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Negotiating Higher Education In The US: Voices Of Ghanaian Graduate Students At A Midwestern University

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NEGOTIATING HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE US: VOICES OF GHANAIAN
GRADUATE STUDENTS AT A MIDWESTERN UNIVERSITY

by

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A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Grand Forks, North Dakota

May
2016

This dissertation, submitted by Mildred Emefa Biaku in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.



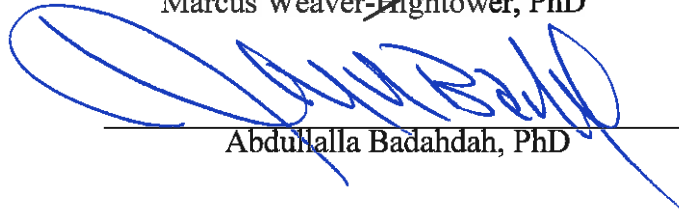
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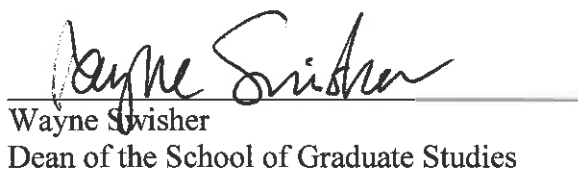


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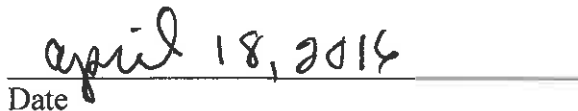


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ABSTRACT

In this case study, there was an examination to gain a deeper understanding of the effects of social interactions experienced by Ghanaian Students with various actors in curricular and co-curricular departments and perceptions of the support during these social interactions. Recommendations were made for ways to enhance social interactions. Data for this qualitative study was collected using three methods; non-participant observation, interviews, and focus group discussions. Participants for the study were six Ghanaian international students and five service providers selected from departments across the campus of a university in the Midwest. It was found that there were systemic issues that were affected by institutional, social, and personal factors. The study revealed that most of the social interactions were inhibited by inadequate social and cultural intelligence. Findings indicated that actors were ill prepared for cross-cultural interactions due of insufficient opportunities for exposure, cultural awareness and consciousness. The research showed that in order to effectively address these issues, there is need for a re-socialization of all actors involved into an institutional culture that promotes social and cultural intelligence. Suggestions for change included increasing access to more interactive activities that promote and encourage all actors to have more opportunities for cross-cultural interactions. It would also create avenues for more cross-cultural efficacy, assertiveness and proactivity in future social interactions. Participants concluded that in order to have successful academic outcomes and experiences, and

mitigate negative experiences, there was need for the institution to establish programs and policies that are geared towards enhancing cross-cultural relations and inter-cultural interactions. Also, all participating actors must be willing to embrace changes to become more assertive, proactive, and augment the social and cultural intelligences.

Keywords: *assertiveness, social interactions, proactive, cultural intelligence, social intelligence.*

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As a result of current trends in globalization, many nations have recognized that to be competitive, it is necessary for people in societies and communities to be well educated (Hall & Matthews, 2008). According to Altbach and Knight (2007), though globalization and internationalization are related words that are frequently used as key words in higher education research today, they do not mean the same thing. In their research, they defined the two terms as follows:

Globalization is the context of economic and academic trends that are part of the reality of the 21st century and Internationalization includes the policies and practices undertaken by academic systems, individuals, and institutions to cope with global academic environments (Altbach & Knight, 2007, p.290).

In light of this, international education has been identified as a key determinant of economic value in a given context.

Globalization and educational trends indicate that many people believe a quality education is fundamental to improving one's social and economic status. Particularly in emerging economies, many parents and their wards continue to look for opportunities for studies abroad in order to achieve better economic and social statuses (Tan, 2014). As such, academic degrees from most United States (US) universities continue to be held in high esteem all over the world (Lee, 2007; 2008). Szelenyi and Rhoads (2007),

also reported in their study that international students leave their home countries in pursuit of higher education in the US to increase their skills. Some hope to return to those countries one day with better competencies for high-ranking professional positions in their fields of expertise, resulting in higher socio-economic statuses.

Higher Education and International Students

Antonio, Chang, Hakuta, Kenny, Levin, & Milem (2004) explain that internalization of higher education is beneficial to all the actors involved. Although many international students benefit greatly from their experiences studying abroad, there is no doubt that their host institutions also benefit in diverse ways. According to Antonio et al. (2004), many institutions try to gain diversity by recruiting various minority groups of students, faculty, and staff. Among the groups recruited are international students, scholars and professors. They do this with the hope of creating an environment that promotes critical thinking and effective communication among different groups of people (Altbach & Knight, 2007).

In recent times, US higher educational institutions have continually and actively recruited international students into their various college departments for a variety of reasons. For example, in a statement reported by the Institute of International Education, Evan M. Ryan, Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs emphasizes that:

International education promotes relationship building and knowledge exchange between people and communities in the US and around the world that is necessary to solve global challenges.... (Open door report, 2013, para 5)

A year later he re-emphasized this same point saying:

...We also need to expand access to international education for students from more diverse backgrounds, in more diverse locations of study, getting more diverse types of degrees. Only by engaging multiple perspectives within our societies can we all reap the numerous benefits of international education - increased global competence, self-awareness and resiliency, and the ability to compete in the 21st century economy (Open door report, 2014, para 3).

To further support this argument, the president of the Institute of International Education (IIE) states that:

Learning how to study and work with people from other countries and cultures also prepares future leaders to contribute to making the world a less dangerous place (Open door report, 2014, para 4).

Despite continuous calls for more internationalization of education all over the world, the international education literature indicates that for decades, higher education institutions in the US have embraced international students from various countries' universities and colleges to study in various disciplines (Altbach & Knight, 2007). The Open Doors Report (2014) stated that, since the year 2000, the number of international students in the US has increased by 72 %. The report also indicates that, in the 2013/14 academic year alone the numbers of international students in the U.S. increased from 819,644 to 886,052, an increase of eight percent, a total of 66,408 over the previous year. This increment reiterates the fact that, the U.S. remains a popular destination for higher education for international students.

Chang, Denson, Sáenz, & Misa (2006) also explain that in the US, diversity occurs in various forms in higher educational institutions. They lay particular emphasis on how socio-cultural practices and inter-racial relationships affect life experiences and crafts a complex platform for all involved. They explain that this serves as a learning tool for enhancing students' educational development and growth.

According to Winkle-Wagner (2010), most institutions continue to strive to achieve diversity because of proven benefits for growth and development. Such environments allow individuals to learn to self-assess and challenge themselves, while learning from various perspectives. These interactions also result in the promotion of richer intellectual, cultural, and social atmospheres (Winkle- Wagner & Lock, 2013). For these reasons, it is important for educators to recognize the various forms of diversity as well and address them to increase students' social development and knowledge base.

According to Bartram and Terano (2011) and Smith and Khawaja (2011), some US institutions in their efforts to create a diverse community go to great lengths to recruit international graduate and undergraduate students. Bartram and Terano (2011) explain that some universities do not only want to create diversity but also a global perspective to their programs. They actively recruit prospective students through special arrangements with current international students or student ambassadors. These students go to their respective home countries to recruit more students for their respective departments.

With the ever-growing presence of international students and scholars in the US, some researchers have delved more into the impact of having more international students in higher education institution. Researchers such as Chang et al. (2006) revealed in their study that their participants reported that having been exposed to social intersections with

individuals from various countries, cultures, and backgrounds had positive effects on their self-development and perceptions. This is because institutions use international students as resources for diverse and international perspectives in the classroom and around the campus communities to enhance the quality of teaching, learning, research, and overall college experience of students and faculty (Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Andrade, 2006; McLure, 2007; National Association for Foreign Student Advisers - NAFSA, 2003). These efforts increase students' as well as faculty's awareness of many global issues (NAFSA, 2003).

In order to sustain the above-mentioned efforts and reputations, it is important for institutions of higher education to pay attention to international students and the various issues they encounter while studying in the US. Besides, any unfavorable experiences these students encounter while in the US could mar the overall perceptions of these institutions and affect the way the US is viewed in the future by these students, their families, their communities, and most importantly, prospective students from their home countries (Lee, 2007; 2008). Hence, the present study looks at these issues through the lens of social interactions of international students. The research focuses on Ghanaian students as a sub-group of international students studying in US higher educational institutions.

Ghanaian International Students (GIS)

Ghana, a former British colony in West Africa, is located along the coast of the Gulf of Guinea. Its land size is comparable to the State of Oregon in the United States. Ghana has a population of approximately twenty-five million people (Ghana Statistical Service; 2010). The French speaking nations of Burkina Faso, La Côte D'Ivoire, and

Togo border Ghana to the north, west and east respectively. Although there are ten administrative regions in Ghana (See Figure 1) not all of these regions can boast of a competitive higher education facility. Many youth from less endowed regions go to other regions across the country in search of quality academic education.



Figure 1. Regional Map of Ghana.

According to Mbawuni and Nimako (2015), in the last two decades, the number of universities in Ghana has increased tremendously. They report that there are currently 76 accredited public, private, and satellite higher education institutions in Ghana running various degree programs, although most of the programs offered are business and administration related. Due to the lack of variety in these programs, coupled with rising needs of globalization, Ghanaian college students are limited in their choices of academic

training (Mbawuni & Nimako, 2015). In addition, though some disciplines such as engineering, medicine, education, and nursing offer relatively good undergraduate programs, there are limited choices for specialization and other graduate degrees to help meet the demands of the 21st century skills and education. These issues coupled with the popular belief of receiving better quality of education in western countries has resulted in many Ghanaian students travelling to other countries including the US for their educational needs.

Although the official language spoken in Ghana is English, there are over forty local primary languages and dialects also spoken. The language spoken depends on which region, ethnic group, tribe, and clan one belongs to or identifies with. Different regions, ethnic, and tribal groups in Ghana also have different cultural practices, values, and norms, which govern daily practices and experiences. It is important to note that Ghanaians are not a homogenous group, as their varying socio-cultural practices and values affect their fundamental ways of life in many ways. For example, Ghanaian students undergo several experiences as foreigners in other countries. Many times, the cultural backgrounds, behaviors, and practices contribute largely to these experiences and the way they are managed.

As the numbers of international students in the US have steadily increased over the last fifteen years, Ghanaian international students' numbers have similarly increased. Statistics compiled by the Open door (2014) report indicate that, there are currently 2914 Ghanaian International Students (GIS) studying in the US compared to 1980 in the United Kingdom (UK) (UK Council for International Students Affairs report, 2014) .

This number specifies an increase of about 150 students over and above the 2764 in the previous academic year (Open Door Report, 2014).

Statement of the Problem

As the numbers of international students globally continue to increase, more researchers are conducting studies into higher education and international students' mobility and experiences (Chen & Barnett, 2000). Many institutional service providers such as college educators, counselors, and advisors are challenged with adjusting and establishing new policies, standards, and specialized programs for international students. Several studies including Lee (2014) and Mwaura (2008) have explored the overall challenges that international students face in the United States.

Although there have been many studies into international students' adjustment issues, very few looked at these adjustment issues based on students' countries of origin. Fewer still focused on students' social interactions with different people (actors) at their respective institutions. A review of current literature indicated that there is insufficient information on international students' social interactions and how these interactions affect educational successes and failures. There are also indications that some institutions have unsuccessfully used this insufficient information in policy formulation and implementation concerning international students (Kisang, 2010). This is mainly because these studies do not provide the required depth of information sought. Some of the outcomes of using this insufficient information include making inaccurate assumptions and creating erroneous impressions that they are standard issues that fit all international students, which can be resolved in particular ways (Kisang, 2010).

The inadequate information on international students' experiences creates a gap in the literature that needs to be addressed. As international students hail from various countries of origin, they are not a homogenous group of individuals. It is therefore important for studies to be focused on sub-groups based on nationality, in order to gain a deeper understanding into each group's particular issues (Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Cadwell, & Utsey, 2005; Lee, 2008).

International education literature generally overlooks the significant issue of social interactions in higher education. For this reason, this study looks at the types of social interactions Ghanaian International Students encounter with others (actors) while in school in the US. It also focuses on the roles these social interactions play in the International Students' academic successes and/or failures.

Personal Statement

As a Ghanaian international student myself, I have undergone many experiences of my own and have shared in the experiences of my peers. These encounters have been enlightening in several ways. I have interacted with several actors in various departments and participated in several discourses and activities in and around my college campus. My involvements with these departments, activities and discourses have equipped me with firsthand information on some social interactions and experiences with different actors in the higher educational system. These attributes give me an insider's perspective on the problem of Ghanaian International Students' experiences of social interactions.

Through these undertakings, I have realized that social interactions with various actors, such as other students, faculty, advisors, and directors of departments, college deans, colleagues, and staff in higher educational institutions have a strong impact on

students' success as they navigate higher education. I also understand that by interacting with all these actors, students are provided with more access to vital information to help make informed choices and/or judgments regarding their academic successes and setbacks. From my experiences, many of my interactions have contributed in no small measure to shaping my visions regarding various stages of academic successes. I have seen how these social interactions have been motivational and encouraging in my perseverance in navigating the complexities of higher education in the US. For example, going to a department and getting someone to show me simple protocols and procedures to follow in a relevant manner has led to very positive experiences.

On the other hand, on occasions when I encountered situations that I perceived to be prejudicial, ambivalent, and unfair, and these made me frustrated. These situations caused me anxiety and fear for the future in higher education and beyond. An example of such a situation was when my tuition waiver did not come through. After several weeks of unsuccessful attempts to rectify the situation, and not knowing whom to confide in, I panicked when I realized rather late that I could not drop courses in which I was enrolled without a myriad of unpleasant consequences including jeopardizing my visa status. Fortunately, I made an appointment with the Dean of the College and after a short investigation, the situation was satisfactorily resolved.

Consequently, I realized that positive and satisfactory interactions are informational and relevant to making better and varied choices in higher education and beyond. These realizations motivated me to undertake a study on how Ghanaian International Students experience the complexities involved in the social interactions and

social networks forged with various actors in US higher educational institutions, and how these social interactions affect their future academic successes or failures.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore through a qualitative lens to gain a deeper insight into international students, especially Ghanaian Students' experiences at a university that will henceforth be known as Midwestern University. Using interviews and focused group discussions, I explored the types of social interactions students encounter with different actors in various institutional departments at Midwestern University. I conducted a case study of six Ghanaian International Students as a subgroup of international students. By allowing these students to talk about, and make meaning of their experiences with actors in various departments, I was given salient and vital information that could be used to enhance future diversity and related efforts at Midwestern University and other institutions.

Midwestern University is a prominent university in the United States, which attracts students from all over the world. At the end of December 2014, there were 14,906 students at Midwestern University. Of this number, 1017 were international students from 85 nations around the world. Of the 1017 international students, 85 were from 12 Sub-Saharan African countries. There were ten Ghanaian students at this institution, making them the fourth highest number of Sub-Saharan African students at Midwestern University.

Research Questions

International students as a whole, and Ghanaian International Students in particular, come into the US from several milieus, which directly bear on their

experiences upon arrival and henceforth the principal guiding research questions for the study were:

- What are the lived experiences of Ghanaian International Students while interacting with actors they encounter while in school?
- What are their perceptions and feelings about the support received through social interactions with various actors on campus?
- How do the students perceive these lived experiences impact their successes or setbacks in higher education?
- What interventions do students anticipate would help resolve the issues (if any)?

Significance of the Study

Despite substantial increases in diversity efforts all around the US and in Midwestern University in particular, international students' particular diversity needs are constantly overlooked often due to splintered diversity efforts (Higher Learning Commission report, 2013). Specifically, though universities in this region continue to set priorities to enrich students' experiences through a strong commitment to diversity and international students' education, a critical observation shows that efforts are fragmented in many respects, mainly because there is hardly any collaboration between departments involved.

Compared to other groups of international students, GIS like many sub-Saharan African students perceive more prejudice from people in the US (Sodowsky & Plake, 1992). Often, people are unable to differentiate between African international students, African New-Americans, and African-American domestic students at first glance or contact. The same biases, prejudices, and discriminations leveled against the third group

(African Americans) are bestowed on all sub-groups of black students. This often results in confusion for the sub-Saharan African international students and GIS in particular.

This is because, while African Americans may have undergone tutelage and socialization in anticipation of these biases, prejudices, and discriminations, as well as strategies to deal with them when they occur, most sub-Saharan African international students are yet to be oriented into these behaviors. This is primarily because having grown up in predominantly black cultures, they have no experience of being seen as part of an oppressed minority. As a result, they are frustrated and confused when they encounter negativity in this regard (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998).

It is also important to note that looking at diversity policy only through conceptualization and promotion of the numbers of international students and other minority students and groups enrolled is problematic. Structures such as offices and departments that work to provide diversity initiatives and programs need to look closer at social interaction and communication dynamics. Without careful scrutiny of the social interactions and communication strategies of all actors involved, the purpose of the objectives and goals for diversity and inclusion of these groups is defeated (Chang, Witt, Jones, & Hakuta, 2003; Milem, 2003).

In order to achieve the ultimate goal of diversity and inclusion, there is the need to find ways to collaborate, interrelate, and integrate all the different facets through research into the different groups involved in the diversity endeavor. If higher education service providers are able to gain a deeper and better understanding of the experiences international students undergo while navigating higher education in the US they will be better informed, and perhaps lead to the creation of better policies and programs. These

well-grounded policies and programs would educate, inform, and promote more positive social interaction and communication processes at Midwestern University in particular, and in the US higher education institution system as a whole. Strategists, recruiters, marketing, and decision-making professionals in higher education institutions all over the United States and beyond may use the findings of my study. I also hope to make a beneficial contribution to current international educational literature and close the gap defined earlier in the literature. Below is a table of terminology and their subsequent operational definitions for this study.

Table 1. Terminology Table.

Terminology	Operational Definition
Cultural Consciousness	The understanding of the differences between oneself and people from other countries or other backgrounds, especially differences in attitudes and values.
Cultural Responsiveness	The ability to bridge the gap between one's own cultural background and the cultural background of other people.
Cultural Sensitivity	The awareness that cultural differences and similarities exist and have an effect on values, learning and behavior.
Cross-cultural Efficacy	The beliefs in capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action for achieving something.
Social Intelligence	The capability to direct attention and energy toward learning about and functioning in situations characterized by cultural differences.
Social Ties	Social connections
Weak Ties	Made up of brief encounters with acquaintances

Table 1. cont.

Terminology	Operational Definition
Strong Ties	More permanent relationships, family, close friends
Co-curricular Department	Service providing departments in higher education
Acculturation	The process of adopting the cultural traits or social patterns of another group.
Culture	“Culture is defined as learned patterns of perception, values, and behaviors, shared by a group of people, that are dynamic and heterogeneous” (Martin & Nakayama 2008, p. 28).
Inter-cultural	Involves two cultures
Cross-cultural	Involves two or more cultures
Social Network	A structure of social actors
Social Capital	The network of social connections that exist between people, and their shared values and norms of behavior, which enable and encourage mutually advantageous social cooperation.
Low Cultural Context	Individuals from individualistic societies where there is general belief in individualism
High Cultural Context	Individuals from collectivistic societies with a high expectation of commitment and mutual goodwill.
Cultural Shock	A sense of confusion and uncertainty sometimes with feelings of anxiety that may affect people exposed to an alien culture or environment without adequate preparation.

Organization of the Study

There are five main chapters in this research. Chapter I presented an introduction to the study through a brief discussion of the background of the research, a statement of the problem, and the research questions.

Chapter II offers a review of the literature related to international students' education and experiences in higher education. One of the purposes of this chapter is to provide an underlying theoretical framework for undertaking this study. Other related international students' experiences in higher education are included in this chapter. A discussion of the need for this study concludes this chapter.

Chapter III stresses the significance of the Intrinsic Embedded Single Case design, the research methods and data analysis strategies adopted throughout the study. In addition to this, the validity and ethical issues considered are discussed.

Chapter IV deals with the findings of the study including the data collected from interviews, focus group discussions and direct observations. The findings are organized according to the codes, categories and assertions found.

Chapter V discusses a case summary, assertions, interpretation as well as implications for practice and recommendations for future studies.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the major classifications of the literature on social capital in relation to current trends, characteristics and contributions of international students in higher education institutions in the United States. The section also highlights gaps in the literature that are relevant to this study. The chapter is sub-divided into five parts.

The first part discusses the theoretical framework guiding the research questions. The second part provides insights into international students' characteristics as compared to other groups of students. The third section provides highlights of issues of International students' pursuit of higher education outside their home countries. Part four describes the distinction of African/GIS international students from all other student groups. Part five discusses the gaps in the literature by focusing on interactions between GIS students and different actors in the host institutions. It also underscores the specific areas of social interactions that need either to be purposefully undertaken or improved upon significantly by all the major stakeholders; not limited to the GIS students, faculty, staff, and other service providers in various curricular and co-curricular departments in the university community.

As stated earlier in Chapter I, the objectives of this study are to provide empirical evidence of how the effects of the social interactions among the different stakeholders impact the successes and failures of GIS students in a Midwestern University.

Undertaking this research using the above-mentioned methods and approach hereby makes a solid and trustworthy academic research contribution to fill the gaps in the current literature on international students' experiences while in the US.

To situate firmly the present research, a comprehensive review of the literature was undertaken and references were made to the most appropriate social interactions theories that are applicable to the numerous facets of social interactions that GIS encounter in Midwestern University. These social theories are discussed below.

Social Capital Theory

Although there are many theorists that have made significant input into social capital theory, only those that make the most relevant contributions to this current study are considered. According to Bourdieu (1986), there are three main forms of capital: cultural, economic and social capital. Bourdieu is of the view that social beings rely on all these forms of capital to thrive, and they influence, and impact daily lives in many ways. Particularly for social capital, he imputes that this form of capital can be assessed for one's benefits in education. He also explains that this capital provides access to networks and connections that provide access to valuable resources and information.

Bourdieu (1980) describes social capital as the number of people in a network that are willing and able to provide their support through information, advice and resources. In 1986, Bourdieu further elaborates on this by defining social capital as the "aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintances and recognition" (p. 248).

Bourdieu explains further that there is group membership in these networks where members are supported and are able to draw from the collectively owned capital accumulated by the group. To elaborate this further, Adler & Kwon (2002) also explain social capital in terms of social networks, where participating individuals derive benefits from these networks because they convey many positive social, economic, and health outcomes.

Though social capital within social networks may be seen as an individual's asset, Putnam (2000) explains that it is also a collective gain in the sense that, it increases commitment to communities and mobilizes collective actions. Lin (1999) also adds to theory by adding the strength of ties component to the theory. Lin (1999) describes social capital as "resources embedded in one's social networks which can be accessed or mobilized through ties in the networks."

Lin (2006) also postulates that social capital situates a person within a network of relationships because social capital affects willingness to provide help and access to embedded resources in the relationships. Putnam further elaborates that, when there is no willingness to help it results in many adverse effects in the network community. He suggests that it results in a decline in social capital within a community. This is because when people within a social network refuse to help each other, it causes social disorder, and alienation, and has the potential to create distrust among members of the affected community. There is need for people to want to help each other within a network enhance a more cohesive and integrated community.

Strength-of-the-ties Theory

Nan Lin (1999) stresses the strength of the ties theory for many disciplines including business and sociology. It stems from the broad perspective of social capital, which is defined as the networks and connections one makes which can provide access to valued resources and information (Vryonides, 2004). According to Putnam (2004) and Lin (1999; 2001) individuals who have a large diverse network of ties or contacts have more social capital than individuals who have smaller and less diversity among their ties.

Social network theorists describe individual actors within a person's social network as nodes, whereas the relationships between these individual actors are described as ties. Researchers such as Kisang (2010) explain that there are exchanges of tangible and intangible goods within every network. Kisang describes tangible goods as being information and services made available for international students' use, whereas intangible goods are social support systems put in place to facilitate learning for international students.

Though there are many definitions for social networks, this study operationally defined social networks as "a set of personal contacts through which individuals maintain social identity and receive emotional support, material aid, services, information, and social relations" (Walker, MacBride, & Vachon, 1977, p.35). Of the various foci of social networking theories, this study addresses the aspects governed by the relationships within the ties. Though there is extensive literature on ties relationships within social network theory, this study focuses on Lin's strength-of-the-ties theory.

In his strength-of-the-ties perspectives on social interactions and networks, Lin (1999) stresses that individuals maintain two main types of social ties in their social

interactions and networks known as strong and weak social ties. According to Lin, when one interacts with different actors, these interactions provide resources for gaining access into other social networks associated with these other actors (Bourdieu, 1980; Lin, 1982; 1999; 2001a). He further elaborates that the social positioning of these actors may serve as bridging, opening, or closing functions for gaining access to information and resources.

Social Ties

There are two main types of social ties that individuals encounter during social interactions. The first type of ties are strong ties wherein individuals are very close to each other and their ties to the network are very strong. Examples of these types of ties would be family members and close friends. These are usually narrower networks of ties because they usually consist of only people who have strong and continuous connections, commitments and interdependency (Lin, 2001).

The second types of ties are known as weak ties. Weak ties are generally used to share information and resources (Lin, 1999). They have some unique factors that include members not having “direct interactions with each other or maintaining equally strong and reciprocal relations with each and everyone else” (Lin, 2001a, p.12). These types of ties are mainly made up of casual acquaintances, such as, speaking with the office manager in an office, a brief meeting with the department chair, or an encounter with another student. Lin refers to these ties as weak ties. The most prominent aspect of Lin’s theory is the strength- of-the-weak-ties, which portrays the roles of weak social ties in providing access to resources that may not be available in one’s personal networks (Lin, 1999; Morgan &

Sorensen, 1999). They are the types of ties GIS are likely to have in various departments in their institutions in the US (Bennett, 2003).

According to researchers such as Tanaka, Takai, Kohyama, and Fujihara (1995) when international students leave their countries of origin, they typically leave behind their strong ties (families, friends, confidants, and neighbors) and seek new relationships (weak ties) in order to survive and transition into a new environment. In using this theory as a theoretical perspective for my research, I was able to further examine how these interactions affect students' academic and social experiences over time.

In order to fully understand how the impact of GIS' experiences affect their social interactions with various actors at Midwestern University, Nan Lin's strength- of-the-ties theory was used to support this study. The study showed that GIS at Midwestern University typically interact with actors they did not know prior to their arrival (weak ties). This is because as Ghanaian students come into US colleges and universities, they are unlikely to know anyone (no social ties) at these institutions before arriving on campus.

Though interactions with these new actors are sometimes brief and impersonal, they define certain outcomes during the students' journey, as they navigate the complexities of higher education. Particularly for international students in a foreign country and culture, social interactions (no matter how brief or impersonal) provide invaluable information and resources that significantly impact their academic journey in many respects.

Consequently, Lin (1999) describes these brief or impersonal encounters as the strengths of- the -weak ties, where the "weak" nature of the ties refers to the fact that the

actors in the interactions are not one's close ties, such as friends, relatives, or neighbors but may provide a wealth of information during social interactions. He postulates that the weak social ties are able to serve as a bridge for receiving information and gaining access into other people's social circles and networks (Lin, 1999), thereby allowing for information flow between different networks circles without necessarily belonging to those circles (Lin, Dayton, & Greenwald, 1978; Lin, 1999).

Strengths-of -the-weak-ties

According to Lin (1999), there are different types and levels of resources that allow people to connect socially. In the case of GIS coming to a new country, several social interactions need to take place to allow them to successfully navigate academia. For example, students may have to interact with the international student office, student health services, wellness center, career center, the registrar's office, housing office, library, and their academic departments among others, in order to become academically successful. Although these interactions create a social network for the students because of all the several contacts (ties) they gain through the interactions, these interactions are usually not intimate.

Lin further clarifies that the resources gained from these ties in the various departments, which encourage, motivate, and provide support are considered as the strengths of the weak ties. To buttress this point, Stanton-Salazar & Dormbisch (1995) found that frequent social interactions within social networks in school boundaries had positive influences on students' performance and future aspirations.

Lin proposes that interacting with individuals, groups and organizations creates a web of networks for an individual. He also explains that there are several resources

embedded in these social networks (Lin, 1999; Lin, Vaughn, & Ensel, 1981). In interacting with several actors in the various departments, one is likely to come across individuals in the department who hold different positions and have different ideas and ways to access information. Some may be service assistants and others may be directors. Each of these actors in the interactional web is likely to bring his or her embedded social resources, from which international students can tap for more information as they interact socially (Nora & Crisp, 2012). Trice (2004) also points out that international students benefit greatly from social interactions because these interactions provide them with information to protect them against adjustment issues and academic challenges.

Preparing for International Education

As international students leave their respective countries to come to the US, they have peculiar experiences that are very different from US domestic students' experiences. Unlike domestic students, international students' navigation of college starts earlier than those of US students. Often, these processes can be frustrating and overwhelming in many ways to international students who do not have guidance.

Although their experiences usually start with the admission process, just like any other group of students in the US, there are other rigorous processes such as evaluation of transcripts from a foreign university into the US version. The visa process is also very rigorous because the international student, particularly those from emerging economies in Africa must have enough evidence of family ties and personal income in their home countries. After this stage, they then have to undergo a visa process at the US embassy.

Upon reaching the US, international student are faced with other barriers such as potential lack of language proficiency, social support and connectedness, unfamiliar

cultural environments and, sometimes, outright discrimination (Lee, 2008). Sometimes when the right social interactions are not made, it creates many social and academic barriers for students. These barriers can cause students to undergo negative experiences while in college in the US (Nora & Crisp, 2014; Andrade, 2006; Zhou et al., 2008).

International Students' Challenges

Although being international students in the US has positive connotations for the students in their home countries (Carter & Sedlacek, 1986; Szelényi & Rhoads, 2007), they continue to experience several challenges while they study in the US. Often, students face social, cultural, and economic shocks while adjusting to the life on foreign soil. Some social challenges they face include distance from their immediate social support systems, (i.e., family and friends), different social values, norms, gender role adjustments, and acute awareness of one's foreign accents.

Some groups of international students also suddenly become conscious of being racial or ethnic minorities in a foreign country, which may not be the case in their respective countries of origin (Lacina, 2002). Researchers of international students' literature have reported that the above-mentioned stressors cause anxiety and depression for students (Constantine et al., 2005; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Bofo- Arthur, 2014). Consequently, these challenges will be examined from the general student perspective and then from an African and Ghanaian students' perspective in particular.

Acculturation/Acculturation Stress/Cultural Shock

According to Berry (1997) acculturation can be defined as the socio-cultural, psychological, and economic acclimatization that result from a change in one's environment. Although acculturation by itself is not a negative experience, conflicts

ensuing from this change can result in stressors that can affect a person negatively. Usually, these experiences are “judged to be problematic yet controllable and surmountable” (Berry 1997, p.19). Berry further explains that there are four ways to encounter acculturation in a different environment from one’s own. These are via assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization. In addition to this, Berry (1980) describes an additional concept, called deculturation. This refers to a person’s inability to identify with the original neither culture nor host cultures.

According to Oberg (1960), cultural shock is the terminology used to describe feelings of uneasiness or anxiety in adjusting to a new culture. It happens usually as a result of social and cultural biases and deviations (Torres, 2009). These mainly happens because of acculturation distress people encounter in a new environment.

Additionally, Oberg (1960), Constantine et al. (2005), and Mori (2000) stated that many international students experience cultural shock when they first arrive in the US. This is because sudden exposure to a new environment, culture, language, norms, and other social values different from one’s own culture is problematic (Church, 1982). Lacina (2002) further explains that this happens because they are not familiar with US customs, values and norms. Lacina expresses that during social interactions, the use of certain idioms, slang, and behavior by US nationals may frustrate their efforts.

Sometimes too, these issues happen because they are unfamiliar and unaware of behavior appropriate to US culture. With this in mind, they may tend to interact only with co-nationals because they share similar language, lifestyle and culture (Ward 2005; Reynolds and Constantine 2007). For example, during simple gestures like saying hello, or how you are, the international student may not be aware that these statements are

rhetorical and may be expecting to carry on a detailed conversation (Lacina, 2002).

Other researchers have also indicated that US nationals tend to carry-on superficial socialization compared to international students, particularly those coming from more collectivistic societies because these students misinterpreted these behaviors to be signs of unfriendliness and mistrust (Pedersen, 1991).

Most international students upon arriving in the US, feel a medley of psychological distress including feelings of confusion, cultural fatigue, cultural shock, lack of self-identity, loss of social support, role expectations, and feelings of rejection or alienation because of the new environment and people. Torres (2009) and Fee (2010) concluded in their respective studies of African-Americans in predominantly white institutions (PWI) and Latino bilingual teachers, brought into the US as liaisons that ability to adjust in a new environment plays a key role in the acculturation process.

Adjustment Challenges

There is also disparity among student groups because of cultural diversity or the lack of it. Although on the surface, going to a foreign country to pursue higher education may seem quite laudable, the student is generally not prepared for the complexities that accompany and/or follow this decision. Some students find the socio-cultural adjustment phases in their transition process to be as challenging as the academic work itself (Zhang & Goodson; 2011). The challenges may be laced with both emotional and psychological stresses (Boafo -Arthur, 2014).

Furnham and Brochner (1982) note that on arrival in a new culture, people need to become acquainted with new cultural values and norms (Zhang & Goodson, 2011; Lee, 2014). Findings indicate that international students hail from two different cultural

domains. Some may come from individualistic cultures, which hold similar values and norms to the US culture in many respects and others from collectivist cultures may not necessarily hold these same values. Since people typically adapt the cultural orientations in which they are socialized, it may be very challenging for individuals to transition from one cultural domain to another in many regards (Ofstede, 1980).

Khawajah and Stallman (2011), and Msengi (2007) in their studies on international students found that many coming from collectivistic societies find it extremely difficult to adjust to the individualistic US society. They found that international students were not able to have meaningful cross-cultural contact with people in their host community, due to the lack of communication and language proficiency, transportation, and housing and food problems. They also found that students felt isolated and alienated from the host institutions because of the rigorous bureaucratic requirements they had to endure, coupled with the lack of adequate infrastructure (housing, groceries, transportation) to support their needs.

Their findings support literature on international students' studies that have found that though higher educational institutions welcome international students' presence on the campuses, they are usually ill prepared to accommodate these students. Lee & Rice, (2007) and Constantine et al. (2005) also found that most institutions expect international students to be able to adjust and integrate into US campus culture without help from the institutions. These situations can result in anxiety, alienation, and depression (Osikomaiya, 2014; Constantine et al., 2004). They can also adversely affect students' experiences, retention rates, and the ability to recommend their host institutions to prospective students.

Academic Challenges

Current literature shows that students who face academic challenges typically feel they lack proficiency in English, which causes them to be anxious and resign to a culture of silence (Osikomaiya, 2014). Reasons for this culture of silence stem from the perceptions that they are often misunderstood or ignored when they try to engage in conversations because of their accents (Khawaja & Stallman, 2011). In addition, many international students encounter some academic challenges when they have to acclimatize to different styles of instruction.

In fact, Brown (2008) found that these behaviors and attitudes create feelings of shame and inferiority to the dominant culture resulting in poor social interactions with their host communities. Additionally, many researchers have found that poor social interactions lead to depression, anxiety, stress, and poor academic performance (Chang et al., 2005; Ong & Ward, 2005)

Social Support System

According to Lee & Ciftci, (2014), Glass & Westmont (2012), Barrera, Sandler, & Ramsay (1981), and Misra (2003), social support provides students with resources to help cope with stress. Glass and Westmont further argue that both international and domestic students suffer several stressors in academia. What makes situations more problematic for international students is the lack of immediate perceived social support. The ability to have a sense of belonging provides students with the perception of social support in some capacity (Glass & Westmont, 2012).

Other studies have shown that students who come into the US have lesser social support because they have not yet formed social networks that help them in this regard.

Usually, since social support is provided through a person's network of family, friends, and neighbors, the longer a person stays at an institution, the more that person is likely to have many interactions that may result in network formations and hence a support system is created (Glass & Westmont, 2012).

When students are able to have social interaction with others in the learning community, over time they develop their own support systems. The types of the social interactions a student perceives typically portrays the strength of his/her support system (Turner & Marino, 1994). This claim is supported by Mittal and Wailing (2006). Their findings show that the international students report significantly less distress when they perceive they have social support.

Atri, Sharma and Cottrell (2007) also reported that for international students, particularly those coming from collectivist societies, the fundamental social support systems they seek are informational, emotional and social. This is mainly because collectivistic societies are group-oriented and so they thrive on interpersonal relationships. If one's social support network is firmly in place, it helps decrease distress and enhance overall social, physical, and psychological wellbeing (Ong & Ward, 2005).

Most international students, particularly African students find that they lack a social support and network system while in the US compared to when they were in their home countries (Johnson et al. 2008). Consequently, this sometimes results in some complications with other students. In order to mitigate these problems, it is common to see international students trying to bond with other international students they perceive to have some commonalities as them. Although this seems to be a solution to the problem of

lack of support, some researchers are of the view that this behavior may eventually lead to self-segregation of international students (Rampersad, 2007).

Discrimination and Prejudice

Although international students in general may experience a medley of all the above-mentioned problems, the degree of experience may differ for students from different cultures (Lee & Rice, 2007). For example, white students from Canada and Europe hardly report racist experiences compared to students from Asia, Latin America and Africa (Lee & Rice, 2007). The experience of studying abroad can be distressing for African students who experience discrimination and racism because of the color of their skin. In a qualitative study in 2005, Constantine et al. found that Kenyan, Ghanaian, and Nigerian international college students in the US reported incidents of prejudice or discrimination more than any other groups of international students. During their interviews they found that not only were these treatments meted from Caucasians, but also from other international people of color as well. For example, a respondent had this to say:

When I first moved into my dorm, I had roommates from Taiwan and Japan who both asked to be moved to another room because they didn't want to room with a Sub-Saharan African. I also heard some Asian and European international students talk about being afraid of Sub-Saharan African students... like we're going to hurt them (p. 62).

To further buttress this point, Ruby (1998) observed that domestic American students' perceptions of Sub-Saharan African International Students in comparison to other international student groups were more negative. These personal struggles in social

interactions and communications, in addition to the need to stay focused and not disappoint themselves, their relatives and friends, prevent the Sub-Saharan Africans from taking full advantage of the social and academic experiences in higher education.

Other Factors

Despite these challenges, there are some other factors that aggravate or help in mitigating these issues and challenges. These include but are not limited to perseverance, persistence, and individual personality traits. The first factor is perseverance. Although most people are aware and know what perseverance is, it is a difficult concept to define. Tinto (2012) explain that most researchers use this concept interchangeably with persistence. I would henceforth also use perseverance and persistence interchangeably in this study (Quaye & Harper, 2014).

According to Tinto (2012), perseverance and/ or persistence is key for students' success in higher education. Tinto (2012) explains that persistence happens when student are retained and remain enrolled in their academic programs. In his view, one cannot discuss academic success without social integration. Students who are active socially within the academic community tend to persist more in their academics until graduation. This is because these students are better integrated into their academic communities, through participation in campus events and activities. By being actively involved in their communities they become more socially interactive within the campus organizations and hence share in other experiences. As a result, these students feel more encouraged and committed to persist in their academic programs until graduation.

These students also tend to be more engaged in their education and are more likely to be satisfied with their overall academic experiences and hence persist in their

academic programs till graduation (Tinto, 2012; Kuh et al., 2006; Quaye & Harper, 2014; Kuh & Gonya, 2015).

In light of this, Chickering (2000) also explains that actors in various curricular departments must proactively encourage international students to persist in their academic endeavors by exposing them to programs and services in their community, of which they may not be aware. Chickering further explains that these actions are important for students because by participating in these programs they connect to various student organizations and other academic resources. For example, participating students gain access to resources from new social ties, which further enhances their social capital largely. By engaging in more social interactions with these new ties, they gain more knowledge and experiences, which eventually shape and develop their personalities, identities, and successes in the future (Evans, 1998; Saunders, 2003; Kuh & Gonya, 2015).

For international students in the US, this is particularly important because due to visa constraints and obligations, persistence in one's academic program and course work is needed to maintain and retain one's visa status in the United States. International students are most likely to face many challenges whether they like it or not, but in order to succeed in their academic career, they would have to overcome these obstacles.

The factors that help are certain personality traits. These traits help individuals to cope in various situations. According to Wehrli and Zurich (2008), several personal traits allow individuals to be well grounded and integrated in the environments in which they find themselves. For example, they explain that people who are sociable and open-minded tend to be more welcoming and approachable. Other personality traits that foster

positive socialization and interactions include agreeability, trust, curiosity, dependability, patience, flexibility, motivation, self-efficacy, tolerance, and other positive attitudes and/or behavior (Halamandaris & Power; 1999; Ward & Kennedy, 1993; Poyrazli et al., 2002).

Other personality traits that are relevant for social interactions are extroversion and introversion. Although some researchers argue that these are natural personality traits, others considered them to be learned and can be changed depending on one's context. Extroversion refers to the extent by which one is active, assertive, and talkative (Halamandaris & Power; 1999; Wehrli & Zurich, 2008). They also explain that when individuals are introverted, they tend to be reserved, serious, and stay within close circles (Kisang, 2010).

Also, researchers such as Lee and Ciftci, (2014), Lee (2014), Athen (1991) and Rueben (1998) describe in their studies that assertiveness is a strong value in the US society. They further explain that international students who fail to conform to this value typically suffer adjustment problems. These researchers are of the view that these attributes bear greatly on one's engagement in social interactions of any kind.

One can literally define cultural responsiveness as a way of relating to people while keeping in mind every person's history, culture, and identity. Researchers in this area typically relate it to pedagogy, which is defined as the art, science, and profession of teaching. There are several definitions for Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. Gay (2002, p. 106) defines the concept of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy as, "the use of cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching more effectively".

Ladson-Billings (1994) also defines Culturally Responsive Pedagogy as a “pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically” (p, 17). Studies have shown that to be competent in this regard, one has to have a clear understanding of what cultural diversity means in today’s global communities (Gay, 2002; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Richards, Brown & Forde, 2007). Eick and McCormick’s (2010) also explain in their study that attaining these competencies allows for empathy towards students’ needs and treats them more as individuals.

This creates harmony as it addresses most students’ needs. Most international students perceive there is a lack of cultural sensitivity and it causes strain on interpersonal relationships between them and their host community. Although these social distances created are inadvertent for the most part, it usually results in international students’ self-segregation. These students turn to other co-nationals in time of need. Although they sometimes get help from these co-nationals, the help may be inadequate.

African International Students

It is a fact that most African countries are unable to cater to the higher educational needs of their students in the face of growing globalization necessities, particularly the acquisition of new and applied skills, through technology and evolving disciplines. These necessities contribute to the ambitions and decisions of African students, particularly those from Ghana and Nigeria to come to the US in pursuit of higher education (Boafo-Author, 2014; Osikomaiya, 2014) These students leap to the challenges of globalization and internalization by enthusiastically and optimistically making efforts to transform their educational statuses.

This is because though most governments in Africa believe in the importance of education for sustainability and development of their economies and governance, they typically only pay attention to the first and second cycle educational institutions because of the “belief that primary and secondary schooling are more important than tertiary education for poverty reduction.” Tertiary education is neglected (Bloom, Canning, Chan & Luca, 2014, p.2) in many respects. Most students are forced to settle for the programs that are not very viable in the 21st century or go abroad in search of better educational facilities and opportunities.

These students are attracted to the US because of the perceived stable democratic political atmosphere, the extensive nature of the educational system, and the exposure to advanced technology. In most cases, the need to acquire new and applied skills in response to new challenges of globalization makes Sub-Saharan African students seek relevant higher education abroad and thereby eventually enhances their socio-economic statuses in their home countries (Kumi-Yeboah, 2010).

The Open Door Report (2014) shows that, there are currently 31,113 international students in US institutions from Sub-Saharan African Countries. Of this number, 14,998 are from West Africa alone. Nigeria, with a total population of 173.62 million has the highest number of nationals studying abroad at 7,921. Although Ghana is a relatively smaller country in comparison to Nigeria, with a total population of approximately 25 million it has the second highest number, with 2,914 nationals studying in higher educational institutions.

On arrival in the US, the transition phase is further complicated by unanticipated happenstances such as sudden cultural shock, acculturation stress, lack of cultural

competencies on the part of the host institution and community, and lack of social support. Over time, they begin to have problems due to non-sustained efforts of their respective governments to support them. Additionally, their host tertiary institutions' inability to reinforce their visions and/or manage the realities that confront these students creates difficulties and hinders their academic successes.

Challenges for GIS

Higher education in Ghana for most Ghanaian youth remains a problem. Many public or state tertiary institutions are underfunded. There are also large class sizes to help increase accessibility, which results in compromising quality of education. Ghanaian students face challenges such as accessibility, affordability, and retention as the general infrastructure of tertiary education continues to decay (Atuahene, 2015). In 2000, it was reported that approximately, 24 million dollars was allocated for funding higher education in Ghana. This money only covered 12% of total government discretionary allowances for five public universities and eight polytechnics (Atuahene, 2015).

Due to these continual inadequate funding situations, dire academic facilities in Ghana from year to year, coupled with other macroeconomic factors and increasing general poverty levels, higher education seems to be a mirage for most Ghanaian youths. According to Atuahene (2015), less than half of the qualified applicants do not gain admission into tertiary institutions in Ghana. Some of the students who do not gain access to the public institutions enroll in private tertiary institutions in Ghana (Morley, 2014), whereas others seek higher education abroad (Kumi-Yeboah, 2010).

According to Mbawuni and Nimako (2015), in the last two decades, the number of private universities and satellite colleges in Ghana has increased greatly. Also, many

of the polytechnics and training colleges are currently running various degree and diploma programs. It is reported that there are currently 76 accredited public, private, and satellite higher education institutions in Ghana. Although the numbers of institutions have increased, there is still a lack of variety in the programs offered. There are also very little advanced degree program choices (Atuahene, 2015; Mbawuni & Nimako, 2015; Morley, 2014). According to these authors, after gaining access to university education in Ghana, one is still challenged by the limitations of agency (choice) and professional areas of specialization and other higher degrees at the masters' and doctorate levels. This results in many youth seeking to obtain higher degrees in other countries after their bachelors' degrees.

Like many African students, Ghanaian students believe that having a Western (particularly a US) education is prestigious and privileged (Osikomaiya, 2014). This is due to perceptions of access to higher levels of technology and other specialized skills acquisitions. Many Ghanaian students come to the US highly inspired and in search of their own identities and individuation. At the same time, they are suddenly faced with making independent decisions far away from home, without the support of family and friends. These decision-making processes may be as fundamental as grocery shopping, preparing a daily schedule and /or as complex as choosing a college major (Anaya & Cole, 2001).

Also, this group of students find themselves challenged in several ways as they deal with several cultural clashes (Osikomaiya, 2014) including, climate, environment, culture, language use and accent, loss of social support systems (Sandhu, 1994), and continuous pressure to acculturate (Osikomaiya, 2014; Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1998).

Pruitt (1978) explains that though students are able to transition well into their new Western environments, a majority find it extremely difficult to make the necessary changes to cope and transition.

Often, GIS may have completed high school, and may have already be enrolled or completed an undergraduate program in their home countries before arriving in the US to continue their education. For the first time, they find themselves in a different educational atmosphere than they are used to. These differences may be extensive in many ways. For instance, international students may have a hard time recognizing and responding to cultural norms of the host country. Sometimes these differences are only apparent to the domestic students. One fundamental issue is in the case of language and accents. There are also systemic and structural differences that are often obvious to GIS. For example, many GIS in the study explained that they chose to come to the US because of perceived student centered instruction.

Unlike other groups of international students, GIS tend to be quite proficient in English as it is the official language spoken and used in instruction in Ghana. Most GIS coming to the US are only made aware of their own accents when they arrive in the US and are told they speak differently from the domestic students. Sometimes this is difficult for them because they assume that they have been speaking English officially their whole lives; and suddenly perceive themselves as unable to because some individuals have difficulty in communicating with them. In other cases, their difficulties may be the use of language, grammar and terminology. For example, even if students are proficient in English language usage, they may not be used to the use of excessive acronyms such as abbreviations of words and phrases, specialized language, or certain descriptions and

expressions of the language. This makes communication difficult and can result in anxiety, distress, disengagement and sometimes alienation.

Interactions with other Students

As mentioned earlier, one of the main reasons why international students come to the US is to undergo cross-cultural and intercultural education. But this intercultural education cannot happen if there is no interaction with domestic students in essential activities (Zhou et al., 2008). For this reason, some institutions host their international students by lodging them with local host families that have college students themselves so they can interact more with domestic students as well as the host families.

Other researchers have also found that interaction with other domestic students is important for international students in a foreign country (Nora & Crisp, 2014). According to Andrade and Evans (2009) when international students interact more with domestic students of the host country, it creates room for more cultural adjustments for international students. This is consistent with Astin's (1993) findings that, when students interact with other students, there are better educational outcomes. These positive outcomes result in growth and development, particularly at the undergraduate level.

Other positive outcomes have been linked to interactions with peers in higher education. In particular, cross-racial interactions have been seen to improve one's critical thinking and cognition as well (Astin, 1993). Over time, when students interact with other students, particularly from other races, it creates better inter-racial understanding and social awareness of the differences between themselves and others.

In 2001, Chang found that when students interact with people from other races there is the possibility of more open conversations about race, which is often a

challenging issue in higher education. This creates more positive attitudes toward race and ethnicity, and produces a decline in overall negative attitudes pertaining to race, stereotypes and prejudice. Cross- racial interactions allow students to have more interactions with others and create better relationships due to familiarity.

These forms of interactions are important for international students, particularly, African students. Studies have shown that African students typically come to the US with less social capital than their counterparts who are domestic students. To buttress this point, Blake (2006) explains that international students suffer more relationship problems than their domestic counterparts in higher education and have more volatile relationships with other students in their colleges because, they find it difficult to assimilate culturally with the host country's students. Sometimes these failed relationships may result in a loss of status or identity by the international student. To further drive home this point, Forbes-Mewett & Nyland (2008) found that

not only do international students need to adapt to a foreign education system and a foreign language and culture; like migrants, they also need to adjust to being part of the social minority; that is, they encounter difficulties associated with being different (p. 5).

Experiences with Faculty

According to a study by Solórzano and Bernal (2001), micro aggressions occur in the classroom social interactions. Although sometimes the micro aggressions occur inadvertently in some cases, Osikomaiya (2014) reports that sometimes international students, particularly those from Sub-Saharan Africa feel relegated to the background of the classes because they are typically not called upon to answer questions in class or

excluded from general discussions with their peers. Osikomaiya, (2014) expatiates on this point saying that students are not called upon to contribute to class discussions because they have accents that are not easily understood by their domestic hosts/actors. These attitudes may result in the students learning, resolving, or deciding to stay silent in the class.

In addition, there is extensive literature on the topic of maladjustments of the black students in college compared to their white counterparts. Most research indicates that black minority students come to college less prepared for college than their white counterparts (Greer & Brown, 1987). They also perform worse than their counterparts do. More recent studies have indicated that black students may perform poorly, mainly due to stressors created by negative stereotypes and prejudices about their racial group (Owens & Massey, 2011). Sometimes, black students internalize these stereotypes. These stereotypes may also result in lack of motivation, feelings of disengagement, alienation, isolation, powerlessness, and uselessness (Harper & Quaye, 2009; 2014).

Chavez, Ke and Herrera (2012) also explain in their study that, often teachers fail to see that there is a difference between dominant groups and other minority groups' perspectives to the higher education experience as a whole and fail to teach culturally responsively to enhance inclusivity and learning of all racial groups in the classroom. In most cases, faculty dealing with black international students in particular, fail to make the distinction between international and domestic status and treat them like black minority students. This may result in formation of biases and prejudices by faculty against these groups of students, which may become problematic overtime (Constantine, 2005). Constantine further reports that race is central to international students' acculturative

stress, because, prior to being in the US, they had no experiences of racial discrimination, and biases (Phinney and Onwughalu 1996; Lee and Opio 2011).

Some studies show that there are ways to mitigate these issues and often, this happens with experience as teachers educate and improve themselves with best teaching practices (Barkley, 2010). One of the common ways to initiate this process for teachers is using the icebreaker method where students are asked to provide some background information, while instructors also provide pertinent information on their expectations and goals for their courses. Since international students don't have an understanding of what will be required of them in American classes, it is useful to find out who they are at the beginning of the semester.

This way both faculty and students get to know one another and prevent speculations on academic abilities. However, icebreakers do not tell a faculty member about academic abilities. This is important because “student engagement is a process and a product that is experienced on a continuum and results in a synergistic interaction between motivation and active learning” (Barkley, 2007). By doing this early, faculty may find a niche where they will positively impact all their students, particularly black African international students, since they may have some insight into students’ cultural backgrounds, and garner some cultural competencies from these interactions.

According to Lundberg and Schreiner (2004), when students are able to interact with faculty well, it leads to very positive learning outcomes. Also, when students have quality relationships with faculty, these faculty members are likely to become mentors to these students. When these micro-relationships occur, coupled with adequate formal faculty interactions, the results are significantly positive (Lundberg & Schreiner (2004).

Other researchers, like Smith (2005), have looked at the contribution of faculty to a student's educational experiences through the lens of race. In their view, when the faculty is diversified, "it is likely to contribute to what is taught, how it is taught, and what is important to learn; contributions that are vital to the institution" (p. 51). They continue by explaining that, when faculty are of a racial minority group, they are more likely to provide the opportunity for students to interact with other students that are different from them. This creates room for opportunities to embrace diversity.

Experience with University Community

The university campus community has a huge role to play for international students. Most international students find themselves to be socially limited to their campus community. They live, learn and work on the same campus due to visa restrictions. The institutions of higher education need to cater specifically to the needs of international students in helping them with adjustments to the academic and social cultures. Although campus community involvement is necessary, universities typically assume that international students will adapt to the campus environment by themselves (Constantine, 2005) and so they do not make any effort to intervene on their behalf.

According to Glass (2012) collaboration in team-oriented campus events and activities help international students garner a better social development. For example, Moores & Popadiuk (2011) explained in their research that, when international students participate in community organizations, it makes them feel a stronger sense of belonging. Other researchers have also recognized that continuous socialization with domestic students facilitates international students' persistence to graduate in their programs of undertaking in the stipulated time (Severiens & Wolff, 2008).

Unfortunately, despite all these benefits, research has found that international students typically do not take advantage of these institution-based events. Between pressures of keeping grades up and dealing with other school-related emotional problems, they are left with little or no time for leisure. Hitherto, this behavior only augments the international students' stressors even more.

Often for international students, social interactions are key to their success, because, finding oneself in a completely different environment can be challenging in many respects. According to Nora and Crisp (2012) often, students do not interact enough with others around them. This results in substantial lack of information, missed opportunities, and frustrations usually to the detriment of the students (Ginsberg, & Wlodkowski, 2009). Based on the above-mentioned issues faced by many international students as they seek to navigate higher education in the US, it is increasingly becoming apparent that more research needs to be carried out on specific international student groups because they are not a homogenous group.

Also, there is very little literature on the effects of social interactions on international students' experiences in higher education. My study therefore is intended to contribute to the literature by exploring the types and effects of social interactions Ghanaian International Students encounter with different actors in various institutional departments. Chapter three provides a detailed description of the rationale for methodology, methods, steps and processes adopted and participant selection to enable this study to be carried out successfully.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research project was to explore the lived experiences of a group of Ghanaian students attending a US higher educational institution. As mentioned in Chapter I, the study examined the types of social interactions Ghanaian International Students encounter with different actors in various institutional departments at Midwestern University. There were two sets of participants: Six Ghanaian International Students who have been studying in the United States for over a year for the interview session and five staff member participants selected from five on-campus departments.

This study uses a case study approach because after several deliberations with my advisor and an extensive review of literature for this research, a case study approach was the best fit for answering the research questions. I am the principal investigator, interviewer and observer for this study and I have included in this chapter, a description of the design and methods used in this study. The following research questions were used to guide this study:

- What are the lived experiences of Ghanaian International Students while interacting with actors they encounter while in school?
- What are their perceptions and feelings about the support received through social interactions with various actors on campus?

- How do the students perceive these lived experiences impact their successes or setbacks in higher education?
- What interventions do students anticipate would help resolve the issues (if any)?

Rationale for a Qualitative Design

Although there are many ways of conducting research, one has to choose a methodology based on the types of information sought (Lock, 1989). I used qualitative research techniques for this study. After carefully reading the literature on the subject area, I sought a deepened insight into Ghanaian International Students' experiences and perceptions of their social interactions as they navigate higher education in the US. A qualitative approach allowed me to capture more information including micro-interactions that would otherwise not have been available. Merriam (2009) also explains that qualitative research designs are appropriate when researchers strive to understand people's constructed meanings and the experiences they have in the world.

Additionally, Creswell (2007) stated that it is necessary to use an appropriate qualitative methodology for studies on issues about understudied groups or populations in order to fill the gap in existing literature. A review of current literature indicated that although there are many studies that look into international students' adjustment issues, very few looked at these adjustment issues through the lens of the students' countries of origin (Lee, 2007). However the few studies that have focused on country of origin are mainly Asian countries. Furthermore, there is insufficient information on international students' social interactions and how these interactions affect their educational successes and/or failures.

It is a problem that is best studied through the voices of individual participants to gain a thorough understanding into the peculiarity of Ghanaian students' experiences and how they make meaning as they interact with various actors at Midwestern University. The use of a non-qualitative approach would have prevented the depth of information that was covered through interviews, focus group discussions and observations (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 2009). Using this case study design was appropriate for gathering and analyzing data about GIS' lived experiences, stories, feelings and perceptions.

Case Study Design

According to Baxter and Jack (2008), there are many types of case study designs and one must choose to use a particular type based on the overall study purpose. They further expounded that although different authors use different terminologies in describing the case study design types, Stake (1995) and Yin (2003) have the most predominant categorizations. These are explanatory, exploratory, descriptive, intrinsic, instrumental, and collective case study design types. Baxter and Jack further asserted that one also has to decide the approach to use in analyzing the data as single or multiple case studies Yin (2014).

In addition to this, Baxter and Jack mention that in choosing a single case study design, one may decide to "involve the unit of analysis at more than one level" (Yin, 2014; p. 53). Yin (2014) refers to this as "an embedded, single-case study design" (p. 54). Yin explains that in order to do this the unit of analysis of the data is sub-divided and analyzed separately within the case. This he called "within case analysis." Another level of involvement is analysis between the different subunits. He referred to this as "between

case analysis.” The last level of involvement is across all of the subunits, also known as “cross-case analysis.”

Intrinsic Embedded Single Case Study Design

For the purposes of this study, an intrinsic embedded single case study design was used. The subsequent paragraphs explain the reasons behind the selection of this case design. I have adopted a three-tier approach to this explanation. I explain the reasons behind the intrinsic nature of the case study design, the reasons for choosing a single case study approach, and finally the reason for choosing an embedded method to analyze the data on the units of analysis.

Stake (1995) proposes that intrinsic case study is one that suggests that the researcher has a genuine interest in the case. This case study is of particular interest to me because I am a GIS myself and I have research interests in international education. For me, this is not an abstract construct of a phenomenon (Stake, 1995), but an attempt to better understand and be more knowledgeable on the phenomena associated with studying abroad by international students as a whole, and by Ghanaian students in particular (Baxter & Jack, 2006; Stake, 1995).

Another reason why I chose this design was because it is the best vehicle to gather answers for my research questions. The design followed the Yin’s (2014) and the Merriam’s (1997) design. Merriam (1997) explains that case studies are able to uncover deep knowledge and understanding of various social phenomena that would not have been otherwise accessible. Yin (2014) also shows that, a case study methodology is preferred for “investigating a contemporary phenomenon (the case) in depth and within

the real world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident (p. 16).”

Additionally, Yin (2011) explains that in using case studies to gain a deeper understanding of phenomenon in a real world context, the researcher has the flexibility to make operational modifications as needed.

I also chose to use a single case study with embedded units design because all the participants were from Ghana and had similarities in their experiences. However, the data indicated that there were some unique factors. These unique factors included personality traits, prior knowledge/ exposure which influenced their actual experiences, as well as perspectives of the experiences they encountered at Midwestern University (Akyeampong & Stephens, 2002).

As a member of this group of students, I am aware that in as much as they were representative of Ghanaian students’ socio-cultural experiences, attitudes and behavior, they are not entirely a homogenous group in respect to the aforementioned factors. GIS come from a variety of contexts, backgrounds, and disciplines, all of which influenced their individual experiences, attitudes, and behaviors while studying in the US.

The embedded units approach further provided me with the ability and opportunity to study each of the sub-units as individual subjects, situated within a larger group of Ghanaian students. By using this approach, I was able to gain a better insight into the case-study research. This approach is supported by Baxter & Jack (2008) suggestions that case study analyses are “richer and more powerful when you consider that data can be analyzed within the subunits separately (within case analysis); between

the different subunits (between case analysis); or across all of the subunits (cross-case analysis (p.550).”

Research Methods

In designing this research study, there were various steps I took to enable me to come to a successful end. Before starting the research process, I identified the site for recruitment of participants as well as methods for gathering and analyzing data. The second step was the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process. Once I got approval for the research, the process was started by using snowball sampling (Morgan, 2009) to recruit my participants. This is a single case study of six Ghanaian graduate students who were recruited from the Midwestern University community. Data from interviews, observations and focus group were used to build the case.

Participants

Most qualitative studies, compared to quantitative studies, have small sample sizes. The participants included in this study were in three categories; namely, interviewees, participants from a focus group, and myself. I selected six Ghanaian graduate students (four male and two female) for the core interviews from the population of Midwestern University. In addition, a focus group was also constituted, using five representatives from different service departments who were also recruited using purposeful sampling. All of these participants contributed to get to the depth and richness of the data collected, (Creswell, 1994).

Additionally, although participants from the interviews were the main unit of analysis for the case study, data from all other participants in the study was equally valuable because their contributions to the data was used to support the research findings

in various way. The data collected from the focus group and my own contributions was used to corroborate and buttress the information gathered from the interviewees' data.

Selection of Participants

Participants for the interviews were selected using snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a strategy used in qualitative research data collection where there is difficulty in accessing subjects to participate in a research study (Morgan, 2009). A month before the research began, I contacted three of the Ghanaian students and solicited their participation in a letter of invitation via email. They agreed to participate and connected me with other prospective participants. I then contacted these other participants by detailed email invitations to participate in a research study (see Appendix 2). The invitation letter included an overview of the research interests, the duration of the sessions of the interviews and obligations for participation. Consequently, a sample size of six participants for interviews was selected from respondents. I used interviews and direct non-participant observation methods to collect data from the six participants.

For the focus groups, I researched on the various departments at Midwestern University and the services they provide to the various groups of students on campus, (particularly international students). I selected five departments that had the highest contact time with international students. These were the Writing Center, International Programs Office, Library, Department of Education, and Housing Office.

Using purposeful sampling, I then went through the departmental directory to seek out prospective participants within the department. Once I identified the prospective participants, I sent them invitation letters of participation via email. Their letter was a slight modification of the version sent to the prospective students for the interviews (see

Appendix 3.). Table 2 below indicates the categories of participants included in this study.

Table 2. Participants for the Study.

Participant Groups	Number of participants
Interviews	Six Ghanaian International students
Focus Group	Five Service Providers at Midwestern University (Writing Center, International Programs Office, Library, Department of Education and Housing Office)

Data Collection Process

I received Institutional Research Board (IRB) approval for the research and an approved consent form for all my participants. All participants were given IRB approved consent forms to peruse and sign on the day of the interviews. This document had a brief description of what the research is about, whom to contact, the research period and a disclaimer statement, telling participants they can decide to terminate the research at any time. Participants in the focus group discussion were provided some of the questions prior to the interviews to help them prepare for the discussions. All participants were given pseudonyms and participant information was stored separately from transcribed data in a locked box.

Once participants gave their informed consent, and all documents were signed, the interviews and discussions respectively began. Participants were asked a series of semi-structured questions (these are further explained in the data section). In situations where the answers provided were ambiguous, the researcher sought to clarify the answers, using probes. There were at least two separate interview sessions of one hour

with each subject. The first session was used to answer general semi-structured interview questions. Subsequent sessions were used to probe and clarify information received in the first session as well as other questions that were not covered in previous interview session(s). All discussions were recorded using a digital voice recorder and I began transcribing the data a week later. Transcription of the data took two weeks. All transcribed data and consent forms were stored at separate, safe locations.

Data

According to Yin (2014), “a major strength of case study research is the opportunity to use many different sources of evidence” (p. 121). The terminology used for various data sources in this type of research is data triangulation (Yin, 2014). Yardley (2008) also explains that multiple sources of data for case study research are ideal for accuracy and conviction. It is also important to note that since I am also a GIS, I understand the context of six Ghanaian students, as well as the challenges and possibilities the new context presents. For this study, I collected data using in-depth interviews, direct observation, and a focus group discussion. While collecting the data using the above-mentioned sources, I also wrote down observational field notes and personal commentary in a research journal.

All of these data sources were used to inform the research. Figure 2 below shows the convergence of multiple sources of evidence for my studies. Baxter and Jack (2008, p.556) explain “collection and comparison of data from various sources (triangulation) enhances the overall quality of the data based on the principles of convergence and the confirmation of findings.” Using these multiple sources of data provided me with a deeper understanding and improved the overall quality of my research (Yin, 2009; 2014).

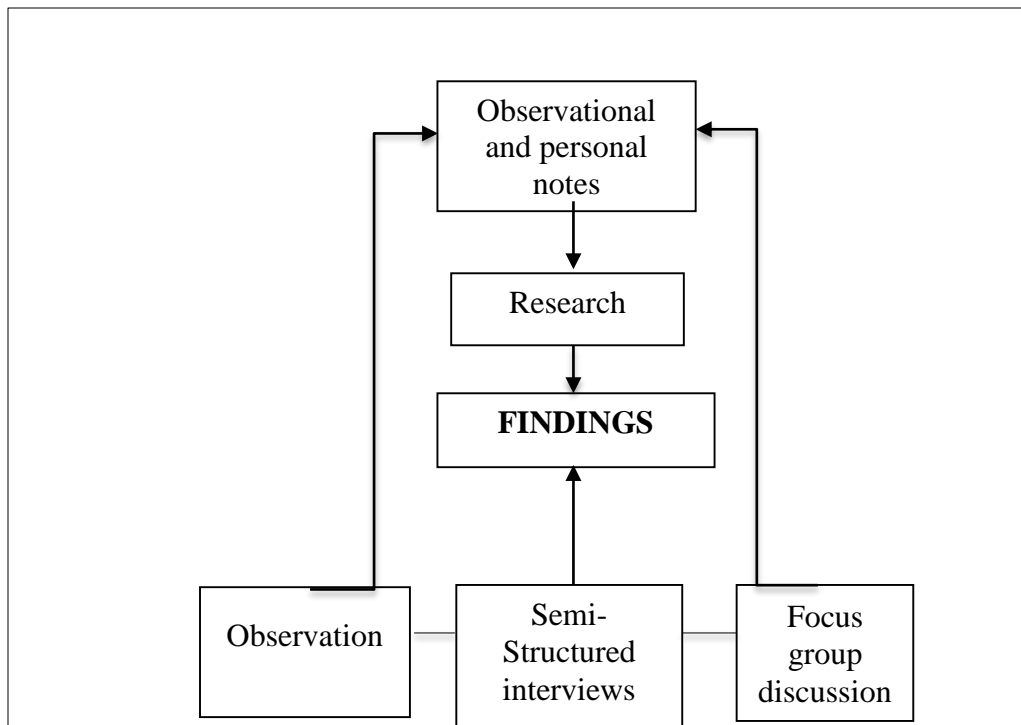


Figure 2. Convergence of data sources for study.

Observations

One of the ways I collected data was non-participant observation of my participants' daily interactions with actors around campus. For example, on one occasion I followed Marian to the library. Unknown to her, I was observing her while she explained something to the attendant. Since this is a case study taking place in a real world setting, I made observations of subjects' social interactions and relations to other actors so I could attain additional information into the participants' experiences (Yin, 2014). These findings were not included in the final data analysis because they did not provide any insightful information to the research.

During both the interviews and focus group sessions, I took down notes as participants spoke. I recorded nonverbal cues that I observed during the interviews as well. These cues included participants' reluctance to answer certain aspects of the questions despite the various attempts at probing. At the end of each interview session I wrote a brief summary of events of the day into my journal. I did this in order to identify what my own judgments and biases were in order to take precaution against putting them into my research analysis. For example, on one occasion I wrote:

As Marian spoke about her experiences in the classroom, I had a flash back on my own experiences in class during my first year at Midwestern University. I was not sure why.... I found myself agreeing with what she was saying most of the time. It was as if she was narrating my own story to me...I had a sense of accomplishment when I was done with the session, because I could identify with her experiences. (Journal entry, April 3, 2015).

In another entry later that week, I mentioned that the participant was carefully choosing his words during the session. His use of "professional," did not look genuine. It looks like he has "an axe to grind" with some people in his department. These notes along with personal commentary were organized into detailed descriptions and documented immediately after the observation in my journal. Recording these circumstances were important to my research because, according to Creswell (2007) writers need detailed descriptions of proceedings as they ensued in a study to have a thick description of the events that took place during the study.

Interviews

According to Seidman (2012), in-depth interviews are one-on-one interactions between the researcher and the participant that allows the researcher to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences of others and the meanings those experiences hold. Using in-depth interview sessions with participants enabled me to gain understanding into Ghanaian students' individual perspectives and experiences while they try to navigate college in the US. Adopting this method gave me the opportunity to capture subjects' personal experiences and/or biases, while allowing access to sensitive information that participants may not have willingly shared in front of a large group of people. Yin (2014) believed that case study research should include interviews, observation and direct observation.

I interviewed six people. Each participant's interview was conducted in two separate sessions. Each interview session lasted approximately one hour. The interviews were conversational and semi-structured in nature. The interview protocol was only used as a guide (examples are provided below). This paved the way for probes and clarifying questions as the interviews progressed. According to Yin (2011), interview questions should provide enough flexibility for the person answering to give accounts of the circumstances surrounding their experiences.

I started the interview process with demographic questions to establish some rapport and confidence. I also had an initial icebreaker question (with probes where necessary) of, 'why did you choose to come to the US to study?' Once participants were able to tell me their reasons for coming to the US, I was able to start a conversation on

their experiences and how their views have been upheld or changed because of their experiences so far.

Some of the subsequent interview questions that were asked were:

- 1) Tell me about your experiences in interacting with people in these department
 - a. Were the visits pertaining to particular incidents or occasions in your academic journey? Examples?
 - b. How did the information you received help to further your academic journey?
- 2) Tell me about the occasions when you interacted with some of these people and you perceived that more could have been said or done and you did not receive the help (if any).
- 3) What are your perceptions of faculty and staff interactions at your academic department?
 - a. How does your international student status affect your interactions with faculty and staff in your department?
 - b. Tell me about faculty interactions with you in the department. With examples if possible, give me scenarios of a typical class interaction
 - c. How have these interactions affected your academic journey?

As the interviews progressed ambiguous responses were probed for further explanation. Follow up questions were asked to elicit a deeper understanding and clarity where necessary.

All the interviews were transcribed soon afterwards. Most speech idiosyncrasies such as word repetitions, including “you know” and “like” were left out because they

reduced the quality of the text. Significant long pauses, fillers, and/ or emphases such as hmmm, um, err were captured. I also did not include names of individuals and their respective departments. All participants were given pseudonyms. I used a digital recorder to record each of my sessions. After an hour of interviewing, I ended the session so that participants could rest and not feel overwhelmed.

This strategy also allowed me to go back and replay the recorded sessions to see if there were any issues that needed clarification. I was also able to compare some of my notes with what I heard and ensuing issues were probed into at the next session. It allowed me to reflect and give commentary more accurately on the interactions, in my journal.

After all the interviews were recorded all conversations files on the digital recorder were downloaded onto a desktop computer. I made use of the play and stop buttons on the computer's quick player to listen to the conversations, and spoke them out aloud for the voice-to-text feature of my tablet (iPad) to record and transcribe. All the interview conversations were transcribed verbatim using the start, stop, and play buttons on the digital recorder. All transcriptions were made using the note pad feature on the iPad.

Focus Group

Another data collection method was the focus group, which consisted of five actors from various departments around the Midwestern University campus who interact with Ghanaian students in various capacities. Departments represented were housing, international programs, writing center, library and education. Although five participants were invited to the discussions, only four were present at the actual venue on Wednesday,

April 6, 2015. The last participant was unable to be physically present and so she got a copy of the semi-structured guiding questions via email.

The focus group discussion was carefully conducted to allow a multifaceted communication between the researcher and the participants, and the participants and their co-participants (Morgan, 1997) . For this study, it was important to incorporate this strategy because it opened up discussions of Ghanaian students' experiences from multiple perspectives.

Data from the focus group was gathered based on information gathered from the interviews conducted with Ghanaian students at Midwestern University. This data was used to support findings from interviews with the six Ghanaian students. The information from the focus group discussion with five actors from various departments, who serve these students in various capacities were used to buttress findings from the interviews and observations. Some the discussion questions included in this research were:

1. What are your perceptions of your interactions with international students, particularly Ghanaian students in your respective departments?
2. With examples (if possible) tell me about occasions when interacting with some of these students, you perceived that more could have been said or done and you did not give the help needed (if any).

Participants for these discussions were also given pseudonyms but the department names were used as identifiers in the analysis because they played important roles in the interviewees' experiences at Midwestern University. After the discussions an identical transcriptions process from the interview sessions was used to transcribe the data.

Data Analysis Procedure

I collected all the data during Spring 2015. I kept a notebook in which I made notes, reflected, and monitored my research activities during the study. Participants shared with me their experiences and perceptions, which were accepted as their perception of the truth (Nolan & Talbert, 2011). In using this approach for the study, each participant had the opportunity to narrate his or her experiences without restriction (Yin, 2014). After all the data was collected for the interviews I transcribed all the data. After this the focus groups discussions were made. Some of the codes that evolved from the interview data such as questions two above were included in the questions for discussion. Transcriptions for these sections were also made soon after.

All the data collected were organized into a data base file for analysis. From the data, I observed that each of the participants had a different experience. With this in mind, each of the sub-units was analyzed separately and then the whole group was analyzed collectively to determine general themes of the case, as well as differences in the themes at the embedded levels.

The units of analysis were the six participants who had experienced higher education in the US. It was important to look at each of the individual sub-units separately and then collectively in the context of this study so as to gain a richer understanding of the phenomenon. The individual sub units' transcripts were examined to establish a primary coding scheme, using an open code system.

Coding

After all the data were transcribed from both the focus group discussions and interviews, I started the data analysis. I met with my advisor for a white board session.

We deliberated on the best practices of coding and decided on an open coding system to analyze the data.

According to Flick (2006, p.297), an open coding system aims at “expressing data and phenomena in the form of concepts.” In order to do this, we went through one of the transcripts together, sentence-by-sentence, and page-by-page, and segmented groups of text into separate sections and made notes. After all the text was segmented and the notes done, we grouped notes that were similar in meaning together and described them with a single word or phrase, which became a code.

Although most of the text resulted in a code formulation, others were discarded because they were not suitable for code formulation. This process was important because, according to Charmaz, (2000), it prevented me from inputting my own motives into the data. After going through a few pages together, my advisor asked that I continue this process on my own to identify more codes. I replicated the process and came up with more codes from the other interviews.

After going through three of the transcripts and adding some new codes, as I went through the volumes of texts, I noticed that some of the codes became repetitive and so I decided to flip the process by “linking particular codes to whole texts “ (Flick, 2006, p. 300) for the rest of the transcripts for the interviews. After the preliminary coding, I reread the data for further coding. Comparable codes were combined and renamed. Codes that were deemed unimportant to the study were further analyzed to determine how they would be used in the final report. The same process was repeated for the focus group transcripts. The codes from the interview data and focus group data were compared and identical codes from both categories were put together and color-coded. After all the

interview transcripts were analyzed and coded, the codes were put into categories and sub categories (Charmez, 2003).

The final codes identified in this study depict the most prominent participants' responses (see Figure 3 below). After doing these for two of the transcripts, emerging codes formed the basis for subsequent transcripts. As remaining transcripts were assessed, new codes emerged and previously established codes were modified as comparisons and connections in participants' responses became clearer.

Emerging codes were grouped into three broad categories in relation to issues of social interaction experiences gathered from both the interview and focus group transcripts.

According to Strauss & Corbin (1998), coding involves breaking down data into concepts, and then putting it back in different ways without losing its meaning. First the concepts are created by linking them closely to the text, and then later categorized broadly into three main categories. There were three evolving themes for these categories and the relations between them established. Consequently, two assertions were made. The subsequent pages provide an illustration of the conceptual diagram of the categories of codes, the evolving themes and assertions made as a result of the relationships between these themes. Figure 3 represents codes, categories, and assertions made in this case study. The codes are listed according to the research questions they address. The codes in the diagram are grouped using different fonts and colors. Those codes in bold times new roman font are used to determine codes that deemed to be leading to more positive outcomes. Those in regular fonts are codes that were describing more negative outcomes. The codes are differentiated by those pertaining mainly to interviewees (green), focus

group (blue) and to both interviewees and focus group (red). I have also included a black and white version of this chart in the appendix.

There were three categories evolving from the codes; namely institutional, social, personality factors. All the codes and categories identified are used to make the final assertions of GIS face several systemic challenges and all University actors must be re-socialized to become more culturally and socially intelligent.

Category I depicts institutional factors that affect GIS's lived experiences and social interactions at Midwestern University are impacted by these factors. This set of codes was generated based on data from both interviews and focus groups. Codes in this set include, holistic approach education, small class sizes, enrollment processes, communication and follow-ups.

Codes that represented actual and perceived experiences while interacting with actors in the Midwestern University Campus have been listed in Category II. Codes in this category included Culture, acculturation stress, cultural shock mentoring, communication, cultural sensitivity, social skill orientation and assertiveness. All codes in this set were also generated from data collected from both groups of participants. Although there were many codes generated under this theme, there were very few codes that overlapped between the interview data and the focus group data.

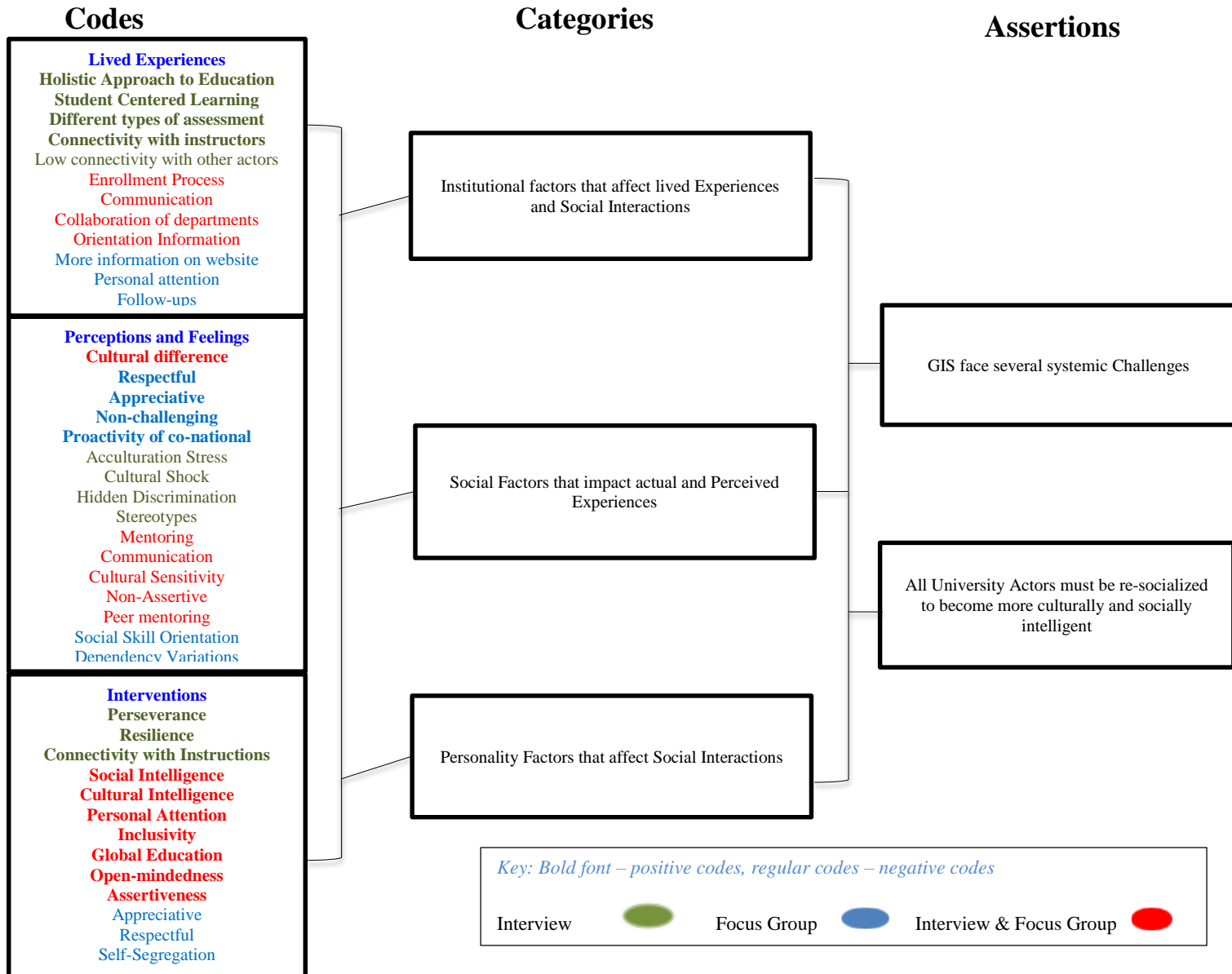


Figure 3. Conceptual Framework of Codes, Categories and Assertions.

Listed in Category III are codes that indicated the interventions needed to facilitate better social interactions in future. Most of these codes were affected by the current institutional culture based on the personality, behavior, and attitudes actors as they interact at Midwestern University. This set of codes was also generated based on all participants' contributions and they include, perseverance, resilience, and connectivity with instructors, connectivity with peers self-segregation, open-mindedness, social intelligence and cultural intelligence.

According to Yin (2004) an effective way to layout information in the findings section is to use the themes found in the data analysis as sub-headings. A discussion of each category was developed to explain the details of each set of codes with specific illustrations of the various participants' viewpoints and quotes (Creswell, 2008). Two assertions were made to show the connections between the three main categories found in the study. I reassessed the literature to find the relevant theories and explanations to support my findings. See Appendix E for the steps taken in this data analysis procedure.

Trustworthiness and Validity

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), qualitative research data collection is primarily based on human perspectives and description. According to Stake (2010) there is need to use several measures to show trustworthiness and credibility. Throughout this research, measures of credibility were used to establish trustworthiness. I used data triangulation as a measure for validity and trustworthiness (see figure 2). According to Yin (2014) "by developing a convergent evidence, data triangulation helps to strengthen the validity of the case study" (Yin, 2014, p.121)

I collected data from three sources. The three sources of data were interviews, focus group discussion and direct observation. The reason for using three data collecting methods was to provide better research outcomes as data collected from multiple sources (Stake, 2010), improves the credibility of the research results. After all the data was collected, member checking of transcripts and peer debriefing were used to mitigate issues of validity and reliability.

Member checking

I selected various participants to crosscheck transcripts to make certain that what was said is what was transcribed and the meanings were interpreted correctly. All necessary changes requested by participants were made so that transcripts were accurate reflections of their experiences and perspectives. This validation procedure provided me the chance to have more accurate information for my research.

Debriefing

My second trustworthiness and validity check was debriefing. Through whiteboard sessions, my advisor and I reviewed the data and analyzed it on several occasions (Skate, 2010). This enhanced the clarification of the data analysis and prevented missing information and/or misinterpretation. Through this process, my adviser facilitated the evaluation of my methodology for flaws and provided me feedback on the accuracy and credibility of some of the interpretations and findings I had in my study.

Ethical Considerations

I ensured that during the interview process no emotional or psychological distress ensued. Prior to the interview process, I gave participants an IRB approved consent form to read and I explained to them the underpinnings of the study. Participants were also

informed that they could opt –out of the study at any time without prejudice or repercussions. I also explained that they had the option of not answering questions that they felt uncomfortable.

To guarantee confidentiality, data and findings were only discussed with my advisor and dissertation committee. All the data were digitally recorded and stored on a password protected recording device. Pseudonyms for names and locations were used throughout the study. The only names used in the study were the names of the departments that played significant roles in participants’ experiences at Midwestern University.

Limitations

There were three main limitations to this research study. The first one is that the study was only limited to Midwestern University. Perhaps future studies should involve other Ghanaians studying at other mid-western universities, in order to gain a broader perspective of Ghanaian students’ experiences. The second limitation was that I did not include domestic students’ perspectives in the research, as this would have provided an additional dimension to the overall analysis. The third limitation observed was about time constraints. I am of the view that the study would have been conducted better longitudinally. If participants’ experiences had been tracked consistently throughout the trajectory of their experiences at Midwestern University, from the time they arrived on the campus, to the time they graduated, there would have been more information on participants’ experiences. I propose that because it would have provided a richer content/depth and context of participants’ experiences and encounters as they happened,

rather than asking for later recollection of these events, where some of the details may be lost.

Chapter III Summary

In this chapter, I provided details of the different methodological steps taken during the study. These steps included an overview of the study problem, research question, and research design. I also explained the procedures followed to gain access to and recruiting participants, and conducting the interviews and focus group discussion. Incorporated in this section also were processes used in data collection, data analysis comprising of groupings of codes, generation of three categories, and two assertions. The three evolving categories as well as the assertions made as a result of the relationships found between the categories are also listed. Other precautions taken to increase validity and credibility, as well as obvious limitations of the study were included as well.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Many studies including Osikomaiya (2014) and Constantine et al. (2004) on international student experiences and adjustment issues, have indicated that moving from one country to another poses many academic social, cultural, and personal challenges. Although many strategies have been proposed in the past to curb these challenges, they have not been uniformly successful. Sometimes looking for support through social interactions is the choice one has to make in order to maneuver and succeed in the new environment. Although social interactions are important in any human environment, particularly for international students, they are only useful if there is proper communication during these interactions.

Although social capital theory is the central theory used in this study, I have utilized the strength-of- the- weak-ties component by Lin (1999, 2001) as a locus in analyzing and explaining the findings in this research. This component shows that the types of social ties and social interactions between actors are mostly brief and impersonal. As actors interact with other, they form wider social networks, more social relationships and resources, which increase their social capital. These social interactions also gain them access into other prospective and embedded resources within the learning community, which they otherwise would have found to be unattainable.

The purpose of this embedded single case study was to gain a deeper insight into Ghanaian International Student’s experiences and social interactions they encounter with different actors in various institutional departments at Midwestern University. In this chapter, findings are presented from information synthesized from interviews, focus group discussions, and non-participant observation data. This chapter also includes a discussion of the three categories constructed from the results of the data analysis namely, institutional factors, social factors, and personal factors. The chapter begins with a brief description of demographic information of participants both from the interviews and the focus group. Demographic information is provided first for the interviewees, followed by the focused group participants.

There were two female and four male participants in the interviews. They were all graduate students in different academic departments across the Midwestern University campus. These students have been studying in their respective programs for at least two years. Table 3 provides a chart of their demographic information. Although participants gave various positive explanations for why they chose to come to the US and not any other developed nation to study, they all indicated that they came to the US on their own free will (reasons indicated in last column of Table 3 below).

Table 3. Demographic Information Table of Interviewees.

Name	Age	Gender	Length of Stay in the US	Program of Study	Reasons for Choosing the US
Kojo	36	Male	9	PhD	It is the epitome of knowledge in the whole world in terms of advancement and everything.

Table 3. cont.

Name	Age	Gender	Length of Stay in the US	Program of Study	Reasons for Choosing the US
Jude	32	Male	3	PhD	PhD in the US is a little bit different from other countries.
Marian	30	Female	2	Masters	I wanted to do a PhD in the US
Peter	34	Male	5	PhD	Generally what we see on our TVs and from the media, US is more open and people are well informed, know what they are doing. United States is number one in Science. Even though the West especially Europe is kind of catching up and they do a lot of science.
Abby	29	Female	6	PhD	I really wanted to do communication disorders and we don't have the program in Ghana, at least we didn't have it when I wanted to enroll in *it, which is why I came here to the states.
Charles	42	Male	4	PhD	My family moved to the United States

The interview participants in this study had all been impacted by various types of social interactions with actors in the different departments at Midwestern University.

They believed that although there were many positive effects of their education at this institution, there were some other factors that created issues and struggles for them. They thought that there is need for improvements in many respects. These are discussed subsequently.

Table 4 specifies demographics of focus group participants and positions they hold in their respective departments.

Table 4. Demographic Information of Focus Group Participants.

Name	Department	Position	Years of experience in this role
Elisse	Education	Director	4
Carl	International Center	Student Advisor	6
Beth	Library	Reference Librarian	22
Haily	Writing Center	Director	-
Sonia	Housing	Assistant director	38

Participants in this session also have had many interactions with GIS and other international students. Although they are not always, aware if the interactions with African international students are with Ghanaian students per se, most of them were able to recall encounters and experiences with particular Ghanaian students. Participants explained some of the situations that they encountered and how these situations could have been mitigated if certain factors had been put in place. These are also illustrated subsequently as I discuss the themes and code categories.

Category I: Institutional Factors that Affect Lived Experiences and Social Interactions

Institutional Factors that influence the lived experiences and social interactions are discussed in figure 4 below. The diagram portrays a list of codes provided by the different groups of participants of the study. It is indicated that as GIS come to Midwestern University to study they encounter many lived experiences as they interact with many actors during social interactions. Findings from this study indicated that institutional factor play a pivotal role in the overall experiences of their education.

As indicated earlier in the chapter, all interview participants mentioned that they came to study in the US of their own free will. Participants provided the institutional factors that have affected their experiences both positively and negatively.

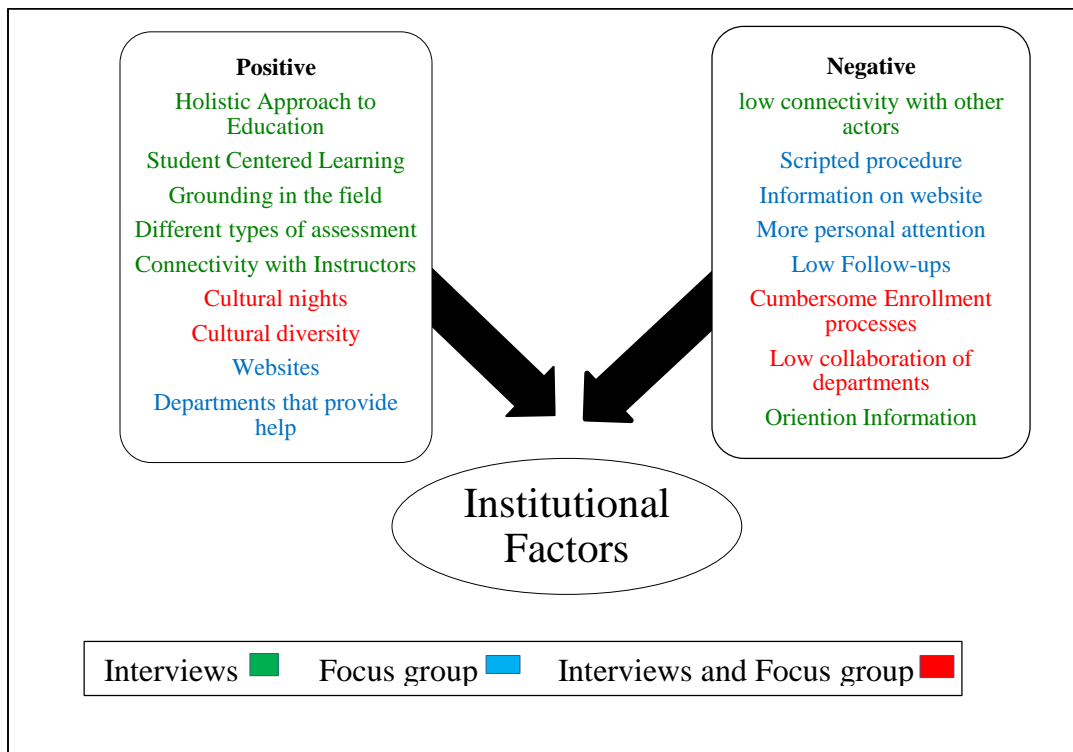


Figure 4. GIS lived experiences.

There were three sets of codes under institutional factors that affected participants' lived experiences. They are sub-divided by those pertaining mainly to interviewees (green), focus group (blue) and to both interviewees and focus group (red). The codes are explained and supported with quotes from participants. Although most of these codes are not mutually exclusive of each other, there is need to illustrate them separately. The findings for codes derived from the interviewees are discussed first, followed by those for the focus group and then finally those common to both interviewees and focus group. For subsequent categories, the process is repeated.

For the interviewees, five main codes evolved from the data. These were, a holistic approach to education, student-centered learning, grounding in the field, different types of assessment, and connectivity to instructors. These codes are discussed below.

Holistic Approach to Education and Grounding in the Field

Most GIS explained that there were major issues that influenced their experiences and caused them to stay in the US. They were particularly impressed with the holistic approach to education at Midwestern University. One participant said “the American system focuses more on getting you grounded in the field before you advance to doing the research and that is what I needed.” They realized that as they went through their extensive course work, they learned more in their academic programs, which grounded them better in their respective disciplines. They explained that though they had some experiences in higher education prior to coming to the US, they realized that the systems of education were different.

Participants explained that, although there is a move in Ghana where people can no longer hold faculty positions without a PhD, there was very little opportunity for them

to acquire these degrees in Ghana and so they have no other choice than to come to the US. While in the US institutions they are offered opportunities that the Ghanaian educational institutions did not provide for them. They explained that in the US, education was unique because everyone started at the same level and was required to do extensive coursework to broaden their knowledge base. GIS explained that in the US the educational structure consisted more of core and elective classes, which are tailored to provide a firm grasp of academic disciplines. They also explained that this would not have been the case in European universities, which are mainly focused on independent original research from the beginning of degree work, under the assumption that one already has some level of grounding in the academic discipline.

Due to the extensive coursework versus research requirement of US Universities compared to many other western universities, participants expressed that they were now capable of doing more in their disciplines because they were able to learn more about their disciplines through course work requirements. Participants explained that in most European universities, PhD education is more focused on doing research rather than teaching. As such they do not provide enough grounding through taught course work like in the US.

According to participants, coming from Ghana without rudimentary grounding in one's discipline and going into a research-focused environment would be problematic. Participants explained that in the US they are taught more through extensive coursework before being asked to do research. Abby explained that:

because my undergraduate [degree] was in linguistics and not communication disorders and the graduate program here is emm... focuses on doing course work

and I wanted to do that. That is why I decided to come here so that I benefit from the course work.

Jude added to this information when he said:

Because their PhD is a little bit different from other countries... so for what I wanted to study, I didn't have certain background. And if I go to Europe, I go straight into a PhD program because I had masters already. But if I came to the US, they don't consider your masters, they sort of start you right from the basics and try and teach you and ground you in the research so that's probably the main reason why...

Peter expands on this by saying "I think that is the best option we have. It helps us to kind of fit into the system because they assume you don't know anything. That is how they treat their own student too".

Participants further specified that at Midwestern University there were no assumptions made about students' abilities. They explained that regardless of place of origin all students in the program had to undergo the same amount of taught coursework to get grounded before attempting to do research in the discipline.

GIS believed that they were getting an all-around, grounded education, which did not only include their own academic intellect. They were taught other skills that would make them succeed in their disciplines. There were indications from all participants that innovative ways to study as well as access to study materials, preparing and delivering presentations, working in groups, and writing academically were several skills sets that their respective departments used to facilitate their learning to become professionals in their respective fields of study.

Participants were particularly awed at the fact that, not only did they get to know the various theoretical aspects in their fields of study, but they also got to know current practical applications of these theories in the industry and society, through visiting guest speakers and resource persons. They reported that this was an additional insight and advantage over getting educated in Ghana. GIS reported that they were also particularly impressed at the way information was completely demystified because the students were required to have a vested interest in their own education through research. For example, Charles said, “back home, there is a lot of emphasis on the theoretical basis of every work. We are forced to do what we call rote learning. We just try to memorize stuff and just reproduce. There is a disjoint between what is learnt in classroom and practical application.” He explained that while he was in school in Ghana, he learned passively and had very limited opportunities to see the practical implications of what he was studying. He is of the opinion that in the US students were required to play a more active role in their education. He said:

I realize that when I came, comparatively, education in the US, they are trying to find the linkage between what is actually in the classroom and the real world. And a lot of the work is also thrown at the students to do a lot of the digging. So, basically lecturers and professors only act as facilitators to guide you. The students do the bulk of the work. You do your own research and try to probe and to find out what is out in the world.

Peter furthers this argument when he remembered what he and his colleagues said:

we think we are having the best of PhD training. It is kind of structured, so by the time you are in your second year, you are done with your course work. We do

regular lab meetings, we do general club meetings every Monday, and we do work in progress every two weeks. So it kind of keeps you on your toes.

He continues saying:

So the basic tools you need in grad school like presentations and how to talk to people, is done on regular basis, every single week you are giving a talk. So by the time you are done, especially when you are close to defending your dissertation, you are not scared of going to fail or scared of going to speak to people because that's what you've been doing all the time.

Participants perceived that this approach to education provided them with a more robust training and it helped them to better understand what they were learning in many regards. This also helped them to develop a sense of confidence and competence.

Student Centered Learning

Many of the participants described that the way they were taught in the US was very different from when they were in their home country. They explained that in Ghana classes were predominantly teacher-centered. They said professors were seen as the citadel of knowledge and they were the ones that disseminated relevant information to their students. They also explained that students rarely were given the opportunity to challenge or evaluate the professor without being reprimanded.

In comparison, they saw that professors in the US served more as facilitators of knowledge, who encourage their students to become self-directed in their learning in many ways. For example Peter said that he saw classes to be:

more like student centered. Go read books, you are given books, websites... go read, come, let's sit down, let's discuss. In contrast to what we have back home,

the professor gives you what you have to know. Then you have to go read, produce it back. Here they give you the chance to explore, even things that are outside what they are teaching.

This goes to support Charles' argument that while in Ghana the learning style was rote and [he] rarely had the opportunity to question things. Peter also explained that his current professors were very understanding and encouraged their students to explore.

Peter explained that:

If you say something and have the answer wrong, they have a way of going around it. You could be wrong but they made it such that... you are not stupid for saying that. Nobody will tell you outright that that is wrong and don't do that and don't do this.

Another participant, Jude also explained that:

Here, the professor says something and you can disagree, he gives you the chance to express yourself and explain why you disagree and what you think it should be. If he's wrong, he will admit that he is wrong. I didn't have that environment back home.

In creating student-centered environments, students are encouraged and enabled to participate more in class discussions and articulate their ideas more as they learn. Participants explained that this was unlike the Ghanaian educational approach, which stemmed from a more teacher-centered perspective, where "the spotlight was on the teacher and the teacher's knowledge" with minimal emphasis on the learner. Jude said that one of the main differences he has observed while in the US was: "in Ghana,

questions are set for the student to fail. In the US they do everything possible to help students to succeed.”

While all participants articulated that they found the student-centered approach to be beneficial to their education some of them were skeptical that the approach could be detrimental to students in the long run. Abby explains that by allowing students to maneuver and determine what they want to learn, sometimes students shy away from ‘difficult’ topics. She explained that sometimes topics that are considered problematic are not taught or well explained. She validates this when she said:

I have seen professors here trying to please students to the detriment of the student themselves because they think that oh!, they are like, if they don’t do that to make students happy then they are not going to get good reviews and assessments. So they sometimes do it and you can clearly see that this is not going to help the students, so that is a different thing too... The professor lightens the load so much that student are really not putting in enough effort and emm..

It was explained that though not all professors do this, some professors are sentimental in their approach to education. One of the reasons provided for these emotions was about course evaluations. They are afraid of getting unfavorable evaluations from their students and so they reduce the workload by not being stringent in their expectations. Although doing this may not necessarily be in the best interest of their students. Abby added:

I would say that usually professors who are people pleasers do that. They just want to lighten the load so much that you’ll realize that you are losing out, this is not something that emm should be taken out, it’s difficult but you should be allowed to embark on it ...something like that.

Assessment

GIS also explained that another main factor affecting their academic performances was the fact that they were given different forms of assessment. Participants were particularly happy because of the non-comprehensive nature of their exams and multiple levels of assessments helped to portray their strengths in their academic programs. Participants believed that they were able to achieve high scores since they had fewer materials to read per test, which was not the case in Ghana.

Jude explained the practice in his department:

We tend to have blocks and you take exams per that block, you don't really have to worry about that in your final exams. So at the end of the day you tend to have lots of assignments, you have lots of tests and this sort of reduces like the requirement for each block to make the A or B or whatever you need, whereas in Ghana there are certain courses [where] you don't even take a test, or an interim assessment. You just write final exams, which is just straight point 100....

He continues comparing the assessment process in the US to Ghana and explains that the process in US did not usually involve comprehensive examinations. He said:

so what you do in block one, you are not going to write the final exams in block four or block two or block three. But in Ghana it is a whole huge textbook, you are expected to know everything by the end of the semester and that is sometimes crazy.

Connectivity to Instructors

Another strong factor that students expressed was the fact they felt very connected to their professors in comparison to their peers. They found that unlike their previous

experiences in Ghana, they felt very comfortable approaching their instructors about concerns or ideas they had about their courses. Participants described that there was a good “adviser to student ratio.” Charles elaborated on this factor by saying that the informal setting in the classrooms allowed students to open up during class discussions and other social interactions with the professors. He stressed that during discussions with students:

a faculty member acts like a facilitator and there is a wider leverage for discussion so that even when an idea is put forward in class, it is expected that it is supposed to be debated and new ideas are welcomed, new ideas are welcome. Nothing is “stupid.” No, whatever idea is thrown in the classroom is subject to debate with intention of broadening the knowledge base and expanding on literature. So those are some of the fundamental differences. And we have quite a less formalized atmosphere [here] in teaching. The relationship between students and professors is informal; first name basis, which is rare in Ghana.

There were other institutional factors that were discussed by both sets of participants which were about the institutional behavior and attitudes. For example, both focus group and interview participants had similar views about some of the institutional factors. All participants thought that the university websites needed more information and explanation that is more detailed. They also believed that as service providers they needed to move away from the scripted institutional ways of interacting with students, and provide a more personalized service to students. They perceived that students needed more personalized attention and one way of ensuring that was to create a system where

students were provided with follow-ups on their inquiries to facilitate more positive student experiences.

Participants from housing and the international programs departments provided the strongest views on this factor. They explained that there needed to be more information on their respective departmental websites. These suggestions were provided in response to issues they have encountered with international students. They were of the view that although their websites provided basic information that students needed in order to interact with their departments, there was need for more proactivity when it came to addressing issues with international students. They explained that most international students did not find their websites to be as interactive as they should be.

Personal Attention

Focus group participants also explained that sometimes they have followed certain scripted procedures in doing things because of institutional and legal restrictions. They spoke about issues regarding giving out information or personnel information about other students, which they cannot share with other people. Other times they feel they just do the bare minimum in providing services.

This behavior sometimes results in their inability to provide the much-needed personalized attention to the students they encounter to help them to successfully navigate their education. For example, Sonia tried to throw light on some of the issues that were responsible for restrictions in providing personal attention saying: “you know we have some legal restrictions” “... we really cannot give out [personal] information”. She explained that sometimes they felt handicapped by the situations they encountered

with international students because of institutional regulations such as Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

Collectively, focus group participants also admitted that sometimes, they had observed they had not really been of help to the students who had come to their offices. They attributed this to the fact that, although they sensed that they did not provide students with their requested services, they failed to go the extra mile for these students to see what else could be done or follow up . Beth explained that sometimes this happened because the actors did not want to appear as if they were treating international students differently. Other times they simply failed to see them as a sub-group of students that may be in need of extra assistance compared to domestic students. Elisse also added to this when she said, “I have also always thought that maybe we could also do more but I also do not want international students to feel like they are some isolated group that should be treated differently than US domestic students and citizens.”

Some of the participants also spoke about occasions when they had gone out of their way to provide personal assistance, different from what they would normally do for domestic students. They said that they were glad they did because these special attention and interactions yielded more positive results than they had anticipated.

One participant described efforts she personally put into her programs to help international students. Haily explained that as part of her duties, she interacted many times with international students and she saw the need to develop her staff to serve her clients better. She said:

As a coordinator of the Writing Center one of my goals was to help the writing consultants work effectively with student writers from various cultural and

linguistic backgrounds, which of course includes our international students. I built a lot of activities towards this purpose into our initial training and ongoing staff development.... basically what I tried to do is to recognize that international students are a diverse group and not make assumptions. I try to get to know each student as an individual and find out what he or she needs to meet specific goals.

Elisse also narrated her personal encounter with a GIS who was bereaved and was sitting somewhere all by himself. She explained that she was aware of the student's situation and decided to go sit with him and talk about his family and saw his demeanor change a little. She also mentioned that she probably would not have done this with a domestic student. After her narration, I told her that this was a good thing for the student because in Ghanaian culture it was important that a bereaved person not be alone and saw throughout the first stages of the bereavement. He or she had people visiting constantly to keep him or her company.

Follow-up

One main concern participants had was on many occasions, there were no follow-ups to check on students who had come for help. It was agreed that the institution needed to embrace the culture of following-up with students they encounter, in order to ensure that things were working well with them. Both groups explained that on occasions, some actors make recommendations and/ or they referred students to other departments where they could be helped if they are unable to provide the assistance themselves. Some GIS complained that once they got referred they were on their own. They typically did not get any follow-up to see the outcome of their referral. Focus group participants also

reinforced this point in their discussions. Haily narrated her personal experience as follows

With one African international student (I'm not sure which country he was from), the other WC staff and I had a problem with helping him use the university's login and our scheduling system. There were multiple attempts to resolve the issue, some miscommunication (I think), and he got pretty upset during the whole process.

Haily further explained that sometimes when international students come to their department not all issues are readily resolved because the problem is not very obvious. This sometimes results in some frustrations and misunderstandings. She continued talking about the incident, saying:

It seemed to us he thought we were blocking his access to the Writing Center, but we had determined he needed help with the university-wide log-in, and we had to refer him to university tech support. Once you have to refer a student to a different university service, it is hard to stay part of the interaction.

Other participants also mentioned that although they were aware of the need to follow up on their students, they did not do so because of time constraints. One participant had this to say, "I guess sometimes we have the follow up but sometimes we don't get a time to do the follow up."

Other institutional factors evolving were those common to both GIS and focus group participants. These are enrollment processes and procedures, communication, collaborations and orientations. For enrollment processes, both groups of participants acknowledged that they were extensive and cumbersome in many ways. The issues that

were discussed by both groups included practical processes like check points for international students, visa requirements, and general information for the international system. The representative from the international students' programs explained that there are different phases that international students encounter in the US educational system. He explained that in the initial phases interactions typically are about cultural orientations and as they progress the interactions focus more on immigration needs for employment. Carl expressed that:

We first meet the international students when they arrive on campus that is held at the international students Center. Typically they are jetlagged at that point in time and typically they are kind of in the honeymoon phase of cultural shock and we do a lot of cultural orientation with them at that point in time, and then as they progress through the end degree program we focus more on what the immigration needs are and what the employment needs and what the opportunities are and so it gets more into the serious conversation at the end the degree programs.

Both groups of participants believed that more should be done to alleviate the issues that have evolved as a result of current enrollment processes. Although the interviewees also talked about these same issues, the general perception was that the international center provided them services that mainly concerned the visa status issues.

Abby explained saying "... I think the international office is the biggest asset to the international student obviously, in the sense that like... I really don't patronize their services a lot so I don't know much. But according to what they advertise or what they let us know, they are there for immigration things."

Most GIS felt that when it came to other academic issues concerning enrollment, they were generally left to fend for themselves and the international center did not do enough to advocate on their behalf. This was of concern to them to the extent that they only go to the international center when they have visa related issues. They believed that there needed to be a unit within the international programs office, which catered to general social support situations that had nothing to do with the legal and institutional requirements of being an international student.

Communication and Collaboration with Other Departments

All participants acknowledged that communication was an existent problem between host actors and international students, which needed to be addressed. GIS believed that during communications they had very good command of the English language, because they had always communicated in English. They also believed that they were able to speak effectively and articulate their issues when interacting with actors around campus. GIS reported the host actors sometimes did not view their perceptions of their levels of proficiency in the same light. These created feelings of frustration, alienation and isolation, especially when others could not understand them as well and complained about their accent being too thick to make them comprehensible.

They explain that ironically, where as they tried to understand domestic actors' "slang" when they spoke, they in turn did not put in as much effort to understand them. Kojo explained that on one occasion when he was looking for directions, he had approached someone, the person looked at him and said. "...I cannot understand what you are saying, please can you speak English?" Kojo reported that he was offended by the actor's response because he believed he had been very articulate in his interaction.

Two of the focus group participants mentioned that with GIS students, although the issues was not with their language proficiency per se, they still had issues understanding them because of their accent. One focus group participant said:

I always try to keep in mind that whereas I am always working with these rules and regulations, they might be brand-new for the incoming international student and it can be difficult for them to try to understand what they all mean.

Another participant supported this when she narrated what she did when she encountered issues interacting or communicating with international students. “I try to direct them towards people [domestic actors] who have had some international experience because I think they are more understanding of the experiences and challenges that international students have [since] they themselves have lived in another country”.

Collaboration

On issues of collaboration, GIS said they had observed that very little collaboration existed between the different service providers. They explained that though all departments claimed to be welcoming of diversity, efforts were done in silos, and this resulted in very little collaboration between departments. They said that even when students needed to be referred to other departments, there was very little coordination between the departments. Charles was of the opinion that even when unusual situations occurred and it was in the interest of the affected department to take initiative to investigate in order to educate staff, actors were reluctant to seek out the necessary information in order to make informed and educated decisions on how best to resolve the problem. He recalled an incident that he had encountered with his dependent spouse visa when he was trying to register for the academic year. He said:

I remember during my masters' program, I had a problem with my status. There was confusion with my international students' status. I went to the school of graduate studies; it used to be graduate school, they really couldn't find where to place me in terms of my international student status.

He shared that unlike many other international students, he had come on a different non-immigrant visa as a dependent of his spouse who was then working in the US. He further explained:

I actually didn't come in on what is called an international students visa (F1). I had a wife who was working here so my status is quite different from an international student...This was something that they were not used to so they didn't really understand it and it was creating problems for me as an international student. I went to the graduate school and they were virtually beating around the bush. It was only when another international student who had the same problem came and explained to them that they acted.

Charles believed that the department should have been more proactive and acted more aggressively and assertively but they did not. Other participants gave similar encounters to that effect as well. Participants said they also believed that when issues occurred, they had access to very little information on what they could do to alleviate their problems. To support this claim, the focus group participants also agreed that more needed to be done in this regard.

Sonia shared that although they encountered several issues they could not handle by themselves as a department, "sometimes we refer these students to other departments. We should collaborate more with each other in order to help our students." This

statement supported what GIS said about a need for departments to collaboration more with each other.

Category II: Social Factors that Impact Actual and Perceived Experiences

Category II shows the impact of social factors on actual and perceived experiences. There are three sets of codes in Category II. Figure 5 illustrates codes in Category II and they are subsequently presented below and supported with quotes from participants. This set of codes are also grouped according to whether they represented positive or negative connotations in the study. This set of codes are also grouped according to those more focused on participants from the interviews (green), focus group (blue) and the last group of codes are factors common to both focus group discussions and interviews (red).

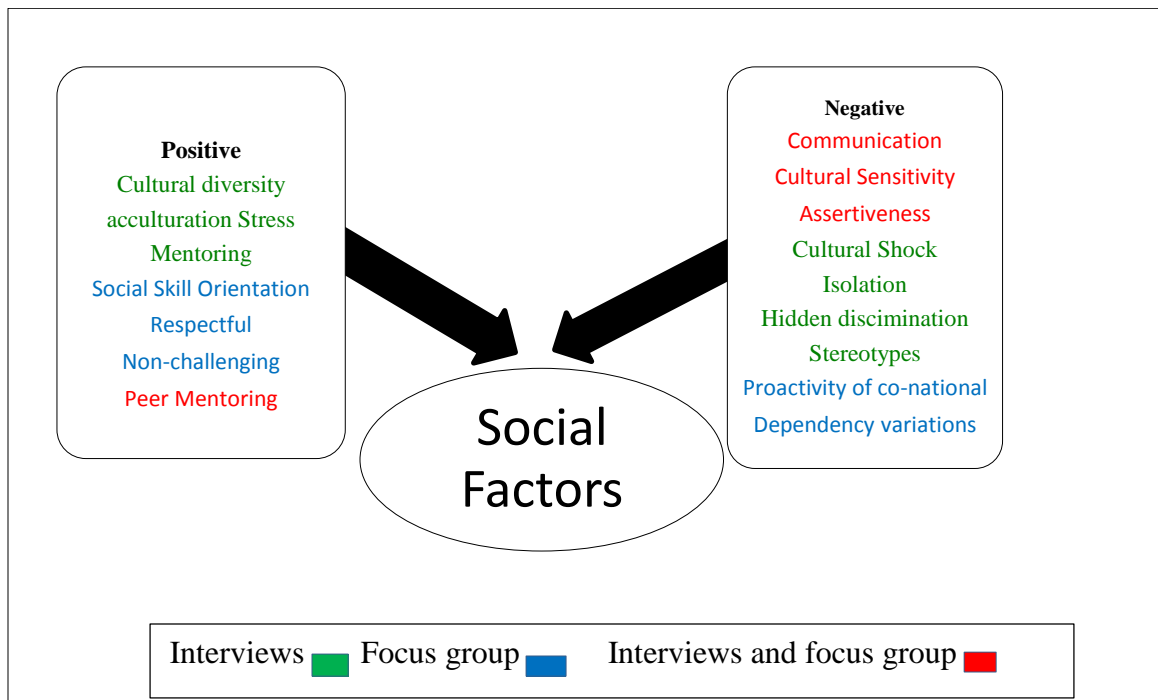


Figure 5. Social factors that impact interactions.

Culture, Acculturation Stress, & Cultural Shock

Most participants expressed that culture and other related factors such as acculturation and cultural shock were factors that affected their social interactions in many ways. For most GIS, they had been very aware when they were leaving home to come to the US where they would be in a different culture. Some participants even said that they were surprised that it was fairly easy for them to leave Ghana to go abroad. They explained that between cultures transitioning seemed longer than they had anticipated and this caused them to encounter issues.

GIS expressed their disappointment over this, saying that, when they first arrived, although they could feel that the environment was different, they were very optimistic of the future. Carl explained that this as the honeymoon phase that most international students experience when they first arrived in the US. What participants could not understand was the length of time it took to adjust to the culture, ways of doing things, and other environmental changes. One participant said that he believed now that one never got used to the American culture. Abby said she thought she understood and said, “I knew I was going in after something and that was my focus. It was pretty easy for me. The transition here was not, but the decision to leave home was.” They explain that they tried to integrate into the US culture in many ways but this has not been easy. They also mentioned that leaving their homeland to come to a different country was not an easy decision for them to make. Abby expressed that though speaking English was not an issue for her, the biggest concern she had was adjusting to the food and people’s behavior.

Kojo said the most surprising thing to him was the way people talked. He explained that sometimes when he went to an office to talk with people, they were very reluctant to talk with him, and if they did, they only did because their jobs required them to, “they are doing their jobs” “they are very professional”. He believed that compared to what happens in Ghanaian culture, relationships were very superficial and people only treated you certain ways because their jobs required them to do that. He explained “because you come from a different cultural background, when things are being done in a different way, you feel very, very uncomfortable”. Jude further elaborates on this same issue by saying:

We come from a totally different culture. We come from a culture where we take someone who is even not a relative as an auntie or as an uncle because the person was extra helpful [or the] person was nice, whatever. You come into this culture you realize that everything is professional.It doesn't exist. ...I mean, one or two people can be extra courteous to you but I have just come to learn here that people can be smiling with you but that smile is supposed to be there because of their job, that's how they are supposed to be perceived.

Marian also expressed that “they mostly only discussed safe topics like the weather.... I get tired always talking about the weather.”

Stereotypes, Hidden Discrimination and Isolation

With the exception of one person, most participants were very open about their perceptions of prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination. Interviewees recounted experiences of their social interactions where they felt that they were treated differently. These encounters stemmed from a variety of issues, including low academic performance

expectations, class discussions, ignored during peer-to-peer interactions where they expected them to be ignorant on issues being discussed or their views discounted, extra scrutiny by professors on class assignments, louder than normal interactions with other actors.

Peter perceived that sometimes people are just extra careful in hiding their prejudices and discriminations. He said:

some are careful; I must say especially the professors. In the early stages they are too careful not to let you have the impression, they are discriminating against you. Sometimes, I think they are over protective. Even when they have to tell you something directly, they find a way of saying it so it doesn't hurt you much or it doesn't look like they are doing it because you are black or because you are from Africa or somewhere.

Though most GIS were frank in narrating incidents that had occurred regarding prejudices and discrimination, one participant did not partake in openly discussing his feelings on these issues. Although he did not openly talk about his encounter, his nonverbal cues and nonchalant way he answered coupled with a deep sigh indicated that he may have harbored some reservations about the same issues.

Some GIS said that they recognize that they were being treated this way because there was a general lack of diversity in at Midwestern University and people generally did not know how to work with individuals like them. Peter explained that

I think they are very nice and warm, courteous....they are nicer than we thought...Even though sometimes they ask some annoying questions may be they do not mean it that way they just ask out of ignorance. I remember there was a

time when we went for conference in San Francisco. While on the flight, one of my colleagues asked me; Peter is this your first flight? So I just said well I didn't swim across the Atlantic oceans when I was coming.

Others felt that it was more a matter of prejudice stemming from stereotypes people have about African Americans in particular and black people in general. One participant said that on one occasion another international student had mentioned to him that if he had never met him he would not have known that there were smart people in Africa. He said that although this was a contemptuous statement, he just shrugged it off and presumed that the individual was making the inference out of sheer ignorance. Other participants also explained that sometimes they realize that these encounters happened inadvertently.

Jude explained that:

... I don't know if we should judge from the professors or the student but I can tell from my observation that it's just prejudice that they've grown up with or carried over on what they've seen on TV or social media and things like that, that emm... Africa is a third world country and third world countries don't have good education and so students there are not...don't do very well emm... don't do as well as the American students.

He continues by blaming some of these behaviors on racial stereotypes that provide notions about race and abilities. He also explained that, "so they would expect Chinese or Asian people to be good at math and or maybe emm...Indians to be.... and East Asian people to be good at math, Indians to be good at engineering and just things like that.

Although this was a serious issue, it was said in a humorous way indicating that the participant did not think of it as malicious insult but rather an act of ignorance. Jude continues by saying light heartedly:

Africans don't have any of those, actually they think that Africans are dumb, so I guess that's the expectation they have of every African they meet. My friend said that 'every African is dumb unless proven otherwise so that is basically how... that's what I think once they see you... you know there's been studies on accents; different accents and how they are perceived and I think that the African accent even though it's not the same even though it sounds the same to them, I don't know.

He adds a little humor saying with a nod, "but the African accent plus maybe the color has the perception of unintelligent... I think and so..."

Mentoring

Mentoring was another social factor that GIS perceived to be a main determinant of their social outcomes in the US. Participants recalled that that sometimes they were able to cope in some of the social interactions they encountered because someone had mentored them well about that those types of situations. Some of the participants explained that they had mentors in other universities in the US with whom they have been discussing incidents and issues.

Peter narrated the pivotal role his Ghanaian mentor in another US university has been playing throughout his academic journey in the US. He explained that his mentor had been an international student himself for a while in the US. As such he had been advising him based on his own experiences in higher education in the US. Peter

explained that although he was not staff at Midwestern University he had mentored him prior to his starting the PhD program. He also explained that he has continued to maintain a rapport with him through constant social interactions. He explains that mentorship was a beneficial component in his training saying:

I think it's a very big advantage. I've tried very hard to maintain that relationship. Until now he is one of my references that I use everywhere. He has still provided that guidance and direction even till today. I call him on his house phone and everything. We are that close. So that early interaction I had with him about, this is how PhD in the United States works...I still use that advice.

Other GIS also mentioned that they were mentored prior to coming to Midwestern University. Those who said they were mentored before coming into their respective program reported that they were cautioned about some of the social encounters that could happen while in the US. They also mentioned in some instances they had been schooled on how best to manage these issues when they happened. Others also mentioned that "they knew where they came from", and having gone through rigorous training in Ghana, both at their homes and schools, they were able to handle issues when they occurred. So they were not too surprised when they had these problems.

Participants in the focus groups also had social factors that they believed affected GIS social interactions and experiences. They explained that most of the encounters they had with most African students, and GIS in particular, showed that they were very respectful and non-challenging. They also said GIS were appreciative of everything that was done for them. Although being respectful and non-challenging on the surface seem

like good attributes, it is my perception that there is more to the use of these grammatical expressions.

Based on the way the word “respectful” was used coupled with literature on collectivistic cultural behavior (Hall, 1989), I believe that participants used this word as a cover for lack of assertiveness. Elisse mentioned that in an earlier encounter with a GIS she was baffled about why the individual would not speak up in a class discussion. She said it was only when another student mentioned to her that he would only speak up after he was asked to answer a question (because cutting into a discussion was rude) that she realized she had to go the extra mile to get him to join in class discussions.

Other participants also held the view that although GIS were respectful in many ways, there was a need for more social skill orientation for this sub-group of students because sometimes their unassertive behavior (which may be cultural) could get in the way of many social interactions. In addition, they explained that though most international students they encountered had more dependency on their assistance than domestic student groups, it looked like GIS tend to have higher dependency on their services because of lack of proactivity of their co-nationals. Sonia elaborated on this when she mentioned that although some groups of international students relied solely on personnel in her department for their needs, some other international groups were more cohesive and they usually had co-nationals within the group that did most of the coordination for her department.

Through reports narrated by both groups of participants two main concepts evolved as findings of social factors affecting social interactions experiences. These were cultural and social intelligences. The use of these concepts in daily interactions created

problems regarding communication, cultural sensitivity, cross-cultural efficacy and assertiveness. These are discussed below.

Although both groups of participants explained that communication remained a social factor, there were divergent views on the issue. For interviewees, they felt that they were unable to interact well with other participants because they perceived that these interactions were not very informative to them unless they had to do with their academic demands. These participants recalled that most of the interactions they encountered that went well were very formal and had to do with specific services such the health or academics. One participant recalled that when they had class discussions, it surprised him that people would speak about a subject even if they did not know much about the issues discussed. He mentioned that for him, he only spoke up if he had something substantial to say.

Another participant also mentioned that during certain interactions, other students sometimes got more favored because they told their story. “Ghanaians do not tell their story” “we are not taught to tell our story” and that is why much is not known about their abilities. For focus groups, they believed that the culture of respect made the GIS not as assertive as they ought to be. Most of the time they had to initiate the conversations before GIS would answer. One participant mentioned that if she had never met me she would have always held a different view of GIS students as very “respectful.” But because she had met and interacted with me, she felt she could discuss anything without being careful of what she said.

Another element that surfaced within both groups was mentorship. Although both groups reported that there was a dire need for peer mentorship to enhance their

international students' experiences, not all programs employed this method of integration in their respective programs. Only one representative from the focus group reported that they were currently using peer mentorship as a program for new and incoming transfer international students. Some of the GIS explained that on a few occasions they have encountered situations where some GIS served informally as peer mentors.

Category III: Personality Factors that Influence Social Interaction

The last category of codes was personality factors that affect social interactions experiences and consequent academic successes. These are also sub-divided into three color coded groups as illustrated in figure 6 below.

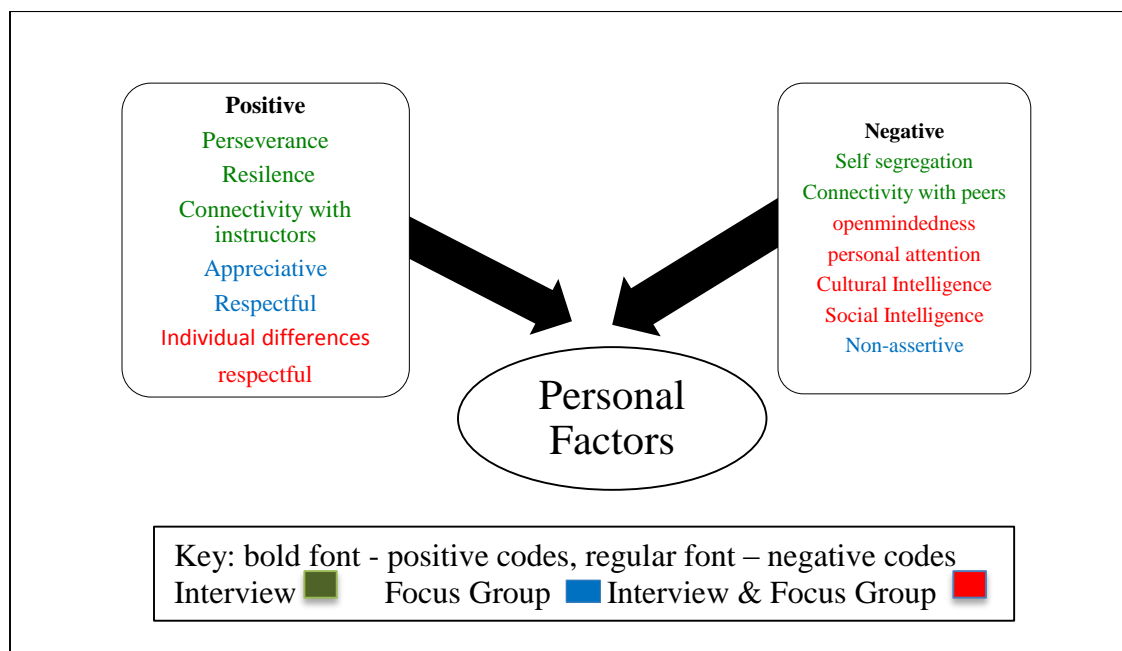


Figure 6. Personality factors that influence social interaction.

Interviewees explained that although they often encountered difficult situations, while studying in the US, they were able to cope with these adverse situations because of

sheer perseverance and resilience. Sometimes during these encounters, they turned to other co-nationals for assistance when they perceived that they were not getting adequate attention from actors across campus.

GIS also explained that although at times interacting with instructors tends to be much easier than interacting with peers, they persist to facilitate these interactions because that is the only way they feel they can successfully navigate their education. One participant explained that the best advice he ever got while at Midwestern University were those he got from his academic advisor. He explained that the advisor went out of his way to tell other students about his abilities and this created a very positive image for him in his department. He further explained that once he had this leverage over his other colleagues, things became much easier for him in the department. He was able to talk to other professors easily about his goals and seek their expert advice on issues surrounding these goals.

Another student explained that over time, persistent interactions with faculty begin to bear fruit. Jude explained that: “after like a year or two, when you’ve proven to people that you are not dumb”. Jude explained that when one proves to be academically good over time professors begin to have more confidence in his or her abilities. They are more willing to steer them in certain academic directions that would make them more successful because other people also become interested in helping you navigate the process involved to becoming successful. Jude stated, “if you were given exposure like other people had, you would have excelled. You will be exceptional... Now people open up to you. You can walk to any office. Now they treat you like any other person. The other advantage is you try to get more results.”

Self-segregation

On the issue of self-segregation, participants reported that by self-segregation they saved themselves embarrassment from some host actors, were able to build stronger bonds with some co-nationals, and were able to open up to fellow GIS more. This is because they perceive that they all encounter similar situations and so they are able to discuss among themselves and find salient solutions to their predicaments. Others opined that this behavior is detrimental in many ways because in doing this, one is only limited to information that co-nationals have. One participant explained that it is important that in such situations one endeavors to seek help from other actors across campus as well, because these actors may have more beneficial information.

For the focus groups also, emerging personal factors included appreciative, respectful personal attention and open-mindedness. This group of participants explained that because the GIS encountered are so respectful and appreciative of services they rendered to them, they are always willing to help them, if they are able. They also mentioned that they realized not all GIS are open-minded about seeking their help. As well, they explained that they realized that some GIS were more assertive than others and are able to go out on their own to talk to different actors when they need help. Others tend to keep more to themselves.

The housing office representative also mentioned that she has observed that “some student groups are more dependent, too.” They mentioned that they realize in their dealing with international student groups, that some groups are very cohesive and have co-nationals who are themselves very assertive and helpful. They served as liaisons and peer mentors, sharing in some of the dependency and welfare responsibilities of their co-

nationals. This reduces the level of dependency the international students from these groups put on their respective offices.

The representative of the international office explained that although they call for peer mentors every year, he has never seen a peer mentor who was a GIS. He also added that perhaps it was because most of the GIS at Midwestern University were graduate students with very busy schedules. Although they identified that this particular factor was an individual trait, as an institution, there was need to enhance student's social skill orientation in order to facilitate better transitioning outcomes for GIS students and other international students as a whole. Some also mentioned that although they cannot speak for everybody in their departments, they were willing to provide more personalized attention to these individuals to help them to succeed at Midwestern University.

For the GIS, the story was slightly different. One participant mentioned that on one occasion, "I was told that they were working with one student from Ghana for the cultural night. I asked who the person was but they would not say" "You cannot ask them who the Ghanaians on campus were... They will not tell you. ...You will have to seek them out yourself". This statement supports Sonia's earlier explanation that there are some institutional restrictions that prevents them from divulging certain information about Midwestern University students. It indicates that although GIS try to integrate into their community by first bonding with co-nationals but sometimes, bottlenecks from institutional regulations prevents this from happening, thus increasing their dependence on other actors in the community for most of their assistance.

There were two main personal factors that evolved for both groups of participants. These were social intelligence and cultural intelligence. Both groups of participants

believed that when institutions start to admit international students there was need to create awareness for all parties involved. They perceived that all parties needed to be interested in knowing more about the type of individuals they are going to be working with. In support of this, one focus group participant explained that “Generally, though, I have always enjoyed working with international students because I like getting to know people from different cultures, and I feel that talking to international students about writing has helped me learn not only about their cultures but also about my own.”

All actors involved within the institution need to have some level of cultural intelligence and social intelligence to be able to interact effectively. Although for now this remains a personal endeavor on most fronts, these efforts need to become institution wide efforts so as to become beneficial to all groups of students.

Systemic and Contextual Challenges

Throughout this research, findings indicate that although GIS are content that they are getting a US education, there are several contextual and social differences that need to be addressed in order to enhance their experiences. There is a general perception that most of the obstacles they encounter in their academic journey can be alleviated if actors were more sensitive and empathetic towards them. Findings also indicated that although the attributes of sensitivity and empathy are attainable, there are fundamental institution-wide changes that need to take place to make the campus atmosphere and culture more conducive and these are discussed subsequently.

First, although most GIS demonstrated that they were attracted to come to the US to study mainly based on the reputation of the US educational system, they realize that there are structural deficiencies that created intercultural problems. Participants explained

that they were surprised at the inadequacy of the social and cultural infrastructure at the institution. Most of the systemic problems identified were as a result of the structures of institutional programs, academic courses and behaviors of actors as a result of these existing institutional structures.

Secondly, there were also several social differences identified throughout many of the social interactions because participants in the interactions are unaware of their social differences during the interactions. Participants are of the view that although there is a growing presence of international students, current institutional programs on diversity are unable to equip actors with the level of exposure, assertiveness, and cross-cultural efficacy necessary for successful social interactions. They perceive that if the institution were to increase efforts in promoting diversity by introducing programs that yield attainable competencies in social and cultural skills. Gaining these skills may lead to better intercultural interactions since these structural issues create numerous contextual problems during social interactions.

Apart from contextual issues, participants also observed social differences as another main cause of failed social interactional. Findings indicated that the way individuals are socialized plays a very important role in their social interactions. (Hall, 1989) indicated that culture exist within a continuum, from high context to low context. For GIS coming from a high context culture where people are deeply involved with each other, there are cohesive relationships among people, certain behaviors during social interactions may seem alienating because of the way they have been socialized to think and act with other people.

Hall (1989) explains that individuals from collectivistic cultures typically are high context during their social interactions. He also explains that people from high context backgrounds believe in high commitment expectation and mutual goodwill when interacting with other people. They are socialized to have strong self-control and avoid direct confrontation in order to maintain harmony. In these cultures, also, information is generated and disseminated widely through simple messages with deep meanings, not limited to verbal and non-verbal cues such as bodily gestures, tone of voice and demeanor. For instance, individuals from collectivistic culture are taught to read more into nonverbal communication when interacting. These attributes are manifested in most of the GIS' behaviors revealed in the study, including lack of assertiveness, non-challenging and respectfulness as explained in the findings.

For domestic actors, coming from a low context society, which is highly individualized, they are socialized to communicate clearly and impersonally. They are also socialized to have more fragile social bonds in comparison to others from high context societies. According to Hall, because of the low cultural context socialization that most domestic actors have received, they believe they are at liberty to withdraw from an interaction if they perceive that it is not going well because they usually have less feelings of commitment to it based on the socialization. In addition to this, Hall further described people from low context backgrounds to generally not want to undergo self-examination and take responsibility for things they perceive they have no obligation to do.

Despite all these social differences, Ang, Van Dyne, Koh, Ng, Templer, Tay, & Chandrasekar (2007) indicated that individuals could become socially intelligent based

on re-socialization and increased social knowledge and / or awareness. Though some researchers have argued that social intelligence is society specific, I am of the view that one can be re-socialized to gain this skill as it allows individuals to gain certain competencies that are needed for effective communication during cross-cultural relationships and interactions. Boyatzis (2008) explains that social intelligence which he defined as the ability to "recognize, understand and use emotional information about others that leads to or causes effective or superior performance (p.8)," promotes competencies such as social awareness and relationship management. He further explains that these competencies are generally manifested through attributes such as empathy, proactivity, and teamwork. Hence, if all actors at Midwestern gained a sense of social responsibility and awareness as they become more socially intelligent, they would be empathetic and proactive towards each other regardless of the socio-cultural socialization and background. Findings in this study stress the need for all actors to possess this intelligence in order to interact successfully.

The above-mentioned contextual differences also confirmed that an important element missing within the context of Midwestern University learning community was the cultural intelligence to facilitate better intercultural social interactions. Ang et al. (2007) stated in their study that cultural intelligence consists of an aggregate of three components: metacognitive, motivational, and behavioral intelligences. In order to have metacognitive cultural intelligence there are several thought processes individuals must undergo in trying to understand a person from a different culture.

In the context of GIS interacting with US domestic actors, both parties have to undergo these thought processes during any interactions they encounter and create ways

to interact successfully. Although sometimes these cognitive exercises may include cultural specific knowledge, often, a mere coherence in reasoning and ability to read cues correctly during communication goes a long way to enhance the conversations. The findings from this study suggest that sometimes actors are unable to successfully undergo these thought processes, and end up frustrating other efforts of communicating during social interactions.

Another aspect of cultural competency is motivational cultural competency. This is the “capability to direct attention and energy toward learning about and functioning in situations characterized by cultural differences (Ang et al, 2007, p.4).” The authors explain that for successful social interactions to occur, one needs to recognize and understand the differences in cultures and feel the need to be engaged in the interaction.

They also mentioned that there must be a genuine interest to be engaged with the other person. Bandura (2002) also explained that actors who show genuine interest in their interactions tend to have confidence in their high cross-cultural efficacy, which helps in motivation to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds in the first place. The findings suggest that sometimes the social interactions occurring between GIS and other actors fail because either one or both parties are unwilling to engage fully in the interactions when issues are ‘not business as usual’. Sometimes these happen inadvertently because they might have misread the nonverbal cues prior to or during the process of interaction.

In addition to being motivated, Ang et al. illuminated that only feeling motivated to interact with others from different cultural back grounds does not make an individual culturally intelligent. They explain that one actually needs to carry out appropriate

actions both verbally and non-verbally within specific settings. Some of these appropriate behaviors are not limited to tone of voice, gestures, facial expressions, and language use.

GIS expressed disappointment during some interactions when people seem unwilling to engage in the interactions in the first place. They also explained that during these interactions sometimes the information sought is inadequate. They explained that whereas some actors may give them directions on alternative places to seek help or alternative ways to solve their issues, others are not as informative.

GIS also perceive that more could and should be done. They believe that more attention should be given to them and even if the actors they speak to are not able to provide the needed assistance themselves, there is need for them to try to direct them elsewhere. This is because there is the general perception that as host actors, they were in a better position to know more about other beneficial on- campus resources. GIS reported that in the throes of their pressure, anxiety, and uncertainty, the student sometimes leaves actors' offices feeling dissatisfied and frustrated.

The lack of coordination ensuing from these interactions creates problems and adversely affects the students' social experiences and subsequent academic experiences. Domestic actors also explained that sometimes these issues happen because they were unwilling to go the extra mile for various reasons expressed in the findings.

Another point supporting this evidence was when GIS expressed perceptions that they had to constantly prove or validate themselves during most of these interactions, because of difficulty in communicating or articulation of their ideas. These difficulties stem from their accent or use of English words that are not common to the American English grammar. To elaborate further on this point a participant gave her encounter at

the Speak Test, which was required by her department for her graduate teaching assistant position. She said,

I remember using the word junction, and the lady asked, how can there be a junction in the middle of the road? ...I was upset and so I ignored her comment and repeated myself, I could see she was also getting angry and she was about to fail me. So I said to her you know what, let's check this out and she went and got a dictionary. I finally realized that she wanted me to use intersection, which was not a word I ever used anyway, but has the same meaning as junction.

Though these encounters may seem trivial, it shows that sometimes people are not willing to go the extra mile. Had this GIS not acted insistently and assertively in her situation, she would have failed the test and missed the opportunity to teach.

Participants from the focus group also believed that giving these students more information through more interactive websites and personalized attention would help them to have more informative interactions and increase their social mobility in many respects. They also explained that there was need to follow up with students they encounter to ensure that their needs were met. They also explained that these less structured or informal interactions would make students feel more welcomed to seek help when they needed it rather than go to other co-national for help that may not always equip them with the most accurate information.

The results also show that GIS sometimes feel entitled to more attention when they encounter issues across campus. They call for more ways to enable all actors to become vested and more culturally sensitive and empathetic towards the international

students they encounter. The consensus was that although social interactions tend to be the basis of the social world, sometimes people are unable to adhere to the obvious.

Though participants indicated that the current outlook of the Midwestern University community indicates that it is a personal responsibility for people to be proactive in their social interaction, there is a call to make it an institution-wide effort. Most of the participants expressed that as a community, social interactions should be a key factor in community building and integration, sometimes various actors in the community are not aware that a little extra attention in their interactions goes a long way to help those they interact with.

In order to create a culturally and socially conscious institutional community at Midwestern University, participants called for innovations to increase their cultural intelligence and social intelligence. They called for many institutional changes including ways orientations are conducted. GIS in particular were of the view that all parties should undergo orientations about each other. They believed that all departments and domestic students need to be included in the social and cultural orientations international students undergo on arrival at Midwestern University. They also stated that there was need for more inter- cultural programs coupled with the necessary advertisement since a couple of cultural nights per semester was not providing enough exposure to create the much needed sense of the awareness of the cultural diversity and the associated cultural intelligence that all actors need to interact successfully around campus.

The results also indicated that GIS believe more programs need to be created to facilitate more exposure and visibility for international students. They also indicated that all actors have to consciously undergo cultural sensitivity training so as to serve and

support each other better. Particularly for academic programs, the departments need to include international students more in their classroom engagement processes so that domestic students can or are obliged to interact more with the international students especially those from Ghana.

Summary of Chapter IV

Chapter IV provided an outline of the general findings in the research based on the data analysis and interpretation. Three main categories emerged from the study about the factors affecting GIS experiences and their social interaction in higher education. The three main factors emerging were institutional, social and personal factors. As information from the three categories were synthesized, the findings indicated that GIS experienced issues regarding these factors as result of systemic challenges ensuing contextual and social differences. Findings also indicate that in order to curb these challenges, there is need for intentional efforts to create institutional and personal changes aimed towards the enhancement of cultural and social intelligences for all current and prospective actors at Midwestern University and beyond.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSIONS, INTERPRETATION AND RECOMMENDATION

The aim of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of lived experiences of Ghanaian International Students at Midwestern University through their social interactions, perceptions of the support they received from these interactions, and the subsequent effects on their academic successes and setbacks. In addition participants were asked to provide some recommendations for the nature of interactions they would hope to have in the future. Data was collected from interviews of six Ghanaian International Students and focus group discussions with five representatives of various departments that have been interacting constantly with Ghanaian students. In this section, I discuss the findings of the study and the implications of these findings for practice and recommendations for further studies.

In the results, it is indicated that there are three categories of factors that affect GIS accessibility and transitions when they interact with newfound ties namely: institutional, social, and personal factors. It was also specified that these factors occur as a product of real and/or perceived contextual and social disparities between the actors involved in the interactions. Chapter V provides an interpretation of the findings in light of implications and recommendations.

Summary of Findings

The study found that GIS face several systemic challenges as a result of contextual and social differences. These differences are further aggravated by the nature of current institutional programs. Throughout this inquiry, it is indicated that although GIS are satisfied with the US education, they are pessimistic of many of the social interactions they encounter with various actors. GIS made particular reference to interactions that do not involve their professors. The results of the study indicated the need for structural changes that would enhance cross-cultural social intersections at Midwestern University so students can gain the full benefits of their experiences in higher education in the US.

The results imply that GIS interact with actors when they have issues and are in search of solutions. This situation increases their vulnerability because of their high dependency on foreign actors. During interactions between GIS and host actors sometimes the information sought is not well articulated, and may result in GIS not receiving the needed help because their requests are inadequate or unclear. On a few occasions, they are given additional suggestions and directions on alternative places to seek help or alternative ways to solve their issues. However, these interactions are often not as informative or proactive and this creates instances of frustrations and stress for both parties.

GIS come from a high context cultural background where there is high reliance on group dynamics (handholding), and there are more meanings read into non-verbal communication. In trying to operate in a low context culture where independence is valued and there is little inference in non-verbal communication is challenging at best.

Sometimes informational cues during social interactions are misrepresented and /or misinterpreted. Such situations result in negative perceptions and consequences that impact interactions in adverse ways.

The findings also revealed that there is a general perception that domestic actors in most departments were knowledgeable and were in a better position to know more about other beneficial on-campus resources. This assumption is not wholly true because it was found that the current institutional culture really did not embrace collaboration and actors are not as knowledgeable and coordinating with other resources in the manner that is most efficient for supporting GIS students. It was also explained that there was need for departments to cultivate the culture of follow-up with students they encounter to ensure that their needs were met.

GIS reported that in the throes of their pressures, anxieties, and uncertainties, they sometimes leave actors' offices feeling dissatisfied, frustrated, and alienated. Sometimes these feelings are more so as they think of these same situations occurring in Ghana. It would be much easier to resolve them because of a larger social network and more positive cultural dynamics. As a consequence of the lack of coordination ensuing from these interactions students' experiences and subsequent academic experiences are depreciated in their eyes. Overtime, GIS learn to tread cautiously when interacting with other actors because they do not want a repeat experience of a previous negative experience. Often, because of prior and ongoing social interactions GIS prefer to interact with co-nationals which is gratifying in the short run, but may be problematic in the long-run because the information received may not necessarily be accurate or adequate.

Participants felt more could be done to disseminate information to students as a whole. There were suggestions for more interactive websites and personalized attention so that students were not too dependent on other actors for the information they sought. The results also indicated that the culture of using scripted interactions that showed “professionalism” were not necessarily indicative of helpfulness and proactivity. It was indicated that should actors employ less structured or formal ways of interacting, foreign students would feel more welcomed and able to seek help when they need it rather than go to co-nationals for help. In addition to this they were of the opinion that this information would help them to feel more integrated into the learning community, and enhance their learning and international experiences in many ways. Additionally GIS explained that actors in their academic departments, particularly domestic students needed to make more effort to be more conscious of the way they behave and interact with the international students they meet.

Interpretations and Practical Implications

The study participants perceived their education has been transforming because they have gained core competencies and practical skills, such as being able to confidently speak publicly and analytically convey their thoughts in front of a group (Szelenyi, Rhoades, 2007). Findings explained that the repetitive nature of tasks in academic courses led to feelings of confidence, competence, and hope for the future. Though the outcomes of their academic experiences remain remarkable and commendable in many respects, there were views that the institution needed to do more for their students; particularly international students. The main systemic issues affecting international students’ experiences and social interactions include a misunderstanding of sociocultural

differences such as cultural background effects, cross-cultural efficacy, cultural intelligence and social intelligence. These issues are discussed subsequently.

Strengths-of -weak Ties Involved in Social Interactions

As mentioned earlier, the research was framed around the Social Capital Theory with particular emphasis on the component of the strength-of- the- weak- ties. GIS remain foreigners at Midwestern University, no matter their length of stay. In order to succeed in their academic journey, they rely constantly on the outcomes of social interactions with others they hardly know. Bourdieu (1983) stated that resources provided by acquaintances in most social relationships, enhances social capital because of perceived social corporation and expected returns (Lin, 2001). To support this, researchers such as Coleman (1988) have explained that among the forms of social capital that exist is obligation and expectation of trustworthiness from the social environment. Although Domestic actors in the study were aware of the need to avail themselves to GIS and help them as much as they could, GIS showed that their expectations were not always met.

According to Lin (1999) in relying on other actors for information and other interactional factors, GIS encounter many ties that serve as bridges into other networks they otherwise do not have access to. As a result, participants have gained access to different networks by using the actors they encounter during their interactions to gain access to different arenas of information, at different levels in the social strata of higher education. Lin refers to these assets as strengths- of- the-weak-ties. Although for the most part the new ties served as strengths, sometimes, there were some weaker associations as shown in the results of poor social interactions and relationships.

Clash of Cultures

From the research findings I am of the view that whereas GIS were described as not being assertive, non-challenging and “respectful” these attributes are indicative of their high context cultural background where there is a general perception of top-down decision making processes. There is also an expectation that people in authority are truly and directly responsible for other people who are lower in the hierarchy of society. Those in the lower positions are also expected to respond accordingly by being respectful and appreciative of what is done for them and do so without challenge. Hence, people are able to navigate their interactions through a strong dependency on connections and relationships (Kim et al, 2012).

For individuals in the low context cultures such as that of the US there is a general expectation of individualism. People are able to succeed because their assertiveness and independent nature is prevalent and more valued. As such, international students (particularly GIS) coming to the US and unknowingly experiencing the low context cultural expectations may find this alienating in many respects because they do not feel the cohesiveness they are accustomed to. This supports the explanation that indicated that cultures in Africa, Asia and some parts of Europe tend to be very group-oriented and there is great reliance on members in these groups for information dissemination (Kim et al. 2012; Constantine et al., 2005; Hostede, 2001).

In addition to being group oriented, high context cultures also tend to be highly interpretative of all forms of interactions including both verbal and non-verbal. Due to these fundamental cultural traits, the study indicates that GIS may be reading more meaning into and misinterpreting certain behavioral cues and attitudes. For domestic

actors also the situation is not very different. There is indication that domestic actors may be misunderstanding or misinterpreting certain cues as well during social interactions.

Although it was agreed that both GIS and US domestic students come from collectivistic and individualistic cultures respectively, there was need for a sense of connectedness between the two groups. This means that although GIS are typically not socialized to be as assertive as their US counterparts, they needed to learn to be more assertive in their social interactions, so as to be accessible to their US counterpart in order to foster social relationships and interactions (Athens, 1991; Lee, 2014). However, in as much as this is laudable in many respects, US domestic students and other host actors also have to be willing to connect with GIS and other international students through attitudes and behavior. They have to be willing to understand that international students are different in their pronunciation of certain words or use certain grammar that may not be used in the US (Lee & Ciftci, 2014).

There is need to be more careful in some choices of interactions in order not to be perceived as racially prejudicial or stereotypical when interacting with international students particularly GIS. This is necessary because GIS complained that when they tried to have informal social interactions, there seemed to be a general lack of common topics to talk about. Even when people tried to make small talk about general issues like “April Fool’s Day,” the conversations felt “annoying” because it was a mainstream conversation and the domestic friend had assumed that the GIS was unaware or unable to converse about it.

Cross-cultural Efficacy

Another main issue evolving from this study indicated that individuals at Midwestern University do not have adequate cross-cultural efficacy. Searle and Ward (1990) explained that cross-cultural efficacy occurs through increased contact with people of other cultures. They explained that when people learn more about each other through language, customs, and norms they become more understanding and are able to relate more effectively with each other. Lee and Rice (2007) explained that when groups of people are given the opportunity to interact more with each other their cross-cultural efficacy increases.

This is an important concept in this study because results indicated that actors do not know enough about each other to interact successfully. This is an indication that there is a general deficiency in the level of exposure that an actor has with others from the cultures represented on the college campus, and it is important that this is resolved in the near future. Halamandaris & Power (1999) state that exposure is an important feature of cross-cultural efficacy. They also explained that a general lack of exposure prevents people from being assertive when they encounter others from other cultures because they are not sure of how to interact or what to say some times. It was also indicated in the study that there is a need for a drive institutionally to create more cross-cultural efficacy for all actors involved by creating more publicity of international students, their culture, and abilities.

This is necessary because participants claimed they never really engage in on-campus activities because there were minimal opportunities at best. In fact, the only activity all participants recalled ever attending regarding international students' events

held at Midwestern University were the cultural nights organized by the office of international students programs. This indicated that more needed to be done to create opportunities and for international students to socialize and interact with domestic students as well as actors from many departments.

By doing this, not only are international students making new friends, they also get exposed to better ways to socially interact within their host country. Domestic students get the chance to learn more about the international students they encounter. It also facilitates better social interaction outcomes because they get more opportunities to access valued resources and information while increasing their social networks (Lin, 1999; 2001; Vryonides, 2004, Nora & Crisp, 2012).

Participants also mentioned that the orientations they had about the US culture did not equip them with enough information to properly interact with other people they come across. They also stated that domestic students needed to be orientated with information about how to interact and behave towards international students. This is important because it would encourage students to be more willing and curious to know more about the international students they meet across campus and in their classrooms.

These suggestions support findings by Zhang & Goodson (2011) that when opportunities are created for social interactions between host nationals and international students it generates positive outcomes for all parties involved. They explain that such contact creates room for respect for other groups, reduction of prejudice, reduction of stereotypes, increase in knowledge, and more effective communication in the future (Allport, 1954).

Additionally, when actors are able to gain cross-cultural efficacy it would enable them to feel more connected to the people they interact with because they would learn to understand the things they do or say more and interpret them better. This is because participants agreed that there were many cultural issues involved in their interactions. Sometimes simple interactions like “how is the weather” without waiting for an answer, or a simple hand gesture of using the left hand to shake hands looked to GIS as if the actor(s) involved did not care. This supports Ward et al. (2001) that communication patterns differ by culture. Although by asking about the weather might have been a rhetorical question by the domestic actor in this scenario, to GIS there was need to provide an answer as a sign of respect.

Introducing the concept of cross-cultural efficacy in the structural underpinnings of diversity would also contribute greatly to the cultural shock experienced by GIS. This is crucial as they were most concerned about the struggles they have trying to transition from the Ghanaian culture into the US culture. Mwaura (2008) explained that international students, particularly those from Africa are not usually aware of the degrees and layers of cultural transitioning they have to undergo while in the US. He explains that often, they are made aware of their minority status, issues of accent, their skin color, and a different societal value system for the first time in their lives when they first reach the US.

Likewise Lee and Rice (2007) also explain that sometimes, domestic actors know nothing about the foreign actors they encounter. They are forced to identify them only through characteristics such as skin color and accents. They explain that this creates a recipe for neo-racism towards foreign actors. Rather than refusing to socially interact

with each other, there is need to persist in interacting with others who are different so as to gain efficacy.

These explanations support research findings that constant social interactions with actors occur over time, increases participants' awareness of communication patterns, cultural practices, and mitigates emotional stress evolving from cultural misunderstanding (Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001). Over time, though some of the initial cultural issues may dissipate, other culturally related issues may emerge depending on the actors involved in the social interactions. This can be problematic, hence the need for actors to gain more cross-cultural efficacy.

Also, in trying to gain cross-cultural efficacy, there was a prevailing agreement for the presence of mentors and other multicultural experts to be assigned to some high contact departments in the learning community. The results indicated that there was need for both mentors and peer-mentors to be available for students all year round. This way, GIS and other International Students as well as domestic actors can go to an actor with adequate social and contextual knowledge of the peculiarities and dynamics involved with international students' acculturation issues.

Cultural Intelligence

Evolving from the study was the lack of cultural intelligence and social intelligence on behalf of actors at Midwestern University. As indicated in the findings, all actors needed to have some level of cultural intelligence and social intelligence to be able to persevere and interact effectively. The figure below depicts the processes involved to becoming culturally intelligent.

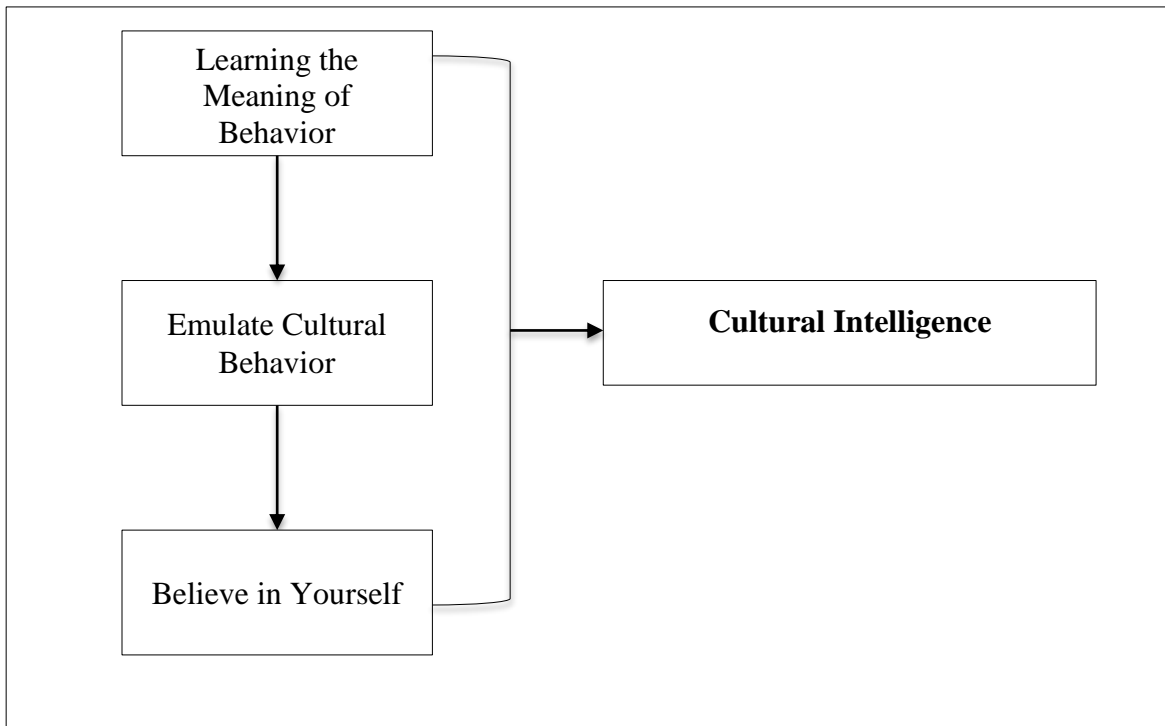


Figure 7. Actor's Processes to Cultural Intelligence (adapted from Snow, 2010).

Engle and Crowne (2014) described cultural intelligence as one's "ability to function in culturally diverse situations. Although some researchers such as Ang, Van Dyne and Koh (2006) argue that it is a social trait, others argue that it is a multifaceted trait that describes what a person does across time and in given situations. Another quality of cultural intelligence is that it is not culture specific (Ang et al., 2007). One does not need to know of a particular culture before interacting with a person from that culture.

In order to be culturally intelligent, one needs to be able to interpret behaviors and or attitudes in the context of the individuals involved and be able to tell the differences between what is cultural, or what are the person's idiosyncratic behavior. Scholars in the field of cultural intelligence have explained that there is more to a person's personality than what meets the eye. Assuming before arriving in the US, GIS or home actors had read all the materials about each other's' communities, they would still not know all

about the culture or the way of life of the people they are going to come across at Midwestern University.

By continually and strategically making inquiries and learning about the meanings behind some of the behavior they encounter, they will be able to make progress. In the US, it is strange to just approach anyone and start asking questions about culture and values, because either they may not be too comfortable talking about themselves to a total stranger about their culture, or they may not even be able to analytically explain their own culture (Kim et al., 2014). The more strategic way to do this is to look for consistent behavior and attitudes in social interactions and make appropriate inferences to that effect about the actors they are interacting with. By doing this they show traits of cultural intelligence.

In addition to this, a person's use of nonverbal cues during interpersonal social interactions speaks volumes about their behavior. By reducing ethnocentric behavior and trying to emulate the cultural behaviors of host actors or international students by incorporating simple things like understanding hand-shakes or greetings that other cultures may have. These little gestures serve as icebreakers and create an atmosphere of comfort, trust, and openness that facilitates smoother and more effective interaction and inclusivity.

Also, believing that one is capable of learning new ways of interacting is a strong personality trait that results in many successful social interactions (Ang et al., 2007). If one does not believe that he or she is capable of successfully understanding another's culture enough to fully engage in an interaction, he or she gives off an aura that may not be conducive for engagement and may result in frustrating the encounter. Nonetheless, if

the individual involved believes that he or she can and should be able to interact successfully, no matter the setback, he or she would be able to engage in a successful social interaction.

Social Intelligence

Another personal factor is social intelligence. Goleman (2006) explains that social intelligence is an important trait that all individuals need to successfully navigate the social world. Snow (2010) also asserts that when people find themselves in a new place they have to learn to be people smart. He argues that they have to be attentive, interpretative, and monitoring. See illustration in figure 8 below.

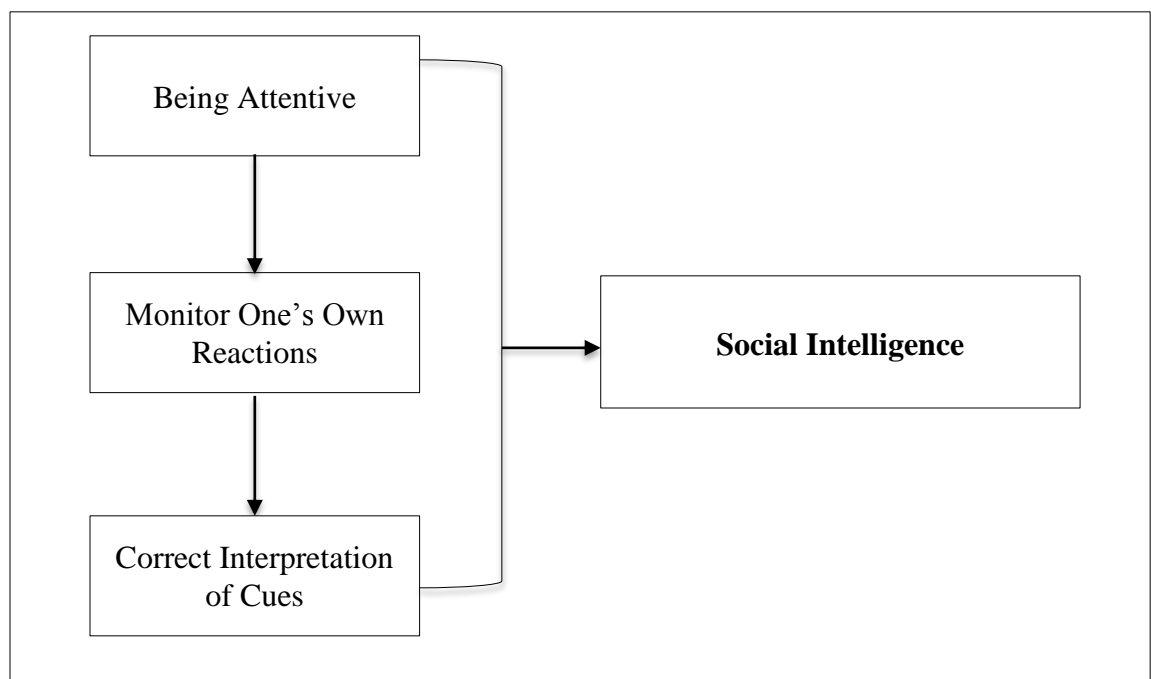


Figure 8. Social Intelligence (adapted from Goleman, 2006).

Findings show that for GIS and their domestic hosts to have successful social interactions and experiences, there is need for actors to be attentive and pick up on social cues and feelings of the people they interact with. If one is oblivious to these cues, it may

foil attempts at current and future interactions. Goleman (2006) emphasizes the importance of correct interpretations of social cues from people we interact with. Findings show that because GIS come from high context backgrounds they typically read meanings into their social interactions with host actors. Sometimes they misinterpret these cues and misrepresent their intentions. These actions may result in various degrees of anxiety disappointment, and frustration. The study also confirms that often most host nationals are not attentive enough to international students to understand them sufficiently so as to proactively offer assistance. This means that if the assistance request is not obvious and clear, it does not get as much attention.

These behaviors also result in negative outcomes. The last personal trait Snow points out is the way we monitor our own behavior or reactions to the situations we encounter. From the results, I found that not all GIS persist when they encounter certain situations. Sometimes the GIS' own negative reactions to their situations are problematic. In the face of challenges, one has to take a step back and look at the interactions closely. Sometimes this may involve another social tie, but it is important to know that giving up is not an option (Tinto, 2012). There is need to sometime reassess the situation and strategically make a decision to persist until something happens.

This research also shows that GIS believed that although there are many factors that have been attributed to their experiences, there is still much to be done in the realm of diversity and inclusivity. Particularly, they were concerned about the hidden discrimination and lack of inclusivity especially among discussions with their peers in the academic departments. Although many studies on international students' experiences do

not focus on race as a problem, GIS perceived that sometimes they were discriminated against because of the color of their skin.

They perceived that sometimes actors treated them differently because of stereotypes attached to African Americans in the US. Participants also explained that not only did the white domestic actors, but also other international students from different races portrayed these attitudes. Findings show that although racism is not a major issue at Midwestern University, prejudicial and stereotypical behavior, attitudes, and stigma relating to it results in problematic social interactions. This is because host actors sometimes act on these stereotypes and/or make certain insensitive utterances that may result in GIS feeling levels of discomfort and / or embarrassment.

Ghanaian International Students at Midwestern University are smaller in number compared to other groups of international students on campus. Most of the participants have no immediate relatives living with them in the community. This also indicates they have weaker social ties in their learning community compared to students of some other countries who might have other relatives living with them on campus. They indicated that these challenges persist mainly because they are unable to assimilate into their new social and cultural environment. For the GIS in this study, the issues mainly stem from their social interactions with various actors on campus. GIS reported that there are many foiled attempts at having successful social interactions at Midwestern University. These encounters have given the basis for some implications for GIS and the various actors they encounter in higher education.

As previously mentioned, most of the actors GIS encounter whether domestic or foreign would be considered as weak ties as they were unknown to the participants prior

to their arrival at Midwestern University. It is important to note that many social relationships begin as an association with a weak tie (Lin, 2001). This means that it is usually the primary and simplest phase in most social relationships although sometimes it is hard to see because of other variables such as cultural differences and language. For GIS, this is more so because they are so few and they are unlike other nationalities, which have stronger and more visible networks because of their numbers and cohesion.

GIS have to do more than just interact with people they do not know. They have to learn quickly how to cope with situations that arise when interacting because of their high level of dependency on their newfound weak ties. They are dependent on these ties throughout the learning community for most of their services and resources. Though one may think this situation is only temporal, it is also important to note that in order to build strong associations such as a close friend, mentor, peer mentor, roommate, advisor etc. in the learning community one has to first of all get involved with a weak tie first. Eventually, these associations grow stronger or create avenues to other associations. During this evolution, sometimes the weak ties become stronger assets because of the amount of resources they impart. This way they become strengths to the GIS in the association.

Throughout the study it was indicated how much GIS relied on the involvement of the weak ties they encountered and that they were not adequately prepared to interact with their new ties. Due to this deficiency, they found it more difficult because they could not identify the root cause of their problems. As such, although these ties were needed throughout the various transitional phases, for the most part the experiences were difficult

because they were unable to interact effectively and efficiently resulting in some implications for practice.

Implications

The first implication is, that there must be some structural changes at the institutional level. In order to facilitate better social interactions among different people within the institution, both GIS and domestic actors need to have access to more information about each other. In order to do this, there must be changes made to the existing institutional programs that promote diversity. There has to be more programs created that facilitate more social interactions among different cultural groups.

Some suggested programs include mentoring programs and peer-mentoring programs. It is believed that these programs should be mandatory for all departments that constantly interact with international students because this would give students channels of access to discuss issues more frequently with the appropriate personnel in a timely manner. It is also portrayed that there must be institutional wide programming to promote inclusivity and curb isolation and alienation at all levels of interaction. Although participants mentioned that the cultural nights were the only events they made no suggestions for other programs.

The second implication is that all actors involved in social interactions must consciously and willingly change their personal attitudes and behavior towards their social interactions with actors from different cultural backgrounds across the institution. This is because individual actors' must be willing to accept the efforts of change initiated by the institution for it to work successfully. Figure 9 on page 136 shows that when the above-mentioned codes of change occur, they facilitate the effects of exposure, cross-

cultural interactions, and assertiveness of both domestic and international actors. The findings in this research although are specific to Ghanaian International Students; they can be related to the general international student population at Midwestern University. Depicted in Figure 9 also are my recommendations for processes involved in facilitating successful social interactions for positive academic outcomes. The diagram shows the impact of institutional changes on current and diversity programs coupled with personal attitudinal and behavioral changes. The effects of these changes on social interactions are discussed subsequently.

The diagram below describes how major structural institutional and personal changes in programming and event planning can increase exposure, cross-cultural efficacy and assertion between international student groups and domestic actors. It also shows how these features would increase cultural and social intelligence for all actors and result in more cultural consciousness, cultural responsiveness and cultural sensitivity and enhance social interactions across the institution (Halamandaris & Power; 1999; Wehrli & Zurich, 2008).

Challenges and Ideas for Successful Social Interactions

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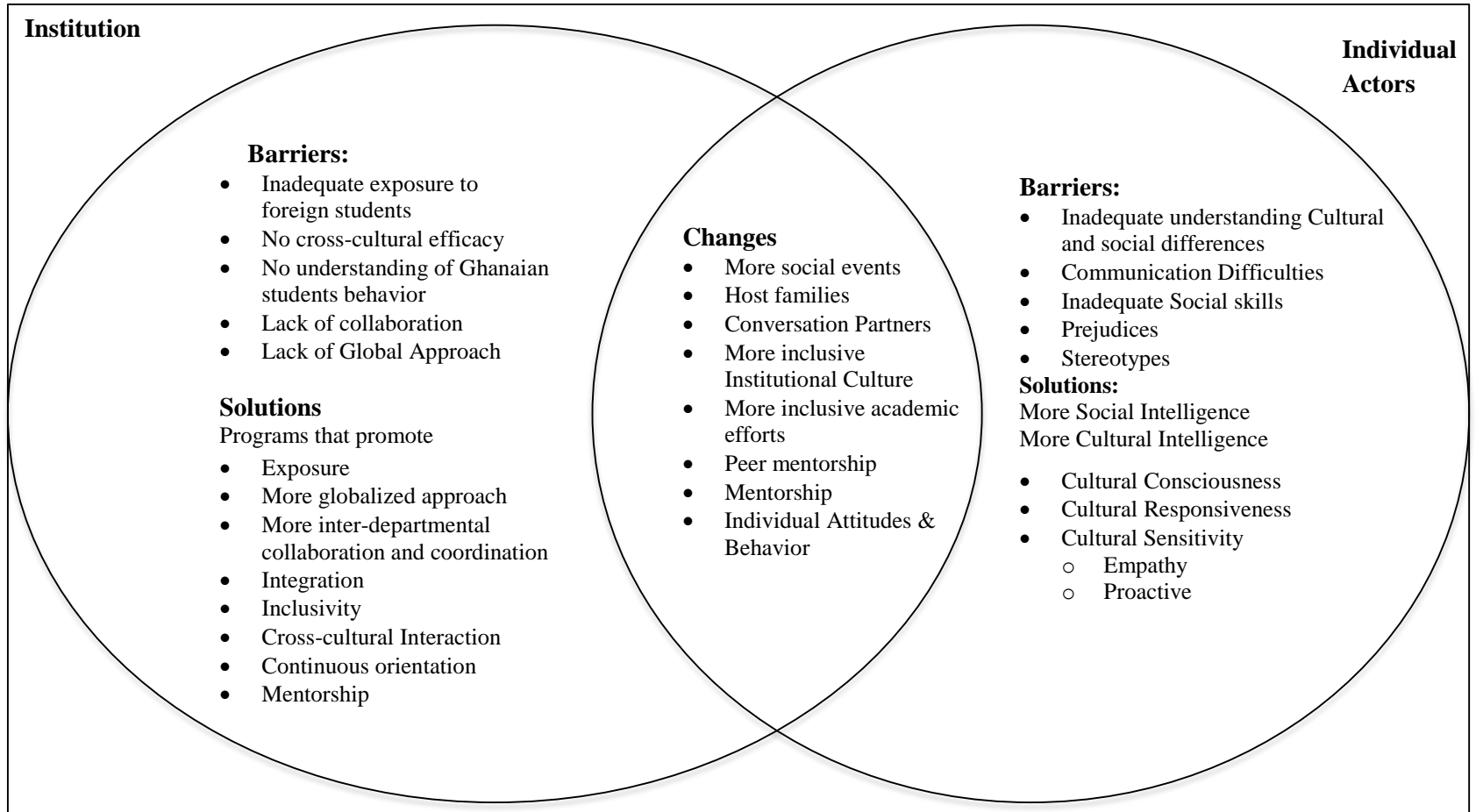


Figure 9. Social figure interactions.

Suggested Changes

As stated earlier in this chapter, there is the need for some structural changes to be done in order to make the campus community more culturally and socially intelligent. As specified earlier, cultural intelligence simply means one's ability to function in a culturally diverse situation (Ang et al., 2007; Robert & Crowne, 2014). Although most of the international education literature mentions many of related aspects of cultural intelligence, including cultural consciousness, cultural sensitivity and cultural responsiveness which all presume knowledge of the particular cultures, cultural intelligence is not group specific. For instance, one does not need to know about Ghanaian culture per se to interact effectively with GIS. Cultural intelligence prepares one accordingly.

Though findings in this study also show that being culturally conscious, culturally sensitive and culturally responsive are not substitutions for cultural intelligence, all the above-mentioned factors are attributes of a culturally intelligent actor (Robert & Crowne, 2014). In addition to this, most of the international education literature mentions that international students undergo cultural shock, acculturation stress, alienation, self-segregation, prejudice and stereotypes among many challenges. All these issues were discussed in this research. The existing literature also explains that when international students undergo so many challenges, it affects their academic successes adversely.

Although previous literature has given many reasons why these issues continue to persist, they fail to critically examine the reasons why these issues persist (Lee & Rice, 2007). This study adds to the existing literature by providing insight on some underlying reasons for this persistence. It is important that all stakeholders understand the underlying

structural, contextual, and social elements involved during social interactions in order to formulate interventional strategies. In fact, this study shows that previous solutions to these issues have been too general and non-contextual.

This study found that these issues continue to persist mainly because previous studies did not look at the factors holistically from the institutional, social, and actors' personality perspectives. They also fail to factor in how the level of actors' competencies for cultural intelligence and social intelligence affect social interactions. From the study, the above-mentioned perspectives as well. It was also found that there is need for a fundamental re-socialization into a more supportive campus community culture. The focus of the re-socialization should be to make individuals generally more assertive to people from varying cultures, whether foreign or domestic. This would go a long way to enhance social interactions in an ever-growing diversity, especially at Midwestern University.

Throughout the study, it was notable how individuals recounted their experiences of ineffective social interactions. Deardorff (2006) explained that when people are able to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on their intercultural awareness, skills, and attitudes then they can be described as culturally intelligent. This explanation is supported by a study by Wilson, Ward, and Fischer (2013) which expressed that in order to be culturally intelligent, one needed to possess skills that allow functioning within any cultural context and interacting successfully with people from different cultural backgrounds. The findings of this study indicated that both domestic and foreign actors lacked this competence and they need to learn to adjust, cope, and function better in their new and changing environments respectfully.

The other necessary skill set that was lacking but has been found to be important to successfully interact is social intelligence. This is an important attribute that all actors need to have in order to successfully interact because it encompasses important traits such as attentiveness and the ability to interpret nonverbal cues correctly, while monitoring one's own reactions to the things being said verbally and non-verbally. This shows that when all involved interacting parties possess this intelligence they are constantly aware of each other and are more attentive during their social interactions. This facilitates more openness, assertiveness, better communication because all parties are conscious of all forms of communication and interpreting them correctly.

These measures would help in alleviating most of the issues identified in the study. On the issue of acculturation stress for instance, the literature explained that many international students are confused on issues of customs and behaviors (Lacina, 2002). The only way to address this issue is through more constant interactions with domestic actors and gaining an understanding of the US culture, learning more about language use such as pronunciation, and grammar among other issues.

Foreign actors would also become more confident in their interactional abilities because they would gain cross-cultural efficacy, and become more socially intelligent because they would learn to be more attentive and interpret verbal and non-verbal cues better. These interactions also facilitate more exposure into other social and cultural aspects of the involved actors' lives and overtime this would create the necessary ingredients to becoming culturally intelligent. Subsequently, actors would gain communication competencies including, accustoming to language, gestures, attitudes, and behavior of different groups of individuals.

The study shows that changes need to occur to encourage social interactions with different groups in order to promote exposure, cross-cultural efficacy and assertiveness. These attributes would make all actors involved in the social interactions to become more culturally and socially intelligent of each other which is manifested through beliefs and behavior. These qualities also facilitate a culture of open mindedness and respect for shared differences, reciprocity in relationships where there is more inclusivity and less hidden discrimination, empathy and proactivity amongst actors. All these attributes are necessary ingredients in promoting good channels of communication, social interactions and a strong social network.

Applications

The study would be useful to all institutions that recruit international students, particularly Ghanaian International Students into their programs, including policy makers, program coordinators, directors of various curricular and co-curricular departments, and general student organizations. Other organizations that work with international students and expatriates would also find this research interesting because it targets the importance of using international students in inter-cultural development programs.

Although the study found that there are some efforts at encouraging diversity these efforts need to be re-strategized and executed differently in order to resolve issues identified in the study. There might be the need to bring in diversity experts with core competencies in cultural intelligence and social intelligence to facilitate the formulation of these programs. Some programs that institutions can incorporate into the fabric of its efforts include but are not limited to; more international themed programs, peer

mentoring, host families, conversation partners, more exposure for international student related programs particularly, inclusivity efforts in classrooms.

Social Events. The study found that the international programming office served a more formal and administrative role for most students. There is a call for more informal programs where students get the chance to interact and learn with other people from various countries of origin. These programs could be hosted jointly or collaboratively with various curricular and co-curricular departments and individuals. For example, practitioners could incorporate monthly social events into the programming that is well-publicized institution wide where actors come and interact informally with others including representatives from the various departments and groups. Instructors can also build these programs as extra credit incentives into their classes.

This way, the program advertisement is decentralized through the various departments and group leaders. The institution itself also centralizes it so that more actors would know more about the events and want to attend. In addition to this, there is need for more social support services to be provided by the international programming office that are not perceived as official or prescriptive but provide a more personalized and supportive atmosphere for students to come and talk to someone about other issues in their lives. For example, there could be a counseling unit within the office of international programs where individuals are able to serve as readily available resources. Any international student can go and talk freely about issues he or she encounters without feeling that his or her visa status would be in jeopardy.

Findings in the research explains that all international students undergo a mandatory orientation processes on arrival in the US, where they are introduced to the

new educational system, resources on campus and a glimpse into the US culture. As indicated in the research, most international students are not very coherent during the orientation process because they are either too jetlagged or in the “honey moon” phase of the US experience. As such, they are unable to comprehend wholly what is going on. Also, the orientation process should involve some faculty who would provide insights of having international students in class and what is expected of them so they can have first-hand information from faculty before actually going to class for the first time (Levine, 1993). According to Levine, the presence of faculty members in orientation programs is important so that information provided are not only from co-curricular perspectives.

Additionally, there was a call for the orientation process to involve domestic students as well in the orientation process so they can also get acquainted with the international students they would be meeting on campus. Also, the study found that orientations and other culturally related programs must be done periodically throughout the semester, in order to provide more learning opportunities for actors. Ang et al. (2007) stated there is a need for continuous contact with people from different cultures to espouse intercultural understanding, development of efficacy, and intelligence.

Mentorship/ Peer-mentorship. Although some departments have started these mentorship programs they are at a very low scale. There is need for a program that provides every international student a domestic peer mentor because it provides international students ready access to a network and domestic friend, while providing the perception that they matter in the lives of others different from themselves. More departments need to buy into these programs because it provides ready contact into cross-cultural relationships. Both domestic and international students would benefit from these

relationships because it promotes involved actors to be in constant interactions with each other.

Overtime, as these interactions continue actors would be able to become more open in their interactions more inter-cultural information would be shared. They would be able to talk more about the issues they encounter with other actors as well. Unlike previous experiences, this strategy would enable all parties involved in the relationship to feel a sense of inter-dependency for inter- cultural knowledge. This would help to alleviate feelings of vulnerability due to over-dependence on host actors, inequality, inferiority, exclusivity, stereotypical assumptions, and segregation.

Host Families and conversation partners. Just like the effects of peer-mentorship, if every international student were linked to a domestic host family or conversation partner, it would be easier for intercultural exchanges. Also, in most cases, not only the international students involved would be liaising with these host families, but often, other family members out of curiosity may want to know more about who their loved ones are associating with. If properly monitored and maintained, these interactions could foster very good bonds and relationships and also increase cross-cultural efficacy of the people involved in the interactions (Wilson, Ward, and Fischer (2013).

Inclusivity efforts. Inasmuch as there is a call for international diversity in academic classrooms, the study found that most international students perceive exclusivity in class discussions, either because they are not called upon to share their views or are oftentimes ignored. This issue could be resolved if there was more of an academic focus on the global perspectives in class discussions. If there were more discussions and emphasis on the global perspectives, international students would also

get the chance to share more about their home countries. This may create avenues of intrigue for other classmates and facilitate more inquiry into the international students' background and vice versa.

Although the study found that faculty was more inclusive in their activities compared to the students, faculty members can strive to bolster this inclusivity by being more approachable, openly inviting international students to their offices, making a concerted effort to engage them in discourses, and assigning groups that are not made up of one nationality. Also, enabling domestic students to do projects together with international students can also provide avenues for students to get to know each other and make them appreciative of different cultural perspectives. In addition to this, departments need to create spaces where students get the chance to interact with each other informally outside of class, as this would help students to learn from each other (Astin, 1993).

The interventional strategies mentioned above are to facilitate change and enhance cultural and social intelligences through the exposure, cross-cultural efficacy, and assertiveness they promote. They can only be beneficial if they are acted out conscientiously as they may be effective in creating the necessary exposure for cross-cultural efficacy, cultural intelligence, and social intelligence.

One also needs to be aware that contextual and social aspects of any form of social interaction is not only important to how international students influence higher education but also how the US higher education system impacts international students (Lee, 2008). This study indicated that social interactions are pivotal in adjustment and success for students and there is no standard way of doing things that would lead to successful interactions. One just has to endeavor to be aware of the sociocultural

differences and be culturally and socially competent to deal with situations as they arise. The face of diversity is ever changing so it is important to re-strategize according to the changing needs of the groups represented in this diversity. The study revealed that whether cultural and social intelligence are portrayed as personalized attributes, or shown socially within the context of social interactions, they are major components of effective and sustained social interactions among groups. It is an area of study that needs to be explored more in the future.

This is because inasmuch as the research has pointed out these concepts as the keys to effective interactions, the study was not structured to explain how to best create a structural adjustment process that measures the growth levels of social and cultural intelligences overtime. Further inquiry into these concepts in regards to international students, particularly GIS could shed more light on these ideas. The study also shows that these are important concepts that need to be studied separately from adjustment and adaption, which are the major foci in many of the current international education literature. For better results, all suggested changes both institutionally and personally must be effected at the same time. If people do not change their attitudes and behaviors as the institution strives to implement these changes in their programs, it would be futile.

Actors need to embrace and participate in these programs for them to be effective. If these changes are done diligently, all actors involved would have more exposure to different people with diverse backgrounds as they participate in more programs across the campus community. Consequently, as they gain more exposure, their cross-cultural efficacy would increase. They would be become more assertive in their interactions as they get used to talking to people from culturally diverse backgrounds. They are also

more likely to become better communicators and their cultural sensitivity, empathy and proactivity during their social interactions with the people they encounter would be heightened. Over time, their cultural and social intelligence would be enhanced.

Limitations of Study

The findings for this research were not generalizable due to many reasons. The first is the purposeful sampling of GIS from a university in the Midwest. Secondly, the study is limited by the sample size of participants because there were only six GIS interviewed for the study. Another limitation was that all participants were from the Midwestern University campus. Although there are many GIS in higher education across the US only a small fraction of this number was included in the study. As such the results were not generalizable to the entire population of GIS in higher educational institutions throughout the US.

An additional limitation to the study was that although I have been very cautious of my potential biases of this study. During the collection and analysis of the data, as a member of the in-group studied, I might have inadvertently influenced the study because I can also relate to many of the narratives provided by the participants. Finally, participants might have left out some vital information in their narrations because most of the answers provided to the questions were based on recollections of events that happened in the past.

Suggestions for Future Research

The purpose of the study was to look at Ghanaian International Students and their experiences at Midwestern University through the social interactions they encounter. Although the study was very insightful on GIS experiences in higher education there are

a number of recommendations for future studies based on the findings of this study. The study indicated that the fundamental issues in social interactions stem from differences of culture as proposed by Hall (1989). There is need for more research into the effects and differences of interactions with people of low cultural context backgrounds with individuals of high cultural context backgrounds. There is also need to look at ways of bridging these differences in order to render more positive results.

Another aspect of culture that was profound in this study was institutional culture. Peterson (2007) explains that the behavior, actions, and purpose of people within an institutional organization enable its members to act in particular ways. From the research there was a call for re-socialization of the Midwestern University community to embrace institutional and individual changes proposed in the study. This is an opportunity for future research into current characteristics of institutional culture as they pertain to international students. In the future more studies could compare current future institutional characteristics at many stages of the re-socialization process as some of the changes are implemented.

An area not included in this study was the influence of gender and age differences on social interactions. More research should be conducted to see if these variables have any effects on social interaction. Also, there is need to have a replica of this study with other international student groups at Midwestern University, so as to have a comparison of the different results. This would enable policy formulators at Midwestern University to have a holistic picture of their international students' experiences through the social interactions they encounter, perceptions of the supports they receive and recommendations, if any. This would also help to establish the transferability of findings.

There were five main ideas emerged from the study namely: cultural intelligence, social intelligence, cross-cultural efficacy, exposure, and assertiveness. There is need for future studies to expand more on these ideas. Especially as cultural and social intelligence as concepts relating to cross-cultural social interactions in higher education are new inputs to the international education literature more studies need to be conducted from these perspectives. Possibly, there should be a quantitative inquiry in regards to these concepts to explain their actual levels. This would also create a new segment for the international students' literature on experiences in higher education.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT

Consent to Participate in Research

TITLE: *Negotiating the complexities of social capital: Voices of Sub-Saharan African Students*

PROJECT DIRECTOR: Mildred Emeña Biaku
PHONE # 701.777.3205
DEPARTMENT: Teaching and Learning

STATEMENT OF RESEARCH

A person who is to participate in the research must give his or her informed consent to such participation. This consent must be based on an understanding of the nature and risks of the research. This document provides information that is important for this understanding. Research projects include only subjects who choose to take part. Please take your time in making your decision as to whether to participate. If you have questions at any time, please ask.

You are invited to participate in a study entitled: *Negotiating the complexities of social capital: Voices of Sub-Saharan African Students*. This study seeks to look at the effects of students' experiences in interacting with service providers in various curricular and co-curricular departments on campus, the university community and the larger community as whole. The purpose of this study is to provide a platform where students' stories and experiences can be told. The research will be conducted for a period of one year. During the study, participants will be asked to engage in no more than two interview sessions and one focus group discussion. Each session will approximately one hour long. All interviews and focus group discussions will be conducted in a reserved discussion room at the UND apartment community center. Participants are free to terminate a session, if there are feelings of discomfort at any time.

All records of this study will be kept private, secured, and monitored by University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board. Only the principal investigator has access to the data. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, you may contact the University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board at 701.777.4279; or my dissertation advisor, Dr. Jodi Bergland Holen, at 701.777.6705 or jodi.holen@und.edu.

Sign here if this study has been explained to you, your questions have been answered, and you agree to take part in this study.

Subjects Name: _____

Signature of Subject

Date

I have discussed the above points with the subject.

Signature of Person Who Obtained Consent

Date

Approval Date: DEC 22 2014

Expiration Date: DEC 21 2015

University of North Dakota IRB

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANTS INVITATION LETTER

Dear Participant

My name is Mildred Emefa Biaku. I am PhD student from the University of North Dakota in the Teaching and Learning Program. I am under the advisement of Dr. Jodi Bergland Holen. I am undertaking a research study that examines students' perceptions of their experiences, as they interact with actors within the university community as well as the impact of these social interactions on their academic career. I seek to answer the following research questions:

- What lived experiences do Ghanaian International Students have while interacting with actors of different strata of the systems they encounter while in school?
- What are their perceptions and feelings about the support received through social interactions with various actors on campus?
- How do these lived experiences impact their successes or setbacks in higher education and what interventions do students anticipate would help resolve the issues (if any)?

I would like to interview Ghanaian international students who have been in the US higher institutions system for at least one year. All sessions will each be approximately one hour long. I will conduct all sessions myself and they will be audio and video recorded.

All participants will be assigned a pseudonym and all personal information would be kept confidential. If you are interested in participating in the research, please contact me at mildred.biaku@my.und.edu or call me at 701.777.3205.

Anticipating a favorable response.

Many thanks.

Sincerely,

Mildred Biaku.

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR GHANAIAN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Introduction of interviewer; explain the study, and the consent form, to the participant.

Collect demographic information (Age, Sex, Country of Origin, Program of study, Level of study, Number of years in the US.)

Questions for Interview

- 1) Why did you choose to come to the United States to study?
 - a. Why did you want to leave (name of home country) to study abroad?
 - b. Was it your first choice?
 - c. How easy a decision was it?
- 2) What are some of the systemic differences in education you have encountered since you have been in school in the US?
 - a. What are some adjustments you made as a result of these differences?
- 3) Tell me about some of the programs and services your institution has for international students (specifically people from Ghana)?
 - a. How did you become aware them?
 - b. How often do you use/attend these services and programs?
 - c. What supports do they offer you as international students?
 - d. What supports do they offer you to help you cope with campus life?
 - e. How helpful have these supports been to you?

Interactions with Actors in various Departments

- 4) Can you name the departments on campus that you usually go to or use frequently
- 5) Tell me about your experiences in interacting with people in these department (names from 5)
 - a. Were the visits pertaining to articular incidents or occasions in your academic journey? Examples?
 - b. How did the information you received help to further your academic journey?
- 6) Tell me about the occasions in interacting with some of these people where you perceived that more could have been said or done and you did not receive the help (if any).

Interactions with Curricular Departments

- 7) What are your perceptions of faculty and staff interactions at your academic department?
 - a. How does your international student status affect your interactions with faculty and staff in your department?
 - b. Tell me about faculty interactions with you in the department. With examples if possible, give me scenarios of a typical class interaction
 - c. How have these interactions affected your academic journey?
- 8) If you had the chance to make changes in the classroom, name some changes you will want your professors to make for a student from Ghana and why?
- 9) Tell me about your interactions with other students-
 - a. Particularly international students
 - b. What about domestic students?
- 10) Who are your closest friends since you have been in the US?
 - a. Do you have any family here?
- 11) Have you heard of the term self-segregation?
 - a. How does this pertain to international students as a whole?
 - b. How does it pertain to Ghanaian student on campus?
 - c. In your opinion, how advantageous/ dis-advantageous is it academic success/ failure of international students as a whole and Ghanaian International students in particular?

Interactions with the campus community

- 12) Tell me about your experiences in interacting with the campus community.
 - a. Do you actively participate in campus events? Why/ why not?
 - b. Tell me about some interactions you've had at these events
 - c. How have these interactions affected you academically?
- 13) Based on your experiences, do you think of your social interactions with people all over campus.
 - a. What do you think all these departments (actors) can do for students like you to enhance your experiences at the institution and higher education in general?
- 14) How can your institution help international students from your country make better adjustments?
 - a. Are there any services that the institution could offer that would better help Ghanaian (international) students?
- 15) What advice do you have for students from your country coming to this institution to study?

APPENDIX D

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS (DISSERTATION)

Interactions with International Students, particularly Ghanaian Students

- 1) Having interacted with different groups of student, tell me about your interactions with international students.
 - a. To the best of your knowledge, what are some measures or precautions your department has put in place directed towards providing services for international students particularly African international students and Ghanaian students for that matter
 - b. As a service provider, how or what precautions do you take while interacting with these students?

- 2) What are your perceptions of your interactions with international students, particularly Ghanaian students in your respective departments?
 - a. With examples if possible, give me scenarios of a typical interaction session with a Ghanaian student
 - b. How are these interactions different from other interactions with other students?
 - c. How differently will you handle interacting with these students from other students

- 3) With examples (if possible) tell me about occasions in interacting with some of these students where you perceived that more could have been said or done and you did not give the help needed (if any).

- 4) Based on your experiences in your respective department, what do you think of your social interactions with this subgroup of students
 - a. Is there a need for improvement? Why or why not?
 - b. how can we change our ways of interacting with these students to enhance their experiences at this institution?

- 5) Some people are of the perception that African students (Ghanaian) keep to themselves because they perceive that they do not get help from host service providers. What are your perceptions on that?

- 6) How can your department help African and/or Ghanaian international students make better adjustments?
 - a. Are there any services that the institution (your department) could do so as to better help Ghanaian International students successfully navigate higher education?

What advice do you have for Ghanaian students coming to you for services, advice, and questions?

APPENDIX E

DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE STEP

- 1) Reviewed literature to find out findings of other literature on international students experiences.
- 2) Wrote down code ideas during and after interviews
- 3) Coded completed interview transcript with emergent codes.
- 4) Searched literature for existing theories that matched the findings.
- 5) Coded new transcripts with emergent and new codes.
- 6) Modified codes for more clarity
- 7) Developed a code chart
- 8) Investigated Codes that could be grouped by similarity, combined and collapsed into categories
- 9) Developed and category names.
- 10) Advisor Check helped redesign and organize categories as major findings.
- 11) Reviewed literature to research theories and findings of this study
- 12) Assertions were developed
- 13) Advisor check helped to clarify and formulate the final two assertions.
- 14) Review the literature for support and differences for results of the study.
- 15) Develop implications and recommendations based on findings.

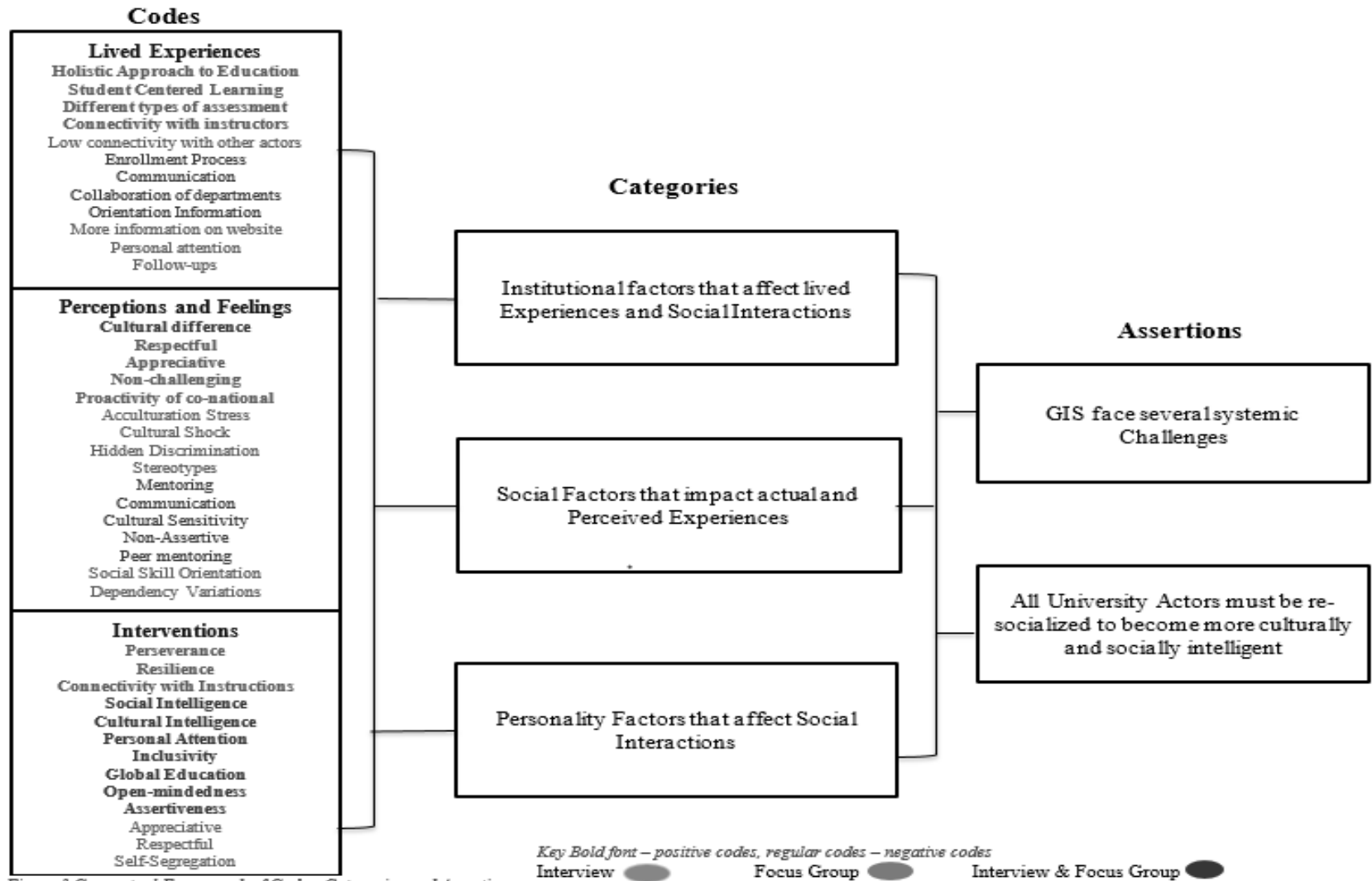


Figure 3 Conceptual Framework of Codes, Categories and Assertions

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