including introversion/extroversion, temperament, assertiveness, self-confidence, and self-efficacy, which, as mentioned before are often influenced by people’s home cultures. At the same time they are crucial for the adaptation process to a new culture (Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003). Various studies examine different personality variables that affect the adjustment
process of people coming to other countries. Several studies have found that the extent to
which newcomers to a country experience difficulties in adjusting to a new culture
largely depends on a variety of external factors such as knowledge and attitude about the
host culture but also internal factors involving health, stress management, and personality
(Yost & Lucas, 2002; Armes & Ward, 1988).

The influence of culture on personality cannot be neglected if we observe the
ways some societies raise their children to be compliant, whereas others teach them self-
reliance and individual initiative which emphasizes assertiveness (Ember & Ember, 1990;
Kaplan, 2004). The way young people are raised may have as much an impact on their
self-concept, including their self-confidence and their self-efficacy, as does their genetic
inheritance (Kaplan, 2004). These personality characteristics will be discussed in the
context of culture more carefully in the next section.

Self-Confidence/Self-Efficacy and the Experience of a New Culture

Even though personality variables have been recognized as highly related to
cultural adjustment, there is insufficient empirical research examining their impact on this
multifaceted adaptation process. Two personality variables of special interest, which have
repeatedly been acknowledged as influential on people’s behaviors, are self-esteem/self-
confidence and self-efficacy. They have been seen as predictive of how well newcomers
adjust to a new culture. In order to be able to make a successful transition, self-efficacy in
learning how to meet needs of physical well-being, such as food and security, comes
before self-efficacy in meeting school and work requirements. These again precede needs
for social relations and personal development. Thus, self-efficacy is crucial to boost self-
confidence for persisting in the new culture (Winkelman, 1994; Poyrazli, McPherson, Arbona, Pisecco, and Nora, 2002).

Since literature frequently mentions these concepts, the question “What is the impact of self-confidence and self-efficacy on the adaptation to a new and unfamiliar culture?” is legitimate. Even though the adjustment process has been characterized as very complex and undoubtedly cannot be understood without the many factors mentioned earlier, we need a clear definition of these two specific personality variables that are critical in influencing the cultural experience.

Defining Self-Esteem/Self-Confidence and Self-Efficacy

Both self-confidence and self-efficacy are important concepts in the development of the self – the organization of an individual’s subjective experience based on the conscious understanding of one’s being. Literature frequently discusses self-confidence and self-esteem as related components of the self-concept; therefore, it is important to define each variable individually. Self-esteem is determined by the judgment people have of themselves and includes various aspects of the self such as perceptions of self-worth and self-confidence (Kaplan, 2003). Self-esteem is defined as the opinion of one’s own character and abilities, whereas self-confidence is the degree of confidence/trust in one’s own abilities, and taking pride in what one does (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English, 1995). The awareness of the self is also related to factors of self-acceptance, coping with the environment and self-enhancement. Those with high scores in self-esteem tend to be more sociable and optimistic about career goals and usually cope better with stress. High self-esteem is also positively related to creativity, conflict resolution, and interpersonal relationships; it also alleviates job-related frustration,
prejudice, and mistrust towards others. Previous research also suggests that people with a healthy level of self-esteem or self-confidence are more likely to interact with members outside their ethnic group (Valentine, 2001).

Self-efficacy can be understood as a person’s belief about his/her capability to produce desired results, to master new skills, to achieve goals, and to accomplish tasks (Bandura, 1977; Anderson & Betz, 2001; Wade & Tavris, 2000). Self-efficacy became a central idea in Bandura’s Social Learning Theory. This theory suggests that one’s belief concerning competence in certain behavioral domains influences choice, performance, and persistence in endeavors (Bandura, 1977; Anderson & Betz, 2001). Bandura claims that self-efficacy is attained through four sources:

a. The experience of mastering new skills and overcoming obstacles including occasional failures to gain self-efficacy.

b. Identification with successful and competent positive role models such as people who have accomplished something one is striving for.

c. Receiving helpful feedback and encouragement from people to increase self-efficacy

d. The capability of interpreting and managing one’s own physiological state such as stress and nervousness to turn it into a source of energy (Bandura, 1977).

Bandura divides behavior into two components: learning and performance. He postulates that learning happens either through direct reinforcement or through observation of others. Whether a certain behavior (performance) is displayed is influenced by a person’s self-efficacy (people choose activities, tasks, careers, friends depending on their judgment of self-efficacy), which may or may not be accurate. People
will attempt situations or tackle tasks that they believe they are capable of handling but avoid those which they do not think they are able to manage. Those with a high degree of self-efficacy put more effort into attempting particular tasks than others who have a low degree of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy judgments depend on various factors, some of which are past experiences, observations of others, verbal persuasion, and one’s physiological condition, also known as emotional arousal (Bandura, 1977; Kaplan, 2003). Emotional arousal is often a result of stressful and challenging situations. If someone is not able to control fear-provoking thoughts and anxieties, he/she may not possess positive coping skills to handle threatening situations (Bandura, 1997). People of any background entering a new and unfamiliar culture may feel threatened by the new environment, and they may lack positive experiences or role models for academic and social self-efficacy even if they appeared to be self-efficacious in their home culture. This is not surprising since self-efficacy is not static but dynamic and changes with demands, situations, social context, and the individual development of people (Berry & West, 1993). Two self-efficacy concepts are especially of interest for understanding international students’ adjustment:

a. Academic self-efficacy is defined as the desire to approach academically challenging situations without hesitation or fear of not being able to handle them. More academically self-efficacious international students are believed to show better adjustment (Poyrazli et al., 2002).

b. Social self-efficacy is defined as the confidence in one’s ability to engage in social interaction (social self-efficacy), which is necessary not only to initiate but also to maintain interpersonal relationships in life. Social self-efficacy as well as
confidence have been found to relate to depression and social anxiety as well as career (un-)decidedness, all part of the cultural shock experience (Anderson, 2001). International college students’ social self-efficacy may very well be challenged due to differences in cultural values and communication difficulties. In general, people with higher skills in social self-efficacy are found to be able to cope with stressful situations and depressive symptoms (Constantine, Okazaki & Utsey, 2004).

For many reasons it is very important for people who encounter a new culture to have the desire to face career and academic challenges and to interact and get to know the cultural differences, because that is how they will start making sense of cultural cues. It can be assumed that this way they will acquire information to feel more comfortable around people in the host country and adjust more easily. Studies regarding the relation of self-efficacy and adjustment among international students, immigrants, or other newcomers to another culture have not been researched (Poyrazli et al., 2002).

**Impact of Self-Confidence and Self-Efficacy on Cultural Adjustment**

The impact of the personality variables of self-confidence and self-efficacy on cultural adjustment has been mentioned in previous sections. In order to understand the prevalent issues affecting international students’ adjustment to a new culture better, these personality traits will be looked at separately.

**Self-Confidence and Cultural Adjustment**

A new cultural experience due to studies abroad, overseas work assignments, or immigration to a new country for other reasons includes differences in cultural perceptions, values, and practices which influence the understanding of and attitudes
towards living in a foreign culture, relationship development, and accomplishment of goals. A number of personal characteristic variables have been examined and their outcomes measured: difficulty in adjustment, acculturative stress, satisfaction, contact, cross-cultural understanding, and effectiveness at transfer of skills and knowledge. Besides initiative, self-confidence has been determined as important for success in adjustment (Clifford & Hammer, 1995). Self-confidence was defined above as the degree of confidence/trust in one’s own abilities and taking pride in what one does (Oxford Advanced Dictionary, 1995). In this context, self-doubt is important to mention. If people feel uncertain about performing different tasks, people with more self-doubt rate themselves as less confident (Hermann, Leonardelli, & Arkin, 2002).

Any person with low self-confidence entering a new and unfamiliar culture may have difficulties adjusting and get frustrated often when their behaviors, their habits, and their attitudes are interpreted differently than in their own culture, and they may encounter rejection. Depending on their level of self-confidence, they will either doubt their functioning in the new culture or overcome difficulties they encounter relatively quickly and be reasonable about the differences and problems (Winkelman, 1994; Clarke & Hammer, 1995).

Another aspect related to self-confidence is assertiveness, which is highly valued in the U.S. culture. Literature suggests that international students, especially Asian females, often lack assertiveness and initiative (Poyrazli et al., 2002; A woman’s support group, 2003); appear passive; may not initiate contact with students, professors, advisors, and any other natives of the host culture; or get socially involved with people. Poyrazli et al. (2002), who conducted a study on assertiveness, academic self-efficacy, loneliness,
and adjustment of international graduate students found that students with higher level of assertiveness reported higher academic self-efficacy and better speaking, writing, and comprehension proficiency in English. They also found that those students who socialized with Americans were more assertive. Assertiveness has also been found to be related to social and academic self-efficacy (Poyrazli et al. 2002).

Another personality characteristic crucial in making transitions to new situations and cultures and becoming integrated is introversion/extroversion. This aspect of personality “describes the extent to which people are outgoing or shy. It includes such traits as being talkative or silent, sociable or reclusive, adventurous or cautious, eager to be in the lime light or inclined to stay in the shadows” (Wade & Tavris, 2000, p. 459). It can be inferred that extroverted people who are usually perceived as enthusiastic, lively, and cheerful have an easier time to function in a new setting and may have fewer problems relating or accepting unfamiliar situations.

**Self-Efficacy and Cultural Adjustment**

In their research, Harrison, Chadwick, & Scales (1996) suggest that individuals with high general self-efficacy manifest greater degrees of general, interaction, and work adjustment, and this finding applies to any adjustment process including cultural transition. Furthermore, individuals with high self-efficacy tend to persist in displaying new behaviors and, therefore, have greater opportunities for receiving feedback about their acquired skills than those with low self-efficacy. Self-efficacy has been found to have an impact on relationship and perception skills. Therefore, self-efficacy may affect not only newcomers’ perceptions about their abilities to perform successfully, at work and in school, but also their skills at relating effectively (Harrison, Chadwick, & Scales).
Personality characteristics determine people’s self-concept, which has an influence on the ways people interact with people in their environment. Insufficient research has been done on most of these characteristics in the context of adjustment of people to new countries and their cultures. In the attempt to explain culture shock experiences and their symptoms, it is important to note cultural differences alongside with personality features. The following section will look more closely at the culture shock phenomenon, its symptoms and stages, and its manifestation in people as they live in a new and different culture.

Culture Shock

What is Cultural Shock? – Definition

Oberg (1960) conceptualized cultural shock as the consequence of strain and anxiety resulting from contact with a new culture and the feelings of loss, confusion, and impotence, which are due to loss of accustomed cultural cues and social rules. Newcomers (including immigrants, sojourners, and international students) to a culture experience both physical and psychological reactions involving physiological, emotional, interpersonal, cognitive, and social components with effects resulting from changes in socio-cultural relations, cognitive fatigue, role stress, and identity loss (Oberg, 1960; Winkelman, 1994). People, especially those who do not have family or friends from their home country as a social support network, might avoid social events, show little to no interest in anything but what is from their home culture, isolate themselves from others, complain about being tired, and sleep extensively, which are ultimately signs of depression (Oberg, 1960; Winkelman, 1994).
Familiar signs are important when we go about things in our daily lives. Well-known cues like words, gestures, facial expressions, customs, or norms are acquired in the course of growing up and are as much a part of our culture as the language we speak or our beliefs. When entering a new, strange culture, familiar cues are removed and create feelings of frustration and anxiety. One phase in this state of culture shock is the reaction to frustration by rejecting the environment; another phase is regression, when the original home environment becomes very important and only the familiar things from home are considered positive and good (Oberg, 1960). According to Yost & Lucas (2002), the extent to which immigrants experience culture shock depends on various factors, like previous familiarity with other cultures, the expectations and amount of preparation for the cultural change, the availability of support systems, the grade of difference between the native culture and the new one, and differences in the individual personalities. The degree of cultural dissonance between their familiar native country and the one to which they immigrate strongly influences how well individuals can acculturate to the culture they have chosen to live in (Yost & Lucas, 2002).

Stages and Symptoms of Cultural Shock

Several researchers have named a number of stages of culture shock that people usually go through at different paces and experience to various degrees. Most of the stages defined in the literature generally only differ in their terminology from Oberg’s (1960) initial four stages of cultural shock:

1. The Honeymoon Stage

This first stage, according to Oberg, can be compared to a honeymoon-like experience, which is usually characterized by fascination of and
excitement about the novelty of and the pleasantness of the experience. At this stage the newcomers are positively surprised as a result of their limited exposure to the local culture of the newly entered country and not having to deal with institutions and formal situations directly. People from a foreign country are fascinated by the new and surprised by some pleasant encounters with people who welcome them, an experience comparable to entering a vacation resort. The people entering a new country see things positively as they are usually the ones who voluntarily came to the new country (Oberg, 1960).

2. The Crisis Stage
Oberg (1960) describes people in this stage as revealing a hostile and aggressive attitude towards the host country and developing stereotypes. After the positive effect of the novelty starts to fade away and everyday situations are to be dealt with, people begin to encounter ambivalent situations they do not know how to handle and are overwhelmed with. A crisis may occur, which could be the result of increasing problems and negative experiences. Immigrants, sojourners, international students, and other newcomers to a new culture may develop feelings of helplessness and confusion to go along with the lack of control and the wish to go home (Oberg, 1960).

3. The Stage of Development of a Positive Attitude
At this stage people have usually been abroad for some time and have realized that as a kind of survival mode they have to accept differences
and deal with them with humor. Experiences that used to be bothersome and depressing to the individual person are seen differently. What once created hostility towards the new culture is still seen critically but taken with more humor about how the host culture is doing certain things often accompanied by saying, “I can’t believe …” and “That’s so funny …” People can laugh about their miscommunications and differences and realize that they cannot expect that the natives of the country they moved to to change their ways of thinking/operating in their own culture. The initial problems with the new environment still exist, but people from foreign countries start adjusting and are positively meeting the challenges of how to function in the new culture (Oberg, 1960).

4. The Stage of Adjustment

During this stage the newcomer generally becomes accepting of the new culture as another way of living. After some time, newcomers to a new culture realize that they cannot change their host culture and that different countries have different customs. They start understanding and accepting the host culture in its context and realize that they live in a new environment that is not going to change and that they have to adjust to the new situation. Oftentimes they are still adhering to their own values and convictions as a result of their upbringing in a different setting. Since full assimilation is almost impossible, people respond constructively to cultural shock and develop a bicultural identity, which allows them to
operate successfully in the new culture as well as in the cultural setting of their home culture (Oberg, 1960; Winkelman, 1994).

These stages defined by Oberg (1960) describe clearly what newcomers to a new culture are going through but may vary in how they manifest themselves depending on personal history, development, and personality of the individual beings. Certain symptoms that occur frequently in connection with cultural shock need also to be seen in relation to those individual differences.

Symptoms of Culture Shock

Examining the characteristic perceptions of the new culture in the different stages, it is clear that the culture shock experience is accompanied by different feelings and symptoms. The most common symptom of culture shock is the feeling of helplessness, the impotence of the stranger to not being able to deal competently with his/her environment due to unfamiliarity with the cognitive aspects of the culture and inability to perform the necessary role-playing skills (Taft, 1977). In order to understand certain roles and expectations in a culture, the person new to a country may have to inquire about what is appropriate and culturally accepted and also obtain information on different cultural practices.

Another symptom is the strain due to the required effort to make the necessary adaptations, also called “culture fatigue,” which comes forth as irritability, dissatisfaction, insomnia, and psychosomatic disorder (Smalley, 1965; Taft, 1977). A cognitive overload is also reminiscent of the physical tiredness that delays learning processes and may also result in a refusal to learn the new language (Oberg, 1960; Smalley, 1965; Taft, 1977; Winkelman, 1994).
Many immigrants and other newcomers to a country have to make enormous efforts to be able to listen to and communicate with the natives of the new country as part of the cognitive overload. This situation can be extremely tiring and frustrating and furthermore manifest in the body’s need for more sleep. People who have to struggle with understanding the language and communicating also need more time for processing information and often have to ask questions more frequently in order to make sense of what they hear, which adds to the experienced fatigue (Oberg, 1960).

Furthermore, a sense of depression and loss that derives from the feeling of uprootedness from one’s home culture results in a feeling of deprivation of companions, profession, edible food, recreation, cultural stimulation, and social status. Sojourners and immigrants, for example, desire to be with friends from their home countries, eat familiar foods, and share their original culture and traditions (Taft, 1977). Because of depression, people are sometimes paralyzed and unable to get out of this situation without the help of others. At the same time, though, they do not want to be among others. The feeling of being uprooted from one’s home culture may also result in lethargy and indulgence with food (Smalley, 1965).

The reliance on one’s own culture oftentimes results in the newcomer’s rejection of the host population or his/her feeling of rejection by the people of the host country. This experience is most likely a mutual process, especially because the person is depreciative of him/herself and unwilling to try to become integrated (Smalley, 1965; Taft, 1977). The foreigner is suspicious of the “superior” host people, develops a hostile image of them, and may be afraid of being taken advantage of, cheated, robbed, and injured (Oberg, 1960). These fears certainly depend on what countries and cultures
people are entering. People who go to developing countries, for instance, are often afraid that the indigenous people, who are generally poor and may try to get money and other valuables from them. Travelers, who are often easily recognized and are not so familiar with foreign currencies, have had the experience of being cheated when buying souvenirs or food. People entering a developed county but coming from a less developed country do not usually have this kind of fear but are rather afraid that they might be considered as people who are taking jobs away. They may also fear that they could be exploited financially and otherwise because they are not as familiar with the system and are used to different practices from their own countries. Generally speaking, people are unsure about whether they can trust natives in other cultures because of stories they have been told by people who have had immigrant or international experiences (Oberg, 1960).

A very common symptom of culture shock is the confusion about one’s role and role expectations and about one’s values and feelings of self-identity. The outcome could range from a mere ambivalence or uncertainty in behavior to emotional paralysis, which may become neurotic problems such as phobias, psychosomatic symptoms, and depression. The degree of these symptoms varies and is usually not as severe as often assumed (Taft, 1977). Oberg also mentions that newcomers are often more concerned about minor pains and seem to get ill more often (Oberg, 1960).

The realization of dissimilarities between the cultures, along with feelings of surprise, discomfort, anxiety, indignation or disgust, also described as “moral anxiety” and recognized as the violation of their own values, is also a result of culture shock (Taft, 1977). People coming from various countries have different values and belief systems. In a new culture they often cannot find a community that shares their beliefs and values, nor
the community support and encouragement to keep them. Therefore, they may feel alienated and interpret the host country’s practices as strange and perceive the people as indifferent and unappreciative of their cultures even if this may be a misperception.

All of the aforementioned symptoms promote a desire to return home to reencounter the familiarity of one’s own culture and find a comfort zone. The degree to which individuals who come to a new country/culture experience the symptoms of culture shock varies also depending on individual psychological characteristics such as self-confidence and self-efficacy (Oberg, 1960, Winkelman, 1994). These factors have to be considered – aside from many other factors – when people are trying to assist immigrants, sojourners, foreign students, and other newcomers to a country in the attempt to manage cultural shock.

**Attempts to Managing Culture Shock**

In order to successfully manage cultural shock, Winkelman (1994) suggests a combined cognitive and behavioral approach, because cultural shock is caused by

a) a cognitive overload as the new culture requires the newcomer to consciously think about things that natives are unconsciously aware of.

b) behavioral inadequacies because newcomers cannot know right away what behaviors are appropriate in different situations (Winkelman, 1994).

People going abroad need to be aware of the culture shock experience and obtain a cognitive orientation that helps to effectively adapt and develop behavioral skills to diminish the impact of or resolve cultural shock. Managing cultural shock and successful cross cultural adjustment are generally evaluated by the degree to which those coming to
a new culture for different reasons adjust to the general environment, to interaction with host nationals, and to work (Harrison, Chadwick, & Scales, 1996).

For successful general adjustment, Winkelman (1994) proposes certain strategies that may help avoid severe problems. He recommends that those who are entering a new culture prepare for changes before their departure and get to know resources that will help them to cope and adjust to the new environment. Also, cross-cultural training could be useful for helping them to learn skills and acquiring cultural knowledge in order to reduce misunderstandings and learn cultural appropriate behavior. Newcomers have to be aware of the value conflicts that they will encounter and willing to change their attitudes about the new culture by identifying the benefits of living in a new country instead of complaining about their experience of feeling treated as inferior and about the differences from their home country. Stress management is important to help the individuals deal with the ambiguity of cross-cultural adaptation and to keep one’s sense of cultural identity. Once the adjustment to the general environment is dealt with adequately, the newcomer can form satisfactory relationships and friendships, but the nature of the foreign country’s cultural social relations must still be understood, including social/cultural interaction rules. The newcomers have to acquire an understanding of the behaviors of the host culture as well as of the inevitable conflicts and recognize that cultural behavior always has to be seen within the context of the individual culture (Winkelman, 1994). Work adjustment research has shown that poorly adjusted employees often return early from overseas assignments with return rates of 16-40 percent, whereas those who are well adjusted are usually more effective and more
accepted (Harrison, Chadwick & Scales). These findings may apply to international and immigrant students as well.

*International Students and Their Adjustment to the U.S. Culture*

For international students, living in the USA can be interesting and exciting but also very frustrating when they realize what the cultural differences are. Recent international students, including both immigrant students and those here for a year or the duration of a program of study, experience culture shock related to their adjustment to the USA frequently involving anxiety and stressors that may lead to profound educational, social, and psychological problems. Without the help of school counselors to address school expectations and differences in their perceptions and worldviews and to assist in preserving their cultural values and making cultural transitions, symptoms of culture shock may persist and negatively impact international students’ and other newcomers’ successful adjustment (Constantine & Gushue, 2003).

Often, international students feel more comfortable meeting other international students who are going through the same experiences as they are, rather than meeting people from the U.S., including their international student advisors (Hayes & Heng-Rue, 1994). They may learn to adopt superficial aspects of the American culture but not have the competency to effectively interact socially (Brilliant, 2000). Another component is the lack of understanding by American students of international students’ cultures and needs, which leads to a less-than-desirable interaction on both sides (Jacob & Greggo, 2001). For international students, coming to the USA often means the loss of shared identity, which they used to have with their families and peers in their home country, consequently leading to feelings of loneliness. Traditions, customs, values, and norms the
students shared with their families and friends in their home countries seem to clash with the new culture (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998). Lucio-Lockett (1998) found that when international students cannot share their experiences and, therefore, keep those to themselves, they are put in a position in which they cannot “perform their identities,” resulting in a “squeezing effect.” This effect means, in concrete terms, that students feel squeezed into the new culture and that adjusting within the host culture’s frame becomes an attempt to squeeze one’s identity within pre-existing conventions (Luzio-Lockett).

Students who find friends from their own countries often build groups and ethnic communities to meet their needs for social contact(s). Being part of these cultural subgroups may lead to more isolation from the U.S. culture. International students also feel more relaxed sharing their views and experiences of the U.S. culture with other internationals, because they are sometimes afraid of being criticized or marginalized for their thoughts and beliefs by Americans (Hayes & Heng-Rue, 1994).

Beliefs and values are frequently closely related to religion, which is an important aspect when exploring cultural differences. Cultural customs and practices are greatly influenced by religion, and people from diverse backgrounds around the world “view their religion as right and feel great social pressures when they believe their religious beliefs have been violated” (Lacina, 2002, p. 24). Even though the U.S. consists of a very diverse population, individuals belonging to non-Christian religions might experience problems in observing their holy days and traditions (Lacina, 2002).

The experience of difficulties in relating to Americans does not minimize the wish for more contacts with people from the host country (Hayes & Heng-Rue 1994). In a study by Rajapaksa and Dundes (1999), in which 182 international college students were
surveyed regarding psychological adjustment and socio-cultural adaptation, 42 percent of international students had no U.S. friends. Of those students who were not content with their social support network, 67% felt lonely and as if they had left part of themselves at home. Interestingly, many students did not base their dissatisfaction with their social support network on the number of friends they had made in the USA, which indicates that the concept and nature of friendships varies across culture and needs to be addressed (Rajapaksa & Dundes, 1999).

In addition to the loss of social support, limited English proficiency contributes to adjustment and interaction problems. The language barrier often prevents international students from getting socially involved or from actively participating in classroom discussions. Students from the host country frequently do not have the patience to interact with them (Hayes & Heng-Rue, 1994). Other international students may be fluent in the language of the host country but have communication problems because of non-verbal expressions (David, 1971). While some students misunderstand greeting routines such as “Hi, how are you?” and give the greeting person a very detailed answer most of the time, Americans are only looking for a short response to a routine greeting phrase. This and similar experiences may give the impression that the initially perceived friendliness of Americans may not be genuine and leaves international students confused (Myburgh, Niehaus, & Poggenpoel, 2002)

These days, most colleges organize international student meetings and many are encouraging U.S. students to attend these events not only to get to know different cultures, but also to hear and learn about the experiences and struggles of international students in the USA in order to understand their situation. Through the stories
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

international students share at these meetings, organizers and participants realize how complex the factors that influence adjustment to the U.S. culture are. Oftentimes, only a small number of American students attend international student meetings or make friends with students from foreign countries even though it would be of great value for them in order to become sensitive to the diverse needs of the international student population and to mutually work on a better understanding of cultural practices and ways of knowing and relating (Rajapaksa & Dundes, 2002).

Exchanging stories, talking about problems, and interacting with people from the host culture are important and can remove barriers between cultures and, furthermore, help the communication process among peoples of diverse ethnicities and from unfamiliar countries. In order to successfully relate, mutual understanding of backgrounds, communication styles, and patterns are essential (Myburgh, Niehaus, Poggenpoel, 2002).

Cultural Differences and International Students

Students from foreign countries face the challenge of understanding and functioning within a new environment while keeping their own identity. Cultural differences are always present in their daily interactions (Brilliant, 2000). Culture is a complex construct involving a large number of characteristics, such as individual and group identity, values, language, communication, cognition, and behavioral patterns (Hofstede, 1984; Behring, Cabello, Kushida, & Murguia, 2000). The culture we grow up in shapes our lives, our personalities, and our perception of other people and cultures. The role certain traditions and religions play in our lives, and the values, norms, and the economic situation of our home countries are part of our personal cultural identity. There
are different ways of categorizing cultures; one dimension most frequently used looks at individualism-collectivism (Brislin, 2000). In individualistic societies, people are more focused on their own individual goals and are raised to become independent. This culture is found in most westernized industrialized countries, whereas individuals from more traditional cultures (e.g. in Africa, Asia, and Latin America) see themselves in relation to others and as part of a group. The identities of the people of collectivist cultures are determined by the thoughts, feelings, and actions of their groups (from which they are afraid of being excluded). In an individualistic culture such as the U.S., independence from their families early on is highly valued, and young people who are not able to separate from their families and other groups are frequently seen as failures (Kaplan, 2004). If we distinguish among U.S. immigrants with strong cultural orientations, we can observe that cultural patterns of European-Americans, for example, include an individual worldview, nuclear family bonds, a more secular orientation, more concern with time than situation, and a tendency to analyze problems. Asian-Americans, who are more collectivist, are usually highly dependent on family and have clearly defined family roles and status and an emphasis on familial harmony and social authority. They usually restrain feelings, are formal in social situations, and place high value on achievement and job success. An individualistic culture brings forth competitive and independent people who are mostly concerned with their own needs. People from a collectivist culture, on the other hand, are more likely to rank their own needs behind others’.

Western and non-western cultures shape people and determine the cues and meaning of certain behaviors, which become more distinctive when people enter cultures different from their home culture (Hofstede, 2000; Kaplan, 2004). Therefore, it can be
assumed that students from western countries may have fewer problems in adjusting to the American culture because their home countries have more in common with the U.S. culture than do those from non-western countries. Since there is only limited literature available that examines international students’ belonging to these larger groups, this assumption needs to be carefully examined and individual factors have to be taken into consideration.

International students and any newcomers to the USA notice the differences from their cultures very quickly. They realize that within their home culture they can show their attitudes and motives and find acceptance, whereas using the same cues in a different culture might be misinterpreted and hosts may fail to recognize these. In the adaptation process, international students become more aware of their own selves and their cultural differences with the host country. Depending on personality characteristics and the (dis)similarities between their home and host culture, the students experience culture shock differently (David, 1971).

Research has found that the greater the similarity to international students’ own culture to the U.S. culture, the less intense the culture shock (David, 1971). Also, those who develop open-mindedness, ego strength, ability to accept ambiguity and a universal attitude toward humans are more likely to not suffer severe symptoms of culture shock (David). Nevertheless, international students face difficulties due to the unfamiliarity with American customs, norms, and values, but they also experience the loss of their social support network from home (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998).
Personality of International Students and Cultural Adjustment

Even though research addresses personality traits as some of those influencing international students’ adjustment, there is very limited empirical research that has looked at any of them in specific. Poyrazli et al. (2002) studied 122 international graduate students to determine levels of loneliness, assertiveness, academic self-efficacy, and their influence on adjustment and found that assertiveness and academic self-efficacy were among those accounting for variance. Most frequently, assertiveness is mentioned as a problem, especially for Asian students when entering the U.S. culture (Poyrazli et al., 2002). In the article “A women’s support group for Asian international students” (2003) published by Journal of American College Health (2003), the author states that 56 percent of all international students in the USA are from Asia and many of them are not used to expressing themselves in an assertive way and keep rather private, trying to deal with difficulties themselves. At the same time assertiveness may be a gender sensitive issue in other cultures where women are not raised to be as assertive as men. This finding suggests that especially Asian female international students could benefit from a women’s support group. This support group may help them to become more assertive, which is very important, if not essential, to adjust and be successful in the USA (A women’s support group, 2003)

In their study about international learners’ experiences at universities of a first world country, in which they interviewed eighteen international students from ten different countries, Myburgh, Niehaus, and Poggenpoel (2003) found that students with positive realistic self-concepts claimed to have fewer problems in a different cultural environment. In the interviews, international students also reported that their personal
efficacy, faith, and confidence in their ability to be efficacious in social and daily life situations has helped them with their adjustment.

Since international students make the decision to come to the United States and study on a voluntary basis, it can be assumed that their level of self-efficacy is higher to begin with. Literature suggests, though, that self-efficacy levels are not static and can change depending on positive experiences and mastering of challenges (Berry & West, 1993). Research on personality factors of any kind and their influence on culture shock and adaptation to a new culture only offers suggestions but does not offer empirical studies to draw further conclusions.

Language Difficulties of International Students

Since culture shock experience and adapting to a new culture is such a multi-faceted process, it is important to consider not only length of stay, age of arrival, and ethnic-cultural identity but also language proficiency. One of the stress factors for international students coming to the USA is their ability to communicate in English. Many students may have studied English in their home countries for many years but realize upon entering the U.S. that there is quite a difference between studying a language and using it as means of communication. It is also important to consider that ways of communicating and approaching people strongly depend on personality factors such as self-confidence/self-efficacy, assertiveness, and extraversion/introversion (Poyrazli et al., 2002).

Students who are able to communicate in English may experience better psychological well-being than those who have difficulties. Language proficiency may
also be an important component of international students’ social skills (Constantine, Okazaki, Utsey, 2004).

Social Support Network of International Students

Relating socially requires successful communication, which depends on not only language but also cross-cultural knowledge and skills. Students going abroad experience a loss of their social status since they can’t maintain the social role they used to play in their home countries. The change of environment requires a new definition of who they are within a new culture. A main concern of administrators of different universities is the adjustment of international students to college life and the culture of the U.S.. Counselors on university campuses are confronted with these students’ loss of social networks and are encouraged and required to help them build new social contacts (Hayes & Lin, 1994).

Many international students start looking for peers who share the same ethnic and cultural background and soon build or become members of ethnic communities. It is much easier for them to socially connect with those of the same or a similar cultural background who can help them overcome the stresses accompanying the change of culture. It may be the fear of not being accepted by Americans that discourages students, especially those whose culture is represented in the U.S. through a greater number of students, from initiating contacts with U.S. students. Within their ethnic communities, foreign students have no difficulty keeping their social self-esteem, but at the same time they are in danger of not learning to adjust to the U.S. culture. (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998). Al-Sharideh & Goe (1998) found in their study that the relationship between the adaptation to the American culture and self-esteem decreases with a growing number of strong ties to those of the same culture. They, therefore, suggest that a balanced social
international students the social support needed to make possible satisfactory personal
adjustment to the life on U.S. university and college campuses and the American life in
general (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998).

Summary

Theories and research are clear on the influence of cultural background,
personality characteristics, social support, and proficiency in the host country’s language
on cultural adjustment. The factors addressed in the literature review are only some of the
many variables that interact with each other and influence adaptation to a new culture.
Even though previous literature suggests that greater similarity between home and host
culture could result in less intensive culture shock, no existing study has examined the
adjustment differences of western and non-western students. Personality is not only a
result of heredity but also shaped by culture. Certain cultures may nurture some
personality traits in males but not in females; therefore, attention needs to be given not
only to personality variables as such but also to gender differences in cultural adjustment
that have not been given much attention in previous research.

The Current Study

The current study will look at the variables discussed in the literature review and
address issues including language trying to answer questions about (a) the impact of
culture and language, personality, and social network on the adaptation of international
students to the U.S. culture; (b) the relation between perception of cultural differences
and experience of culture shock; (c) the differences in adjustment among western and
non-western students; (d) gender differences, language proficiency, and social support
network in context of adjustment; and (e) personal experiences of international students with culture shock.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Design of the Study

This mixed-methods study was designed to explore the adaptation process and culture shock experiences of various international students at a Midwestern Community College. Participants were asked to respond to written survey questions to elicit quantitative data; an oral interview followed with the intention of soliciting qualitative data.

Instruments

Two instruments were developed for this study: a questionnaire and an interview. The purpose of the questionnaire was to measure international students’ levels of cultural adjustment and culture shock symptoms (cultural match), social support and self-confidence/self-efficacy considering cultural background, gender differences and English language skills. The interview’s purpose was to give an insight into international students’ experiences with the U.S. culture from the student’s point of view. The results of both the questionnaires and the interviews built the basis for the study.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was developed after an extensive literature search addressing how well international students of different cultural backgrounds, social support networks, and self-confidence/self-efficacy levels adjust to the American culture. Studies that included all of these factors have not been found in previous research; therefore, a questionnaire was developed based on research and personal experience as well as experiences from fellow international students. The questionnaire contained 41 items, including demographics of students and questions pertaining to their cultural experience.
in the USA. Some of the questions were in Likert-style, using Strongly Agree – Strongly Disagree and Never – Sometimes – Often – Most of the Time questions, with the highest score per item being four and the lowest, one. Some questions were written with negative stems to reduce the possibility of patterned responses and were reverse coded for analysis. Other questions gave choices from a-d (with scores a=1 and d = 4). Questions 17 and 41a and 41b were open-ended and analyzed together with the interviews in the theme analysis (see questionnaire in Appendix C).

Sections of Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of five sections, each addressing different aspects of adaptation and culture shock:

I. **General Information**

This part consisted of five questions to demographically describe the participants, following general questions including country of origin, gender, age, length of stay in the U.S. and religion. This section was adapted from Rajapaksa and Dundes (2002).

II. **Experience of Cultural Differences**

The second part was composed of eleven questions, one of which was open-ended, based on factors frequently named in previous research as important to people’s culture. Aspects of general adjustment such as living conditions, food, costs of living, pace of life, and perception of discrimination toward their own culture, as well as aspects of interaction adjustment including relating and communicating with Americans, were examined (Harrison, Chadwick, Scales 1996; Lacina, 2002).
The highest score students could get on this part was 40, indicating that they had no problems with cultural differences; the lowest score to achieve was 10, signifying severe problems adjusting.

III. **Attitudes**

This section included four questions that focused on self-confidence and six questions on self-efficacy. Self-confidence is defined as having confidence/trust in one’s own abilities and taking pride in what one does (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English, 1995). Self-efficacy is identified as confidence in oneself about what one can or cannot do in certain situations or what tasks he or she can accomplish. (Anderson & Betz, 2001; Harrison, Chadwick & Scales, 1996). The questions used for determining the level of self-efficacy were adapted for the survey from a scale by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (2000), which had been used across cultures for measuring general perceived self-efficacy with 17,500 people from 22 countries (Schwarzer & Scholz, 2000). Evidence for validity of the scale had been published in several articles (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 2000). Questions used for determining the level of confidence were adapted from Confidence (2001). One question was eliminated in order to increase the reliability of the scale. The highest score that could be achieved in this section was 36, revealing a high level of self-confidence/self-efficacy; the lowest score of 9 indicated low self-confidence/self-efficacy.
IV. Social Network

Since social network and support systems – the relationships international students build with people in the host country – have been found to influence how well foreign students adjust to the U.S. culture, several questions addressed this variable. The researcher developed six items that are descriptive of the social support systems on which international students rely. The questions examined the living situation and the number of new friends made in the host country – American and Non-American friends – as well as the number of close friends (Hayes & Lin, 1994; Lacina, 2002). Four questions were used for the statistical analysis, with the highest score of 16 and the lowest score of 4 indicating a stronger and weaker support network, respectively.

V. Cultural Shock Experience (Cultural Match)

In this last part of the questionnaire, which was renamed Cultural Match in the analysis, the researcher addressed physical and psychological problems often associated with international students’ new cultural experiences in their host country. The degree of difference varies, depending on the cultural background of the individual student. The ten questions have been adapted from Rajapaksa & Dundes (2002), of which eight items address symptoms such as feeling of homesickness, stress, depression, discrimination, and illness. Two open-ended questions inquire about the best experiences and the most difficult times for international students in the USA (Harrison, Chadwick & Scales, 1996; Rajapaksa & Dundes, 2002). The highest score (32) indicates that students do not show
symptoms of culture shock, and the lowest score (8) means students are experiencing severe symptoms of culture shock.

Reliability and Validity of Questionnaire

A reliability check was performed on each of the sections/scales to determine if the designed survey questions were consistently giving reliable results. The researcher performed a reliability analysis to determine Cronbach’s Alpha values for the overall measure and each scale (Thomas, 2005). In order to increase the reliability of the self-efficacy/self-confidence scale, the item “Sometimes I am frustrated with myself” was eliminated. The overall reliability of the instrument was proved to be adequate, with $\alpha = .69$ very close to the commonly accepted threshold.

The validity of the questions was not determined separately because the questions had been adapted from a study by Schwarzer and Scholz (2000) on 18,000 people from 22 countries, which had claimed validity. The themes used aligned well with those from the literature review; therefore, content validity was provided for this particular group also.

Interviews

A follow-up interview composed of 23 questions was used for the qualitative theme analysis. The interview items were grouped into general questions about social network, attitudes, and cultural adaptation, similar to the parts in the survey. The interview questions were designed to follow up on the answers of the questionnaires in order to get a more in-depth understanding of the cultural experience of international students and their problems and concerns in adapting to and living in the U.S. Another reason for interviewing the students was the fact that English was not the native language
for most of the subjects, and the interviewer had the chance to reword some of the questions and add prompts to clarify confusion caused by a language barrier. The questions used for the interviews (see Appendix C) were selected and adapted for the current study from interviews/questionnaires of existing literature (Myburgh, Niehaus, and Pogenpoel, 2002; Rajapaksa and Dundes, 2002), personal experiences, and previous conversations with international students. The last question introduced the students to Oberg’s (1960) model of culture shock to examine the student’s perception of the phenomenon in their own experience.

Procedure

Survey Procedure

Before administering the questionnaires, the researcher received consent from the research department and the head of the counseling department of the college at which the research was done. The initial contact with the international students was made at a multicultural event in March 2004, where the researcher approached international students and gave them a basic description of the purpose and concept of the study. Those who showed interest left their contact information (e-mail, phone numbers, address) with the researcher. Some of the voluntary participants received the questionnaires per e-mail or were personally contacted; others received them at monthly international student meetings in the fall 2004 and winter 2005 semesters. The instructions and basic information regarding the study, as well as the consent form for both the questionnaire and the interview, were included in the questionnaire packet. Some of the questionnaires were e-mailed back to the researcher; others were left in the mailbox of the coordinator of the international student club meetings club to be picked up by the researcher. The
surveys carried students’ names for the purpose of personally contacting them, but their names were not being used in the actual research; the questionnaires were coded instead for confidentiality.

*Interview Procedure*

Those who had given written consent to being interviewed were contacted per e-mail or phone at a later time. With those who responded, the researcher set up appointments for interviews at locations and times convenient to international students and met with most of them at the college in between classes.

Most of the interviews lasted for approximately 30-40 minutes and were tape-recorded. The researcher then transcribed the interviews and coded and marked them for emerging themes, patterns, and other relevant information. Then the researcher analyzed the interviews together with the open-ended questions from the surveys “What have been your best experiences in the USA?”, “What have been your most difficult experiences?”, and “What have been your most difficult times in the USA so far?” The experiences concerning culture shock and adaptation were summarized and described to give insight into the issues regarding the adjustment process of international college students to the U.S. culture. Then phenomenological research was used, defined to “identify the ‘essence’ of the human experiences regarding a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2003, p. 15) to explore the students’ experience with Oberg’s concept of culture shock.

*Participants*

The subjects of the study were international students attending a small Midwestern Community College with a total enrollment of 7,800 students. At the time the study was conducted, 160 foreign/international students attended the college, with
125 students holding student visas and 35 holding other visas, such as various work visas or greencards.

**Survey Participants**

All of the forty-five students participating in the study \((n=45)\) had been in the United States for at least six months and no longer than 23 years (see Table 1). The subjects had lived in their home country for at least six years; therefore, it was felt that they had enough experience in their country of origin to be included in the study. Within the sample, two broad cultural groups were distinguished, international students from western and non-western countries. Individuals’ independence and working towards their own goals were determined as characteristics of western countries (Triandis, 1989; Kaplan, 2004). These characteristics are more likely to be found in North American and Northern and Western European cultures (Triandis, 1989). People from non-western countries often see themselves in relation to and dependent on others, and their personal goals cannot be separated from collective goals. Their cultures are also seen as having clearly defined family roles and status and being highly family- and group dependent. Asian, Eastern European, Middle-Eastern, Latin American are usually characterized as collectivist cultures countries (Triandis, 1989; Kaplan, 2004). The participants for the current study from western countries came from Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Ireland \((n=14)\). International students from non-western countries came from Bosnia, Congo, Cameroon, China, Columbia, Jamaica, Iran, Indonesia, India, Ivory Coast, Mexico, Pakistan, Palestine, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Romania, Sri Lanka, Syria, and Tanzania \((n=31)\).
Sixty percent of the participants were female, and 40 percent were male. The average age of the students was 26. The international students had been in the USA on average for 55.6 months, or between four and five years. For both the age and the time of stay, the researcher created three categories to find whether there were any differences in the responses depending on age of the amount of time spent in the U.S.. In respect to language, the researcher found that 14 students had used English as one of their primary languages, whereas 31 students had studied English as a second language in their home countries before coming to the USA. These groups were not the same as the western/non-western comparison, with many western students from countries where English is not a primary language (e.g., Greece and Italy).

Religion was also included to describe the student population surveyed since most people from diverse cultures around the world have been found to view their religious beliefs as right, and they experience enormous social pressures when they feel that their religion and its traditions are being violated (Lacina, 2002). The demographics show that 57.8% of all surveyed students were Christian, 15.6% Muslim, 6.7% Buddhist, and 20% other.

Since the researcher distinguished between western and non-western students, student characteristics of each group were looked at separately as well to see if there were any major differences. Of the 14 western students, five were male and nine female, with an average age of 25.7 years and an average U.S. stay of 63 months or approximately five years. Of the 31 non-western students, five were male and eight female, with an average age of 26 years and an average stay in the U.S. of 52.2 months or between four and five years.
Twelve western students identified themselves as Christian, two as other (Deist, None). Among the non-western participants in the study 14 were Christian, seven belonged to Islam, three to Buddhism, and “Other” included one student belonging to Sikhism, one to Hinduism. One defined himself as Atheist, one as “Deist and Agnostic,” and three as “Nothing” or “I don’t believe in any religion.” At the time of the study, all 45 students attended the same college, pursuing degrees in various fields.

*Interview Participants*

The interviewees who had filled out the questionnaires prior to the interviews attended the community college and were enrolled in different programs at the time of the interviews. Nine international students, representing both genders as well as western and non-western countries, agreed to meet with the researcher. They were students from nine different countries. Four females and two males were from non-western countries. The four non-western females were from Iran, the Philippines, Poland and Romania, and the two males from Bosnia and Cameroon. Of the three interviewees from western countries two were female and one was male. The female international students were from Germany and Italy, the male student from Australia.
Table 1.

*Demographic Information on International Students (N = 45)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>International student characteristics</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-22</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-25</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>44.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over 25</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>37.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Religion</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>57.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judaism</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English as One of Primary Languages</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>31.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English as Second Language</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>68.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Western/Non-Western Home Country</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>31.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Western</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>68.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stay in the United States in months</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-12 months</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>28.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-60 months</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>42.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more than 60 months</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>28.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Analysis Procedure

*Quantitative Data Analysis Procedure*

After the surveys were collected, the researcher coded them and used SPSS to analyze the data. First the Cronbach Alpha was used to determine the overall reliability. The reliability of each scale was also determined. Second, Pearson Correlations among totals of the scales for social network, cultural adjustment, cultural match, and self-efficacy were used to find how the scales correlated. Third, descriptives for totals for each scale were analyzed. Finally Analyses of Variance (ANOVAS) were performed by cultural background, gender, and language proficiency.

*Qualitative Data Analysis Procedure*

After the quantitative data analysis, the researcher used grounded theory to code responses to the open-ended written questions. The following themes emerged:

- Theme 1: Language and Communication Problems
- Theme 2: Life Style and Cultural Differences
- Theme 3: Social Support and Making Friends
- Theme 4: Positive Experiences
- Theme 5: Difficult Times and Experiences

From the nine transcribed interviews, the researcher coded the above themes. Relevant and exemplary quotations were then used to offer support or refute quantitative findings. The responses to the question about culture shock were collected and analyzed, as were student suggestions for assistance with the adjustment to the U.S. culture.
Researcber’s Role

The researcher is an international graduate student, born and raised in Austria, who had lived in the United States for six years at the time this study was conducted. It is possible that respondents may have been more forthcoming because of a shared identity as international students with the researcher.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Two different sets of data were analyzed for this study: quantitative data from 45 surveys and qualitative data consisting of answers to open-ended questions from the surveys as well as interview responses from nine international students. The results portion is divided according to the type of data standing with the quantitative data followed by the qualitative responses.

Quantitative Data

Seventy surveys were handed out to international students at a Michigan community college at an international student meeting, of which 48 were completed and returned. Only data from surveys of international students who had been in the United States for at least six months were being used; therefore, the surveys of three students were not included because they did not meet this criterion. Those who did not return their surveys were students who had not been able to complete the questionnaires and did not bring them to the assigned mailbox or to the next international student meeting. The surveys were coded and statistical analyses were performed for the following variables: self-efficacy/self-confidence, cultural adjustment, cultural match, and social support. First the researcher ran a reliability analysis for all four scales and for each scale separately. Second, the totals of each scale were calculated; then the means of each variable were analyzed by cultural background (western and non-western) and then by gender. Finally, the influence of knowledge of the language of the host country (English as one of the primary languages in the students’ home country) on all four variables was examined. Results and their significance are presented here.
Overall Results

Reliability

In order to determine if the designed survey questions were consistently giving reliable results, the researcher ran a reliability analysis to determine Cronbach’s Alpha values for the overall measure and each scale. The commonly used threshold of $\alpha = .70$ was employed to evaluate the scales. Overall, the instrument demonstrated adequate reliability with $\alpha = .69$ very close to the commonly accepted threshold. In addition, reliability analyses were then run for each of the four scales separately. The reliability for each of the scales was either approaching or above the accepted value with $\alpha = .72$ for self-efficacy, $\alpha = .70$ for cultural adjustment, $\alpha = .74$ for social network, and $\alpha = .68$ for cultural match (total of culture shock questions). After examining the scales, the researcher found that one of the items for self-efficacy reduced the scale reliability, and, therefore, the survey question “Sometimes I am frustrated with myself” was not included in further analyses. The scores in the tables included show the values after rescaling self-efficacy for reliability increasing $\alpha = .72$ to $\alpha = .76$.

Correlations

Next the researcher compared the scales in order to find out whether or not there are similar patterns in the results and correlations among the different scales. Examining the outcomes, a correlation between cultural match (total of cultural shock questions) and cultural adjustment scales (see Appendix C) was found with $r = .51$ and a significance of $p < .001$. 
This correlation makes sense when we consider that students who express better adjustment to the U.S. culture will most likely not experience cultural stress or physical and psychological symptoms of culture shock as severely as those foreign students who express less positive adjustment. Therefore, international students with a home culture more similar to the culture of the host country were found to be better adjusted. See Table 2 for correlations.

Table 2.

*Pearson Correlations Among Totals of Social Network, Cultural Adjustment, Cultural Match, and Self-Efficacy (n = 45)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Social Network</th>
<th>Cultural Adjustment</th>
<th>Self-Efficacy</th>
<th>Cultural Match</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Network</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Adjustment</td>
<td>.267</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>-.133</td>
<td>-.227</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Match</td>
<td>.187</td>
<td>.508**</td>
<td>-.237</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Correlation is significant at the .001 level (2-tailed)**

*Descriptive Analyses*

After the scores for each variable were summed up, means for totals of self-confidence/self-efficacy, cultural adjustment, cultural match, and social support network were calculated. The mean score for self-confidence/self-efficacy was 23.1, with a lowest possible score of 9 and a highest possible score of 36 indicating high self-confidence/self-efficacy levels. The mean score for cultural adjustment was 27.0, with a lowest possible score of 10 and a high of 40 meaning better adjustment. The mean score for cultural
match was 24.3 with a low of 8 and a high of 32. The higher the score in this part, the better have the students coped with culture shock. The mean score for social network was 10.5, with a possible high score of 16 and a lowest score of 4 because only four questions were used in this part. A low score in social support network suggests a weak social network, whereas a high score indicates a strong social network.

The relatively high variability comparing minima and maxima can be noticed and may indicate that characteristics of subgroups such as western versus non-western students and gender have an influence on the scores. These determined subgroups will be considered in the further analyses. See Table 3 for standard deviations and range of scores on the totals of each variable.

Table 3.

Descriptives for Totals of Self-Confidence/Self-Efficacy, Cultural Adjustment, Cultural Match, and Social Network

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Efficacy (Rescaled)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Adjustment</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Match</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Network</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Western and Non-Western Students.

Of all those participating in the international student survey, 14 students (31.1 %) were from western countries and 31 (68.9 %) from non-western countries. Differences in cultural background, as discussed earlier, are assumed to have an influence on the
adjustment process of international students. A one-way analysis of variance was performed to determine whether there was a significant difference in the cultural adjustment of western and non-western international students. Western students had higher mean scores and less variability within scores than their non-western counterparts. The largest difference was found in cultural adjustment, with $M=29.0$ for western compared to $M=26.1$ for their non-western fellow students. See Table 4 for descriptives on all scales by cultural groups.

Table 4.

**Descriptives for Self-Efficacy, Cultural Adjustment, Cultural Match, and Social Support by Cultural Groups**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-Efficacy</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Western</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cultural Adjustment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>36.0</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Western</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cultural Match</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Western</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Network</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Western</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The one-way analysis of variance on differences in cultural adjustment between western and non-western students indicated that there is a significant difference
$F(1,43) = 3.98, \ p = .05$, with western students reporting more positive adjustment than non-western students ($M = 29.0$ and $M = 26.1$ respectively). It appears that students whose home culture has features of a western culture like the U.S. have fewer problems adjusting to this country. International students from a culture defined as non-western with features of collectivism and less industrialization and noticeable differences in their customs, and so forth, have a harder time adjusting to the U.S. See Table 5.

Table 5.

*One-Way Analysis of Variance Summary for Cultural Adjustment by Cultural Groups*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>$F$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>79.5</td>
<td>79.5</td>
<td>3.98*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within group</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>859.5</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>939.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p=.05

*Gender.*

The student group studied comprised 18 males and 27 females. Means for totals of self-confidence/self-efficacy, cultural adjustment, cultural match, and social support network were determined for gender. In general, a trend of males scoring higher than females can be noticed. It can be speculated that there are gender differences in the adjustment process of international students to the U.S. culture. See Table 6 for minima, maxima, mean scores, and standard deviations by gender.
Table 6.

*Descriptives for Cultural Adjustment by Gender*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-Efficacy</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cultural Adjustment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cultural Match</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Network</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One-way analyses of variance were used to determine whether the subscale differences by gender were significant. The only significant difference between male and female international students was found on the cultural adjustment scale. The one-way analysis of variance performed on gender and cultural adjustment showed a significant difference with \( F (1,43) = 9.92, p < .01 \), with males reporting more positive adjustment than female students (\( M = 29.4 \) and \( M = 25.4 \) respectively). It can be speculated that this finding is a result of the different socialization of males and females in their home culture but also gender differences in general.
From the data it can be concluded that gender differences need to be considered when examining adjustment of international students to the U.S. culture. Gender-specific characteristics often influenced by culture may play a crucial role in this process. See Table 7 for differences between the groups.

Table 7.

*Analysis of Variance for Cultural Adjustment by Gender*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>176.02</td>
<td>176.02</td>
<td>9.92*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within group</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>762.96</td>
<td>17.74</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>938.98</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .01

*Language*

Since communication with people in the host country largely depends on English language skills of international students, the subjects were compared by primary language of host country (English/non-English). Information on the participating students’ countries of origin was collected in order to determine whether English was one of the primary languages used in their home country. The researcher found that 31 students did not use English as one of their primary languages before coming to the U.S., whereas 14 students did.

The descriptives show that international students who used English as one of their primary languages in their home countries scored lower in the self-efficacy category and slightly lower in the cultural match scale. They scored higher in the cultural adjustment and social support scales, which may signify that language is an important factor for both
social support networks and cultural adjustment of foreign students to the U.S. culture. See Table 8 for differences.

Table 8.

Descriptives for Language Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Non-English</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Min</td>
<td>Max</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td></td>
<td>31</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Adjustment</td>
<td></td>
<td>31</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>36.0</td>
<td>26.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-English</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>27.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Match</td>
<td></td>
<td>31</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>24.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-English</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>24.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Network</td>
<td></td>
<td>31</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A one-way analysis of variance was run on all scales and showed a significant difference on social networks $F(1,43) = 9.0, p < .004$, with students who used English as one of their primary languages reporting a stronger social support network ($M=12.3$ and $M=9.7$, respectively). These results reveal that English language skills have an influence on international students’ making friends with people in the host country. Being able to communicate in the host country’s language is crucial for interacting and functioning in the host country. See Table 9.
Table 9.

*One-Way Analysis of Variance for Social Network by Language*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>64.0</td>
<td>64.0</td>
<td>9.0*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within group</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>305.2</td>
<td>7.19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>369.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.004

Summary

The statistical analysis of the survey data presented valuable insights in the adjustment issues of international students. The reliability of the instrument approximated the commonly accepted threshold with $\alpha = .69$. The reliability of the self-efficacy/self-confidence scale was increased by eliminating one question. A significant relationship was found between cultural differences and experience of culture shock, indicating that fewer cultural differences account for a less severe culture shock experience. ANOVAs were used to determine the differences in adjustment for cultural background, gender, and English language proficiency and provided significant results. According to the statistical outcomes, western students adjusted significantly better than non-western students, and male students reported better adjustment than their female counterparts. The use of English as one of the students’ primary languages in their home country indicated a notably stronger support network.
Qualitative Data

For the qualitative part of the analysis, the researcher analyzed the responses to open-ended questions on the surveys and responses to questions from the follow-up interviews. The responses to the open-ended survey questions were collected, and five themes emerged from the given answers. The transcribed interviews were analyzed and exemplary quotations were then used to support or refute the quantitative findings and emerging themes.

The open-ended questions on the surveys included “What have been your best experiences in the USA?”, “What have been your most difficult experiences?”, and “What have been your most difficult times in the USA so far?” Two participants did not write answers to the open-ended questions; one of them was 44-year-old male from Sri Lanka, and one was a 39-year-old female from Palestine; both had been here for over ten years and live with their spouses and their children. Five international students – all male and from non-western countries (two from India, one from Tanzania, and one from Cameroon) answered the questions about their most difficult experiences or times as “None,” “Not that I can remember,” or “Probably nothing has been hard for me while living in the United States of America.” Two mentioned that they had no difficult experiences/times except for the experience in the winter (both from Africa). The fact that all five students who did not mention any difficulties living here were male is consistent with the quantitative results from the statistical analysis that showed that males had fewer difficulties adjusting than females.
The interview questions were divided into general questions, social network, attitudes, and cultural adaptation, similar to the parts in the survey. At the end of each interview, the researcher explained Oberg’s (1960) stages of culture shock to the international students and asked them in what ways and to what extent they thought this model was applicable to foreign students’ adjustment to the U.S. culture. The students had the chance to explain and give examples to show how culture shock had been manifested in their lives; they also addressed the positive and negative adaptation experiences in the U.S.

Nine international students met with the researcher for the interviews, in which they had the opportunity to explain some of their answers given in the questionnaire. One interviewee was a western male, two were non-western male students, two were western female, and three were non-western female students. Their home countries were Australia, Bosnia, Cameroon, Italy, Germany, Iran, Philippines, Poland, and Romania. All of them were encouraged to give examples in order to provide better insight into their experiences. In the following thematic analysis, the five emerging themes are supported by the quotes of the international students’ answers.

Thematic Analysis

The responses to the open-ended survey questions served as basis for the thematic analysis. The interview answers revealed the same themes. Qualitative data from both data sets produced the following themes:

- Theme 1: Language and Communication Problems
- Theme 2: Life style and Cultural Differences
- Theme 3: Social Support and Making Friends
Theme 4: Positive Experiences

Theme 5: Difficult Times and Experiences

Theme 1: Language and Communication Problems

When exploring the experiences of international students, one of the most frequently mentioned issues in functioning in a new culture involves communicating in the host country’s language. In most cases, the classes the students take at colleges and universities in the USA are held in English, and many of the day-to-day activities and interactions with people require international students’ knowledge and use of the English language. In order to come to this country and study, many students have to pass English language exams or prove some knowledge of English to the visa-issuing embassy. Even if the students have studied the language of the host country back home for several years, they face difficulties when communicating with the people in the USA.

Fifteen people explicitly mentioned language and communication problems as one of the most difficult experiences in the surveys: eight were non-western females, three were western females and four non-western males. All nine interviewees mentioned that they had to work on language and communication skills when they came to this country. Seven interviewees addressed language and communication difficulties as an influential factor in their adaptation to the U.S. culture. Some examples from the open-ended questions about difficulties included: “Communication barrier,” “… in the beginning my limited vocabulary knowledge – to bring my point across”; “Knowing American jokes,” “To learn English, getting adjusted.” One interviewee, a female student from a non-western country, described her experience with communicating:

I think the funniest thing here is when someone says, “I’ll call you” … “I’ll call you later.” That means not tonight in the evening, that means whenever
… before I die, they will call you later, some day probably … that’s the truth … that’s what I had problems with in the beginning when I came to the United States; because when someone said, “I’ll call you later” I thought it is the same day … but it’s not later … someday … whenever … we keep in touch, but I know this now.

Another female student from a non-western country said, “… it is very different … it’s not your first language … some things are hard to understand … like American accent …” Many international students had learned British English at school, instructed by teachers from their own countries. In foreign countries, English is often taught only for writing purposes, and for that reason it takes international students some time to get used to the American accent. A female student from a western country who had lived in Mexico for some years before coming to the USA described her experience:

Before coming here – when I was in Mexico – I took some classes about writing English at the university over there. When I came here I could maybe communicate myself with people by writing because actually speaking was totally different. I could not really understand a word. It helped me to start with something but my preparations did not work for my communication skill because I could not even ask for help. At the university in Mexico they had a Mexican accent and to me it was really easy to understand them when they were speaking (English) but when I came here, it was totally different. The pronunciation was with a kind of accent that was totally different for me. For me – even just saying “car” was really hard … So I had a hard time. … I started to go to the ESL classes that they offer … It helped me a lot … and all those people were international students … in the same situation. So I was a little bit relieved. What was bad about that … everybody has a really strong accent and it did not help me a lot with my pronunciation skill because I was learning maybe different accent instead of the American pronunciation … It’s really good to communicate with international students because … if they understand you, you can communicate, but on the other hand you have to have the possibility that somebody corrects you to improve your speaking skill because if not, it is impossible (to improve) …

This student addressed the problem that learning English from non-native speakers did not provide the opportunity to get used to the accent of the U.S. people. The English language is spoken with many accents especially when we consider that international
students frequently socialize with other international students. Every language background produces a different accent and that’s what makes getting used to American English often difficult. In order to be able to learn American English, proper pronunciation, and slang, students need to communicate with native speakers.

Other students had used English as one of their primary languages in their home countries, which could be considered an advantage. Still, even those students reported difficulties. One non-western female student who had used English as one of the primary languages in her home country expressed, “We know how to write, read, and comprehend, but it was different at the airport … where you actually speak it – they could not understand me at all … It took me a while … to get the accent and the slang.” Apparently this student was really surprised that she wasn’t able to communicate with Americans even though she had used English when talking to people in her home country. International students report their experience of not being understood by people not only because of their limited knowledge of English but also because of their accent.

Often, the accent seems to be the greater barrier in communicating. Those students who had used English primarily to communicate in their home countries before coming to the USA reported this experience. One male student from Australia said in the interview, “Even though we speak English – it’s a completely different language … It took me maybe a month or two before I realized they did not know what I was talking about.” The same student became frustrated with one of his teachers when she did not seem to understand his answer:

I hate when I put my hand up and give an answer and everyone says, “What?” So I am just like, “I am not going to put my hand up the next time. […] It has happened that the teacher asked me (like) a question and I gave the
right answer and she said, “No,” and someone else gave the same answer and she said, “Yes.”

Not only do students report the language barriers in relation to communication as such, but they also mention that they are discouraged at times because people seem to become impatient when talking or listening to them. One western woman said that she had difficulties “… maybe at first when you do not really speak well, people do not take the time to listen to you or explain you anything and sometimes get impatient.”

Another female from a western country stated that it was especially difficult to understand people when one can’t see their non-verbal language:

It has been difficult talking and understanding people on the phone: everything needs to be done on the phone – complaining about a bill, asking for information about getting a service, etc. At first it is very hard to get used to it. I wanted to have the possibility to contact people personally in order to be able to read their labial language. Now it is better …

This student also addressed problems with language, pointing out that not seeing the person who she is talking to and not seeing the lip movements makes it even more difficult to understand people.

Even those students who did not mention language problems specifically stated that they either enrolled immediately in language classes or had studied for a specific, often required English exam to enter a U.S. college or university. Some had had some language experience because of previous visits to the United States. One stated, “I was a summer au pair, I came always when I had a school break – I came for about two months.” One male student from a nonwestern country said, “I started school right away – basic English classes, like ESL (English as a second language) classes”. Another male non-western student, coming from a country with French and English as its two official languages, said, “… My uncle bought tapes and I listened.”
Summary.

It appears that years of speaking and studying English in their home countries is no guarantee that international students will be able to communicate with Americans without difficulties. Knowledge of a language is more than translating words and assembling them into sentences. Language needs to be understood in the context of culture - many words and phrases and slang that are unique to the American culture are not easily understood by those coming from other countries. Students recognize that acquiring the knowledge of the language spoken in and getting accustomed to the accent in the host country are crucial for a positive adjustment in the USA. Language is important when communicating with everyone: peers, teachers, and everyone with whom they need to converse. Being able to communicate in English is a big advantage and a springboard to succeeding in any endeavors in the new country.

Theme 2: Life Style and Cultural Differences

International students come from various language, culture, religious, political, economic, social, family backgrounds, and regions with different climate and topographical characteristics. All these aspects have shaped the students’ personal lives; therefore, when coming to the USA these students realize that their backgrounds differ from the U.S. culture in many ways. Dissimilarities in cultures are experienced in daily life such as when trying to relate to people, going to school, going shopping or eating out, or dealing with people in offices. Some differences are related to food, attitudes and values, particular customs, and celebrating holidays, while others are related to economic situations. To what degree students experience difficulties with the cultural challenges
seems to depend on a variety of factors including personality, age, length of stay, the presence of family or ethnic communities, visa status, and their economic situation. Most students realize that it is necessary to adjust to the U.S. culture to function in it, but this realization does not eliminate the struggles students have with the cultural differences, values, and life style of the people in the host country.

_Pace of Life._

The students mentioned a variety of experiences when it came to the adaptation to the American life style and cultural differences. Seven students explicitly addressed cultural differences as their most difficult experiences in the questionnaires. Six of them were females of whom four were non-western and two were western; one student was a western male.

Two students wrote that in the beginning they did not know where they belonged in this new country and its culture. “I thought all eyes were on me…when I came, I was very alienated…I was conservative, the way I dressed and talked” (non-western female); a male student originally from a non-western country, who had lived in Germany for some time before coming to the USA, wrote that, “Fitting in when I came to the U.S.” was difficult.

Depending on where in the United Stated the students live – urban or suburban area, wealthy or lower to middle class areas, and with whom the students live – their own families, friends, or other students with host families – life style differences were experienced more or less severely. A non-western female student addressing differences in general explained:

I think almost everything is different – school is different of course, living by
myself without a family is different, economy is certainly different, lots of stuff; people are really busy … people don’t get much free time. So everyone is kind of doing their own thing. You don’t meet that many people to care about you … Probably, you don’t care so much about the others because you don’t have the time …

The “busy-ness” of American people, their “not-having-time,” was mentioned in different contexts repeatedly by both the surveyed students and again by those who had volunteered to participate in the follow-up interviews. Students describe Americans as “always busy – they don’t relax, don’t have a lot of vacation” and one international student described some of his fellow American students this way, “Students here come in their pajamas, maybe go home and back to bed … they hop in classes and hop out …”. One western female student said that one of her most difficult experiences has been “the fast pace in everyday life …” Another female western student addressed that “nobody has time” and coming from a country where university expenses are taken care to a great extent by the government and students usually just focus on studying, she also concluded that “It is busier for me to go to school and to work …” She added that “you wouldn’t stay with your friend, you’d go to lunch for an hour or so and that’s it and they are off to the next appointment …” This experience is similar to a non-western student who also points out that “going to school and work together is kind of hard” and she also addresses the fast-paced American life, saying, “In my country time is not running. Most of the time I did not have a lot to do … now I have a lot to do and I don’t have time…”

In the context of “busy-ness,” students also experienced individualistic traits of the American culture. Three female interviewees suggested that people in their home countries are more sociable. One non-western female student said that she was lonely and “… the neighbors did not even care. I would say ‘hi’ to the neighbors – they would say
'hi.' I guess it was weird for them too. I asked them for their names and told them “I am your neighbor.” They were like ‘Okay.’” Talking about family, one non-western female stated, “I know in my country we have a party at least once every other week, like we dance and stuff …” Another female student from a western country said she misses “the sociability – going out with your friends and sitting down in a coffee shop and talk for a couple of hours …”. Interestingly a female student from Italy talked about her background and about how she had experienced the people in her home country as restless:

In my country life is really stressful – everybody is really stressed, everybody don’t care about you – maybe in the United States … I think here it is a superficial thing because to have the real idea of the culture you have to know people and find out better and it is a culture and its characteristics but the approach is much better here in the U.S. because you feel more comfortable. In Italy … at the airport I can hear people screaming and they are running all the time, they don’t care about you if you just stop because you feel sick … They don’t have patience they don’t care about anybody. Here everything is slower and less stressful and that’s why I feel better.

This student, who had also lived in Mexico for some time, describes people of her own culture as stressed, loud, and rather uncaring. She also mentions that she used to live in a city; that may explain parallels to a more individualistic culture. Generally people in bigger European cities are more detached from the people around them. Also, the similarities of her home culture with the U.S. culture may explain why this student states that she feels better over here. The student seems to still struggle with whether or not she has “the real idea of culture” about the USA and she also says that everybody’s experience “depends on the place you are coming from…”

Some of the students perceive people as very nice and friendly in the USA. A non-western female student said, “I just know the people from school, they are very nice”
and a male non-western student said “the people I live with are friendly…” A western female student described Americans as “hyper friendly” and feels annoyed by the phrase “How are you doing?” One non-western female student asserts in this context

… sometimes when you approach a person and you have a conversation with that person they may seem like they have an interest by asking you “How do you do?” or “How are you?” or … you look at them and you think they really want to know but sometimes then when you really start opening up the file they kind of cut you off a little bit. It’s kind of a false message … I don’t know if that’s real or not … It is different in my country … if someone would ask you “How is everything?” they are ready to listen basically. If they don’t want to know they won’t say this they will just say, “Hi” and they won’t say anything else. So that’s kind of a mixed message …

The students generally experience Americans as friendly and helpful but are not always sure how genuine this friendliness is. Often they are confused when Americans and others in this country ask “How are you?” because when people ask that question in other cultures/countries people often stop and open a longer conversation inquiring about how things are going in someone’s personal life. In the United States, however, usually it only requires giving a short answer and the phrase is no more than a greeting.

Other life style and cultural differences observed by international students were concentrated around necessities in daily life such as getting to places, the availability and consumption of certain foods, family life, community life, and politics.

A western female student said about cultural differences and life style, “Some aspects are similar but some aspects are very different. For example, that you need a car living here – that was a big adjustment. I can’t go with a train or a subway to places … If I want to go to a park I have to drive for 20 minutes or so … for me that is bad …” A male western student added, “I don’t have a car in Michigan which is impossible and I am always relying on someone else for a ride …” These international students attending a
community college in Michigan are coming from countries with well developed public transportation systems that allows getting to and from school easily. These students are also used to having entertainment and recreation in close proximity. Considering that the surveyed students are attending a community college with no student housing makes owning a car even more necessary.

*Customs and Food.*

Since each culture and country is also characterized by their unique foods, students were asked about their adjustment to American food. Of the nine interviewees, six specifically mention that it was rather difficult for them to adjust to the food in the United States - all five females and the only western male complained about food. One non-western female student wrote on the survey that getting adjusted to “American culture and food” was one of her most difficult experiences. Those interviewees who said that they had no problem getting used to the food over here admitted that they had food typical to their home country quite often. For example, this non-western male student said he eats “American food and I eat food from my own country and the make-up of the preparation is different …” The other student said that food is “no problem, the same food was in [the country he lived before] too.” Both of them live with family members, and the one who is Muslim lives in a community with a high Muslim population, which may indicate that food from his culture is available when needed.

A non-western female, living with her family, points out regarding food, “My mom cooks everyday. So we eat rice every meal … if it is not rice, it is not a meal … I don’t like their rice … I think it is their taste. I guess I need to acquire their taste. I don’t like their food here. I like Italian food though. I don’t like American food.” A western
male student said about food in the USA: “I choose pretty much what I eat but there is too much fast food here. There is a lot in Australia too but it is not everywhere. One of my roommates ate fast food three times a day … I couldn’t believe it …” This student also said, “… All my favorite foods you can’t get here,” and then he added, “I found a store that carries a pastry – so I have a load of it at home all the time.” A western female declared that what she misses most about her country were “Some foods like breads and sweets and coffee … Luckily my boyfriend and I like Italian food and he likes to cook, but the food here tastes different – a little extreme. It’s too sweet or too greasy …” Another non-western female student said “I even gained kilos because of the type of food they have here.”

One non-western female reports that she is not familiar with “… the different behaviors during the holidays because each culture has customs … during the holidays … The shock was also what kind of food they eat during the holidays … I mean I was used to all kinds of special dishes during Christmas and here … or during Easter … when you come during Easter time and you have basically scrambled eggs with ham for breakfast on Easter morning.”

It appears that international students miss food from home and are actually looking for certain foods they had in their home countries. They have a difficult time with fast food, which is relatively cheap and affordable for students but does not seem to satisfy students’ dietary needs. Those who have a choice try to find certain products they know from their home countries and frequently prepare or have their families prepare food that’s typical for their countries. Often food can bring memories of home and family gatherings, especially on holidays. It can also be a comfort when international students miss home and struggle with homesickness.
Theme 3: Social Support and Making Friends

For international students, studying in the USA is accompanied by leaving their friends and, in most cases, their families. The lack of a social support network can be a very difficult experience, especially when students are rather shy, have little confidence and social self-efficacy, or are embarrassed to approach people because of their limited knowledge of English. In addition, cultural differences may be a barrier for making friends.

On the questionnaires, six international students mentioned making friends as one of their most difficult experiences in the U.S.; four more students said that making friends, missing family, fitting in, and not knowing anybody in the beginning were very hard for them. In the interview the students were asked, “What people have you been socializing with?” which was followed by prompts that involved questions about why they thought they socialized with certain people more than others and their perception of friendship. Two interviewees (one non-western male and one non-western female) reported that they did not have much time to socialize: “… I really don’t have that much time to socialize with people but I think I should socialize with anybody who wants to socialize with me. I don’t want to make a choice …” Three male students explained that they had friends from everywhere. It is important to note here that two of these young men were on sports scholarships, playing on a soccer team with other international students. One of them (non-western) said, “… I got African-American, Polish, Albanian [friends] – I got friends from everywhere...” the other one (western), “… we hang out mostly with athletic people – other teams …”
All six female interviewees stated that they primarily socialized with international students or people from other countries; four of them added that they did not have many American friends like this western female student, who also tried to give reasons why she has more friends from other countries than the USA:

… Most of my friends are from other nations and I have only a few American friends – I am involved in school projects with them – so I have a few. At work I have contacts with Americans. Real friends and people I socialize with are mostly from Europe … I think it is how they make friends … they are not really interested in new friends. Europeans come here and are alone and are looking for connections with people who understand the situation …

The same student indicated that she has noticed differences in the concept of friendship between her home country and USA:

[Here] … you determine somebody as a friend after you have seen him/her for two times, you go for lunch for an hour and you say, “That’s my friend.” … Even when I think that would be an American friend to me and I call, “You know what, I am going to come over for a couple hours, let’s talk …” people would feel strange about it. It is not normal in America to do this.

Another female student (non-western) asserts she not only lives with a roommate from her home country but also socializes with people from her home country at the church she attends. She has other friends also. She stated, “I met some people from Asia – I have a friend … like a friend … I mean, it’s not really a friend, sometimes I meet people …”

Two female students wrote something similar on the questionnaire. “Making real American friends” and “Making friends is hard- you know a lot of people but not friends” are just some examples that leave students concerned.

The examples here show that female international students seem to have a more difficult time connecting with people in the host country. They indicate that they have
mostly friends from their country/culture, and in that respect they have a clear concept of friendship. When it comes to people they have met from other, unfamiliar cultures, they seem to be unsure whether or not to call them friends.

Asked why they socialize and feel more comfortable with people from mostly other countries than the U.S., one non-western female student said:

I don’t know … I have American friends, I have Chinese, Japanese, Indian, Persian of course … If they are from my country, they understand it better because they have lived here for ten years or so … they are from the same country, they know what is going on, what is the difficulty with my country and stuff like that … [Here] most of the people don’t know a lot about other cultures … I mean some do, some don’t, but the ones that don’t and don’t want to, can’t have an idea … it’s their fault …”

Trying to understand their culture or showing interest in their backgrounds appears to be important when international students make friends with people in the USA. Whereas male students do not mention problems with finding friends explicitly – two mentioned it was difficult for them to find a girlfriend – their female counterparts admit that it is difficult for them to find friends and especially Americans to relate to. In the study, the male students did not go into detail about their definition of friendship whereas the female students did, which shows it is vital for them. This gender difference in the qualitative findings cannot be neglected and triggers questions addressing the dissimilarity of male and female conceptualization of friendship.

Theme 4: Positive Experiences

International students encounter new situations, people, and customs on a daily basis. Some of the experiences are positive and encouraging; others are negative, discouraging, or misunderstood. In spite of the difficulties international students come
across, they have a great appreciation for many pleasant attributes accompanying living and studying in the United States.

*Positive College Experience.*

Of the 43 students responding to the open-ended questions, 19 students reported that being a student at the college they attended at the time of the survey was one of their best experiences. They specifically mentioned that “Experience of being a student,” “Being an active part of the school,” “Sports Award Scholarship,” “Sharing moments and study with classmates”, “Working at the college as a tutor and assistant,” “School in the U.S.” contributed to a positive college experience.

Eight out of the nine interviewees emphasized their positive experience with school. All except for one of the nine interviewees said they liked college in the United States for various reasons. For example, one of the students stated that in Europe the “school system is tougher” and one non-western female student explained

> It was really hard to get into a university in [home country] … you have to pass an exam to get into a university … there are many people trying to do that. You have to have a good score to pass that exam and to be able to study. That was the public university … you could get into a private university but that was expensive and it was not that good … I like the school here because you get to do so many things. If you really want to learn you can get all the help you need to learn …”

A non-western male declares the differences between the school system of his home country and the USA:

> What I like best about the USA is academics – that’s where my interest lies. They go straight to the point. They go straight to the point and let you know this is your future and this is how you are to move in order to achieve what you want to achieve … In my country you need to divert your mind; you have to do a lot of things in order to come out in a specific field. If you want to become a medical doctor you need to study all the subjects. You don’t really need to specify or focus. That’s why medical doctors [there] can be lawyers; they can do this or can do a variety of things …
A western female declares that she likes the opportunities of getting involved in any function at the college she attends. She also explains what she likes about studying in the USA, making comparisons to studying in her home country.

If you want to be involved in school, you have the chance to do what you want to do that is something we don’t have in [home country] … in […] there are no multiple choice tests and true/false answers – you have to study everything by heart and everything is in an essay form which makes it more subjective than here, because if he [the teacher] doesn’t like your answers you get a bad grade … If you read the book [here] and you are prepared you get a good grade. I see an advantage in us being more disciplined – studying in a different way and that is a big advantage for a lot of my classes. It is easier to get an A because I am used to sitting down and reading for a couple of hours and Americans are not and they don’t have time.

This student also addresses the fact that students don’t have time to study especially when they work full-time. In her home country students don’t work as much or not at all when they are going to the universities, “You work a couple hours a day or two days a week and that is it. A lot of studies need to be done for the university [in my home country].”

A non-western female student brings to attention her work on campus and the financial support for schooling, stating that she likes best “the opportunity to have a job and to study … if you are a good student … you can go to school for free …” Another western female student gives an example of her satisfaction with school in the U.S., addressing the role of American teachers at American universities and colleges. She explained what she likes best:

… the way they teach university and colleges. The professor and the teachers are ready to help you anytime and anywhere. … in my country at my university professors were like gods. In order to have the opportunity to talk to them you had to write a letter to “God” … Here it is totally different because every question I have about homework and everything can be answered … in my country that is impossible …
Another western female student said about school:

In general I think people treat me very well and welcome me very warmly and how me around – that is very nice. Sometimes people say you have to be happy with a 3.0 because you are not an American. And I say, “That’s not an excuse – I can have a 4.0 too. For a long time I had to convince people that I can get it. I see an advantage in us being more disciplined – studying in a different way and that is a big advantage for a lot of my classes. It is easier to get an A because I am used to sitting down and reading for a couple of hours and Americans are not … they don’t have time. A lot of them don’t put time into working hard.

In general international students report very positive college experiences. They value the availability and approachability of professors when they have questions, and they believe they can achieve their goals by putting a reasonable amount of effort in their studies. Most of the students appear to be highly ambitious regarding their studies and seem to reveal high academic self-efficacy. The opportunities to be involved in different organizations and student activities are appreciated by the students.

Meeting New People and Different Cultures.

In the questionnaires, twenty students mentioned that meeting new people and learning about new cultures were among their best experiences (nine students and eleven students, respectively). “Creating relationships, sharing experiences, feel like being at ‘home,’” “A few of the friends I have made have been the best ones I have ever had,” “…People from America were so nice, they helped me a lot …” and “Meeting friends who helped me” are just some of the quotes accentuating the point that students have enjoyed meeting new people in the United States. It may appear that these quotes contradict what international students said about making friends, but it is important to clarify that meeting new and nice people does not mean making friends with them.
Of those who mentioned meeting people of new cultures as one of their best experiences on the questionnaires, two specified that they enjoyed “the openness of the culture” and that they “feel comfortable around people from different countries and learn more about them …” In the interviews, two of the male interviewees (both on the soccer team, one western, one non-western) agreed that they enjoyed meeting people from different cultures; one of them said he liked best “… the people; the many different cultures; different religions, different races, ... I never got into a fight – good with everybody …” The other student said, “It’s definitely good for me to live here because they are different.”

Many international students come from rather homogeneous cultures and are confronted with the diversity in this country. Many international students embrace cultural differences, are curious and want to learn about other cultures, and want to share their backgrounds with others. They express frustration about people who are not interested in other countries, customs, and cultural differences. Students from western cultures feel that people are interested in their backgrounds, whereas students from non-western countries repeatedly report that people don’t understand their backgrounds or they even have stereotypes. Since international students frequently socialize with other international students, they are often very inquisitive about the various backgrounds of people.

Opportunities.

Eight of the interviewees mentioned that they had better study, job, and economic opportunities in the USA. Non-western students in particular from Bosnia, Poland, Romania, and the Philippines said that the U.S. economy was one of the reasons they
liked to live in this country. One of the non-western male students compared his home
country’s situation with the situation in the USA, “It’s better, the economy and
everything. If I go back home, there is no job, there is nothing.” Regarding better
economy, a non-western female student explained:

I like that my dad is getting a better income. In [home country] you make just
enough to get around and we did not own a car. Here, my mom has a car, my
dad, I, and my brother is [sic] going to get a car. I like that the way of living is
easier. We never owned play station, plasma TV … also … the insurance …
my mom … had her first physical assessment in a long time … she was
diagnosed with breast cancer. I was thinking, if we had been in [country], we
wouldn’t have known. She is well now.

A western female student said, “I think it is easier, much easier. Life has a lot of
commodities … job opportunities …” A non-western female is confident that after
finishing her nursing program, she will get a job right away. Another western female
student said that the opportunities to get involved at school and international student
activities helped her meet more people. In addition to a better economic situation and
school and work opportunities, three non-western females (all from the Middle East)
pointed out as their best experiences that “the USA gives a lot of freedom and rights to
individuals,” “women are valued more than in my home country,” “freedom and working
in the college as a tutor and assistant.”

Apparently international students are very content with their college experience
and believe that they are given many opportunities involving getting scholarships and
being actively involved in sports and other activities. They are also very open and curious
about meeting new people and cultures. A better economy for some non-western students
and the perception of greater freedom especially for females are also frequently noted as
best experiences in the U.S.
Theme 5: Difficult Times and Experiences

Most students listed difficult experiences on the questionnaires; many related to cultural and life style differences, language and communication, and making friends. Some of the problems were not linked to one of those categories but rather to international student regulations, visa status, and political problems. Three students (two from the Middle East) mentioned that they had a very difficult time around 9/11, one of them also added that “when I started wearing my head scarf” it was difficult for her. Five students complained about the international student regulations involving high tuition payments, getting a work permit, “because I did not have a certain status,” “not being hired for jobs because of not being a citizen, not being able to vote.” Four students also mentioned that their most difficult times were when they missed their families and could not go home or when they could not be with their families during the holidays because of regulations that did not guarantee their return to the USA. One western male student explained:

Although being from a country so close to the U.S., my experience has been that I have been treated as an outsider for not being born here. Also the government has made the transition to citizenship difficult for me and my family. I have also not agreed with most of the social and domestic and international policies of the U.S. government.

One non-western male student said in respect to politics that “The only thing I don’t like are the politics, I don’t get the politics. I don’t get it. It’s much different to Europe …” Some students who have lived with American host families question “family values” and “the way Americans raise their kids …”
Cultural differences regarding values and political differences and regulations pertaining to international students upset them, especially when these regulations make living in the country more difficult.

One female student from Asia in the nursing program of the college was upset about how she was treated because of a trait that was shaped by her culture. She talked about one of her most difficult experiences:

The instructor has noticed that I am actually not so assertive and not so open. The nursing instructor and the nursing counselor talked to me about being shy and I don’t think that is my fault that I am shy. I don’t think I am like that with the patient. So they see me as shy because I respect my instructor. I am not like that to my patients; I am very assertive with my patients because I know I have to deliver a certain kind of care …”

Many of the difficult experiences of international students relate to language, communication, and cultural differences. In addition, hardships related to international student regulations that deny some of the rights U.S. citizens hold frustrate these young people at times. Some students are occasionally intimidated by political tensions involving their home countries and the USA and are critical of political decisions in this country.

Living Through the Stages of Culture Shock

One of the interview questions specifically addressed Oberg’s (1960) concept of culture shock, accompanying symptoms, and the stages: 1) Honeymoon Stage, 2) Crisis Stage, 3) Stage of Developing a Positive Attitude, and 4) Stage of Adaptation. After the researcher explained the four stages of culture shock, the students were asked whether they had experienced culture shock in the way described, and they were encouraged to make comments.
Of the seven interviewees responding to the questions regarding culture shock, one was a non-western male, two were western females, and three were non-western females. All except for one non-western male and one western female said that they had lived through all the stages. A non-western female was surprised that Oberg’s (1960) honeymoon stage and crisis stage were consistent with her experience:

This is actually really funny … basically when I came here I hit depression after 6 months … I did not want to be here anymore … I got disappointed with my host family … things started getting out of hand … I think this stage lasted about a month and then I started to battle, get some information, learn about the culture a little bit more; some of the problems – I put them behind …

After her crisis stage, this student has learned to accept differences and moved on and tried to learn more about the culture; she explained where she thought she was at in the adaptation process to the U.S. culture:

I am in the stage of Adjustment … this is just exactly how it was … I guess I was in cultural shock because this is what it looks like … that’s why I decided “Well I have to be here … It’s not so bad … I got to get used to it and if I want to go to school and live here I have to adjust because they are not going to adjust to me … I am in the States … I am supposed to adjust … I am not assimilated totally but I am adjusted … I am ok with it [the culture] … I learned how to deal with it … I know how I have to do it in order to be here and work here … and so I have to accept certain things … that’s the way it has to be … I am here for a while … but I still have my culture and did not cross it out of my mind …

Asked about whether she has had a crisis experience with the desire to go home more than once she continued:

Yes, sure. They always come when you have hard times … when I am just so upset when I had to look for my apartment … when I was moving … I did not know what to do; it was depressing … I can’t deal with this … or even with other things at school … when the legal papers weren’t done right and I had to deal with it by myself … it is just hard … the main one was the first but there is more than one crisis …
This student said that her experience of culture shock in the United States followed Oberg’s concept. She also indicated that she made an effort to get out of the crisis stage by learning more about the U.S. culture. This in turn really helped her to eventually arrive at the adjustment stage. Another non-western female student who had been in the United States for almost four years at the time of the interview explained about her transition to the U.S. culture:

Yes, I think I went through all of the stages and I consider myself to be in the stage of adjustment at this point of time. I think my honeymoon stage only lasted for 24 hours or less. From the Detroit Airport to the expressways and to the apartment, I was thrilled and excited for a little while (since we are in the U.S.) … there were many different factors that caused the crisis. First, it was the severe jetlag for 2 weeks. I came in mid September, and it was a cold September (temperature wise). It was around 40s and 50s in Michigan at that time, and I came from a tropical country (80s-100s all year long). That was very discouraging and I just wanted to go home as soon as I felt all those ghastly changes.

Another non-western female student who had lived in the United States for four years at the time of the interview confirmed that she went through all the stages but

I think I passed the last two before the crisis stage … I don’t think I had the crisis stage that early … I felt really good and I felt I was adjusted here and everything but then when something bad happened at home, then occurred my crisis stage … I think I am adjusted here and can live here … at the same time I have a crisis only because of the problems with my family at home.

The quotes here show that these students lived through culture shock at different rates and their crisis stage was triggered by different problems. Oberg (1960) had suggested that problems in the personal experience with the new culture, such as school, language, and dealing with people at different places contribute to the crisis stage. It appears that international students experience a crisis because of different reasons, not all of them related to living in the host culture, and they also indicate that their desire to go
home did not only relate to one crisis but occur more often, especially at times of transition. Not being able to control certain situations and having the desire to go home seems to describe the crisis stage best.

One of the students (non-western male) who said he did not go through culture shock the way Oberg suggested said that only a financial crisis would make it difficult for him to live in the United States. The other student who did not think she was affected by culture shock (western, female, aged 44, in the United States for five years) said she felt very comfortable in and well adapted to the culture of the United States. She admitted that her son, who had been a teenager when coming to the United States, had major problems when he came and he had just recently returned to his home country. This student suggested that Oberg’s model “can be applied depending on the culture they [the students] are coming from.” She emphasized that “the order can be changed depending on cultural background,” education, cultural knowledge, and the students’ goals. She continued, “People who come here because they got a new job may never have a crisis because they found what they were looking for …” She believes that she never had a crisis because “of my personality.” She explains that she will continue her studies even if her husband is going back to her home country before her graduation. Her high level of self-confidence and self-efficacy reveal as she talks about her future plans: “I hope to move to Brazil and teach there and then move to Korea … and know more about different cultures – I really like that connection with new cultures and challenge myself a little bit in being able to live there and understand the new thing and learn more about cultures.”

Three of the interviewees thought that Oberg’s model was very helpful to them in understanding the process of adjusting to the U.S. culture; one of them said she wished
she had known about it before. Knowledge about the symptoms and stages international students go through would not change the process but at least help them understand what they experience at different times.

Culture shock affects international students in very different ways. Most students seem to live through all the stages, and it appears that non-western females experience more severe crises than western females whose culture has more in common with the U.S. culture. The order of the cultural shock stages and the length of time students stay in the stages may vary, and crises with the wish to go home occur more than once. It needs to be noted that those international students without family support in the new country report more difficulties getting through their crises. Males in general report fewer difficulties in adjusting to the U.S. culture. Personality factors, the amount of difference to the U.S. culture, and ways people are socialized in their gender roles appear to contribute a great deal to the problems.

Students’ Suggestions for Dealing with Cultural Differences and Problems

In the interview the international students were asked to give suggestions that would be helpful to international students dealing with cultural differences and other problems. Three of the international students stated that international student meetings were very helpful in dealing with adjustment problems, with one student suggesting having “a partner so you can talk and share together … the next time you can share what you don’t understand … another person can help.” Two non-western students stated that they needed the counselor mostly for international student regulations and to “keep me informed,” and they approached their friends when they had problems with the U.S. culture. Two western females suggested that a counselor specifically dealing with cultural
issues would be of help. One of them specified “an international counselor who could offer a workshop … that you are aware of the problem and know what you can do …” Two students also mentioned that meeting people who had lived in other countries before and teaching students “speaking and communication skills” would be helpful.

International students believe that there is a need of assistance with cultural adaptation problems, especially for those students who don’t have family or sufficient social support networks in the United States. It appears that non-western students suggest students should meet with others to share their problems. Western students suggest a counselor specifically dealing with adjustment issues of international students would be helpful. The preference of each cultural group may be influenced by their collectivist or individualist cultural background.

Summary

The themes that emerged from the interviews give insight into international students’ experiences. Difficulties and adjustment issues evolve around language and communication problems, life style and cultural differences, making contact with and finding friends among Americans, and status in the U.S., including restrictions due to regulations. Personality factors are reported to be important in the academic setting and for interacting with people from the host culture but would need to be explored further. Students express their positive experiences with school and their opportunities with education. Students from non-western backgrounds state that they feel valued and enjoy freedom and economic advantages in the United States. Culture shock appears to be a phenomenon that international students go through. They reported that they experience symptoms of culture shock and use different coping skills to overcome them. Students
emphasized the wish to know more about it in order to be prepared and develop better coping strategies. All the answers give useful information on issues of student adjustment and encourage further exploration.
A significant number of international students with diverse cultural backgrounds study at U.S. colleges and universities. The current study attempted to explore the impact of culture (western and non-western), personality, and social network on the adaptation of international students to the U.S. culture, including these questions: (a) Is there a relation between perception of cultural differences (adjustment) and experience of culture shock (cultural match)? (b) Do non-western students have a more difficult time adjusting to the U.S. culture? (c) Are there gender differences in the adjustment process? (d) Do levels of self-confidence/self-efficacy affect adaptation? (e) Do language proficiency and social support network affect the adjustment? This study also looked at the personal experiences of international students with adaptation to the U.S. culture and culture shock.

The results of the quantitative and qualitative data will be used to answer and discuss the research questions. Considerations regarding the results and limitations of the study will be acknowledged in order to shed light on international students’ experiences.

Cultural Adjustment and Symptoms of Culture Shock

The first question the researcher looked at was “Is there a relation between perception of cultural differences (adjustment) and experience of culture shock (cultural match)?” The international student survey examined correlations among cultural adjustment, social support network, self-efficacy, and cultural match. Exploring the outcomes, a correlation between cultural match and cultural adjustment was found with \( r = .51 \) and a significance of \( p < .001 \). Students who did not report having difficulties with cultural differences also reported having fewer and less severe symptoms of culture.
shock. This finding is consistent with the qualitative findings. The only student who claimed to not have problems with the American culture and also stated that she had not experienced symptoms of depression, homesickness, loneliness came from a country with similar cultural patterns as the USA. It can be hypothesized that students with western backgrounds are either only having minor crises living in the USA, experience less severe symptoms, or have better coping strategies and resources to ask for assistance. At the same time, age and social and academic self-efficacy need to be considered in this respect, as well as preparation for coming to a new culture or experience of other cultures prior to moving to the United States. All of these factors seem to have an influence on the experience of culture shock symptoms of international students in the USA.

Adjustment Differences between Western and Non-Western Students

Most studies on international students had only looked at international students as such, or at certain groups such as Asian students, Latino students, and others. A clear definition helped categorize countries into western and non-western and compare the two.

In the present study the researcher found that international students from non-western countries had a more difficult time adjusting than western students with a significant difference of $F (1,43) = 3.98, p = .05$. In general, students from western countries that are characterized by individualistic features and as having more in common with the U.S. culture reported fewer problems adjusting to the U.S. culture than their non-western peers. Even though there was an imbalance in the sample, with 31 non-western and 14 western students, the significance cannot be underestimated. The findings from the interviews support the quantitative data. Non-western students expressed frequently
that it was difficult for them to get used to a busy American lifestyle that often sacrificed opportunities for social interaction. Students from non-western backgrounds are not used to a fast-paced life from their home countries and take issue with all the scheduled meetings at work and after work. Free time in other countries is often used for socializing with family and friends and not for activities that require scheduling. Because people of collectivist cultures see themselves in relationship to and dependent on others and closeness to extended families, non-western students express discomfort with individualist features of the American life-style.

Western students often mentioned that it was difficult for them to get used to American fast food and that they tried to find or prepared food that they used to enjoy with their families back home. Food may seem to be a minor thing to complain about in a country that offers so many ethnic food options, but it needs to be considered that familiar food also has a comforting effect, reminding students of home, parties, and holidays with their families. Non-western students reported having food from home frequently. It can be speculated that non-western students living in ethnic and cultural communities have a more difficult time accepting the American culture and food because they practice their home culture with other people from their home countries. Because of the community they experience with other international students or immigrants to the U.S., they may not try as hard to become adjusted. Western students, however, may not have or not need the community with their own nationals as much because the differences between their culture and the home culture are not as extreme. Western students addressed the differences they had experienced regarding food and sociability, but they did not see those as problems in their adjustment because they expressed that they had
noticed similar social behavior in their home countries at times and ate fast food occasionally in their home countries.

These findings exemplify that students from non-western backgrounds have a more difficult time adjusting to the U.S. culture and support the quantitative data from this study. The awareness that international students are not part of one cultural group can help those working with students to distinguish and understand certain behaviors and issues of western and non-western students.

Gender Differences and Adjustment

One of the research questions of the current study was “Are there gender differences in international student adjustment?” Most previous literature has either not looked at gender differences in international student adjustment or not reported any differences. The current study, however, suggests that female students have a more difficult time adjusting to the U.S. culture than male students, with $F (1,43) = 9.92$, $p < .01$. The significant differences found in the quantitative analysis were also supported by the answers to the interview questions. In the interviews, all but one female expressed that they had problems with the American life style, stating that people don’t seem to care, were superficial, and did not want to make “real” friends. It appears that female students are struggling with the way people relate and with the concept of friendship. They seem to look for deeper connections and are bothered by using the term “friend” to describe someone with whom they would go out with for lunch a few times or do projects or sometimes talk between classes. “Friends,” in their definition, are people with whom you can feel comfortable sharing personal things and to whom they can go anytime, which differs from their experience in the U.S.. They also indicated that it was
difficult to care about someone deeply if you did not have time. None of the male interviewees mentioned having problems making friends, and the two students who were on the soccer team said that socializing with the athletes fulfilled their social needs. Male students also mentioned only minor crises lasting for a short time when asked about their culture shock experience. It could be speculated that male students may not want to admit that they have problems with adjusting and culture shock symptoms simply because they were not socialized to admit difficulties or express feelings in their culture. Even though 60 percent of the interviewees were female and 40 percent male, the results show relevance especially since they find support through the interviews. Overall, the quantitative data supported by the qualitative findings suggest that male students adjust better than female students and encourage teachers and anybody working with international students to acknowledge these differences.

Self-Confidence and Self-Efficacy

The current study did not find a significant difference in the statistical results on levels of self-efficacy/self-confidence and cultural adjustment between western and non-western cultures or male and female students, but the interviews suggested certain tendencies. One of the non-western students specifically mentioned that her not being assertive was an issue for pursuing a degree in the USA. Other non-western females did not report any difficulties personality-wise but appeared less confident when giving answers or often said “I don’t know” or “I am not sure” or were tentative about their answers. One student who showed a lot of self-confidence/self-efficacy suggested that she was well-adjusted because of her personality. She was determined to achieve her goals no matter what it would take and admitted that she liked to venture out to do
something new. These findings would need further examination for various reasons. Self-efficacy, self-confidence, and assertiveness are influenced by positive experiences and success; therefore, the age of students – they would have more life experience – may play an important role. It appears to be very difficult to measure the level of self-confidence/self-efficacy of international students because the international student’s decision to come to the USA requires a higher level of self-efficacy and self-confidence to begin with. This may suggest that those who choose to leave home and come to the U.S. have higher self-confidence/self-efficacy, and these characteristics including assertiveness may be nurtured in some cultures more than in others. At the same time, self-efficacy has been found to be dynamic, indicating that discouraging experiences may lower the level of self-efficacy as Bandura (1977) suggested. In order to be able to find more support for a positive relationship of self-confidence and self-efficacy, more empirical research would be necessary.

Usage of English and Adjustment

The current study attempted to answer the question about whether language influenced international students’ support networks. The quantitative data of the study revealed that students with English as a primary language have stronger social support networks than those who had studied English as a second language. Countries that were colonized by Great Britain during the colonial times use their native language and English as official languages. Students from these countries may have different accents but are more fluent in English. This appears to be an advantage for them in making connections with other students. All of the interviewed international students said that they socialized with other international students, but those who had used English as a
primary language back home reported having more friends, including American friends. They reported that they made connections easily and seemed to be more confident in expressing themselves. In the interviews, these students were also perceived as more talkative, and they readily answered all the questions, giving many examples. At the same time, these students admitted that people had problems with their accents no less than students who had studied English as a second language. Those students, who did not speak English very well or had studied English in their home countries, seem to have a more difficult time starting conversations or approaching people. It can be speculated that that is why these students are more likely to make contact with international students and have only a few American friends. International students may feel inferior to American students because of their language and communication barriers and, therefore, socialize with those who have a similar experience communicating.

Culture Shock Phenomenon in the Experience of International Students

The current study explored international students’ experience with culture shock by introducing them to Oberg’s (1960) model. After learning about the stages and symptoms of culture shock, international students were surprised to see that they all had experienced or witnessed some form of culture shock. Some students were amazed by how accurately Oberg’s (1960) model described their experience adjusting to the new culture and expressed that they wished they had known about this model before so they would have been prepared to meet the challenges. A few students suggested that they thought the crisis stage accompanied with the wish to go home would occur not only because of difficulties with the new culture. They suggested that incidents that had happened back at home left them feeling helpless and depressed. Other students again
said that they thought the order of the stages could be changed, that their crisis occurred after they had already felt adjusted. Some students also suggested that crises with the wish to go home had occurred to them more than once. Only one student claimed that she had not herself experienced culture shock but had witnessed it with her son. Since this student was at least 15 years older than the other interviewees and had been exposed to another culture besides the American culture before and showed a very strong personality, it would be interesting to examine all those factors’ influence on experiencing culture shock.

The findings of the current study suggest that students do not seem to be aware of the culture shock phenomenon at the time they live through it. International students, therefore, may benefit from learning about the theory before or soon after they decide to live in the United States or other countries for an extended period of time.

Difficult and Pleasant Experiences

The recent study tried to shed some light on international students’ experiences with living and studying at U.S. colleges. International students encounter a variety of new and unfamiliar situations, places, and people when they enter the U.S. These students report that international student regulations restricting them, and holding a status that doesn’t allow them to go home and visit, were some of their most difficult times. They also mentioned having a difficult time during holidays when they were away from family and they were afraid of getting in unforeseen financial crises. As young people developing into adults, they do feel the restrictions that apply to them and keep them from living carefree. Those students with strong family ties, mostly non-western students,
appear to be very upset when they are advised to not visit home because of the risk of not being able to return to the USA to finish their degree.

In addition to difficult times, international students report many positive experiences. Non-western female students – primarily from the Middle East – mention that they value freedom, independence, and the fact that women have equal rights as men in the United States. Other students appreciate the diversity in this country, the opportunity to meet many people from many different cultural backgrounds and to get academic and sports scholarships. Students also like the opportunities to be able to work on campus.

Summary

The current study found that there is a relation between perception of cultural differences (adjustment) and experience of culture shock (cultural match). It also revealed that non-western students have a more difficult time adjusting to the U.S. culture than western students. Females were found to have a more difficult time in adjusting than male students. Findings about English language proficiency showed that international students with English as one of their primary languages had stronger support networks. No significant differences were found in the quantitative study regarding self-confidence/self-efficacy and cultural adjustment, but qualitative findings suggested the influence of personality variables on experience of culture shock and adjustment. It was revealed that proficiency in English accounted for stronger social support networks. International students’ responses to interviews suggest that adjustment problems and culture shock are very much part of their experience living in the U.S.
SIGNIFICANCE OF CURRENT STUDY

Previous literature offers a wide array of studies addressing international student adjustment to new cultures. Many of the studies focus on certain groups of students, such as Asian, African, and Latin; students from particular countries; or international students and experiences in general.

No single study has categorized students by western and non-western backgrounds and examined differences in their adjustment to the U.S. culture. This study revealed that cultural heritage needs to be acknowledged when examining the adaptation process of international students to the U.S. culture.

Gender differences in international student adjustment have not been addressed or reported in previous literature. The results of this study, therefore, suggest that it is important to recognize and be sensitive to the different needs of female and male international students.

Personality variables such as self-confidence and assertiveness have been noted in previous research as important in the adjustment to the U.S. culture. Self-efficacy, including academic and social self-efficacy, has not been sufficiently researched in respect to international students’ adaptation process. This study’s qualitative findings may motivate researchers to further explore the mentioned personality variables.

Language barriers have been repeatedly reported to influence cultural adjustment. No study had looked at the differences in social support network and international students’ previous use of English as a primary language or as a second language.
The culture shock model (Oberg, 1960) has been used to describe cultural experiences of newcomers for many years. This study, however, asked students to share their experiences and express their opinions about its accuracy and helpfulness to them. International students’ experiences with culture shock and their suggestions for coping with a new culture are very valuable as they may help develop ideas for assisting this student population with their transition to a new culture.

Implications

Findings from the current study imply that there is a need for college and university personnel to know about cultural differences and be aware of the struggles international students with different cultural backgrounds have with adjusting to the U.S. culture. When international students are in the classroom, they may just appear to be part of the group speaking with an accent. However, on top of their studies for school, they have to study the new environment and work on their language and communication skills, which can be very challenging.

The question coming out of this study is: How can International students’ needs be addressed and coping skills developed? The answer is not that simple. The study suggests that students’ needs differ depending on their cultural backgrounds, gender, language proficiency, and other factors. Here are some suggestions from the interviewed international students, the researcher, and previous research:

- International student meetings can address cultural differences and different problems. Comparing cultures and talking about differences and misunderstandings may give a better understanding of the U.S. culture and its customs.
Workshops addressing topics that international students have problems with can be beneficial. Suggestions could be given regarding behavior in certain situations, socializing, coping with acculturative stress, understanding American slang and idioms, services available with academic difficulties, and so on (A women’s support group, 2003).

Culture shock seminars: International students may be advised to attend sessions that address symptoms and stages of culture shock soon after arrival in the United States to prepare them for difficult situations. It is important to not make culture shock appear as a disease but part of a new cultural experience and to emphasize that if addressed early on, symptoms may be coped with better. Culture shock seminars may also be of value for domestic students and college and university personnel to understand international students better.

Assertiveness training: Students, especially non-western females, may benefit from learning how to project themselves in an assertive way (A women’s support group, 2003)

Communication clubs for international students and Americans could be helpful for improving communication skills.

An international student counselor with cultural knowledge and cross-cultural communication skills could be helpful for specific cultural questions.

Mentoring programs: International students who have lived in the United States for some time could be paired up with new international students to help them with living and studying in the new country.
E-mail partners could share experiences and give advice regarding adjustment issues.

Limitations and Future Research

The current study gives insight into the experiences of international students in the United States. Its findings are important for understanding international student adjustment issues, but the research needs to be replicated at other U.S. colleges and universities.

International students volunteered for this study, which may indicate that students who did not want to be part of the study may not want to address the issues or may have a harder time adjusting. Volunteerism may have an impact on the results. Conducting this study with a random sample may be considered to see if there are differences in results.

The international students participating in this study had been in the United States for an average of five years. This sample may, therefore, be reporting better adjustment than international students who have lived in the country for a shorter time.

A relatively large number of students attending the community college at which this study was done were not necessarily at what is considered college age. Age can have an impact on international student adjustment, self-confidence, and self-efficacy and may therefore have an influence on the results.

In the future this study may be replicated considering the factors mentioned afore to see if there are changes in the results. The current study has considered some of the many variables influencing adjustment issues of international students. The significant findings reported here provide important information for university and college personnel to
reflect on their awareness of cultural and adaptation issues of international and may be valuable to their practices in dealing with this group of students.
REFERENCES


CultureConnect is an international initiative whose goal is to improve global, cross-cultural understanding. Retrieved from http://cultureconnect.state.gov, November 13, 2005.


APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

Information regarding the Study

Participant Consent Form

Consent Form for Head of the Research Department

Consent Form for the Vice President of the College
Information regarding the Study

You have been chosen to participate in a study of how self-efficacy/self-confidence, cultural background and social network influence international students’ responses to culture shock in the USA.

This study is being conducted in order to find out in what way certain factors influence the way international students cope with the U.S. culture. Findings in the study may be helpful for those working with international students to be aware of and address these issues when working with students from different countries.

I will send questionnaires to you either per e-mail or mail, depending on your preference and I would like you to send them back to me as soon as possible. The first page of the questionnaire is your consent form, which you will sign if you are willing to participate. The consent form will be torn off after all the data is collected and your name will not come up in my thesis. If you are also interested in being interviewed for 30-40 minutes you will receive $10. Here again, your name will not be used in any of my written analyses. You are not required to answer any question you do not feel comfortable answering.

Thank you for your participation.
**Participant Consent Form**

Thank you for participating in a study of how self-efficacy/self-confidence, cultural background and social network influence international students’ responses to culture shock in the USA.

This research is part of my Masters’ Thesis in Educational Psychology with emphasis on personality development at Eastern Michigan University. Please sign the consent form if you are willing to complete the questionnaire and indicate if you are interested in being interviewed (30-40 minutes). You will be compensated for the interview with $ 10.

Thank you for your cooperation and your time.

Stefanie T. Baier

If you have any further questions do not hesitate to contact me at (248) 921-8456 or stefaniebaier@yahoo.com.

---

I am willing to complete the questionnaire.

Yes       No       (Circle one)

________________________________________
Name

________________________________________
Signature

---

I am interested in being interviewed.

Yes       No       (Circle one)

________________________________________
Signature

Please contact me per e-mail: __________________________________
(e-mail address)

or phone: __________________________________
(phone number)
Consent Form

I would like your permission to do a study with the international students at your college. As commonly known, international students go through a cultural shock experience when entering a new culture. Many factors have been identified to influence the severity of this phenomenon, but I am particularly interested in how self-efficacy/self-confidence, cultural background and social network influence international students’ responses to culture shock in the USA. This study is part of my Masters Thesis in Educational Psychology with emphasis on personality development at Eastern Michigan University.

For conducting my study I would like to give questionnaires to approximately 20 international students at your college. These questionnaires will be mailed to the individuals and their consent will be required. In addition to the questionnaire, 4-6 international students, who express their interest and give consent to being interviewed, will be contacted at a later time for interviews which will last for 30-40 minutes will be tape recorded. Then after the products for this research are complete, tapes will be destroyed. The students have to right to opt out anytime if they choose to do so. Students who are willing to be interviewed will be compensated for their time with $ 10.

Please sign below if you give me permission to conduct this study with the international students at your college. If you have any further questions regarding this study, please contact me at (248) 921 8456 or Dr. Ethan Lowenstein (from the EMU faculty) at (734) 487-7120. For questions about the rights of a research participant, you may contact Eastern Michigan University’s Human Subjects Review Committee Contact Person Michael Bretting at (734) 487-0496.

____________________________________         _____________________
Signature                                                                                       Date
Consent Form

I would like your permission to do a study with the international students at your college. As commonly known, international students go through a cultural shock experience when entering a new culture. Many factors have been identified to influence the severity of this phenomenon, but I am particularly interested in how self-efficacy/self-confidence, cultural background and social network influence international students’ responses to culture shock in the USA. This study is part of my Masters Thesis in Educational Psychology with emphasis on personality development at Eastern Michigan University.

For conducting my study I would like to give questionnaires to approximately 20 international students at your college. These questionnaires will be mailed to the individuals and their consent will be required. In addition to the questionnaire, 4-6 international students, who express their interest and give consent to being interviewed, will be contacted at a later time for interviews which will last for 30-40 minutes will be tape recorded. Then after the products for this research are complete, tapes will be destroyed. The students have to right to opt out anytime if they choose to do so. Students who are willing to be interviewed will be compensated for their time with $10.

Please sign below if you give me permission to conduct this study with the international students at your college. If you have any further questions regarding this study, please contact me at (248) 921 8456 or Dr. Ethan Lowenstein (from the EMU faculty) at (734) 487-7120. For questions about the rights of a research participant, you may contact Eastern Michigan University’s Human Subjects Review Committee Contact Person Michael Bretting at (734) 487-0496.

____________________________________         ____________________________  
Signature                                      Date
APPENDIX B

Checklist of Specific Risks Involved in the Research

Human Subjects Approval
I. Application Status  New

The purpose of the study is to examine to what extent the personality variables of self-efficacy and self-confidence, cultural background and social network systems affect international students’ responses to culture shock. The knowledge about the influence of the addressed variables may help those working with international students develop strategies to give assistance in their adjustment to the U.S. culture.

II. Numbers, Types and Recruitment of Subjects

A. Numbers and characteristics of subjects:
   There will be 16-20 subjects that fill out the questionnaire. They will be college students 8-10 of them will be from Asia/Eastern Europe and 8-10 will be from Western Europe (from countries of the European Union). If possible I will try to get an equal number of male and female students.

B. Special Classes:
   The students involved in this study will be college students, but not from any particular program.

C. How are individual subjects to be recruited for this research? The recruitment will happen in several stages. First I will send an e-mail with the precise description of the project to the International Student Advisor of a college in Michigan. I will also contact the Director of the Advisement services as well as the head of the research department of the college. I will make personal contact with some of the international students at a Multicultural event, give them a preliminary description of the project and ask them for contact addresses and phone numbers. I will also try to get a list of the international students at the college from the international advisor. I will then contact the students per e-mail or mail. After the initial contact I will send the questionnaires to them per e-mail and mail (including return envelopes) at their convenience. I will ask each one of them on the cover sheet of the questionnaire whether they are willing to be interviewed at a later time.

D. How is it clear to the subjects that participation is voluntary and without any negative consequences?
   Students will be given information regarding the study (see Appendix A). The participation is voluntary and the students will be informed that they may opt out if they choose to do so. They will receive a written consent form that includes information about the questionnaire and the interview including the researcher’s e-mail address and phone number for further questions. Please see Appendix A for the mentioned information sheets.
III. Informed Consent

The Head of the Research Department and the Vice President of the college will each receive a consent letter to give consent to the study. The International Student Advisor and the Director of the Student Counseling will each get the consent letter to be informed of the procedure. The subjects will be informed through introductory e-mail letter and will be asked to give consent in a consent form, which will also include the consent form for the interview. See Appendix A

IV. Specific Risks Involved in the Research

There are no risks involved in the study. The interviewees will be compensated for their interview time with $10 each. Please see appendix B for checklist of Specific Risks involved in the research.

V. Confidentiality

A. To what extent is the information confidential and to what extent are provisions made so that subjects confidentiality is protected?
B. What are the procedures for handling and storing all data so the confidentiality of the subjects is protected (particular attention should be given to the use of photographs, video and audio recordings).
C. By what means will the results of the research be disseminated? How will the subjects be informed of the results? Will confidentiality of subjects or organizations be protected in the dissemination?

The interviews for which I have the subjects’ consent will be tape recorded and transcribed. After the questionnaires the sheets including personal data will be torn off to pick the interviewees. After the transcription, the data will be cleaned and pseudonyms will be used. I will keep the questionnaires and transcripts in a secure location in my home until the final analysis of the data is completed. After completion of the study, a period of five years, tapes and notes will be destroyed. For all study products and results of the study’s data collection pseudonyms will be used. The International Students Advisor and the head of the research department as well as the person in charge of the International Students Relations Club of the college at which the study was performed will each receive a copy of the research study. Subjects may also have the opportunity to get a copy and have information removed at any time.
VI. Describe any anticipated benefits to subjects from participation in this research.

Subjects who participate in this research may benefit from this study in getting a deeper understanding of components of cultural shock and may motivate them in getting involved in helping other international students cope with culture shock. The international student advisor and anybody working with international students may use the results to attend to the needs of international students according to the outcomes in the international students meetings. The students interviewed receive $10 each for their time invested.

VII. Describe instrumentation and protocol to be used.

Please see Appendix C for instrumentation to be used:
   1) Preliminary Questionnaire
   2) Preliminary Interview questions

The final questions for the study will be submitted as soon as they have been reviewed by the advisor and final changes have been made.
Eastern Michigan University
College of Education
Review Committee on Student Research
Involving Human Subjects Committee Action

Project Title: How do international students respond to culture shock in the US?
Principal Investigator (must be a faculty member): Dr. Lowenstein
Department: Teacher Education
Co-PI / Student Investigator: Stefanie Baier
(For student projects, a faculty supervisor must be listed)

Approved [X] with provisions Disapproved [ ]

Provisions:
1. All consent forms need to state the length of time for the eight lessons to be taught.

Signature for the Committee: ___________________________ Date: 4/14/04

Comments:
* Please note that all Human Subjects Proposals need to be submitted well in advance of scheduled solicitation of potential participants and that no data involving Human Subjects should be collected prior to approval.

NOTE

1. Investigators are obligated to advise the review committee of any change in protocol that might bring into question the involvement of human subjects in a manner at variance with the considerations on which the prior approval was based.

2. Every 12 months from the date of this approval or at shorter intervals where specified by the committee, the investigator must submit the proposal to the committee for re-review.

3. Investigators are required to immediately suspend an inquiry if they observe an unanticipated negative change in the health or behavior of a subject that may be attributable to the research, and shall report the circumstances promptly to the review committee for its further review and decision on continuation or termination of the project.

XC: File

Revision 4/14/04

APP
APPENDIX C

Questionnaire

Interview Questions
Information regarding the Study

You have been chosen to participate in a study of how self-efficacy/self-confidence, cultural background and social network influence international students’ responses to culture shock in the USA.

This study is being conducted in order to find out in what way certain factors influence the way international students cope with the U.S. culture. Findings in the study may be helpful for those working with international students to be aware of and address these issues when working with students from different countries.

I will send questionnaires to you either per e-mail or mail, depending on your preference and I would like you to send them back to me as soon as possible. The first page of the questionnaire is your consent form, which you will sign if you are willing to participate. The consent form will be torn off after all the data is collected and your name will not come up in my thesis. If you are also interested in being interviewed for 30-40 minutes you will receive $10. Here again, your name will not be used in any of my written analyses. You are not required to answer any question you do not feel comfortable answering. For questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Eastern Michigan University’s Human Subjects Review Committee Contact Person Michael Bretting at (734) 487-0496

Thank you for your participation.
Participant Consent Form

Thank you for participating in a study of how self-efficacy/self-confidence, cultural background and social network influence international students’ responses to culture shock in the USA.

This research is part of my Masters’ Thesis in Educational Psychology with emphasis on personality development at Eastern Michigan University. Please sign the consent form if you are willing to complete the questionnaire and indicate if you are interested in being interviewed (30-40 minutes). You will be compensated for the interview with $10.

Thank you for your cooperation and your time.

Stefanie T. Baier

If you have any further questions do not hesitate to contact me at (248) 921-8456 or stefaniebaier@yahoo.com.

---

I am willing to complete the questionnaire.

Yes  No  (Circle one)

______________________________  __________________________
Name  Signature

---

I am interested in being interviewed.

Yes  No  (Circle one)

Signature

Please contact me per e-mail: ________________________________
(e-mail address)

or phone: ________________________________
(phone number)
Questionnaire for International Students

Directions:

(1) Please begin with the questionnaire after filling out the consent form.
(2) Print your name in the blanks below.
(3) Circle your responses to each item or fill in the blanks.

I. General Information

Name: ____________________________________________________________

First                                                                               Last

Major/Field of Study: ________________________________________________

1. What is your gender?
   (a) Male
   (b) Female

2. What is your age?       __________

3. What is your home country?    ______________________________

4. How long have you been in the United States?
   __________ years       __________ months

5. What is your Religion?
   (a) Christianity (… in specific _____________________________)
   (b) Judaism
   (c) Islam
   (d) Buddhism
   (e) Other: ____________________________________________________
II. Experience of Cultural Differences

Answer the following questions by using
Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), Strongly Disagree (SD)

I have had problems

<p>| | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>… adjusting to living in the USA.</td>
<td>(SA)</td>
<td>(A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>… adjusting to the American Food</td>
<td>(SA)</td>
<td>(A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>… adjusting to the costs of living in the USA</td>
<td>(SA)</td>
<td>(A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>… adjusting to the pace of life in the USA</td>
<td>(SA)</td>
<td>(A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>… adjusting to the individualistic culture</td>
<td>(SA)</td>
<td>(A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>… getting accepted by Americans</td>
<td>(SA)</td>
<td>(A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>… with people treating me unfriendly because of me not being an American</td>
<td>(SA)</td>
<td>(A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>… making American friends</td>
<td>(SA)</td>
<td>(A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>… communicating with Americans</td>
<td>(SA)</td>
<td>(A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>… practicing my religion and traditions</td>
<td>(SA)</td>
<td>(A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>What have been your most difficult experiences in the USA?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
III. Attitudes

Answer by using Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), Strongly Disagree (SD).

17. When I set goals I can achieve them. (SA) (A) (D) (SD)
18. I am confident that I am able to handle unexpected situations. (SA) (A) (D) (SD)
19. If I have something difficult or unpleasant to do I stick to it until I finish it. (SA) (A) (D) (SD)
20. I can remain calm when facing difficulties, because I have good coping skills. (SA) (A) (D) (SD)
21. I can solve most problems if I put in effort. (SA) (A) (D) (SD)
22. I face problems and try to find solutions. (SA) (A) (D) (SD)
23. Sometimes I am frustrated with myself. (SA) (A) (D) (SD)
24. I am worried about making low grades. (SA) (A) (D) (SD)
25. I am afraid I will disappoint my family/friends. (SA) (A) (D) (SD)
26. I am afraid I may not know enough about international student regulations or legal procedures to keep my status (SA) (A) (D) (SD)

IV. Social Network

Please circle your responses.

27. Who do you live with? (Circle all that apply)
   (a) My family
   (b) With students from my home country
   (c) With International students
   (d) With American students
   (e) Alone
   (f) With my boyfriend/girlfriend or spouse
   (g) Other ___________________________________________________________
28. How many **new friends** have you made since you have been here?  
(friends: people you talk to and meet frequently)  
(a) 0 or 1  
(b) 2-5  
(c) 5-8  
(d) more than 8

29. How many **American friends** have you made?  
(a) 0 or 1  
(b) 2-5  
(c) 5-8  
(d) more than 8

30. How many **non-American** friends have you made?  
(a) 0 or 1  
(b) 2-5  
(c) 5-8  
(d) more than 8

31. How many American friends would you consider your **close friends**?  
(Close friend: somebody you talk to about personal things)  
(a) 0 or 1  
(b) 2-5  
(c) 5-8  
(d) more than 8

32. Most of my **close friends** are  
(a) I don’t have any close friends  
(b) from my home country  
(c) Americans  
(d) International Students
V. Cultural Shock Experience

Answer the following Questions with NEVER (N), SOMETIMES (S), OFTEN (O), MOST OF THE TIME (M), – you may explain some of your experiences below (*).

During your time in the USA how frequently

33. Have you been homesick? (N) (S) (O) (M)
34. Have you felt depressed? (N) (S) (O) (M)
35. Have you been discriminated against? (N) (S) (O) (M)
36. Have you felt stressed in meeting school requirements? (N) (S) (O) (M)
37. Have you been sick (compared to when you where home)? (N) (S) (O) (M)
38. Have you had any eating problems? (N) (S) (O) (M)
39. Have you felt you needed assistance in coping with the new cultural experience? (N) (S) (O) (M)
40. Have you felt better in the U.S. culture than in your home country (N) (S) (O) (M)

41. What have been your
   a) best experiences?
   
   b) your most difficult times in the USA so far?

(*) Anything else you’d like to let us know about your cultural experience
Interview Questions

General

1) You are from ..... Can you tell me what you did in your home country before you came to the USA?

2) What made you decide to come here to study?

3) Did you and if how did you prepare for coming to the USA?

4) What do you miss (most) about your country?

5) Is it very different for you to live in the USA? Why/Why not?

6) What do you like best about the USA?

Social Network

7) What people have you been socializing with?

8) Do you feel that people you have met in the USA understand your perceptions and culture?

9) What are things in the U.S. culture that you are not familiar/comfortable with?

10) Do you think you are treated the way you should be?

Attitudes

11) When you do projects at school/homework etc., is it difficult to get them done. Do you easily give up? Do you ask for assistance?

12) Do you usually become active when you want to achieve something? (Examples)

13) Have you ever felt you’d like to drop classes, because they were more work than you expected?

14) Do you feel embarrassed when you get called on or have to spontaneously do something in front of the class?
Cultural Adaptation

15) Have you had periods of depression/ frustration/sadness ever since you got here?

16) Have you had periods of no/enormous appetite – do you eat because you are frustrated?

17) Have you experienced times of loneliness related to your different cultural background and to what extent?

18) Have you had times when you needed more sleep and were constantly tired?

19) What upsets you most when it comes to experiences over here? (Examples)

20) What experiences in this country have made you feel good and valued?

21) If you could get any kind of assistance in dealing with cultural differences what would you like?

22) What pos/neg college experiences are your most memorable ones?

23) Culture shock …