

# **A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT EXPERIENCE AT AN AMERICAN COLLEGE**

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**TOTAL QUALITATIVE REPORT AT NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY**

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# STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

*GLOBALIZATION* HAS AND WILL INFLUENCE ALL ASPECTS OF HIGHER EDUCATION (FLYNN & VREDEVOOGD, 2010). THE CURRENT TREND OF GLOBALIZATION HAS INFLUENCED THE DEMOGRAPHICS IN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS. THE INCREASE IN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AT AMERICAN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES SUBSTANTIATES A NEED TO UNDERSTAND THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT EXPERIENCE, WHICH WILL AID COLLEGES IN BETTER INTEGRATING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN AMERICAN COLLEGES. IN UNDERSTANDING THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT'S LIVED EXPERIENCES AT AMERICAN COLLEGES, EDUCATORS CAN GAIN DEEPER CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES AND INCORPORATE CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE INSTRUCTION TO ENHANCE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ENGAGEMENT.

# PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY WAS TO EXPLORE THE ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS OF INTERNATIONAL BACKGROUND ENROLLED IN ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES (EAP) AT AN AMERICAN COLLEGE IN SOUTHEAST FLORIDA.

THE STUDY UTILIZED A QUALITATIVE APPROACH WITH OPEN-ENDED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS. THIS STUDY PROVIDED ADMINISTRATORS, FACULTY, AND STAFF USEFUL INFORMATION FOR SEVERAL PURPOSES. STAKEHOLDERS WILL BECOME BETTER INFORMED HOW TO PARTNER WITH INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS TO PROMOTE STUDENT SUCCESS, STRENGTHEN CONNECTIONS, AND BUILD STUDENT SELF-CONFIDENCE.

# THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

ACCORDING TO HOFSTEDE (2010), THE SCHOOL EXPERIENCE REINFORCES THE CULTURAL VALUES THAT HAVE ALREADY BEEN EXPERIENCED WITHIN THE FAMILY SETTING. THE THEORY BASED ON THE EXPERIENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT IS GROUNDED IN THE CULTURAL DIMENSIONS THEORY, ORIGINALLY DEVELOPED BY HOFSTEDE (1980).

THE CULTURAL DIMENSIONS THEORY COMPARES CULTURES, INVESTIGATES CULTURALLY DERIVED PATTERNS, AND PROVIDES GENERALIZATIONS AMONG VARIOUS CULTURES AS A METHOD TO GAIN BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY, MINIMIZING THE RISKS OF IGNORING THE IMPACT OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN VARIOUS SITUATIONS (HOFSTEDE, 2010).

# LITERATURE REVIEW

THIS LITERATURE REVIEW FOCUSES ON RESEARCH RELEVANT TO THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ENROLLED IN HIGHER EDUCATION COURSES. THE LITERATURE REVIEW SUGGESTS THAT CULTURAL DIFFERENCES EXISTS AMONG INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND INFLUENCES LEARNER STYLES, PREFERENCES, AND STUDENT AND TEACHER ENGAGEMENT. FURTHER, IT ALSO EXAMINES THE CULTURAL COMPETENCY OF EDUCATORS, INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ADJUSTMENT, AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE; IN ADDITION, POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE ISSUES WILL BE DISCUSSED.

- **STUDENT LEARNER STYLES AND PREFERENCES ACROSS CULTURES**
- **INTERACTION BETWEEN LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS**
- **THE CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT OF STUDENT AND TEACHER**
- **INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ADJUSTMENT**

# PARTICIPANTS

- **THE TARGET POPULATION:**

- VIEWED THIS AMERICAN COLLEGE AS THEIR HOST INSTITUTION
- ENGLISH IS NOT THEIR HOME LANGUAGE
- DID NOT PLACE INTO COLLEGE-LEVEL ENGLISH CLASSES
- CAME FROM A DIFFERENT CULTURAL, LINGUISTIC, OR ETHNIC BACKGROUND WITH LIMITED EXPOSURE TO THE LOCAL CULTURE, OR WHO OBTAINED A STUDENT VISA TO STUDY IN A FOREIGN COUNTRY

- **TOTAL: 9 PARTICIPANTS**

Name	EAP level	Reason for migration	Age	Years in United States	Gender	Country of origin	Highest degree
ISP1	4	Better life	20	7	Male	Haiti	High school
ISP2	4	Political	20	2	Female	Dominican Republic	High school
ISP3	3	Better education	20	1	Female	Colombia	High school
ISP4	4	Citizenship, Political	25	3	Female	Russia	Bachelors in Human Resources
ISP5	4	Political	19	9 months	Male	Venezuela	High school
ISP6	4	Better education, Political	20	4	Female	Venezuela	High school
ISP7	4	Economic	31	4	Male	Russia	Bachelors of Engineering
ISP8	3	Degree from the U.S.	19	2	Female	Haiti	High school
ISP9	2	Economic	27	4	Female	Cuba	High school

# DATA COLLECTION

## INDIVIDUAL SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

- EACH PARTICIPANT COMPLETED A PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM AND A WRITTEN PARTICIPANT FORM WITH DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION. THE OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS ELICITED A TEXTUAL DESCRIPTION (I.E., WHAT THE PARTICIPANTS EXPERIENCED), AND A STRUCTURAL DESCRIPTION (I.E., HOW THEY EXPERIENCED IT IN TERMS THE CONTEXT). FIVE PROTOCOL QUESTIONS BASED ON EXPERIENCES WERE ASKED: EACH INTERVIEW LASTED 60 MINUTES IN LENGTH.

## FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEWS

- PARTICIPANTS READ THROUGH THE TRANSCRIPTIONS TO MAKE ANY CHANGES.
- TWO FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS WERE ASKED IN ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS THAT WERE APPROXIMATELY 30 MINUTES IN LENGTH.



## Research Questions

These research questions provided the framework for the exploration of the international students' experiences who attend an American college. Additionally, this study seeks to understand the challenges and successes that face them both academically and socially, as well as the factors that motivate or hinder the students to attend an American college.

**Central research question.** What are international student experiences while attending an American college in South Florida?

The following sub-questions will assist the researcher in gaining additional information in order to understand the international students' experiences.

- What is the international students' academic experience at the American college?
- What is the international students' social experience at the American college?
- What motivates or hinders international students to attend an American college?

*Thematic Results Social Experiences of International Students*

Themes	ISP1	ISP2	ISP3	ISP4	ISP5	ISP6	ISP7	ISP8	ISP9
1. Social life exists	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	
2. Social life is good			X		X	X	X	X	
3. Social life is a challenge	X	X							
4. No social life with local students	X	X							
5. Social life with international students	X			X	X	X			X
6. Respect and community exists between students	X	X							
7. Issues with communication	X		X	X	X	X	X		X
8. Good clubs and programs	X	X						X	
9. Issues with organizations and clubs				X					

*Thematic Results Motivators of International Students*

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Themes	ISP1	ISP2	ISP3	ISP4	ISP5	ISP6	ISP7	ISP8	ISP9
1. Tutoring and support	X	X			X			X	
2. Learning and studying	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
3. Faculty explaining lessons	X	X		X	X	X		X	
4. Social life does exist	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	
5. Social life does exist among themselves	X			X	X	X			X

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*Thematic Results Challenges of International Students*

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Themes	ISP1	ISP2	ISP3	ISP4	ISP5	ISP6	ISP7	ISP8	ISP9
1. Lack of faculty interaction			X						
2. Labs are a challenge	X								
3. Cost of tuition	X		X	X	X				
4. Enrollment and advisement	X		X	X					
5. Language issues		X	X	X	X		X	X	X
6. Issues with communication	X		X	X	X	X	X		X
7. No social life with local students	X	X							

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*Thematic Results Academic Experiences of International Students*

Themes	ISP1	ISP2	ISP3	ISP4	ISP5	ISP6	ISP7	ISP8	ISP9
1. Tutoring and support	X	X			X			X	
2. Learning and studying	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
3. Role model	X								
4. Faculty explains lessons	X	X		X	X	X		X	
5. Lack of faculty interaction			X						
6. Likes school	X	X							X
7. Labs are a challenge	X								
8. Labs are helpful			X						
9. Costs for tuition	X		X	X	X				
10. Enrollment and advisement	X		X	X					
11. Academic dishonesty and cheating		X	X	X			X		
12. Language issues		X	X	X	X		X	X	X
13. Fast track and fast pace			X		X	X			X
14. Success and opportunities							X	X	

### **Limitations and Delimitations of the Study**

Phenomenology reports what and how participants have experienced a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Looking at one school is limiting, and does not reflect the entire group of international students. The researcher did not conduct a focus group nor conduct the interviews in the participants' native languages.

The researcher did not choose to conduct the interview via Internet since many international students either do not have access to a computer, Internet, and/or have limited technological prowess, which could limit the number of participants willing to take part in the study.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Over the past two decades, research has focused on activities at the organizational level and the social and academic experiences of international students, but should now focus on the development of international and intercultural perspectives in teaching (Sanderson, 2011). Future studies could focus on participants from selected regions of the world who are attending an American college or university. Also, studies could be determined by institutional classification; for example, public, private, for-profit, and not-for-profit. Finally, studies could cover international students in graduate programs because they have had more years of experience within the institutions of higher education.

# THANK YOU ... QUESTIONS

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