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Postsecondary Education for International Undergradute Students with Learning Disabilities in the United States

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POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION FOR INTERNATIONAL
UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS WITH LEARNING
DISABILITIES IN THE UNITED STATES

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements of the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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College of Education and Behavioral Sciences
School of Special Education
Special Education

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has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in College of Education and Behavioral Sciences in School of Special Education, Program of Special Education

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ABSTRACT

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The aim of this study was to examine the experiences of international undergraduate students who are identified with learning disabilities and enrolled in universities in the United States. There is a dearth of studies investigating the unique needs and challenges of this population. This is the first study to explore the phenomenon of international undergraduate students with learning disabilities that identified the challenges related to supporting their unique needs. This study was conducted through the use of qualitative data collection and analysis methods that included in-depth interviews and review of documents. Study participants consisted of five professionals working in the disability support office, three advisors at the international education office, a psychologist, and three international undergraduate students with learning disabilities and/or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Nine main themes emerged including English proficiency, social challenges, factors impacting academic success, knowledge of available supports, providing accommodations and supports, disclosure, identification of learning disabilities, disability awareness, and self-advocacy.

Findings suggested that international undergraduate students with learning disabilities face external and internal challenges to accessing supports and

accommodations. External factors are related to institutional practices and regulations that govern how students receive supports. These factors are associated with issue pertaining to the professionals' challenge of distinguishing between language differences and learning disabilities as well as the eligibility determination process of learning disabilities. Internal factors are those related to the students' experience, knowledge and culture. These factors impact the students' decisions to disclose their disabilities and to self-advocate. It was found that English proficiency significantly impacts the academic success, disability identification, and types of accommodations offered by the disability support service offices Similarly, the cultural background of students has a significant impact on students' knowledge of available supports, challenges related to self-identification, and self-advocacy skills.

Keywords: International students, learning disabilities, disability identification, disability awareness, disclosure, accommodations

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It started as a dream, an unreachable, unattainable fantasy where I magically and mystically arrived at the pinnacle of academic learning: the acquisition of a Doctor of Philosophy degree, the momentous occasion when the hood is draped over my cape, when the presentation of the newest of the doctoral status is conferred, where my dream becomes true. This dream would have remained in the realm of fantasy were it not for key people and inspirational sources that enabled me to create a bridge from this fantasy into reality, and it is to these people and sources that I reach out and embrace from the bottom of my heart, acknowledging that without them, I would have never reached this destination today. You have been the pillars and supports, the trusses and girders that inspired, guided, encouraged, and beckoned me across this bridge, from my first hesitant steps at the onset, through the clouds of doubt and mists of discouragement, into the bright sunshine of my final firm footsteps at the culmination of my journey.

First and foremost, I want to express my undying gratitude and thanks to my parents, Abdulwahab and Jawaher and siblings, Talal, Yazeed, and Sarah, for it was you who placed your trust and faith in me and enabled me to start dreaming. From the beginning, you have helped and supported me, holding high expectations and strong beliefs in my abilities to set and reach my goals, strengthening me in my times of weaknesses and discouragement, and always holding up to me your vision of my capabilities. Your unconditional love has been my firm foundation throughout this entire journey.

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this status, and earning a scholarship based on my efforts, a strength I know deep inside

came from you. With your help, I intend to use my gifts and abilities to your service.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Importance of Postsecondary Education

Over a lifetime, an average worker with a Bachelor's degree in the United States

can expect to earn $2.1 million dollars. This is twice what a worker with a high school

diploma earns (Newman et al., 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Historically,

a person with a high school degree would obtain a middle-skill job such as a plumber,

clerical assistant, or health care assistant; today, these jobs require individuals to have a

degree beyond high school diploma (Achieve, 2012). In the 21st century, emerging

emphasis is now placed on higher level skills for competitive employment. Based on

these demands, earning a college degree is a vital step to meet the needed economic

competencies in knowledge, skills, and abilities that will tremendously increase the

likelihood of obtaining satisfying employment and securing financial independence

(Boyles, 2012; Marcotte, Bailey, Borkoski, & Kienzl, 2005; Shaw & Dukes, 2013;

Taymans, 2012). Several options are available to secure a postsecondary degree:

attending a four-year university or college, a two-year community college, or a vocational

and technical school (Kochhar-Bryant, Bassett, & Webb, 2009; Mellard, 2005).

A higher education degree is a desired goal that can impact adult outcomes as it

paves the way for better careers and high quality of life (Madaus & Shaw, 2006; Mellard,

2005). This is also true for international students who attend higher education institutions

across the United States, which makes the United States the primary destination in the

world for international students who aim to pursue their higher education degrees (Lillyman & Bennett, 2014). Studying in the United States represents a valuable opportunity for international students because it frames their future opportunities for the remainder of their lives (Furnham, 2004).

International Students at Higher Education in the United States

Recent records indicate a 40% increase in international students studying in United States universities and colleges as compared to a decade ago, including a steady increase for the past three years. The Institute of International Education (2014) Open Doors report indicates that the number of international students in higher education grew by 8% compared with the previous year. Figures of the 2013-2014 academic year indicate that the United States hosts international students from more than 24 nationalities. Most of these students represent non-western cultures including the following top ten countries: six Asian countries (China, India, South Korea, Taiwan, Japan, and Vietnam) and one Middle Eastern country (Saudi Arabia). Students from China and Saudi Arabia significantly contribute to the growth rate of international students on university campuses (Institute of International Education, 2014).

The ever-increasing numbers of international students entering higher education in the United States have added many new and varied cultural perspectives into many college communities (Andrade, 2006; Kwon, 2009). International undergraduate students undergo significant adjustments as they overcome new language, social, cultural, and educational obstacles associated with living and studying in a foreign country (Onabule & Boes, 2013; Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006; Terrazas-Carrillo, Hong, & Pace, 2014). Studies have found that international students face more challenges transitioning to

postsecondary education life compared with the transitions of their United States peers (Heyn, 2013; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Academically, international undergraduate students report language barriers, especially in reading and writing assignments, oral interactions in classes, and understanding faculty instructions and class materials (Hall, 2013; Heyn, 2013; Wenli, 2011). Other issues include those related to social support, discrimination and prejudice, low self-esteem, and interactions with United States peers (Lopez & Poyrazli, 2007; Sumer, Poyrazli, & Grahame, 2008; Trice, 2003).

Despite those transitional obstacles, many international undergraduate students have successfully overcome academic, social, and cultural issues by employing a variety of coping strategies. However, others may face additional challenges related to learning disabilities. Based on the established knowledge regarding the prevalence of learning disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2010) along with the knowledge that learning disabilities in math, writing, or reading areas are language-based in nature (Schmitt, Justice, & Pentimonti, 2013), an assumption can be made that "learning disabilities can occur in any cultural or economic group, although the observed prevalence varies across the groups" (Taymans et al., 2009, p.7). Learning disabilities among students in postsecondary education is discussed in more detail in the following section.

Students with Learning Disabilities in Higher Education

Research shows a steady increase of students with learning disabilities who are enrolled in postsecondary education settings, an increase that has risen tremendously in the past 25 years in the United States (Hadley, 2006; Lightner, Kipps-Vaughan, Schulte, & Trice, 2012; Skinner, 2004; Stodden, Conway, & Chang, 2003). The percentage of

students with learning disabilities who enrolled in postsecondary education increased from 29.5% in 2003 to 63.3% in 2009 (Newman et al., 2011). Although students with learning disabilities are increasingly enrolling in higher education institutions, degree completion rates remain a concern for this student group in comparison with the general population. The National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 found that only 41% of young adults with learning disabilities earned a postsecondary education degree in comparison with a 52% completion rate of the general population. Completion rates of students with learning disabilities who completed four-year colleges are 34% of students compared to 51% of the general population (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014; Newman et al., 2011).

Low completion rates have encouraged researchers to investigate factors associated with academic and personal issues of college students with learning disabilities that may contribute to the documented low college completion rates. Research has shown that students with learning disabilities face a number of external and internal challenges as they pursue their college goals (Belch, 2004; Getzel, 2008). External factors are institutional in nature; these include the requirements of documentation in order to receive disability support services as well as the variety supports that are available in different postsecondary settings (Gormley, Hughes, Block, & Lendmann, 2005; Sparks & Lovett, 2014). Internal factors include personal factors related to self-advocacy skills including students' understanding of their own disability as well as self-disclosure skills. (Barnard-Brak, Lechtenberger, & Lan, 2010; Bolt, Decker, Lloyd, & Morlock, 2011; Getzel & Briel, 2006; Getzel & McManus, 2005; Getzel & Thoma, 2008; Palmer & Roessler, 2000; Skinner, 2004).

**Learning Disabilities Among International
Students**

Cross-cultural literature suggests that individuals worldwide can exhibit characteristics associated with learning disabilities (Sideridis, 2007; Taymans et al., 2009). This claim is also supported by cross-linguistic literature positing that language-learning disabilities have their roots in individuals' first language (e.g., Spanish, Japanese, Chinese, etc.). Such students who attempt to learn English as a second language will display the same types of learning disabilities regardless of language (Durgonoglu, 2002; Ijalba, 2008; Taymans et al., 2009).

Establishing *bona fide* learning disabilities in different countries must take into account the varied identification practices (Green, 2010). For example, several Western counties have established systematic identification protocols for individuals with learning disabilities (e.g., Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom, and the United States; Sideridis, 2007). However, a substantial number of countries still lack identification procedures needed to identify individuals with learning disabilities; a scarcity of experts exists to guide this process leading to much lower prevalence rates of learning disabilities in some countries (e.g., Taiwan, India, and China; Farrar, 2014; Gerber, 2007; Sideridis, 2007). As a result, many individuals in these countries may have enrolled in United States postsecondary education institutions without being formally identified with learning disabilities. Their learning challenges become clear as they (a) attempt to learn another language, and (b) evidence processing difficulties in reading, writing, and math as well as executive functioning skills such as organization, time management, and study skills.

At this time, it is unclear how many international undergraduate students studying in the United States have an identified or an unidentified learning disability. Despite the lack of data on the number of international undergraduate students with learning disabilities currently studying at United States universities, it is anticipated that their numbers may increase as a result of the documented steady growth of international students across the nation (Institute of International Education, 2014). A Saudi educational official at the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission indicated that a significant number of international undergraduate Saudi students struggle to meet colleges' rigorous academic demands as a result of their learning disabilities. Furthermore, "this number of students is underestimated because many of them do not come forward and declare their disabilities" (A. Alhashimi, personal communication, November 21, 2013). This issue is concerning as the literature shows that college students with learning disabilities undergo many challenges throughout their college experiences that impact their college success and retention (Hamblet, 2014; National Council on Disability, 2011; Newman et al., 2011).

Statement of the Problem

The aforementioned challenges regarding international undergraduate students and college students with learning disabilities presented a unique situation for international undergraduate students with learning disabilities who studied at United States colleges. These students confront multiple challenges due to their double identities: being an international student on one hand and identified with learning disabilities on the other. An attempt was made to find appropriate literature regarding international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities in United States colleges and

no studies were found. Still, the literature regarding the educational and cultural adjustments that international students undertake as they transition to United States universities along with the literature describing college students with learning disabilities provided a valuable conceptual framework to guide this study. This study contributed to the extant literature base of students with learning disabilities enrolled in postsecondary education. It explored the experiences of a unique group of college students who possessed diverse educational and cultural backgrounds.

Purpose of the Study

The primary goal of this study was to explore the experiences of international undergraduate students identified with learning disabilities and enrolled into United States universities through the perspectives of three groups: disability support service office professionals, advisors at the centers of international education, and international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities. In the first prong of the study, disability support service office professionals shared the process of identifying international undergraduate students as having learning disabilities. Additionally, they described how they support international undergraduate students in understanding their disabilities and developing self-advocacy skills. Finally, professionals' perceptions regarding the needs and challenges of international undergraduate students through considering the students' educational and cultural backgrounds were investigated. The second prong of the study explored the perspectives of the advisors at the centers of international education regarding the needs of international undergraduate students who were suspected of having learning disabilities.

The final prong of the study explored the perspectives of international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities in order to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences, challenges, and self-advocacy skills. Additionally, students were asked to describe the supports they received from the disability services offices and the accommodations access processes.

Rationale of the Study

A phenomenological qualitative study was employed for several reasons. This study helped to define and explore the gap in the literature that investigates the experiences of international undergraduate students identified with learning disabilities who study in United States universities. Prior literature that investigated the experiences of undergraduate students with learning disabilities in United States universities has only focused on United States students. An extensive body of literature exists that clearly indicates the upheavals that United States undergraduate students with learning disabilities encounter that impact their college retention. Students encounter several challenges including the provision of adequate documentation of learning disabilities, accessing appropriate accommodations and supports, and determining their self-disclosure and self-advocacy skills. Added to these issues for international undergraduate students are the different educational, social, and cultural contexts to which international undergraduate students need to adjust.

One issue that was critical for investigation in this study was the documentation and identification process of students with learning disabilities, which was a mandated step to access needed supports and accommodations offered by disability support offices in United States universities. Providing acceptable documentation can be a challenge for

students with learning disabilities because universities' documentation requirements often rely on recent, formal evaluations which students may lack. Postsecondary settings are not obligated to conduct or pay for the students' formal assessments that are required prior to receiving accommodations and supports in postsecondary institutions (Madaus & Shaw, 2006; Shaw, 2006). Federal regulations mandate postsecondary settings to ask students with learning disabilities to present recent documentation that demonstrate significant restrictions in academic ability in order to receive accommodations and supports (Madaus, Banerjee, & Hamblet, 2010). Consistent documentation requirements in postsecondary institutions have been debated in the field of learning disabilities due to the lack of specificity in the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendment Act (2008) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (1973), which govern disability support practices in most universities (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 2007; Shaw, Keenan, Madaus, & Banerjee, 2010; Sitlington & Payne, 2004). Higher education federal regulations do not establish assessment requirements for learning disabilities that contribute to the variability and inconsistency among postsecondary settings (Gormley et al., 2005; Sparks & Lovett, 2014; Taymans et al., 2009). Based on this contentious issue, there was a critical need to understand how disability support services professionals grant and utilize accommodations for international undergraduate students with learning disabilities, especially those who may have lacked documentation and prior identification.

Another prominent issue that impacted students' access to accommodations and supports was the issue of students' disclosure of learning disabilities their ability to advocate for specific needs. College students with learning disabilities continuously

encounter situations where they must advocate and request support for each class they take each semester (Beale, 2005; Field, Sarver, & Shaw, 2003). Research has shown that students with learning disabilities who have limited self-determination and self-advocacy skills often struggle adjusting to college demands (Field et al., 2003; Hadley, 2006; Palmer & Roessler, 2000).

Given the significance of self-determination and self-advocacy skills for college success and to access needed accommodations and supports, many factors may hinder international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities from advocating for their learning needs. International undergraduate students with learning disabilities who represent non-western cultures (e.g., Asia, South America, and Middle East) have been acculturated differently; collectivistic values are often more emphasized than the individualistic values of mainstream American culture (Hofstede, 1980). These values are group-oriented; they place less emphasis on individual choice and often avoid seeking personal assistance. Students from collectivistic cultures also frequently avoid disclosing personal challenges to individuals in authority (Hampton, 2000; Leake et al., 2006). Research has consistently shown that international students tend to avoid seeking supports when needed due to many embodied cultural values that inhibit them from communicating their needs (Kilinc & Granello, 2003; Mori, 2000). Seeking professional help such as counseling and therapy is less accepted in non-westernized countries. When help is needed, the cultural expectations for individuals are to seek help from family and the most immediate social community other than seeking it formally from service providers (Ali, Liu, & Humedian, 2004; Heyn, 2013).

Students from collectivistic cultures may confront situations in which they must adhere to the expectations placed in an individualistic-oriented educational context if they are to succeed in United States colleges. Lack of self-advocacy that may have inhibited international undergraduate students from accessing needed supports presented a strong rationale to conduct this study.

Significance of the Study

The paucity of studies that investigate the needs and challenges of postsecondary international undergraduate students with learning disabilities underpinned the current study. Studies have examined the experiences of international college students regarding the challenges impacting academic performance and social interactions while also taking into account students' diverse educational and cultural backgrounds (e.g., Hall, 2013; Heyn, 2013; Wenli, 2011). However, no studies currently exist that seek to understand the needs of international undergraduate students with learning disabilities attending United States universities.

The findings of this study benefited three stakeholder groups. These groups include disability support service office professionals, advisors at the centers of international education, and international undergraduate students with learning disabilities themselves. First, this study highlighted the needs of a diverse group of international undergraduate students with learning disabilities who represented a growing number of college students across the United States. As a result of the novelty of this study, the findings will inform disability support service professionals with new and valuable information regarding the needs of international undergraduate students with

learning disabilities. Data gained from this study was used to review and reassess current practices offered to international undergraduate students with learning disabilities.

The findings of this study also informed international scholarship sponsors regarding the experiences of a unique group of students who were challenged by their learning disabilities. They would address the rigorous academic and social demands that existed in college settings. Moreover, the findings of this study benefited international undergraduate students with learning disabilities who planned to attend United States universities by clarifying the expectations set forth by United States college settings and their disability support services.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

Q1   From the perspective of disability service office professionals, what are the unique needs of international undergraduate students identified with learning disabilities?

Q2   From the prospective of support service professionals at university international education centers, what are the unique needs of international undergraduate students who may be suspected of having learning disabilities?

Q3   What is the assessment and identification process for international undergraduate students who have learning disabilities?

Q4   How do international undergraduate students identified with learning disabilities become aware of their learning disabilities?

Q5   How do international students with identified learning disabilities advocate for themselves?

Definitions of Terms

Terms used in the study are defined below:

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorders (ADHD). This is a behavioral condition that creates a challenge to concentrate on everyday functions and daily routines. Individuals with ADHD generally face difficulty being organized, maintaining their focus, developing realistic goals and thinking before acting (American Psychological Association, 2016).

Disability support service offices. Divisions established within postsecondary education institutions that provide supports and accommodations to students with disabilities. "At the postsecondary level, the recipient is required to provide students with appropriate academic adjustments and auxiliary aids and services that are necessary to afford an individual with a disability an equal opportunity to participate in a school's program" (U.S. Department of Education, 2008, para. 23).

Disability support service professionals. Professionals who work at disability support service offices refers to professionals with a wide range of responsibilities that include but are not limited to (a) make decisions regarding service eligibility to students with learning disabilities; (b) respond to students' inquiries about their legal rights and responsibilities; (c) coordinate auxiliary aids and individualized accommodations for students; (d) ensure students' access to needed accommodations in college classes; (e) consult with faculty and other campus departments regarding the needs of the students with learning disabilities; and (f) deliver individual counseling regarding disability issues and to promote students' development regarding their self-advocacy skills (Association on Higher Education and Disability, 2015).

International student advisor. International students advisor is a professional who works at the center for international education that is located within a public four-year United States university. The main responsibilities and roles of international student advisors include but are not limited to (a) assessing English proficiency levels of international undergraduate students; (b) providing educational, social, and cultural guidance; (c) communicating with college faculty regarding the academic challenges of international undergraduate students; and (d) supporting the educational, social, and cultural needs of international undergraduate students.

International undergraduate students. Non-native English-speaking students who are enrolled in 4-year public universities and who hold temporary student visas (Andrade, 2006).

Learning disabilities. Refers to,

> A heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning or mathematical abilities. These disorders are intrinsic to the individuals, presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction, and may occur across lifespan. Problems in self-regulatory behaviors, social perception, and social interaction may exist with learning disabilities but do not themselves constitute a learning disability. Although learning disabilities may occur concomitantly with other… conditions (for example, sensory impairment, mental retardation, serious emotional disturbance), or with extrinsic influences (such as cultural differences, insufficient or inappropriate instruction), they are not the result of those conditions or influences (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities. (NJCLD, 1990, p. 3)

Postsecondary education. Programs that provide further education and training for students with disabilities after their high school graduation. Postsecondary education includes attending a four-year university or college, a two-year community college, or a vocational and technical school (Kochhar-Bryant et al., 2009; Mellard, 2005).

Self-advocacy. Self-advocacy is a sub-skill of the construct of self-determination. Skinner (1998) defines self-advocacy as individuals can: "(a) demonstrate understanding of their [strengths and needs]; (b) are aware of their legal rights and responsibilities; and (c) are competent in communicating their rights and needs for those in position of authority" (p.279).

Self-determination.

Self-determination is a combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that enable a person to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behavior. An understanding of one's strengths and limitations together with a belief in oneself as capable and effective are essential to self-determination. When acting on the basis of these skills and attitudes, individuals have greater ability to take control of their lives and assume the role of successful adults. (Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, & Wehmeyer, 1998, p. 2)

Summary

An introduction to this study was provided in this chapter. It portrayed that need to explore the experiences of international students with learning disabilities studying at United States universities. The ultimate goals of this study were to: (a) understand the unique challenges of international students with identified learning disabilities; (b) explore how international students received learning disabilities identifications; and (c) how internationals students are aware of their disabilities and advocate for their needs for supports.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Due to limitations in the literature regarding the experiences of international undergraduate students with disabilities who pursue United States higher education, this chapter provides a review of the literature in attempt to frame an understanding of the relative factors regarding the needs of international undergraduate students with learning disabilities studying at United States colleges. This chapter includes four main sections encompassing issues related to international undergraduate students with disabilities who study at United States colleges. The first section briefly reviews domestic and international undergraduate students with learning disabilities in United States higher education. The second section of this chapter discusses literature related to the process of second language acquisition, characteristics of language-based learning disabilities, and issues related to first language development of English language learners. The third section portrays issues regarding personal and institutional factors imposed by disability policies and regulations that influence students' success including self-identification, self-advocacy skills, available accommodations, and documentation requirements. The final section reviews the literature regarding challenges that international undergraduate students with learning disabilities may encounter concerning cultural differences, language proficiency, disability social stigma, and the lack of appropriate identification tools. This chapter concludes by discussing the dearth of studies that examine the

experiences and challenges of international undergraduate students with learning disabilities.

Overview of Domestic and International Students with Learning Disabilities in United States Postsecondary Education Institutions

Prior to the 1990s, students with disabilities had limited opportunities to enter higher education institutions due to social and educational difficulties that saw individuals with disabilities as not capable of meeting the demands of higher education institutions (Altbach, 2005; Flexer, Simmons, Luft, & Bear, 2005; Lloyd & Hallahan, 2005). However, this view has substantially changed since then due to a number of educational, cultural, and economic forces. The Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (2008) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (1973) created an infrastructure that provided opportunities for students with disabilities through the rights of equal access to all services, benefits, programs, opportunities, and activities, essentially establishing an more equal playing field for individuals with disabilities (Christ, 2008; Raue & Lewis, 2011). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004), which governs special education practices in K-12 educational systems, required special education programs in the secondary education systems to develop postsecondary goals including employment, independent living, and postsecondary education through transition services for students with disabilities (IDEIA, 2004; Trainor, 2010). In addition to these legislative forces are the fundamental economic demands placed on competencies in knowledge, skills, and abilities that made a college degree an integral milestone for all individuals in order to obtain satisfying employment

and to secure financial independence (Boyles, 2012; Marcotte et al., 2005; Shaw & Dukes, 2013; Taymans, 2012).

For most secondary students with learning disabilities, postsecondary education has become a primary postsecondary goal (Cameto, Levine, & Wagner 2004). As a result, there has been a steady increase of students with learning disabilities enrolling in postsecondary education in the past 25 years (Hadley, 2006; Lightner et al., 2012; Skinner, 2004; Stodden et al., 2003). According to the United States Department of Education (2012), approximately 11% percent of undergraduate students who were enrolled in higher education during the 2007-08 school year reported having a disability. Of these, approximately one-third (31%) was identified with a specific learning disability, making this the single largest student disability category (Raue & Lewis, 2011). However, research indicates that only a quarter of students who are identified with learning disabilities during their secondary education inform their college or university of their learning disabilities. Therefore, the incidence of students with learning disabilities may be considerably higher than the data suggests (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014).

The National Longitudinal Transition Study

To document the secondary education experiences and the postsecondary outcomes of students with disabilities, two longitudinal studies were conducted, 15 years apart. Between 1985 and 1990, the Office of Special Education Programs conducted the first National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS-1). The goal of the six year-long study was to examine the experiences of students with disabilities who received special education services in 1985. Factors were explored that influenced young adults' transition to employment, post-secondary education or training, and independence. Data from the

NLTS-1 study were collected from a representative sample of more than 8,000 special education students between the ages of 13 and 21. Data from the second study, NLTS-2, were collected between 2001 and 2009, following up on the post-high school experiences of young adults across disability categories for a period up to eight years after high school. In both studies, multiple sources of data were gathered, including telephone interviews with young adults with special needs, their parents, surveys to school staff while youth were in secondary schools. Data also were gathered from direct and alternative assessments of academic reflecting students' academic skills and knowledge as well as school transcripts. (Newman, Wagner, Cameto, Knokey, & Shaver, 2010; Newman et al., 2011).

A comparison between NLTS-1 and NLTS-2 studies found that the percentage of high school graduates with learning disabilities who enrolled in postsecondary education within four years of graduation increased from 29.5% in 2003 to 63.3% in 2009. Significantly, in the NLTS-2 study, 67% of young adults with learning disabilities were enrolled in postsecondary education (Newman et al., 2011). Fifty percent of young adults with learning disabilities had enrolled in a two-year community college program; these students were much less likely (21%) to attend a four-year college or university when compared to students in other disability categories such as speech/language (33%), hearing impairments (34%), and visual impairments (40%).

Despite the increased enrollment of students with disabilities in postsecondary education, student retention and degree completion rates remain a concern. The NLTS-2 study found that only 41% of young adults with disabilities earned a postsecondary education degree in a comparison with a 52% completion rate of the general population.

Completion rates of students with disabilities are highest in two-year or community colleges (41% versus 22% of the general population) followed by vocational/technical institutes (57% versus 64% of the general population). In four-year colleges, only 34% of students with disabilities completed a degree compared to 51% of the general population (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014; Newman et al., 2011).

International Students with Learning Disabilities

In the school year 2013-14, international undergraduate students comprised approximately 4% of the total number of students in United States four-year higher education institutions (Institute of International Education, 2014). Based on the fact that 10% of all students enrolled in United States colleges have a disability, and that disability is a common occurrence in all cultures and languages, it is safe to assume that a number of international undergraduate students may also have a disability. In 2013, an international academic advisor for the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission (SACM) indicated that there was an increasing trend of international undergraduate students who were identified with learning disabilities and received disability support services while studying at United States colleges (A. Alhashimi, personal communication, November 17, 2013). However, given the lack of research into this area, it is not possible to know how many international undergraduate students have learning disabilities and would benefit from learning supports.

In an article that discusses the needs of emerging international populations with disabilities in United States higher education, Korbel, Lucia, Wenzel, and Anderson (2011) argue that international students with disabilities often face unique challenges as they adjust to a new culture and language as well as to academic demands. The authors

suggest that the disability support service office work collaboratively and proactively with staff at the international student office to assist students in their transition. Students in higher education who are culturally and linguistically diverse often meet significant barriers to being identified with a learning disability (Pellegrino, Sermons, & Shaver, 2011). Some barriers reported by Pellegrino et al. (2011) include students' unawareness that they have a disability based on cultural definitions, they may not be aware of the services and accommodations that are available to them, and that students may not have or be able to afford disability documentation.

For international undergraduate students, there is often a cultural challenge when they are identified as having a disability. Many countries and cultures identify "disability" differently; thus, some international undergraduate students who are identified with learning disabilities in the United States might be considered as "nondisabled" in their home country (Korbel et al., 2011; Reid & Knight, 2006). Many culturally and linguistically diverse students may not have the knowledge of disability supports because they have not shared the knowledge of or experience of receiving such supports previously (Leake & Cholymay, 2004; Soorenian, 2011). Similarly, international undergraduate students may not have prior documentation of disability before the start of their postsecondary education, nor know how to acquire it (Madaus & Shaw, 2006; Shaw, 2006). At this time, little is known about the identification process of international undergraduate students with learning disabilities (Pellegrino et al., 2011).

In addition, among students who are culturally and linguistically diverse, many have learning disabilities (Taymans et al., 2009; Wagner, Francis, & Morris, 2005). Language proficiency impacts the identification of international undergraduate students

with learning disabilities. Thus, considerable literature has been generated regarding the intertwined issues around language differences and language-based learning disabilities. The following section discusses second language acquisition, language-based learning disabilities, issues between language differences and language-based learning disabilities, and the relationship between first language proficiency and difficulties in acquiring a second language.

<center>**Second Language Acquisition**</center>

Second language acquisition is an important research topic in many fields, including linguistics, speech language pathology, and education (e.g., Birdsong, 2006; Hoover, 2009; Ritchie & Bhatia, 2009). A wealth of information exists concerning second language acquisition of school-aged children and youth (Bigelow & Schwarz, 2010). An understanding of the developmental processes of second language acquisition is critical as this understanding helps educators distinguish between linguistic issues related to second language acquisition and the language difficulties that characterize disability (Hoover, 2009). However, few studies address the process of second language acquisition for the adult English language learner population. To fully understand the process of second language acquisition for adult English language learners, the following section discusses the development of English as a second language including the stages of second language acquisition.

Second Language Development

In order to develop literacy in second language, English language learners must be able to comprehend language in order to make meaning from print (Helman, 2009). According to Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, and Christian (2005), developing

literacy in a second language relies on having a solid foundation in oral language first. Research studies indicates a positive correlation between proficiency in oral language development in English and students' academic achievement in English-based content areas, especially in the areas of English reading and writing (August & Shanahan, 2006; Genesee et al., 2005). To develop oral language, English language learners need to develop skills in the four main components that comprise oral language: phonology, morphology, vocabulary, and syntax.

Phonology refers to the awareness of sounds; when a sound is not part of students' home language, students may struggle to demonstrate and represent this sound (Dressler, 2002). For example, the English sound system may differ significantly compared with sound system associated with other languages such as Arabic, Chinese, and Hebrew. Morphology refers to the ability to distinguish the smallest meaningful segments of words such as affixes, suffixes, and prefixes. For instance, the word "dogs" has two morphemes: dog -s (Helman, 2009). Some students have difficulties applying morphological procedures of English such as using plural and past tense forms.

Vocabulary development signifies the ability to identify a word's meaning has a big influence in literacy development. When students fail to understand the definition of a word in a text, this may hinder their ability to comprehend the main idea from a reading passage (Dufva & Voeten, 1999). However, when students recognize English words that are similar to the student's home language, they are more likely to be acquired with greater ease (Dressler & Kamil, 2006). Developing a solid foundation of phonology, morphology, and vocabulary will aid learners to develop syntax. Syntax is defined as the ability to manipulate segments in a sentence which helps in constructing a meaningful

sentence (Helman, 2009). For example, in Spanish and Arabic language systems, the adjective always comes after the verb. It is important for teachers to be aware of the differences in syntax systems associated with their students' primary language as research has shown that when the students have a different syntax system from English, they are more likely to miss a word in a sentence (Lipka & Siegel, 2007). Overall, a sufficient development of phonology, morphology, vocabulary, and syntax serve as a foundation to adequately develop oral language in English, which is the first step to develop English proficiency.

Given the different components comprising oral English language development, the transition from oral language to written language is long and can take years. Research suggests that English language learners can sufficiently obtain conversational fluency within 1 to 3 years, yet English language learners may need more years to reduce the gap between them and native English speakers (Cummins, 2003). Several studies suggest that it may take 10 years for English language learners to reach an advanced level of English proficiency that allows them to compete with their native speaking counterparts (Genesee et al., 2005; Taymans et al., 2009).

Stages of second language development. It is critical to acknowledge typical developmental stages that occur during second language acquisition in order to draw accurate conclusions regarding the learners' progress. Although developmental stages may appear as disorders, in fact their occurrence is normal and anticipated during the second language learning process (Hoover, 2009; Roseberry-McKibbin & Brice, 2005). The following section discusses some of these stages: the silent stage, the production stage, the intermediate stage, and the advanced stage (Baca & Cervantes, 2004;

Cummins, 2000; Ernst-Slavit, Moore, & Maloney, 2002; Hoover, 2009; Hoover &

Mendez-Barletta, 2008; Ovando & Combs, 2012).

The silent stage. This is considered the first level of learning a second language

in which English language learners immerse themselves in active listening and

comprehension. They remain quiet to listen and understand the new language. Second

language learners at this stage may be involved in behaviors that include confusion of

losing their control over their own learning, lack of attention, shyness, and withdrawal.

The silent period may last between a few weeks to 1-2 years depending on the English

language learner's age and command of their first language (Ernst-Slavit et al., 2002;

Hoover, 2009; Roseberry-McKibbin & Brice, 2005).

The production stage. In this second stage of second language acquisition,

individuals begin to understand simple vocabulary and to comprehend English as a

language that encompasses new rules, forms, and sound-symbol systems. Individuals in

this stage start speaking and producing approximately 1000 to 3000 words that they can

use and comprehend to help them make productive conversations with others. Oral

articulation includes short phrases and sentences that are used for social language.

Because the production stage is considered an initial developmental stage, individuals

may produce grammatical flaws, which may lead to frustration (Baca & Cervantes, 2004;

Ernst-Slavit et al., 2002; Hoover, 2009; Ovando & Combs, 2012).

The intermediate stage. In this stage, English language learners can understand

and purposefully use up to 6000 words. Moreover, individuals become more confident to

generate more complex sentences and to provide opinions. As a result, individuals begin

to use age-appropriate language and engage in small-group activities and discussions in

which they exhibit comprehension and purposeful language usage. As individuals increase their second language capabilities, they become more proficient in producing written language. Nevertheless, it is important to note that learners may continue to make periodic errors in speaking, reading, and writing (e.g., syntax, grammar, vocabulary, and punctuation; Cummins, 2000; Hoover, 2009; Hoover & Mendez-Barletta, 2008).

The advanced stage. In the fourth stage, second language capabilities are further developed and refined in which learners are involved in larger conversations and are able to identify connections in narratives. Further, individuals are capable of using the language fluently and produce written language in a way that is similar to their native English speakers counterparts. In this stage, learners produce few errors and their expressive and receptive language comprehension reaches an advanced level (Baca & Cervantes, 2004; Cummins, 2000; Hoover & Mendez-Barletta e,t al. 2008; Ovando & Combs, 2012).

Language-Based Learning Disabilities

An overview of the developmental process and stages of acquiring a second language has been presented. However, because typical challenges associated with second language acquisition may also occur with students with learning disability, a "typical" second language progression may be misinterpreted as a disability. The following section explains the nature of language-based learning disabilities and discusses characteristics of students with language-based learning disabilities.

Learning disabilities comprise a heterogeneous group of disorders that include difficulties in the attainment and usage of listening, speaking, problem-solving, mathematics, reading and writing skills (NJCLD, 1990). Recent reports indicate that 2.4

million school-aged students are diagnosed with learning disabilities including those who demonstrate challenges with spoken and written language (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). Difficulties in spoken and written languages include inability to process sounds or a sequence of sounds, decoding, respond to recall questions, and make inferences from written materials (Case & Taylor, 2005; Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2015; Schmitt et al., 2013). Individuals with language-based challenges most often possess average cognitive capabilities; however, their language deficits endure across the lifespan (American Speech-Language Hearing Association, 2015; NJCLD, 1990).

Some individuals who possess a language-based learning disability diagnosis may have been initially identified as having language impairment, and as such, received support from speech language pathologists (Schmitt et al., 2013). Many of these students have struggled to transition from the oral language structure to the literate language system (Hirsch, 2003). Although these individuals are able to manage casual discussions or read non-academic books, they frequently exhibit problems with composing academic materials, comprehending science or social science books, or extracting information from academic texts (Schmitt et al., 2013; Snow, 2010).

Younger learners with language-based learning disabilities are often able to compensate for their language difficulties because many school activities utilize non-text materials, (e.g., visual and hands-on activities; Schmitt et al., 2013). However, older learners with language-based learning disabilities regularly demonstrate serious language struggles in higher academic grade levels due to the reliance on expository texts that include complicated syntactic structures and higher-level reading and written materials

(Nippold, Mansfield, Billow, & Tomblin, 2008; Schmitt et al., 2013; Snow, 2010).

Consequently, research has shown that individuals with language-based learning

disabilities are challenged to process four fundamental areas of language: phonology,

morphology, semantics, and pragmatics that are discussed below (Schmitt et al., 2013).

Phonology

Phonology refers to an element of language regarding how speech sounds are

distributed and ordered, which impacts articulation and speech production (Case &

Taylor, 2005; Reynolds & Fletcher-Janzen, 2000). Individuals with language-based

learning disabilities may struggle in developing normal pronunciation of complex words

or phrases (Case & Taylor, 2005). Phonological difficulties may result in challenges with

manipulating syllables that are manifested in one of four main areas: omission,

substitution, distortion, and addition (Case & Taylor, 2005; Schmitt et al., 2013).

Individuals with language-based learning disabilities who have phonological difficulties

may omit part of a word (e.g., "bi" for "bike") or replace one phoneme with another (e.g.,

car for far). There is evidence to indicate that individuals with language-based learning

disabilities may have difficulties recalling phonological information that may result in

memory and word decoding problems (Schmitt et al., 2013).

Morphology

Morphology is the study of word structure, specifically, the smallest units that

change meaning in words, such as suffixes and prefixes (Kieffer & Lesaux, 2007).

Examples of this include confusion of personal pronouns such as you, he, she, it, and I,

and substituting objective pronouns (e.g., her study at the library; Schmitt et al., 2013).

Despite the fact that some individuals with language-based learning disabilities are able

to understand basic morphological systems such as pronouns and verb tenses in spoken language, they may produce errors in the same basic morphological structure when it appears in written language (Schmitt et al., 2013; Windsor, Scott, & Street, 2000). In both spoken and written languages, individuals with language-based learning disabilities may be limited in producing complex sentences using morphologically correct pronoun, noun, and verb phrases, resulting in immature communication styles (Case & Taylor, 2005; Kuder, 2003; Nippold, Mansfield, Billow, & Tomblin, 2009).

Semantics

Semantics refers to the ability of individual learners to extract meanings from words, phrases, and sentences and how these linguistic items are related in meaning (Case & Taylor, 2005). Semantics also can convey itself in linguistic associations among items, individuals, languages, or occurrences in the environments in which words have meaning (Richards & Schmidt, 2002). Individuals with language-based learning disabilities may be limited in their semantic abilities needed to comprehend higher-level texts that are heavily loaded with advanced vocabulary words due to the individuals' low development of low-frequency vocabulary words (Adams, 2010; Schmitt et al., 2013; Snow, 2010). Moreover, learners with language-based learning disabilities struggle to understand advanced semantic and figurative language such as idioms, metaphors, proverbs, and similes (Case & Taylor, 2005; Hirsch, 2003; Kuder, 2003). An example of difficulty understanding idioms is that individuals with language-based learning disabilities may literally interpret "A bird in the hand is worth two in a bush" believing that someone exactly is holding a bird in his hand (Case & Taylor, 2005, p. 129).

Pragmatics

Pragmatics concerns the study of language use for social functions; in other words, it refers to using the language to communicate for variety of purposes including greetings, labeling, requesting, informing, taking turns, staying on topic, and using appropriate facial expression and eye contact. Pragmatics also include non-verbal factors such as gestures, body language and facial expressions (American Speech-Language Hearing Association, 2015). Individuals with language-based learning disabilities may use complex sentences when involved in conversations with others; however, they struggle in participating in more literate forms of oral discussions (Scott & Windsor, 2000). For example, learners with language-based learning disabilities may tend to produce ambiguous ideas resulting from their struggle to convey their ideas, maintain focus on a topic, maintain relevant comments to a certain topic, and be aware of inappropriate comments during discussions (American Speech-Language Hearing Association, 2015; Schmitt et al., 2013). This area of language can impact social well-being, thus these learners may struggle in establishing and maintaining friendships and they may avoid peer interactions (Brinton & Fujiki, 2004; Troia, 2011).

Language-Based Learning Disabilities
and Second Language Acquisition

The previous sections contrast second language acquisition with language-based learning disabilities. Researchers in the United States initially addressed these two areas separately, however, more recently the disproportionate placement of English language learners in special education programs has been identified as an area of concern in K-12 classrooms (Klingner, Artiles, & Barletta, 2006; Klingner & Eppolito, 2014). As a result, researchers have investigated whether academic challenges that English language

learners have are related to language differences or are attributed to learning disabilities.
In this section, the literature regarding the difficulty of distinguishing between language
differences and language-based learning disabilities and assessment practices to identify
learning disabilities in English language learners are reviewed.

A dearth of studies exists that investigate issues related to English language
learners and learning disabilities in postsecondary education settings. However, a number
of studies has examined assessment tools that educators have used to differentiate
language differences from learning disabilities (e.g., Fletcher & Navarrete, 2011;
Klingner et al., 2006; McCardle, Mele-McCarthy, Cutting, Leos, & D'Emilio, 2005;
McCardle, Mele-McCarthy, & Leos, 2005). The following section reviews studies that
discuss assessment practices used in K-12 special education, as much of this research can
be used to inform assessment practices in postsecondary education.

**Language Differences or Language-
based Learning Disabilities**

The research discussing English language learners who may or may not have
language-based learning disabilities is sparse. This lack of research increases the
challenge of distinguishing language difficulties from language-based learning
disabilities. At this time, there is no assessment that addresses the dual challenges that
English language learners with language based disabilities face. As Wagner et al. (2005)
explain:

> At the heart of this inconsistency lie problems with the definition and
> identification of learning disabilities in general and the added complexity of the
> interplay between language and learning for children who are learning in a second
> language. For these children, it is unclear whether limited language proficiency in
> English is interfering with learning or is masking a learning disability, or leads to
> poor performance on assessments used for identification, which are not culturally
> and linguistically appropriate for that purpose. (p. 6)

In their attempts to better understand the second language development process, Case and Taylor (2005) reviewed the literature of second language acquisition and language-based learning disabilities. They indicate that English language learners and language-learning disabilities share common language difficulties in pronunciation, syntax, and semantics. The authors conclude that it is a challenging task to confidently exclude language-based learning disabilities from typical second language acquisition; however, they provide educators with ample classroom activities that would help teachers in their informal observation data collection process.

Coupled with the difficulty distinguishing between language difficulties from language-based learning disabilities, there are significant limitations regarding identification tools used to ascertain which English language learners also demonstrate language-based learning disabilities (Klingner & Artiles, 2006; Wagner et al., 2005). These limitations exist because the available standardized tests for a language-based learning disability diagnosis are designed and normed on native English speakers only; accordingly, results stemming from these tests are not reliable or valid in identifying learners for whom English is their second language (Wagner et al., 2005). Other challenges related to the identification of English language learners include the misuse of tests to detect the IQ-achievement discrepancy, misinterpretation regarding students' language abilities, and ignorance of cultural differences and their impact on learning (Jimenez, Siegel, & Rodrigo Lopez, 2003; Klingner & Artiles, 2006; Salend, Garrick, Duhaney, & Montgomery, 2002).

Assessment Practices

Despite the lack of reliable and valid assessment tools to ascertain if English language learners have language-learning disabilities, many assessment practices have been researched. A study by Klingner et al. (2006) found that professionals (primarily psychologists) give improper attention to the language development issues as possible a causal relationship to the English language learners' learning struggles. Professionals use English-based tests to assess these learners' difficulties while also disregarding the learners' first languages and ignoring the possibility of using bilingual tests. Finally, Klingner et al. conclude that assessment practices for English language learners have remained the same for over 20 years. These findings are well documented by Figueroa and Newsome (2006) who examined professionals' compliance with federal and state regulations that emphasized the non-discriminatory assessment practices through the use of non-biased tests with English language learners. Results revealed that professionals failed to follow legal and professionals guidelines.

In their review of legal guidance regarding assessing English language learners, Duarte, Greybeck, and Simpson (2013) suggest multiple assessment instruments that would assist professionals in their evaluation process. They propose that assessments like Woodcock-Munoz and Student Oral Language Observation Matrix (SOLOM) are promising tools to determine learners' dominant language and their proficiency in their first and second languages. Further, Duarte et al. (2013) encourage diagnosticians to use informal assessment tools such as observations as valuable source of data that would guide their conclusions.

The practice of examining the proficiency of English language learners in their first and second languages is based on the hypothesis that there is a correlational relationship between first language deficits and some of the challenges in acquiring a second language. The following section provides a thorough discussion regarding this issue as it relates to the focus of current research.

Relationship Between First Language
Proficiency and Second Language
Difficulties

A lack of specific language skills in a first language will most likely result in difficulties in learning a second language. "The pronunciation, semantics, morphology, and grammatical rules and construction of a new language may cause considerable frustration... especially when they have not completely internalized these components in their native language" (Levine, 2000, p. 126). In order to determine whether a student has a second language difficulty or a language-based learning disability, researchers argue that most of the learning difficulties that many English language learners may exhibit should be assessed using tools developed in their native language. The need to examine learners' proficiency in their native language is supported by strong evidence claiming that students who have language-based learning disabilities in their native language will have similar difficulties acquiring a second language (Durgonoglu, 2002; Taymans et al., 2009).

This emergence of the native language literature was based on a phenomenon that emerged during the 1960s when the term "underachievers" emerged to describe students who struggled with their second language learning (Sparks, Ganschow, & Patton, 2008). Since then, studies have been conducted with high school and college foreign language

learners who were considered to be at risk for difficulties in acquiring second language competence. Some students identified through these studies had learning disabilities diagnosed while others experienced learning difficulties without learning disabilities diagnosis (Sparks et al., 2008).

Linguistic Coding Differences
Hypothesis

The linguistic coding difference hypothesis developed by Sparks, Ganschow, and Pohlman (1989) is an attempt to explain some of the challenges being exhibited by foreign language learners. This hypothesis was derived from the review of the native language literature and Cummins' (1979) Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis. The native language literature suggested that learners who have difficulty with reading and spelling often struggle with specific language rule systems (e.g., phonological awareness, sound-letter correspondence, and grammar structures; Rayner, Foorman, Perfetti, Pesetsky, & Seidenberg, 2001; Sparks et al., 2008). On the other hand, Cummins (1984) states that individuals cannot achieve bilingualism without possessing a strong foundation of their first language skills. Based on the principles of the native language theory and Cummins' hypothesis, researchers working on the linguistic coding difference hypothesis propose that success in foreign language learning depends on having proficient first language skills, and that when individuals have problems in their native language, these will appear in foreign language learning as well. Thus, there appears to be a connection between second language difficulties and native language deficits, particularly phonological processing skills (Meschyan & Hernandez, 2002).

The work of Sparks et al. (1989) posit that when learners' native language linguistic code system (e.g., phonology, semantic and syntactic) is not adequately

developed, foreign language acquisition may be more challenging to learners who demonstrate these language-based learning disabilities in their native language. They further elaborate that deficits in the native language linguistic codes may result from minor to more significant difficulties in oral and written aspects in learning a second language. Finally, these researchers emphasize that among linguistic codes, deficits in phonological processing skills primarily affect the reading and writing skills of one's first language. "If phonological problems cause difficulties with [foreign language] learning, both oral and written, then it seems plausible to speculate that phonological difficulties are likely to cause oral and written language problems in [first language]" (Sparks & Ganschow, 1993, p. 295). According to this hypothesis, learners who struggle with basic sound units and who are unable to efficiently manipulate sounds may struggle in expressive and receptive language which can impact basic language comprehension.

Researchers found that high school and college students with learning disabilities and students who are at-risk for foreign language difficulties have poor phonological processing skills in both first and second language (Sparks et al., 2008). The linguistic coding difference hypothesis evidence provides a relevant foundation regarding international undergraduate students who may exhibit language difficulties that may be linked to learning disabilities in their native language. To determine if there is a connection between the learning difficulties of foreign language learners and challenges in the primary language, researchers have documented the relationship between primary language skills and foreign-language learning difficulties.

A longitudinal study by Sparks, Patton, Ganschow, Humbach, and Javorsky (2006) explored early predictors of foreign language aptitude and proficiency in oral and

written skills. Fifty-four students were followed over a 10-year period, from first to tenth grade; the students' native language literacy, oral language, and verbal intelligence skills were measured in elementary school. The students' foreign language aptitude was measured early in their ninth grade year, and their foreign language proficiency was measured late in their tenth grade year. Among all measured variables, native language measures were the strongest predictors for foreign language proficiency. Findings suggest that there is a relationship between students' first and second language skills, and that native language literacy skills in first grade are associated with second language aptitude and acquisition, even after ten years.

Sparks et al. (2008) conducted a 5-year longitudinal study of 156 students who were learning a foreign language. The goal of this multiple measures study was to determine whether there was a correlational relationship between the students' native language capabilities and their foreign language aptitudes. Students' native language skills were measured five years before they enrolled in a foreign language class in high school. The researchers found that the students' first language decoding skills in elementary school were strong predictors of foreign language decoding skills which facilitate foreign language reading comprehension.

Meschyan and Hernandez (2002) found similar results. They examined whether native language word decoding ability could predict the second language proficiency of 80 college students, all monolingual English speakers, who enrolled in an introductory Spanish class. Results showed that native language decoding skills predicted students' second language proficiency, as well as to their course grade. The findings of this study

align with the cross-language transfer hypothesis in phonological awareness among college students.

Learners who have a language-based learning disability often demonstrate similar challenges when learning a second language. In a study that examined the phonological skills of 55 college students with a prior learning disabilities identification who were learning a foreign language, Downey, Snyder, and Hill (2000) found that these students showed greater phonological deficits in their primary language when compared with their peers without learning disabilities. In a review of the cross-linguistic literature, Durgonoglu (2002) emphasized that learning difficulties stemming from learning disabilities can be distinguished from the typical language development process by testing these learners' language skills in their first and second language.

Based on the cross-language transfer concept proposed by the linguistic coding differences hypothesis, there is persuasive evidence to suggest that testing the learning difficulties of English language learners can be done using tests in individuals' native languages. Two studies of adult English language learners illustrate this principle.

In the investigation of 32 Mandarin speaking Chinese learners, Harrison and Krol, (2007) detected a relationship between language skills in both native language and English as a second language. Researchers conducted multiple tests with the study participants in both Chinese and English, including non-word repetition, word labeling, and decoding. They found that deficits in the participants' phonological skills in English were also apparent in their native Chinese.

Similar conclusions were found in a study by Ijalba (2008). 60 adult Spanish-speaking English language learners who demonstrated difficulties learning English were

tested on phonological awareness, reading, and spelling skills in both English and Spanish. Participants were also asked to rate their success in learning English. Results revealed that the learners who expressed difficulties acquiring English had Spanish language literacy deficits in phonological processing, decoding, and spelling that were mirrored in their English reading and writing skills. On the other hand, students who reported no difficulty learning English had equivalent strengths in their native language skills.

To conclude, although first language skills are well documented as being strong predictors for later success in second language acquisition, this evidence should be used with caution due to two considerable limitations. First, the majority of studies were based on investigations conducted with English speakers who struggle to acquire a foreign language. Second, the few studies that tested English language learners in their first language was possible only due to the availability of fully developed assessments (Taymans et al., 2009).

Through the development of the linguistic coding difficulties hypothesis, Sparks et al. (1989) state that second language learners fall within a range of skills, from challenged to outstanding with many different levels in between. These learners may have sufficient conversational language skills but have great difficulty using the technical language required for reading and writing. Others may be able to read and write but have poor receptive and expressive verbal conversational skills in the second language. According to the researchers, these difficulties may stem from challenges in their native language skills. Cummins (2008) provides further explanation that may be more relevant to second language learners.

**Basic Intrapersonal Communication Skills and
Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency**

In an attempt to explain the process of acquiring a second language, Cummins (as cited in Cummins, 2008) identified two dimensions of learning that affect second-language learners. These dimensions refer to two distinct sets of abilities: students' Basic Intrapersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and the adequate development of students' Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency skills (CALP) that are needed for academic purposes. In order to determine whether English language learners have language-based learning disabilities or not, it is critical to understand the difference between these two language dimensions, each of which has a unique timeline and inherent challenge.

The first level of second language development, BICS, involves the use of high frequency vocabulary where language skills are used to communicate with others in a variety of social situations (Roessingh, 2006; Roseberry-McKibbin, & Brice, 2005). Learners at this level are surrounded by embedded-contexts in which they access a wide range of supplemental visual and oral cues that aid for understanding language (Cummins, 2000). During the development of BICS, individuals gradually acquire language as they transition from the so-called silent period in which they became able to maintain face-to-face conversations (Cummins, 2003; Roessingh, 2006). A consensus suggests that average English language learners across all ages tend to acquire this ability in two years after day-to-day conversational experience in academic and non-academic settings (Cummins, 2003, 2008; Roessingh, 2006).

Once BICS has been established, learners begin to develop more complex and proficient language skills. Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency skills (CALP) develop through social interactions that occur in educational settings (Cummins, 2008).

Through developing CALP, language skills are increasingly used for formal academic learning in which academic tasks occur in more reduced-context situations in which less guidance and cues are available. For example, while learners engage in in-class listening or intense reading tasks, they are dependent on the language itself for understanding (Cummins, 2000). In order to succeed academically, individuals must begin to understand and use compound written and oral language. Further, individuals use low frequency words that exist in academic texts such as social studies, science, math and literature (Cummins, 2003). Proficiency in academic language can be defined as "the extent to which an individual has access to and command of the oral and written academic registers of schooling" (Cummins, 2000, p. 67). Moreover, proficiency in academic language involves using advanced cognitive abilities that include comparing, synthesizing, evaluating, and referencing of information in different academic areas that requires higher reading comprehension skills. In order for English language learners to sufficiently reduce the gap between them and their counterparts in English academics (e.g., vocabulary), they need to immerse into CALP development for five to seven years (Cummins, 2008).

The timeline of the development of BICS and CALP skills, between two and seven years respectively, is important in the discussion of second-language learners. Many international undergraduate students are under pressure to obtain a degree in a short time period. Even though many students participate in an intensive English language program prior to beginning their undergraduate degree, this may not offer sufficient time to develop the advanced English skills that support their academic success. As a result, many international undergraduate students may face academic

difficulties that can be attributed to insufficient English capabilities. An example of this issue is the potential overlap between BICS and CALP (Roseberry-McKibbin & Brice, 2005). International undergraduate students may appear fluent and adequately use spoken English in their daily social interactions. Yet, they may show specific language difficulties in reading, writing, spelling, social studies and other content area subjects. This example may be present in everyday situations for international undergraduate students who may be falsely identified with learning disabilities. It is therefore important that educators in higher education understand the distinction between BICS and CALPS in order to avoid confusing normal conversational and academic challenges of English language learners with learning disabilities.

The previous section discussed some of the challenges of acquiring a second language, and the difficulty distinguishing between language difficulties and language-based learning disabilities. These linguistic challenges often present a dilemma when it comes to accurately identifying international undergraduate students with learning disabilities. These students face the compounded challenge of learning a second language while seeking support for their unique learning needs as they navigate through academic demands in college classes. Educators in higher education need therefore to be sensitive to the multiple predicaments their students face.

Federal Disability Rights in Higher Education

Issues that include self-disclosure, self-advocacy, and documentation requirements have been shown to impact the access to needed supports and accommodations to ensure college success for undergraduate students with learning disabilities. These issues stem from the federal disability rights that govern procedures

regarding the support provided to college students with disabilities. The following

section briefly portrays provisions of these regulations followed by a thorough review of

the literature regarding their implications. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

and the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (2008) highlight federal

disability rights that protect persons with disabilities, including persons with learning

disabilities, from discriminatory actions. More specifically, Section 504 ensures

"qualified handicapped persons" access to physical and pragmatic facilities that receive

or benefit from federal financial assistance (Gerber, 2003; Katsiyannis, Zhang,

Landmark, & Reber, 2009; Madaus & Shaw, 2006), while Americans with Disabilities

Act Amendments Act (2008) extends the regulations to private facilities that do not

receive federal funds.

Based on these regulations, the responsibilities and obligations of higher

education are to provide equal opportunities for all students with disabilities. This

includes providing equal access to activities that are offered on campuses such as

admission requirements, treatment of students, academic adjustments, housing, financial

and employment assistance, and non-academic services. (Brinckerhoff, McGuire, &

Shaw, 2002; Katsiyannis et al., 2009; Madaus & Shaw, 2004; Rao & Gartin, 2003).

Colleges and universities are obligated to offer a minimal level of academic

modifications, accommodations, and auxiliary aids without any financial charges to

facilitate students' access to academic requirements when requested by students with

documented disabilities (Brinckerhoff et al., 2002; Madaus & Shaw, 2004). Examples of

auxiliary aids include readers, audio materials, assistive listening devices, large-print

materials, and speech synthesizers (Brinckerhoff et al., 2002; Katsiyannis et al., 2009; Simonton, 2006).

Some institutions may charge for services that are above the minimal level, if these services require unique personnel, such as a tutor or interpreter. However, authorized personnel in colleges and universities may not modify academic requirements that are deemed essential by an academic program, such as licensing requirements (Katsiyannis et al., 2009; Madaus & Shaw, 2004). Accommodations that are determined to significantly alter program requirements, lower standards, or create financial and administrative burdens may be denied (Brinckerhoff et al., 2002, Hamblet, 2014; Katsiyannis et al., 2009; Simon, 2011). It is noteworthy that none of these regulations indicated above would be available to college students with learning disabilities unless students identify themselves and request support (Rabren, Eaves, Dunn, & Darch, 2013).

Critical Elements for College Success

Despite recent statistical figures that show a steady increase of the students with learning disabilities enrolling in higher education institutions (Hadley, 2006; Heiman & Kartv, 2004; Lightner, et al., 2012), only 41% of these students graduate compared to 52% of their peers without disabilities (Newman et al., 2011). The NLTS-2 study reports that almost 58% of college students with learning disabilities did not consider themselves as having a disability; additionally, 8% of college students with learning disabilities thought they had a disability yet did not notify their schools (Newman, Wagner, Cameto, & Knokey, 2009). As a consequence of this underreporting, a number of students with learning disabilities may not actually be accessing the support services available (Hartman-Hall & Haaga, 2002; Kurth & Mellard, 2006). The following section examines

issues that minimize students' access to available support services in order to understand why students are under-reporting their disability and learning needs.

Disclosure of Disability

Most individuals do not disclose personal and private information to just anyone, especially not to people they only recently have met (Barnard-Brak et al., 2010). This lack of disclosure is particularly relevant to students with learning disabilities due to the non-apparent nature of their disabilities (Brinckerhoff et al., 2002; Quinlan, Bates, & Angell, 2012; Stein, 2013). Further, students with learning disabilities encounter a major change in their responsibility to disclose their disability when they enter higher education. Unlike the experience in secondary school, where the school was responsible for locating students and providing services, higher education regulations require them to disclose their disabilities to institutional agents in colleges and universities in order to obtain needed supports. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (1973) and Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (2008) regulations prohibit staff and faculty in colleges and universities from asking students whether they have a disability (Barnard-Brak et al., 2010; Brinckerhoff et al., 2002; Quinlan et al., 2012). Due to the aforementioned issues, several barriers pertaining to disability disclosure that are documented in the literature are discussed below.

Barriers to Disclosure

When reporting factors that inhibit the level of students' with learning disabilities access to accommodations, self-disclosure was a frequent theme in the literature (Barnard-Brak et al., 2010; Garner, 2008; Ketterlin-Geller & Johnson, 2006). Through the process of accessing accommodations, students report their fear of social stigma

(Denhart, 2008; Marshak, Van Wiere, Ferrell, Swiss, & Dugan, 2010; Quinlan et al., 2012), and their fear of losing their sense of belonging (Kurth & Mellard, 2006) as factors that inhibit their self-disclosure. These challenges may contribute to the students' tendencies to postpone identifying themselves to the disability support services office and to wait until their success would be at risk and they need an accommodation (Kranke, Jackson, Taylor, Anderson-Fye, & Floersch, 2013; Lightner et al., 2012; Stein, 2013).

Few studies have explicitly investigated issues of disclosure of students with learning disabilities in higher education; however, some researchers have attempted to explain why students with learning disabilities wait to disclose their disabilities. Lightner et al. (2012) investigated factors that contributed to students' with learning disabilities postponement to seek services from the disability support services office. Through students' narratives, the researchers found that the primary driving force for students to seek disability support services was academic failure, which is consistent with the findings of other researchers (e.g., Barnard-Brak et al., 2010; Kranke et al., 2013; Stein, 2013). Interestingly, Lightner et al. (2012) found that students downplayed the reasons for shame and fear that instructors and peers would view them as lazy and incompetent to delay seeking assistance from the disability support services office. Instead, the students identified insufficient knowledge of one's disability, costs of assessments, time constraints, and lack of information of services available in their university as major reasons of their delay of seeking assistance from the disability support services offices.

According to regulations in Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (2008), self-identification is primarily the students' responsibility (Barnard-Brak et al., 2010; Brinckerhoff et al., 2002; Lightner et al., 2012; Quinlan et al., 2012; Trammell &

Hathaway, 2007). Yet, researchers recognized that the decision to ask for services and supports is a complex and multifaceted process that involves internal and external factors. Nevertheless, research has linked students' internal and external factors with students' disclosure (Hartman-Hall & Haaga, 2002; Quinlan et al., 2012; Trammell & Hathaway, 2007). Students' internal factors that inhibit them from seeking disability support included limitations in goal setting, focus on achieving goals, low self-esteem, and personal beliefs about their disabilities (Cawthon & Cole, 2010; Ferri, Connor, Solis, Valle, & Volpitta, 2005; Trammell & Hathaway, 2007).

External factors include creating environments that encourage students to share information about their needs and seek accommodations (e.g., Hartman-Hall & Haaga, 2002; Quinlan et al., 2012). To address the issue of students not disclosing their disabilities, Quinlan et al. (2012) call for social justice and empowerment; they state that instructors must create equal access to all students and understand their learning differences. "When an instructor accommodates all, everyone in the class becomes empowered" (Quinlan et al., 2012, p. 230). However, many studies found that some instructors explain classroom policies and syllabus rigidly that imply that instructors are neutral regarding accommodations. These actions from instructors create a first impression that intimidates students from disclosing their learning needs and asking for help (Hartman-Hall & Haaga, 2002; Quinlan et al., 2012). In addition, the negative attitudes of many faculty members coupled with insufficient knowledge of regulations pertaining to disability issues and how disability can impact students' academic performance also affects students' decisions to disclose (Cawthon & Cole, 2010; Hartman-Hall & Haaga, 2002; Quinlan et al., 2012).

Self-advocacy

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (1973) and Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (2008) delineate the responsibility for students in post-secondary education to identify themselves, provide documentation, and request accommodations (Field et al., 2003; Getzel & Thoma, 2008; Madaus & Shaw, 2006, 2004); thus, students with learning disabilities encounter continuous situations where they must advocate and request support for each class they take every semester in order to succeed (Beale, 2005; Field et al., 2003). Self-advocacy skill refers to the ability to know one's self, one's rights and responsibilities, to communicate, to lead, and to know how to succeed in postsecondary settings (Pocock et al., 2002; Test et al., 2005). Students with learning disabilities who have limited self-determination and self-advocacy skills often struggle adjusting to college demands (Field et al., 2003; Hadley, 2006; Palmer & Roessler, 2000). Self-advocacy and self-determination are two constructs, often used interchangeably, that are widely reported in the literature as indicators for students' success in achieving postsecondary education (Field et al., 2003; Walker & Test, 2011; Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2003). Self-advocacy is one component of the global self-determination construct (Field et al., 2003; Schreiner, 2007); as a result, a person with low self-determination may not know their strengths and needs and, accordingly, may not seek help.

Barriers to Self-advocacy

A review of literature indicates that when students request accommodations, they often face embarrassing, frustrating, and stigmatizing consequences that are the result of ineffective accommodations (Kurth & Mellard, 2006; Stein, 2013), negative attitudes by

faculty members (Quinlan et al., 2012), and an insufficient awareness of students'

disabilities and legal rights by faculty members (Bolt et al., 2011; Lock & Layton, 2001;

Quinlan et al., 2012). Encountering these situations reduces the opportunities for students

to advocate for their rights and access needed supports (Field et al., 2003) A consensus in

the literature found that students with learning disabilities enter colleges and universities

with limited understanding of their disabilities and how their disabilities impact their

learning (Getzel & Briel, 2006; Getzel & McManus, 2005; Getzel & Thoma, 2008;

Skinner, 2004). This lack of understanding also extends to a lack of knowledge of

effective accommodations and how to request them (Janiga & Costenbader, 2002; Palmer

& Roessler, 2000).

Self-awareness: A Sub skill of
Self-advocacy

Janiga and Costenbader (2002) surveyed administrators and special education

coordinators who provide supports for students in various postsecondary settings.

Respondents reported that students with learning disabilities enter colleges and

universities unaware of their own strengths and weaknesses, ignorant of needed

accommodations, and are heavily dependent on their parents or special education

teachers. In an interesting contradiction with the literature, Skinner (2004) found that low

knowledge of needed accommodations and legal rights also existed in individuals with

learning disabilities who successfully graduated from college.

Accommodations and Supports

As mentioned earlier, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (1973) and Americans

with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (2008) require colleges and universities to provide

"reasonable accommodations" that facilitate students' with disabilities access to

academic requirements (Brinckerhoff et al., 2002; Madaus & Shaw, 2004). These legal

provisions stress students' access to all campus-wide activities; academic success itself is

no longer the primary goal in colleges and universities as in secondary schools (Gormley,

2007). However, the legal requirement of "reasonable accommodation" is inherently

ambiguous, which has resulted in colleges and universities differing in their interpretation

of how to provide accommodations as well as which accommodations to provide (Belch,

2004; Bolt et al., 2011; Cawthon & Cole, 2010). As a result, disability support service

professionals in postsecondary settings often find themselves to be constrained from

generating a wide range of accommodations for students with learning disabilities

(Palmer & Roessler, 2000). The heterogeneity of learning disabilities constitute of a wide

range of challenges that include, reading, written expression, reasoning, or math

challenges (NJCLD, 1990). Each of these heterogeneous challenges requires different

types of supports and accommodations to which disability support service office have to

determine the appropriate accommodations (Lindstrom, 2007; Ofiesh, Hughes, & Scott,

2004). Along with the vague legal guidance of "reasonable accommodations", the

heterogeneity of learning disabilities complicates the process of creating a unified set of

accommodations to meet their individualized needs to succeed in college settings

(Brinckerhoff, Shaw, & McGuire, 1992).

Types of Accommodations

Different models and approaches have emerged that go beyond the minimal legal

requirements to provide supplemental and customized services to foster success for

students with learning disabilities (Getzel, 2008; Oguntoyinbo, 2012). These approaches

also vary in terms of the types and intensity of accommodations and supports available

(Lindstrom, 2007). There are three categories of supports based on the comprehensiveness of the supports provided. The categories include (a) common services and support, (b) coordinated supports and services, and (c) comprehensive programs of support (Kravets & Wax, 2012). Some services are provided as part of the disability support services offices on campus or from distinct programs that collaborate with disability support offices (Getzel, 2008; Harding, Blaine, Whelley, & Chang, 2006; Oguntoyinbo, 2012). The following section presents types of the supports provided in each category along with an example.

Common services and support. Universities and colleges in this category provide the minimum level of supports required, the most common of which is instructional and test accommodations that are in compliance with federal regulations (Brinckerhoff et al., 2002). The most commonly used instructional and tests accommodations include extended time during tests, a quiet location, note takers, course notes or assignments from instructors, frequent breaks, preferential seating, test read aloud, access to audio reading materials, and early registration (Brinckerhoff et al., 2002; Sharpe, Johnson, Izzo, & Murray, 2005; Stein, 2013). Other common services include assistive technologies that serve as tools to modify the presentation of materials such as scanners, text help software, tape recorders, voice recognition software, and word prediction software (Ofiesh, Rice, Long, Merchant, & Gajar, 2002; Sharpe et al., 2005).

Coordinated supports and services. Universities and colleges in this category charge students with learning disabilities extra fees by offering supplemental services. These services are provided through a partnership with disability support services offices on campus in which students with learning disabilities may receive specific skills courses

or remedial classes to meet their unique needs (Kravets & Wax, 2012; Mull, Sitlington, & Alper, 2001). Institutions that provide these additional services, such as Virginia Commonwealth University's supported education model and University of Arizona's Strategic Alternative Learning Techniques have gained reputations for fostering student success in the classroom across the nation as a result of the services they provide for students with learning disabilities (Getzel, 2008; Oguntoyinbo, 2012). For instance, the supported-education model that Virginia Commonwealth University developed sets an example of supports and services that are integrated within existing services on campus and incorporate services and supports into students' learning routines (Getzel, 2008; Getzel, McManus, & Briel, 2004). These supports include teaching students with learning disabilities study skills such as writing strategies, proofreading strategies, color-coding of information, developing mnemonic strategies, and organizational skills. Students also receive training to develop their self-advocacy and stress management skills, personal skills, and exposed to career exploration activities (Getzel et al., 2004).

Comprehensive programs of support. Structured programs provide the most comprehensive services for students with learning disabilities in which the entire university and college are exclusively geared toward serving students with learning disabilities. Additionally, administrators and staff are all specialized in the area of learning disabilities or related services (Kravets & Wax, 2012). An example of this type of colleges is Landmark College in Vermont, which is the first accredited college across the United States to exclusively serve students with learning disabilities and attention deficit hyperactivity disorders (Kravets & Wax, 2012; Parker & Boutelle, 2009). The emphasis at Landmark College is to teach students with learning disabilities to be

independent and to address their difficulties through coaching services without overly relying on accommodations (Landmark College, n.d.). Coaching services include teaching students to take actions on their own life goals and develop their own systems and strategies through planning, prioritizing, organizing, time management, getting started, maintaining motivation, and self-monitoring (Parker & Boutelle, 2009).

Efficacy of Accommodations

Effective accommodations and supports are those that offer equal access to academic requirements and reduce the impact of students' learning disabilities on their interaction with academic content (Ketterlin-Geller & Johnson, 2006). Among all colleges and universities, the most used accommodation was extended time in exams followed by note takers, faculty course notes, study skills supports, alternative exam formats, and adaptive equipment and technology (Raue & Lewis, 2011). These findings align with the reports of students with learning disabilities of the most used and effective accommodations (Bolt et al., 2011; Kurth & Mellard, 2006; Stein, 2013).

Despite these facts, empirical evidence linking the use of accommodations with college success of students' with learning disabilities is lacking (Lindstrom, 2007; Mull et al., 2001). Emerging evidence exists in the literature pertaining to some instructional approaches and types of supports that are implemented in different colleges. Along with the growing body of the literature that reports students' experiences with accommodations (e.g., Barnard-Brak et al., 2010; Bolt et al., 2011; Cawthon & Cole, 2010; Quinlan, et al., 2012; Stein, 2013), studies that investigate the efficacy of specific approaches and instructional practices do exist, including executive function coaching (Parker & Boutelle, 2009), paired associate learning strategy (Cooper, Lingo, Whitney, &

Slaton, 2011), text-structure strategy (Gaddy, Bakken, & Fulk, 2008; Parker & Boutelle,

2009), mentoring (Brown, Takahashi, & Roberts, 2010), and peer tutoring (Vogel, Fresko

& Wertheim, 2007). Among those approaches and instructional practices, the discussion

of three promising college practices follows.

Three Promising College
Practices

In a landmark study, Brinckerhoff et al. (1992) urged the field to promote the

independence of college-bound students' with learning disabilities: "if the goal of

postsecondary services for students with learning disabilities is to prepare them for adult

life, then training for independence should become the focus of every activity" (p. 425).

Further, Mull et al. (2001) found, through their synthesis literature regarding

postsecondary education for students with learning disabilities, that 65% of articles

reviewed recommended teaching learning strategies in college settings. These calls led a

number of researchers to examine the efficacy of different instructional approaches and

models that were effective with elementary and secondary students, and used explicit

instructions with college-bound students with learning disabilities to foster their

independence and compensatory skills (Allsopp, Minstkoff, & Bolt, 2005; Parker &

Boutelle, 2009). Studies that report the effectiveness of several models and approaches

are sparse as a result of the inconsistency in provisions of college supports to targeted

students. Most of the supports offered to students used strategies that are geared toward

fostering their academic skills and self-determination skills (Allsopp et al., 2005). In a

single-subject study, Cooper et al. (2011) found that teaching students with learning

disabilities through empirically validated approaches of learning strategy instruction such

as Paired Associates Strategy, these students were able to identify, recall, and read information in testing situations.

Allsopp et al. (2005) examined the effectiveness of individualized course strategy instruction that took place in three different colleges and lasted three years. The intervention was tailored to the students' specific needs in which students model several academic and study skills with their instructors, who would then provide feedback. Through mixed method examinations, researchers found that students with learning disabilities who were on academic probation increased their grade point average significantly as a result of the intervention. Moreover, students indicated that the individualized nature of the strategy played a role in their improvement while services at disability support offices did not provide them with the same level of effectiveness due to the lack of individualization.

Although the above studies indicate that explicit instruction is critical to promote the students' college academic performance, Parker and Boutelle (2009) argue that didactic supports such as teaching note taking and test taking may not be sufficient for students who are able to acquire academic content but struggle in their self-regulation skills. Thus, these researchers conducted a program evaluation by soliciting students' perceptions about the impact of executive function coaching on their self-determination skills. The executive function coaching model contrasts with the premises of therapeutic counseling. Coaches guide students to generate solutions for a particular learning challenge through attention to their preferences, beliefs, and ideas. Parker and Boutelle (2009) found that students viewed coaching positively because the model addresses adult needs by promoting their independence and responsibility to make decisions and take actions.

Moreover, coaches help students to refine their goals, increase their self-awareness, promote self-determination, and reduce stress (Costello, & Stone, 2012).

Learning Disability Documentation

Federal regulations allow postsecondary settings to ask students with learning disabilities to present recent documentation showing significant restrictions in ability in order to receive accommodations and supports (Madaus et al. 2010). Given the legal ambiguity, variability and inconsistency among postsecondary settings pertaining to their documentation requirements (Gormley et al., 2005; Sparks & Lovett, 2014), the challenges of obtaining appropriate documentations are well documented in the literature (Madaus et al., 2010; Sparks & Lovett, 2013, 2014).

Providing acceptable documentation can be a challenge for these students because postsecondary documentation often relies on recent, formal evaluations that students may lack when they exit K-12 education. Furthermore, postsecondary settings are not obligated to conduct assessments or pay for students' assessments that are required prior to receiving accommodations and supports in postsecondary institutions (Madaus & Shaw, 2006; Shaw, 2006).

Documentation Requirements

Disability support service professionals can determine the appropriate accommodations for students by relying on information that includes the nature of the disability, specific deficit areas, the disability impact of academic areas, history of accommodations use, and students' strengths (Ofiesh et al., 2004). To follow specific criteria for granting accommodations, guidelines from the Association of Higher Education and Disabilities (AHEAD) and other standardized testing agencies, such as the

Educational Testing Services, typically provide recommendations to colleges regarding

disability documentation (Gormley et al., 2005; Sparks & Lovett, 2014). The Association

of Higher Education and Disabilities' guidelines suggest that colleges and universities

describe students' current level of functioning by collecting multiple sources of

information (Madaus et al., 2010; Shaw, 2012). These guidelines emphasize students'

self-report as the primary source of documentation followed by evaluation of previous

use of accommodations, assessments, IEPs, and a Summary of Performance (Shaw,

2012). Previously, the focus of documentation relied on intelligence and achievement

testing through the discrepancy model of identification. Current guidelines discourage the

use of testing and discrepancies and stress linking successful previous use of

accommodations with the suggested future accommodations to meet the students' current

functioning (Madaus et al., 2010).

Dukes, Shaw, and Madaus (2007) developed a Summary of Performance model

geared towards students with learning disabilities. Sections of the Summary of

Performance included the student test scores, student statement of needs, and reports

containing information regarding the student's academic history, previous

accommodations, rationale for the accommodations being requested, and

recommendations. de Vries and Schmitt (2012) examined the perceptions of 300

disability support professionals about the usefulness of specific sections of the model

Summary of Performance and how the professionals' personal characteristics influenced

their judgments on each section of the Summary of Performance model. Characteristics

included the professionals' level of education, earned degree, discipline, number of years

of experience working in disability services, and type of training they received in

interpreting disability documentation. Findings indicate that regardless of disability support professionals' characteristics, they perceived students' test scores, rationale of accommodations, history of use or success of accommodations, report writer's recommendations, and students' inputs to be very useful if the Summary of Performance is comprehensive in nature (de Vries & Schmitt, 2012). Given the invisible nature of learning disabilities, the accommodation-decision making process should rely on a comprehensive review of the students' documentations that explains the nature and impact of the students' learning disabilities on their learning (Brinckerhoff et al., 2002; Lindstrom & Lindstrom, 2011).

Unfortunately, few institutions rely on AHEAD guidelines and best practices; many institutions rely on recent psycho-educational evaluation reports using standardized tests to determine students' eligibility for supports (Gormley et al., 2005; Madaus et al., 2010; Sparks & Lovett, 2013). Psycho-educational evaluation tools assess intellectual, cognitive, and educational achievement levels of individuals that yield to educational planning. The assessment tools include Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale-III, Kaufman Adolescent and Adult Intelligence Test, and Woodcock-Johnson Tests of Cognitive Abilities and Achievement-Extended (Bell, 2002; Weis, Sykes, Unadket, 2011; Woodcock, McGrew, & Mather, 2001).

Given the uncertainty pertaining to current documentation criteria used among different postsecondary settings, several researchers empirically explored this issue across the nation (e.g., Gormley et al., 2005; Madaus et al., 2010; Sparks & Lovett, 2009a, 2009b; Weis, et al., 2012). According to Sparks and Lovett (2014), Gormley et al. (2005) were the first researchers in the field to investigate learning disabilities

documentation requirements by surveying 104 postsecondary institutions. Gormley et al. (2005) found that approximately half of the institutions required recent documentation that is conducted within three to five years; 39 of the institutions required qualified professionals to provide documentation that includes scores from standardized, norm-referenced tests with recommendations for appropriate accommodations. This study found that more than half of the institutions required aptitude and achievement tests. More than half did not accept students' IEPs or Section 504 plans from their secondary school as adequate documentation. Additionally, they found that students can obtain accommodations only when they provide evidence of successful previous use of accommodations supported by a psycho-educational report (Gormley et al., 2005).

The aforementioned considerations have spawned further investigations as they have raised issues regarding the diagnostic criteria used to identify students with learning disabilities, the quality of documentation provided, compliance of these documents with the diagnostic criteria that postsecondary institutions identify, and the documentation decision making process to grant accommodations (Madaus et al., 2010; Sparks & Lovett, 2013, 2014). In addition, research indicates that evaluation methods used by evaluators to document learning disabilities are not reliable (Proctor & Prevatt, 2003; Sparks & Lovett, 2009a; Weis, et al., 2012). To support this claim, Sparks and Lovett (2009a) used five different diagnostic approaches for learning disabilities identification to examine test scores of 378 students who were previously identified with learning disabilities. The diagnostic approaches included (a) the discrepancy, (b) the academic impairment, c) the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders model, (d) Response to Intervention, and (e) a developed model of academic impairment

(Dombrowski, Kamphus, & Reynolds, 2004). Interestingly, 55% of the five diagnostic approaches failed to identify the students as having learning disabilities.

In a study by Weis et al. (2012), different university settings were compared to explore the objective criteria for identifying students with learning disabilities. Findings show that students at four-year public college were less likely to meet any criteria of learning disabilities than private and two-year public colleges. Furthermore, students at community colleges were far more likely to meet the comprehensive cognitive criteria whereas students in four-year private colleges were more likely to meet the discrepancy model criteria. Their findings suggest that students with learning disabilities at community colleges possess authentic academic deficiency whereas students at private colleges tend to have higher cognitive ability and average academic achievement level.

College Success of Students with Learning Disabilities

Today, approximately 26% of students with disabilities attend 4-year colleges (Newman et al., 2009) Despite the considerably increase in enrollment rates, completion rates of students with disabilities are consistently lower than the general population (Wessel, Jones, Markle, & Westfall, 2009). Research has identified student persistence as a significant factor that predicts college success for students with disabilities. Of the many factors that can predict students' persistence is their engagement in campus life; this is considered a critical aspect for their learning experience (Agarwal, Calvo, & Kumar, 2014). Higher education studies strongly indicate that students' satisfaction regarding the support offered by institutions as well as their sense of belonging are strong predictors for students' college success (Strauss & Volkwein, 2004). These findings align with those identified by Morris (2002) who concluded that students who participate in

extra-curricular activities in which they develop social interactions and bond with peers are more likely to persist through college. Consistent findings exist regarding persistence factors for college students with disabilities (Boutin, 2008; Getzel, 2008; Wessel et al., 2009).

Through quantitative measures, Mamiseishvili and Koch (2011) aimed to identify factors that influenced the persistence of students with disabilities in United States higher education. They found a relationship between students' social integration and their persistence through college. They also found that students who never participated in any academic or social activities (e.g., interact with faculty, meet with academic advisor, school clubs, school sports) were less likely to stay in college.

It is important to note that among college students with disabilities, students with learning disabilities compose a higher proportion of the participants sampled in the study. Numerous researchers have used students' voices to report factors that facilitate academic success and form students' academic identity. Researchers have found that problem solving, goal setting, self-management skills, and innate desires to succeed are components of successful college students with learning disabilities (Anctil, Ishikawa, & Scott, 2008; Barnard-Brak et al., 2010; Garner, 2008; Gerber & Reiff, 1991; Getzel & Thoma, 2008; Thoma & Getzel, 2005). For example, in a study investigating the experiences of individuals with learning disabilities who successfully graduated from college, Skinner (2004) found that through students' awareness of their own disabilities and use of compensatory strategies to address their weaknesses, students were able to address college academic demands.

Issues of perseverance are well documented in the literature. Successful students with learning disabilities are risk takers in which they engage in trials and errors that helped them to shape their understanding of themselves and navigate success through unsuccessful experiences (Getzel & Thoma, 2008; Thoma & Getzel, 2005). In an interesting study, Anctil et al. (2008) developed an academic identity model based on students' narratives that explained the developmental process of students' persistence, competence, and career decision making to create a strong sense of self-realization. Through students' understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses, they were able to request and access accommodations and understand which accommodations meet their unique needs.

Furthermore, among all other factors, possessing a strong support system was a salient characteristic of successful college students with learning disabilities. Through qualitative studies, students state that the encouragement, guidance, and support from families, friends, instructors, and academic support personnel played a critical role forming their success in college (Dowrick, Anderson, Heyer, & Acosta, 2005; Gerber & Reiff, 1991; Skinner, 2004). Additionally, developing strong relationships with professors, establishing friendships with peers, and seeking out service support were other elements that led to successful college experiences (Getzel & Thoma, 2008; Thoma & Getzel, 2005). In sum, it is noteworthy that students' self-determination and self-advocacy skills, along with access to accommodations, are the three main factors that researchers identify for the success of college students with learning disabilities.

Unique Challenges Faced by
International Students

International undergraduate students with learning disabilities face two major

challenges when they begin their academic programs in higher education in the US:

becoming identified as a student with a learning disability and being an English language

learner (Korbel et al., 2011; Pellegrino et al., 2011). Other challenges revolve around

external and internal factors that students with learning disabilities encounter as they

pursue United States higher education. External factors are institutional in nature; these

include the requirements of documentation in order to receive disability support services

as well as the variety of supports that are available in different postsecondary settings.

International undergraduate students may struggle to meet documentation requirements

held by United States postsecondary education institutions. They may not have prior

documentation of disability before their enrollment to United States colleges and may

lack the knowledge on how to acquire proper documentation.

Internal factors are related to self-determination skills, in particular self-advocacy

skills, students' understanding of their own disability and self-disclosure skills. Higher

education institutions in the United States frequently emphasize the need for college

students with learning disabilities to demonstrate a high level of self-determination skills

in order to access needed supports (Beale, 2005; Field et al., 2003; Hadley, 2006; Palmer

& Roessler, 2000). However, for many international undergraduate students, this can be a

significant cultural challenge.

In many non-Western cultures, disability is often significantly associated with

social stigma (Crabtree, 2007; Gharaibeh, 2009). The extent to which international

undergraduate students belong to a non-Western culture significantly affects how they

advocate for themselves and access disability services. There is a dearth of research into the educational and cultural adjustments that international undergraduate students with learning disabilities have to make. Thus, in the following sections issues regarding cultural differences, language proficiency, and social stigma in non-western cultures that affect international undergraduate students are discussed.

Cultural Differences: Collectivism
vs. Individualism

A dominant philosophy within United States education is the assumption that students' performance, school persistence, and well-being are based on great autonomy, strong internalization, and intrinsic motivation that underlie self-determination skills, based on the theory of self-determination (Levesque, , Zuehlke, Stanek & Ryan, 2004; Miserando, 1996; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Yet, many international undergraduate students who represent cultures that do not adopt the individualistic principles that exist in higher education in the United States may find it difficult to fulfill individual-oriented demands such as self-determination skills.

Although self-determination theory argues that psychological needs for autonomy and competence are universally shared (Chirkov, Ryan, Kim, & Kaplan, 2003), other researchers contend that principles of self-determination are not equally reinforced in collectivistic cultures as emphasized in individualistic cultures (Leake & Black, 2005; Leake et al., 2006). However, individualistic and collectivistic cultures place a very different emphasis on self-determination skills stemming from the different values, beliefs, and behaviors that form each type of culture. In order to address differences stemming from cultural issues, researchers have attempted to identify distinctions

between individualistic and collectivistic values (Leake & Black, 2005; Leake & Cholymay, 2004; Leake et al., 2006).

Individualistic cultural identity refers to the communities in which the ties between individuals are loose. The expectations of individuals are to take care of themselves and their immediate family (Hofstede, 1980). Specifically, individualistic cultures expect individuals to be independent, pursue individual rights, set and accomplish personal goals and interests, express personal needs and desires, and adhere to one's own values and beliefs (Leake et al., 2006; Niles, 1998; Yamauchi, 1998). Conversely, characteristics associated with collectivism identify communities in which individuals are tied into strong, unified groups. Throughout their lifetime, individuals continue to protect each other in exchange for loyalty (Hofstede, 1980). Individuals possessing collectivistic values and beliefs are group-oriented as interdependent members of a group such as family, immediate friends, neighborhood, and tribe. Collectivistic behaviors include obeying and respecting authority, working with a group to achieve common goals, and holding to a group traditions, beliefs, and values (Leake et al., 2006; Niles, 1998; Yamauchi, 1998). Following the individualistic-collectivistic distinction developed by Hofstede (1980), individualistic values are mostly expected and emphasized in North America, Europe, and Australia while interdependence and collective identities representing collectivistic values are mostly demonstrated in the Middle East, South America, and some parts of Asia. Many international undergraduate students come from cultures that are more collectivist than individualistic (Leake, 2012). In the following section, the impact of collectivist culture on the development of self-determination skills is explored.

Self-determination and Collectivism
for Students with Disabilities

The literature of secondary transition for students with disabilities has shown that self-determination and self-advocacy skills are a strong predictor and a key for college success for students with learning disabilities (Field et al., 2003; Getzel & Thoma, 2008; Thoma & Getzel, 2005; Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2003). Within an individualistic culture, the emphasis on personal self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with learning disabilities lays considerable responsibility on the students to initiate requests and to advocate for supports and accommodations (Leake & Black, 2005). Self-determination construct is culturally loaded notion that is constructed based on individualistic perspective which places high priority on personal autonomy and independence (Leake, 2012; Leake & Black, 2005; Leake et al., 2006). For individuals to be self-determined in an individualized-oriented context, they are expected to independently set goals, make decisions, solve problems, and have well-developed skills of self-evaluation, self-observation, self-awareness, and self-advocacy (Black, Mrasek, & Ballinger, 2003).

Researchers suggest that in order to effectively develop self-determination skills, individuals must possess the capacity to acquire the attitudes, knowledge and skills required for specific social contexts and they must receive the opportunity to develop these skills by being in a social context that fosters and encourages such skills without interference (Field et al., 1998; Leake & Black, 2005). However, some students with learning disabilities who are from collectivistic backgrounds may lack both the capacity and the opportunity to develop self-determination skills due to fundamental collectivistic values that stress determining and fulfilling decisions and goals within a family.

Collectivistic-oriented individuals are expected to be group-oriented instead of being individual-oriented. It is assumed that individuals will accept decisions made by authority figures without question and set goals that are suitable to the welfare of the family instead of setting personal goals (Leake & Black, 2005; Santiago & Tarantino, 2002).

A critical dimension of behaving in a self-determined manner is to be able to self-advocate. College students who have learning disabilities need to develop self-awareness of their disability, self-acceptance of their disability, as well as knowledge of their rights and the resources available (Field et al, 2003; Janiga & Costenbader, 2002; Palmer & Roessler, 2002). Further, they need to be able to express their needs in order to access supports.

Students from individualistic cultures, on the other hand, often express personal opinions, pose personal questions, and discuss their needs with others (Leake & Black, 2005). College students with learning disabilities who are from collectivistic cultural backgrounds are more likely to be challenged to demonstrate self-advocacy skills due to their inherent cultural values. These values might inhibit them from disclosing personal challenges or seeking support from individuals perceived to have higher authority (Hampton, 2000; Leake et al., 2006). This emphasis on individual responsibility for demonstrating self-determination and self-advocacy skills requires students to independently acknowledge their needs and kinds of supports and accommodations to compensate for their learning disabilities. These individualized-oriented contexts may be prejudiced against ethnic minorities, including international undergraduate students, which unfairly impacts students' access to needed supports and accommodations due to the inherent conflict with these students' cultural backgrounds (Reid & Knight, 2006).

Social Stigma

Goffman (1963) proposed that stigma toward disability is a socially constructed reaction concerning the deviation from agreed-upon social norms. Goffman further posits that, in the case of a disability, the social stigma is constructed based on perceptions rather than focusing on functional limitations of individuals with disabilities (Saetermoe, Scattone, & Kim, 2001). Thus, disability is a concept that is subject to current societal views and perceptions that vary considerably across cultures (Meyer, 2010; Reid & Knight, 2006). Social stigma exists across racial groups, religious affiliations, educational levels, and income levels. In cultures where disability is stigmatized, negative attitudes can lead to judgmental behavior and discrimination against individuals with disabilities (Lam, Tsang, Chan, & Corrigan, 2006). The following discussion regarding social stigma of disability will focus on non-western societies where collectivistic values are more emphasized.

Middle-Eastern cultures. Despite the fact that most Middle Eastern countries are gradually adopting globalized cultural standards, Middle Eastern cultures are deeply rooted in tribal structure. These roots emphasize that the self-image of the tribe is of the utmost importance; thus, individuals within the tribe are highly sensitive to other's opinions, views, criticisms, disapproval, and any shame that may impact the tribe's good name (Gharaibeh, 2009). Within this social context, individuals with disabilities may be held responsible for negatively affecting the tribe's self-image and external reputation. "A tribe's honor, reputation, and social standing depend on certain qualities that are thought to be passed on from generation to generation. Genetic defects and congenital disabilities are stigmatizing because they diminish the tribe's social standing"

(Gharaibeh, 2009, p. 71). An upshot of this stigma of disability is the use of the words that describe disability in Arabic. These are similar to the American slang term "retarded" and literally mean "handicap, hindrance, cause for delay" (Gharaibeh, 2009, p. 71). Consequently, due to the social stigma attached to disability in the Middle Eastern societies, individuals with disabilities are often devalued (Crabtree, 2007).

Asian cultures. Non-western cultures are mostly formed by strong religious beliefs that shape the social reasoning and thought processes of individuals within these societies. For example, Asian cultures are formed by strong social values that emphasize stable relationships with society by maintaining social harmony, order, and equal responsibilities. Based on these values, individuals do not exist alone but are perceived to be blended within a harmonic group. Asian cultures stress that individuals accept their roles in society as these are handed down by fate (Saetermoe et al., 2001). Given these values, family responsibility that is the most important group in Asian societies is confront by feeling of shame and guilt.

Asian families who have a family member born with a disability may feel considerable shame and guilt; families with a disabled child are seen as being responsible for disturbing the social norm. Exhibiting behaviors outside what is considered to be normal in society, for example, not speaking clearly or requiring a wheelchair, is inappropriate and brings shame to the family (Geaney, 2004). Given Asian values regarding harmony and responsibility toward the whole community, disability is seen as disharmony and, accordingly, is hardly tolerable in Asian culture (Saetermoe et al., 2001).

Attitudes towards disabilities. Cross-cultural studies have explored the nature of social stigma in non-western societies. In a multi-phase comparative study that examined differences in attitudes toward disabilities across ethnic groups (Asian, African-American, Hispanic-American, and European American), Saetermoe et al. (2001) found that individuals who represented Asian backgrounds were more likely to have negative, stigmatizing attitudes towards individuals with disabilities. Additionally, researchers found that Asians frequently desire to keep social distance from individuals with disabilities and are unable to differentiate between individuals with physical disabilities from those with mental illness. The researcher also examined whether participants' birth place influenced their attitudes toward disabilities. They found that Asian-American participants who were born in the United States had less stigmatizing attitudes compared with participants who were born in Asia.

In a widely cited comparative study, Westbrook, Legge, and Pennay (1993) compared Chinese, Italian, German, Greek, Arabic, and Anglo Australian individuals regarding their attitudes toward social distance from individuals with disabilities. They found that Germans were less likely to distance themselves from interacting with individuals with disabilities, while participants from Greece, China, and Arabic speaking countries were most likely to avoid social interaction with individuals with disabilities. Westbrook et al. (1993) concluded that collectivistic countries compared with individualized countries are more likely to stigmatize individuals with disabilities.

Academic Challenges Unique to
International Students

In addition to the considerable transition of attending a United States university for the first time, international undergraduate students face two unique academic

challenges: issues related to language proficiency and a radically different learning culture (Hall, 2013; Heyn, 2013; Kwon, 2009; Yeh & Inose, 2003). These two issues may potentially create distinctive difficulties for international undergraduate students with learning disabilities that may not be easily recognized by educators in postsecondary education settings. The following section will discuss social and academic challenges associated with language-related difficulties and students' adjustment to different academic cultures.

Language proficiency. Being proficient in the English language has a direct impact on students' ability to succeed academically and to engage socially with their American peers (Andrade, 2006; Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2010; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Research has shown that language proficiency influences and is influenced by the frequency of social interactions between second language speakers and English speaking peers as language proficiency is related to different aspects of cultural adjustment and adaptation (Araujo, 2011; Gomez, Urzua, Glass, Payne, & Zabriskie, 2014; Olivas & Li, 2006; Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006; Swagler & Ellis, 2003; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Yeh and Inose (2003) found that high frequency use of English and the extent to which international students feel comfortable speaking in English predicted lower stress levels and better academic performance among international students. Parallel with this, research has found that students with high English ability level are less likely to face cultural adaptation problems (Poyrazli, Kavanaugh, Baker, & Al-Timimi, 2004). Conversely, several studies have established a correlation between lack of language proficiency and psychological challenges including anxiety and depression. International undergraduate students with low frequency language use and a lack of social interactions

with American peers were found to have higher levels of anxiety and lower levels of self-esteem (Dao, Lee, & Chang, 2007; Swagler & Ellis, 2003).

Low language proficiency presents obstacles that impact academic performance in writing assignments, oral and written exams, understanding lectures, and the ability to seek further explanations (Hall, 2013; Heyn, 2013; Mori, 2000). International undergraduate students have attributed their passive level of participation in class activities to weak language skills, nervousness, and lack of confidence (Robertson, Line, Jones, & Thomas, 2000; Wenli, 2011). In a study that explored the perceptions of university professionals (e.g., professors, department administrators, and deans), it was found that English proficiency was the primary challenge impacting international undergraduate students' academic achievements (Trice, 2003).

The majority of studies that examined the impact of language proficiency on students' overall academic and social adaptation utilized students self-reports, raising questions whether research results capture actual language abilities or students' internal perceptions. Researchers have suggested that many international undergraduate students may have low self-perception regarding their language proficiency which may not reflect their actual language capabilities (Lin & Betz, 2009; Swagler & Ellis, 2003). Wenli (2011) found that international undergraduate students often avoided participating in class activities despite of their content knowledge due to fear of embarrassment. Swagler and Ellis (2003) argue that international students' low language proficiency may be self-perceived rather than actual demonstration of poor language capability. Lastly, Kwon (2009) states that "international students who attended English as second language

programs were more likely to feel intimidated and isolated in English speaking classes"
(p. 1032).

Disparities in educational expectations. Another aspect that has been shown to impact international undergraduate students' acculturation is the difference in learning styles between their home countries and the United States. International undergraduate students must adjust to academic assumptions and expectations that are unfamiliar and often unspoken in order succeed in United States colleges. For many international undergraduate students, the rigorous demands of the United States higher education system present an academic culture shock (Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006; Wenli, 2011).

Two qualitative studies explored the experiences of Middle Eastern students who study at United States universities. These studies revealed that many students attributed their academic challenges at United States universities to insufficient academic preparation, including low academic demands and lack of rigor at the secondary level. These students stated that ineffective teaching strategies and methods employed by their secondary school teachers failed to prepare students for the rigorous academic demands emphasized in United States colleges (Hall, 2013; Heyn, 2013).

International undergraduate students have indicated that the amount of reading and writing assignments that are expected from them in United States college classes present considerable academic challenges. Robertson et al. (2000) conclude that the main academic challenges international undergraduate students encounter include lack of critical thinking skills, difficulties comprehending spoken English, and weak writing skills. Andrade (2006) suggests that, " because educational systems and ways of thinking

are cultural, professors often fail to recognize the complexity of language issues

confronting foreign students, particularly those associated with writing" (p. 138).

Coupled with inadequate prior preparation, international undergraduate students

must cope with the disparities of the expectations placed on them by the educational

systems of the United States and that in their home countries. Research has indicated that

the demands imposed by the United States education system adds to the students'

challenges; class requirements that range from increased writing demands, participation

in classroom discussions, and frequent content testing all represent a different

instructional style than international undergraduate students may be used to (Mori, 2000;

Onabule & Boes, 2013). American instructional strategies that stress oral discussions and

in-class participation can be an academic shock for international undergraduate students

who are used to being passive recipients of knowledge and whose previous education

valued reading skills rather than conversational skills (Sherry et al., 2010; Wenli, 2011).

Many international undergraduate students lack sufficient executive functioning skills

that promote learning how to learn, critical thinking, and problem solving skills that are

not adequately emphasized in their education system. This may be due to a teacher-

centered approach that is prevalent in other educational systems (Smith & Abouammoh,

2013). Wenli (2011) has attributed the low class participation of Chinese students to the

educational culture emphasized in China. International undergraduate students who

represent Asian educational cultures, such as China and Taiwan, are "usually taught to be

compliant, remain quiet in class, and withhold expressing their thoughts or asking

questions until invited to do so by their teachers" (Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006, p. 422).

However, students who are quiet and who do not actively participate in United States

college classes are often seen by professors as passive learners, who are inattentive and possibly incapable (Wenli, 2011).

Lack of Appropriate Identification

Many international undergraduate students who have learning disabilities enroll in United States colleges and universities without having prior disability identification in their home countries. This raises a concern regarding the availability of the types of identification tools used to identify students with learning disabilities in their native countries. Many international undergraduate students come from countries that lack standardized tests to identify learning disabilities (AlSulaiman & AlQafari, 2014; Farrar, 2014; Sideridis, 2007). In a study investigating current assessment practices to identify students with learning disabilities in public schools in Saudi Arabia, AlSulaiman and AlQafari (2014) found a significant lack of formal assessments to support the identification procedures. This limitation led to a heavy reliance on informal assessments (e.g., screening tools and curriculum based measurements) to identify students and to design instructional goals.

Professionals in adult education systems are charged with appropriately assessing and identifying challenges stemming from students' English language proficiency (Harrison & Krol, 2007). However, there are few valid identification tools available which can be used to ascertain whether English language learners have language-learning disabilities (Klingner & Artiles, 2006; Wagner et al., 2005). Research suggests that educators in adult education institutions frequently lack competencies to accurately identify English language learners who may be at risk of learning disabilities (Limbos & Geva, 2001). Also, there is a lack of consensus regarding how to operationalize a reliable

and valid method to identify learning disabilities (Harrison & Krol, 2007; Wagner et al., 2005).

The aforementioned issues present consequences regarding the support needed for international undergraduate students with learning disabilities. International undergraduate students may not receive the support they need due to the lack of proper documentation showing that they have learning disabilities and require special attention. Research has clearly indicated undergraduate students with learning disabilities who do not receive support are at risk of academic failure (Fichten et al., 2014; Troiano, Liefeld, & Trachtenberg, 2010). These issues provide a critical need to identify international undergraduate students with learning disabilities in order to intervene and support their needs.

Need for Research

The reviewed literature in this chapter provides an overview to understanding the challenges and the needs of international undergraduate students with learning disabilities. Barriers impacting students' access to needed supports and accommodations were discussed. These barriers include documentation issues and students' self-identification and self-advocacy issues. Added to these issues for international undergraduate students are the different educational, social, and cultural contexts to which international undergraduate students need to adjust.

An attempt was made to find resources that address the needs of international undergraduate students with learning disabilities. No studies have been found to address this need; only two studies were found that address the topic of international undergraduate students with disabilities in higher education (e.g., Korbel et al., 2011;

Soorenian, 2011), however, neither of these addressed learning disabilities. There is an urgent need to explore the needs of international undergraduate students who have been identified with learning disabilities. The following section briefly discusses the need for further research.

Documentation issues. Federal regulations mandate postsecondary settings to ask students with learning disabilities to present recent documentation that demonstrate significant restrictions in academic ability in order to receive accommodations and supports (Dukes et al., 2007; Madaus et al., 2010). International undergraduate students with learning disabilities can be challenged to provide acceptable documentation because universities often require documentation that relies on recent, formal evaluations, which students may lack (Madaus & Shaw, 2006; Shaw, 2006). Despite the available financial support, some international undergraduate students may be unable to afford obtaining assessment to document their learning disabilities (Pellegrino et al., 2011). Madaus et al. (2010) called future researchers to examine how disability support service office professionals determine eligibility decisions for college students with learning disabilities. Because there is a general lack of research into the needs of international undergraduate students with learning disabilities, it is also important to understand how disability support services professionals grant accommodations for international undergraduate students with learning disabilities, especially those who may lack prior identification and, thus, no disability documentation.

Challenges to self-advocacy. Research has shown that students with learning disabilities who have limited self-determination and self-advocacy skills often struggle in adjusting to college demands (Field et al., 2003; Hadley, 2006; Palmer & Roessler,

2000). Research has shown that students with learning disabilities often are incapable of describing their disabilities and may lack knowledge of legal rights (Izzo & Lamb, 2003; Triano, 2003; White, Summers, Zhange, & Renault, 2014). In her study of international undergraduate students with disabilities, Soorenian (2011) found that many were unable to express their need for accommodations. Specifically, she discovered that many international undergraduate students were unaware of available disability supports at their universities, or that they could access these supports. Given these challenges, there is a need for research to explore how international undergraduate students with leaning disabilities advocate for their needs.

Challenges to self-disclosure. Lack of self-awareness along with fear of stigma that is related to disclosing their disability may cause students to avoid accessing needed supports and accommodations (Barnard-Brak et al., 2010; Collins & Mowbray, 2005; White et al., 2014). Consistent with this, Soorenian (2011) found that international undergraduate students with learning disabilities did not disclose their disabilities because they felt it was culturally inappropriate to do so during classroom instruction. Soorenian (2011) calls for future research to examine the experiences of international undergraduate students with disabilities regarding the barriers they face in accessing accommodations. This includes exploring and comparing the perceptions of students with the perceptions of disability support service professional with regard to challenges associated with self-disclosure and self-advocacy.

This study examined gaps in the literature regarding challenges that international undergraduate students face when it comes to accessing disability supports and accommodations in post-secondary education. The current study provided a better

understanding of the supports that this unique group of undergraduate students needs in order to succeed in United States colleges and universities. Specifically, this study explored identification procedures used to identify international undergraduate students with learning disabilities, the unique challenges that these students face in accessing supports, and how the students self-advocate for their unique support needs.

Summary

In conclusion, the reviewed literature provides a conceptual framework to understand issues concerning international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities studying at United States universities. Four main areas are seen to potentially impact students' college experiences as well as identifying them. First, issues associated with second language acquisition, language-based learning disabilities, and issues related to the students' first language proficiency might affect how international undergraduate students are identified with learning disabilities. This issue is significant because the learning disabilities identification process is based on exclusionary criteria. Second language acquisition issues must be ruled out in order for students to be identified with true learning disabilities. Second, many international undergraduate students may find it challenging to self-advocate for their academic needs, as self-disclosure runs counter to students' cultural backgrounds. Third, the documentation requirements at United States universities can be a barrier for many international undergraduate students, who demonstrate characteristics of learning disabilities yet who may lack prior acceptable identification. And finally, international undergraduate students face unique challenges based on their native culture; these challenges include cultural assumptions about disability and self-advocacy, educational expectations and preparation, and

language proficiency. Overall, the reviewed literature suggested exploring the

experiences of international undergraduate students who received learning disabilities

identification while studying at United States universities.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The primary goal of this study was to explore the experiences of international undergraduate students who were identified with learning disabilities and enrolled into United States universities through the perspectives of disability support office professionals, international education office advisors, and students themselves. Through a phenomenological qualitative research design, the approaches that were available for meeting and supporting the needs of international undergraduate students with learning disabilities were investigated. To ensure a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, the following section portrays a discussion of the epistemology and theoretical perspective guiding the investigation process followed by a detailed explanation of participants, sampling procedures, data collection methods, data analysis procedures, and techniques to enhance research rigor.

Research Questions

The following research questions were identified to guide this study:

Q1   From the perspective of disability support center professionals, what are the unique needs of international undergraduate students with learning disabilities?

Q2   From the perspective of advisors at the university center for international education, what are the unique needs of international undergraduate students who may have learning disabilities?

Q3   What is the identification process for international undergraduate students who may be suspected of having learning disabilities?

Q4   How do international undergraduate students identified with learning disabilities become aware of their learning disabilities?

Q5   How do international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities advocate for themselves?

Epistemology

As Crotty (2003) stated, it is imperative for researchers to justify the selection of certain methodologies and methods being used. To do so, Crotty identified four basic elements of social science research that guide the research process. These include epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology, and methods. The epistemology was the philosophical foundation that allowed researchers to determine the nature and the roots of the knowledge that researchers seek to understand and to identify what kinds of knowledge are valid, possible, and sufficient (Crotty, 2003; Schwandt, 2007). In this study, constructionism was the fundamental perspective that guided this study. This perspective stressed that knowledge, meaning, and truth are not found externally; rather, these concepts were constructed and transferred based on human interactions between individuals and within their social contexts. Thus, there was no single truth; instead, the different ways that individuals make sense of their experiences were equally valid and deserving of equal respect. The emphasis of constructionism suggested that individuals attempted to make sense of their world and different epistemological reflections were created by focusing on "the meaning-making activity of the individual mind" (Crotty, 2003, p. 58). Through this lens, knowledge was not passively obtained. It was developed and constructed by human beings as they made sense of their interactions with their worlds (Maclellan & Soden, 2004; Yilmaz, 2008). These constructed meanings became

social constructs because humans' thoughts and the way they observed and made sense of things were influenced and shaped by their cultures (Crotty, 2003).

In this study, disability support service office professionals, advisors at the center of International Education, and international undergraduate students with learning disabilities shared their experiences of working with--or being--international students with learning disabilities, using their own words and stories. They had been given the opportunity to verify and check whether I accurately captured their responses. Through participants' shared perspectives, I was able to uncover these constructed meanings and interpret them within the context of the study. By collecting and comparing participant statements, I was able to develop knowledge of the phenomenon under study.

Theoretical Perspective

The theoretical perspective of a study provided an underlying structure that fundamentally supported the research methodology and thus created a context of a logical research process (Merriam, 2009). This perspective was the lens that guided my attempts to understand and explain certain concepts associated with the societal context and individual members' actions. This lens helped me to determine which methodology was appropriate for obtaining the answers to study questions, as well as to frame the questions themselves. Crotty (2003) described the theoretical perspective in the following way: it is "how we know what we know" (p. 8).

Interpretivism as a theoretical framework of this study aligned with the constructionism standpoint as both were often used interchangeably (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Merriam, 2009). According to the principles of interpretivism, there were multiple realities that wre originated culturally and historically. Interpretations

of meanings were assumed to be constructed socially and experientially in an intersubjective manner through individuals' interactions. The behaviors and actions of individuals were guided by assumptions developed through their interactions with their environment. This was an ongoing process, as individuals modify meanings as a result of their interactions with new meanings (objects) they encounter (Crotty, 2003; Hay, 2011). Through the tenets of interpretivism, researchers are able to obtain meanings, motives, causes, and other experiences with the help of their participants (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988; Neuman, 2000). Thus, social context and the impact of culture fundamentally influence the creation of meanings, which was implicit in the subjective nature of interpretivism.

For this study, I selected interpretivism as a theoretical perspective to uncover aspects associated with supporting the needs of international undergraduate students with learning disabilities that have never being studied. Interpretivism was selected as the most appropriate framework to guide me in capturing the multiple cultural realities of the participants--the different languages, cultural assumptions, and professional standing of participants. I intended to use the experiences shared by participants to better understand their perspectives and assumptions, and thereby to interpret and describe the phenomenon being studied.

Researcher as an Instrument

Through transcendental or psychological phenomenology, Creswell (2013) addresses the possibility that researchers' prior experiences may interfere with their interpretations of the participants' experiences. Thus, researchers must devote more attention to describe the participants' experiences and focus less on their own

interpretations. In order to account for the influence of researchers' prior personal experiences on their interpretation of the phenomenon, I used bracketing (Merriam, 2009). Bracketing refers to when "investigators set aside their experiences, as much as possible, to take a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination" (Creswell, 2013, p. 80). Since the phenomenon that was studied involved the experiences of international undergraduate students who study at United States universities and I am an international student who had encountered different educational and cultural expectations implicit in a United States university, I needed to set aside personal experiences, insights, and perceptions during the investigation of the phenomenon.

Methodological Framework

The goal of this study was to investigate the experiences of international undergraduate students identified with learning disabilities who studied at United States universities. In order to best address the expected outcomes from this study, qualitative inquiry provided an ideal approach to explore the perspectives of the participants. "Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem" (Creswell, 1998, p. 15). This type of research provided researchers an approach to conduct investigations in natural settings, to construct a more comprehensive picture of a phenomenon, and to deliver detailed points of view of the research participants (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative research explores many variables within few cases, which is in contrast with the nature of quantitative inquiry. Moreover, qualitative research approaches allow researchers to interpret different variables and reveal their connectivity,

how they relate to each other, and how these variables function in a holistic form (Merriam, 2009).

Several factors were associated with the targeted sample that this study aimed to explore such as race, language, culture, and disability. "A hallmark of qualitative research today is the deep involvement in issues of gender, culture, and marginalized groups" (Creswell, 2013, p. 51). Therefore, qualitative research was used as an avenue to describe, understand, and interpret the meanings that individuals have constructed regarding their unique experiences (Merriam, 2009).

Qualitative methods could uncover the why and how aspects of a phenomenon that would never be understood solely using quantitative research. According to Pugach (2001), qualitative research is not an alternative approach to quantitative research. Rather, qualitative methods can prove more powerful than quantitative methods when it comes to studying issues related to disability due to the unique perspective of individuals who have disabilities and their low incidence in the population. Ferguson, Ferguson, and Taylor, (1992) claim that qualitative research addresses the underlying belief that experience is socially constructed and the construct of disability is described within the social realm. Qualitative research has the potential to govern practices directed to individuals with disabilities as it provides approaches that investigate salient and complex issues by conveying disciplined narratives that are associated with individuals with disability and their service providers (Pugach, 2001).

The research design selected for this study was a qualitative phenomenological methodology. Phenomenology supports an interpretivist approach, and had been selected as the most appropriate methodology to capture the essence of the research questions.

This approach is often used for research questions that seek to address complex and multivariate factors associated with the phenomenon being investigated (Creswell, 2013; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Using phenomenological methods allows researchers to capture the fundamental essences and the structure of participants' experiences as well as their perspectives and interpretations of the phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). Applying tenets of the phenomenological approach permitted me to deeply explore participants' insights, collect contextual data regarding their experiences, and provided rich descriptions of the phenomenon under investigation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In this study, the phenomenon being studied was an emerging topic within the field of disability research. By capturing the unique experiences and perspectives of participants who lived with, work with, and addressed issues related to the phenomenon, I sought to capture the very essence of the phenomenon being studied. Ultimately, obtaining a deeper understanding of the phenomenon in question may have resulted in the development of emerging practices and policies for this unique population.

Methods

Participants

Three distinct groups of participants were recruited to participate in this study. The first group was international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities who were registered at disability support service offices located in public universities. The second group of participants was comprised professionals who work at the disability support service offices at those universities. The third group was advisors at the International Education Office at these universities who supported the needs of international undergraduate students. The rationale behind selecting the second and third

groups was that these professionals worked predominantly with international

undergraduate students with learning disabilities. The disability support service

professionals provided unique insights regarding the needs of international undergraduate

students with learning disabilities based on their experiences working with this

population. The advisors at the Center of International Education were selected in this

study because they had direct communication and interactions with international

undergraduate students who experienced significant academic challenges. One

psychologist was included in the study due to her role in identifying international

undergraduate students with learning disabilities. The three groups of participants

provided valuable information as they experienced different aspects of the phenomenon

under study.

Selection Criteria

In order to ascertain appropriate participants and sites pertaining to the

phenomenon that were studied, the researcher had to determine the selection criteria for

the study sample. Selection criteria were determined through a process in which the

researcher "creates a list of the attributes essential" to the study (LeCompte & Preissle,

1993, p. 70). These criteria were used to assist the researcher in recruiting appropriate

participants. In order to recruit a sample that could provide insight into the research topic,

systematic planning and preparation were needed.

Selection criteria included three unique participant groups. The selection criteria

for international students with identified learning disabilities included:

1. International undergraduate students who were registered at the disability

    support service offices as eligible recipients of the services provided for

students with identified learning disabilities. The focus on undergraduate

students, particularly, was to explore the transitional issues of these

students from the structured system of high schools to the less structured

environment of postsecondary education settings.

2.   Students' cultural backgrounds reflected non-western cultures such as

Asian and Middle Eastern regions of the world.

Selection criteria for professionals who worked in the disability support service offices

included:

1.   Experience working with international undergraduate students who had

identified learning disabilities.

2.   Experience supporting the needs of international undergraduate students

who were registered and receive accommodations and supports as a result

of their identified learning disabilities.

Selection criteria for professional advisors at centers for international education included

experience working with international undergraduate students in higher education who

may have had identified learning disabilities.

Sample Size

Sample size has played a significant role in quantitative research; however,

determining how many participants to be included in a phenomenological study was

essential in order to capture in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study.

Numerous guiding qualitative research books and articles suggested that a sufficient

number of participates was to be anywhere from 5 to 50 (Dworkin, 2012). Based on

Creswell's (2013) reviews of qualitative studies, the number of participants could range

from one participant to several hundreds, whereas Dukes (1984) stated that 3 to 10

participants was acceptable in phenomenological studies. Given these sample size

variations, the optimal sample size of this study was between 10 to 13 participants based

on the inclusion of three groups of participants. Between 3-6 international students, 4-6

disability support service office professionals, and 2-4 advisors of the Center of

International Education were recruited.

Sampling Procedures

Phenomenological studies tend to include a narrow sampling procedure, reflecting

the unique topics being studied. Locating study participants who meet the established

criteria and experience requirements that address the phenomenon to be studied may

prove challenging given research topic (Creswell, 2013). In order to access the

appropriate sample of participants that would serve the purpose of the study, the

researcher used a qualitative non-probability, purposeful sampling procedure (Creswell,

2013). As indicated in Merriam (2009), "purposeful sampling is based on the assumption

that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must

select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 77). Purposeful sampling or

judgment sampling would permit an understanding of the research problem and the

essence of the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2013).

Settings

The study took place first in disability support service offices that served

undergraduate international students with identified learning disabilities and, second, at

the center for international education that were affiliated with public universities located

in three different states in the United States. The selection of the settings was determined

based on the preliminary information that would be collected regarding the existence of the targeted population. Study participants were recruited from both disability support service offices and center for international education. Data collection was conducted on campus in a space that was most convenient to each participant group.

Data Collection Methods

Multiple forms of data were collected in order to capture the essence of the phenomenon being studied and to ensure triangulation of participant responses (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2005). Data consisted of one-on-one semi-structured interviews, observations, and review of documents. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three groups of participants: disability support service offices professionals, advisors at the Center of International Education, and international students with identified learning disabilities (student participants) in university settings. The review of documents included the researcher's collection of artifacts that would support and triangulate the findings of the interview.

Interviews. The primary source of data in this study was the use of participant interviews that will assist the researcher to capture an in-depth understanding of the needs of international undergraduate students with learning disabilities and how these needs are being addressed from a variety of perspectives. Information obtained from interviews assisted the researcher to uncover the cultural, social, and academic factors associated with the experiences of international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities who study in United States colleges and were eligible to receive disability services. Hence, interviews were utilized to gather participants' thoughts, feelings, interpretations, interactions, and past experiences of the phenomenon being studied.

Interview questions were developed based on the research questions and phrased in a way that is easily understood by all participants (Creswell, 2013).

The use of semi-structured, open-ended questions was employed to maintain the study focus and simultaneously to allow participants to openly discuss and explore issues that neither they nor the researcher may have considered (Merriam, 2009). The use of semi-structured interviews gave participants the opportunity to share their narrative more freely without the frequent interruption of structured questions. According to Nind (2008), when interviewing participants who have learning disabilities, "sometimes direct questions are helpful, and sometimes a natural style of interviewing, which includes probing/leading questions, can form the basis of shared narratives based on 'natural exchanges' (p. 11). Due to the potentially sensitive nature of the topic of this study, individual interviews were selected as the most appropriate form of data collection (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The interview sessions followed an interview protocol developed by the researcher (see Appendix A).

Each of the three groups of participants used a separate list of semi-structured interview questions in order to solicit answers to specific research questions. Questions for the disability support service office professionals were expected to elicit responses to Research Questions 1, 3, 4, and 5. Questions for the advisors at the Center of International Education were aimed to elicit responses to Research Question 2. Questions for international students with learning disabilities were anticipated to elicit responses to Research Questions 3, 4, and 5. These semi-structured interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

Document review. Document examination was a valuable source of data that could convey information regarding the underlying context and background of the phenomenon under study that could provide an understanding of current practices (Mertens & McLaughlin, 1995). The purpose of reviewing documents in this study was to triangulate findings stemming from interviews and observations. For example, one of the topics that professionals were asked to respond to was the process of determining eligibility for international students in order for them to receive supports and accommodations.

To triangulate these responses, a review of the service eligibility process in relevant documents was examined. Document review was the process of systematic examination, analysis, and interpretation of both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) data that were collected from a variety of documents relevant to the phenomenon being studied (Bowen, 2009; Schwandt, 2007). Documents that may be included in the data collection process may take several forms. For this study, documents included and may not have been limited to the disability support service offices webpage at each research site, service eligibility criteria, accommodations for students with learning disabilities, institutional policy and procedures, affiliated resources on campus, brochures, printed or online announced events, flyers, and other relevant information.

In addition to the three data sources mentioned above, the researcher maintained a fieldwork journal (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). The fieldwork journal included recordings of the researcher's experiences in the study settings, along with personal thoughts, ideas, challenges, and reactions regarding the research process itself (Merriam,

2009). In addition to recording details of the study in real time, the journal was used to minimize researcher bias and provide an audit trail for the study.

Data Collection Procedures

This section conveyed how the data collection was accomplished using preliminary site visits, semi-structure interviews, observations, and document review. Before data collection, the researcher obtained the permission of the Institutional Review Board at the University of Northern Colorado to conduct the study (Appendix B). After obtaining study approval, the researcher followed a structured framework to begin the data collection process. A crucial factor concerning qualitative research was to capture an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied from participants who could contribute to developing insights and understanding of the phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). Therefore, a three-phase data collection procedure was followed to ensure capturing the essence of the phenomenon under study. These phases were: (a) identifying research sites, conducting initial site visits and review of relevant documents; (b) recruiting participants; and (c) conducting interviews.

Phase one: Identifying research sites. This phase involved contacting universities located in the Rocky Mountain Region to select appropriate research sites. The researcher first contacted directors of disability support service offices to determine their match to the selection criteria. Second, the researcher contacted advisors at the Center of International Education at each of the identified sites. Site visits were arranged to assist in identifying study participants. According to Merriam (2009), on-site observation was one method that was used to identify study participants that involved informal discussions with potential participants to determine who should be included in

the study. Preliminary interviews were arranged with coordinators at the disability

support service offices and advisors at the Center of International Education. "A

preliminary interview is necessary to determine whether the person meets the criteria for

participating in the study" (Merriam, 2009, p. 105). In the preliminary interviews, the

researcher discussed with the disability support service office directors or coordinators

and advisors at the Center of International Education the purpose, scope, and methods of

investigations, securing space, and obtaining permissions. In addition to the introductory

interviews, the researcher reviewed documents relevant to the study.

Phase two: Recruiting participants. During this phase, the researcher recruited

disability service office coordinators and advisors at the international education office at

the selected university sites. In compliance with the higher education federal regulations

concerning confidentiality regarding student information, the researcher would not have

access to student files. Thus, disability support service office professionals were asked to

assist in recruiting student participants. The professionals were informed about the

procedures regarding the recruitment of international students with learning disabilities at

each site.

Phase three: Conducting interviews. The final phase of the study involved

participant interviews. Before data collection began, the researcher scheduled a time and

place to conduct interviews with each participant. All interviews occurred at a time and

place that was convenient to individual participants. It was anticipated that most

interviews would take place on campus at each research site. The researcher explained

the purpose of the study, confidentiality measures designed to protect the participants,

and information regarding participants' rights to voluntarily withdraw from the study at

any time. Prior to conducting interviews, participants were asked to sign an Informed Consent Form (see Appendix C).

Demographic information. Participants were asked to provide demographic information at the start of each interview (see Appendix D). Disability support service office professionals and advisors at the Center of International Education were asked to provide demographic information regarding their age, gender, ethnicity, work experience with international undergraduate students with disabilities, and the nature of their work. Student participants were asked to provide demographic information about their age, gender, length of time living in the United States, age when identified with a learning disability, and whether they received disability supports (accommodations, modifications, adaptations) prior to the start of their degree program in the United States (see Appendix D). After obtaining demographic information, the interview session began.

Interview procedures. It was anticipated that each interview session would last no more than 90 minutes per session. Interviews were recorded using a digital audio recorder. In addition, the researcher took brief notes to capture significant participant statements, as well as to include the thoughts and reflections of the researcher (Creswell, 2013). These reflections included insights regarding information obtained through the interviews, description of non-verbal behaviors of participants during interviews, and researchers' parenthetical thoughts (Merriam, 2009). These notes were used to ask participants clarifying questions, elicit additional information, and served as field notes for later analysis (Merriam, 2009).

Data Analysis Methods

In this study, a constant comparative method of data analysis was used to interpret the data. Constant comparative method refers to "comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences" (Merriam, 2009, p. 30). Constant comparative methods allowed in assigning categories to identified patterns and determine connection among them as well as it fostered the development of emergent themes (Schwandt, 2007). Through constant comparison method, I implemented a repeated process of comparing the analyzed data with new data until new statements did not bring new information (Boeije, 2002).

The goal of the data analysis process was for the researcher to identify "significant statements" and common themes which emerged from participants' shared experiences. Identifying common themes allowed the researcher to describe the experiences of participants through their "textural description" and explain how participants experienced the phenomenon through their "structural description" (Creswell, 2013, p. 80). During the data analysis stage of the study, I engaged in several steps to consolidate, reduce, and interpret the dataset derived from the participants' experiences and interactions of the phenomenon that was studied (Merriam, 2009). These steps included organizing the data, classifying (coding) the data, and identifying themes that were detailed from the classifications.

Transcribing. The first step of the data analysis process was to transcribe all interviews, reviewed documents, and notes taken from the fieldwork journal. After each interview was completed and transcribed, I read transcriptions and listened to the digitally recorded interviews to check for the accuracy of the transcription. The

transcribed interviews were sent to each participant in which they reviewed their

responses, member check. This member check was used to ensure that the responses

captured from participants were accurate, which would in turn increase the internal

validity of the study. For reviewed documents and fieldwork journal notes, the researcher

combined written and verbal descriptions and reflections in written reports that was used

for later coding and generation of themes.

      Data management. Due to the large amount of data that was derived from

multiple participants across two settings, it was crucial to organize and manage the

collected data. Both Creswell (2013) and Merriam (2009) suggest that researchers must

attend to the necessity of organizing and managing data at the onset of the data collection

process. This would help the researcher be able to retrieve specific pieces of the data after

data collection is completed. This organization process involved assigning electronic files

that were used to sort each data source such as the digitally recorded interviews and

transcriptions, scanned documents, and fieldwork notes.

      NVivo qualitative data analysis software. The proceeding step was used as an

initial step in order to later upload interviews and field notes transcriptions into a

computer-assisted qualitative data analysis, NVivo10 (QSR International, 2014). Once

data were collected, all electronic documents including transcribed interviews and

scanned documents, and fieldwork notes were imported and arranged into distinct files

the NVivo10. The electronic features of NVivo10 will allowed me to manage and

visualize the compiled data set that were stored in one place for ease with the coding

process. Visualizing data facilitated identifying patterns and then group them into codes.

One of the strong features of the NVivo10 is that it allowed me to create codes, add

description to them, and assign a color to them. Once I identified a pattern, they could easily highlight it and import it into the appropriate code. A final use of the NVivo10 concerned the trustworthiness of the study. By saving subsequent versions of data analysis, the researcher can established an audit trail by tracking the steps used during data analysis process (QSR International, 2014).

Coding process. The next step of the data analysis procedure was to identify themes and code the themes and patterns in the collected data, which was the core of qualitative data analysis (Creswell, 2013). "Coding involves aggregating the text or visual data into small categories of information, seeking evidence for the code from different databases being used in a study, and then assigning a label to the code" (Creswell, 2013, p. 184). The coding process consisted of two steps that include open coding and developing themes.

Open coding. Collecting, organizing and coding the data were not necessarily sequential activities. Coding could have occurred at any time in this process. In this step, I coded the sources of data by designating words, letters, and phrases that summarize participant statements. To illustrate, as I was writing field notes, reviewing documents, and conducting interviews, short phrases, marginal notes, or key concepts were developed in order to make sense of the data as it was being collected; this was considered a "rudimentary analysis" (Merriam, 2009, p. 174). During participant interviews, I noted significant and emphasized statements which aided in the process of coding and categorizing themes after data collection has been completed. Throughout this process, coding of significant statements were developed, in what Merriam (2009) refers

to as "open coding" (p. 178). It is worth to mention that developing open coding did alter the research questions, research methods, or interview questions.

Developing themes. Once the researcher had coded significant statements, comments, and relevant pieces of data, the following step was "analytical coding:" clustering relevant and common codes and sorting them into themes (Merriam, 2009, p. 180). Themes "are broad units of information that consist of several codes aggregated to form a common idea" (Creswell, 2013, p. 186). These themes were developed based on the researcher's identification of recurring patterns and regularities among the identified codes. Predetermined themes were developed before analyzing the data using elements derived from the literature and research questions in order to guide the coding process. According to Merriam (2009), assigning clusters of codes into labeled categories could be determined based on an external source, such as the literature, research questions, or the study orientation. "Categories should be responsive to the purpose of the research. In effect, categories were the answers to your research question (s)" (Merriam, 2009, p. 185). However, the researcher needs to be flexible when labeling categories in order to capture the views, experiences, and statements of the study participants (Creswell, 2013).

Qualitative Research Rigor

Ensuring rigor in conducting qualitative research has long been a controversial issue, especially regarding the difficulty in producing valid and reliable qualitative research (Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001). The challenge of ensuring valid and reliable results in qualitative research stems from the endeavor to incorporate both rigor and subjectivity into the qualitative research process (Johnson, 1990). Merriam (2009) referred to this process as ensuring the "trustworthiness" of qualitative findings whereas

Creswell (2013) calls it the validation process. However, both scholars emphasize the importance of producing authentic findings that foster validity and reliability.

Several researchers have discussed the issues of trustworthiness, authenticity, and goodness as criteria to establish rigor in qualitative research (e.g., Eisner, 1991; Emden & Sandelowski, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Marshall, 1990; Whittemore et al. 2001). However, many qualitative researchers adhere to the model that Guba and Lincoln (1989) presented as a "gold standard" for identifying rigor criteria (Whittemore et al., 2001). The following section describes criteria related to trustworthiness that I followed to ensure valid and reliable findings of this study including credibility, transferability, and dependability.

Validation Strategies (Credibility)

Credibility and transferability were used in qualitative research that corresponds to validity concepts used in quantitative research. The term credibility corresponds with the quantitative research term internal validity that refers to providing assertions that the researchers captured with a high degree the participants' views, experiences, and constructions of realities (Merriam, 2009; Schwandt, 2007). Lincoln and Guba (1985) posit that internal validity is a means to ensure the *truth value* in which researchers build confidence regarding their interpretations of the subjects and the contexts within the phenomenon being studied. In other words, qualitative research is credible when accurate descriptions or interpretations of certain human experiences are present which other individuals, who have common experiences, are able to connect with and acknowledge the interpretations to their own (Krefting, 1991; Sandelowski, 1986).

Transferability

Transferability parallels the quantitative term, generalizability, that refers to the extent which research findings can be generalized and applied to other situations, settings, and other individuals (Krefting, 1991; Merriam, 2009). Although ensuring transferability in qualitative research has been questionable, generalization is not seen as an absolute end product of qualitative research; instead, the main purpose of qualitative studies is to present accurate descriptions as possible of a particular phenomenon (Krefting, 1991). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), "the inquirer cannot know the sites to which transferability might be sought, but the appliers can and do." To enhance transferability, the primary researcher ought to provide "sufficient descriptive data" (p. 298).

Reliability

Dependability or reliability in qualitative research refers to the extent to which researchers produce findings that can be consistent and replicated given similar situations (Merriam, 2009). Dependability in qualitative research has been a problematic issue because qualitative research describes human behaviors that are not static. Moreover, the settings being investigated by a qualitative study can be complicated as a result of irrelevant and unexpected variables (Krefting, 1991). Despite the difficulty of ensuring dependability in qualitative researcher, dependability can be enhanced "through careful documentation of procedures for generating and interpreting data" (Schwandt, 2007, p. 263).

A consensus of opinion affirms that qualitative researchers cannot capture an objective reality or truth, nor does qualitative research have transferability as a main

purpose of investigation (Creswell, 2013; Krefting, 1991; Merriam, 2009). Despite the

challenge of generalizing the findings of qualitative research, there were several

strategies (see Table 1) that were employed to increase the validity and the

trustworthiness of the study findings that included triangulation, clarifying researcher

bias, thick description, external audit, and member check (Creswell, 2013; Merriam,

2009).

Table 1

Summary of Strategies to Ensure Rigor

Criteria	Strategy
Credibility	Triangulation
	Researcher Bias
	Member Check
Transferability	Thick Description
Dependability	Triangulation
	Audit Trail

Adopted from Krefting, L. (1991). Rigor in qualitative research: The assessment of
trustworthiness. *The American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, *45*(3), 214-222.

Triangulation. Triangulation is a powerful strategy to ensure trustworthiness in

qualitative findings, especially credibility. This process can be utilized to enhance the

transferability and the dependability of the findings (Krefting, 1991). The concept of

triangulation encompasses the use of several and various data sources, methods,

researchers, and theories to cross-check and confirm data and interpretation (Merriam,

2009). "When qualitative researchers locate evidence to document a code or theme in

different sources of data, they are triangulating information and providing validity to their

findings" (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). Qualitative researchers can converge and corroborate their findings by using different data sources and methods. Using data triangulation techniques, findings can be protected from the bias of using only a single method, source, or a single researcher's preconceptions (Patton, 2002). The triangulation approach that I employed included the use of multiple sources of data that consisted of interviewing more than one group of participants, accessing multiple settings, and by using two methods of data collection: interviews and documents reviews.

Researcher bias. Major critics of the qualitative approach have challenged the subjective nature associated with both data collection and data analysis processes due to the ongoing personal interactions between the researcher and the participants of the study (Patton, 2002). Therefore, an essential element that qualitative inquiry experts emphasize is the clarification of the researcher's ". . . assumptions, experiences, worldviews, and theoretical orientation to the study at hand" (Merriam, 2009, p. 219). Maxwell (2005) further explains that identifying the researcher's perspectives, biases, prior knowledge, and assumptions of the phenomenon is crucial in that it aids to understand the influence of the researchers' assumptions and expectations on the findings and conclusions of the study. The choice of research design, research methodology, theoretical perspective, selected sample, and explanation of the phenomenon are all constitutive of reflexive research (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). For this study, the researcher has identified interpretivism as the theoretical orientation that would influence data collection and data analysis processes.

Other qualitative research experts refer this process as a continuous reflexive process that occurs throughout the research. "A reflexive researcher is one who is aware

of all these potential influences and is able to step back and take a critical look at his or her own role in the research process" (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 274). Thus, I worked to identify my personal stance towards the research topic and participants as well as my potential biases in this study. Since I aimed to explore the experiences of international undergraduate students who receive disability support services at United States universities and the process of qualifying them for these services, my background of the phenomenon, prior experiences, and culture background may influence my interpretations and conclusions. I had a shared background regarding the challenges associated with being an international student pursuing higher education at new cultural and educational systems with very different expectations than their home countries. Additionally, my professional background as a special educator with a background in learning disabilities in postsecondary education settings may have influenced the interpretation and conclusions drawn from this study.

To address the possible influences of the researcher's subjectivity, background, and biases, I undertook the following validity practices to avoid any emerging biases. First, I disclosed my personal information to the study participants. However, information regarding my status as an international student and the goal of my interest in the study was shared. Second, I involved in a continuous dialogue with my research advisers regarding the progression of the study. This dialogue began with discussions regarding the research questions, research design, and methodology, and extended to the data collection and data analysis processes in order to avoid any possible biases. Lastly, I maintained an ongoing reflexive process throughout the study by using a fieldwork

journal to reflect on my feelings, thoughts, reactions, and experiences throughout the study.

Thick description. Thick description was used in order to account for transferability. Thick and rich description involved providing sufficient detail when describing research contexts, meanings, interactions, and reactions that are relevant to the findings of a the phenomenon being investigated (Merriam, 2009; Schwandt, 2007). To provide rich and thick description of the findings, I provided direct quotes and detailed descriptions of the settings and participants. In this way, I enabled readers to create connections and to transfer information to other relevant settings due to the common features (Creswell, 2013).

Member check. Member check was a trustworthiness strategy that was used to account for the credibility, in which researchers solicit study participants to provide their feedback regarding the study findings (Creswell, 2013). "This is the single most important way to ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 111). Following this strategy, I sent interview transcriptions back to the study participants and asked them whether the researcher accurately captured their statements.

Audit trail. Audit trail was a strategy to enhance the reliability of the study. It was a means to authenticate the study findings that involves describing how data were collected and how findings were established. To create an audit trail, I kept a fieldwork journal that contained the reflections, challenges, ideas that emerged during data collection and data analysis processes. Additionally, the use of NVivo10 established and

audit trail by tracking the steps used during data analysis process (QSR International, 2014).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues and concerns could have surfaced at any time during the daily practices associated with any kind of research employing any research design (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Due to the researcher-participant relationship, it was more salient to address ethical dilemmas that might arise as a result of the in qualitative than in quantitative research. "When the research is highly collaborative, participatory, . . . ethical issues become prominent" (Merriam, 2009, p. 230). Researchers must plan certain procedures to protect study participants from any potential physical, psychological, social, economic, or legal harms (Creswell, 2009). To address ethical consideration associated with all research stages, the following procedures were used.

Confidentiality Measures

All digital audio recordings, interview transcripts, and other scanned written materials related to the study were electronically stored on a password-protected computer accessible only me. Written materials, including informed consent forms, documents used for review, and the field journal, were stored in a locked closet for a period of no more than three years (June, 2018). Interview transcripts and other research data was only shared with my research advisors. All data collected will destroyed three years after the study was conducted.

In order to ensure the confidentiality of the participants in this study, each participant was assigned a pseudonym. This pseudonym was used as the only identifier on all documents related to participants, with the exception of the informed consent form,

and was used in lieu of real names on all written materials, including the dissertation and potential articles.

Conducting Sensitive Research

The researcher was mindful of the sensitive nature of the topics being researched in this study, and that student participants may have been double-sensitive as a result of their dual identity of being both an international student as well as being identified with learning disabilities. Individuals with learning disabilities may have had low self-esteem due to past experiences in which their voices were not heard and valued; they may have needed the support of a trusted person during the interview process (Nind, 2008). Furthermore, some participants may have been hesitant to share their personal experiences due to possible cultural stigma of disability (Gharaibeh, 2009; Saetermoe et al., 2001). Thus, developing trust between student participants and me was critical as it provided space for participants to share their insights about their own experiences (Moore, Klingner, & Harry, 2013). To ensure that participants felt safe and heard, I briefly introduced myself and shared my own background as an international student in order to familiarize myself to the participants. Throughout the study, I attempted to address any cultural concerns the student participants had. In instances where interview questions were clear to the participants, I reworded the questions. Also, I avoided using jargon or unfamiliar words during interview sessions. At any time during the study, if a participant became uncomfortable with participating in the study or he/she refused to answer any questions, their decision was respected.

When interviewing individuals with disabilities, Nind (2008) suggests that eliciting narrative statements through open-ended questions may be less limiting to

participants than using a question and answer template. Merriam (2009) cautions that researchers need to consider whether their interview questions might be harmful to the participants. To follow these suggestions, I attempted to address these issues through the use of semi-structured interview questions that provided a starting place for a discussion and offered participants the opportunity to tell their story using their own words. Leading questions was avoided as they might have revealed possible biases or assumptions from the researcher in which it may have restricted participants from honestly sharing their insights (Merriam, 2009). By using sensitive and non-stigmatizing language, I attempted to avoid causing offense. To account for this issue, I ascertained possible stigmatizing, offensive, and biased interview questions by applying a peer-check technique.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of international undergraduate students who were identified with learning disabilities and enrolled into United States universities through the perspectives of three participant groups: disability support office professionals, international education office advisors, and students themselves. A phenomenological qualitative research design was used to explore the approaches that were currently available for supporting the needs of international undergraduate students with learning disabilities. Qualitative methods included use of interviews and document review; the constant comparative method was used to identify patterns and develop themes related to the research questions. To ensure qualitative rigor and trustworthiness, thick description, triangulation and member check were used, and researcher bias was addressed throughout the study. An audit trail was provided through the use of a field journal and qualitative analysis software. Finally, due to the potentially

sensitive nature of this topic, ethical considerations addressed participant confidentiality

as well as creating a safe space for participants to share their perspectives.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate the experiences of international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities who attended universities in the United States. In this study, I intended to describe issues and challenges pertaining to international students with disabilities including their unique needs, how their needs were supported, the identification process, disability awareness, and self-advocacy skills by exploring the perspectives of Disability Support Service (DSS) professionals, Center of International Education (CIE) advisors, and the students themselves. This chapter presents a review of the methodology used including data collection procedures, a description of study participants, a narrative of the study results based on the identified emerging themes, and a summary of the study results and answer to the five research questions based on findings from the study.

The following research questions guided the data collection process:

Q1   From the perspective of disability service office professionals, what are the unique needs of international students identified with learning disabilities?

Q2   From the prospective of support service professionals at university international education centers, what are the unique needs of international students who may be suspected of having learning disabilities?

Q3   What is the assessment and identification process for international students who have learning disabilities?

Q4   How do international students identified with learning disabilities become aware of their learning disabilities?

Q5   How do international students with identified learning disabilities advocate for themselves?

A total of twelve study participants were included in this study. Study participants included five professionals who worked in three different DSS offices, three advisors at three different CIE offices, one psychologist, and three international undergraduate students, two with identified learning disabilities and one with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). These participants were identified based on specific criteria for each participant group. The criteria to include the DSS professionals consisted of their experiences working with and supporting international undergraduate students who have identified learning disabilities. The inclusion of international undergraduate students who have identified learning disabilities was based on their registration at a DSS office in a four-year university in the United States. A second criterion for students was that their cultural and linguistic background was Asian or Middle Eastern. The criteria to select the CIE advisors included experience working with international undergraduate students in higher education who may have identified learning disabilities.

Two main sources of data were used in this study: interviews and document review. The first data source was interviews that were used to aid me to acquire in-depth understanding of the needs of international undergraduate students with learning disabilities and how these needs are being addressed from a variety of perspectives. Interviews were conducted using semi-structured and open-ended questions following interview guides that allowed study participants to openly share their perspectives, thoughts, and experiences regarding the study phenomenon. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and saved in electronic files in my computer that was password protected.

The second source of the data collection was reviewing the documents of the three DSS offices included in the study. Documents reviewed consisted of service eligibility requirements for the three DSS offices, the accommodations provided to university students with learning disabilities at each of these offices, and other resources available on campus that provided students with additional supports. A fieldwork journal was employed to record the my experiences conducting this study as well as personal thoughts, ideas, challenges, and reactions that emerged throughout the research process.

Collected data that included interview transcripts and documents were saved in a rich text format and uploaded into NVivo qualitative software, and was then reviewed for analysis. All data collected were stored in a locked closet or in electronic files on a password-protected computer.

Description of the Participants

The data collection process began in summer 2015 at the Northern Rocky Mountain University which is located in a midwest state in the United States. Most of the interviews were conducted with disability support services professionals and centers for international education personnel during the summer semester in order to take advantage of their smaller workload. At the beginning of the fall semester of 2015, I sent a recruitment letter through email to ten international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities who were registered in the disability support service office at Northern Rocky Mountain University; however, only one student responded to this email and subsequently participated.

The most difficult process for conducting this research was to recruit students who were international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities and

registered at the disability support offices to receive accommodations. Recruitment

emails and flyers were distributed throughout the two campuses for almost a month but

with no responses. Thus, in order to recruit more students, I started to expand the

possibilities and contacted universities outside of the midwest state. Two universities in

two different states were identified and included in the study. The first university is

located in the eastern region of the United States while the second university is located in

the western region of the United States. Selecting these two universities was directly tied

to the identification and recruitment of the two students. After scheduling the interviews

with students and professionals via email and phone calls, I travelled to each research site

to conduct the interviews.

The following section summarizes a description of the three settings, which

includes the Northern Rocky Mountain University, Eastern Region University, and South

Western University. Following this, a description of the study participants from three

different campuses is provided. Study participants included five professionals who work

at disability support service offices, three professionals who work at centers of

international education, and three international undergraduate students.

Northern Rocky Mountain University

The first research setting is a public university, named the Northern Rocky

Mountain University by me, located in a midsized city that is considered the fourth most

populous city in the midwest state in 2015. The Northern Rocky Mountain University has

an approximate enrollment of on-campus undergraduate and graduate students of 27, 034.

According to the Institution of International Education report of 2014, this university

ranks second in the state in terms of the highest number of international student

enrollment; in 2015, there were more than 2,148 international students enrolled. The university offers 150 academic studies within 8 colleges and schools offer more than 100 undergraduate degrees. In 2015, the DSS office at Northern Rocky Mountain University served more than 800 students with a variety of disabilities.

Eastern Region University

The second research setting is a private university, labeled the Eastern Region University by the researcher, which is located in an urban, cosmopolitan city in an eastern state. The Eastern Region University is known to be among the oldest universities in the United States and was created in response to an Act of Congress to educate and prepare future leaders in the early 19th century. The university has three campuses that offer more than 2,000 courses from a wide range of disciplines to more than 26,000 students who represent 50 states and 130 countries. The approximate number of undergraduate student enrollment is 10,000 along with 14,000 graduate students. Within the region, the Eastern Region University is ranked as the university with the highest enrollment of international students, with a total of 4,659 international undergraduate and graduate students by the Institution of International Education in 2014. In 2014, Eastern Region University provided disability supports through their DSS office to more than 1,200 students with a range of disabilities.

South Western University

The third research setting is the South Western University that constitutes five campuses across different metropolitan areas in a western state in the United States. The South Western University is a comprehensive public research university that is ranked as the largest public university across the United States by enrollment, with 66,309

undergraduate and 15,751 graduate students. Among universities that are located at the western area, the South Western University has the highest number of international students with an enrollment of 11,330 students, which is the highest among the research settings. The university offers more than 300 academic undergraduate programs and majors.

Because the South Western University consists of five campuses spread across a large geographical area, it has four DSS offices. The site visit and interview with the DSS professional occurred at the one office where international undergraduate students with disabilities register. This office provides services and support to more than 1500 undergraduate and graduate students with a range of disabilities.

Advisors at the Center of International Education

Three study participants who worked as advisors at the CIE offices located within each of the three universities were included in this study. These three participants were selected based on two factors: their job description and their experience working with international undergraduate students who may have suspected of having learning disabilities. The primary responsibilities of these advisors included but were not limited to: (a) assessing the English proficiency levels of international undergraduate students; (b) providing educational, social, and cultural guidance; (c) guiding international undergraduate students who are in need of appropriate resources on campus; (d) communicating with college faculty and other professionals regarding the academic, social, and cultural challenges of international undergraduate students; and (d) supporting the educational, social, and cultural needs of international undergraduate students.

Zara: International student advisor 1. Zara was an international student advisor at the Northern Rocky Mountain University. The interview occurred in the case management program office. At the time of this study, Zara was 41 years old. She is originally from India and is currently married to an American citizen. She possesses a Bachelor's degree in English literature and a Master's degree in Student Affairs in Higher Education. Zara came highly recommended by the disability support professionals at her university because she had worked hard to establish a strong collaboration between the Center of International Education office and the disability support services office. Until last year, she worked as a student case manager and advisor for almost 600 international students whether they had studied at the English intensive program or had passed the English intensive program and transitioned to study college academic classes.

Zara possessed a wealth of knowledge regarding the challenges that international students confront in United States universities. This was in part because Zara herself was an international student 14 years ago and could relate directly to the challenges that many international students encounter. As a result, her professional and personal experiences enriched the interview process, as she was knowledgeable about many elements impacting college experiences for international students, such as immigration issues. Zara was attentive and interactive during the interview; she recognized the importance of each interview question quickly and needed little clarification of the questions.

Before Zara started her current job, she worked for nine years as the student care coordinator at the INTO program which is geared to international students who plan to enter the affiliated 4-year university. The program was developed based on a global education partnering organization that provides foundation courses for international

students, particularly academic English language courses (INTO, n.d.). Despite Zara's new position, she still supports the needs of international students and works collaboratively with staff at the English intensive program in addressing students' academic, social, emotional, and cultural needs and adjustments, especially in crisis situations. Besides Zara's current position as a student case manager, she teaches college classes for undergraduate students where 50% of her classes consist of international students. Clearly, she demonstrates sufficient background regarding the academic journey and challenges that international students face.

Ronny: International student advisor 2. Arranging an interview with an international student advisor at the Eastern Region University was challenging because no one responded to my initial email request. The disability support office professional at the Eastern Region University referred me to Ronny, an international student advisor. The interview took place at the office of the international English intensive program. Ronny is a 45-year-old Caucasian man who has 25 years of experience as an academic advisor for international students. During the interview with Ronny, he was interactive, attentive, and enthusiastic about participating in the study.

Ronny holds a Bachelors degree in English Literature and intensive English program training. Prior to his current work, Ronny worked as an English teacher where he taught English composition. Because of his previous experience as an English teacher for international students, Ronny's current responsibilities include advising English teachers on how to teach international students, including the writing and language patterns international students typically demonstrate. However, Ronny's primary focus was to provide academic advising to international students. He explained, "I get feedback

from the teachers in the classroom, and then I try to figure out what's the problem with

the student." Ronny helped new incoming students to prepare for college.

> My job is to help the students prepare to come to the university, get ready for the math placement exam, and make sure [they] come here prepared to start strong. I just gave a presentation to all the international graduate students about how important it is to start strong and to hit the ground running.
> Also, Ronny said that he provided presentations discussing issues related to

academic success and academic integrity.

> I talk about the campus resources available to them; here are stories of success and how they occurred and stories of failure and how they occurred. We learn from people's failures so we don't repeat them. We discussed academic integrity, academic dishonesty, and the consequences of the latter.

Ronny also indicated that he provided an overview of what is expected in

American universities, "…we are more uptight here about being on time, in your seat,

paying attention." When I asked Ronny regarding his job supporting international

students with academic challenges, he stated, "We're going to have a conversation about

working with tutors in calculus and making it mandatory and signing a contract that says,

'You will do the following three or four things this semester to make sure [they would be

on track].' "

Camilla: International students advisor 3. Camilla, a 30-year old Asian-

American woman, was the third international student advisor I interviewed. The

interview took place at Camilla's office that is located at the South Western University.

During the interview, Camilla was welcoming; she smiled easily throughout the interview

and confidently answered all of the interview questions.

Camilla possesses five years of experience in providing academic support for

international students whether they were still enrolled in the English intensive program or

had started university classes. She holds a Bachelor's degree in English and French and a

Master's degree in Higher Education and Student Affairs Administration. She also acquired a background in social justice education, student development and leadership. Prior to her work as an advisor for international students, Camilla served as a residential director in student housing where her experience revolved around challenges pertaining to transition to college for international students.

Camilla's current responsibilities include guiding international students regarding their student visas and providing academic supports. "Our office uses what we call a portfolio model; each of our staff members gets assigned to be liaisons with different colleges and schools at the university." Camilla was assigned to address issues regarding students who were admitted to the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, the College for Architecture and Planning, and the College of Arts and Media. She further explained that by using the portfolio model, she can work with students who have graduated from the English intensive program and who have received admission to colleges to which she was assigned. "My students tend to have academic trouble related to their math classes; they really struggle with whatever the prerequisites are in order for them to be admitted to the engineering college." Besides addressing academic challenges, Camilla also indicated that part of her work was to support the cultural and social needs of international students.

Professionals at the Disability Support Services

Professionals at the disability support service offices provide supports to students with identified disabilities according to the requirements established by the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (2008) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (1973). The disability support service professionals are required to comply with the

following responsibilities identified by the Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD, 2015). These responsibilities include but are not limited to (a) making decisions regarding service eligibility for students with learning disabilities; (b) responding to students' inquiries about their legal rights and responsibilities; (c) coordinating auxiliary aids and individualized accommodations for students; (d) ensuring students' access to needed accommodations in college classes; (e) consulting with faculty and other campus departments regarding the needs of the students with learning disabilities; and (f) delivering individual counseling regarding disability issues and to promote students' development regarding their self-advocacy skills (AHEAD, 2015).

Despite the differences among the settings in their demographics, campus, size, location, and affiliation, the three universities have features in common regarding the supports they provide. The disability service centers at each university have clear mission statements, targeted disabilities, documentation guidelines, and lists of provided accommodations. These centers are affiliated with a variety of other support offices that provide academic success workshops, self-advocacy supports, and assistive technology resources. In addition, each disability services office is staffed with professionals with various backgrounds such as counseling, special education, and adult education.

All three universities serve students with a wide range of disabilities. These include learning disabilities, attention deficit disorder, chronic health conditions, sensory disabilities, physical disabilities, and psychiatric disabilities. Professionals provide support to these students through accommodations that include but are not limited to alternative text materials, extended time on exams, reading services, equipment loan and checkout, and physical classroom accessibility.

Besides these academic accommodations, the DSS office at the Eastern Region University offers strategic skills services that exceed what federal laws require. These strategic skills services included academic skills assistance, career development, learning disabilities and attention deficit disorders consultations, and study abroad support, all of which are provided by specialists. The specialists include disability professionals, faculty and other instructional specialists, and learning and career specialists. These specialists also provide one-on-one support in coursework management, study skills, reading strategies, note taking tips, organization, time management, writing support, and research.

Five professionals who worked at the DSS offices at the three research settings participated in this study, as well as one psychologist who assisted with the identification of learning disabilities.

Roxy: Disability support service professional 1. The first participant to be interviewed was Roxy, a middle-aged Caucasian woman who worked as an accommodation and advocacy specialist at the DSS office at the North Rocky Mountain University. Of all study participants, Roxy was the most excited to participate. She recognized the importance of conducting this study and helped me to recruit other disability support professionals who worked at the same office. During the interview, Roxy was expressive and responded to the interview questions with minimal need for explanation. She defined herself as a person who genuinely embraced cultural diversity on campus. One way that Roxy developed rapport with international undergraduate students with disabilities was to invite them to her house on social occasions such as Halloween and Thanksgiving.

Roxy holds a Bachelor's, a Master's, and PhD degrees in Special Education. She had a long history working with students with disabilities, as she was a special education teacher in public secondary education settings for 18 years. She started working at her current position three years ago. Roxy worked closely with college students with a variety of disabilities, including learning disabilities, visual, hearing, physical disabilities, mental health, chronic health conditions as well as students who had temporary conditions. Her current job responsibilities include determining college students' eligibility to receive accommodations, ensuring students' access to needed accommodations and supports, and helping these students in their academic endeavors by directing them to on-campus resources such as tutoring, assistance with math and writing, and advocating for the needs of her students. When Roxy was asked to describe her job at the office, she stated:

> We will have students make appointments with United States and it can be a freshman who's never been to college coming straight from high school, it can be students who've been taking classes for a while on campus and are struggling, have never been diagnosed and so they come to see what supports are available. We work with people with chronic health conditions, with mental health conditions, and with disabilities like learning disabilities, attention deficit disorder so there's a whole range of what falls under disability in our office.

She further stated:

> Once people come in if they have a disability, we get their documentation, write up a memo that lists what their accommodations are, and then they give that to the instructor so it's a nice way. It never says what their disability is, that's all confidential, but it just says this student is eligible for accommodations under the law and we list what the accommodations are and it'll have my name on it.

Tom: Disability support service professional 2. Tom works as an accommodation and advocacy specialist at the Northern Rocky Mountain University. Tom is a 38-year-old Caucasian man with cerebral palsy who uses a wheelchair for

mobility. The interview took place in Tom's office during the summer semester. Tom's physical condition impacted his speech to a degree that his verbal articulation was not always clear. The interview process was slightly slower because of Tom's articulation. His speech did not impact his interaction and enthusiasm when responding to the interview questions. As Tom himself is an adult with a disability, he was fully engaged into the interview process and eager to understand why I was interested in disability issues.

Tom holds a Bachelor's degree in Psychology and a Master's degree in Adult Education and Training and Human Resources Studies. He also serves as the chair of the commission on disability issues at his local city council. When Tom was asked to describe the type of supports he provided to college students with disabilities, he stated that he provided coaching for those who struggle to navigate through college demands. Nevertheless, his focus was to ensure that all students get their needed accommodations:

> We would do an intake appointment and we would talk about what their needs might be, what they perceive their challenges may be, if they need accommodations through housing, if they need someone to act as a liaison to their instructor.

When Tom was asked to explain his job in providing accommodations at the onset of students' meetings, he indicated, "It's very individualized, though. I mean if a student needs to sit in a particular area of the class I will let the instructor know, 'please, reserve a particular seat for the student,' or something like that." Tom further explained:

> See if they have a reading disability. If they have a lot of difficulty reading textbooks, I will then do a referral for the assisted technology resource center, where they can do things like get their textbooks in an audio format so they then can listen to their textbooks instead. Then, we can also get them set up with our testing services where they can come here [to the DSS office], they can take their exam, so receive extra time.

Cristina: Disability Support Service Professional 3. Cristina was an accommodation and advocacy specialist at the Northern Rocky Mountain University. While Roxy and Tom immediately replied to my email invitation to participate in this study, Cristina did not. However, when I met her in person while conducting interviews with the other disability support professionals, she was willing to schedule an interview. This interview took place at her office that was located at the disability support service office. Throughout the interview, Cristina was collaborative and contributed more time than expected. She was very honest in her responses and sought to ensure that she answered all my questions accurately. In fact, Cristina made a point of being clear and accurate, and did not generalize her responses regarding the international students she worked with.

Cristina holds a Master's degree in English Composition and a second Master's degree in Counseling. Her essential job duties include providing support to students through coaching, advocating, and tutoring. In addition to her work in providing accommodations and advocating for students needs for more than 20 years, Cristina described herself as a well-known disability professional on campus. She frequently received calls from professors and administrators at the university setting whenever they needed her consultation regarding disability issues.

Cristina stated that she met students with disabilities for intake information where she obtained information about their disabilities and reviewed their documentation to determine if the student had adequate documentation as well as guiding other students who lacked documentation in locating appropriate resources. She described how this process is tailored to the specific needs of each student:

The law says it has to be individual, but it's easier to do it individually. So, most students just really need the letters for their professors saying what accommodations they get. Then it goes smoothly from there, and they use the accommodations, but some students run into professors that say, 'No, we're not going to do this,' and then I have to gently explain to them that we are going to do this.

As a student in elementary school, Cristina (who was 59 at the time of the interview) had herself been identified with learning disabilities. This motivated her to go "above and beyond" for her students to ensure that they received the assistance and accommodations they needed to succeed. She stated,

I have lots of ideas about how to attack material that's causing a problem. Because of struggling with it myself. . . . I talk to them about different strategies of . . . That they might want to try and help them understand that this is not one size fits all, [students] have to experiment.

Sally: Disability support service professional 4. This interview was conducted with Sally at her office located at Eastern Region University, where she manages the disability support office. The contact with Sally occurred one month before I personally met her via email, and she helped me to recruit students by sending two research announcement emails. During the interview process, Sally was confident and expressive and believed in the importance of current study. She started sharing her perspectives even before I started the interview process.

Sally is a Caucasian 62-years old female with 14 years of experience in working with college students with disabilities. She holds a Master's degree in Special Education. Prior to her current position, Sally worked as a K-12 special education teacher, and a coordinator of learning disabilities services for the Northeast University. She was also involved in a comprehensive evaluation unit in the department of pediatric and adolescent medicine at the Northeast University. Sally indicated that her background as a special

education teacher in particular helped her to provide individualized assistance to students with unique needs.

Sally's primary role in her position was to determine disability eligibility and to provide reasonable accommodations for college students with various disabilities. She described her focus as developing a multifaceted program to promote individualized support for students who were registered at disability support office. Besides her duties as accommodation and advocacy specialist, Sally also provided continuous learning skills support to ensure students' academic success, and explained that providing learning skills support went beyond the disability support office's legal compliance to the regulations of the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (2008) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (1973). Instead, these extra supports were the result of Eastern Region University's initiative to foster student retention rates by supporting first-year students with their transitions to college life.

Sally stated that the majority of international students with disabilities who were registered in the DSS office were identified with psychological, physical and attention deficit disorders while fewer students were identified with learning disabilities. She attributed the limited number of international students with identified learning disabilities to the lack of a solid foundation of learning disabilities identification procedures in the students' home countries.

Stacy: Disability support service professional 5. Stacy is a Caucasian 36 year-old woman with three years of experience as a disability access consultant. The interview occurred at her office that was located at the South Western University. Before conducting the interview, Stacy gave me a tour at the office where I was able to observe

the office atmosphere. Stacy was very articulate and knowledgeable regarding disability issues, and this shone through in her responses to my interview questions.

Stacy's educational background includes a Bachelor's degree in Special Education with an emphasis on deaf education and a Master's degree in the Generalist Special Education program. She worked as a special education teacher of students who were deaf/hard of hearing in the state of Pennsylvania. "I worked in birth through twelfth grade; for maybe thirteen years I taught, and then I've been here at South Western University for almost three years." When I asked Stacy about her caseload of college students with disabilities, she indicated that she worked with almost 300 students and international students constitute 20 percent of them. Stacy's primary role in her current position is to determine students' eligibility to receive accommodations through examining students' documentation and interviewing students.

> We meet with the students, go over documentation … or we have them get documentation for their disability, determine the eligibility, and then approve them for accommodations, and help them navigate through that whole process of the accommodations that they're approved for.

When asked about whether she involved the students in determining their needed accommodations, Stacy replied that her philosophy was to involve the students in the process as much as she can. Stacy indicated that the process of determining students' accommodations did not rely solely on students' documentation. "It's all of these different things that we discuss and talk about. It's not just, 'your documentation and your score says this, which means you're going to get this, this, or this.' " Stacy also indicated that she highly considered students' self-report when it came to determining their exact challenges and when selecting appropriate accommodations.

> When I hear a student say, "I'm spending twelve to twenty hours studying for my exam, I'm spending two hours a day, I'm meeting with a tutor, I'm rewriting my notes, and I'm putting all of this time and effort. I'm going to supplemental instruction. I'm doing all of these things and then I sit down to take my exam and I can't remember anything". That's a good self-report.

Stacy believed that eligibility documentation usually lacks a thorough description of the student's challenges and which strategies and accommodations students need.

Wendy: Psychologist. Throughout the interview process of DSS professionals and the international education advisor at Northern Rocky Mountain University, they identified the psychologist who was responsible for identifying international undergraduate students with learning disabilities. Although Wendy was not a disability support professional, her role as the learning disability specialist at the learning center at Northern Rocky Mountain University made her a person of interest for this research study. After consulting with the research advisors, I decided to invite Wendy to participate in the study. To my delight, she accepted.

Wendy is a 56-year-old Caucasian woman with 27 years of experience working as a psychologist at the Northern Rocky Mountain University. She specializes in learning disabilities at the learning assistance center located on campus. The interview occurred at a coffee shop that was located close to campus. Wendy was excited to share her perspectives regarding identifying international undergraduate students with learning disabilities. She shared that she attended conference sessions discussing the issue of identifying and serving international students with learning disabilities and was therefore completely aware of the need to conduct research into these issues. Because Wendy holds a PhD degree and is an expert in learning disability identification issues, she was articulate and knowledgeable in her responses to the interview questions.

Over the past 27 years, Wendy's job responsibilities have ranged from being a psychotherapist providing counseling to university students who struggled with domestic violence and depression to providing learning supports to university students who demonstrated learning challenges. It was in this role that Wendy became interested to the identification of learning disabilities.

> Before 18 years ago and even up until 2007, one of the services we would provide is the IQ testing, the achievement testing, the continuous performance test, and clinical interviews and stuff to identify whether somebody might have a specific learning disorder and also whether they might fit the diagnosis of ADHD.

Wendy stated that they used to offer formal learning disabilities testing with almost no cost, especially to low income students. Yet, the university no longer offers these services because of the time and funding commitment required.

> That's where my extra training and supervision and in-depth experience then started, about 18 years ago. We no longer do the formal testing evaluation for learning disabilities. I've done that for years, but we don't offer that as a service to our students anymore. It's too time intensive. We went for years and it was just a free service, didn't cost them anything.

Although her department did not really want to eliminate the formal evaluation service, they were not able to fully support it either. Wendy explained that she was the only learning disabilities evaluator for six or seven years. When I asked her to describe her current role at the learning assistant center, Wendy responded that she offers less therapy and more consultation. "I do an initial consult, sort of like an intake about the students' academic troubles …the most common additional thing I do is testing."

As Wendy's job responsibilities changed over time, she became a liaison between the counseling center and the office of international students and scholars.

> It's not like hordes of students came to do traditional western counseling through that … it's more to have an ongoing relationship so that if the members of the internationals [staff at the CIE] have a mental health type question or crisis with a student, they're familiar enough to reach out to us to ask for some help.

**International Undergraduate Students
with Learning Disabilities/ADHD**

The three international undergraduate students who participated in this study were non-native English speakers with identified learning disabilities and/or ADHD. Two students were identified with learning disabilities and one student with ADHD. I chose to include a student with a diagnosis of ADHD because his ADHD status hindered the students' ability to succeed academically. They were enrolled in one of three different four-year public universities and possessed temporary student visas. International undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities and/or ADHD encountered challenges that impacted their experiences as college students at United States universities. These challenges included but were not limited to (a) English language proficiency and its impact on academic success and cultural adjustments; (b) different educational expectations between international students' home countries and the United States such as in-class participation versus being passive recipients of knowledge; (c) diverse learning styles of international undergraduate students such lack of critical thinking and rote-learning style that was emphasized at their home countries; and (d) lack of established learning disabilities and/or ADHD identification procedures in the students' home countries that impacted their academic performances in United States universities.

Alex: Student 1. The first student who participated in the study was Alex, a 24-year-old man, originally from China, who attended the Northern Rocky Mountain

University at the time of the interview. The interview occurred in a quiet room located on the first floor of Alex's college department next to his classroom. During the interview, Alex was confident and expressive; however, he was sometimes quite brief in his responses. Hence, I had to explain and extend some of the questions to elicit further responses. Alex's English language was fair enough to respond to the questions, although he had some difficulties with his pronunciation. Alex's family lives in China and he has one sister. Alex had been studying in the United States for two years after he transferred from his college in China, and he majored in mechanical engineering. He was in his junior year in China when he decided to pursue a different learning experience abroad. "That is reason I'm here and this year is my senior year. I am going to graduate next year."

Alex indicated that it was totally different being a college student in China compared to the United States "In China, I was a really outstanding student, my GPA [grade point average] is really high. . . . what we do in China just focus on the lectures." When I asked Alex to explain the difference, he indicated that there was less pressure to study in a college in China versus studying in Chinese high schools. Alex attributed this to the high pressure placed in Chinese high schools to prepare their students to pass entrance examinations to be accepted for colleges. When I asked Alex about the academic challenges he met in the United States, he responded that during his first semester he found it hard for him to survive due to the massive load of content that he had to comprehend. He also indicated the challenge to follow his professors due to the new language. "At first it is really hard for me, it's totally different languages and I even cannot understand what our professor is talking about in the lecture." Though, Alex

stated that what reduced his language difficulties were that his major was heavily based on graphic and mathematic symbols which he was able to understand.

As Alex moved from his first semester to the next, his academic challenges increased as his GPA dropped. When Alex was asked to reflect regarding his learning disabilities, he indicated that it always was a challenge for him to learn a language. He indicated that this problem started when he was in China,

> I got identified with learning disabilities two years ago but when I was in China, I was not good at learning language. Even Chinese, I'm not good at it . . . when I read my book, I have to read back and forth several times so that I could understand what's the meaning of that sentence.

Alex indicated that he had been having this problem since middle school where he knew back then that he was different than his peers. "It was hard when I was in middle school . . . because I think other people are way smarter or reading speed of way faster than me . . . I just keep it in secret and I don't want other people to know."

Heba: Student 2. Heba was the second student that I interviewed; two interviews took place at a library room in the Eastern Region University. The purpose of the second interview was to follow up on certain points that she mentioned during her first interview. The interview process went smoothly, as Heba was expressive and comfortable in sharing her story.

Heba is a Saudi Arabian 22-years old woman who speaks English, Spanish, and Arabic fluently. She is the youngest of four sisters. Heba was born in Saudi Arabia from a Saudi Arabian father and a Colombian mother who divorced when Heba was four years old. After her parents separated, they decided that it would be best for their children to be raised in the Middle East; hence, Heba's mother left Saudi Arabia and lived in Egypt with her four children. As a result, Heba received her primary education in Egypt through

attending two international schools where their learning systems were based in English. After high school graduation, Heba decided to pursue higher education in the United States.

She has been living in the United States for three years with her older sister while studying at Eastern Region University. At the time of the interview, Heba was in her third year, majoring in Sports and Event Management. Heba also expressed her desire to apply for an internship in Latin America for a while. When I asked her regarding her future goals, she stated that she aimed to earn her Bachelor's degree and to launch her own event company in the Middle East.

> I'm not sure what kind of events for now. I was thinking of weddings or corporate special events. Or, recently, since I started my major, I got interested in sports events too. I like that and I think that it's a market that would really work, also in the Middle East.

When I asked Heba regarding her academic performance when she was in primary schooling, she said that she struggled academically in her first school where she failed second and eighth grades. "My parents always knew [especially] my mom. She was like, 'Heba, you have a problem, you have a problem.' I kept doing bad in school." Heba indicated that the learning system at her first school was rigid and academically-based with no inclusion of the non-academic classes such as arts and sports that Heba liked, "It was all testing. Four times a week, you'd have an exam…you wouldn't get homework, you wouldn't get anything, it was just exam based, it wasn't really learning." Therefore, Heba's parents decided to move her to the American International School which, in addition to academic subjects, also offered sports. Here, Heba was able to perform her preferred sport, soccer. "It was a lot more homework, projects, and

assignments, which are based on your grade, too, other than just the exam base. That was

nice. Also, that your teachers put in a little bit more [effort]."

When I asked Heba what kind of academic challenges had she been having that

made her to go a psychologist and get diagnosis, she indicated that she always struggled

with spelling in all three languages.

> Spelling was always, always, always a problem for me. I speak three languages,
> English, Spanish and Arabic. In all of them, I can speak really well. Kind of
> perfectly in all, but reading and writing in all I've been horrible.

Heba struggled most with Arabic and was placed in a special class in her

secondary international school in Egypt where she received a certificate of Arabic as a

foreign language.

> They put me in special Arabic, not intermediate but a lower level. Then, I just
> kept going from intermediate year to year. For example, I'd be in grade 5 and I'd
> be taking grade 1 Arabic. Then, it just continues like that . . . until now, I can't
> read and write Arabic, I know all the letters and all that stuff.

Heba also struggled with reading and writing in Spanish, which is her first

language. She had a Spanish tutor who suspected that Heba might be dyslexic. When she

was nine, Heba's mother recognized her daughter's academic challenges and contacted

two psychologists in Egypt to determine the cause of Heba's academic struggles.

However, she did not receive a diagnosis of learning disabilities.

Despite her academic struggles, Heba graduated from high school and moved to

the United States to earn her Bachelor's degree. The first year, Heba attended a

community college where she performed well academically. Although her GPA was

good, Heba's mother insisted that Heba seek assessment. "I was doing really well there

and I didn't need it or anything, but then my mom insisted, 'Heba, take it.' " Heba

followed her mother's recommendation and asked a counselor at the community college

to help her find a qualified professional to assess her. "I went there in [her community college] and I just asked a random counselor. He goes, 'Your grades are really well, so I think even if you are, you're doing really well.' " Nevertheless, when Heba transferred to the Eastern Region University, she began to struggle academically and her GPA dropped from 3.7 to 2.00. "As soon as I came here I got like all Cs. My GPA went to 2 . . . it was so much material compared to the community college . . . I didn't expect so much work." Heba's mother knew that her daughter needed assessment and that assessment procedures and special services were well established in the United States therefore, she encouraged Heba to visit the DSS office at her new university to seek their help. As a result, Heba was identified with dyslexia a year ago.

> As soon as I transferred here, my mom was like, "Heba, just do it, it's better to know. Especially since you know that in the States they can accommodate you and they can do so much more for you here than if you were in Egypt."

Rayan: Student 3. Rayan was the third student interviewed. He is a 23-year-old man from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia who attends South Western University. I interviewed Rayan twice, both times in a study room located in a public library near the university. My first impression of Rayan was that he was shy and that interviewing him would not be easy. Conversely, the interview went smoothly and lasted longer than I had anticipated. During the first interview, I collected preliminary information about Rayan's current and previous experiences as a student. The second interview was more personal. Rayan volunteered more information as a result of a rapport that developed between him and me.

Rayan's English was proficient enough to conduct the interviews in English; however, I told Rayan to speak in Arabic if he needed to in order to express himself more

clearly. Rayan was the fourth among his siblings; his whole family lives in Riyadh in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Rayan received his primary schooling in Saudi Arabia where he performed well academically. Once he graduated from high school in Saudi Arabia, he was accepted at AlRowdah University to study dentistry. After the first year ended, Rayan decided to apply for a scholarship to study medicine in the United States. Rayan first arrived to the United States in 2010 and explained, "I thought that United States is the best choice that I can make to earn the medical degree, but it was more difficult than I expected. It was a shock for me." Rayan said that he used a private agency in Saudi Arabia to assist him with gaining admittance to a university in the United States. Once he arrived at the university, he realized it was not the university he thought he had applied to. Though, since he was admitted, he decided to stay and begin his education there. "My first semester went well at the university where I was a half time college student because at that time I was still taking English intensive classes." After he became a full time college student, Rayan started to have academic challenges. "My GPA dropped drastically and I started failing classes." As a result, Rayan was dismissed from the university and transferred to a community college where he could improve his GPA in order to reenter his university. Rayan was able to return to his university but he started failing classes again. "At the beginning, I thought that my English proficiency was the reason behind my struggles so I pushed myself to continue convincing myself that my English will improve as years pass."

Rayan stayed at his university for four years but without progress, as a result, he decided to transfer to South Western University. "At that time, I knew that my English improved but I still struggle, so I thought that I should move to an easier university."

Once Rayan transferred and started taking classes in his new university, he continued

having similar challenges which included difficulties concentrating, depression, and not

attending classes. "I always suspected that something wrong is going on with me but at

the beginning of my academic problems I did not want to seek consultation."

Nevertheless, Rayan realized that if he wanted to pass his classes, he needed to seek help.

Thus, in the summer of 2015, Rayan sought a psychological clinic where he was assessed

and diagnosed with ADHD. As a result of his diagnosis, the psychologist prescribed him

medications such as Vyvanse, Adderall, and Dextroamphetamine that helped Rayan

concentrate on one thing, "I started doing one thing until I get done. Then, I will just

switch and go somewhere else."

Review of Documents

The second source of data collection was the review of documents. Documents

reviewed included both printed materials available at the DSS offices and information

from each university's DSS office website. These consisted of service eligibility

requirements, the accommodations provided to university students with learning

disabilities, and other on-campus resources that were available to support students, such

as information regarding the writing center, advocacy support, and student organizations.

While each university followed federal guidelines for disability eligibility, the services

offered varied between universities and DSS offices. The following section delineates the

document review of the documentation guidelines of the three DSS offices included in

this study. Then, a section that indicates the differences in services among the three DSS

offices is also provided.

Disability Support Service Offices

Most information regarding the eligibility criteria for disability services, documentation requirements, and provided accommodations were included in the webpage of each DSS office included in this study. The first step to determine eligibility for accommodations for undergraduate students with learning disabilities is that students need to identify themselves as students with a disability. Also, they must complete a DSS intake sheet and provide documentation that proves the existence of a disability. The intake sheet represents a registration form that students complete for each semester they request accommodations. Information that students need to provide includes a) personal information; b) description of their disability and whether a disability is temporary or permanent; and c) a release of personal information. Moreover, students are required to describe the academic implications of their disability and list requested accommodations. Based on the information included from students and DSS professionals, recommended accommodations can be determined which are then included in the intake sheet.

Documentation guidelines. In order for students to complete the registration process and receive needed accommodations, they must provide documentation that verifies the presence of a disability. General documentation guidelines should include

1. The existence of disability.

2. A description of how a disability significantly impacts the student's academic performance.

3. Indication of required accommodations that are needed to ensure an equal opportunity for students to participate in or benefit from programs available at the university.

Each disability category has its own documentation guidelines. Learning disabilities documentation should be current using psychoeducational assessments that are conducted by an objective and qualified professional. The diagnostic report should include the following:

1.   A description of reported problems regarding developmental and medical issues, psychological histories, and family history.

2.   Exploration of the student's academic history and performance during elementary, secondary, and postsecondary education.

Assessment should be based on the use of more than one test or subtest. Assessment reports should provide evidence that learning disabilities have a significant limitation on the student's learning and academic performance. For students' aptitude level, the results should be derived from a complete intellectual assessment using Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale or equivalent standardized tool. Current academic achievement level should be determined using a comprehensive battery to record academic functioning and fluency in reading (decoding and comprehension), mathematics (calculation and applications), and oral and written language. Information processing such as short and long-term memory, sequential memory, auditory and visual perception, processing speed, and executive functioning should be assessed.

Additionally, learning disabilities documentation should include standard scores and percentiles for all measures. These tests should be reliable and valid to be conducted with adult population. A direct and clear language should be used in the diagnosis report.

Accommodations and additional supports. As indicated in the reviewed documents, DSS professionals determine students' support needs and provide reasonable

accommodations. The most common accommodations provided include but are not limited to extended time, less distracting environment, alternative formats of exams, alternative text, and note taking support, reader and/or scribe, computer/adaptive technology, lab and library assistance, and test proctoring services. Other accommodations can be determined based on a student's specific needs. Once students are granted accommodations, it is their responsibility to inform their instructors of their need for accommodations and request that these be implemented. The objective of providing accommodations is to ensure that students with learning disabilities have the same access to their academic programs as students without disabilities.

Additional supports and services are provided to students with learning disabilities through other departments in each of the three campuses. These services include tutoring support, workshops in study skills, time management, test-taking and memory strategies, computer assistive devices and assessment, wellness services and general counseling, and diagnostic assessment for learning disabilities. Some of these services are provided for American citizens only based on the restrictions of the grant funding this program; thus, no international undergraduate students can benefit from these services.

Differences among the disability support service offices. By viewing documents through the three DSS offices, each follow similar procedures that include the intake process, documentation guidelines, and types of accommodations they offer. However, they varied in two main areas. The first area pertained to the additional supports that go beyond providing reasonable accommodations that Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (2008) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act

(1973) mandate. Among the three DSS offices included in the study, only the Eastern Region University offers services beyond the mandated accommodations. By providing one-on-one support through strategic skills services, freshmen students receive individualized support to master skills that are needed in their transition to a four-year university. Through academic skills assistance, students can receive one-on-one support in effective time management, organization and planning, reading and study strategies, writing, and test-taking strategies. Students with documented learning disabilities can also receive career development support that consists of navigating internship opportunities, learning to write a resume, preparing for interviews, identifying job accommodations, and developing a professional identity.

The second area is associated with documentation that each DSS office accepts. For example, the Eastern Region University does not accept IEPs or Section 504 plans from secondary educational institutions as a sufficient documentation. However, Northren Rocky Mountain University and South Western University accept IEPs and Section 504 plans as adequate documentation. Another aspect was how explicit documentation guidelines were across the three DSS offices. Both Eastern Region University and South Western University ensued that students obtain a thorough evaluation reports in contrast with the Northern Rocky Mountain University that did not provide explicit guidelines. For example, South Western University provides students with a verification form to guide evaluators. This form outlines criteria for receiving DSS service eligibility in which evaluators should complete the form to ensure the thoroughness of their evaluation reports.

Findings

During data collection, I interviewed a total of five DSS professionals, three CIE professionals, one psychologist, and three international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities and/or ADHD. A series of semi-structured interview questions were used to elicit responses from the participants, and follow-up questions were used to help clarify participant statements. These qualitative data were analyzed using the constant comparative method, and organized into themes. The findings presented in this chapter are represented by the themes that emerged from the data collected during interviews.

Nine main themes emerged from the qualitative data. These were language proficiency, social challenges, factors impacting academic success, knowledge of available supports, providing accommodations and supports, disclosure, identification of learning disabilities and/or ADHD, disability awareness, and self-advocacy. Each of these themes is discussed in detail in the following section.

Language Proficiency

The first theme to emerge from the data collection process was language proficiency. Language proficiency refers to the academic capability level of international undergraduate students to listen, speak, read, and write, in English. When the study participants were asked about the academic needs of international students, all three participant groups (including CIE professionals, DSS professionals and student participants) identified language proficiency as a key challenge for international students. Some participants reflected on the interrelation between language proficiency and disability. Others gave examples of how low language proficiency was actually a barrier

for students seeking services that were available to them on campus, yet only described in written English which students could not yet understand. Other participant statements emphasized the impact of language proficiency, both in understanding the questions and providing responses to exam items, on the students' performance during exams. Several of the participants also discussed that not all faculty members were aware of the difference between a language barrier and a learning disability. Hence, due to the lack of awareness from faculty members, many students were referred to the DSS office for support by faculty members.

English proficiency. The undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities and/or ADHD shared their perspectives regarding their challenges as second language learners. Both Rayan and Alex stated that the language barrier was a significant challenge for them. When Rayan first arrived in the United States, he attended a four-year university, but was not able to keep his grade point average high enough to stay in his program. He reported having trouble understanding the materials and completing the assignments, mainly due to his lack of English proficiency. Rayan was placed on academic suspension and chose to leave his original program and attend community college, where he received high grades.

These statements align with what Rayan, an undergraduate student with identified ADHD, expressed. During a summer semester, Rayan felt he understood the materials that were covered in class, but was not able to complete assignments in a timely manner. At that time, he thought his main challenges were related only to his lack of English proficiency, so he approached his professors to ask for assistance. They clearly knew that English was not his first language; this was obvious from how he talked, how he wrote,

the state of his grammar. Rayan knew his English was weak. Some instructors offered

him an additional half hour on exams. However, not every instructor was this

accommodating,

> Some other professors, they would just say, "No, it's not fair." I say, "It's not
> fair? Is it fair to study it in a second language, in a different country? Is it still fair
> when it's . . .?" He just said no.

Camilla, the CIE professional, frequently discussed classroom experiences with

the international students who were on academic probation. These students were asked to

complete an academic success packet, including several questionnaires about their study

and personal habits. While it was clear that some students had spent their time partying,

many of the international students whom Camilla suspected of having learning

disabilities told her that they felt they were able to understand the class material, but that

submitting written assignments and completing exams were often the most challenging

parts of the class for them.

> Some of them will say, "I felt like I understood the material during class, and I
> was doing all the homework. I studied all the time, but when it came time for
> tests, I was always nervous and I didn't know what to do. I feel like everything
> flew out of my head, and I didn't understand it anymore when I was looking at the
> paper."

Sally, the DSS professional, also found that for many international students,

written work led to unique challenges. She shared that some students reported having a

hard time paying attention, or taking notes in class because they felt the instructor spoke

too quickly. It wasn't a question of not understanding the materials, rather they just

couldn't write it down fast enough. Although Sally often recommended accommodations

like digital recorders or smart pens, these were time consuming solutions for students

who had to go back and listen to the lecture again. Most students felt that their limited

English proficiency, especially in reading, impacted their ability to do well on exams.

Sally further indicated,

> They feel that even though they believe they really know the course material, it takes them too long when they're taking an exam. They leave out so many questions that when it's graded, it gets a poor grade. Some of them say they have a hard time reading the text material, that it takes them too long, that they seem to be reading and re-reading and re-reading.

Roxy, the DSS professional, described meeting international students for the first time during the evaluation period. In an attempt to determine whether their challenges were simply due to language or whether there might be other issues, she would ask them about their previous academic experiences. She would listen as students described if they had ever had trouble reading in their native language, or if their teachers had ever given them extra time on assignments. For those students who struggled primarily due to language barriers, she would contact their instructors and request informal accommodations, such as extra time on exams.

> Some instructors will give international students extra time and then that takes care of it but we know that over time as your English becomes more proficient then that need will go away but if you have a disability it will not.

Several participants focused on how students' level of English proficiency impacted their comprehension of what support services were available to them on campus. Most information about campus resources is provided in written form, available to any student--who can comprehend written English. Zara, a CIE advisor, stated,

> Students who don't have the language competency, who cannot necessarily read through, "Okay, let me read through their office page and see what their office page says." They're not going to do that, because they're still trying to gain the competency around the language, because everything happens to be in English, which does not help at all.

Stacy, a DSS professional, shared similar concerns regarding students' ability to comprehend frequently used terminology. She stated that if the students do not have the adequate level of English language, they struggle to comprehend the basic terminology that is usually used in DSS offices:

> The most challenging aspect of language for international students is their level of English comprehension. If they've never used accommodations in the past, and I'm saying accommodations, and disability resource center, and testing accommodations, and note taking, and they're not fluent in English yet, they might not understand what I'm telling them.

In the beginning of his studies, Alex had difficulty was understanding what his professors were saying during lectures, as well as comprehending some of the terminology used in his courses. One of the ways he addressed this was by recording his lectures so he could revisit the information during revision. This allowed him to listen at a slower pace, and to look up those words he didn't understand

> During the class, I cannot fully understand the words used by the professors so and I return back home I re-listened again. And couple of times later I got familiar with my professors and because I think every professor, they use specific words.

However, his chosen major reduced the language gap, as mathematical symbols constitute a universal language he was already familiar with,

> At first it is really hard for me because it's totally different languages and I even cannot understand what our professor is talking about in the on the lecture. But, it's mechanical engineering. I could understand all the graphics… mathematical letters, all the symbols, I know all of them.

In summary, international students faced unique challenges due specifically to the difficulties of completing higher education classes in their non-native language. Language proficiency directly affects whether students understand the content of their classes, are able to complete the requirements of their courses, can finish exams within the time allowed, and can locate available on-campus resources.

Knowing the difference between a language barrier and a learning disability.

All three of the participant groups noted that language proficiency was a significant

factor in the students' academic success. The DSS professionals Tom, Roxy, and Cristina

all shared how faculty members and CIE staff would sometimes send international

students to the DSS offices to receive accommodations in response to students'

difficulties in finishing exams on time. As Tom stated,

> We were having a problem where professors were just sending students to us, because they were taking too long on their exams because, you know, they were reading a foreign language to them, but we can't just provide services.

In some cases, international students with low English proficiency were being

mistaken for a student with a learning disability by their instructors. However, based on

the document review discussed above, in order for students to receive services from the

DSS office, they must be able to provide documentation of a disability.

Roxy saw a difference between students who came to the DSS office on their own

as opposed to students sent to DSS by their instructor. Although she was happy to

provide suggestions to instructors about in-class accommodations for students who were

struggling in class, simply struggling in class or during exams was not sufficient evidence

to support the presence of a learning disability. She described a situation where two

international students in the INTO program came to DSS and requested extra time on

exams. During their conversation, Roxy asked if either of them had struggled with taking

exams previously. They had not. Roxy shared that,

> I said, "It takes you longer because this is your second language." They said yes. . . . we're working with INTO right now to say that some students don't have a learning disability, they have a language difference and extra time will help them with that process.

Similarly, Cristina often provided suggestions for in-class accommodations and strategies to students sent by faculty to seek assistance at the DSS office. However, if these suggestions proved to be ineffective for some students, Cristina would seek to determine the roots of the students' academic challenges. She found that statements that students made during subsequent conversations would often give a clue whether something else was going on. Cristina believed that student statements that helped her to determine the difference between having language difficulties and learning disabilities were often quite subtle.

Wendy, the psychologist, shared how not all of those who worked with international students were aware of the difference between a language difference, which resolves over time as students gain proficiency, and a learning disability, which does not.

> The difficulty, which those specialists [at the English Intensive Program] know and we know and RDS [the DSS office] knows, is how would we know whether this is a problem in their English learning or a problem with academics? Again, you need to have that clinical interview from somebody who has an awareness of both factors [language proficiency and learning disability].

Not all participants were equally aware of this difference. Ronny, the CIE advisor, suggested that all international students had a learning difference due to the language barriers they encountered, and that this learning difference could be considered a disability:

> International students have a learning difference; in fact, you could call it a disability. They can't read as fast as a domestic student. When they had a class where they had an exam to take in 50 minutes that had 80 multiple-choice questions, my students got halfway through. The Americans were getting up and leaving before the class ended, having finished it.

Therefore, until their level of English proficiency became sufficiently developed, Ronny felt that many international students needed basic, informal accommodations to achieve

academic success. This confusion between what constitutes a language difference and a learning disability is evident from Ronny's next statement:

> I would have a terrible learning disability if I were thrown into China and had an exam. How much time would I need to finish it? Ten years. Let me learn Chinese real quick. I've actually had some professors email me and say, "Is it okay if I give your students more time on the exam?" "Yes, it's okay."

Although Ronny was not clear about the difference between proficiency and disability, he realized that for some students, there was more going on than simply low English proficiency. He described meeting with international students who were attending classes and working hard, yet who still were not improving. Instead of simply putting them on academic probation, he began to refer these students to the DSS office so they could be assessed. It became increasingly important to him not to just assume that it was a language barrier, but actually to see beyond the students' challenges with English.

According to the CIE advisors, DSS professionals, and students themselves, language proficiency is a major challenge for international undergraduate students. In addition to impacting students' academic performance, the barrier of low language proficiency can prevent students from knowing what supports are available to them. The interrelation between language differences and learning disabilities led to confusion among some CIE advisors and faculty members, who referred international undergraduate students to the DSS office, because they attribute students' academic challenges to a disability and not to language differences.

Social Challenges

The second theme that emerged from the data is social challenges. International undergraduate students face unique social challenges when it comes to adjusting to a new culture and society when they choose to attend universities in the United States. In

addition to learning to read and write and interact in a new language, some of the

challenges that were discussed include issues relating to social adjustments and

integration into the undergraduate student body, making friends with American students,

and unique social challenges that international students encounter with peers from their

own culture. This theme of social challenges emerged from my interviews with CIE

advisors.

Social adjustment. Camilla and Zara, CIE advisors, stated that many

international students whom they worked closely with shared their personal experiences

of loneliness and depression. Camilla shared that many undergraduate students,

particularly those in their first year of college, face cultural adaptation issues that result in

their being lonely. Many students struggle to communicate with new people, adjust to the

climate, new kinds of food, make friends, and live independently in a new culture.

Camilla shared a situation with one student, who felt quite adrift in his new situation,

> He was very lonely in his apartment all the time. I think he didn't really know how
> to get involved, and so when he came in to meet with me, I would try to suggest
> ways to get involved on campus, asking him if he wanted to join any particular
> clubs, sports, or organizations that might appeal to him, but I think he was really
> struggling with that.

This student became so visibly depressed that Camilla referred him the counseling center

on campus for mental health support.

Zara stated that many international undergraduate students volunteer that they feel

lonely and express how difficult it is to make friends with American students. They have

a hard time understanding the social scene among American undergraduate students. Zara

shared that, being a former international student herself, she can relate to the social

challenges that international students encounter. International students talk differently,

act differently, and dress differently than their American counterparts; the isolation often results in feelings of homesickness.

Ronny, a CIE advisor, shared an example of unintentional isolation that resulted from the university's dorm policy. He stated that international undergraduate students, like domestic students, are obligated to live in a dormitory for their first year in college. While some dorms are single gender, others are mixed gender, which can create cultural conflicts among international students. A female Omani female student experienced an increase in social isolation when she was assigned a room in a mixed gender dorm,

> We had a woman from Oman who said to me, "I feel like I'm in a prison in this country". She's in a dormitory that's mixed gender; It's like two rooms, shared bathroom, female; two rooms, shared bathroom, male; etc, down the hall. She says she likes to take off her hijab when she goes home and just whatever, walk around and whatever. She said she can't leave her room.

Because she was not able to remove her hijab and interact freely with others in the dorm, she felt that her ability to socially interact with her American friends was restricted. Once this issue had been brought to the attention of the CIE office, this student was allowed to move to an off campus apartment. Ronny explained that not all Muslim women would complain about this issue. However, for this particular student, it was significantly troublesome that her academic performance became impacted.

All of the CIE advisors indicated that international students often decide to band together with their own cultural or linguistic group and not integrate into their new society. Ronny stated that in his experience international undergraduate students tend to separate themselves and stick together. Camilla felt that international students preferred to hang out with each other and even live together during their time at university.

> Students who come from regions of the world where there are other students here already in the community, a lot of them tend to live together. For example, we have a lot of students from the Middle East, particularly from Saudi Arabia, who tend to live together. We have a lot of students from India who come on flights together and tend to live together. There are a lot of students from China who tend to live together, and not as often do those students ask for assistance for finding roommates outside of their cultural group.

Zara explained that she did not necessarily consider this to be a social challenge; rather, she perceived that students banded together because it was simply more comfortable for them. She said that students who come from the Middle East, China, and India come from communities that place a high value on family and community. They are naturally more socially comfortable when interacting with others who share similar cultural values. For these students, it is counter-intuitive to live independently and make autonomous decisions without checking with their community. However, Zara agreed that the tendency of international students to not mix with their American peers also hinders them from meeting new people, learning the language, and understanding new cultural cues. She believed that it is natural for international undergraduate students to stick to their cultural group especially if they have not acquired socially fluent English.

> It's very natural, because for a one year language, competency is not great. Why would you want to go and embarrass yourself? . . . as human beings and when you are transitioning into a new culture, you want to be with the culture that you know.

Ronny believed that this tendency to segregate to cultural groups impacted the students' academic performance. When international students worked closely only with each other, their language development slowed as they continued using their native language to communicate. Ronny illustrated this with examples of students who come from under-represented cultures such as Vietnam, Morocco, and Malaysia. Because they do not come to an existing cultural community, they often learn English more quickly.

> Students from Vietnam, Morocco, Malaysia . . . they learn English more quickly. They integrate more quickly with the domestic population, because they don't have a choice. They know a fair amount of English . . . Vietnamese guy came here with remedial kind of English skills, but by the end of two semesters, very strong English skills.

Thus, while interacting with one's cultural group provides international students with camaraderie and social connection, it can also impact their acquisition of English as well as academic success.

Social issues within students' own cultures. Zara and Ronny shared a unique social challenge that many international students face related to cultural and religious issues. At times, international students may struggle to fit in even within their own culture. Students who were obviously different than the majority of individuals from their culture and who do not follow their cultural expectations may find themselves marginalized within their own culture. Zara shared that what makes social challenges unique for international students was that the individuals within their community might treat them inappropriately.

> Your community can be great, and they can be very mean, because if you are not keeping up with their standards, and they are the ones who are going to define the standards. . . . If you are different, you act different, you dress different or you are from a region where the rest of them are not. I have had girls from Oman who've had a lot of problems just because they took off their hijab and just because they had some friends who happened to be from the opposite gender. They were completely ostracized.

Issues associated with compliance with cultural standards also impact international undergraduate students who may be suspected of having learning disabilities. Zara was the only CIE advisor who discussed this issue when she stated that international undergraduate students with disabilities whom she worked with faced complicated issues with their cultures. She shared an incident where a female

international student who suspected she might have a learning disabilities had to consider

many cultural issues related to being a woman with a disability. Zara stated that in some

cultures, women are often not highly valued.

> To be a women itself is a tough thing, and then to be a woman with disabilities is
> even worse . . . The fact that your culture is not supportive, because the culture is
> always very deficient in thinking. They don't think about what you have, but they
> always think about what you don't have. That's the lens that people look from,
> and especially in cases of women, it's more true. It's like what is it that you don't
> have or you don't have beauty, or you don't have … and now you have a
> disability. Disability is always negative.

Zara went on to describe the multiple cultural challenges this particular student faced,

including social issues of struggling to fit in with her cultural group, maintaining her

GPA, and her reluctance to identify herself as having a disability. "The fact is that this

[academic success] is not coming to fruition and she's dealing with financial issues,

emotional issues, social issues and then still trying to somehow survive." Therefore, for

some female international students, having a disability adds yet another layer to an

already complex cultural identify.

Ronny discussed several situations when international students shared their

experience of conflict within their own culture due to religious and gender differences. In

his office, his team had to address cultural situations that arose in classrooms,

> We've had issues with Sunnis not caring much for Shia, and the Sunnis
> outnumber them significantly. We've had alleged reports of conflict or tension
> between Chinese and Taiwanese, males bullying females.

In the situations when Ronny addressed issues between men and women, he discovered

that some of the men would make inappropriate comments to the women. He shared a

situation when one female student asked him to remove her from her class due to ongoing

and extreme harassment in class, from inappropriate comments in a non-English language
to aggressive behavior.

> You'd have a class with one woman, and she would come and say, "Get me out of there. I cannot take this, because they're saying these things to me and my teacher doesn't know it." . . . before class or during group projects or something, where inappropriate comments are made. That's something social that comes to us.

According to the CIE advisors, many international undergraduate students
encountered social issues in their new university environment. Communicating and
interacting with American peers was challenging for them which often led to their
spending time with peers from their own cultures. In some cases, this minimized their
opportunities to learn the new language and integrate into on campus activities. Other
social conflicts were noted that occurred with peers within their own culture.

Factors Impacting Academic Success

The third theme that emerged from the data was the unique set of factors that can
impact academic success among international undergraduate students with identified
learning disabilities and/or ADHD encounter. While CIE advisors primarily addressed
issues related to maintaining good academic standing and academic misconduct, DSS
professionals discussed the need to support strategic study skills as well as provide
accommodations and other disability supports. These included personal organization and
time management skills, and adjusting to different learning environments and teaching
styles the students encounter in the United States.

Maintaining the grade point average. All CIE advisors discussed the challenges
that international undergraduate students faced in maintaining their GPA. The CIE
advisor who worked with international undergraduate students studying in the English
intensive program focused on strategies to assist students in improving their GPA, while

CIE advisors who worked with the students who were admitted to academic classes

focused on the consequences of failing to maintain their GPA.

Camilla worked with students who attended classes in several campus colleges.

She was assigned to work with students in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, the

College for Architecture and Planning, and the College of Arts and Media; thus, she was

very aware of academic issues related to classes on those colleges. Most students that she

worked with majored in pre-engineering, and struggled meet the prerequisites in order to

be fully admitted to the engineering major. She stated,

> As a full engineering student, they take those courses required for pre-engineering
> students and often fail. It's not just the math classes, it's other classes as well.
> Sometimes they tell me that they focus on the math class too much, so then they
> ignore their other classes, and they fail those, or vice versa. They really struggle
> with the level of math, and sometimes I think it's skill-based. They just don't have
> the capacity at that level yet. They don't have the foundations in order to go into
> the math class they get into.

For these students who were already admitted to academic classes, Camilla's support was

limited to guiding the international students to consult with their academic advisors. She

helped students identify various resources on campus, including writing and tutoring

support, and also directed students to seek assistance from different offices on campus,

such as the DSS office.

The CIE advisors were concerned about international students who were failing

classes. However, because Ronny worked with international undergraduate students who

were still studying in the English intensive program, he had more direct responsibility to

address these challenges. Ronny described a common situation among international

undergraduate students, who were struggling to pass their intensive English classes,

> Many students are trying and attending class and they are not getting it done, they can't get through an exam, their essays aren't improving despite the fact that they're working hard and working with the writing tutors.

Moreover, Ronny's work also consists of developing an action plan, a "contract" with students, in which he required students to follow a certain plan in order to increase their GPA.

> We actually do those contracts the first semester. If I hear someone struggling, if I look at their grades in Canvas or Blackboard or whatever system the teachers use, I could see their grades, and if their grades concern me, we're going to fill out a contract that I keep in a file. Then when the student comes back to me, if they've not succeeded, I'm going to determine whether or not they've fulfilled the contract. I'll talk to the tutors. I'll talk to the teachers. Did the student's attendance improve? Did the student attend tutoring twice a week like I required? Did the peer mentors in the Global Village community that our students are a part of see this student there regularly?

While Ronny and Camilla discussed the importance of providing scaffolded assistance to students who were at risk of failing classes, they did not address factors that underlie this issue. Zara provided an interesting perspective when she shared that the GPA is often a completely foreign concept for international students to grasp. She stated that it was really difficult for international students to fully understand what they have to do to be successful in a United States university. They come from educational cultures where grades are awarded very differently.

> Because all of the assignments comes towards your final grade, that's a harder concept, because most other cultures you go for this exam at the end of the year and you spit out everything that you have learned and that's your final grade. Sometimes you don't have to worry what you have submitted or not.

It can be difficult for international students to comprehend that every assignment carries weight, and that the points count cumulatively here. Missing a 10 point assignment can be the difference between an A and a B grade. As a result, international students face unfamiliar educational expectations which can dramatically affect their GPA. For

international students, a low GPA can have serious consequences, including academic probation.

Academic probation. Academic probation refers to a formal warning that students receive when they fail to maintain a certain GPA that is determined by their institution. The actual GPA will vary between universities and programs. Students who are placed on academic probation may be required to meet with academic advisors and to develop a plan of action aimed at returning the student to good academic standing. In addition to issuing a warning and providing academic advising, some universities place students on restricted academic probation, requiring them to reduce their credits per semester, from full-time to part-time, until their GPA is increased. This restricted academic probation is considered troublesome for international undergraduate students because in order to maintain their student visa status, they need to be full-time students enrolled in a minimum of 12 credits. Unless students adhere to these rules, they may be deported from the country due to the United States immigration regulations.

Academic probation was a significant concern to the CIE advisors. Ronny described the steps he took in monitoring student progress to help them improve their GPA. However, once students exited the English Intensive program and took academic classes, they became subject to more serious consequences than a contract with their CIE advisor. Camilla explained that,

> Academic probation is if a student has performed ... Let me think, I don't know what the exact cut-off is on the GPA, but if a student falls below a certain grade point average in a given semester, then they are placed on academic probation with the university, which is like a warning system so students know, "Hey, you're struggling with some classes. You need to perform better next semester, or else there will be further academic consequences.

For international students who fail to raise their GPA, Camilla outlined some of the consequences of being placed on restricted academic probation. These students faced the possible loss of their F-1student visa unless they were enrolled as full-time students; thus this specific university rule had a significant impact for international students with suspected learning disabilities. Zara, the CIE advisor, added, "It blows me away every time I work with international students, and not even bringing in the whole issue of immigration. Those rules are already set. Those are set by the federal government."

Therefore, Camilla stated, it was critical to catch these students early and provide supports so they could avoid moving from academic probation to restricted probation and the possible loss of their visa. One way of providing support for international students facing academic probation, was the Academic Success Packet used at Camilla's university. This packet requires that students develop a plan for success in collaboration with their academic advisors. Students must meet all the requirements laid out in the package before they can be removed from academic probation. Camilla shared,

> Like I said, one of those things is writing out "What are three things I'm going to do to make myself more successful?" First, identifying what are three things that contributed to me not being successful last semester? What are three things I'm going to do to change those things, and what are three resources that I can use on campus that can help me? It might be, for example, our office. The student might work with us and write out three steps.

While Camilla and Zara discussed the challenges of supporting international students who were placed on academic probation, Ronny had a slightly different experience. He had the authority to place students on academic probation. However, the CIE office takes into account the possibility that students' academic challenges may be due to a disability. Ronny's approach, therefore, was to refer students for further evaluation prior to being placed an academic probation. He stated,

When somebody's trying and attending class and they are not getting it done, they can't get through an exam, their essays aren't improving despite the fact that they're working hard and working with the writing tutors, then we say, "Okay, hold on a minute. There's something else going on here, we're not going to put the student on any kind of probation or dismissed learning thing. We need to figure out first what's going on. We could put them on probation just to get their attention, but we're not going to do anything drastic until we've sent them to something like the [disability support service office].

Academic misconduct. Many international undergraduate students come from educational cultures that are more cooperative than the United States. university system. Sharing information with other students is considered not only culturally acceptable but also socially required between friends. The CIE advisors discussed the issue of academic misconduct that sometime arose among international undergraduate students.

Academic misconduct refers to actions that might result in creating unfair academic advantage for one self or other students. This can include academic dishonesty, such as cheating and deception, or more seriously, plagiarism. Zara, Ronny, and Camilla stated that they had observed many cases where international undergraduate students were overly helping each other in assignments and exams, which could bring into question their academic integrity. Ronny, for example, indicated that one of the issues that he covered in orientation was the consequences of academic misconduct. He explained that it is very important to discuss the issue of academic dishonesty with the students as academic integrity is one of most highly valued educational expectations within the United States university system. Ronny suggested that because international students tend to bond together socially, it is easy for them to become involved in issues relating to academic dishonesty.

Camilla stated that her experience was that it was common for international undergraduate students to work together with their homework. She suggested that many

international students think that there is nothing wrong with helping classmates with their

homework. However, as Camilla emphasized, helping can sometimes cross an academic

bright line in the United States.

> Like helping on homework is standard. You help each other with homework,
> where in America, no, that's plagiarism to help. Somebody else with their
> homework, so that maybe plays a role in it. I hear that a lot that foreign students
> are much more used to helping one another, whereas in America, that's frowned
> upon.

Zara provided an explanation about the underlying cultural aspects associated

with academic misconduct. She stated that in many of the cultures that these students

come from, such as China and the Middle East, helping each other on assignments and

take-home exams is not considered to be dishonest.

> [Students believe] it's okay for students to look at notes that you have written to
> the same answers from the people who are now in a grade above you. It's
> completely okay to share. It's a very collectivist culture. I could get it from the
> cultural perspective, because you just help everybody that's around you, and it's
> completely okay for you to write the same answer. After all, it's the same
> question, right?

Academic dishonesty can take many forms. Cheating on exams is a recurrent

problem among both American and international students, and is often facilitated by the

presence of smart phones. Zara described examples of students using their phones for

unfair academic advantage during testing.

> We have seen using cell phones or using texting to talk to another person who's in
> a different section, but has a different test time, we have seen some of that. Or
> using phones to browse. We have seen some of that. I would say that that's
> probably a problem with international or with domestic students. I don't think
> that's only international students. I just know because I get all of these reports.

Zara further explained that plagiarism can be a confusing concept to some

international students. Students may be so focused on providing the correct answer, they

fail to consider how they arrived at that answer. They might think it is ok to present

information that is available without giving credit to the original source. Zara felt that

many international undergraduate students were simply ignorant about what plagiarism

consisted of as well as the consequences of engaging in engaging in academic

misconduct. She suggested that international students simply need to be educated more

about appropriate ways to use external sources in their assignments so they do not

unintentionally plagiarize other authors' work. She stated,

> [Students think that] the information is out there. I didn't create that information, so if it's out there, it's out there. I'm just going to give you what's out there. If you ask me for it I'll give it to you. I completely understand that. Yet, this culture holds into a very high standard. Plagiarism and academic misconduct is big in this culture. It's almost like a zero tolerance policy.

Most universities take accusations of plagiarism very seriously. Consequently,

when international undergraduate students became involved in plagiarism when doing

assignments, they failed some of their classes. In Zara's experience, professors varied in

their reactions toward plagiarism. Some of them would fail the students on specific

assignments while others fail the students on the whole class. And failing classes could

have dire consequences for international students.

All of the CIE advisors suggested that international students often face challenges

in adjusting to studying at universities in the United States. One reason for this is that the

learning environment can be vastly different from what they are used to in their native

country, and the students may therefore lack the strategic study skills that are necessary

for academic success.

Different learning environments. The learning environment refers to the

diversity of pedagogical styles and practices, expectations for participation and

demonstration of learning by students, multiple roles for students and professors,

differing world views, as well as the curricula that are used in United States

postsecondary education which differ significantly from what the students were used to in

their home countries. Three DSS professionals, two students, one CIE advisor, and a

psychologist, all shared similar perspectives regarding the educational shift that

international students usually experience. Cristina, a DSS professional, indicated that

some students would come to her office to express the challenges in keeping up with

what their professors required them to do.

> A lot of international students, who come in from high school, and the demands they meet here with professors, are often quite different…it's quite a transitional phase and it happens so suddenly, within the structure of going from high school to college, there's a little bit of faltering.

Zara, a CIE advisor, mentioned that international students who may be suspected

of having learning disabilities face a substantial difference in teaching styles that are used

in United States classes. Many students come from educational cultures that require

students to sit passively and take notes. Asking questions or discussing topics is often

considered disrespectful to the teacher and not well tolerated. Being a former

international student herself, Zara provided a rich understanding of what international

students who come from regions such as the Middle East, India, and China were required

to do in classes in their home classes:

> They were not expected to add a whole lot into the class discussions because the teacher is definitely the one with the power. Teacher gives you knowledge, you just take it. [When it comes to] engagement in class, sometimes they don't always get what is actually engaging in discussion and engaging purposefully and fruitfully in discussions.

Thus, for international students to succeed in a typical United States university

classroom, they need to purposely engage in discussions with their classmates, ask

questions to clarify their understanding, and give their opinions on a wide range of topics.

Most international students from the Middle East or Asia have never had the opportunity to develop or practice these skills. Alex agreed with Zara's statement, adding his own take on the differences in workload between his Chinese program and his United States program. Alex stated, "in China, we just focus on the lectures . . .you don't have to pay any attention on the homework . . . it's less pressure in China if you study college in China." Alex further elaborated regarding the structure of a design class that was delivered differently in China compared to the United States Alex indicated that he liked the engagement level offered in United States university classes. Classes in China required him to listen to the lectures without any real involvement in doing projects, and his instructors would suggest that he find a job if he needed the experience. He stated, "In China for the design class, we just draw the design in a computer and hand it in to the professor and that's it." However, in his current United States program, he builds the design himself and participates in a competition at the end of the semester. "I start to love to study here because I get a more hands-on experience . . . I learned a lot from the project, so in China--no project." Alex stated that classes in Chinese universities would not include hands-on projects which would help students to learn by experience.

Wendy, the psychologist, spoke of the significant shifts that international undergraduate students undergo. In addition to the language barrier, international students experience a number of developmental stressors, including the transition away from home to more independence, living alone for perhaps the first time, dealing with different cultural mores, and meeting unique educational expectations. Higher education professionals often do not discuss these situations with the students, yet these factors can be highly impactful on the academic success of students. She explained it this way,

They were able to do well in high school and get grades that now, they don't know how to perform like that in this. Add that to especially here you're talking about Saudi undergraduates or who are coming from other countries. You've got that going way away from home, the cultural shift, the religious shift, the new language shift. You do need somebody who's aware of all those things and can say, "How does that influence cognitive functioning, learning, motivation, retention, all of that kind of stuff?"

Rayan, an international undergraduate student with identified ADHD, discussed how some of the theoretical constructs he encountered in his classes caused personal conflicts with his cultural and religious background. Because he wanted to be a doctor, he majored in pre-med biology, which was not a subject that came easily to him. He struggled with the concepts of Darwinian evolution and the assumed superiority of the scientific method. These conflicted with his religious training, which placed Allah in the center of knowledge, not at the periphery, and this essential conflict impacted his motivation to continue learning,

They keep on repeating lots of theories that are in conflict with what we believe [in Islam]. Okay, I got no problem with it [Darwinian evolution]. They just keep forcing it, keep forcing it. Even sometimes it doesn't make any sense how they relate to so many aspects …the evolution, natural selection, all of that. I would agree with them, no problem, but I don't know, I've been hitting that wall. Shall I just agree with them? Study more, I could study. I could understand it better.

He further elaborated,

I've been trying to just go around it and think of it in a different way and always relate to Allah and always relate to a God because you can't just prove that every single organism in here has just been developing by itself. That's what's confusing me.

Another challenge that international undergraduate students face is the sheer amount of work they are expected to complete. This is often a surprise for new undergraduate students and raises the issue of whether they possess the strategic skills

necessary for academic success. These skills include personal organization and time management skills.

Strategic study skills. Sally, the DSS professional, stated that many international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities and/or ADHD have needs that go beyond simple accommodations. Most students who receive services through the DSS office need one-on-one support to help them to develop the study skills they need to succeed academically.

> We have found the vast majority of our students to need more than just extended time on exams. They need somebody to help them develop study skill strategies, time management, organization, addressing the writing process more effectively as expressive writing demands increase over time here.

Stacy, the DSS professional, suggested that time management was the single biggest challenge to academic success for many international students with learning disabilities and/or ADHD. She believed this was due to the students' tendency to not be organized. Stacy found that many international students are used to a more lenient educational system before they arrive in the US; hence, she needed to teach time management skills to assist them in attending class and studying. In addition to being a student, an international student also needed to make time to meet with his/her DSS advisor, request accommodations, and follow up with his/her professors in a different way than previously. She identified time management as a major source of the students' academic struggles. She stated,

> Time management is huge, that affects their academics. . . . "I missed the test." "Why did you miss a test?" "Oh, I just forgot" or "I didn't think I would do well," or "I meant to do this," or "I meant to show up," or "I meant to wake up," and it's like, "Well, you can't miss a test and think that you're going to be okay." Not following up with the professors. Not studying enough. Not going to the tutors, bad time management.

Stacy's perspective aligns with what Rayan, a student, shared as his recipe for success in a United States university. He indicated that in order to be successful and be able to meet the high demands of classes, he needed to organize himself.

> Just organize yourself, organize yourself in a daily, not even in a daily basis, in hour basis. From this hour to this hour, I'll be having lunch for 15 minutes. I'll be texting for 15 minutes. I'll be doing this homework for this class that's due next week or two weeks after.

Heba, a student, shared a similar perspective regarding the academic challenges that she faced once she transferred to a four-year university. She was surprised by the workload that was required but quickly understood that she would be lost unless she devoted the time and attention that her studies required.

> It's a lot of work, you really need to do all the readings, you need to do all the assignments to do well or else you'll be lost. It's very time consuming and you need to put your effort and you need to know your responsibilities as a student if you want to do well.

Additionally, she indicated that her biggest concern was finishing exams on time, especially those that required essay responses. Heba described the challenges of having learning disabilities during exams. In addition to the stress of preparing for the exam, her dyslexia impacted whether she was able to complete all items on the exam. She had to read through exam questions several times, she knew she was making spelling mistakes, and she spent a considerable amount of time correcting these. When exams consisted primarily of essay questions, she was often not able to complete all items on the exam. Even excellent time management skills could not ameliorate the impact of having a learning disability.

International undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities and/or ADHD faced several challenges in adjusting to a new learning environment. These

included different pedagogical approaches, expectations regarding students' participation, and high academic demands. According to the CIE advisors, international undergraduate students often faced difficulties maintaining good academic standing which might result in academic probation. Unintentional cases of academic misconduct were also discussed. The DSS professionals suggested that international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities and/ or ADHD often needed assistance in developing strategic study skills.

Knowledge of Available Supports

The fourth theme that emerged from the data is the international students' knowledge of supports that are available on campus. Two CIE advisors, four DSS professionals, and two students shared their perspectives regarding this issue. International undergraduate students are often unaware of the supports that exist at universities in the United States because they have never experienced these resources previously. Sally, a DSS professional, stated that when someone does not have previous experience receiving disability support at home, "these students don't even know that it's something that they can seek help for, that there are resources that they can look into."

Zara, a CIE advisor, explained that international undergraduate students, especially those who attended the English intensive programs, encountered many transitional issues including their limited English proficiency and cultural acclimatization. One challenge that these students faced was their unawareness of the services and supports that were available on campus. Zara said,

In most other countries, except for maybe Western Europe, Great Britain, Germany, even they are not very well developed when it comes to student affairs or disability supports . . . the entire division does not even exist in most of the world. When you come from a part of the world where this does not exist, then how do you come to a new culture and ask for something that you don't know exists?

Zara further indicated that as is the case with most universities, her university relied on freshman orientation as the main source of information to inform international students about available resources on campus. However, these orientations were given to all students in English, a language in which most international students were not yet fluent. Zara further claimed that the orientations gave students a lot of information in a short period of time, which was a challenge for students with limited English proficiency. She also noted that the freshman orientation occurred while international students were focused on making housing, medical, and academic arrangements. Zara explained,

Think about international students flying in, doing 15/17 hour flights, non-stop flights from a different culture, being totally jet lagged to a point where they're complete zombies. Then you make then you make them sit down three days in a row in 16 hour sessions, giving them all of this information. We have checked the box, we've given them that information but when they actually need it, when they're in trouble in October and they're hit by homesickness or mental health or anxiety, depression, are they going to remember? No, because they came in at that euphoria, that you curve of cultural adjustment at the top of the curve and you're feeling euphoria, right? That's when we give them the information about how you might feel when you're at the bottom.

Camilla, a CIE advisor, stated that she often shared information about the academic resources that were available to international undergraduate students. During discussions with these students, she sought to identify whether their challenges pertained to certain classes or to all of their academic classes. If students had similar challenges in all classes, Camilla suggested that they approach the DSS office. She noted that when she

mentioned the DSS office to the students, they were apparently not aware of the existence

of such supports on campus. She said,

> They just have never heard of the disability office. They don't even understand
> that it exists, or what its purpose is, so I try to explain it in a way that makes sense
> in context, "It's there for student success, and trying to make students who
> struggle with tests, or struggle with learning in this way, be better in the
> classroom, so you can succeed and get your degree here.

Although these students had been informed of available supports during freshman

orientation, Camilla's experience was that many of them need the guidance of an advisor

or faculty member to guide them to appropriate assistance.

Stacy, a DSS professional, stated that in her experience international

undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities or/and ADHD did not

approach her to request assistance on their own. They were usually referred via a friend

or a professor. Stacy claimed that they did not self-refer because they were often unaware

of the supports available to them on campus. Further, international students did not have

a background of receiving accommodations or disability services in their previous

educational experience. "They don't know that it's here, but they've never received any

kind of services to even know, so not necessarily even that the disability resource center

is here."

Sally, a DSS professional, shared similar experiences as Stacy. She, too,

frequently met international students who had never heard about the supports available on

campus, and who were referred by others to the DSS office. Sally pointed out that there

were a number of factors that influence whether students are aware of available supports,

including possessing solid understanding regarding learning disabilities, previously

receiving accommodations, and coming from a family knowledgeable about supports to

share with their child. She found that international students were far less likely to come

from such a background, which impacted their awareness of existing disability supports.

When compared to their American counterparts, international students with disabilities

should be considered disadvantaged.

> Students whose performance might be impacted upon by an undiagnosed
> disability of some sort, their needs are more than the American students because
> they don't know what to do, whereas families here in the United States are so
> aware of the laws that oversee or guarantee the provision of somebody's special
> services that it's something that they think to use very, very quickly.

Moreover, Sally further stated that a unique factor pertaining to international

students' lack the awareness was due to the difference in societal awareness of disability

issues between the United States and their native country. She explained that

international undergraduate students do not know that American society recognizes and

respects individuals with disabilities and that these individuals are entitled to receive

services on campus.

Challenges related to referral. Most of the study participants indicated that

international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities and/or ADHD

approached disability support service offices due to instructor referral, through a friend,

or referral by the CIE office. Based on the participants' statements, it is rare for an

international student to self-refer; however, it did occur with one of the students who

participated in this study.

Tom, Roxy, and Cristina, DSS professionals, all indicated that on most occasions,

professors refer international undergraduate students to their office, "Often their

professors say, 'You are really struggling with this, and I know you're paying attention in

class, and I know you're taking notes, and you're always here, and you ask good

questions, and then you fail the test.' " Stacy, a DSS professional, indicated that it was

rare for an international undergraduate student to approach the disability supports service

office on their own. She stated, "

> They've been referred to come here or one of their friends has brought them in
> here. A lot times, international students come in the first time with a friend. I had
> an international student that I was working very closely with. She suspected two
> of her friends had a learning disability, so she brought them in with her so they
> could find out what kind of supports and things like that they could get.

Rayan and Alex, students, indicated that their performance on exams and their

frustration with failing classes made them approach the help of the international

education office. Rayan explained that due to his academic struggles the previous

summer, he approached the CIE office for assistance. The CIE advisor shared several

resources with him, including the DSS office. Rayan then pursued services at the DSS

office.

Alex also stated that due to his fear of failing a chemistry class, he approached the

international education office to seek their help, after which they referred him to the DSS

office. Camilla, the CIE advisor, also stated that she mentioned the DSS office as an

option for students who were placed on academic probation. Because DSS services were

frequently unfamiliar to international students, Camilla found she had to be very specific

about what the DSS office had to offer, even down to the location within the campus,

> The confusion is probably the more common one, where they just don't
> understand what I'm asking them to do, so I write down the location and say, "If
> you want to go here, it's in the Student Commons Building on the second floor.
> It's called the Disability Resources and Services, and they have people that you
> can talk to about seeing whether they have anything for you that can help you
> succeed better in your test taking."

Camilla stated that when she mentioned the DSS office as an option, students

often showed hesitation about approaching DSS due to the stigmatizing disability labels

associated with disability services. She had to explain the nature of the services offered

through the DSS office, describing the types of support and accommodations students

could access at the DSS office. In her conversation with students, Camilla focused on

tools that would result in the academic success for the students.

Roxy stated that international students were very hesitant to seek out help, "our

office says resources for disabled students and a lot of people don't want, and that's what I

hear as well is 'well, I don't have a disability but I really struggle with tests.' " Zara, the

CIE advisor, indicated that she took into consideration the reluctance that might occur in

which she explained to them what they could expect from visiting the DSS office and

what types of accommodations were available for them to use. She even offered to join

international students for their first visit to the DSS office. "I try to tell them that they're

located at a different location, none of your friends will know. What might come out of

the meeting asking about accommodations and what would they look like. She further

stated, "I would ask the student, 'Are you more comfortable there [at the DSS office] Do

you want them to come here [to the CIE office]. They would come over here and I'd just

give them a conference room so they could do their assessment over here."

Eligibility documentation. One topic that many participants brought up was the

importance of having appropriate and comprehensive disability documentation that

identified the student's needs. Throughout the interview process, the DSS professionals

mentioned a common situation when they encountered international students who

demonstrate characteristics of learning disabilities, yet lacked proper documentation to

support their needs for accommodations. All DSS professionals stated that they provided

provisional (temporary) accommodations for almost a semester to those students. By

offering these temporary accommodations, international students who were suspected of having learning disabilities would have the time to seek needed documentation that would help them become eligible for permanent accommodations. The DSS professionals indicated that providing provisional accommodations was very beneficial in a way that would give the students time to examine the effectiveness of accommodations and at the same time give them the time to seek required evaluation. Terry stated,

> We give a semester of provisional status for students receive accommodations and get diagnosis. Now, we'll do a referral for a learning assistance consultation, and that's through the counseling center.

Stacy indicated that once international students arrived at her office, they already felt confused and overwhelmed because they did not know what supports and resources were available to them. Furthermore, they did not know which procedures that they need to undertake to receive accommodations. Many students were unaware that they had a disability; therefore, they also lacked proper documentation identifying their disabilities. Consequently, Stacy followed a unique approach that she used to help the students receive needed accommodations while they lacked the required documentation. She said,

> If they don't have any kind of documentation, I will tell them, "Why don't you go to counseling? First time is free. Just get a copy of your visit?" Then at least legally I have some sort of documentation that shows a student has sought counseling.

Rayan was one student who took this advice. He used the counseling service to document his need for accommodations. "I went to counseling. Then [they] just give me advice. I just took the paper that says I went to a counselor to support my case for the withdrawal of classes and stuff like that." This was the first step for Rayan to receive eligibility for services.

Sally, a DSS professional, stated that before she asked international students to seek comprehensive testing, she provided in-depth consultation with international undergraduate students who demonstrated characteristics of learning disabilities. She helped them to define their academic problems and suggested quick tips and ideas to help them overcome some of these academic challenges. Some of her tips and ideas included using a recorder, studying in groups, and managing study times. She further explained, "Sometimes that's enough. If it's not, then they may want to pursue the full evaluation or whatever other assessment would be needed to document a disability and then, be able to request the more formal accommodations."

The majority of DSS professionals agreed that having a thorough and comprehensive evaluation report aided in the process of determining accommodations for international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities and/or ADHD. For example, Stacy indicated that the more detailed assessment she can get from the students, the more she can provide needed accommodations. "It's the documentation. Before we design a plan of accommodations, there's got to be clinical documentation," Sally stated.

When I asked Heba how the DSS professionals became aware of her needs and the types of accommodations she needed, she responded that DSS professionals relied on the recommendations listed in her evaluation report. "It's based on the testing I did that she recommended some extra time [during exams] based on how I tested when I was getting diagnosed." Heba further explained that she was not involved in any discussions with DSS professionals to determine her needed accommodations; these were provided based predominantly on the evaluation report. "They [the DSS professionals] write the

report, saw what they [the evaluators] recommended and what I needed based on them. They just did that. They just put what was on the report and accommodated me based on the report completely." However, Heba noted that there were some discussions where the DSS professional offered her the use of a smart pen. This is a pen that students use to take notes on special paper while recording a lecture simultaneously. The pen synchronizes words and diagrams with the lecture. When reviewing lecture notes, the pen plays back the part of the lecture that is connected to specific notes and diagrams.

Stacy and Sally both mentioned that they rely heavily on the information included in clinical documentation, predominantly the psychoeducational reports written by professionals outside of the DSS office, to determine what constitutes appropriate accommodations for international students with disabilities. Tom, on the other hand, provided a different perspective regarding the quality of the assessment reports that they received from some of the international students. Sometimes these made him rely less on formal documentation and rely more on the students' self-report. Tom explained that international undergraduate students came from countries where procedures used to evaluate learning disabilities were limited, which impacted the quality of their documentation.

> Some students don't come from a very privileged background, and that goes back to why I don't try to be too reliant on documentation, because what you'll find in this profession is the students who come from privilege have the best documentation, but that doesn't mean that they are any more limited in their disability than another student.

When I asked DSS professionals whether international students provided needed documentation to obtain accommodations, most of the professionals indicated that the

majority of these students lack appropriate documentation. However, Sally stated that she

sometimes received foreign documentation,

> I'll go to our language departments, and I'll ask somebody to help me translate, I don't need all the details. Once I have that general understanding of what the student's learning difficulties were evaluated to be, I can then say, "Well, perhaps extended time on exams would be helpful for you." "Perhaps being able to take your exams on a quieter space because you seem to be very susceptible to distractions, and it makes it hard for you to think and to concentrate." It could be the note taking. It could be the alternate format text materials.

According to the DSS professionals and CIE advisors, international undergraduate

students lacked the knowledge of the existence regarding supports available to them on

campus. Several factors could influence the students' unawareness including language

proficiency, prior diagnosis of learning disabilities, previous experiences with

accommodations, and educated and knowledgeable families. Due to the students'

unawareness, they did not approach DSS office by their own in which they mostly

referred by a friend, a CIE office, or an instructor.

All study participants indicated that international students frequently lack

appropriate documents to support their need for accommodations. The next section

includes statements of the DSS professionals, CIE professionals, and the students

regarding the process of providing accommodations that the students need.

Providing Accommodations and Supports

The fifth main theme to emerge from the data analysis was the process of

providing the accommodations and supports that international undergraduate students

with identified learning disabilities and/or ADHD need to succeed academically. The

participants discussed three types of supports: academic accommodations, emotional

supports, and strategic learning supports.

Academic accommodations. There was a consensus among study participants regarding the types of accommodations that international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities and/or ADHD prefer. The most common accommodations offered through DSS include extended time and a quiet room during exams, extra time on class assignments, note takers, using assistive technology, and alternative text formats. By soliciting responses regarding how the students' needs were supported, all study participants indicated that among all accommodations, most international students with identified learning disabilities and/or ADHD preferred extra time and a quiet place in which to take exams. "A big one is getting more time for the exams or taking their exams in a different place that's not in the classroom. They have learned to love and appreciate it," Stacy stated.

All students who participated in the study used extended time as their primary accommodation. When I asked Heba, a student with identified learning disabilities, whether the accommodations she received were effective or not, she stated, "It's very effective with taking the exams, the extra time, the computer. That was really useful last semester because a lot of my classes required essay responses . . . especially with my spelling problems." Alex, a student identified with learning disabilities, stated that he liked taking exams in a quiet room because it helped him to concentrate better.

Another type of accommodation that Sally, the DSS professional, indicated depended on the students' English mastery,

> If the student has reasonably good English language mastery, we ask them to dictate their exam . . .they can talk into a recorder or to the computer with this software that transcribes from what it hears, that may be a better way for the student to demonstrate what it is they know.

Emotional support. Supporting the students' needs did not rely solely on offering common reasonable accommodations; CIE professionals and DSS professionals also addressed other needs of international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities and/or ADHD. Tom and Cristina shared their experiences regarding how they emotionally support international undergraduate students who received diagnoses of learning disabilities. Cristina, for example, indicated that since these students usually received their learning disability identification while studying abroad, she provided counseling services, "I provide a lot of counseling, I help students through the grief process, because they're new to their disability, they feel like they're now worthless because of it." Tom, who himself has cerebral palsy, said,

> In this field, no one is happy having disabilities, . . . especially when you receive a diagnosis. And for a lot of students who receive a diagnosis, it's kinda a relief because they understand what's wrong… they always thought that they are stupid or something.

Strategic learning supports. Both Stacy and Sally, DSS professionals, often went beyond just offering accommodations, providing individualized supports that addressed the unique needs of international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities. "For the international students, I feel like I have to do a little bit more for them in the beginning and with them and then give them the independence." Stacy found her background as a special education teacher helpful when it came to determining the unique needs of the international students. She emphasized that the needs of international students often go well beyond simply offering accommodations; students need to learn skills that will help them to navigate the educational demands they face. She further elaborated,

I think part of it is that's my education. That's my teacher background in … so, "What good is that doing for you?" I'm not just going to sit there and go "Okay". I will keep challenging them because that's how they're going to learn and grow. If they don't have anybody to show them then I feel like it is my responsibility to, like I said, it's not just the accommodations. It's navigating, figuring all of this out.

Sally indicated that she discussed other strategies with international students. "We talk about learning styles, and they don't always know what learning style is all about and how they might be able to implement different kinds of study strategies and reading strategies that matches their learning style." Sally explained that in her office, they recognize that offering common accommodations such as extended time on exams is not enough all the time. She stated, "They need somebody to help them develop study skill strategies, time management, organization, addressing the writing process more effectively as expressive writing demands increase over time here."

CIE advisors such as Zara and Camilla indicated that besides referring students who may be suspected of having learning disabilities to disability services, they also refer them to other supports available on campus. These resources range between counseling centers, mentoring programs, academic advancement centers, and assisted technology resource centers. However, Camilla shared that determining which resources to refer the students to, depends on what the students share with her.

A unique conflict of interests. Occasionally, a conflict of interest can arise between using certain accommodations and the goals of the intensive English program. An obstacle that some internationals undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities and/or ADHD encountered was whether some of the departments would agree to implement suggested accommodations that DSS office determined. Both Zara, the CIE advisor, and Cristina, the DSS professional, discussed this issue. When Zara listed

available resources on campus that provided extra support for international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities, she mentioned that the occupational therapy program offered a mentoring program to students with learning disabilities. However, Zara stated that, "In terms of learning disabilities, the occupational therapy program has a lot of program software that helps with your learning disability. That became problematic for [English language learners], because they don't want you using software when you're learning the language." Cristina described this conflict of interest when she suggested some of the accommodations for international undergraduate students with learning disabilities who still studied at the English intensive program on campus. "A big piece of their program is becoming proficient with English . . . many of the accommodations that we do for people are to help them, and that undermines what the class is trying to teach." Cristina further explained that some software programs commonly provided by DSS, use a word bank or correct a student's spelling, grammar, or punctuation. While these accommodations work well for university students who struggle with spelling, they may be problematic for international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities, because, as she explains, "they're supposed to be learning how to spell the word." Thus, the accommodations offered by DSS might conflict with the objectives of the English intensive program that aims to teach basic English skills.

From the perspectives of the DSS professionals and students, international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities preferred receiving extra time and using quiet room during exams. Other supports that were commonly provided included emotional support and one-on-one strategic learning support to help students improve their study skills. Additionally, CIE advisors referred students to other resources

on campus. A unique conflict of interest existed between accommodations commonly provided by DSS and the English Intensive program.

Disclosure

The sixth theme that emerged in this study was challenges related to disclosure. In the context of the current study, disclosure refers to whether international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities and/or ADHD disclose their academic, social, or cultural challenges to the DSS professionals or instructors. International students may hesitate to disclose information because they come from cultures that stigmatize individuals with disabilities.

Sharing information. When asked to reflect on the students' academic, social, and cultural needs, DSS professionals all indicated that while international undergraduate students share challenges pertaining to their academic performance, they rarely share their personal information. Cristina indicated that 99% of what DSS professionals do is driven by what the students are sharing with them. She further stated, "I tell them that a key here is that you have to tell us because we don't track you, but if you tell us then we will do what we can for you." Roxy agreed with Cristina, using the example that it was easier for international students to disclose that they had a physical condition, such as Crohn's disease, rather than a learning disability.

Tom, a DSS professional, shared a situation with a student who was from China who insisted of receiving accommodations while at the same time denying that he had a disability or had received accommodations before. Tom shared that during his interview with the student, he finally understood this student's reluctance to state that he had a disability,

I met with one student who was Chinese and didn't say that he'd ever been diagnosed . . . he divulged to me that his teacher used to let him sit in the corner to take exams … his parents made him promise that he would never tell anybody that he had difficulty.

Cristina stated that most of the students only use the DSS office as a place that offered academic accommodations. "It's not hard for them to talk to me about anything that is business like, 'these are accommodations I need in my class but nothing emotional."

Only one DSS professional, Stacy, stated that she had met international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities and/or ADHD who disclosed their disability upon arrival at the university. This was because they were already diagnosed with a learning disability prior to attending the university.

Some students are self-disclosing before they even get here. Then the international student office will contact us. This one particular person who contacted me basically said, "Seems like some of the students get a to-do list when they first get here of all of the different things that with the visa, and getting registered, and meeting with this person," so she was adding disability resource center registration to her to-do list, but that's only because the student had self-disclosed to her.

Stigma. Tom attempted to explain the reason why an international student shared information with him while he didn't with another coworker in the office. "He disclosed this to me because I'm a male and I have a disability, obviously." He further described that students who were Asian had a high code of honor leading them to hide their challenges. These students were often very reluctant to receive any label of disability. According to Tom, Asian students tended to attribute their challenges to their difficulties with English language proficiency. He stated, "they will even lie and say that, 'I went to [disability support office], and I tricked them into giving me accommodations when I didn't really need it.' " He further explained, "I don't see Asian students to be open,

they're hard to get to know, there is something about Asian students about honor… and you hide everything you feel and you hide what is perceived to be a shortcoming." Tom attributed this to the culture. He shared his experience of traveling to China and Japan, where he noticed that he rarely saw individuals with disabilities in public. He suggested that this was reflective of the different levels of acceptance of disabilities in different countries. Alex, a student from China, shared a statement similar to Tom's, "In China, we don't want to share our disadvantages to other people, when I knew I have little [bit of] learning disability . . . I just keep it in secret and I don't want other people to know."

Sally, a DSS professional, stated that many students chose not to disclose their disability or their needs for extra help because they did not want to be singled out. Her experience was that some international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities do not request class accommodations because they do not want to be publicly identified as having a disability and thus choose to restrict themselves to those accommodations that are provided in the disability office. What Sally indicated aligned with Alex' statement. "I do not want to be treated differently, I want to be treated equally . . . I hand in my homework on time exactly the same time with a normal student." Sally thought that international undergraduate students with learning disabilities might be ashamed of their academic difficulties because they need to meet their cultural expectations for success. "They don't share that with their family and they often keep it, they won't even share it with somebody here. Their problems get worse because we're not attempting to tackle them sooner before things get so terrible."

I asked Heba, Alex, and Rayan whether they would identify themselves as individuals who had learning disabilities and/or ADHD. Heba stated that her mother was the one who pushed her to seek help from the DSS office. She stated,

> Mom always knew, deep down there was something . . . "Just say you think you have a learning disability, say what happens, how did you get diagnosed. What do you guys recommend? The whole process, just go ask about it."

Heba further explained that it was not a challenge for her to ask for the DSS help or even to share to others that she had learning disabilities. She stated, "I feel here there is more knowledge about learning disabilities, so it makes it easier to talk and communicate about it and make it more comfortable. In the Middle East, learning disability is kind of like a stigma." Moreover, Heba indicated that when she recently applied for an internship, she declared in her resume that she has a learning disability. Yet, she regretted sharing this information in her application.

> Because I know in the workplace . . . it depends on the task, like if I'm doing events, my disability doesn't have anything to do with how I'm going to do an event. It depends on what I'm doing.

Alex said he would not share this information with others when he returns to China.

> If your boss knows, they will assign a good project to someone else. They will maybe say "you have learning disability, you cannot handle stress, maybe I'll give this project to another person." But for me, I'm not. I can handle it, do that [it]. I could spend way more time than other people. I could work hard. I could achieve the same goal with other people or even better than the other people. I don't want other people know that I have this kind of disability to not underestimate me.

Rayan indicated that he was shocked that he got the ADHD diagnosis and he would not share it publically because "I'm not trying to take medicine all of my life." He further stated that it was not a shame for him to have ADHD, but he did not want to make his family sad.

According to the DSS professionals, in order for them to provide supports, they relied on what the international students shared with them. Yet, international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities were hesitance to disclose their needs. This was due to the social stigma associated with disabilities in their home countries. Two students described that they would not identify themselves as individuals with disabilities while one student was very comfortable disclosing her disabilities.

**Identification of Learning Disabilities and/or
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder**

The seventh theme that emerged from the data was identification of learning disabilities. This theme refers to the process that was used in order to identify international undergraduate students with learning disabilities and/or ADHD to grant them eligibility for disability services. DSS professionals, CIE advisors, and international students with identified learning disabilities and/or ADHD who participated in the study were interviewed regarding their perceptions of the process of identifying international undergraduate students with learning disabilities. Among the three students who participated in the study, two were identified with learning disabilities and one student was diagnosed with ADHD.

Data from the interviews and document analysis indicate that none of the disability support service offices included in the study conducted assessments. Professionals who work at the disability support service offices help in guiding the students on how and where to get assessed in order obtain needed documentation for service eligibility purposes. It is worth mentioning that in order for students to receive eligibility for disability services, they are required to provide documentation that indicates their specific disability. In order for students to obtain required documentation,

they need to seek an evaluation from a professional qualified in their specific disability. Thus, this theme includes documentation requirements for disability identification, challenges in identifying learning disabilities for international students, and eligibility for accommodations that covered what kinds of documentation the students in this study obtained.

Documentation requirements. Data from document analysis indicated that all three DSS offices had similar requirements because they all followed Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (2008) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (1973) guidelines. Students needed to provide evidence of a disability determined through evaluation by a qualified professional unrelated to the student. Documentation requirements included diagnostic documentation that illustrates the nature and the extent of learning disabilities and/or ADHD, discussed the impact of learning disabilities and/or ADHD in the university environment, and indicated the connection between the disability and recommended accommodations.

Each disability category has its own documentation requirements. Learning disability documentation requirements include current and comprehensive report of aptitude and academic achievement that are derived from psycho-educational assessments. ADHD documentation requirements should include current diagnosis of ADHD derived from age-appropriate, diagnostic evaluations conducted by trained and qualified professionals such as psychiatrists, psychologists, or neuropsychologists.

Challenges associated with learning disability identification. The study participants stated that it is not an easy process for international undergraduate students to receive a diagnosis of learning disabilities. Sally, a DSS professional, shared that most

international students who come to the DSS office have physical disabilities or other,

more visible conditions that impact their day-to-day functioning. Even without previous

experience of accommodations that assist their academic success, an obvious disability

provides a bridge for these students to work with the DSS office to identify resources and

determine supports. However, when international students are struggling academically,

this could be due to several factors, including their level of English proficiency.

    Language difference versus learning disability. Ronny and Zara, CIE advisors,

Cristina and Roxy, the DSS professionals indicated that whenever international students

experience academic challenges, it is immediately assumed that the language difference

is the cause, not a disability. This can hinder the process of formally identifying

international undergraduate students with learning disabilities. "Everyone is just going to

jump to the assumption that it is a language thing," Ronny said. The difficulty of

distinguishing language differences from learning disabilities also presented a challenge

in supporting the needs of these students. Cristina noted that because it is often

problematic to distinguish between language differences and learning disabilities; this can

result in students not receiving the accommodations they actually need. Wendy, the

psychologist, echoed this statement. She stated that the lack of valid assessment tools for

international students often made it highly challenging to determine whether a student's

academic difficulties stem from a language barrier or a true learning disability.

> It becomes a challenge particularly for international students to discern between
> are they struggling academically because of the English language mastery or are
> they struggling academically because even in their primary language, they would
> exhibit a learning disability?

    Sally, the DSS professional, explained that this uncertainty might cause late

diagnosis and create additional academic troubles for international students during their

first years at university. As students improve their English proficiency, they start to

realize that it is not the language alone that is impacting their performance. One challenge

DSS professionals address is when to suggest comprehensive testing that would help

identify the source of the academic problems the students.

> It's something that does not often get recognized early on, so these students may go through their entire freshman year or sometimes their entire sophomore year. Once there's the sense that, "Well, I've been here this long. It's really not the English language itself that's getting in the way," that there may be an opportunity to guide them to explore, "Well, why don't you pursue the comprehensive testing that might allow us to identify some aspect of a learning disorder?

These statements align with Rayan's initial perception regarding his academic

struggles. As an international undergraduate student with limited English mastery, Rayan

stated that during his first years in university, he thought that his struggles were due

solely to his low English proficiency. He indicated that not until his fourth year did he

realize that while his English proficiency improved, he still faced the same academic

issues. "The problem I thought was English and not understanding the materials and stuff

like that."

Zara, a CIE advisor, stated that it is a challenging to identify learning disabilities

with international students because of the diverse linguistic background of international

undergraduate students. Zara's experience was that it was often hard to distinguish

between language barriers and learning disabilities because learning disabilities are an

invisible disability. She further stated that language issues complicated the identification

process. Thus, she believed that providing provisional accommodations acts as a "time-

out" in which an international student would have the time to acquire the needed

documentation.

It is a very, very tough call, like when is it a learning disability and when is it not? Especially if you're throwing language in there, then how do you solve all of this? My first step is always to get [disability support service office] involved, because what [disability support service office] can do is to give them accommodations for six months. When they get the accommodations, it gives a breather time in order to get diagnosed, because diagnosis is not easy either.

Lack of documentation. In order to determine how international undergraduate students are identified with learning disabilities and/or ADHD, two CIE professionals, four DSS professionals, one psychologist, and three students shared their perceptions regarding the identification process. DSS and CIE professionals indicated that the majority of international undergraduate students who received accommodations lack appropriate learning disabilities documentation from their home countries. Both Sally and Tom, DSS professionals, indicated that it is rare to receive learning disabilities documentation from another country. Sally attributed that to the lack of existing identification systems in their home countries, "I would guess that a lot of that is the lack of identification in their home countries of their being that category of a disability." Roxy, a DSS professional, also stated that when international students approached her assistant, they usually have medical reports indicating a disability but not a learning disability diagnosis:

Some people come in and say, "Here, here's my records, here, I was diagnosed." That doesn't happen as often so the students that I've worked with that are from the Middle East will have medical records but they don't necessarily have a learning disability diagnosis.

Cristina, the DSS professional, also stated that it is easy for international students to possess reports documenting health issues such as epilepsy versus learning disabilities documentation. "We have a number of international students that have documentation of epilepsy because it's easier for them to get that documentation in their home country."

Stacy further stated that some international students seek accommodations with documentations of ADD or ADHD; however, their actual disability is an unidentified learning disability. Although the majority of study participants indicated that students lacked needed documentation, Sally, DSS professional, had additional perspective. She stated that the lack of documentation depended on the country these students came from. She indicated that she received documentations from Israel, Korea, and Japan; yet, this documentation varied in their comprehensiveness.

> It really depends on the country. I have seen some from Israel that were very comprehensive, I've had some documentation from Korea and from Japan, I would say in general, it's thin. It's not quite as in-depth. They will be using different tools and I'm familiar with the standardized assessment tools that we use here . . . they're using different tools, but I'm still trying to figure out what the essence of the results [are]. What does it help me to understand about the student's learning needs, to be able to determine what are the accommodations that would be best suited for them.

The majority of CIE advisors who participated in the study indicated that they were not involved in the disability identification process beyond referring them to the DSS office for evaluation and services. They referred the students to the DSS offices when they suspected the students' academic challenges exceeded language differences. When I asked Camilla about the students' reactions when she referred them to the DSS office, she stated that she does not mention learning disabilities because she wants to avoid any words or labels that may seem stigmatizing to students. Instead, Camilla encourages the international students to go to the DSS office because they can receive assistance as well as information about resources there.

> I don't usually use those words anyway. I don't diagnose anyone . . . I don't often use that phrase because I don't want it to discourage them if I'm trying to target them or label them with this term. It's not my place to diagnose them with anything anyway.

Only Zara, a CIE advisor, went beyond her regular work as an advisor and gathered more information about the students' difficulties. Zara stated that instructors in the English intensive program often referred international students to her when they noticed that students were demonstrating academic challenges that appeared to go beyond language difficulties. These instructors noticed that the students were struggling and failing to respond to the supports offered in class. Once Zara suspected that international undergraduate students might struggle academically due to a disability, she requested that instructors document everything they noticed.

> The referral would always come from [instructors] and I made clear to them that that we have resources for disabled students on campus . . . what I would do is I have the [instructors] write up everything that they have noticed. I make them give me writing samples. I make them document at least for a week, two weeks, what they're seeing, because with international students, it's very hard. They don't even have the language.

Additionally, because Zara understood the challenges of learning disability identification, especially regarding international students whose native language was not English and who may not have had access to valid assessments in their native language. She emphasized acquiring documentation from instructors including students' work samples and written reports of the instructors' observations regarding the students' challenges. She also stated that once she received the documents from instructors, she would interview students about their educational backgrounds. In particular, she would ask students about their academic history during high school to ascertain whether the students had similar challenges in their native language. She stated,

> Documentation is crucial. Once I get that documentation, the student will come in and meet me. I don't necessarily do anything because I am not an expert in that. What I would do then, looking over all of it, I usually ask the student some basic questions about, "Have you ever had this problem? Do you think your teachers in high school ever told you that? Or did you have problems reading when you were

growing up? How is it in your own language? You have tough time reading in English, what about your own language?" I have some basic questions to ask but I don't make any assumptions based on that. I send the entire packet and my observations along with any emails that teacher has sent to [disability support service office].

Cristina, Tom and Roxy all followed a similar approach in which they used the students' self-report as one way to determine whether the student should receive accommodations. Tom indicated that he usually had many international students who needed extra help but who lacked the required documentation for eligibility determination. He further stated that because of the overlap between language differences and learning disabilities, he delved into the students' history. Tom stated that he always asked international students whether they experienced similar issues back in their home countries. He also claimed that if the students confirmed that they actually had similar issues in their native language, he considered their response as a sign to provide accommodations. Roxy stated that she uses her background as a special education teacher for over 20 years to evaluate the possibility that international students encounter academic challenges due to a true learning disability.

> I've worked with disabilities for 20 years so when people are explaining what's going on them I'm listening for those things. If they're saying, "Well, I have a hard time" and as they're talking to me, you know it's like what is their level of spoken English and I don't want to just say oh, it's a language difference bye, bye. I want to listen to see if it's part of their language trouble, the fact that they may be struggling learning English is because they have a learning disability. You know, what came first?

In order to address the lack of appropriate documentation and the need for learning disabilities identification, Tom, Roxy, Cristina, and Stacy, all of whom are DSS professionals, stated that they provide temporary (provisional) accommodations for international undergraduate students for a semester. During this period, the students were

encouraged to seek needed documentations. "We give a semester of provisional status for students to receive a diagnosis. We'll do a referral for a learning assistance consultation and that's through the counseling center", Tom stated. Roxy also shared consistent statement; she stated that she used the provisional semester as an evaluation period,

> We send them over to learning assistance services on campus that will do some evaluations to see if they can figure out if [international undergraduate students] have a learning disability and find people off campus that may work with them.

Stacy also stated that she provided temporary accommodations to international undergraduate students while they seek needed documentation. Though, she further stated that she suggest that international undergraduate students seek the help of counseling center to receive a receipt of their visit as documentation that prove their need for accommodations. She stated,

> If I have a student who comes in here not during disability, but sometimes depression and anxiety are as the result of a learning disability because they just don't know what to do with it. If counseling can say "the student was here five times in the last three months," and a student is reporting that they're feeling depressed or anxious, I'll take that. I don't necessarily need this formal report from.

Although the majority of DSS professionals stated that they provide provisional accommodations, Sally stated that once international students approach her assistant she provided a consultation interview. Sally indicated that there is no systematic and organized approach to identify international undergraduate students with learning disabilities. Thus, she conducted a consultation interview with them to estimate the need for them to pursue a complete psych-educational testing.

> If [international undergraduate students] come to me with an undiagnosed disability at the suggestion of a faculty member or maybe even a roommate or a friend, I'll do a consultation interview and I'll speak with them about what's going on . . . I'll try to gauge the possibility that if they were to pursue testing . . . we

don't always become aware of who these students might be because there is no sort of systematic, very organized approach to identifying them.

Eligibility for accommodations. Since the DSS offices in the study served a number of international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities, I asked DSS professionals regarding the process by which students received an identification of learning disabilities. Stacy and Sally, who represented two different DSS offices, both indicated that they follow their documentation guidelines in which the students must provide evaluation reports using comprehensive psychoeducational assessments. Sally stated that on her campus, there were university-based assessment resources to which she referred the students, "There are some university-based assessment resources that would offer a low cost or no-cost evaluations." She further delineated that the PhD students at the graduate program in psychology conducted and interpreted the results of the standardized diagnostic tools. "[In] our graduate program in Psychology, the PhD students are getting trained in administering and interpreting diagnostic, standardized diagnostic tools. There's a clinic that students can go to arrange for that comprehensive psycho-educational evaluation."

Heba, an international undergraduate student, spoke about the challenges she faced that propelled her to seek an evaluation. When she was a student at a community college, she received good grades and enjoyed her classes. However, once she transferred to a four-year university, her GPA plummeted and she found the workload to be heavy and overwhelming; students were expected to learn far more material in far less time than at the community college. These challenges led her to consider seeking accommodations; however, she was so busy with her school work that she did not pursue this. Heba stated

that once she transferred to her four-year university, her mother encouraged her to get

tested in order to receive accommodations.

> As soon as I transferred here, my mom was like, "Heba, just do it. It's better to know especially since you know that in the States they can accommodate you and they can do so much more for you here than if you were in Egypt." I did the test and then they're like, "Yes, you are dyslexic."

Heba described the evaluation process that she went through. The testing was

very thorough and took two weeks to complete. She was interviewed for two days, up to

four hours per day. Then she completed a battery of academic tests, including reading

skills, comprehension, vocabulary, spelling, and memory tests as well as spatial skills

testing.

Heba stated that going through the evaluation process helped her understand her

disability and how to study. She indicated that the evaluators explained to her how to

study and that she was a visual learner and that she should take advantage of her

strengths.

> [Getting assessed] got me a lot of details because it told me also how to study. Your short [-term] memory isn't that good, but long-term memory is very good. You should use that, and you're a visual learner too. I knew I was a visual learner from the beginning, but at the same time, my long memory, they told me "Your long memory is something that you have to your advantage," and stuff like that. So that helped sort of. I know what to do.

As mentioned earlier, Zara, Roxy, Tom, and Cristina, who worked at the same

campus, had different approaches in identifying international undergraduate students with

learning disabilities. They indicated that in order to guide the students to receive learning

disabilities identification, they refer them to the learning assistant center. They all

mentioned that Wendy, the psychologist at the learning assistant center, was in charge of

identifying the students. Zara, CIE advisor, indicated that once she suspected an

international undergraduate student might have a disability and gathered needed

information to document their academic challenges, she sought the assistant of the learning assistant center for identification purposes. Cristina, DSS professional, and Wendy, a psychologist, stated that international undergraduate students receive learning disabilities identification by testing for Irlen Syndrome. "To see if they have learning disabilities, the easiest way to test them is to see if they have something called Irlen syndrome, which is a visual processing disorder,", Cristina stated.

When I interviewed Wendy regarding her efforts identifying international undergraduate students with learning disabilities, she stated that she did not use a psychoeducational evaluation to diagnose learning disabilities. Instead, she indicated that she first did an initial consultation that served as an intake to gather information regarding the students' academic troubles.

> We don't do the psycho-educational evaluation. I do an initial consult, sort of like an intake about the academic troubles that they're having. As I tell the students, in that time I'm not going to be able necessarily to diagnose you, I can't cure you, but what I'm hoping to do is learn enough about your relative strengths and weaknesses and your concerns to be an effective consultant to you.

She further delineated that she conducted informal assessment through clinical interview and administered *The Long Self-Test for Irlen Syndrome.* "I do the initial consult, I do Irlen [*The Long Self-Test for Irlen Syndrome*] testing and that's with most of the students who come in, meet the criteria, and most of them [international undergraduate students] agree to be tested because we don't charge them any money." She further explained that Irlen testing might detect a visual processing disorder, which may be linked to a learning disability which may impact a students' reading efficiency.

I test for Irlen syndrome. I-R-L-E-N. You may know enough about that visual perceptual processing disorder. It's not a specific learning disorder . . . It is a learning disability in that if your brain is having trouble processing visual information, that can interfere with reading efficiency, learning through reading, test performance because what do you have to do on a test?

When I asked Wendy why she uses *The Long Self-Test for Irlen Syndrome*, she pointed out several reasons. First, *The Long Self-Test for Irlen Syndrome* consumes less time than regular psych-educational evaluation. "With 2 hours as opposed to 20 hours, we're able to get the students help that helps them even if they're weak, much less could be diagnosed with a reading disorder by this time." Second, she stated that there was a high probability that academic troubles in which international undergraduate students experience would be linked to Irlen syndrome.

The percentage of [international undergraduates students] that might be affected by Irlen is a lot higher than the percentage in the general population. They're a select population. They're people that they think, "I study harder and more than my friends who make better grades."

Wendy further explained that research had shown that who had a background of academic challenges or diagnosed with learning disabilities have also Irlen syndrome. "Our data indicate if [individuals] had a history of trouble with academic reading and/or diagnosed with a specific learning disability, up to 45% of them have Irlen concurrent." Moreover, Wendy believed that providing accommodations to address Irlen symptoms could benefit a wide range of undiagnosed issues. "I think most people who know anything about why do you do accommodations for testing or academics, those accommodations which are appropriate to Irlen cover a whole host of undiagnosed problems." Wendy believed that the use of *The Long Self-Test for Irlen Syndrome* do not detect learning disabilities, yet, it helped with process of identifying international undergraduate students with undiagnosed learning disabilities.

Wendy believed that using *The Long Self-Test for Irlen Syndrome* helped to identify international undergraduate students with learning disabilities to address their academic needs. She stated that it is difficult to assess for learning disabilities of international undergraduate students due to the inappropriateness of norm tests. Zara, CIE advisor, and Cristina, DSS professional, agreed with Wendy regarding learning disabilities identification process of international undergraduate students. They indicated that the existed normed tests (which were standardized based on Western native English speakers) were inappropriate. Zara, CIE advisor, stated that primary concern with regard to assessing international students was that a lot of assessments are normed in a different culture than the students.' She further explained that if these tests were used to identify international students, these tests would produce skewed results.

> The problem that they run into is that a lot of these tests were normed in this [United States] culture. The questionnaires that they present are also in English. Then it skews … I feel it's bound to skew when you have a student who's not from this culture, also does not have the same level of language proficiency that's needed to answer those questions accurately.

Cristina also had a similar statement; she further indicated that it is a challenge to test for learning disabilities with international students because they would not be assessed in their native language. Therefore, she referred students to counseling center to test for Irlen testing or anxiety which can help identify international students with learning disabilities.

> They're having all this trouble, and then I tell them go to the counseling center. See if they can write you a letter about your anxiety because if they're slower . . . often learning disabilities cause slower processing . . . So it's a way around, because it's so difficult to get the learning disability documentation.

Only one student in this study was identified with learning disabilities based on the use of *The Long Self-Test for Irlen Syndrome*. When I asked Alex regarding the

learning disabilities identification process, he stated that since he was in China, he already knew that he had learning difficulties but never been diagnosed. He further stated that he received his learning disabilities identification when the DSS office referred him to the counseling center on campus. Alex indicated that after taking *The Long Self-Test for Irlen Syndrome*, professionals at the counseling center explained the results in which an area in his brain function differently than others and provided some recommendations. "After I finish that testing, they told me like there is one island in my brain . . . then [they] try to help me to do some exercise to recover . . . they gave me a blue transportation card which could like this reflections to light . . . because the white paper is too bright so they use a blue one and it help me to be peace and calm."

Rayan was the only student in the study with a diagnosis of ADHD. When I asked him about his ADHD diagnosis, he explained that due to his academic struggles and failing classes, he sought the help of the international office. Once Rayan explained his concerns to the CIE advisor, the CIE advisor explained to him the available accommodations that would help him address his academic concerns. Yet, the CIE advisor informed Rayan that he needed documentation of a disability in order to take advantage of these accommodations. Therefore, Rayan approached the campus health service with a lot of questions to understand why he had these academic challenges. He stated,

> I went to the doctor, the health services at the school. I said, I just needed a doctor." "What's going on?" I said, "I just need a doctor." I just want to talk to a doctor." I didn't care. Even the doctor was confused. He told me, "What's going on? What's up with you?" I said, "Man, there is a problem. I'm not going to classes. I'm not taking exams. I'm not doing the work. I know I could do it. It's a problem." "What's going on? How do you feel?", "I feel bad." "Depression?" "Yeah, you could say depression. Why not?" Yeah. It seems like depression. I'm

not sure if it's depression or not. He just wrote whatever. He gave me a couple of psychiatrists that would help me.

After examination, Rayan was diagnosed with ADHD and depression. At the time, he was shocked because he was unaware that he had ADHD, he only thought he was depressed. He also was prescribed with medication to address his ADHD symptoms.

I've been diagnosed with ADHD, depression as well. He gave me pills and stuff. I just refused to take them. I did not take them. I just didn't want to take them because I just didn't want to get in trouble or stuff like that.

As a pre-med student, Rayan had access to information about medications and their side effects, and was not convinced that these medications were as harmless as they appeared. He was originally hesitant about taking the prescribed medication because he thought he might become dependent on them, or that these drugs might lead to addiction. In the beginning, when he first started taking his medication, he only took them right before exams to give himself the boost of concentration he felt he needed.

According to the document review and interviews with study participants, learning disabilities identification for international undergraduate students is often a challenge for both professionals and students. Specific challenges associated with learning disabilities identification included distinguishing language differences from true learning disabilities, the lack of culturally appropriate assessment tools, and international undergraduate students' lack of documentation from their home countries. DSS professionals grant international undergraduate students provisional accommodations while students pursue needed documentation. While learning disabilities documentation is traditionally derived from psycheducational evaluation, one DSS office used *The Long Self-Test for Irlen Syndrome* as an identification tool.

Disability Awareness

The eighth theme that emerged from the data analysis was disability awareness. Disability awareness in the context of the current study refers to the ability of international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities and/or ADHD to acknowledge and describe their disability and needed accommodations to the DSS professionals. Part of the eligibility determination process is gleaning information from a student's self-report in which these individuals explain their disabilities and the types of accommodations needed to support their learning. Statements of five DSS professionals and three students contributed to the emergence of this theme. Most DSS professionals indicated it is important for students with identified learning disabilities and/or ADHD who seek accommodations to have an adequate understanding of their disabilities. This understanding is necessary for students, in order for them to be able to clearly describe their academic challenges and to be able to determine appropriate accommodations, which is an important expectation of the initial intake process.

Disability support service perspectives. When I asked the DSS professionals whether international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities and/or ADHD were aware of their disabilities, they indicated that most international students were not aware of their disabilities. Cristina shared that when international undergraduate students approach her for assistance, they usually understand their academic difficulties but they relate them while taking exams, not as the presence of a disability. She stated, "One of the things that students would say is, 'I knew all of these answers, I knew this material. I studied, but I couldn't get it fast enough.'" Tom had similar experiences with international students. They would describe their experience but not necessarily within

the context of a disability. "They say, 'Well, I'm mixing up the letters, the words I read

I'm mixing up numbers . . . they generally never say, 'I have dyslexia. I think I have

dyslexia.'"

Stacy's experience regarding the students' lack of disability awareness was

comparable. She explained that when international students ask for help, they describe

their challenges in a practical way.

> They'll say like, "I sit down to take my test and I freak out and I can't remember
> anything and I starts sweating," or "All of my friends I study with them and
> they're all getting A's and then I'm failing the test," or "My advisor told me that
> I'm going to get on academic probation if I don't do better. I don't know what I'm
> doing wrong."

Also, Stacy indicated that many of the international students were unable to

determine which accommodations they needed such as extended time or a notetaker.

Their lack of awareness around their own disability extends to a lack of knowledge about

supports. So these students never come to her office to request specific accommodations

because they simply are not aware that these things exist.

Roxy, however, differed in her students' understanding of their academic

problems. She stated that during the initial intake interview with international students,

they are often unable to describe their academic challenges. She further explained that it

is important for the students to be able to describe their challenges as this would aid her

in the determination of eligibility and accommodations. "In the intake sheet, it will say

name of disability description. Why it [intake sheet] says [requires] description [of

disability] is for people [students] who maybe never have been evaluated. So they

[students] don't know what they have [disabilities]." Thus, Roxy explained that in order

for her to guide international students, she uses many interviewing techniques that allow

them describe their challenges. She stated that during the interview process, she does not

use learning disabilities as a label; instead, she encourages international students to

describe behaviors that are associated with what they are experiencing.

> I talk about not labels necessarily but does this happen to you? Do you find that you have to read this thing over and over and over until you understand it? When you're taking a test do you read the question and blank out? So I talk about behaviors . . . they have to really re-live that whole experience to me. Especially, if they've never been diagnosed. If they've been diagnosed then I already have a framework. So I'll just say tell me what accommodations did you receive before?

> Sally, a DSS professional, used a similar approach to Roxy's. She engaged in

conversations with international students in order to identify their challenges and

determine appropriate accommodations. During the interview, Sally explained that the

identification of accommodations is determined on a case-by-case basis, and is supported

by students' self-reporting of their challenges. In addition to identifying specific

accommodations, she also examined the appropriateness of specific accommodations for

specific classes.

> It's a conversation I need to probe and ask them. They have to be able to tell me what the problem is or I can't figure out what's the best accommodation. The accommodations really should be matching up to ameliorate particular areas of difficulty. It's not, the student walks in and anything and everything we have available is open for them. It's a customized plan.

> Roxy and Sally linked the lack of disability awareness on the part of international

students to their lack of recognition that they may have a learning disability. Roxy

attributed the lack of disability awareness to difficulties in discussing an undiagnosed

disability. She pointed out that international students might not have an appropriate

vocabulary to discuss their challenges in the face of an unknown disability. Sally

compared international students with American students and underscored that

international students are usually less aware of their own disabilities. She was highly

concerned about the students' inadequate knowledge of appropriate accommodations and

how to match accommodations with their unique needs. She further elaborated that being

in a system where accommodations and supports were available and accessible was a

primary reason why American students are aware of their disabilities. However, the lack

of disability awareness for international students with learning disabilities is probably

linked to their limited access to accommodations in their previous educational

experiences.

> If the American students have worked with system for a long time, they know the resources available. They've often have access to those accommodations particularly through high school. The international student is less aware of what can be available to them even if they know they have a disability. Many times they don't know they have a learning disability yet. But if they come knowing that there is a learning disability, we have to talk about what accommodations are available and what accommodations would seem to match what they can describe to me are the academic challenges they experienced.

Sally's statement concerning lack of knowledge corresponded with Heba's

suggestion that because learning disabilities are recognized in the United States,

accommodations are readily available. Heba further explained that although her school

was among the most prestigious schools in Egypt, students with dyslexia were not

identified and accommodations were not offered.

Students' perspectives. I gained an understanding of how the students were

aware of their disabilities by engaging in informal discussions guided by questions such

as " did you have similar challenges while in high school, if so, what were they, can you

tell me what kind of challenges you were having that made you seek disability support?

Most international undergraduate students with learning disabilities understand the exact

problems they were having which hindered them from being successful in college. They

had the ability to describe their problems that mostly pertained to taking tests. I was able

to receive statements revealing their understanding of their disabilities. Both Heba and Alex, students with identified learning disabilities, stated that since they were in primary school, they knew that they learned differently than their peers. Alex, for example, stated that when he was in middle school in China, he was aware that he had reading issues. He further expressed that his peers were smarter and read faster than he did. When I asked Heba about her history during her primary schooling, she demonstrated a clear understanding of her academic challenges. She expressed that her mother also knew that she might have learning disabilities. Heba's previous knowledge that she might have learning disabilities encouraged her to seek assessment for the purpose of identifying her learning disability.

Specifically, Heba indicated that she had a long history with academic challenges associated with spelling. She emphasized that spelling was a consistent challenge for her. Heba reported that she consistently mixed up two to three letters in a single word. She also stated that using computer writing software helped her to focus on her spelling errors.

> Before being diagnosed, I knew I struggled with spelling . . . Since I realize how I type in Word, I see my mistakes and it's spaced like a letter difference, like a letter that's supposed to be in front is at the back, or something like that. It makes me concentrate a little bit more, so I know what my problem is. I always know I mix up two letters or three letters in a word. I mix up the order of those words.

Heba linked her challenges of spelling correctly with the difficulty of finishing exams on time. Heba stated that she was slow in completing exams, made frequent spelling mistakes, and spent an inordinate amount of time correcting spelling errors. She expressed her knowledge regarding which kind of supports she needs in order to overcome her challenges related to spelling and finishing exams on time. She listed spell

check, computer, and extra time as essential supports to address her challenges. In addition to understanding her learning disabilities, Heba also expressed her knowledge regarding the implications of her disabilities on future employment. Despite the impact of these challenges, she was able to enroll in college without any problems. Heba believed that being diagnosed with learning disabilities would not impact her future employment unless the work involved a significant expectation for writing.

Conversely, Rayan, a student diagnosed with ADHD, had a different perspective. When I asked Rayan about his educational history, he stated that he did not experience difficulties when he was in high school. When I asked him how he found out that he need extra help in his classes, Rayan stated that he was placed on academic probation and then suspended from his university. He thought his struggles were due to language issues and depression and not attributed to ADHD. Rayan reported that he was aware that his learning challenges represented something more than a language issue, however, he was shocked when he received the ADHD diagnosis. In spite of this, he was able to list the problems that he consistently encountered for four years. He stated that his challenges include missing classes, skipping exams, and failing to submit assignments. When I asked Rayan how he heard of the DSS office, he stated that once he learned about accommodations, he approached the DSS office.

By examining the above statements of DSS professionals and students, it became evident that the statements provided by the two students with identified learning disabilities contradicted what the DSS professionals provided. From the perspectives of the DSS professionals, international undergraduate students had limited awareness of their disabilities and type of accommodations they need. Only Rayan's did not

demonstrated sufficient understanding because he did not experience similar difficulties in his history.

Self-advocacy

The ninth theme that emerged from the data collection was self-advocacy. The definition of self-advocacy in the context of the current study refers to the ability of international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities and/or ADHD to know one's rights and responsibilities, to communicate, and to ask for help in order to succeed in university settings. Statements from one CIE advisor, five DSS professionals, and three international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities and/or ADHD contributed to the emergence of this theme. Additionally, these statements were summarized from the study participants' responses to the interview questions. Interview questions were posed to solicit participants' perceptions regarding self-advocacy skills of international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities and/or ADHD.

One interview question that was directed to DSS professionals asked: "How are the self-advocacy skills of international students identified with learning disabilities different or similar to American students?" International undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities and/or ADHD responded to my interview question "Picture a situation in one of your classes when you needed extra support, how do you explain your needs to your professors." Although I did not ask CIE advisors' perceptions regarding self-advocacy skills of international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities and/or ADHD, one CIE advisor addressed the question as detailed below. This theme contains statements regarding self-advocacy skills, methods and

approaches that DSS professionals used to develop self-advocacy skills, and students'
perceptions regarding self-advocacy.

Most of the DSS professionals claimed that international undergraduate students
with identified learning disabilities and/or ADHD were limited in their ability to inform
their professors about their disability and their need for accommodations. However, the
DSS professionals varied in their explanations of this issue and their idea on why they
thought that international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities
and/or ADHD had low self-advocacy skills.

Low self-advocacy skills. Cristina stated that international undergraduate
students with identified learning disabilities were often uncomfortable in their
interactions with their professors, hesitant about sharing their needs and less willing to
challenge their professors. She further explained that she guided students to challenge
their professors because they have the legal right, but students usually refuse to self-
advocate. Stacy shared similar perspectives in which she claimed that international
students have no idea how to advocate for themselves. She explained that international
students frequently think that it is disrespectful to ask their professors to implement
accommodations. These statements aligned with the perspectives of Sally, who suggested
that the capacity for self-advocacy among international students is much weaker
compared to American students.

Roxy and Stacy mentioned some situations that they addressed with some
international students with whom they worked. Roxy shared a situation with students
who were hesitant about communicating with their professors. Roxy stated that students
were concerned that their professors would question their honesty and integrity. Students

told her, "How do I get the instructor to understand that I'm not making this up? How can I get them to take me seriously?" Stacy shared a situation with one of the students who had a challenging professor who rejected the student's request to take an examination in the DSS office. She claimed that this situation was difficult for the student because he was afraid to negotiate this right as specified in the university-provided accommodation plan with his professor. Stacy stated that she supported the student and explained his needs to the professor. She emphasized that she taught international students how to advocate for themselves because it is a life skill that they will need in their future employment.

> I always try to teach that to "Get out there, I'll do it with you for you, but you're going to have to start picking this up on your own and learning this because this is a life skill. If you go to a job you have to have the same conversation with your boss, I'm not going to be there.

Along with supporting their self-advocacy skills, Stacy also taught international students about their legal rights that support the process of requesting accommodations.

> Here's why and how you can advocate for yourself and say, "No, I am going to take it in the [disability support office] because I am entitled. "Legally I'm giving them a little bit more reason behind why they're getting these accommodations.

> Sally used similar approach with international students; she claimed that she practiced a conversation where the students and she involved in a role-play. She also encouraged the students to take charge in situations where they have to be accountable for their own learning.

Cultural factors. When I asked the DSS professionals about their perceptions regarding self-advocacy skills, they often attributed the low self-advocacy skills to cultural factors. One prominent factor was the perceived level of respect. Cristina, Stacy, Sally, and Ronny all indicated that international students seemed hesitant to advocate for

themselves or ask for professors' help due to the level of respect that they are accustomed to maintain between students and instructors. Cristina stated that international students with whom she worked regarded the process of discussing alternatives with their professors to be arguments. Ronny, a CIE advisor, stated that one of the students' challenges was that they were afraid to approach their professors. He further claimed that American students usually knew their rights and were prepared to argue with their professors when they needed to, something international undergraduate students are rarely willing to do. "They don't approach professors, don't contact professors, don't seek help when they need it." Ronny shared a situation of a student who refused to work with his professor even though his professor emphasized an open door policy. The student would rather work with a tutor than approach his professor; it was simply too intimidating for him.

Ronny further shared a perspective from a Chinese professional who worked at an international program. His colleague told him, "We had a woman here who worked in international programs from China, who told us that professors are given great respect and therefore are unapproachable." To address this issue, Ronny sought to teach international students about their rights with respect to how to approach their professors. "We tell the students in orientation, "You will approach your professor. You are paying your professor. Your professor is working for you. They are there with office hours you need to go and meet with them."

What the DSS professionals stated paralleled the experience of one of the students included in the study. Alex, a student with identified learning disabilities, stated that he would ask his professor for clarifications when he encountered any challenge, but not

before asking his friends in the class. He claimed that he does not communicate with his

professors if he needed help or additional clarifications. He clarified that he is at the same

level of his classmates, and there is no need for him to approach his professors. He stated

that he would first study hard, then ask his classmates for further clarification before he

communicate with his professors.

> I didn't communicate with my professor that much if I meet problem, I definitely would ask of him. But I think my point study hard then try to communicate with my classmates instead of professor . . . I think we're in the same [level]. They would understand what is my question is. Sometimes I feel nervous if I cannot represent my question clearly to my professor.

Sally provided further elaboration regarding this issue. She stated that some

American students appear to be excessively comfortable when communicating with their

professors in contrast with international students who avoid any kind of communication

with their professors. She believed that finding a middle ground for international students

is imperative, in which they feel comfortable communicating with their professors.

> I'd like to find a middle ground. I think American students are not respectful enough and I think that the international students could moderate that to be able to feel like they could have a conversation, that they could ask for some additional help from an instructor.

Stacy and Sally demonstrated a meaningful understanding of the underlying

elements associated with their students' low self-advocacy skills. They both stated that

international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities and/or ADHD

had limited self-advocacy skills because they lacked the knowledge of disability services.

Stacy thought the development of self-advocacy skills depended on the students'

previous experiences in receiving accommodations. Sally further explained that the lack

of self-advocacy skills stemmed from the students' unawareness of the existence of

disability services available in the United States.

Sally stated that many families in other cultures place extremely high expectations for success on their children; this can place international students in a state of academic distress. She suggested that the support, or lack of support, that international students receive from their families can impact students' self-advocacy skills. When I asked Sally to clarify the connection between family expectations and self-advocacy skills, she claimed that international students would often hide their learning difficulties from their families. Consequently, they will not have the family support they need regarding their academic challenges, which again prevents them from asking for help, and exacerbating their academic difficulties.

Heba, a student with identified learning disabilities, provided statements that were consistent with what Sally shared, although based on a different set of experiences. Heba shared her long history dealing with undiagnosed learning disabilities and the influence of her mother. She stated that her mother's support, knowledge, and understanding of her learning disabilities, made her feel comfortable about her disability. She even shared that the reason she approached the DSS office, and started the process of disability identification was due to her mother's recommendation.

> When I was diagnosed and everything, she did her online research and she'd send me the research, whatever research I'd find on my email. Then she'd call me. She'd send me such a cute message like "It's okay. We all have it. I think your Dad even has it too. It's something so normal. We'll just have to learn how to deal with it." She was so easy about it. She made it very easy for me too. She never made it like it was a big deal or anything.

When asked how she expressed her need for extra help in her classes, Heba claimed that she does not have any issues with respect to requesting additional assistance. She even shared several situations where she negotiated with her professors about taking her exam at the DSS office.

I tell them honestly I need extra time. I don't think I'll be able to finish, I'm worried about the essay question, I think I'm going to need extra time. Is it possible if I do get extra time for me to finish the exam and stuff.

When I asked Heba whether this was due to her openness in talking about her needs or due to her professors' understanding, she clarified that as long as she accepts and is comfortable with her disabilities, and her professors understand her learning disabilities, asking for help would not be an issue. She further elaborated that American society has a deeper understanding of learning disabilities which made it easier for her to communicate about her disability.

I feel here there is more knowledge about learning disabilities than [Middle East], so it makes it [easier] to talk and communicate about it and make it more comfortable. In the Middle East, it's kind of like a stigma, a learning disability.

Rayan, a student with identified ADHD, had different experience than Heba and Alex. When I asked Rayan to share his experiences of advocating for his needs to his professors to be accommodated in class, he stated that everything is done electronically. Consequently, he did not have the need to have face-to face conversations with his professors. He explained that he worked closely with his DSS professional to complete an accommodation request via online application. Moreover, Rayan stated that it is much easier to complete this process electronically than doing it face-to-face, especially if a class enrolls between 300-400 students and the professor possibly would not be able to notice him. "I just do it at home, I just open the syllabus of each class. I [go] through each class I entered the exam time and date for each class. I just did it in one day," Rayan stated.

According to the DSS professionals, international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities and/or ADHD avoid asking their professors for help or

requesting their accommodations to be implanted. Factors impacting their low self-advocacy skills were due to cultural aspects where students prefer to maintain a level of respect between them and their professors. Students varied in their self-advocacy levels, one student had high level of acceptance that allowed her to comfortably request accommodations. Another student indicated his hesitancy communicating with his professors.

Summary of Findings and the Answer
of Research Questions

Research Questions

In order to answer the research questions, I identified themes that provided particular insight into the topic of each question. In the following section, each research question was answered by the input and discussions of participants within each theme.

Research question 1. From the perspective of disability service office professionals, what are the unique needs of international students identified with learning disabilities?

Findings from five themes were used to address research question 1. These themes included (a) language proficiency, (b) factors impacting academic success, (c) knowledge of available supports, (d) providing accommodations and supports, and (e) disclosure.

Language proficiency. Language proficiency was identified by all of the DSS professionals as the predominant challenge that international undergraduate students faced as they navigate through their academic career. Low English proficiency resulted in two specific challenging aspects for students. The first aspect impacts students themselves as language proficiency affects their academic performance including

comprehending professors, completing assignments and successful exams. Tom and Roxy noted that many international students needed more time to complete assignments and exams due to their level of English proficiency. Yet, Sally described how the DSS accommodations she offered were often time consuming for students. The second aspect is that language proficiency affects evaluation and the identification of learning disabilities. Roxy shared that it can be difficult to distinguish between language differences and true learning disabilities. Therefore, she engaged in in-depth interviews with students to help determine whether these students had similar academic struggles in their native language. If so, she would refer them to the DSS office for assistance.

Tom, Roxy, and Cristina shared that faculty often refer students to the DSS office for accommodations and supports due to students' linguistic challenges. An example of this is Ronny, the CIE advisor, who was not clear about the difference between low language proficiency and learning disabilities. The DSS professionals shared that the DSS office cannot offer services simply to address language differences; students need to be identified with learning disabilities in order to receive accommodations.

Factors impacting academic success. DSS professionals noted that international undergraduate students faced a number of unique educational challenges that impact academic success. These included learning to navigate a novel learning environment with different academic assumptions and requirements, and challenges with personal organization and time management. Stacy suggested that time management was a particular challenge to some international students due to their previous experiences in more lenient educational environments in their home countries. DSS professionals also indicated that international undergraduate students were surprised that they were

expected to address a high amount of work. As a result, their needs go beyond simply providing common accommodations to one-on-one supports for study skills.

Knowledge of available supports. According to the DSS professionals, few international students approached the DSS office seeking support on their own. Stacy suggested that these students frequently did not realize what supports were available to them on campus. This was in part due to their not realizing they had learning disabilities, but also because they had not received accommodations previously. Sally suggested that the lack of self-referral among international students could also be due to the difference in societal awareness of disability issues between the United States and their native countries. Because, many international students were not aware that individuals with disabilities are entitled to receive services on campus, they were thus hesitant to approach the DSS office due to the perceived shameful stigma of disability in their home cultures.

Providing accommodations and supports. Most of the international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities and/or ADHD preferred accommodations such as extra time on assignments and exams and a quiet place to complete exams. Both Stacy and Sally discussed offering more strategic supports that addressed the unique needs of their international undergraduate students. These included learning study skills, such as reading and study strategies, personal organization, time management skills, and developing an effective writing process to help them succeed academically.

Disclosure. Disability support service professionals rely on students to disclose their needs for support. However, the DSS professionals agreed that many international students found it difficult to disclose their personal, social, and cultural challenges. Roxy

found that in her experience it was generally easier for international students to disclose a physical condition than a learning disability. Many students also prefer to attribute their learning challenges to their difficulties with English language proficiency. This lack of disclosure affected how the DSS determined the types and levels of support they could offer. Sally suggested that international students sometimes chose not to disclose their disability because they did not want to be publicly identified as having a disability. This desire for anonymity may also lead to students choosing to restrict themselves to accommodations that are provided in the disability office.

    Summary. Thus, according to DSS professionals, the unique needs of international students identified with learning disabilities include receiving assistance in improving English language proficiency, help in identifying the unique cultural challenges that they face. They need to be provided information regarding supports that are available to students with learning disabilities, to understand the process of acquiring accommodations and supports, and finally to understand the importance of disclosing information that will help them to receive appropriate accommodations and supports.

    Research question 2. From the perspective of support service professionals at university international education centers, what are the unique needs of international students who may be suspected of having learning disabilities?

    Five themes emerged from interview with three CIE advisors from three different universities who participated in the study and contributed to answer the second research question. These themes are (a) language proficiency, (b) factors impacting academic success, (c) social challenges, (d) knowledge of available supports, and (e) accessing accommodations and supports.

Language proficiency. All CIE advisors noted that language proficiency was a unique challenge for all international undergraduate students. They noted that low English proficiency impacted the students' performance in all class activities including understanding their professors, completing written assignments and performing well on exams. Camilla stated that these challenges were significant enough to impact students' GPAs and, in some cases, place students on academic probation.

Ronny suggested that international students have a "learning difference" due to the challenge of low English proficiency. He described a situation he often encountered with international students, where they were attending all classes and working with writing tutors. Despite working hard, these students did not appear to be making sufficient progress. He recognized the possibility that some of the international students who failed to make progress might actually have a learning disability, and had started referring them to the DSS office for evaluation.

Zara shared her experience that not only did low English proficiency affect students' academics, it also had an impact on the students' knowledge of available resources on campus, especially when this information was available in written form. Students who do not have the linguistic competency to read technical information are generally not able to access information from the university website or even from written flyers on campus. They may therefore not be aware of available resources unless they are told by others.

All of the participants discussed the interrelation between language proficiency and disability. Zara and Camilla both indicated that it could be challenging to determine

whether international students needed to be assessed for learning disabilities due to their English proficiency.

Social challenges. The three CIE advisors indicated that international undergraduate students face social challenges adjusting to a new university environment. Students often encountered challenges in communicating with and interacting with their American peers. All CIE advisors stated that they had observed cases where international undergraduate students felt lonely and depressed. Several international students faced difficulties making friends with American students and tended to bond together with other students from their own culture. This prevented them from meeting new people, integrating within the new culture, and developing their English language skills.

Some international students encountered social marginalization within their own culture due to within-culture differences. The CIE advisors mentioned several examples of ways in which international students experienced conflict with members of their own culture. These included gender discrimination, disability issues, and religious conflicts. Zara stated international undergraduate students became culturally isolated within their own culture. This occurred when they did not follow the cultural or religious standards imposed by their own cultures.

Factors impacting academic success. The CIE advisors identified four main factors that significantly impact the academic success of international undergraduate students. These include difficulty in maintaining a GPA, adjustment to a different learning environment, academic probation, and academic misconduct. Ronny, who worked predominantly with international students in the English Intensive program, collaborated directly with students to develop an action plan to increase their GPA to

avoid academic probation. Camilla, who worked with students taking academic classes, helped students to identify different resources available on campus, including the DSS office, and encouraged students to use these resources. While Ronny and Camilla addressed issues associated with students' GPAs, Zara indicated that the concept of GPA is novel for many international students. She suggested that adjusting to the difference in educational environments and expectations presents a significant challenge for many international students. Zara further stated that many international students needed to learn how to actively engage in discussions and other class activities.

Both Camilla and Ronny discussed academic probation as a significant issue for international students. Unlike American students, international undergraduate students who are placed on academic probation might lose their legal status in the United States. Therefore, CIE advisors worked collaboratively with their international students to help them address the challenges that led to them being placed on probation. Another serious concern to the CIE advisors was the issue of academic misconduct. Zara described how many of the international students come from very cooperative cultures where sharing information and helping peers is considered acceptable. Students are often surprised that sharing answers on assignments and exams is considered to be academically dishonest in the United States.

Knowledge of available supports. Two CIE advisors reflected on the issue regarding students' unawareness of available supports on campus. Camilla shared that part of her responsibilities was to guide students to seek support from different resources on campus, including the DSS office for those students she suspected of having learning

disabilities. However, many international students had never heard of DSS services and did not understand the nature of the supports offered there.

Zara shared that many international students struggled to ask for assistance due to their low English proficiency and their cultural background that discouraged them to request support. Although general information about on-campus supports was usually provided to all students at freshman orientation, this always came when international students did not have the language proficiency nor yet the educational experience to understand this information. Thus, international students were often unaware of the supports available to them on campus, and CIE advisors spent time explaining and referring them to the available resources.

Providing accommodations and supports. CIE advisors described an important part of their job as sharing information about the resources that were available on campus to international students. When they suspected a student of having a learning disability, Zara, Ronny, and Camilla often referred the student to the DSS office. Depending on what information students shared with them, they also referred students to resources like tutoring programs, mentoring programs, the counseling center, and the assisted technology resource center.

A particular challenge for international students occurred when accommodations from the DSS office conflicted with the standards of a particular academic program. Students with learning disabilities are often provided with reading or writing software that provides decoding and spell check features. While this is very useful for students with learning disabilities such as dyslexia, it could not be used within the English

Intensive program or during exams, when students are graded on their ability to read and write fluently and without external assistance.

Summary. According to the CIE advisors, the unique needs of international students with suspected learning disabilities included the need for informal classroom and exam accommodations until they reach sufficient English proficiency, help in navigating their unique social and intercultural challenges, and adjusting to a new educational environment. International students may also need assistance in maintaining their GPAs, thus avoiding or overcoming academic probation, and receiving clear information about academic misconduct and how to avoid it. Finally, CIE advisors discussed providing international students with timely and appropriate information regarding available on campus resources, and helping students to access available support.

Research question 3. What is the assessment and identification process for international students who have learning disabilities?

The theme of identification of learning disabilities and/or ADHD emerged from statements made by DSS professionals, CIE advisors, the psychologist, and students, and was used to address the third research question. Two subthemes were identified that include documentation requirements and challenges associated with learning disabilities identification. Additionally, three main challenges were identified that consisted of language differences versus learning disabilities, lack of documentation, and provisional accommodations.

Identification of learning disabilities and/or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. A critical step for students to receive accommodations was to provide documentation that indicates the existence of a learning disability and/or ADHD. Based

on the information included in document review and interviews, none of the DSS offices

in this study was responsible of conducting assessments; instead, the DSS professionals

guide international undergraduate students to seek the appropriate evaluation resources.

Additionally, documentation needs to be specific and thorough, clearly indicating the

presents of a disability, the impact this disability has on student access to achievement,

and appropriate accommodations.

    Challenges associated with learning disabilities identification. As students

cannot access needed accommodations without documentation, there are certain

challenges associated with providing documentation. These challenges included language

differences versus learning disabilities, lack of documentation, and provisional

accommodations.

    Language differences versus learning disabilities. CIE advisors and DSS

professionals agreed that identifying learning disabilities for international undergraduate

students is a significant challenges because it is difficult to distinguish whether the

academic challenges were associated with language differences or with a true learning

disability. Ronny believed that when international students struggle academically,

instructors are quick to assume it is due to language proficiency issues. This might result

in a delay in referring students to the DSS office to receive supports and

accommodations. Wendy, the psychologist, noted that the dilemma with international

undergraduate students was the lack of valid measurements to rule out language

differences and confidently identify learning disabilities. Sally stated that the challenge in

distinguishing between English proficiency and learning disabilities might lead to

indecision among DSS professionals in when to recommend that students pursue

comprehensive testing for learning disability identification. She further suggested that lack of early identification of learning disabilities can increase the academic challenges that students already face.

Lack of documentation. All DSS and CIE professionals emphasized that it is uncommon that international undergraduate students who need accommodations to possess the required learning disabilities documentation from their countries. Roxy explained that most international undergraduate students that she worked with usually provided medical reports to document their disability; however, this did not necessarily support a learning disability diagnosis. Stacy stated in her opinion that many international undergraduate students who received accommodations had documentation of ADD or ADHD but their real disability was unidentified learning disabilities.

The CIE advisors were not officially involved in learning disabilities documentation. However, when Zara suspected that a student might need assistance from DSS, she gathered information such as student work samples, instructor observations, and students' academic history in order to assist in the documentation process. DSS professionals indicated they relied on the students' self-report regarding their academic history to determine whether their academic challenges were found in their native language.

Provisional accommodations. International undergraduate students were often granted temporary accommodations through the DSS office. This allowed the students time to pursue formal disability evaluation. Also, DSS professionals used this period as an evaluation phase where they could recommend learning strategies, try out accommodations, and gather more information about the students.

Eligibility for accommodations. Each university had written guidelines for disability documentation requirements that included requiring students to pursue comprehensive psychoeducational testing. Two DSS offices followed these guidelines, while one DSS office used *The Long Self-Test for Irlen Syndrome* as an alternative testing method to identify learning disabilities. (*The Long Self-Test for Irlen Syndrome* does not diagnose learning disabilities; rather it detects a visual processing disorder that might be associated with learning disabilities.)

Two students in this study were evaluated for learning disabilities. Heba underwent a psychoeducational assessment that included reading skills, comprehension, vocabulary, spelling, and memory and spatial skills. Alex received eligibility for services through the use of *The Long Self-Test for Irlen Syndrome*. Rayan received an ADHD diagnosis from the health center on his campus.

Summary. The identification process for international students who have learning disabilities consists of establishing eligibility through documentation. Universities have written guidelines regarding disability documentation requirements. Two main challenges associated with the identification process for international students with learning disabilities were identified; the difficulty of determining if the student's academic challenges were associated with a learning disability or were due to language differences, and international students' lack of documentation.

Research question 4. How do international students identified with learning disabilities become aware of their learning disabilities?

Disability awareness emerged as a theme through statements provided by students and DSS professionals. This theme was used to address the fourth research question. The

intake process that all DSS offices follow required students to described their academic

challenges and identified appropriate accommodations and supports. They relied on

students' self-reports when developing a plan of assistance. Thus, in order to receive

appropriate assistance, students who seek support from the DSS offices must possess an

adequate understanding of their disabilities.

Both Heba and Alex discovered that they learned differently than their peers when

they were in elementary school. However, neither had been formally diagnosed due to the

lack of appropriate assessment procedures in their home countries. Once they started their

undergraduate studies in the United States and started experiencing academic challenges,

both Heba and Alex approached the DSS office to seek assistance. Both of them were

subsequently identified with learning disabilities and demonstrated a clear understanding

of their challenges as well as what type of accommodations matched their specific needs.

Rayan, who had been a straight A student through high school, was dismayed when he

experienced academic challenges and was further shocked when he was diagnosed with

ADHD.

However, DSS professionals indicated that many international undergraduate

students with whom they worked did not have an adequate understanding of their

disabilities. Sally pointed out that a primary reason to the international students'

unawareness of their disabilities was because they did not receive prior supports in their

primary schooling. To assist students in developing an awareness of their learning needs,

Roxy and Sally engaged in conversations with international undergraduate students in

which they prompted students to describe their academic challenges. DSS professionals

also helped students to identify which accommodations work in specific academic situations.

In summary, the international students identified with learning disabilities in this study became aware of their disability and unique learning needs while they were still in elementary school. However, they were not formally diagnosed until they attended universities in the United States and experienced academic challenges. DSS professionals suggested that many international undergraduate students were not aware of their disability, perhaps due to never having received support previously. The DSS professionals helped students increase their awareness through conversation and exploring accommodations.

Research question 5. How do international students with identified learning disabilities advocate for themselves?

Self-advocacy emerged as a theme through statements from DSS professionals, one CIE advisor, and the students. This theme, along with the subtheme of cultural factors related to self-advocacy, was used to address the fifth research question.

All of the DSS professionals and the CIE advisor believed that international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities and/or ADHD had low self-advocacy skills. Sally and Stacy believed that because international students had not received accommodations previously, they had not developed their self-advocacy skills. Many students were also not comfortable informing their instructors about their disabilities and requesting supports in class. This was in part attributed to cultural factors. Although the students were aware of their legal right to accommodations, they perceived self-advocacy to be disrespectful towards the professors.

Disability support service professionals indicated that international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities and/or ADHD were limited self-advocacy skills; yet, DSS professionals addressed this limitation by implementing different approaches. Some DSS professionals stated that they used some situations that occurred between students and their professors as an opportunity to teach international undergraduate students how to advocate for their needs. Stacy, for example, noted that she taught international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities and/or ADHD that advocating for your rights is a life skill. Additionally, she informed her students about their legal rights requesting their professors to implement class accommodations. Sally paralleled Stacy in which she engaged in role play exercise with students where they could practice negotiating and communicating with their professors regarding accommodations.

Students participated in this study demonstrated different levels of self-advocacy. Alex stated that he avoided communicating with his professors even when he needed clarification of information and assignments. Instead, he asked his classmates for help and worked hard. Conversely, Heba was comfortable asking her professors to provide accommodations. She attributed her advocacy to her family support and to her high level of acceptance. Rayan requested accommodations through the university's online application; therefore, he rarely needed to request accommodations from his professors in person because his accommodations request was sent electronically

In summary, according to DSS professionals, many international students with identified learning disabilities do not have strong self-advocacy skills. Many international undergraduate students did not have prior experience negotiating with their teachers

regarding their learning needs. This may be due to lack of understanding of self-advocacy as well as cultural factors where making requests of a professor is considered disrespectful. While DSS professionals offered opportunities to practice self-advocacy skills, many international students remained hesitant about requesting accommodations and support in class. In this study, family support, disability acceptance, and willingness to disclose a disability were factors that had a significant impact on the students' self-advocacy.

Summary

This chapter described the findings based on participant interviews and document reviews. Study participants were five DSS professionals, three CIE advisors, a psychologist, and three international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities and/or ADHD. The data analysis revealed eight themes that addressed the five research questions. These themes were language proficiency, social challenges, factors impacting academic success, knowledge of available supports, providing accommodations and supports, disclosure, identification of learning disabilities and/or ADHD, disability awareness, and self-advocacy.

Information provided in this chapter set the stage for Chapter 5 that includes a summary of the study findings, discussion the identified themes with regard to the literature review, limitations of the study, recommendations, and directions for future research.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This phenomenological study explored the experiences of international undergraduate students with learning disabilities who were enrolled in universities in the United States. The investigation consisted of examining the perspectives of Disability Supports Service (DSS) professionals, Center for International Education (CIE) advisors, and international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities and/or attention deficit hyperactivity disorders (ADHD). The goal of the investigation was to explore the essence of the unique needs of international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities, how their needs are being met, features of the identification process, the nature of the students' awareness of their disabilities, and their self-advocacy skills.

In conducting the literature review for this study, no research studies were found that investigated the experiences of international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities. The majority of existing studies examined the experiences of international undergraduate students regarding the challenges they encountered that impacted their academic performance and social interactions within college contexts, taking into account their diverse educational and cultural backgrounds (e.g. Hall, 2013; Heyn, 2013). Therefore, the findings of this study contributed significantly to the body of literature focused on international students with disabilities, and also to the literature of

culturally and linguistically diverse populations with disabilities in postsecondary institutions.

Participants in this study consisted of five DSS professionals, three CIE advisors, one psychologist, two international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities, and one international student with identified ADHD. Two sources of data were employed: interviews and document review. This chapter presents a brief summary of the study findings, a discussion of the results, and a description of the limitations of this study. Finally, recommendations for policy, and practice, and directions for future research are provided.

The following research questions guided this study:

Q1   From the perspective of disability service office professionals, what are the unique needs of international students identified with learning disabilities?

Q2   From the prospective of support service professionals at university international education centers, what are the unique needs of international students who may be suspected of having learning disabilities?

Q3   What is the assessment and identification process for international students who have learning disabilities?

Q4   How do international students identified with learning disabilities become aware of their learning disabilities?

Q5   How do international students with identified learning disabilities advocate for themselves?

Summary of Findings

The current research study identified nine main themes: language proficiency, social challenges, factors impacting academic success, knowledge of available supports, providing accommodations and supports, disclosure, identification of learning disabilities and ADHD, disability awareness, and self-advocacy. The first theme pertained to

language proficiency and how it impacts the students' academic performance as well as how it impacts the professionals' judgments regarding the students' learning disabilities. The second theme discussed social challenges encountered by the students including issues of adjusting to the new university environment, bonding with peers from their own cultures, and addressing cases of conflicts with their own culture. Factors impacting academic success were the third theme to be discussed, and included students' challenges at maintaining sufficient GPA for good academic standing, consequences associated with academic probation, and academic misconduct. Further, it was found that international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities and/or ADHD often have issues with strategic study skills that would help them address the vast amount of academic demands placed by universities in United States. The fourth theme addressed students' knowledge of available supports. The perceptions of CIE advisors and DSS professionals indicated that many international undergraduate students lacked knowledge about available supports, which was attributed to the students' lack of prior disability identification and experience with receiving accommodations and similar supports. The fifth theme was providing accommodations and supports. DSS professionals shared that the accommodations most preferred by international students were extended time and using a quiet space during exams. Additional supports were provided that addressed the lack of strategic learning skills demonstrated by the international students. The lack of disclosure where international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities were hesitant to share their needs with the DSS professionals was the sixth theme to be discussed. This hesitancy was explained by the social stigma associated with disabilities in the students' home countries. The seventh theme discussed challenges related to the

identification of learning disabilities with international undergraduate students. Two main

challenges were identified that impacted professionals' ability to identify these students.

Professionals indicated that it was often challenging to distinguish between language

differences and learning disabilities; further, they stated that this difficulty is magnified

by the lack of documentation from these students had. Disability awareness was the

eighth theme identified in the study. DSS professionals noted that international

undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities and/or ADHD are often

limited in their understanding of their own disabilities along with type of supports that

they actually need. However, two of the students who participated in the study

demonstrated a clear understand of the specific challenges associated with their learning

disabilities and kinds of accommodations addressing their challenges. The ninth and final

theme in this study concerned self-advocacy skills of international undergraduate students

with identified learning disabilities and/or ADHD. From the perspectives of the DSS

professionals, international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities

and/or ADHD frequently avoid asking their professors for help, clarification, or even to

request that in-class accommodations be implemented. Several professionals attributed

these limited self-advocacy skills to cultural factors in which students chose to keep a

distance to maintain a level of respect with their professors. The students who

participated in this study differed in whether they approached their instructors; one

student stated that she was comfortable discussing her learning disabilities and need for

accommodations to her professors while the other two students were not.

Discussion

In the following section, external and internal factors that impact international undergraduate students' access to disability services are discussed based on the study findings. External factors are related to institutional practices and regulations that govern how students receive supports and were discussed primarily by DSS professionals, CIE advisors, and the psychologist. These factors are associated with issues pertaining to the professionals' challenge of distinguishing between language differences and learning disabilities as well as the eligibility determination process of learning disabilities. Internal factors are those related to the individual's experience, knowledge and culture. Although these factors are related to international students, they were discussed by all participants and connected to students' cultural influences. These factors were found to impact the students' decisions to disclose their disabilities and to self-advocate.

External Factors

External factors are those institutional factors that primarily concern the practice and assumptions of DSS professionals and CIE advisors. These consist of language differences versus learning disabilities, documentation and assessment, factors impacting academic success, knowledge of available supports, and providing accommodations and supports.

Language differences versus learning disabilities. A core discussion issue in this study pertains to whether the academic challenges that international students experienced were due to language differences or to learning disabilities. This issue has a significant impact on whether international students are referred for evaluation for learning disabilities and subsequently receive accommodations. The majority of current

research literature that discusses the interplay between language differences and learning disabilities is primarily concerned with English language learners in the K-12 educational system (Case & Taylor, 2005; Jimenez et al., 2003; Klingner & Artiles, 2006; Salend et al., 2002; Wagner et al., 2005). No studies were found that discussed this issue among international students in postsecondary educational settings. Therefore, the findings in this study are discussed based on the extant research of K-12 English language learners.

Professionals who participated in the study (DSS professionals, CIE advisors, and a psychologist) all claimed that they faced difficulties when trying to ascertain if the academic challenges that international undergraduate students exhibited were tied to true learning disabilities or difficulties in learning a second language. These findings align with those identified by Case and Taylor (2005) who stated that English language learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds often showed similar academic difficulties to students with learning disabilities in syntax, punctuation, and semantics. It can take a significant amount of time for English language learners to master the more complicated aspects of language proficiency. Cummins (2008) described the process of language proficiency development, from basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) to cognitive academic language proficiency skills (CALPS). There is a timeline in the development of BICS and CALPS in which all English language learners progress as they develop their proficiency in English. To illustrate, students might demonstrate that they have good social and interpersonal language skills; however, they experience challenges with academic reading and writing. In order for international students to succeed academically, they need to develop their proficiency in academic language including the use of advanced cognitive skills such as synthesizing, evaluating, and

referencing of information that requires higher reading comprehension skills. Research

has shown that it takes on average five to seven years to develop these higher level

language skills (Cummins, 2008). And yet, international students are generally given one

year in the English intensive program to learn "sufficient" English to enroll in academic

classes. Two of the international students who participated in this study had limited time

to develop their English proficiency due to the requirements set forth by their scholarship

sponsors.

The lack of language proficiency might explain some of the academic challenges

that international students experience. It can be very challenging to determine if students

need more than academic supports such as tutoring or writing coaching to improve their

language proficiency skills. As a result some international students are referred for

evaluation for learning disabilities. According to the CIE advisors in this study,

international students need to develop their language proficiency to a certain degree so

that it becomes evident that students are not making the academic progress that is

expected before the advisors refer them for DSS support.

Although CIE advisors are expected to possess a basic background knowledge of

the typical development of second language acquisition, not all of the CIE advisors in this

study demonstrated such an understanding. One CIE advisor demonstrated this lack of

understanding by confusing language differences with learning disabilities. This advisor

claimed that if he was expected to learn Chinese in a short period of time, he would have

a learning disability. Another CIE advisor clearly understood the process of acquiring a

second language due to her own personal experience. She was a former international

student who had studied in an American university and experienced challenges similar to the international students with whom she now worked.

Another critical aspect discussed in the literature is the connection between challenges associated with second language acquisition and specific language problems in a first language. There is strong evidence that if a student possesses learning disabilities in his or her native language, these challenges will definitely be transferred to a second language (Durgonoglu, 2002; Harrison & Krol, 2007; Levine, 2000; Taymans et al., 2009). Cummins (1984) contends that individuals cannot sufficiently develop their second language without having strong first language skills. Several studies investigated this issue for college students with learning disabilities and found that students who had difficulties acquiring a foreign language had deficits in their first language; conversely, a proficient first language can predict later success in acquiring a second language (Meschyan & Hernandez, 2002; Sparks et al., 2008; Sparks et al., 2006). This belief aligns with the results of the current study. Both DSS professionals and CIE advisors indicated that when they worked with international students who were not making progress despite working hard, the advisors delved into the students' academic histories to ascertain whether students had experienced similar challenges in their native language. These professionals believed that if students admitted that they indeed had similar academic challenges in their native language, this could be considered a "red flag" for possible learning disabilities rather than typical issues related to second language acquisition.

The DSS professionals interviewed in this study indicated that this type of screening for previous academic challenges was one method that helped them to

determine whether international students had challenges due to a language difference or a *bona fide* learning disability. This information helped in making decisions regarding whether to provide international undergraduate students with provisional accommodations as well as to guide them in pursuing a formal learning disability evaluation. Since DSS offices do not provide supports and accommodations to international students without identified disabilities, having knowledge about students' previous academic history is critical for comprehensive learning disability identification.

Documentation/assessment. In order for international undergraduate students to access accommodations, they need to provide acceptable documentation that verifies their learning disabilities. This documentation should be recent and rely on results derived from the use of multiple psychoeducational tools (Gormley et al., 2005; Madaus et al., 2010; Sparks & Lovett, 2013). This documentation should indicate the nature of the disability, specific areas of deficits, the disability implications on certain academic areas, as well as students' previous use of accommodations and students' strengths (Ofiesh et al., 2004). Disability support service professionals who determine appropriate accommodations rely heavily on information included in learning disabilities documentation. Federal regulations require that students who demonstrate a functional limitation that hinders their learning receive disability supports (ADA, 2008). However, it is the Association of Higher Education and Disabilities (AHEAD) that provides DSS professionals at universities across the United States with specific criteria to guide them in the eligibility determination process. Disability support service professionals are encouraged to rely on various sources of information, including emphasizing students' self-report as a primary source of information. In this study, the documentation

requirements described in the research literature align with the documentation requirements set forth at each of the DSS offices.

All participants in the current study indicated that international undergraduate students generally lacked the required documentation to prove the presence of learning disabilities and/or ADHD. Two international undergraduate students in this study who were ultimately identified with learning disabilities stated that they became aware that they had learning disabilities during their schooling in their home countries; however, they had not been evaluated for or identified with learning disabilities before they arrived in the United States, and therefore could not provide documentation of a disability to their DSS office.

Two of the DSS professionals shared cases of international undergraduate students who did possess thorough disability documentation from their home countries. These students were from countries where learning disability identification procedures were already established such as Israel, South Korea, and Japan. One DSS professional described the difference between receiving comprehensive and thorough documentation from these "privileged" countries versus incomplete or "thin" documentation from other countries where disability identification is more arbitrary. When faced with incomplete documentation, this professional relied more on students' self-report. DSS professionals shared that international undergraduate students who come from countries such as Saudi Arabia and China more frequently lack the documentation needed for them to receive services. This was evident by the statements of Heba and Alex, students identified with learning disabilities, who both shared that they knew they had some form of learning disabilities; however, they could not be appropriately diagnosed in their home countries.

The lack of documentation aligns with the findings of AlSulaiman and AlQafari (2014) who claim that there is a significant deficit of formal learning disability assessment tools in Saudi Arabia. Thus, most students with learning disabilities in Saudi Arabia received their learning disability status based on the use of informal assessments (e.g., screening tools and curriculum-based measurements).

The lack of formal learning disability identification procedures in countries such as Saudi Arabia and China is attributed to social and cultural factors. This lack of formal identification procedures is attributed to cultural beliefs towards disability issues (Lam et al., 2006). Research suggests that a social stigma exists toward disabilities in Asian or Middle Eastern societies where individuals with disabilities are perceived as individuals with less "societal value" (Meyer, 2010; Reid & Knight, 2006). These perceptions are traditionally directed to more visible disabilities such as physical and intellectual disorders. However, stigma associated with any kind of disability can result in non-identification. Another issue is whether countries can economically support the identification of additional students with disabilities, especially those that are considered "invisible," such as learning disabilities or ADHD. Both Saudi Arabia and China possess sufficient economic standing that each should support efforts to establish a solid identification system for learning disabilities similar to South Korea or the United States. However, no such system currently exists in these two countries. This has resulted in many students graduating from K-12 education in their home countries lacking appropriate assessment or support for learning disabilities.

The inability of international students to provide the required documentation to United States colleges and universities results in not receiving appropriate assistance and

accommodations. Research has found that undergraduate students with learning disabilities are at risk for academic failure if they do not receive needed support (Fichten et al., 2014; Troiano et al., 2010). These findings align with statements by the DSS professionals in this study who provided provisional accommodations to students suspected of having learning disabilities before they were formally assessed. This process allowed students to receive support while pursuing formal disability identification.

Research has consistently evidenced many challenges encountered by professionals to determine whether English language learners demonstrate learning disabilities (Klingner & Artiles, 2006; Wagner et al., 2005). Currently, a significant lack of appropriate and valid identification tools to identify learning disabilities among international undergraduate students hinders appropriate identification The available standardized assessments used to identify learning disabilities were developed and normed based on native English speakers only; consequently, the results are not valid or reliable for individuals from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Wagner et al., 2005). However, proponents of the cross-linguistic literature argue that in order to determine whether learning difficulties stem from learning disabilities or typical second language development, students need to be assessed in both their first and second languages (Durgonoglu, 2002; Harrison & Krol, 2007; Taymans et al., 2009). Disability support service professionals noted the lack of valid assessment tools as a major challenge to determining service eligibility for international undergraduate students.

Two students received their learning disability identification in the United States using disparate assessment tools. Heba, whose English was proficient because she received her primary education in English language schools, underwent

psychoeducational testing for learning disabilities. Traditionally, psychoeducational assessment tools evaluate an individual's intellectual, cognitive, and educational achievement levels. To assess these areas, the evaluator used formal assessments including the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale-III, the Kaufman Adolescent and Adult Intelligence Test, and the Woodcock-Johnson Tests of Cognitive Abilities and Achievement-Extended test (Bell, 2002; Weis et al., 2011; Woodcock et al., 2001). However, the validity of these assessments depends on an individuals' level of English proficiency and cultural knowledge, and are therefore not valid or reliable for many international students.

Alex received his learning disability identification based on the use of *The Long Self-Test for Irlen Syndrome* (Irlen, n.d.). Because the evaluator did not believe that valid assessments existed for English language learners, Alex's evaluator used the Irlen self-test to determine whether students were eligible for accommodations. *The Long Self-Test for Irlen Syndrome* does not identify learning disabilities; instead, it is used to detect a neurologically-based visual processing disorder that may be associated with learning disabilities based on students' reading efficiency. The psychologist interviewed in this study claimed that the use of *The Long Self-Test for Irlen Syndrome* helped to address students' academic needs.

The use of *The Long Self-Test for Irlen Syndrome* as an identification tool for learning disabilities is a clear contradiction with the findings in the research literature. However, the psychologist interviewed in this study, who was responsible for conducting learning disability evaluations, believed that *The Long Self-Test for Irlen Syndrome* was an appropriate assessment tool to use with international students. This was due to the fact

that the test is non-verbal and does not require students to respond to cultural or linguistic constructs. Although *The Long Self-Test for Irlen Syndrome* is not an accepted identification tool for learning disabilities, the Irlen society claims that up to 45% of students who have a learning disability diagnosis also have Irlen Syndrome. The psychologist stated that in providing accommodations that address Irlen Syndrome a number of undiagnosed learning problems may also be addressed. For the psychologist, using this quick screening tool allowed the DSS professionals to grant students eligibility for services and needed accommodations.

Factors impacting academic success. In this study, factors that impacted students' academic success included level of English proficiency, adjustment to a different learning environment, the need for strategic study skills, and challenges associated with academic probation and academic misconduct. Researchers have identified insufficient language proficiency as a major issue impacting the social interactions between international undergraduate students and their American peers (Andrade, 2006; Sherry et al., 2010; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Yeh and Inose (2003) indicate that when students are more comfortable interacting and speaking in English, and have high frequency use of language; they have lower levels of stress and perform better academically. These findings align with the findings in the current study. The CIE advisors interviewed in this study stated that many international undergraduate students chose to socialize with peers from their own culture due in part to their lack of English proficiency. The advisors posited that students avoided the embarrassment of speaking in public, preferring social isolation over integrating into the wider university environment. The CIE advisors further suggested that extensive interaction with same-language peers

led to low social interaction with American peers and suggested that this impacted the international students' academic performance as well. A study by Wenli (2011) found that international students frequently avoid participating in class activities due to the fear of being embarrassed in class.

Numerous studies have explored the effects of low language proficiency on academic performance (Hall, 2013; Heyn, 2013; Mori, 2000). In these studies, low language proficiency was found to impact the academic performance of international students especially in writing assignments, oral and written exams, comprehending lectures, and the ability to ask for clarifications. In the current study, participants, including the DSS professionals and CIE advisors, all indicated that the sheer amount of work that international undergraduate students faced was a challenge for them. They shared that international undergraduate students were surprised by the unfamiliar academic demands they encountered at their universities. For the students with learning disabilities and/or ADHD, finishing exams on time was also a challenge. Heba shared that due to her weak spelling skills, she struggled with finishing exams on time, especially when the exams required written essay responses.

In addition to the unexpectedly rigorous academic demands of international students, other expectations within the learning environment can come as a culture shock. Students encounter teaching styles and participation requirements that are vastly different than those with which they were previously accustomed. Wang and Mallinckrodt (2006) describe educational environments where students are required to be quiet and compliant, and where withholding questions and comments until invited to participate by the instructor is considered respectful. The American instructors frequently see this behavior

by students as unengaged, inattentive, and even incapable. Zara, a CIE advisor, stated that it was often a challenge for many international students to adjust to the new educational environment and demands, particularly in relation to the need to actively participate and interact in class discussions.

DSS professionals in this study stated that many international students with learning disabilities and/or ADHD had limited strategic study skills that help them to meet new and rigorous academic demands. Professionals argue that providing common accommodations such as extra time on exams and a quiet space during exams does not address the true learning needs of many international students with learning disabilities and/or ADHD. These students' lack of strategic study skills led one DSS office to provide one-on-one instruction in study skills that went beyond formal accommodations.

This finding aligns with Smith and Abouammoh (2013) who claim that a high number of Saudi Arabian postsecondary students lack the executive functioning skills needed to meet the demands of university classes. According to the literature, many students with learning disabilities may have deficits in executive functioning skills (NJCLD, 1990; Schmitt et al., 2013; Toll, Van der Ven, Kroesbergen, & Van Luit, 2011). The learning disabilities of these students are masked by the informal supports they received from their high school teachers. Some students have used compensatory strategies that hid their learning disabilities well enough until they attended college (Skinner, 2004). In addition, many students have not developed the strategic study skills required for future academic success. This phenomenon was directly attributable to cultures where students are routinely required to memorize and repeat information, and are not encouraged to develop the executive and strategic study skills so critical in United

States universities (Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006). It was clear that most international undergraduate students with or without disabilities face a number of challenges including learning a new language, adjusting to a new learning environment, and developing executive functioning skills. All of these confounding factors could have significant effects on the academic success of international undergraduate students.

Two specific findings found in the current study were not discussed in the research literature. First, all of the CIE advisors discussed the consequences of academic probation and misconduct for international students. International students who are placed on academic probation due to low grades face two daunting challenges. If they are unable to improve their GPAs, they can be dismissed from their university. This situation occurred with one of the participants in this study. Rayan, a student with ADHD, shared that before he received his diagnosis and received support and accommodations, he was dismissed from his previous university due to his low GPA. It was not until he was diagnosed with ADHD that he recognized that he needed the supports offered by the DSS office to help him with his academic challenges.

Both Ronny and Camilla, CIE advisors, discussed situations where they implemented a plan of action for international students with low GPAs. One component of the plan consisted of locating support resources on campus. When these advisors suspected students of having a learning disability, they referred them to the DSS office for further evaluation. This particular finding suggests that some international undergraduate students struggle academically and be placed in academic probation due to unidentified learning disabilities and/or ADHD. It is important to note that the consequences of academic probation for international students can be severe; they are

required to reduce the number of credits in which they can enroll which subsequently violates the conditions of their student visa. They risk losing their legal status and being sent home. An example of these consequences was Rayan's experience with academic probation. He clearly stated that, if he had received supports from the DSS, he would not have been placed in academic probation and dismissed from his previous university.

CIE advisors also discussed issues related to academic misconduct. They stated that many international students come from cultures where sharing information is considered socially appropriate. They described situations where international students shared their homework, exam responses, and failed to credit sources appropriately. There are two explanations for these situations. First, many international students feel overwhelmed by the amount of work they are required to complete. One of the strategies they can employ is to work collaboratively on assignments that require individual effort and to share information inappropriately with peers. Second, rules regarding plagiarism are virtually unknown in other countries and are never discussed in secondary academic environments. Zara suggested that many international students are ignorant of the academic rules and regulations that comprise part of the educational environment at universities in the United States. Because the consequences of academic misconduct can include being dismissed from the university, the CIE advisors felt that it was important to discuss these educational rules and cultural expectations clearly and frequently with international students.

Knowledge of available supports. Investigating students' knowledge of the supports that are available on campus is an area of research that was not directly explored in the literature. A dissertation by Soorenian (2011) examined the experiences of

international students with disabilities studying at universities in England. She found that international students with disabilities did not request the accommodations they needed due to their ignorance regarding available disability supports that were available on their campuses. This finding aligns with the current study. While the participants in Soorenian's study consisted exclusively of students, the current study includes the perspectives of CIE advisor, DSS professionals, and students.

Study participants indicated that international undergraduate students lack knowledge regarding supports available to them on campus. CIE advisors stated that when they mentioned the DSS office to international undergraduate students (who may be suspected of having learning disabilities), students usually were unaware of the existence of such supports. They were confused about the purpose of the DSS office and unfamiliar with the kind of supports the DSS office could offer. DSS professionals stated that there are several factors that play a part in the students' knowledge of available supports. These factors consist of prior knowledge of learning disabilities, previous use of accommodations, and supportive prior experiences coming from educated and informed families who have the knowledge of disability supports.

Despite the lack of prior identification of a disability for some students, other students, such as Heba and Alex, knew that they had some sort of learning disability. However, Alex did not know that disability supports exist and thus did not approach the DSS office by himself. This indicated that disability supports were not widely prevalent in his home country. To illustrate, when special education services were available in schools, even students who did not receive special education services were made aware of these services. Another explanation to this finding is that some students knew they had

a disability and received prior identification, yet, they chose not to admit their knowledge of disability supports for fear of stigma and feeling their sense of belonging would disappear. These feelings are more magnified for international undergraduate students who already know they are different from their American peers in their language, culture, beliefs, and values. The existence of a disability adds another layer to their differences which they believed would widen the divide between them and their American peers. For them, disclosure is simply not an option.

International undergraduate students' lack of knowledge of available supports is clearly linked with their lack of knowledge about disabilities and disability support. Many international students come from countries where individuals with visible disabilities are segregated or even shunned. Disability issues are generally not discussed, and individuals with invisible disabilities do not reveal this information, even within their close circle of friends. Thus, many international students are not simply unaware of invisible disabilities, but also completely unaware of the supports that exist to meet the needs of individuals with such disabilities. International students who have learning disabilities are unaware that they have disabilities and attribute their academic challenges to language differences, a different educational environment, or personal incompetence. Because they have not received formal accommodations previously, many of these students are unaware of the range of supports available or which ones can best support their learning needs.

Research suggests that family support is critical to promote college success for students with learning disabilities. According to DSS professionals, students who come from families with knowledge of disability supports they are able to guide their children

in locating disability supports available in their campus tend to be more knowledgeable about disability supports. For example, Heba's family accepted her learning disability and encouraged her to pursue identification and accommodations while attending the university in the United States. Conversely, Alex's parents were not aware that he had a learning disability, and when he informed them of this fact, they asked him to keep it a secret from others including his own sister. Rayan has chosen not to share his ADHD identification with his family; he did not want to disappoint them.

Being knowledgeable regarding disability does not necessarily lead to acceptance by either students or their families. The different levels of knowledge and acceptance are reflected by the different cultural assumptions about disability of each family. Heba came from a multicultural background with a high level of disability acceptance. Her father was from Saudi Arabia, her mother from Columbia, and she was raised in Egypt where she was educated at English-language schools. In school and at home, Heba's social environment consisted of well-educated, liberal, cosmopolitan people; she never felt the need to hide her academic challenges from family or friends. According to Heba's mother, disability identification and supports were considered a positive and beneficial resource rather than something negative or shameful. Thus, although Heba did not have previous experience using accommodations, she actively pursued disability evaluation and supports when she arrived to the United States. In contrast, Alex came from a region where individuals were expected to persevere until they succeeded. His family considered disability to be a weakness best hidden away, and needing accommodations or seeking supports was a personal shortcoming. Alex was therefore unaware of the supports available on his campus; when he started having academic difficulties, it was his CIE

advisor who referred him to the DSS office. Rayan, a student with ADHD, had a different experience. Similarly to Alex, Rayan approached the DSS office through a referral from his CIE advisor but Rayan did not know that he had a disability while he was in high school. He was shocked that he received the ADHD diagnosis.

It appears that the degree of disability acceptance in some cultures directly impacts the level of family knowledge and acceptance of disability, which in turn affects how the knowledge that international students possess regarding availability of disability supports and how willing they are to utilize these supports. Students who come from cultures where all aspects of disability including the use of accommodations and supports being considered stigmatizing will not actively seek the supports they need to succeed.

Providing accommodations and supports. The DSS offices included in this study offered common accommodations in compliance with the regulations of the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (2008) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (1973). According to Raue and Lewis (2011), the most commonly used accommodations are extended time on exams, provision of note takers, access to faculty course notes, study skills supports, alternative formats for exams, and adaptive equipment and technology according to DSS report. This is consistent with reports from students with disabilities regarding the most effective and frequently used accommodations (Bolt et al., 2011; Kurth & Mellard, 2006; Stein, 2013). The current study similarly found that international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities and/or ADHD preferred the following accommodations: extended time and a quiet room during exams, extra time on class assignments, availability of note takers, provision of assistive technology, and alternative text formats. In addition to providing

academic accommodations, DSS professionals indicated that they provide emotional supports and instruction in strategic learning skills to international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities and/or ADHD.

The DSS professionals also indicated that they provided emotional supports through counseling and coaching to international undergraduate students who recently received their learning disabilities identification. These kinds of support go beyond what is expected from the DSS offices included in the study. DSS professionals are only required to offer common accommodations to students with disabilities; however, providing emotional supports indicates the DSS professionals' attention to the unique situation that international students faced. One DSS professional stated that it can be very difficult for international students to be identified with a disability; however, he explained that it could be a relief if students knew why they were struggling academically. Offering emotional supports is critical for international students who are struggling psychologically to cope with the idea of having a learning disability.

As part of the process of determining accommodations and supports, DSS professionals rely extensively on information in evaluation reports and a student's self-report (Ofiesh et al., 2004). Palmer and Roessler (2000) found that DSS professionals are frequently limited in their ability to generate a wide range of accommodations that addresses the specific needs of college students with learning disabilities. This may be due to two factors. First, DSS professionals rely heavily on external evaluation documentation to make their determination of appropriate accommodations for students. Second, DSS professionals have a limited amount of time to spend on each student. They rely on students to provide information about their need for supports and feedback about

their experience in using accommodations. However, findings from the current study indicate that although some international undergraduate students have eligibility documentation from their country of origin, it is generally not comprehensive enough to guide the DSS professionals' practice. International students with prior disability identification might have used different types of accommodations that are not offered through the DSS office at their current university, or simply relied on informal accommodations provided by their teachers. Other international undergraduate students lack previous experience in using common accommodations altogether. In fact, many international undergraduate students may not be aware that they have a learning disability before they approach DSS to seek support.

International undergraduate students who become identified with learning disabilities and/or ADHD face an additional procedural dilemma. Because they have no previous experience with using accommodations, they do not know which supports or accommodations are most useful to them. However, common DSS practice dictates that student self-report guides the decision to implement specific accommodations. Disability support service professionals are used to working with students who know which accommodations work best for them based on previous experience and students who are proactive participants in the process of determining accommodations. Many international students come from cultures where they place high trust in and respect for the knowledge and judgment of professionals. This extends to the process of determining appropriate accommodations. Therefore, when a DSS professional suggests a specific accommodation, many international students will accept this without discussion. Further, international students might not provide accurate feedback about the accommodations

offered, or about their additional learning needs, because they want to avoid appearing disrespectful to the professionals if they disagree with professionals' suggestions.

The challenge of determining appropriate accommodations for international students is not only based on the student's knowledge of disability and supports, but also on the practices of the DSS office. Many DSS professionals serve a large number of students and are thus extremely busy. If these professionals do not make the time to check back with international undergraduate students and create an environment where these students are comfortable disclosing personal information about their experiences with the supports offered, the DSS professionals will miss the opportunity for authentic feedback from students, as well as the chance of providing the most appropriate accommodations for international students.

Internal Factors

Internal factors relate to students' personal experiences, their background knowledge of disability and their cultural assumptions. The discussion of each theme included below is highly influenced by cultural forces. The discussed themes include self-disclosure including stigma, disability awareness, and self-advocacy.

In this discussion, culture is considered to be an internal factor. While culture is often seen as an external factor, once an individual moves to another culture, his cultural identity, values, habits, and assumptions are internalized and these invisible influences guide his behavior, thinking, and reactions to events occurring in his new, external culture. Meeting the expectations and assumptions of a new culture can be challenging and students may not behave or react appropriately with regard to the new cultural norms.

Disclosure. The first step for students in accessing accommodations at their university is to disclose the presence of their disability at the DSS office. However, such disclosure requires that the individual is aware that he/she has a disability, understands the implications of that disability, and has experience with accommodations. Disclosure is easier for individuals that have clear goals and who are willing to make sacrifices in order to reach these goals. It is also easier for those with strong self-esteem that disclosing personal information is not felt as dishonorable or shameful.

Many international undergraduate students are not aware that they have invisible disabilities such as learning disabilities and/or ADHD. Although they may suspect that they have a learning disability, some international students are hesitate to seek assistance. In the Middle East as well as in some parts of Asia, individuals with disabilities are often devalued and perceived to have less social status than typical peers. The social stigma associated with disability often results in negative attitudes, judgmental comments and actions, and open discrimination of individuals with disabilities (Lam et al., 2006). In the current study, DSS professionals indicated that some international undergraduate students do not share their academic challenges because they fear the social stigma associated with needing support. One DSS professional shared his experience with a student from China who denied that his academic struggles were due to a possible disability. Although this particular student was comfortable believing that his academic challenges were due to his low English proficiency, he preferred not to attribute his challenges to a disability. This student was ultimately identified with learning disabilities, and was quickly instructed by his family in China to not tell anyone about his disability. This student considered low language proficiency to be a challenge any international student may

possess. Therefore, he felt comfortable asking for assistance to address his challenges of language proficiency, without admitting to learning disabilities.

Several studies have identified that students' fear of losing their social status among peers and the social stigma associated with disability are the main factors that limit college students with learning disabilities from disclosing their disability (Denhart, 2008; Kurth & Mellard, 2006; Marshak et al., 2010; Quinlan et al., 2012). Findings in the current study confirm that fear of being singled out from peers is a particular concern for many international students. Disability support service professionals, along with one student, indicated that international undergraduate students avoid disclosing their need for accommodations in class because they do not want to be treated differently in front of the class. Many international undergraduate students feel they are already culturally and linguistically disadvantaged. International students with identified learning disabilities and/or ADHD feel additionally disadvantaged by having a disability, and fear their peers and instructors will think they are incompetent or lazy. As a result, they limit the accommodations they will use because they prefer not to disclose their disability in class.

The only international undergraduate student to approach the DSS on her own and disclose her suspicion that she had a learning disability was Heba. It was clear from my interview that Heba had a very strong self-awareness of her own strengths and weaknesses. Due to the support and encouragement of her family, she understood that learning disability identification would ultimately be beneficial for her. This self-awareness coupled with her high self-esteem led Heba to be comfortable disclosing her need for learning disabilities assessment and for accommodations.

A study conducted by Lightner et al. (2012) found that it was only when students with learning disabilities encountered academic failure, that they approached the DSS office, disclosed their disabilities and requested accommodations. This study differed from the current study in that Lightner et al. (2012) surveyed students who were previously identified with learning disabilities yet who chose to not seek accommodations. In the current study, international students interviewed were not identified with learning disabilities and/or ADHD and were not aware of existing supports. However, it was not until these international students struggled with exams, had low GPAs, and failed classes, that they requested assistance.

International undergraduate students are under considerable pressure to succeed in their studies. This pressure is due to the scholarship regulations from their sponsors, rules about academic standing from their universities, and the high expectations about success by their families. The findings in the current study suggest that fear of failure is a driving force for international students to seek out the supports available to them on campus. This supersedes their fear of being identified with a learning disability, and encourages them to disclose their personal challenges. All three of the students interviewed in this study had high personal expectations and a clear vision of their future. This propelled them to disclose their need for supports to help them meet their goals.

Disability awareness. A review of the intake sheets used in all three DSS offices in this study showed that when students request disability services, they are required to describe their disabilities and list previously received accommodations. This reveals that there is an assumption that students who approach the DSS office to inquire into supports and accommodations are already aware that they have a disability and have experience

addressing their learning needs. This is not the case for some international students who have never been evaluated, let alone identified with learning disabilities and/or ADHD. From the perspective of DSS professionals, findings from the study indicated that international students lack sufficient understanding of their own disabilities and do not know what kind of supports and accommodations that they need. Further, DSS professionals stated that being previously identified with learning disabilities and living in a region where accommodations and disability supports are available are critical to the students understanding of their own disabilities and their implications. Findings from the literature suggest that college students with learning disabilities were unaware of their own challenges and capabilities and were, in some cases, completely ignorant regarding the accommodations they need (Janiga & Costenbader, 2002).

Although this finding aligns with statements made by DSS professionals, the student participants in the current study indicated otherwise. Alex and Heba who received their learning disabilities identification in the United States demonstrated a clear understanding of their own academic challenges and kinds of effective supports to address these challenges. What these international students shared presented a contradiction with what the DSS professionals stated. Three factors contribute to this contradiction. First, two of the international students understood that they had a disability and how it affected their learning even before they received a diagnosis and were provided with accommodations. They had more than a year to process this information and to try different accommodations prior to being interviewed for this study. This was not found with Rayan. He had not experienced academic challenges before coming to the United States and was thus completely shocked at being diagnosed with ADHD. At the

time of the interview, Rayan understood his academic problems but not his ADHD. He had been diagnosed only four months previously and before this, did not know anything about ADHD. He was still processing the information and learning which accommodations were valuable. Second, many DSS professionals lacked the communication skills necessary to communicate effectively with international students. Procedures which are familiar to American students are overwhelming for many international students who are trying to understand a new disability identification process and unfamiliar accommodations in a new language where the words and concepts being discussed are utterly foreign to them. As a result, international students often need additional and different support from the DSS professionals to help them during the eligibility process. Third, DSS professionals gave broader statements regarding students with learning disabilities while the students who agreed to participate in this study were very specific and knowledgeable about their own disabilities.

Finally, even students who suspect they have a learning disability need assistance in determining which accommodations and supports work best for them. When working with students who have never received accommodations previously, DSS professionals need to ensure that these students understand the available accommodations so they can select those that best support them. Alex and Heba developed their awareness of accommodations based on their experience using the accommodations that were offered by the DSS offices.

Self-advocacy. For students to develop their self-advocacy skills, they need to have developed a sufficient understanding of their own disabilities, their strengths and needs, and the ability to request accommodations (Pocock et al., 2002; Test et al., 2005).

Researchers have indicated that adequately developed self-advocacy skills are considered an indicator of the college success of students with disabilities (Field et al., 2003; Walker & Test, 2011; Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2003). In the United States, it is expected that students self-advocate. However, many international undergraduate students hold collectivist cultural values which hinder them from advocating for their needs. These collectivist values inhibit students from disclosing personal information or requesting support from individuals with higher authority (Hampton, 2000; Leake et al., 2006).

In this study, the DSS professionals stated that many international undergraduate students have limited self-advocacy skills. They stated that even with their support and explanation of the students' legal rights, students still refuse to request accommodations from their professors. This limitation is due to cultural differences and assumptions between the educational expectations in the United States and those in the students' home countries. Many international students are used to following their professors' instructions without discussion, to not initiate class discussions, or make requests of any kind in class. Professors are considered to have high authority and asking for additional support in class is considered extremely disrespectful. This presents a challenge for international students even though their professors exhibit a clear understanding and respect toward disability issues and a willingness to provide in-class accommodations. Some international students may even prefer not to reveal that they have difficulty comprehending class materials presented in class.

Individuals in the United States are expected to take initiative, set clear goals and advocate for themselves. This individualistic approach is in stark contrast to the collectivist cultures of many international students. Professionals at higher education

institutions in the United States (including professors, CIE advisors, and DSS professionals) expect undergraduate students to understand their own strengths and needs, be self-motivating, and ask for assistance independently. Consequently, students are expected to proactively request the supports that best meet their academic goals. These cultural expectations also extend to international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities and/or ADHD, who are similarly expected to advocate for their needs once they experience academic challenges. For many international students who recently received their learning disabilities and/or ADHD identification, this level of self-advocacy is not always possible.

Among the student participants in this current study, only Heba was comfortable advocating for in-class accommodations. She stated that because she had a high level of acceptance toward her learning disabilities and because her professors understood her needs, she felt comfortable discussing her learning needs with her professors. Additionally, Heba attributed her ease with discussing her learning needs to studying in a culture where individuals with disabilities were respected and issues of stigma were minimal.

Conversely, Alex was convinced that he did not need to ask his professors for in-class accommodations or even to request clarification of content in class. Rather, he preferred to devote more time to work and also to ask his classmates for assistance. I attribute the difference between Heba and Alex to the different cultural influences to which they have been exposed. Alex comes from a region in China that downplays asking for help and places great respect toward individuals who persevere and address their challenges by themselves. He was expected by his family to hide any weakness, and

not reveal his need for supports or to request accommodations. Heba, on the other hand, comes from a multicultural background that minimized the influence of a single culture. Heba adopted the assumptions of several cultures, including Saudi Arabian, Egyptian, and Colombian, which, when merged, created an acceptance of diversity within her family. This in turn helped her to develop an impressively high level of disability acceptance. Because of her unique cultural heritage, she developed sufficient self-advocacy skills that contributed to her high level of comfort in requesting needed accommodations.

Intersection of Themes

A striking result of the data analyses was the acknowledgement that many of the identified themes were highly interconnected. I found a clear overlap between the themes of English proficiency, academic success, disability identification, and types of accommodations offered by DSS. Challenges related to English proficiency cannot be discussed without considering the impact that this has on each of the other themes. Although each of these themes were discussed independently, it is clear that English proficiency is a concurrent factor that significantly impacts all three themes.

Another interesting example of this overlap is the interconnection between students' knowledge of available supports, disclosure, level of disability awareness, and self-advocacy skills. The ability to self-identify is connected with the ability to self-advocate. In order to effectively advocate for their needs, students need to have a well-developed and sufficient understanding of their own disability. This understanding is highly impacted by the students' level of acceptance, which in turn is affected by cultural mores. The cultural background of the students clearly influences their knowledge of and

level of acceptance of disability as well as their willingness to seek accommodations, especially in relation to the social stigma associated with disability in their culture of origin. Discussing these themes revealed a clear link to the social stigma and how these cultural influences have a significant impact on students' knowledge of available supports, challenges related to self-identification, and self-advocacy skills.

Limitations of the Study

This study has a number of limitations, including the qualitative research method, the reliance of the personal perspectives and experiences of participants, and the lack of previous research into the topic of international undergraduate students with learning disabilities and/or ADHD. In this study, data were collected by interviewing five DSS professionals, three CIE advisors, one psychologist, and three international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities and/or ADHD. The study also included a review of documents at three different DSS offices located at three different universities in three different states in the United States. Although data were collected from universities located in three different regions of the United States, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to other DSS offices, CIE offices, or to international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities and/or ADHD across the United States nation due to the qualitative nature of this research. Only one psychologist participated in the study due to her unique approach on identifying learning disabilities for international undergraduate students. Her experience and perspectives cannot be generalized to other psychologists whose work is to identify learning disabilities for international undergraduate students across the nation.

A significant limitation to this study was the challenge of recruiting international undergraduate students with learning disabilities who were willing to participate. This was in part due to the fact that international students with learning disabilities constitutes a very small number of the entire population of international students attending universities in the United States, as well as the hesitancy of these students to participate in this study. While several international students with learning disabilities were approached by DSS professionals, they ultimately chose not to participate in this study. The inclusion of their perspectives would have added to the findings of this study.

Additionally, the international students who participated in this study represented only two nationalities, Saudi Arabian and Chinese. Moreover, these students varied significantly in terms of familial and cultural backgrounds. They had highly varied family structures that helped form their personalities, values, ways of thinking, and their experiences. Thus, the students' perspectives cannot be generalized to other international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities and/or ADHD.

Another limitation pertains to the method employed to collect data. The primary means of data collection was participants' interviews. This method relies on the perceptions of individual participants that are subject to differing personal views and insights shaped by different experiences. While the findings of this study are rigorous and accurate based on the procedures used to analyze the data, these cannot be generalized to a wider population.

Further, there is a scarcity of studies investigating the phenomenon of international undergraduate students with disabilities. There was a dearth of previous

research that created a challenge to compare and contrast the findings of the current study with the research literature and, thus, to determine areas of transferability.

Recommendations

Findings from this study reveal that international undergraduate students with learning disabilities and/or ADHD face unique challenges regarding evaluation, disability identification, using accommodations and supports, and self-advocacy. These challenges can affect whether international students can access accommodations. The recommendations described below seek to ameliorate some of the challenges faced by international students through improving practices related to individual universities as well as policies in the United States, Saudi Arabia, and China.

Recommendations for Practice

Findings from this study suggest that DSS professionals and CIE advisors need to develop linguistically and culturally sensitive practices when working with international undergraduate students. These practices include creating a database with information regarding the cultural backgrounds represented by international students. This database can guide university service providers to meet the unique needs of their international students. Another recommended practice is that DSS professionals and CIE advisors participate in ongoing professional development in cultural diversity to build competency in addressing the variety of linguistic and educational backgrounds of their students. Additionally, connecting with cultural consultants who can provide insight into the unique needs of international students can guide their practice in meeting the needs of these students.

The findings also indicate some CIE advisors do not possess sufficient background knowledge to address the needs of international students. Recommendations include that CIE advisors receive training in the development of second language acquisition and the difference between language proficiency and learning disabilities. Having this foundation of knowledge would help CIE advisors to determine the most appropriate support for international students, whether that consisted of referring students for additional academic supports or to the DSS office to explore possible disability identification.

Results from the study indicate challenges related to the identification of learning disabilities among international undergraduate students. Several recommendations are proposed to improve this situation, including disability awareness training, development of specific protocols and procedures, and cross-departmental collaboration. Both CIE advisors and DSS professionals need to receive more in-depth training regarding the scope of learning disabilities and ADHD in order to increase their knowledge and skills. Protocols should be developed to guide CIE advisors practice when they encounter international students who demonstrate significant academic challenges, including documentation of students' needs, collection of work samples, elicitation of instructor observations, and consultation with external departments. Protocols should also be developed to guide DSS professionals' practice when they encounter international students requesting services. These should include a revised intake sheet that includes international students' educational background, learning styles, and previous academic challenges; translators in students' native languages should be employed during the initial interview. Moreover, it is recommended that DSS and CIE offices collaborate by meeting

regularly and discussing emerging issues related to international undergraduate students. By building this collaboration, professionals can exchange their expertise to best meet the needs of international undergraduate students with significant academic challenges.

Finally, there is a need for agencies that can guide international undergraduate students with learning disabilities and/or ADHD who plan to earn a Bachelor's degree in the United States. These agencies can identify those colleges and universities that maintain a good reputation in serving students with learning disabilities and/or ADHD and guide students to these universities.

Recommendations for Policy

The findings of this study indicate a lack of culturally and linguistically appropriate identification tools for students with learning disabilities. Associations such as AHEAD, which develops standards to determine eligibility for accommodations, should address the needs of international undergraduate students with learning disabilities and/or ADHD. It is recommended that AHEAD develop a guide for practice that DSS professionals can refer to when they work with international undergraduate students, especially those who do not have prior identification. Considering this issue would not only address the process of identifying international students with learning disabilities, it would illuminate the culturally and linguistic challenges they face.

Although Saudi Arabia and China have implemented policies that protect the rights of individuals with disabilities, these policies are not comprehensive and are rarely legally reinforced. Effective policies should address identification procedures and identify needed services. Additionally, such policies should actively seek to increase societal awareness of disability and the rights of individuals with disabilities. Reinforcing

these policies are critical in societies where negative perceptions toward individuals with disabilities exist and where these individuals are met with discrimination and lack of educational opportunities. In particular, Saudi Arabia and China need to establish strong learning disability identification procedures within the K-12 education system, and provide supports and accommodations for students identified with learning disabilities.

Directions for Future Research

This study is novel because it is the first study that investigated issues related to international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities and/or ADHD. It explored the perspectives from three different groups including DSS professionals, CIE advisors, and international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities and/or ADHD. Thus, the findings revealed many avenues for future research.

At this time, it is unknown how many international students with disabilities are currently attending universities in the United States. There is a critical need to conduct a nationwide study to determine how many undergraduate international students with the range of disabilities are present as well as the available services at the universities they attend.

The findings of the current study are limited in their transferability due to the reliance on personal perspectives utilized in this study as well as the small sample size interviewed in each participant group. Expanding this study to include a larger number of international students from a larger variety of countries and backgrounds would ascertain if the findings in this study can extend to other international students. Specifically, initiating quantitative studies or mixed methods designs are potentially advantageous approaches that could be used to increase the generalizability of the findings for this

specific population. This study can also be extended by including the perspectives of students' families and the view points of sponsoring agencies such as the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission. Additionally, it is important to ascertain if international undergraduate students who have prior disability identification from their home countries face similar challenges to students without such prior learning disabilities identification.

There is a need to investigate the identification procedures employed with international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities/ADHD. Examining the assessment reports of these students would provide information regarding which identification tools and procedures were used during the assessments. Additionally, studies could explore how psychologists address the limited English proficiency of international students during the evaluation process.

There is a need to investigate what constitutes effective accommodations for international students with learning disabilities/ADHD. Exploring the experiences of international students who utilize accommodations can provide important information about which levels of them (i.e., common accommodations, coordinated accommodations, and comprehensive accommodations) are most beneficial to these students.

There is a dearth of ethnographic studies that explore the lived experiences of international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities and/or ADHD. Giving these students a voice to describe their own experiences and make meaning of these, will add considerably to our knowledge about this unique group of students.

At this time, no studies currently exist that explore the self-advocacy skills of international students. Several research approaches could be applied, including

examining cultural barriers to self-advocacy among international students, investigating the effectiveness of self-advocacy instruction for international students, and exploring university faculty perceptions regarding international students' self-advocacy skills.

Finally, international student scholarship sponsors such as the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission have databases that include information about individual students, such as their degree programs, universities, and academic progress. This database can be used to research factors impacting the academic success of students, identify challenges they may face, and their graduation rates. Of particular interest, this database can also be used to investigate the impact of identified and unidentified learning disabilities on the academic success of these international students.

Conclusion

The goal of this phenomenological study was to investigate issues pertaining to supporting the needs of international undergraduate students with identified learning disabilities. The unique needs of these students, the disability identification process, and their level of disability awareness and self-advocacy skills were explored by capturing the perspectives of the DSS professionals, CIE advisors, international undergraduate students, and a psychologist. Data were collected through the use of in-depth interviews and a review of the documents describing the disability services offered at three DSS offices. Results revealed nine themes: language proficiency, social challenges, factors impacting academic success, knowledge of available support, providing accommodations and supports, disclosure, identification of learning disabilities, disability awareness, and self-advocacy.

      This study investigated an evolving issue that has never been explored in the literature. Thus, this study is considered an exploratory study highlighting challenges associated with serving a unique population. Several recommendations have been identified concerning the practice of the CIE and DSS professionals in working with international undergraduate students suspected of having learning disabilities and/or ADHD, as well as recommendations for policies to guide identification and evaluation practices for this unique group of students. The need to provide further training to DSS and CIE professionals has been noted in order to increase their competence in addressing the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Moreover, establishing a systematic approach to identifying students with learning disabilities in countries such as Saudi Arabia and China is highly recommended since many students from those countries come to the United States to earn their Bachelor's degrees. The current study unearthed a need for future research regarding the number of international students with disabilities currently attending universities in the United States, disability identification procedures, and consideration for extending the findings of this study to increase generalizability, as well as to explore the lived experiences of this exceptional group of students.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

**Interview Questions to the Disability Support
Service Office Professionals**

1. Tell me about your work at the disability support service office.

    a. Probe: How you support the academic, social, emotional needs of students with learning disabilities?

2. Picture an international student with learning disabilities at your centers, tell me what their academic, social, emotional, and cultural needs and how you support their needs?

3. How do you interact with professional who work at the Center of International Education?

4. Is working with international students with learning disabilities different from working with American students?

    a. Probe: If so, how do you describe these differences?
    b. Probe: To what extent does the diverse educational and cultural heritage of international students with learning disabilities create their unique needs?

5. From your perspective, how internationals students with learning disabilities were prepared for college?

    a. Probe: How do you address the inadequate prior preparation of students with learning disabilities?

6. Describe how you determine service eligibility for international students with learning disabilities?

7. How are international students identified with learning disabilities aware of your services?

8. Picture a session with an international student with learning disabilities discussing his/her academic, emotional, social challenges, how do international students identified with learning disabilities are aware of their disabilities and type of accommodations they need express their needs to you?

9. How are the self-advocacy skills of international students identified with learning disabilities different or similar to American students?

    a. Probe: To what extent does the students' diverse educational and cultural background impact their self-advocacy skills?

Interview Questions to the Advisors at
Centers of International Education

1. Describe a typical day at the international education center, what are your responsibilities?

2. Describe your relationship with international students after they finish their English intensive program? What does it look like?

3. Picture an international student who enters your office to express a challenge he/she faces, tell me what their academic, social, emotional, and cultural needs and how you support their needs?

4. How do you address these needs? What kind of support do you provide to international students who struggle with academic, language, social, or cultural challenges?

5. If your supports did not meet the needs of the students, what do you do? What extra methods/approaches do you use?

6. What do you do if you suspect that an international student have learning disabilities? Do you refer them to the disability support service office?

7. How do you interact with professionals who work at the Disability Support Service Office?

**Interview Questions for International
Undergraduate Students with Learning Disabilities**

1.   Tell me about yourself - who are you, as a person, a male/female, a student, an international student studying in an American university?

     a.   Probe: Why did you choose to study in the U.S?
     b.   Probe: Can you tell me what does it like to be a college student in an American university?
     c.   Probe: What should you be able to do, academically, socially, and culturally?

2.   What do you do to be successful college student?

     a.   Probe: What strategies do you use to compensate for your academic, social, or cultural challenges?

3.   How did you find out that you have a learning disability?

4.   How did you know that you need an extra help in your classes?

5.   How did you hear about the Disability Support Center?

     a.   Probe: How do professionals at the Disability Support Center know about your needs?

6.   What kind of supports and services do you receive from the Disability Support Center?

     a.   Probe: What kinds of services do usually seek?

7.   Picture a situation in one of your classes when you needed extra support, how do you explain your needs to your professors.

     a.   Probe: How do your professors help you in classes?

8.   When you return home, will you still identify yourself as someone with learning disabilities? Why or why not?

APPENDIX B

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

UNIVERSITY *of*
NORTHERN COLORADO

Institutional Review Board

DATE: June 10, 2015

TO: Reem Alabdulwahab
FROM: University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [764834-1] Postsecondary Education for International Undergraduate
                     Students with Learning Disabilities in United States Universities
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVAL/VERIFICATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
DECISION DATE: June 10, 2015

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The University of Northern
Colorado (UNCO) IRB approves this project and verifies its status as EXEMPT according to federal IRB
regulations.

Hello Reem,

**Thank you for your thorough and well written IRB application. I am approving your application,
but wanted to remind you that your Consents will need to include a phone contact for you as well
as your advisors. These are very minor, so I will not delay your approval.**

Sincerely,

Nancy White, PhD, IRB Co-Chair

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records for a duration of 4 years.

If you have any questions, please contact Sherry May at 970-351-1910 or Sherry.May@unco.edu. Please
include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of
Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB's records.

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Project Title:	Postsecondary Education for International Students Identified with Learning Disabilities in United States Universities.
Primary Researcher:	Reem Alabdulwahab, doctoral student, School of Special Education
Contact Information:	alab9169@bears.unco.edu
Phone:	xxx-xxx-xxxx
Researcher advisor:	Dr. Harvey Rude, School of Special Education University of Northern Colorado
Contact Information:	Harvey.rude@unco.edu
Researcher Co-advisor:	Dr. Diane Bassett, Professor Emerita, School of Special Education University of Northern Colorado
Contact Information:	Diane.bassett@unco.edu

My name is Reem Alabdulwahab and I am a doctoral student at the school of special education in University of Northern Colorado. I am conducting a study that seeks to explore the experiences of international students who are identified with learning disabilities in the United States' four-year universities. I am interested in interviewing you to learn about your experiences in supporting the needs of international students with identified learning disabilities. As a participant in this inquiry, you will be asked to participate in an interview with the researcher individually. Interview questions will focus on your experiences identifying and supporting the needs of international students with learning disabilities. The researcher also intends to understand how international students access needed accommodations. The interview will take no more than 90 minutes. The interviews will be audio recorded to ensure the capture of all responses.

When you are being interviewed, it is your choice to provide your real name. No identifying information will be used in this study. Your confidentiality will be protected by using pseudonyms; no identifying information will be shared with others. The researcher will collect demographic information that includes your age, gender, ethnicity, and years of experience working with international students with learning disabilities. Only the researcher will analyze your responses. Results from the study will available to you upon your request when it has been completed. All of the original paperwork will be kept in locked cabinets on campus. The researcher will strive to protect all confidentiality of your responses.

The risk or discomfort involved in participating in this research study is minimal, no more than would be considered normal for a professional conversation between colleagues. The benefits of participating in this study include receiving a small token of appreciation from the researcher.

Participation is voluntary; you may decide not to participate in this study. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. The interviews will be tape-recorded to back up the notes taken by the researcher and will be transcribed afterwards. Be assured that the researcher intends to keep the contents of these tapes private. Your initial name will be included in the transcript for the purpose of differentiating between participants. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you agree to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection as research participant, please contact Sherry May, IRB Administrator, Office of Sponsored Programs, 25 Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1910. Please feel free to phone (xxx-xxx-xxxx) or email me (alab9169@bears.unco.edu) or my research advisors, Harvey Rude (Harvey.rude@unco.edu) and Dr. Diane Bassett (diane.bassett@unco.edu) if you have any questions or concerns about this research.
Please retain one copy of this letter for your records.
Thank you for assisting me with my research.

Sincerely,

_____   _____

Subject's Signature   Date

_____   _____

Researcher's Signature   Date

CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Project Title:	Postsecondary Education for International Students Identified with Learning Disabilities in United States Universities.
Primary Researcher:	Reem Alabdulwahab, doctoral student, School of Special Education
Contact Information:	alab9169@bears.unco.edu
Phone:	xxx-xxx-xxxx
Researcher advisor:	Dr. Harvey Rude, School of Special Education, University of Northern Colorado
Contact Information:	Harvey.rude@unco.edu
Researcher Co-advisor:	Dr. Diane Bassett, Professor Emerita School of Special Education University of Northern Colorado
Contact Information:	Diane.bassett@unco.edu

My name is Reem Alabdulwahab and I am a doctoral student at the school of special education in University of Northern Colorado. I am conducting a study that seeks to explore the experiences of international students who are identified with learning disabilities in the United States' four-year universities. I am interested in interviewing you to learn about your experiences supporting the needs of international students who are suspected of having learning disabilities. As a participant in this inquiry, you will be asked to participate in an interview with the researcher individually. Interview questions will focus on your experiences addressing the challenges of a group of international students whom suspected of having learning disabilities and experience greater challenges compared with other international students. The interview will take no more than 90 minutes. The interviews will be audio recorded to ensure the capture of all responses.

When you are being interviewed, it is your choice to provide your real name. No identifying information will be used in this study. Your confidentiality will be protected by using pseudonyms; no identifying information will be shared with others. The researcher will collect demographic information that include your age, gender, ethnicity, and years of experience working with international students with learning disabilities. Only the researcher will analyze your responses. Results from the study will available to you upon your request when it has been completed. All of the original paperwork will be kept in locked cabinets on campus. The researcher will strive to protect all confidentiality of your responses.

The risk or discomfort involved in participating in this research study is minimal, no more than would be considered normal for a professional conversation between colleagues. Some individuals may become slightly nervous when being observed, however, since there is no evaluation of performance, this risk is minimal. The benefits of

participating in this study include receiving a small token of appreciation from the researcher.

Participation is voluntary; you may decide not to participate in this study. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. The interviews will be tape-recorded to back up the notes taken by the researcher and will be transcribed afterwards. Be assured that the researcher intends to keep the contents of these tapes private. Your initial name will be included in the transcript for the purpose of differentiating between participants. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you agree to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection as research participant, please contact Sherry May, IRB Administrator, Office of Sponsored Programs, 25 Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1910. Please feel free to phone (xxx-xxx-xxxx) or email me (alab9169@bears.unco.edu) or my research advisors, Harvey Rude (Harvey.rude@unco.edu) and Dr. Diane Bassett (diane.bassett@unco.edu) if you have any questions or concerns about this research.
Please retain one copy of this letter for your records.
Thank you for assisting me with my research.

Sincerely,

_____   _____

Subject's Signature   Date

_____   _____

Researcher's Signature
                                                                     Date

CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Project Title: Postsecondary Education for International Students
                            Identified with Learning Disabilities in United States
                            Universities.
Primary Researcher: Reem Alabdulwahab, doctoral student, School of Special
                            Education
Contact Information: alab9169@bears.unco.edu
Phone: xxx-xxx-xxxx
Researcher advisor: Dr. Harvey Rude
                            School of Special Education
                            University of Northern Colorado
Contact Information: Harvey.rude@unco.edu
Researcher Co-advisor: Dr. Diane Bassett, Professor Emerita
                            School of Special Education
                            University of Northern Colorado
Contact Information: Diane.bassett@unco.edu

My name is Reem Alabdulwahab and I am a doctoral student at the school of special
education in University of Northern Colorado. I am conducting a study that seeks to
explore your experiences as international students who received learning disabilities
identification while studying in the United States' four-year universities. I am interested
in interviewing you to learn about your successful experiences as well as your challenges
and to understand how professionals at the disability support service office are addressing
your needs. As a participant in this inquiry, you will be asked to participate in an
interview with the researcher individually. The researcher also intends to understand how
you access needed accommodations. The interview will take no more than 90 minutes.
The interviews will be audio recorded to ensure the capture of all responses.

When you are being interviewed, it is your choice to provide your real name. No
identifying information will be used in this study. Your confidentiality will be protected
by using pseudonyms; no identifying information will be shared with others. The
researcher will collect demographic information that includes your age, gender, ethnicity,
and years of experience working with international students with learning disabilities.
Only the researcher will analyze your responses. Results from the study will available to
you upon your request when it has been completed. All of the original paperwork will be
kept in locked cabinets on campus. The researcher will strive to protect all confidentiality
of your responses.

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colleagues.. The benefits of participating in this study include receiving a small token of
appreciation from the researcher.

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Please retain one copy of this letter for your records.
Thank you for assisting me with my research.

Sincerely,

_____   _____

Subject's Signature   Date

_____   _____

Researcher's Signature   Date

APPENDIX D

DEMOGRAPHIC SHEET

Demographic Information for Disability
Support Service Professionals

Date: _____   Time: _____

Participant: _____

School: _____

1.   Gender:
          a. Male
          b. Female

2.   Age: _____

3.   Ethnicity:
          a. Amer. Indian/Alaska Nat.
          b. Asian or Pacific Islander
          c. Black/African American
          d. Hispanic or Latino
          e. White
          f. Other _____

4.   Years of experience of your current position:
          a. 1-5 years
          b. 6-10 years
          c. 11-15 years
          d. 16-20 years
          e. 20 years or more.

5.   Number of international Students with learning disabilities: _____

6.   Nature of your work: (please check all that apply)
          a. Accommodation Specialist.
          b. Coaching.
          c. Advocacy specialist.
          d. Tutor.
          e. Assessment
          f. Others. Specify: _____

**Demographic Information for Advisors at the
Centers of International Education**

Date: _____   Time: _____

Participant: _____

School: _____

1.   Gender:
      a. Male
      b. Female

2.   Age: _____

3.   Ethnicity:
      a. Amer. Indian/Alaska Nat.
      b. Asian or Pacific Islander
      c. Black/African American
      d. Hispanic or Latino
      e. White
      f. Other _____

4.   Years of experience of your current position:
      a. 1-5 years
      b. 6-10 years
      c. 11-15 years
      d. 16-20 years
      e. 20 years or more.

5.   Number of international Students currently served: _____

6.   Please describe the nature of your work:

**Demographic Information for International
Undergraduate Students with Learning Disabilities**

Date: _____   Time: _____

Participant: _____

School: _____

1.   Gender:
     a.   Male
     b.   Female

2.   Age: _____

3.   Ethnicity: _____

4.   Home country: _____

5.   Length of time living in the United States: _____

6.   Age when identified wit learning disabilities: _____

7.   Use of accommodations for your learning disabilities before studying in the U.S:
     a.   Yes.
     b.   No.