Factors Affecting International Students’ Developmental Functioning: Student and Faculty Perspectives from Liberty University

by

Andrea S. Childs

Liberty University
FACTORS AFFECTING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS’ DEVELOPMENTAL FUNCTIONING: STUDENT AND FACULTY PERSPECTIVES FROM LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

by Andrea Childs

A Thesis Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science
Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA
2019

APPROVED BY:
Abstract

The enrollment rates of international students are increasing, but the attrition rates of international students may also be on the rise. Aligning with Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model, the goal of this study was to obtain insight about the encounters that undergraduate international students face. The purpose of this study was to evaluate these encounters to ascertain and compile core themes that will promote international student success. Data gathered from undergraduate faculty also contributed valuable insight. Recommendations were made for both the international student body and the undergraduate faculty. This qualitative research design investigated a small sample of undergraduate international students and a small sample of undergraduate faculty at a medium-sized Christian university. Data was obtained through timeline interviews with three senior-level undergraduate international students at Liberty University. Standard interviews were conducted with five undergraduate faculty members at Liberty University. The student interviews revealed main challenges that centered around the core themes of: environment, language, affect, support, and motivation. The faculty interviews revealed main challenges that centered around the core themes of: student aptitude, acculturating to American university standards, finances, support, and faculty abetment. Implications of these findings are discussed, and practicable recommendations are made for undergraduate international students, undergraduate faculty, and applicable universities.

**Keywords:** bioecological model, ecological model, Bronfenbrenner, undergraduate international students, undergraduate faculty, Christian university, proximal processes, faculty abetment
Table of Contents

ABSTRACT .................................................................................................................. 3

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION ....................................................................................... 6

PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY ............................................................. 8
Locating the Researcher ............................................................................................... 9

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW .......................................................................... 12

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS ....................................................................................... 12
FACTORS THAT INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS FACE .................................................... 13
Environmental Factors .............................................................................................. 13
Psychological Factors ............................................................................................... 14
Cultural and Language Factors ................................................................................ 16
Social and Language Factors .................................................................................... 18
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ..................................................................................... 20
Bronfenbrenner Ecological Model ........................................................................... 20
Bronfenbrenner Bioecological Model ........................................................................ 22

CHAPTER III: METHOD ............................................................................................. 24

PARTICIPANTS ............................................................................................................ 24
PROCEDURE ............................................................................................................... 25
THEMATIC DATA ANALYSIS ....................................................................................... 26

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS ............................................................................................. 29

STUDENT 1: ANNIE .................................................................................................... 29
Environment ............................................................................................................. 29
Language .................................................................................................................. 32
Affect ......................................................................................................................... 34
Support ..................................................................................................................... 35
Motivation ................................................................................................................ 38

STUDENT 2: FRANK .................................................................................................. 40
Environment ............................................................................................................. 40
Language .................................................................................................................. 42
Affect ......................................................................................................................... 43
Support ..................................................................................................................... 44
Motivation ................................................................................................................ 46

STUDENT 3: SUSIE ................................................................................................... 47
Environment ............................................................................................................. 47
Language .................................................................................................................. 53
Affect ......................................................................................................................... 53
Support ..................................................................................................................... 56
Motivation ................................................................................................................ 59

FACULTY FIRST THEME: PERSPECTIVES ON INTERNATIONAL UG STUDENT EXPERIENCE ................. 61
Support ..................................................................................................................... 61
Finances .................................................................................................................... 63
Acculturating to American University Standards .................................................... 64
Student Aptitude ...................................................................................................... 69

FACULTY SECOND THEME: FACULTY ABETMENT .................................................... 74
Interpersonal Awareness ........................................................................................... 74
Academic Awareness ............................................................................................... 76
Individual Global Mindset .................................................................................................................. 80
Academic Support ................................................................................................................................. 83
Non-academic Support and Facilitation ............................................................................................... 84

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION .................................................................................................................. 86

SUMMARY OF STUDY ........................................................................................................................... 86
LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH .............................................................................................................. 90
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH .............................................................................. 91
CONCLUSION ......................................................................................................................................... 93

REFERENCES ......................................................................................................................................... 95
APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL ................................................................................................................ 102
APPENDIX B: GRAPH OF FACULTY THEMES ...................................................................................... 103
APPENDIX C: GRAPH OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT THEMES .......................................................... 104
APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW SCRIPT FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS ................................................. 105
APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW SCRIPT FOR FACULTY .............................................................................. 106
APPENDIX F: RECRUITMENT FLYER ..................................................................................................... 107
APPENDIX G: RECRUITMENT LETTER FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS ........................................ 108
APPENDIX H: RECRUITMENT LETTER FOR FACULTY ......................................................................... 109
APPENDIX I: INFORMED CONSENT FORM ......................................................................................... 110
APPENDIX J: TIMELINE INTERVIEW SHEET ......................................................................................... 113
Factors Affecting International Students’ Developmental Functioning: Student and Faculty Perspectives from Liberty University

Chapter I: Introduction

Much recent research reflects the growing concern pertaining to issues international students may face while at English-speaking universities. In the U.S., the enrollment rates of international students in higher education has grown considerably from 623,119 in 2009/10 to 903,127 in 2016/17 (Institute of International Education [IIE], 2017, *International student*). In regards to the overall U.S. student enrollment, international students comprise approximately 4.5% of this population (IIE, 2017, *International student*). The greatest number of international students studying in the U.S. in 2016/17 came from China (350,755), India (186,267), South Korea (58,663), Saudi Arabia (52,661), and Canada (27,065) (IIE, 2017, *Top 25*).

Although the enrollment rates of international students are increasing, the attrition rates of international students may also be on the rise (Bista & Foster, 2011; Tompson & Tompson, 1996). Making the transition into higher education can be difficult for all students, but doing this transition while in a foreign country can augment the difficulty level that these students may face (Beasley & Pearson, 1999; Tompson & Tompson, 1996). The hardships of concurrent transitions (e.g. moving to another country and beginning college) can bring about psychological strain or acculturative stress, which can negatively impact the academic and social success of those that experience it, (i.e. international students) (Beasley & Pearson, 1999; Constantine, Okazaki, & Utsey, 2004; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Poyrazli, Kavanaugh, Baker, & Al-Timimi, 2004; Yeh & Inose, 2003).

In comparison to national students, international students experience a noticeably higher number of difficulties throughout their onset, transition, and duration at English-speaking
universities (Andrade, 2006; Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, & Van Horn, 2002; Robertson, Line, Jones, & Thomas, 2000; Taylor & Ali, 2017; Smiljanic, 2017; Yeh & Inose, 2003). The body of recent research about international students in the U.S. has identified key factors that international students often face, which entail linguistic challenges, educational challenges, and social challenges – all of which can create barriers that can hinder international students from successfully adapting to their new setting within U.S. higher education. (Andrade, 2006; Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002; Jacob & Greggo, 2001; Poyrazli et al., 2004; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007).

Despite the known knowledge of abundant troubles that international students may face while studying in U.S. universities, the proportion of research concerning how universities have taken initiative to assist this population, therefore aiding in the retention of the international student body is lacking – with few exceptions (e.g. Beasley & Pearson, 1999; Jacob & Greggo, 2001). The aim of this qualitative study is therefore fourfold: to extend the body of knowledge concerning the factors and difficulties that international students face in U.S. universities, to gain further insight into faculty’s perceptions of international students, to evaluate the success and degree to which the studied university has positively contributed to the acculturation, adjustment, and retention of international students thus far, and to suggest further ways that universities and faculty can improve in assisting this population. Specifically speaking, the research questions are as followed: (1) What factors or challenges have international students faced since their arrival? (2) How have these factors or challenges affected the international students’ academic achievement and perceived social support? (3) How has the university and surrounding community/city assisted with these challenges and has the assistance affected international student retention? (4) What are the perceived challenges that international students experience
from the faculty’s standpoint? (5) How have faculty assisted the students with these perceived challenges?

**Purpose and Significance of the Study**

A few key components exist that contribute to the purpose and significance of this paper, which will be noted below. Universities across the U.S. are realizing that the attrition rates of their international student body population is steadily increasing (Bista & Foster, 2011; Tompson & Tompson, 1996). In comparison to American students, international students are expected to succeed academically, just like any university student, but must do so while facing a steeper learning curve. This steeper learning curve means that faculty need to be conscious of the various factors that make the international student learning experience different, as well as be prepared to assist and adjust accordingly. There is often a social divide between international students and national students, which must be addressed and corrected.

The proportion of research that analyzes how universities have taken initiative to assist this population does not extend far enough. Research needs to extend further than making sure that the university can (1) retain their international student body population, (2) assist the international student body with their adjustment, and (3) assist the international student body with their academic success. Researchers and educators alike need to maintain a holistic perspective of education. This entails of preparing international students for academic and social success at the university, aiming to ensure that they are equipped to become global citizens, and including American students in this endeavor of uniting the entire student body. Therefore, this paper has the aim of being beneficial and effective, not only for international students, but also for university faculty, and for American students.
**Locating the researcher.** As ‘perspectives’ is in the title of this study, it becomes necessary to share with the readers a personal perspective from the researcher. I am an American graduate student who falls into the classification of a female minority student. This is not explicable applicable to this qualitative study, but you will shortly see how I believe this ties in. The readers are likely wondering what led the researcher to be interested in this field of study, so I hope that the following exploration into my background history will bring some understanding. As an individual who grew up in New York and initially attended the University at Buffalo, I befriended a variety of individuals who came from various cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and were both international and American. It was not until I transferred to university in the south that I realized how different one’s experience at university could be, solely due to their cultural, ethnic, or citizenship status background.

After transferring to Liberty University (LU), I began to study Psychology and Teaching English as a Second Language. After taking courses such as Multicultural Counseling (PSY 351) and Second Language Acquisition (TESL 403), I began to truly appreciate and admire individuals who attend higher institutions in their second language (L2). My appreciation and interest for other cultures continued to grow as I embarked on the journey of learning the Korean language, became a Conversational Partner at LU’s former English Language Institute (ELI), and eventually moved overseas to teach English in Cambodia and South Korea.

To offer a more detailed example, when I was in South Korea, I was able to embrace the role of being a second language learner immersed in the second language environment. I was not fluent in Korean, and therefore, I experienced many ups and downs while trying to navigate through the language system to go about daily life. As a foreigner, I experienced moments of social disapproval from locals, but more so moments of social support from locals. I became
motivated to step outside of my comfort zone and interact with the locals as much as possible, as I realized that the alternative was to remain in my apartment for the majority of the time. I eventually made friends with the ‘regulars’ of the local community by going to the same convenience stores, passing the same children after school, riding the same bus line every weekend to a neighboring city, and attending a church that had both South Korean and foreign members. As my support system there grew, I became to feel less out of place, and more accepted, regardless of how different I looked or how bad my Korean language skills were. This experience was while I was teaching English in South Korea. Therefore, looking back, I could not fathom how difficult it would have been for me to attend a university in South Korea, learning subject matter in a language that I was not fluent in.

Initially, as a minority student, I thought that the experiences of minority American students must be one of the most difficult to endure. Through my previously mentioned experiences, encounters, and exposures, I realized that international students might likely be going through many more difficulties than American minority students. Especially international students whose first language is not English. It was through this realization that I acquired a desire to understand the international student experience better, seeking to discover how they are able to succeed, what types of assistance and support they are receiving, as well as spreading awareness to others of how the international experience can vary greatly from the ‘typical’ university student experience.

Based off of my background story, it may seem to readers that I am partial towards assisting and researching populations that are minorities, marginalized, and may not be appreciated or understood as much as the majority population, which is true. As a researcher and a teacher, it is my aim to spread awareness, in hopes that my readers will become more
appreciative and open to diversity, recognizing the value of every human being. This value is something that should be acknowledged regardless of how different or alike we are from one another.
Definitions of Key Terms

In this study, the term *international students* is defined as individuals who are enrolled in universities or colleges in countries they do not have citizenship in, for a temporary and usually fixed period (Andrade, 2006; Elliot, Reid, & Baumfield, 2016; Jacob & Greggo, 2001). It is important to note that international students may be native English speakers, although, in consideration of the previous statistics, many international students in the U.S. are not native English speakers.

*Adjustment* is defined as the amount of psychological wellbeing, educational satisfaction, and social contentment that the international students have while in the new country and culture (Andrade, 2006; Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002).

*Acculturation* is defined as a progression that occurs when aspects of an individual’s culture begins to adjust, as a result of the individual learning about and integrating aspects of the host culture into their own (Constantine et al., 2004; Poyrazli et al., 2004).

*Acculturative stress* is defined as a specific stress that is due to an individual’s intercultural encounters, affecting their psychological, physical, and social well-being (Constantine et al., 2004; Poyrazli et al., 2004; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Acculturative stress is a factor of acculturation and can vary in severity, with mild stress being on the low-end of the spectrum and incapacitating stress being on the high-end of the spectrum. The degree to which an individual adjusts or mal-adjusts affects the severity of the acculturative stress (Poyrazli et al., 2004).

*Faculty Abetment* is defined as faculty aiding their students in an effort to collectively reach an accomplishment (Abetment, n.d.).
Linguistic competence can be defined as, “the speaker-hearer’s knowledge of his language” (Chomsky, 1969, p. 4).

Linguistic performance can be defined as, “a speaker’s actual use of language in real situations, including grammatical errors and other non-linguistic features such as hesitations and other disfluencies” (Memidex, 2013, para. 1).

Factors That International Students in the U.S. Face

Environmental factors. The initial arrival to a university can be a stressful time for both American and international students. In comparison to international students, American students usually arrive with their family or friends for support, speak the language, typically have their living accommodations already situated, and are aware of how U.S. transportation systems work. International students tend to arrive to the foreign country and university alone, many do not speak English as their first language, do not have living accommodations if they choose off-campus housing, are not aware of how U.S. transportation systems work, may not be aware of U.S. currency rates and the proper value of items, and often times need to obtain a social security number (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Taylor & Ali, 2017). The requirements of this major adjustment without the social support and comfort from family and friends can make the adjustment process of initial transition significantly difficult, potentially sparking culture shock (Newsome & Cooper, 2016; Taylor & Ali, 2017). Presbitero defined culture shock as “…the process of initially adjusting to a new cultural environment…, [in which it] can either minimize or prolong the adaption period of an individual in his or her new cultural environment…” (2016, p. 28). If international students transition to a new country and university without the proper assistance and guidance from the university, then their outlook on the country and university can
be negatively influenced. An international student from a study by Taylor & Ali offered the following personal account:

> The first time I did my food shop I spent that much money that I had to walk to uni for the rest of the month because I couldn’t afford the bus. I felt like we had no help, and these things are hard to figure out on your own. (2017, p. 13)

The lack of access to necessary resources, potential language barriers, and loss of comfort and security that comes with social support can negatively affect international students for durations that last longer than just the initial transition period. Studies have shown that lower levels of social support during this time can lead to higher levels of acculturative stress, and stress from initial transitions can negatively affect students’ academic success (Poyrazli et al., 2004; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Taylor & Ali, 2017).

**Psychological factors.** As briefly mentioned previously, the transition of relocating to a new country or culture can have a serious impact on the psychological well-being of the individual, depending upon a variety of factors. In preparation for leaving their home country and coming to the U.S., international students often formulate unrealistically high expectations of what their experience will be at the university and in the country. These unrealistically high expectations can cause international students to experience high amounts of anxiety and stress, as the reality of their experience often pales in comparison to their predetermined expectations (Constantine et al., 2004; Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002; Liu, 2011; Newsome & Cooper, 2016; Taylor & Ali, 2017).

Homesickness is another concern that international students often face at some point throughout their stay at university. When individuals can no longer handle the “amount of separation from familiar objects, people, and places…” (Smiljanic, 2017, p. 190), they begin to
experience a state of distress, desire, and intense concern for the people, places, and things that make-up “home”, often leading to states of depression, anxiety, and psychosomatic upsets (Fisher & Hood, 1987). Additionally, the international students’ country of origin has been seen as an interplaying factor with the amount of and type of psychological stressors that may be experienced. For example, Asian, Central/South American, and African international students described more experiences of psychological stressors in comparison to their European counterparts (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Yeh & Inose, 2003).

Unrealistically high initial expectations of the new environment and setting, homesickness, and an increased number of stressors experienced due to the students’ country of origin can all lead to unhealthy levels of acculturative stress, becoming another factor which can lead to depression (Andrade, 2006; Constantine et al., 2004). Smiljanic (2017) found that international students who had previous experience traveling to other countries before coming to the U.S. for their university education showed lower levels of acculturative stress, implying that their previous experiences may have helped them to have more realistic predetermined expectations and less homesickness.

A significant concern in relation to this is that despite the high need for psychological counseling, intervention, and support, there have been numerous studies that have shown that international students underutilize these services (Constantine et al., 2004; Jacob & Greggo, 2001; Lacina, 2002; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Senyshyn, Warford, & Zhan, 2000; Smiljanic, 2017). There are many potential reasons for this, such as cultural and language differences, stigmas that hinder the use of counseling services, lack of trust or suspicion towards counselors, and a reluctance to begin counseling despite an interest to receive the service (Constantine et al., 2004; Lacina, 2002; Senyshyn et al., 2000).
Cultural and language factors. The relationship between English-language proficiency, and academic achievement for international students is heavily intertwined, as studies have shown that the lack of adequate English-language skills consistently ranks as the most common problem stated by both international students and university faculty (Andrade, 2006; Holmes, 2004; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Roy, 2013; Sawir, Marginson, Forbes-Mewett, Nyland, & Ramia, 2012; Senyshyn et al., 2000; Trice, 2003; Yeh & Inose, 2003). An inadequate level of English-language skills within an academic setting can cause a great deal of stress for these students, as many struggle with being able to demonstrate their academic competency in English, despite their previous academic successes in their country of origin (Liu, 2011; Taylor & Ali, 2017; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Liu (2011) offered a personal account stating, “…during discussions I could not express myself clearly in English, even though I had good ideas” (p. 80). International students who are not native English speakers often experience problems with listening comprehension, oral discourse, academic writing, rate of speech, and colloquial references such as idioms that may be used in the classroom (Andrade, 2006; Liu, 2011; Sawir et al., 2012). Due to this, a rising concern from faculty is the reliability of the scores from the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), as students with moderate to high TOEFL or IELTS scores have exhibited difficulties with lecture participation and lecture comprehension (Liu, 2011; Parks & Raymond, 2004; Sawir et al., 2012; Tompson & Tompson, 1996; Trice, 2003). A faculty member of a top Midwestern research university expressed the following, ‘the TOEFL [Test of English as a Foreign Language] scores do not seem to be indicative of whether the students can speak English or not’ (Trice, 2003, p. 394). Although this concern is often expressed by faculty, the international students also share this concern, as Liu stated, “…I succeeded in both the…(TOEFL) and the… (IELTS) with total
scores of 617 and 7.0 respectively. However, the reality of my learning experience…was totally different from my expectations…I could not understand what my instructors and classmates were talking about…” (2011, p. 79). It is important to mention that international students from Europe and Canada have been reported to experience fewer language difficulties, as they typically have a strong background in English, and may be native English speakers (Andrade, 2006; Trice, 2003; Yeh & Inose, 2003).

As many international students come from East Asian countries, it is necessary to comment on the pedagogical differences that exist between western pedagogical learners and Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) learners. Western pedagogy is characterized as Socratic, relying on critical thinking, openly discussing and debating ideas, evaluating, and problem solving (Durkin, 2008; Holmes, 2004; Taylor & Ali, 2017). The Confucian-style of teaching generally involves memorization, repetition, imitation, and rote learning, in which the instructor is considered the utmost authority for knowledge (Beasley & Pearson, 1999; Durkin 2008; Holmes 2004; Liu, 2011; Taylor & Ali, 2017). These vast differences in educational styles attribute to why East Asian students often find it difficult to engage in and participate in lecture discussions, which may involve questioning the instructor and sharing one’s own opinion (Durkin, 2008; Liu, 201; Taylor & Ali, 2017; Tompson & Tompson, 1996). A study from Tompson & Tompson reported that faculty identified students with low class participation and students that refrain from asking for clarification as the top two behaviors that negatively impact international students’ academic success (1996). From an East Asian cultural standpoint, many of these aspects of western pedagogy are seen as challenging, disrespectful, inappropriate, and unfamiliar (Durkin, 2008; Liu, 201; Taylor & Ali, 2017; Tompson & Tompson, 1996). Furthermore, the cultural differences between western pedagogy and Confucian-styled learning
often lead the faculty and the international students to have conflicting perceptions of the students’ effort and work. Faculty often view these students as having a deficit or lack in their English proficiency, instead of realizing the cultural differences that are at hand (Andrade, 2006; Beasley & Pearson, 1999; Fox, 1994; Holmes, 2004; Robertson, Line, Jones, & Thomas, 2000). In order to promote a successful learning environment for academic achievement, faculty should strive to gain a multicultural awareness and understanding of the diversity that exists in education around the world, as doing so would help them to better understand the academic difficulties international students may be facing, so proper assistance can then be given (Andrade, 2006; Fox, 1994; Holmes, 2004; Robertson et al., 2000). Additionally, international students should strive to understand their new learning environment and how it interacts with the educational norms from their own culture, creating a ‘middle ground’ that enables them to maintain and respect their cultural values while achieving academic success (Durkin, 2008; Fox, 1994; Holmes, 2004). Fox (1994) stated, “I realize that we [faculty] must do both…help students cope within the system as it exists, with all its imperfections…[and] find ways…to educate ourselves so that we can understand others” (p. 108-109).

Social and language factors. In a similar way to the relationship between English-language ability and academic achievement, English-language ability is also linked to international students’ satisfaction of their social adjustment. When international students come to the U.S., they are faced with the daunting task of developing a new social support system, as their family and close friends often remain in their home country (Andrade, 2006; Senyshyn et al., 2000; Taylor & Ali, 2017; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Studies by Tompson & Tompson (1996) and Taylor & Ali (2017) found that creating a new social support network was crucial for international students’ adaptation and acculturation into their new environment. Specifically,
international students who develop social support with students from the host country tend to exhibit lower levels of acculturative stress, more self-confidence, better adjustment, and an improvement in their language skills (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Sawir et al., 2012; Taylor & Ali, 2017; Yeh & Inose, 2003). While international students who tend to develop social support with only other international students can exhibit higher levels of acculturative stress (Taylor & Ali, 2017).

Despite the importance of developing social support in the U.S., international students can find this task to be quite arduous if their English-language ability has not yet been fully developed, or if they lack confidence in their language abilities (Andrade, 2006; Senyshyn et al., 2000). Therefore, international students who have greater grasp of the English language, as well as a confidence in their abilities tend to perceive greater levels of social support and a better acculturation process (Sawir et al., 2012; Taylor & Ali, 2017). While international students who perceive a lack of social support tend to exhibit greater levels of acculturative stress, less academic achievement, and negative psychological manifestations, such as depression (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Tompson & Tompson, 1996; Yeh & Inose, 2003).

Racism or language discrimination by students of the host country (i.e. U.S.) towards international students can be another factor that inhibits international students from gaining social support networks. An Australian study involving local and international students at a university found that local students thought that having friendships with international students was unnecessary, as the cross-cultural differences were seen as a burden (McKenzie & Baldassar, 2017). Often times, an international student’s accent, low levels of English proficiency, skin color, or lack of colloquial English are the cross-cultural differences that local students tend to either avoid or discriminate against (Brown & Jones, 2013; Lacina 2002; Taylor
& Ali, 2017). As such, a study by Yeh & Inose (2003) found that international students from Europe had significantly lower amounts of acculturative stress in comparison to international students from Asia, Africa, and Latin/Central America, which was perceived to be a result of fewer experiences of racism and discrimination. Similar findings and support have also been found (Brown & Jones, 2013; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Taylor & Ali, 2017). Due to this, it is important and necessary that local students acquire diversity awareness, tolerance, and multicultural acceptance, as friendships between international students and local students can be mutually beneficial (Jacob & Greggo, 2001; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Taylor & Ali, 2017; Yeh & Inose, 2003). It will be beneficial to obtain insight about the acculturation process from the international student body population, as locations with more diversity tend to promote more favorable acculturation adjustment for international students (Constantine et al., 2004; Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Taylor & Ali, 2017).

Theoretical Framework

**Bronfenbrenner ecological model.** Due to the many factors that international students face while enrolled in a university in the U.S., Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological systems theory will be the main theoretical framework used for the current study, but Bronfenbrenner’s ecological system will be discussed first. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological system entails layered systems of interacting environments and contexts that center around the individual of interest. More specifically, Bronfenbrenner stated that ecological models analyze “…the processes and conditions that govern the course of human development in the actual environments in which human beings live” (Bronfenbrenner, 2000, p.129). The microsystem consists of the closest environment and contexts that surround the individual, such as the individual’s family, friends, and school, and at the center of the microsystem is the individual. When two or more
microsystems interact, they form a mesosystem. For example, a mesosystem could consist of one’s family environment interacting with their school environment, which on their own are each microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The next outer layer is the exosystem, which entails the educational system, the economy, religious systems, and the political system that form the society the individual resides in. Outside of the exosystem lies the macrosystem, which consists of the overall culture, social rules, and traditions that surround the individual. Examples of exosystem influences are community neighbors and the parents’ workplace. The outermost layer is the chronosystem layer, which references the time period during which the individual lives (Chiu, Pong, Mori, & Chow; 2012; Elliot et al., 2016; Taylor & Ali, 2017).

An important aspect of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory is that the environmental influence of each layer on the individual dissipates as we move from the microsystem out to the chronosystem. The microsystem has the most impact on the individual because the environmental components of this layer directly interact with the individual on a daily basis. The influence of the mesosystems can vary, as it is dependent upon the relational strength of the interacting microsystems. For example, an individual’s mesosystem that entails of the individual’s school and the individual’s friend group can have a stronger or a weaker impact on the individual in comparison to a mesosystem entailing of the individual’s family and the individual’s school. Despite the varying strengths of the mesosystems, this layer still has a significant influence on the individual (Elliot et al., 2016; Taylor & Ali, 2017).

The exosystem influences the individual indirectly as Elliot et al. states, “the immediate setting interacts with another setting that has an indirect impact on the individual…” (2016, p. 2200). The macrosystem has an important influence when considering international students because it entails of the cultural impact as it affects the individual and all of the preceding layers.
within the ecological system. International students transition from their home country to a foreign country, so their macrosystem experiences a major cultural shift (Taylor & Ali, 2017). In a similar way, the chronosystem also has an important influence for international students as Taylor & Ali state, “their experience is a major life transition and for the student a dimension of time where their environment changes and all the layers in the ecological systems theory change” (2017, p. 4). The relevance of the ecological framework for the purpose of this paper is important because it stresses the need to consider the interacting environments that can directly and indirectly influence the individual as one attempts to analyze the needs or problems of that individual (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007).

**Bronfenbrenner bioecological model.** The transition from Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model to Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model is that the latter adaptation of the same model placed more emphasis on proximal processes. Proximal processes are continuous types of interactions, occurring over frequently steady and prolonged periods of time within the direct or proximate environment. According to this newer adaptation, proximal processes are the main forces that drive development for a person (Bronfenbrenner, 2000). As Bronfenbrenner states, “the form, power, content, and direction of the proximal processes effecting development vary systematically as a joint function of the characteristics of the developing person…” (Bronfenbrenner, 2000, p. 130). These characteristics are the environment, the developmental outcomes, and the social stabilities and shifts throughout the time of the person’s life (Bronfenbrenner, 2000). A major difference between the original ecological model and the adapted bioecological model can be seen from this excerpt, “… in the bioecological model, the characteristics of the person function both as an indirect producer and as a product of development.” (Bronfenbrenner, 2000, p. 130). The original notion of the ecological model
focused more solely on how the environment affected the individual, without including much consideration on how the individual elicits change for themselves as well. Due to this additional expansion, the analysis of results will include perspectives from original the ecological model and its adapted form: the bioecological model.
Participants

The study’s sample consisted of 3 international students, and 5 undergraduate faculty. Ideally, the female to male ratio intended to be around 1:1 for both the international student sample and the faculty sample. In reality, the female to male ratio was 2:1 for the student sample and 2:3 for the faculty sample. Two of the student participants were female and one was male. Two of the student participants, one male and one female, were from South Korea. The other female student participant was from Vietnam. At the time of the interviews, each student was a senior. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained prior to participant recruitment. Volunteer participation was requested from undergraduate international students who currently attend Liberty University. Volunteer participation from faculty was also requested from the same institution of higher education. Please note that both forms of participation recruitment were conducted through convenience sampling. The forms of convenience sampling entailed word of mouth suggestions made by faculty and students, who suggested individuals that might be willing to participate. These suggestions were heeded, in which the researcher then made standard attempts to reach out to the suggested international undergraduate students via the Institutional Review Board approved recruitment flyers and recruitment letters. Faculty participation was recruited by email requests.

The recruitment began in late October, early November for faculty. The international student participants stated availabilities for two months later, in January. Each participant was entered into a raffle for a $25.00 gift card of their choice, in which one participant would be chosen from each sample group; there was one raffle winner for the undergraduate international
student sample and one raffle winner for the undergraduate faculty sample. There were no further incentives besides the raffle.

**Procedure**

Timeline interviews were the main tool used to obtain insight from international students (Adriansen, 2012). As a qualitative study, timeline interviews promote an open and trusting environment between the interviewer and the interviewee, as this method enables the interviewee to take part in leading and directing the interview. The protocol for timeline interviews followed the known qualitative method. A key part of the timeline interview is a piece of paper that serves as a visual aid, representing a timeline of the students’ acculturation and adjustment processes. This piece of paper has a horizontal line in the middle to represent the timeline, and the interviewee was given writing instruments, (i.e. colored pencils) to mark main events and details that came to mind as the interview unfolded. The visual aid reflected a linear recall of events, but students were free to divert from a linear recall, in order to promote a wider range of recall, as one event might spark remembrance of another event that did not occur directly before or after (Adriansen, 2012). The sheet of paper was a tool used to help with the process of creating an open environment, as the focus could be diverted from the interviewee onto the paper. Additionally, this paper that was shared openly between the interviewee and interviewer was meant to enable a more relaxing experience instead of having the interviewer take notes that the interviewee cannot see as the interview proceeds. A personal account from an interviewed student stated, ‘It was nice that I could see what the interviewee wrote and left with’ (Adriansen, 2012, p. 48). The time period of concern for the interview began at the months leading up to the student’s initial arrival to the U.S. and continued through to the present. As Adriansen states, “…the intention is to understand how the patterns of different life stories can be related to their
wider historical, social, environmental, and political context” (2012, p. 41). In this way, the timeline interview method works well with Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model, as they both seek to obtain a holistic account of an individual’s experience.

Standard interviews were conducted for the faculty interviews. There was no significance in relation to the reason for conducting standard interviews for the faculty. Therefore, there is no need to expound upon the method behind standard interviews.

**Thematic Data Analysis**

The timeline interviews were reviewed using thematic analysis, which is a qualitative research method that allows for flexibility and detail while analyzing data. Braun & Clarke define thematic analysis as, “…a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns [themes] within data” (2006, p.79). The theoretical framework from Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological systems theory was the foundational base that the codes and themes were sorted through. Braun & Clarke offered the following definition, “A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (2006, p., 82). As alluded to in the previous definition, it is pertinent that the themes are linked to the study’s research questions in order to obtain a beneficial analysis that can lead to useful findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within the data set was a six-step process. The first step was to become familiar with the obtained data by transcribing the recorded interviews and continuously reviewing the material. The second step was to code the data, detecting broad features from the set that seemed to be significant for the research questions at hand. The third step was to look at the coded data more specifically to find themes that exist, typically by merging relatable codes into groups that fit into an overall theme. The fourth step
was reviewing the themes gathered from the previous steps, in order to ensure that each theme had actual support from the data, and that the discovered themes were distinct from each other. The fifth step involved defining the themes as they related to the data and the theoretical framework of the study. At this step, the themes, and potential sub-themes must be clear, concise, and effective in order for the researcher’s intended analysis to be clearly understood. The sixth and final step was to report the findings from the overall analysis. An important aspect of this step was to include sufficient evidence and useful examples that will be supportive of the research (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The recorded interviews were reviewed between five to seven times by the researcher. The recorded interviews were then transcribed and the transcriptions went through a three-fold editing process. This ensured that the recorded interviews and the transcriptions of the interviews matched as much as possible. The transcriptions were then reviewed through the thematic analysis process in search for codes and themes. Once all of the transcribed interviews were coded, the faculty interviews and the student interviews were separated to search for overarching themes within each sample group. The uncovered themes were listed, reviewed, and edited to ensure that any repetition was minimized. It was at this point that the researcher defined and named the themes, so that the names conveyed the most meaning for their associated content. Two thematic maps were created for the faculty, one for the first main theme and one for the second main theme. One thematic map was created for the international students’ main themes. The faculty’s main themes were placed on two separate thematic maps because the two themes were distinct from each other. In comparison, the international students’ main themes were placed on one thematic map because each of the five themes were associated with one another.
The subthemes and associated codes were all listed with the thematic mapping for further review and accuracy.
Chapter IV: Results

The interviews from both the international undergraduate students and the undergraduate faculty revealed multiple aspects of the undergraduate international student experience, as well as the faculty’s perception of this experience. The international student data revealed the following main themes: environment, language, affect, support, and motivation. The main theme of environment had four subthemes, which were cultural, social, linguistic, and academic. The language main theme had three subthemes, which were acquisition, social effects, and academic effects. The affect main theme had two subthemes, which were socially-related and academically-related. Support as a main theme had two subthemes, which were social and academic. Lastly, the main theme of motivation had three subthemes, which were social, language, and academic. It will be important to note that the student interviews do not share all of the same subthemes; however, they do share all of the same main themes.

The undergraduate faculty’s interviews produced two main themes, which were faculty perspectives on international undergraduate student experience and faculty abetment. Faculty perspectives on international undergraduate student experience carried four subthemes: support, finances, acculturating to American university standards, and student aptitude. Faculty abetment carried five subthemes: interpersonal awareness, academic awareness, individual global mindset (IGM), academic support, and non-academic support and facilitations. The results from the student interviews will be shared first.

Student 1: Annie

Environment. As a brief background, Annie from the first interview arrived in the U.S. in the fall of 2014. She transferred to Liberty University in 2016 and is currently a senior at Liberty University. In regards to the environment, when Annie first arrived, she experienced
feelings of awkwardness in her new culture. This was especially the case when Annie first began to encounter other individuals in her new culture, i.e. the U.S. “For me, it was culturally very awkward to encounter all the people… for example, when you see the stranger, they talk to you very friendly saying, “Hey, how are you?”… I was very uncomfortable” (Student 1, Interview, January 25, 2019). Through further explaining, it was expressed that this discomfort was because the particular cultural greeting tendency occurring in Lynchburg, Virginia, as well as in much of the U.S. was in distinct contrast to the cultural greeting tendencies in Annie’s home country. This shock is not unexpected for international students because a major shift occurs, in which the macrosystem environment for the student suddenly changes. Bronfenbrenner stated that macrosystems are “…carriers of information and ideology that… endow meaning and motivation…” (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 515). Thus far, for the majority of her life, Annie was submerged in a cultural environment that fostered certain ideologies, tendencies, and information, but suddenly, Annie moved to a new cultural environment that fostered ideologies, tendencies, and information that contrasted greatly with her home macrosystem. As she stated,

…later then I learned, Okay. This is part of their culture to say, ‘How are you?’ And even though you don’t know them, it’s just a part of saying, ‘Hey’, and… you’re okay to just pass the person… that was like the first challenge for me to understand the culture (Student 1, Interview, January 25, 2019).

From a linguistic standpoint, she did not have a deep understanding of the English language upon first arriving to the U.S. “… my English wasn’t conversational at all” (Student 1, Interview, January 25, 2019). To assist with this, within the first few months of arrival, Annie enrolled in an English Language Institute (ELI), which was at Liberty University. She shared that this experience was helpful, but it was not without its own challenges.
…whenever I talked to my professor at ELI or talk to my friends… I had a really difficult time to like express… what I wanted to say and interpret what the person’s saying. And like try to like continue the conversation, that was… [the] hardest part for me to learn English (Student 1, Interview, January 25, 2019).

An interesting shift occurred within Annie’s linguistic environment, in which after one semester at the ELI, she transferred to a local community college. This linguistic environmental shift was very noticeable to her, as she was still learning how to become a conversational English speaker. The proximal processes that were at play here included the process of “acquiring new knowledge and know-how” and the process of “engaging in… intellectual… activities that become increasingly complex over time” (Bronfenbrenner, 2000, p. 130). Thus far, Annie has been acquiring new knowledge about the culture, as well as the language. Both of these aims of acquisition were intellectual endeavors that continued to unfold more complexities as Annie continued to learn about them.

When I transferred… that’s the starting point that I really… realizing that, ‘Okay. This is going to be really challenged because all of them are a native speaker’… And I had a really hard time to make friends at ___ because back in the day, I did not know how to talk to people (Student 1, Interview, January 25, 2019).

Annie’s knowledge of the new environment’s culture began to expand within the first 4 to 6 months after arrival. This expansion, which also affected her social environment was largely because she began dating a native English speaker. Through this relationship, Annie began to hang out less with friends who shared the same first language (L1), and began to interact more with people of Western culture. This added microsystem of ‘significant other’, led to a new mesosystem interaction between the ‘significant other microsystem’ and ‘social or peer
FACTORS AFFECTING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

microsystem’. It was noticed that the relationship with the native English speaker served as a way for Annie to grow socially and culturally within the U.S., in which she was able to not only learn more English, but also obtain clarification about various cultural occurrences that seemed strange or confusing.

_ helped me to understand some… concept… that’s strange, for example, like greeting in America or complimenting in this culture… dating… is a part of the challenge, like part of the experiencing the culture. So… _ was like a middle [person] between me and… the culture (Student 1, Interview, January 25, 2019).

Bronfenbrenner stated, “the developmental power of proximal processes is substantially enhanced when they occur within the context of a relationship between persons who have developed a strong emotional attachment to each other” (2000, p. 130). The strong emotional attachment to a significant other helped Annie’s developmental outcome, in which she grew in cultural and social knowledge.

**Language.** Brief components of Annie’s English language experience and journey were mentioned within the aspects of her environment. To expand even further, we review the language experience in lieu of the acquisition, the social effects, and the academic effects. To briefly touch upon the language components that have been mentioned thus far, when Annie first came to the U.S., she did not have a firm grasp of the English language, which made conversation difficult. The ELI proved to be an interesting language learning center, as it helped Annie with grammar, reading, writing, and listening, but for the most part, it lacked the necessary component of practical, every day, language usage practice. She offered the following example,
… when I went to ELI… I was surrounding by second language speakers, who also speak English as a second language… I wasn’t conversational because… I never really been like exposed to English, because I was surrounding by students who also speak English as a second language (Student 1, Interview, January 25, 2019).

Annie harnessed an important aspect of the language acquisition process, which is being exposed to native speakers. At this point of her language acquisition process, she lacked the practical language aspect, which is often acquired when an individual surrounds herself with native speakers of the desired language. Although the ELI was beneficial in multiple ways for Annie, interacting with other international students who were also learning the language did not help her expand her English speaking skills.

Annie’s journey of learning conversational English was said to begin once she transferred to the community college, as she stated, “... since I transfer to ____, I have to like implicitly use my mind to speak a language without any instruction…” (Student 1, Interview, January 25, 2019). Although this was the language environment that she had hoped for while at the ELI, it proved to be its own challenge. Transferring to the community college meant that Annie was no longer receiving English instruction, but was now expected to begin learning course material that would be taught in English. “There’s no guideline for me to like talk to your classmates or professor, right? So that’s how I really like… started to like learn how to talk to people. And how to make like a true conversation… like true communication…” (Student 1, Interview, January 25, 2019).

Creating friendships was a big social effect of the language acquisition process. Initially, it was very difficult for Annie to make friends due to the low English language ability level, but as she continued to be exposed to native speakers, her confidence in English grew. By the second
semester at the community college, Annie began to socialize more, make friends, and speak to professors in person. Initially, she avoided speaking in class and socializing with others due to her language.

Because I felt a little overwhelmed to like see other…. American and the professors. And the first semester at ____, I don’t think I ever talked to professor in person, because I was scared to make mistake with my English. I was scared like to kind of expose myself...
you know English as my second language (Student 1, Interview, January 25, 2019).

Instead of talking to the professors in person, Annie would instead email the professors, if any questions ever arose. Even though emailing was a way for her to avoid language exposure, she still felt the pressures of being uncomfortable in a new language because she did not know how to write academic emails in English at the time. “…but back in the day… the reason why I couldn't tell them because I’m scared to be exposed myself, my English and I was too shy to ask them for a favor for me” (Student 1, Interview, January 25, 2019).

Affect. As the analysis of Annie’s interview continues, it becomes apparent that many, if not all, of the themes are interrelated, as if there is correlational relationship present. In regards to her affect, the improvement of the social environment for Annie, led her to foster feelings of confidence. These positive feelings of confidence due to an expansion of the social environment led Annie to interact more in class, such as asking the professor questions in person. An affective quality that has remained with her from onset to the beginning stages at Liberty University, was that she felt overwhelmed and scared to speak in class or to the professors, due to wanting to avoid making mistakes. In a similar way, Annie felt overwhelmed when entering a classroom. Since classrooms in the U.S. are typically filled with Americans, and usually have an American professor, the realization of the need to speak English in this educational environment seemed
daunting. In addition to these affective components was the fact that she felt pressured to get a degree.

**Support.** It will soon become evident that the support that Annie received was closely tied to the affective responses that she produced. With this in mind, the following examples and insights about support may offer further clarification on the previous aspect of affect. A very beneficial aspect of social support that Annie mentioned was that she moved to the United States with family. The fact that she did not come to the U.S. alone was a socially relieving factor that gave her a sense of partial ease.

Of course my family support me because I got home, you know, mom cook. There’s a food. I don’t have to worry about the apartment, rent, or… the paying for whatever, so I can solely focus on my school. School and all the classes (Student 1, Interview, January 25, 2019).

Annie went on further to say, “…if I go home…this is not America. This is like Korea because…we eat Korean food. They speak Korean. So that’s like my more deep connection with my own family…” (Student 1, Interview, January 25, 2019). In a similar way to the her significant other, her family relationship carried strong emotional bonds, which assisted the student’s educational growth and development. Therefore, Annie’s family played a big role in easing many of her anxieties, especially financially related anxieties. This enabled Annie to place more attention on improving academically.

In addition to the support received from family, Annie also mentioned that the local church that they attend has been a great sense of support within the community. “I’ve been that church almost four years now… And they always treated us really friendly, and they’re like a family people…” (Student 1, Interview, January 25, 2019). In addition to the significant other
that she mentioned previously as being an important aspect for her social acclimation and social support, she also mentioned that friends outside of school were beneficial as well.

Before Annie transferred to Liberty University (LU), she attended the ELI that was previously an extension of LU, and then attended a local community college. While at the community college, an academic advisor was said to have been an important part of her academic support, i.e. the academic advisor assisted Annie with registering for courses, making sure that the courses taken were transferrable into LU.

I remember because it’s a really small school. The one academic advisor. She’s the only one who knows all the information about international students. Because it is very rare to see international students at ____... I remember there’s only 10 people, at that time. And I was one of them (Student 1, Interview, January 25, 2019).

In addition to the academic advisor at the community college, Annie mentioned that the community college’s professors were willing to help her, if they were approached. As an international student who was learning English, trying to become more familiar and comfortable with academic English, a component of the professor’s assistance posed as a problem for Annie.

Professor from ____... they’re willing to help me, if I ask for help, but I was too shy to ask them for help. So I never really asked them for help… they wasn’t really, you know, give me any like direction or instruction that… how can I survive the class (Student 1, Interview, January 25, 2019).

In comparison to the community college, Annie mentioned many key differences with the academic support received from the faculty at LU. One of the most interesting comments was that she noticed a difference in how the professors at LU assisted, in comparison to the professors at the community college. “But the professors at Liberty… They’re much more
friendly. Maybe because like they have encountered more international students and more
foreign people and have that empathy” (Student 1, Interview, January 25, 2019). As previously
mentioned, the community college had a total of 10 international students when Annie attended.
Annie made a great point of how the vast exposure and interaction with international students at
LU has likely helped the faculty become more aware of issues international students may face,
enabling them to better assist the international students. She shared the following, “They kept
telling me, ‘You can do it. You can pass the class.’…” (Student 1, Interview, January 25, 2019).
In addition to the encouragement that was given by the general body of LU professors, Annie
stated that the professors from the her major courses at LU had an awareness of recognizing
when she was struggling. One specific professor was mentioned as Annie reflected and
appreciated this difference,

…he came and talked to me that, ‘Hey___, like I think that you are really important part,
important person in our class. If you have a question… ask me your question during a
class, not after class. Or you can of course come and talk to me in my office, but you’re
not a second wheel. You are the important part of class, so participate.’… And I know…
he knows I got a insight (Student 1, Interview, January 25, 2019).

This type of encouragement from the LU faculty was very important to Annie because this
encouragement went a step further than simply saying, “You can do it.” Annie was able to feel
appreciated, valued, and important within the university, and within the classroom. The professor
saw that she needed encouragement and that she needed to know that her input is valuable,
important, and insightful for the classroom, just as any other student’s is. This situational
example from Annie is supported by Bronfenbrenner who stated that the proximal processes
surrounding an individual are more powerful systems for expanding development, in comparison
to just the environment that surrounds the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 2000). Annie went on to say,

And he wanted me to share my insight with my classmate, my people. So that kind of inspired me to think… because he’s American and he’s professor of like my class, and I felt like I am accepted… by him, which is by the person who were like a part of the society, so I felt like I was kind of accepted (Student 1, Interview, January 25, 2019).

This complex and positive interaction between professor and student had a big developmental impact on Annie in regards to the her outlook and perspective about the vital microsystem of being a student at university. This proximal process pushed her in a positive direction toward achieving greater intellectual and socioemotional development (Bronfenbrenner, 2000). In addition to this one specific professor’s encouragement, Annie also mentioned that the overall department that she belongs to has been very supportive.

**Motivation.** As I previously mentioned, and hopefully this is becoming more apparent as we continue; many of these themes are in direct effect with one another. Annie’s positive affect is tied to the social support or academic support that she received, which then in turn served as a motivating factor for her, which is what we will now look at. From a social viewpoint, Annie’s motivation and desire to become friends with Americans and become comfortable in the new environment drove her to interact more and converse more in English.

… I have that motivation. I had that desire to get along with American friends or just like be comfortable in this environment… Maybe I got more confidence in speaking my second language, since I going to school and talking to people. With the more experience I think I… felt much comfortable in that environment (Student 1, Interview, January 25, 2019).
From an academic standpoint, much of the previously mentioned genuine encouragement from faculty served as a motivating force for her to succeed academically. “…I feel like…they give me… that positive motivation… So like that made me feel like it was a really good feeling that, ‘Oh! It’s making me feel like it’s really good to be here, be part of the society’” (Student 1, Interview, January 25, 2019). An important aspect of Annie’s journey was that she also carried an internal motivation that stemmed from a personal desire to do well with learning English, with socializing, and with academics.

I think I had a motivation that I wanted to be academically success with my school…I really want to get a good grade… I think that’s kind of motivated me to study English…[and] for [that] academic reason that motivate me to learn. Motivate me to like do well in English (Student 1, Interview, January 25, 2019).

Through these different motivational drives, especially her internal motivation, Annie strove to reach developmental competence socially and academically. Bronfenbrenner defined developmental competence as, “the further development of abilities – whether intellectual, physical, socioemotional, or combinations of them” (Bronfenbrenner, 2000, p. 132). Developmental competence is in direct contrast to developmental dysfunction, which was defined as, “the recurrent manifestation of difficulties on the part of the developing person in maintaining control and integration of behavior across a variety of situations” (Bronfenbrenner, 2000, p. 132). A unique motivating facet that attributed to LU was that she felt that going to a Christian university served as an additional motivator, encouraging her to stay and continue studying at the university.

…cause they all Christian and… the idea of Liberty is all about Christianity… people I met they’re all Christian. They’re all faithful Christian, and that affect me that just stick
with the school, and continue my degree. And now I almost complete it… (Student 1, Interview, January 25, 2019).

The university’s unique exosystem of being a Christian university influenced and defined how the social and the academic processes work within this academic setting. For instance, how Annie’s mesosystems and microsystems within this environment interact and develop (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). For Annie, this exosystem was a positive structure for development.

**Student 2: Frank**

**Environment.** To offer a brief background, Frank from the second interview came to the U.S. in the winter of 2009. Frank attended high school locally, and is now a senior at Liberty University. When he first arrived at Lynchburg, Frank faced various challenges in relation to the social and academic environment, including being discriminated against in high school.

…there was a racist movement… there were some mean people, bad people. Whenever I talk to other Asian people like Chinese and Vietnamese, mostly Koreans. Whenever I talk to them, they laugh at us, and then make fun of us. They made like Asian eyes, you know like small eyes, making fun of us. And asking weird questions like, ‘Hey, do you eat dogs in your countries?’ (Student 2, Interview, January 31, 2019).

This racial discrimination did not make the initial transitioning period in the U.S. easy or pleasant for Frank, but instead made him feel isolated in the new environment.

Because we feel isolated in American societies. So we start to hang out with our language people… because I’m Korean… I used to hang out with Korean people when I was in high school because I can share my concerns, hardships, and everything (Student 2, Interview, January 31, 2019).

Unfortunately, the city of Lynchburg, where the university is located did not improve for him.
… outside of Liberty University is very different… people don’t really care about those barriers. They don’t really think international student as like international student, what I mean is, they don’t really care about international people. They treat international people as an American people, which… it’s good thing, but they don’t accept any barriers.

(Student 2, Interview, January 31, 2019).

Frank experienced many negative occurrences between the mesosystem of ‘school and peer group’, and experienced difficulties with the new cultural macrosystem. Much like Annie, the proximal processes within Frank’s environments carried more developmental effect than the environments alone. For instance, it was not the ‘school and peer group’ mesosystem that caused hardships for Frank, but rather the interactions that occurred within this environment, i.e. the proximal processes. This excerpt from Frank shares an important aspect of what international students seek when interacting with others from the American culture. There is a desire to be accepted by Americans, but not without first having their own culture understood, appreciated, and acknowledged. Americans should not seek to make international students become one with the American culture and society, expecting them to blend in, as that does an injustice to the international student’s own culture. All individuals should genuinely desire to get to know others, accepting and respecting one another’s differences and variations. If an individual is lazy or does not have an open mind, then the individual will likely find it arduous to get to know others, preferring instead to avoid the effort that it takes to sincerely become acquainted and familiar with the other person. It appears that these type of encounters were what Frank has experienced within the city of Lynchburg.

As the years passed, he shared that the social experiences improved once the university years began, stating, “People are more mature… I think they understand and in college they’re
more international people than high school” (Student 2, Interview, January 31, 2019). From his perspective, individuals at LU have an understanding, or at least attempt to understand other cultures, international students, the international students’ language, and their societal barriers. This positive experience with the social environment at the university was greatly affected by when Frank stayed on campus in the dormitories. “…I start to have good relationship with American people in dormitory. And since we are living together, I start to have like confidence… about American friends… I was really happy with the dormitory life” (Student 2, Interview, January 31, 2019). As this excerpt showed, Frank’s intimate exposure with Americans boosted his confidence socially and culturally. This positive proximal process interaction within the mesosystem of ‘school and peer group’ served as a buffer against the previously negative experiences that occurred within this mesosystem at the high school level. This is comparable to Annie’s perspective about the effects of her significant other.

**Language.** Frank’s English language acquisition process began when he first arrived to the U.S. “When I came to the United States… I could even not say, ‘Hi’, or ‘bye’, ‘How are you?’” (Student 2, Interview, January 31, 2019). Since he was not yet familiar with English, studying in school was an initial challenge. “…I didn’t understand any class lectures. I didn’t understand any high school assignments… I tried to read high school textbooks… but in that time it was really hard to understand English and understand the chapters, and tests, and everything” (Student 2, Interview, January 31, 2019). By the second year of high school, Frank felt much more comfortable in the language, stating, “I needed six months to one year to understand English and speak English” (Student 2, Interview, January 31, 2019). A force that propelled him to learn English at a rapid pace occurred in university when he became friends with other international students. The key component mentioned was that the other international
students did not share the same L1 as Frank. This proximal process enabled his English language and English speaking skills to greatly improve, moving closer towards intellectual competence for his English language. Prior to this, Frank socialized mainly with other individuals who spoke the same L1. The difference in English acquisition during both of these times was noticed by Frank,

…but in some cases, I can say friends hang out with friends who are speaking the same language are good. But if a person hang out too much, spend too much time for hanging out with those friends, I don’t think it’s not good for living in American society…since I hang out with Korean people, my English improvement was very, very slow (Student 2, Interview, January 31, 2019).

Another great English acquisition opportunity for him was when he lived at a dormitory on campus. It was previously mentioned that the dormitory experience helped Frank gain a positive outlook about making American friends. In addition to this, he stated,

And living with American people help me so much to improve my English because… in my house I speak Korean. I speak Korean with my family. So I don’t really talk in English, but since I went into the dormitory, so I could… speak in English every day (Student 2, Interview, January 31, 2019).

**Affect.** Many of the affectual inducing occurrences that Frank experienced were mentioned within previous themes to varying degrees. To recall, upon initial arrival, Frank felt isolated due to being discriminated against by other students in high school. The discrimination that he faced was focused on both his appearance and his language. He offered the following example,
I had problem with ‘r’ and ‘l’ in accent way. Even though I studied the accent, I cannot fix it because in Korea we cannot, we have no distinction of ‘r’ and ‘l’. So because of the language barrier, accent barrier, when I speak something with ‘r’ and ‘l’, they make fun of us by using ‘r’ words as a ‘l’ words (Student 2, Interview, January 31, 2019).

This type of cultural insensitivity that Frank experienced was a socioemotional developmental dysfunction that cast a very negative social outlook for him, taking years to overcome.

**Support.** The journey that Frank experienced in regards to finding the necessary support could be likened to a rollercoaster, in that the experiences contained their fair share of ups and downs. Initially, Frank had trouble making friends due to linguistic barriers and discrimination that he experienced. To combat this, he learned how to cope with these negative experiences by gaining a support system with other Koreans. Frank shared an experience of how academic support occurred through this support system,

…there was one case, I was in high school class and people start to take the test and I didn’t know… they’re taking the test. So the teacher called my friend who can speak Korean… He called him to our classroom and then he asked me, that friend, to translate for me (Student 2, Interview, January 31, 2019).

Here we see an example of how one positive proximal process experience within a mesosystem can buffer a negative proximal process that occurred within the same mesosystem.

As time went by, he continued to expand the support received, incorporating other international students who did not share the same L1, and eventually to American peers from the university. Through these gradual additions of trusted support, Frank was able to create a more healthy and balanced support system. A great example to expound upon this could be found in
how he started becoming friends with other international students besides Koreans. He shared the following,

…as an international student, I feel like I want to hang out with more international students more than American people. Because we know how hard it is to live in America, as an international student. So we have commons, so we can share our experience in America. And we, as an international students, we learn English (Student 2, Interview, January 31, 2019).

From this, we can see that Frank was able to branch out more socially, while still feeling comforted that those whom he trusted and interacted with understood him.

As a slight shift, we will turn more specifically to the social support within the academic setting that Frank received. A big academic supporter for him was the International Student Center at Liberty University. To offer reasoning for this, he shared,

…I think International Center helps to… gather international students in one place. So in the International Center we can talk to each other, we can have conversation. We can study together… we can open an event, like Parade of Nations, like open houses (Student 2, Interview, January 31, 2019).

As Frank shared, the International Student Center serves a great purpose, in that it is a place where international students can gather comfortably, interact with international students from other countries, and share cultural knowledge with the overall student body, increasing the student body’s cultural awareness and cultural appreciation.

He went on to say, “… So I think International Center is much, much bigger, if they have more events it will be good for both international students and American students who don’t have any interest in international culture or international students” (Student 2, Interview, January
In addition to the International Student Center, Frank mentioned that at LU, there were many individuals that encouraged him in multiple ways. An interesting similarity to Annie was found, as Frank also mentioned the American cultural greeting of saying “hello” to a stranger.

They have very good cultural things that you use when you meet someone or stranger, you say, ‘Hi.’ So when I… say ‘Hi’ to worker in Liberty University and the workers say, ‘Oh, hi’ and then, ‘Oh, you speak pretty good English and please study well in the Liberty University. America needs someone like you and your country might need someone like you.’ … which made me to study harder and then to stay here (Student 2, Interview, January 31, 2019).

In a similar effect to the encouragement that Annie received from a professor, Frank received encouragement, which made him feel like a necessary, important, and contributing student at the university.

**Motivation.** Throughout the interview, Frank exhibited forces of motivation for both the language acquisition process and the academic achievement process. In regards to the language acquisition process, during the first year of his arrival, Frank chose to take time outside of the classroom to work on improving his English skills. This additional effort to learn English occurred because his academic performance was initially in a deficit, and was in direct relation the low level of English competence that he had upon initial arrival.

I started to work on the English skills in my own house and after school. And then I went to summer school in the high school to improve my English. So those effort helped me to catch up the English lectures, English assignments, a little (Student 2, Interview, January 31, 2019).
A key component of this that was motivational for Frank was that improvement and progression were personally noticed. The realization that the extra efforts were paying off, even if slightly, was a motivation to continue. The LU workers’ encouragement clearly served as a motivational force for him as well. To recap on this, he stated that the encouraging words from the workers, “… made me to study harder and then to stay here” (Student 2, Interview, January 31, 2019).

From Frank’s interview, we can see the transition from socioemotional developmental dysfunction to socioemotional developmental competence, as well as an intellectual development in English that continued to grow over time.

**Student 3: Susie**

**Environment.** As a brief background, Susie from the third interview arrived to the U.S. in August of 2015. She is currently a senior at Liberty University. Unfortunately, the initial journey to the U.S. was one that was incommodious and irritating for Susie. This journey began with a flight from Vietnam to Chicago, in which her flight included, from her perspective, an unnecessarily rude stewardess and a rough trip with a lot of turbulence. She then experienced a missed flight from Chicago, Illinois to Roanoke, Virginia. Her boarding gates were changed, but Susie was not notified of this change.

…that was like one of my very first experience in the State, ‘Dang this airport is so huge.’ Vietnam International Airport, I think it’s like this big (making a space between the hands), and then Chicago is like this whole room… so we ran all the way… By the time we made it, they literally just closed the boarding gate like a minute before, but they didn’t open for us (Student 3, Interview, January 31, 2019).

Susie was assisted afterwards by receiving a complimentary replacement flight, but all of the experienced hardships within such a short amount of time did not create a good outlook of the
new environment that she was transitioning into. Fortunately, once she reached the regional airport in Roanoke, Virginia, the International Student Center at Liberty University had a shuttle bus that transported Susie to campus.

Hardships and difficulties with the new environment continued into the first week for her. Susie shared the following example, “Okay, I walked on the highway for two and a half hours… to get to church” (Student 3, Interview, January 31, 2019). This devastating event occurred because of misunderstandings about the public transportation system in Lynchburg, Virginia. Susie and a friend, who was also a new international student, were trying to locate a church that they discovered. In an effort to assist, individuals told Susie to use MapQuest for directions. This assistance was not an issue, but unbeknownst to the individuals who offered the suggestion was the fact that GPS applications, such as MapQuest are not commonly used in Vietnam. Due to this, Susie did not know how to interpret the GPS’ steps and directions. “So we didn't know much. Because back in Vietnam, we don't really use GPS, even now… because imagine if you ride a scooter, like you don’t put your GPS in… it’s not very feasible” (Student 3, Interview, January 31, 2019). In America, using a GPS for directions is quite common, so it was most likely assumed that she would know how they operate, in regards to the directions GPS’ give, and how GPS’ present the signs, etc.

So, I don't know what happened, but then like she kind of like, ‘Oh, I think that there’s a bus that goes to the church.’ By bus that was actually a highway, it’s the 460. But it said, ‘Business 460’, so when we looked it up, it said, ‘BUS 460.’ We thought it was bus, I mean, it’s bus (Student 3, Interview, January 31, 2019).
It was quite easy to see the logical thinking that Susie and her friend had while interpreting the signs, as they were not offered clarification that the ‘BUS 460’ was not a bus that led to the Business 460 highway, but was instead an abbreviation of said highway.

Due to this misunderstanding, a trip that was expected to be 15 minutes via bus turned into two and a half hours of walking in confusion and frustration. Here we see how much the ‘transportation’ exosystem can effect an individual. As she mentioned,

And we didn’t notice like, oh there’s an option for walking. If we hit ‘walking’ it’d be like 3 hours and then we’ll be like, ‘Never mind.’ But it said 15 minutes. So she’s like, ‘Oh I think so, it’s only 15 minutes from here. So if we walk a little bit…’ (Student 3, Interview, January 31, 2019).

Another factor that contributed to this was that Susie did not realize that there would be vast differences between how bus transportation works in Lynchburg, VA and within the university, in comparison to how bus transportation works in Vietnam.

… this school is so huge. They have like buses running around the university. We never have that back in Vietnam, our school is like the New York setting. Like, how can you have bus inside a New York school?… I took buses to go to my high school. So it’s just like very thing that like very normal to me, so I didn’t expect that, you know like, this one was going to be different (Student 3, Interview, January 31, 2019).

The exosystem of ‘transportation facilities’ in her home country were vastly different from the exosystem of ‘transportation facilities’ in the new environment of Lynchburg, VA and Liberty University. This vast difference caused a great deal of hardships and frustrations for her, despite the proximal process that occurred between Susie and the individuals that attempted to help with directions by suggesting MapQuest. This could be because the relationship between Susie and
the individuals who attempted to assist contained no emotional attachment, so the power of the proximal process was rather weak. If the proximal process contained involved an interaction between Susie and someone with strong emotional ties to her, then it is likely that the power of the process would have been much greater, e.g. the individual would have gone into more depth to make sure that Susie understood the directions and how to navigate.

Another factor of the environment that she faced was the process of settling into the new society, which entailed of obtaining everything that was needed for basic day to day living. She offered the following example of the process it took to obtain a cell phone,

So like, getting phone and then we didn’t know that like we need… to have a phone contract, since my phone was locked at the time. I didn’t know that in a phone, I’d have the phone contract you need a social security number… That’s the first time I’ve heard of that, and you need a travel license… (Student 3, Interview, January 31, 2019).

It is important to note how aspects of ‘American’ life that seem so simple to Americans can impact an international individual in such a large way, especially if the individual is not informed of what these aspects are, e.g. a social security number, how to read traffic signs, and how to navigate using GPS directions. Luckily, Susie was able to receive the necessities, such as a cell phone and travel assistance, due to the support of others, which will be talked about in detail in the “Support” theme section.

From an academic perspective, Susie stated that the cultural differences of the academic environment were difficult to adjust to initially.

…I was very surprised when… sometimes like students in my class just joked with professors. That’s not what we do in Vietnam. It would be considered very rude or disrespectful. Or like you need to be very close with the teacher in order to do that, but
you will always see that clear barrier between teacher and student (Student 3, Interview, January 31, 2019).

Although this was a big adjustment for her, she did come to enjoy this type of close, slightly relaxed interactive environment between professors and students. In addition to this, she also mentioned that the way that professors grade at the university was different from how teachers graded work in Vietnam, and that the concept of a private school and a public school in America was different from Vietnam. “… I’ve found that… here public school is not as good as private ones, whereas in Vietnam, it is the opposite… whoever cannot get into public have to go to private school…” (Student 3, Interview, January 31, 2019). Overall, Susie stated, “… it’s just like a little bit of learning difference, but it’s not as prevalent to me, I guess. More of the adjusting with culture, with language, and with people” (Student 3, Interview, January 31, 2019).

The aspects of the cultural environment within the university, which include the student body, posed many challenges for Susie. A big challenge that she dealt with for more than two years was that she encountered many negative experiences from individuals within the student body at LU, because she is Catholic. “…I guess this is more of a Liberty thing… it’s quite conservative. I found that people care too much about the other person religious background… I feel like I’m being judged by that, rather than by me as a person” (Student 3, Interview, January 31, 2019). Liberty University is known to be a Christian university, which was no issue to her, as she was fully aware of this before attending. The issue that Susie encountered was that some students at the university would not accept that she identified with a different religion, i.e. Catholic. Here we see the point of demarcation between the university as an exosystem and the mesosystem within the school environment, as it was not the exosystem that caused direct issues, but rather the mesosystem. The mesosystem was where the continuous interactions occurred,
spurring negative proximal processes between Susie and some of the student body, hindering her social development.

… back in Vietnam, I have a lot of friends who are not Christians. They all from different religions, not to mention like different denominations, but I’ve never felt like that’s something I need to take into consideration when I meet friends (Student 3, Interview, January 31, 2019).

The social environment within Liberty University, as she described, was one that could potentially be difficult for individuals who do not have the same religious perspective as the overall university or the general student body. It is important to note that one cannot make the assumption that this holds true for every individual within the university, but it was something that occurred often enough to Susie to create social difficulties for over two years. She offered the following clarification,

… sometimes I feel like people are pretty surface level… if you follow their way, then you’re right, if not then you’re not right… I really like, you know, hanging out with different people and getting to know new friends, but I keep getting shut down (Student 3, Interview, January 31, 2019).

Something that assisted her with this big challenge was that Susie decided to mentally separate the university’s social environment from the university’s academic environment. “…so that’s more of like social, but then on a professional setting, you don’t encounter that with professors” (Student 3, Interview, January 31, 2019). The positive academic environment that Susie experienced served as a buffer to the negative social environment that she encountered, as we will soon see that she had proximal processes within the academic environment that carried strong emotional ties.
Language. The aspect of attending an American university, therefore needing to function in one’s second language, i.e. the English language, was something that carried challenges for Susie, but was far less intense, in comparison to the previous two students. The reason for this was because she began learning English at age 6 in Vietnam.

…it’s a required subject in school…I kind of passed the exam into like the class that have like more English classes, so it’s more like specialized… So I’ve been in that one for almost like 9 years… and I need to take English every semester (Student 3, Interview, January 31, 2019).

This English language requirement from Susie’s home culture benefitted her greatly, because oftentimes, language challenges and language barriers are main issues for international students who study in America. She did still encounter a couple of language challenges, but the challenges were of lesser intensity, in comparison to the previous students. “… sometimes I have a hard time speaking up in class. I don’t understand everyone’s jokes…” (Student 3, Interview, January 31, 2019). A key language factor that she mentioned was, “…I would achieve that goal, but then I would need to do a little more, compared to some other to achieve that goal” (Student 3, Interview, January 31, 2019). Even though her English language ability was an advanced level, there was still a component of extra effort required to process and carry out assignments, papers, and exams, in comparison to student peers who were native English speakers.

Affect. As previously mentioned, Susie encountered various challenges, resulting in many different affectual responses, both positive and negative in nature. The beginning part of the her experiences at Liberty University and in Lynchburg were very challenging. She reflected back on those experiences that occurred upon initial arrival stating, “… it’s tough, it was very tough. Like I was laughing at those [referring to earlier in the interview when she shared the
stories about the flight experience and the walking experience with laughter, but at the time, it was very, very depressing at times” (Student 3, Interview, January 31, 2019). When Susie experienced the missed flight from Chicago, Illinois to Roanoke, Virginia, she stated, “…I was very scared, all the others were freaking out. I didn’t have any clothes with me because I only have the backpack with my laptop. Like I didn’t expect that it would be that cold in the airport. I didn’t expect that we’d have to stay at the airport… it was the worst 13 hours” (Student 3, Interview, January 31, 2019). Experiencing such a negative, shocking, and unexpected event right at the beginning portion of the journey to the university created unnecessary anxieties and affective responses, especially since she traveled to the country without family. From Bronfenbrenner’s perspective, coming to the US was such an emotionally difficult feat because Susie embarked on a major transition without a highly supportive microsystem, i.e. her family (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). One’s family typically holds strong emotional bonds, especially during moments when emotional support is needed, meaning that the interaction of this proximal process could have been very beneficial for her during this time of engaging in increasingly complex and new experiences (Bronfenbrenner, 2000).

The unfortunate walking experience that occurred the first weekend after arrival was very traumatic and bewildering for Susie, as she experienced multiple stressors within a matter of hours.

So we were walking, and we actually saw a dead deer on the side of the road, it was so gross. That was the first time we saw a deer, it was very sad... I’m just like, ‘God, I’m just trying to go to your church. This is too hard. This is too dangerous.’ So I started crying and I’m like, ‘No, I’m not walking. I’m not doing this anymore. I’m not doing this’ (Student 3, Interview, January 31, 2019).
Luckily, after hours of walking, a random couple pulled off of the highway to where Susie and her friend were walking and they were able to get a ride to the church from the couple.

We came, obviously we missed the whole service because we walked for like 3 hours…

And at the end of mass… we literally just came to the priests and we just like cried. Like we just hugged him and we cried (Student 3, Interview, January 31, 2019).

Fortunately, this overwhelmingly negative event did improve, as the priest assisted Susie and her friend by connecting them with their campus outreach service, which helped Susie in many ways. Therefore, the priest and the campus outreach service helped alleviate a great deal of stress for her in regards to the exosystem environment, by assisting with the transportation services. In addition to the transportation assistance, an individual from their campus outreach service continued to help Susie throughout the years, which included introducing her to a Vietnamese community in Roanoke, Virginia. These things helped Susie acclimate emotionally to the new environment.

The issues of the social environment, i.e. the student body at Liberty University were things that created a negative affect for Susie, in which she felt annoyed, lonely, and confused for over two years. This was an apparent socioemotional developmental dysfunction because her social development within the university remained stagnant for an extended period of time. The pressures and unaccepting viewpoints from some of the student body at the university was something that not only affected Susie, but also affected her roommate, who was also Catholic.

“… I’ve encountered a lot of people that have transferred. One of my roommates did… she’s like… ‘I can’t do this. Like, I know you could, but I don’t think I can, so I need to go.’ So she left” (Student 3, Interview, January 31, 2019). As this excerpt from the Susie’s interview showed, the negative encounters from the social environment at the university were so intense
that her roommate transferred to another university. As previously mentioned, Susie was able to maintain a positive outlook of the university by mentally separating the social environment of the university from the academic environment. In addition to this, she was also able to stay positive through friends’ support. “I can find like more people, that you know are not necessarily… like the Liberty people, then I extended my circle, which has helped… But it’s just like, that… small amount of student body that can be pretty annoying” (Student 3, Interview, January 31, 2019).

Support. One’s family is typically a big source of support when going through a transition. For Susie, the transition of coming to the U.S. and acclimating to the new environments and culture was something that occurred without family. This does not mean that she received no support from family, but support can feel much less effective if the individual and the source of support are separated by very long distances.

sometimes I did wish that I, you know, I had come here with like some family member, or I had like a family member. Well, I actually do have a family member here in the States, it’s my uncle… but I really didn’t get any support from him (Student 3, Interview, January 31, 2019).

She continued to say,

At first, it was very, like, sad because he has been in the States for a very long time. But her doesn’t really like to help people, I guess… I feel kind of insulted… because he could have easily helped me with those (Student 3, Interview, January 31, 2019).

[Referring to the negative initial experiences of walking on the highway and obtaining a cell phone]. In a similar way to the her uncle, Susie’s father did not offer support throughout this process. “…my dad did not really approve my study abroad, because… he viewed American culture, western culture… like indulgent… So it’s a very big opposition… so my whole
education is supported just by my mom, financially” (Student 3, Interview, January 31, 2019).

As we can see, Susie did receive support from her mother, but not being together with family during the initial arrival and transition, as well as not receiving support from her uncle and her father left her in a negative affective state.

Despite the lack of support from Susie’s uncle and father, she was able to gain a great social support system to assist with her time here at the university and in Lynchburg. “… I guess, God really see that, so he put a lot of people in my life, in a totally random way. And they have helped me more than, I think any family member could have helped me” (Student 3, Interview, January 31, 2019). To share a few examples, she was able to obtain a cell phone during the first week of arrival because a new friend put the required information in their name, such as the social security information and the credit card information for the phone contract. Susie and her new friend then created their own contract for the phone payments. Also, an individual from the campus outreach created a great relationship with her, in which Susie was given weekly rides to church, and was introduced to the Vietnamese community in Roanoke for the Vietnamese mass. An even more impressive example of the social support she received came from a family that Susie met through the Roanoke community. This family helped Susie and her roommates obtain a place to live off-campus, and they invited Susie and her roommates to their home during university vacations and national holidays. “They take really good care of us. They… treat us like we’re their children…” (Student 3, Interview, January 31, 2019). These major support systems that were developed in the local environment for Susie, enabled her to feel supported despite being away from her actual family.

… if I had to choose… I’m still okay with coming to the United States by myself, without family. Because it changed me a lot, academically… socially, also professionally, and
spiritually too. It shaped me to become a much independent person, in a lot of ways
(Student 3, Interview, January 31, 2019).

Bronfenbrenner offered information on how this functional shift in support systems could work, “as the level of proximal processes is increased, indexes of competence will rise, those of dysfunction will fall…” (Bronfenbrenner, 2000, p. 132). Susie did not have the proximal processes from family available, but additional proximal processes were created for her through the Vietnamese community, the friend, and the family from the Roanoke community. These proximal processes that were created and grew in emotional strength lowered the dysfunctional development’s effects that she experienced.

The academic support that a student receives while at university can be a very crucial component of the student’s academic success. Due to the additional affect, language, and cultural factors that international students face, academic support may be even more crucial for their academic success. In a similar way to the personal connection that the Annie received from a professor at the university, Susie was able to form close personal connections with two professors at the university. “… one professor, he’s my international business professor… he’s very caring, like he cares… he shared things in class that really affected me and how I think about relationships” (Student 3, Interview, January 31, 2019). From Susie’s viewpoint, the international business professor was an important source of support for her because the professor was able to use the lectures to make personal connections to real life contexts. The second professor who was from the Modern Languages Department also supported Susie by making connections that affected real life contexts for her.
…she’s shaped a lot of things in me, in a lot of ways… like my future path, and what I want to do in life, and how I do things… she helped me see like what I’m passionate about, and she’s very good at like encouraging (Student 3, Interview, January 31, 2019).

These two proximal processes within the same mesosystem reflected as being important drives for Susie’s educational development and personal development, implying that strong emotional attachments existed. Much like Frank from the second interview, Susie stated that the International Student Center was an important source of support throughout her time at the university. From the first day that she arrived at the university, the International Student Center has helped her acclimate, settle into the new environment, and socialize with other students. Upon initial arrival, the International Student Center picked up Susie from the regional airport, took her to Walmart and assisted with advising her on what’s needed, helped her obtain her student ID for the university, held an international student orientation, and helped her obtain the dormitory key for living on campus. Susie shared that these things were quite helpful, so much so that she decided to become an International Student Ambassador for the center, in the years that followed. Through this, Susie showed steps towards reaching developmental competence for the aspect of her social development at the academic setting. As an International Student Ambassador, she helped new international students with things such as the Walmart trips and contacting students prior to arrival to answer any questions that they may have before arrival. She also stated that the international student advisor and the international student recruiter, which were a part of the International Student Center were also extremely helpful.

**Motivation.** From onset to present day, Susie faced many challenges and hardships, socially and academically. A major reason that she has endured and is now a senior at the university, is because of the motivation that she has maintained throughout the years. Each time
after Susie spoke about a challenge that she experienced, she also shared a positive mindset about how that challenge helped her persevere. An example of this can be found in how she continued to study at the university despite the social challenges that she experienced due to being Catholic;

…if I need to like scale it, then I guess I could still persevere with it somehow because I still manage to have a group of friends that I talk to… And then I still got my job here, and I got my scholarship here, so it’s like a lot of benefits that I think just fleeing from… this group of people is not really worth it for me to restart everything again (Student 3, Interview, January 31, 2019).

The motivational accomplishments that she achieved, such as the scholarship, the job, and her friends further show how she continued to move deeper into developmental competence, academically and socioemotionally. In addition to these things, Susie shared that the genuine nature of the faculty, the safety of the campus, and the quality of the university’s facilities, such as the gym, were motivating factors that helped her continue at the university.

The social support that she received from the individual at campus outreach, the Vietnamese community in Roanoke, and her friends helped her maintain a positive outlook and a high motivation, despite the lack of family support, with the exception of her mother. In regards to the lack of assistance from her uncle, she stated, “…it gave me more motivation just to find out things for myself” (Student 3, Interview, January 31, 2019). Referring to the lack of support received from her father, Susie shared how this was also used as a source of motivation.

… that’s also one of the motivation why like I want to be very motivated to do things like, I want good grades… I don’t want to fail in front of him… but most importantly, I
don’t want anybody… to blame her [Susie’s mom]. I want my mom to be proud and happy… my biggest motivation is my mom (Student 3, Interview, January 31, 2019).

Her motivation that stemmed from her mother was something that should be noted because Susie did not have that proximal process readily available for support, as far as location proximity, but this proximal process was so strong emotionally that it was still a vital force for her overall development while at the university. Susie’s positivity could be seen throughout the reflections of the entire experience thus far, “…thanks to that, I learned a lot and I grow a lot… that type of experience then helped me to help others…” (Student 3, Interview, January 31, 2019). This excerpt showed how Susie was able to turn her overall journey into a learning experience that not only helped her, but also enabled Susie to help others who may be experiencing similar occurrences. This further supports the notion that she was able to move from a state of developmental dysfunction to developmental competence, especially within the realm of socioemotional development.

**Faculty First Theme: Perspectives on International UG Student Experience**

From the faculty interviews that were conducted, two main themes emerged. The first of the two themes was: faculty perspectives on international undergraduate (UG) student experience. Four sub-themes were found within this main theme: support, finances, acculturating to American university standards, and student aptitude.

**Support.** An interesting parallel between the student interviews and the faculty interviews was found, in that the faculty’s main types of support noticed to affect students were family support, social support, and academic support. The main components of family support that were seen to affect the international students were: having parents who financially supported the students, students coming to the U.S. without family and having no support system in the
U.S., and students who were receiving pressure from their parent’s back home to do well and succeed. Dr. Esther, a professor within the Department of Modern Languages remarked, especially in regards to Vietnamese students, that, “… students come to the States without family… they’re sacrificing a lot… they’re working really hard… And their parents are expecting the best… you have to be in the top…” (Faculty 3, Interview, November 29, 2018).

Professor Mike, a professor from the Department of Social Work noticed the following, “…sometimes a lot of the students… feel lonely and homesick” (Faculty 4, Interview, November 30, 2018). Both of these excerpts from the faculty’s perspective were indeed aspects mentioned by the interviewed international students. Each student interviewee offered ample information on the sacrifices and hard work that went along with moving to the U.S. to study at the university. This macrosystem shift was likely noticeable by many if not all of the faculty because macrosystems are “general prototypes, existing in the culture or subculture, that set the pattern for the structures and activities occurring at the concrete level” (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 515).

The macrosystem adjustment of moving to a new culture, social environment, and educational environment are the expected occurrences that international students will face, therefore these aspects are likely to be more noticeable by faculty. It is noteworthy to point out that even though the aspects of the macrosystem adjustments are usually easier to notice than other ecological environmental shifts, the interviewed professors included detailed information which showed that they were not simply offering generalized remarks, but were actually paying attention to the experiences of their international students.

The main components noticed for students’ social and academic support were: students depending on other peers who share the same first language for assistance, and international students feeling isolated in class with Americans. Professor Bridgette, a professor from the
Department of General Studies, who teaches English to Speakers of Other Languages 101 (ESOL 101), stated, “…one… struggle I’ve seen is them tending to rely on each other to explain things, instead of relying on [the professor]… They’ll turn to someone next to them, who speaks the same language to say, ‘What did she say?’ And sometimes…they’ll misunderstand it” (Faculty 2, Interview, November 27, 2018). Professor Bridgette continued on to say, “They only want to interact with people in their first language, which I totally get. It’s a comfort thing” (Faculty 2, Interview, November 27, 2018). Dr. Winston, a professor from the English Department, who is a part of the Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) program remarked the following, “You can tell that it’s hard for them to step out from the intimidations of speaking to a professor. The intimidations of speaking to a professor in a second language. The intimidation of speaking to a professor in a second language in front of their peers” (Faculty 5, Interview, December 5, 2018). From Bronfenbrenner’s perspective, it is logical to see why the international students may prefer to reach out to their other L1 peers for assistance instead of reaching out to their professors, as well as why they may find it intimidating to speak to their professors (Ortega, 2008). The international students’ peers fall within the microsystem, which could be labeled as ‘peer group microsystem’ environment, meaning that the students’ L1 peers are within the closest environment to the student, which could serve as a source of comfort, especially amid a big transition such as this instance of moving to another country for school. The action of international students speaking to their professors requires them to move out from the microsystem into the mesosystem, which can seem intimidating, especially if one of the interacting Microsystems seems unfamiliar and overwhelming.

**Finances.** The sub theme of finances had two main components that came up during the faculty interviews, which were financial restrictions and financially influenced affect. Professor
Mike offered the following insight, “You [international students] are limited to financial resources because they are not allowed to work off campus. They only can work an amount of 20 hours… there’s no guarantee that you might find a part-time job” (Faculty 4, Interview, November 30, 2018). Multiple professors also commented that international students are likely to have more financial worries, in comparison to state-side students because international students do not have access to federal financial aid funding. This can create a financial and affective strain for the students and their families. Dr. Esther shared the realization that, “…coming to the United States, and their parents are supporting them financially. This type of opportunity is given to just a… few people” (Faculty 3, Interview, November 29, 2018).

**Acculturating to American university standards.** Faculty mentioned five main components within this sub theme, which were methods of implementing and completing work, plagiarism, assistance, cultural variations, and learning styles. Common remarks in regards to the methods of implementing and completing work were, over reliance on translating applications for assistance, difficulties expressing themselves in an academically appropriate way, difficulties taking timed tests, difficulties with using the required technology, and an overall more difficult experience for international students in comparison to American students. Professor Bridgette shared the following, “I find some of them tend to be tempted to over rely on online translation apps, like Google Translate… because they’re afraid to write in English… so there are unique challenges with composition… because different cultures structure discussion in different ways” (Faculty 2, Interview, November 27, 2018).

Many of the professors noted that intentional plagiarism and unintentional plagiarism are both important issues that some international students struggle with. Dr. Esther remarked,
…I noticed that Nepali and Indian students, cheating is very common and they think that there is nothing wrong with… cheating and plagiarizing… They think whatever you do, if you can get a good grade, you can do that… it took me a while… to explain why that is wrong (Faculty 3, Interview, November 29, 2018).

From this example, one can see that international students may struggle with plagiarizing because it may not be a concept in their home country. Dr. Esther continued with saying, “Every country, every nation has its own expectations. And I found that the notions of good and bad can be quite different from each other” (Faculty 3, Interview, November 29, 2018). Due to this, it is of utmost importance that faculty make sure that international students are aware of and understand the expectations concerning cheating in plagiarism in the U.S., as Professor Bridgette mentioned,

… I also have some students struggle to understand what plagiarism means, because different cultures have different definitions of it… so I’ve tried to really make sure that I spend time explaining what it means, because there’s some genuine misunderstandings coming into a class (Faculty 2, Interview, November 27, 2018).

The cultural differences for the concept and ideology surrounding plagiarism falls within the macrosystem environment. International students learned the educational system of their home country, which entailed of learning about what practices are customary and accepted in the culture. Now that the students have transitioned to the US, they have to learn about the educational system of this new macrosystem environment. As the professors mentioned, the information on the ideologies and customs vary greatly, and can affect the international students’ academic achievement if not heeded.
All of the interviewed faculty made comments on how it can be difficult for international students to seek assistance from professors. Due to various reasons, such as cultural differences and a lack of self-confidence, professors noticed that many international students have trouble trusting the encouragement and feedback that faculty give them. Professor Bridgette noticed, especially with female Vietnamese students, that they often struggle with confidence. This struggle is largely due to cultural pressures that place many burdens on the females. “…I’ve seen a lot of struggles with confidence, and just being perfectionists… being disappointed if they get a 98 instead of a 100, and not believing me when I tell them, ‘That’s a good grade’” (Faculty 2, Interview, November 27, 2018).

Professor Bridgette shared another important observation,

... [I] repeat myself more when it comes to telling them they can come see me... or... that they can email cause they, especially my East Asians, Koreans and Chinese, they apologize when they email me, ‘I’m so sorry to bother you.’... I’ll have to say, ‘You’re not bothering me. That’s what I’m here for. That’s my job. You never need to apologize.’ And they need to hear that multiple times before they’ll realize it’s true (Faculty 2, Interview, November 27, 2018).

As Annie shared, there were many times that she had questions or needed assistance, but chose not to contact the professor due to language-related fears. From both of these instances, one can clearly see how vital it is that faculty make sure that their international students know how important it is for them to seek help from professors when needed. It is not a bother, nor should the student’s English language level hinder this. To recall, proximal processes vary in form, power, content, and direction, in which the environment, the developmental outcomes, and the social stabilities and fluctuations over time play as forces that affect the strength of the proximal
processes (Bronfenbrenner, 2000). Therefore, the potential proximal processes that could occur between the international students and their professors need to increase in strength, which would enable the international students to feel more comfortable approaching professors for assistance and guidance. Faculty and international students could aim to strengthen this proximal process by keeping in mind that the potential developmental outcomes manifested from this proximal process are academic achievement and intellectual growth, which are both very beneficial developmental outcomes for the student. The influence of the other factors could be low because this occurs within the neutral, yet intellectually stimulating academic environment, meaning that the content is academia, the direction is positive, and the social stabilities and fluctuations should have little to no weight on the assistance given by professors and received by international students.

Another cultural comparison of this was shared by Professor Bridgette who stated,

Some of my students from courtesy cultures really struggle with knowing they can come to my office. I also had a student from Cameroon tell me that at school back home, the professors would yell at you if you bother them…she was able to succeed eventually, but it took a learning curve because she really thought she couldn't get help (Faculty 2, Interview, November 27, 2018).

From a cultural perspective, there are many potential reasons why international students have trouble acculturating to American university standards. As previously hinted, it was mentioned by multiple professors that female international students, especially those from Vietnam and Asian cultures tend to toil with developing a sense of confidence in their academic ability. Similarly, female international students, especially those from Korea, were seen to have a high amount of self-imposed pressure on themselves. In regards to male international students,
Professor Bridgette mentioned the following, “…based on what I've heard and what I've learned about those cultures [Vietnam and Asian cultures], …there has historically been a tendency… for parents to kind of spoil the male children… and I think they internalize that” (Faculty 2, Interview, November 27, 2018). Both the cultural variables that affect the female and the male students are things that can negatively affect their academic success, as well as their overall well-being while at the university. In consideration of these cultural variables, it seems vital that professors make sure that all international students know that they are capable of succeeding, and do so in a way that promotes students’ self-confidence, lowers their self-imposed pressure to a healthy level, and ensures that all students realize that it takes effort to succeed.

Undergraduate faculty recognized that in general, international students do have a steeper learning curve in comparison to American students. “…they’re actually being asked to do something that is hard for them to do, then what I’m asking of a native speaker” (Faculty 5, Interview, December 5, 2018). This is due to many reasons, including the reason that most consider first, the language factor. In addition to the language factor is the not-so-subtle realization that oftentimes, international students are faced with the arduous task of having to learn additional educational processes that depart from what they have learned in their home country, such as formatting, organizing ideas, and pedagogical approaches. This necessary step is something that could initially place international students at a disadvantage, in comparison to American students because from the onset, it creates an extra barrier for them to overcome. In regards to plagiarism, Professor Bridgette stated,

It’s about a different definition and having to unlearn a definition that they’ve… lived with their whole life, or just internalizing an entirely new concept… And so they have to unlearn and then…relearn, and that creates a lot more flexibility for them in the future,
but it does mean that they have a steeper learning curve (Faculty 2, Interview, November 27, 2018).

As previously mentioned and just supported through the excerpt, international students have to learn a whole new macrosystem due to the educational and cultural differences that exist with American university systems, which are vital to understand and succeed academically. Another consideration that was mentioned was the size of the classrooms. When international students are in larger classroom settings, it may increase their difficulty level to learn and succeed in that course. Dr. Bruce, a professor from the English Department stated it in this way, “…it’s hard, you know when you got a whole big class and they’re not all international students” (Faculty 1, Interview, November 12, 2018). The classroom setting specifically could fall within the mesosystem, as interactions between the international student microsystem and the school microsystem. The larger the classroom setting is, the more difficult it could be for the student interact and engage successfully, potentially limiting the amount of intellectual and academic development that occurs.

**Student aptitude.** There are motivational and affective considerations when reflecting upon student aptitude. For instance for international students, presentations are tasks that can be quite strenuous and intimidating to do in front of the class. Dr. Winston referenced one of his specific courses stating, “…the students do a lot of presentations and it’s… an extra burden, an extra affective issue, in terms of anxiety. An extra anxiety for them to come and present their work in front of the class” (Faculty 5, Interview, December 5, 2018). Professor Bridgette stated, “…if they have a presentation, they get really scared…” (Faculty 2, Interview, November 27, 2018). An interesting point that was mentioned not only by the faculty, but also by the interviewed international students was that due to the increased anxiety, there were often times
that difficulties manifested within the scope of academic English that were not present within the scope of non-academic English. In consideration of proximal processes, the environment and the social aspects were likely components that contributed to the reason why difficulties arose with academic English, but not with non-academic English. For international students, the environment of academic English is often stressful and socially peculiar, whereas non-academic English does not carry the same stress level and oftentimes feels more socially supportive, especially as the learner becomes more proficient in English. Hence, the proximal processes that have been created for the international student within the realm of non-academic English are likely stronger than the proximal processes created within the realm of academic English.

Another component of student aptitude is linguistic competence. Linguistic competence can be defined as, “the speaker-hearer’s knowledge of his language” (Chomsky, 1969, p. 4). It can also be defined as, “a system of generative processes” (Phillips & Tan, n.d., para. 1). Therefore, for international students, this focus is on their linguistic competence of English. Much of the interviewed faculty mentioned that international students need more time to process, which is expected because they are having to process information in their second language. “It’s difficult for international students to take time to test. It simply requires longer for them to process their thoughts in a second language” (Faculty 5, Interview, December 5, 2018). Professor Bridgette mentioned it this way, “...if it’s your second language, and you’re not a hundred perfect fluent yet, it’s hard to listen and write at the same time” (Faculty 2, Interview, November 27, 2018). This language processing hardship is another component that falls within the macrosystem environmental shift, providing more support to demonstrate how complexly influencing the macrosystem is for international students. An additional important factor that faculty noticed was that there were times when the English proficiency level of an international
student was not at the level that it should have been, in order for them to be successful with their education. Lastly, within linguistic competence was the recognition that there were often difficulties with using academic English despite, no existent difficulties with non-academic English, which has been mentioned previously. Dr. Esther summed this up well stating, “…I mean, even for native speakers, writing papers in academic English is totally different from writing…like personal emails. Because there are certain formats and structures that you’re supposed to follow…” (Faculty 3, Interview, November 29, 2018).

Similar to linguistic competence is linguistic performance, which can be defined as, “a speaker’s actual use of language in real situations, including grammatical errors and other non-linguistic features such as hesitations and other disfluencies” (Memidex, 2013, para. 1). Phillips & Tan state that “the empirical and formal realization of competence would be performance” (n.d., para. 1). Comparable to processing time within linguistic competence, is time needed for taking tests within linguistic performance. Difficulties with taking timed tests occur for many reasons. The first reason that was mentioned by multiple professors was that international students sometimes have difficulty expressing their ideas fully, in an academically appropriate way. Dr. Esther stated,

…300 and 400 level… upper division courses… You are expected to write longer papers in more depth. And I found that a lot of students have trouble expressing their ideas fully… sometimes they have great ideas, but they don’t know how to express them in an academically acceptable way (Faculty 3, Interview, November 29, 2018).

Dr. Bruce stated, “So I see that they’re putting in the effort and they’re thinking clearly, it’s just you know, it’s difficulty in expressing and they’re still working through that” (Faculty 1, Interview, November 12, 2018). The second reason mentioned was that in general, international
students’ ability to express abstract ideas is not as sharp as native speakers. Dr. Winston shares, “…I don’t think it’s avoidable, that the non-native speakers’ capacity to articulate abstract ideas is, generally speaking, not as acute, as that of a native speaker” (Faculty 5, Interview, December 5, 2018). In addition to these two reasons was the repeatedly mentioned realization that professors do see that their international students put in a great deal of effort to understand the course material and to excel. This was something that was not only recognized by multiple professors, but was also greatly appreciated.

Student character was the last sub-component within the sub-theme of student aptitude. A student’s personal character was a key contributing factor to how the student’s aptitude would manifest, and this could be said for both international students as well as for American students. A student’s character is likely developed within multiple environments, such as the microsystem, the mesosystem, and the exosystem, but it is even more likely that a student’s character is developed through the proximal processes that the student engages in. An excerpt from Susie will be restated as an example of this,

…she’s shaped a lot of things in me, in a lot of ways… like my future path, and what I want to do in life, and how I do things… she helped me see like what I’m passionate about, and she’s very good at like encouraging (Student 3, Interview, January 31, 2019). To recall, Susie is referring to a professor who has been an important support figure in her life, as a proximal process that had strong emotional attachments. Bronfenbrenner stated, “the belief system of parents, teachers, mentors, spouses, and close friends… may be especially important… the belief systems of such ‘others’ can function as instigators and maintainers of reciprocal interaction with the developing person” (Bronfenbrenner, 1995, p. 638). In addition to this, and as previously mentioned, Bronfenbrenner believed that the proximal processes are more
influencing for advancing one’s developmental progression, in comparison to the environment’s influence (Bronfenbrenner, 2000).

A noticed component of students’ character was that international students were often found to overly focus on the struggles that they were facing, which could hinder their academic performance. An interesting finding that was shared was that there have been some students that realized that some professors were being lenient and generous to them, more so than how they were with American students, in an effort to assist the international students. This became problematic because some students decided to take advantage of the professors’ leniency and generosity, in which the students were then cheating themselves from reaching their full educational capacity, and exploiting the professor’s assistance. As a side note, this type of assistance from professors will be discussed further in the paper. An unfortunately similar trait was that at times, it was seen that even after the students understood the concept of plagiarism, some students would continue to find no fault with plagiarizing, which could also be said for cheating. The part of this that spoke about one’s character was that the students that did this disregarded or did not care about the consequences that came from plagiarizing and cheating. The last trait that was mentioned by professors was that there were times that international students used their language and/or cultural differences as a justification to avoid putting in the required effort to succeed academically. If these aspects of the student’s character were influenced by close others, then these were instances in which the close others’ belief systems served as instigators instead of maintainers.
Faculty Second Theme: Faculty Abetment

**Interpersonal awareness.** This section of the paper now concerns the methods and ways that faculty have abetted international students. Bear in mind that these methods may also align with how they abet American students, but slight variations may exist. The first sub-theme, interpersonal awareness was the faculty’s desire to understand their international students. Faculty that have an interpersonal awareness aim for their international students to be comfortable enough to communicate with the professor. This desire for their students to communicate with them is key because faculty that have an interpersonal awareness understand that in order for them to truly assist the other person, they must first know and become familiar with that person. As Dr. Esther stated, “True helping comes from understanding the other person... When you are providing help, you really have to discern the other persons’, the other parties, need correctly. Discernment must… proceed the actual helping” (Faculty 3, Interview, November 29, 2018). This enables the faculty with the ability to identify the best ways to assist their particular student. Fortunately, many faculty did share that they aimed to get to know their international students on a deeper level, therefore going a step further than knowing the surface knowledge of their students. Dr. Winston stated,

I acknowledge their presence, maybe in a more explicit way and I look for how they respond to it. Something that is very subtle, I think, but very intentional. I try to make sure that they know that they are an equal participant in class. I really try to make that an explicit thing that I do (Faculty 5, Interview, December 5, 2018).

Thus far, these items surround the idea of faculty connecting with their students, showcasing their desire to create proximal processes with their students.
On the other side of faculty interpersonal awareness was the opportunity for faculty to learn from their international students, as much as they were educating them. This included a willingness to sit and listen to their students, allowing the students to touch upon aspects of their life that went beyond their education, such as personal or social difficulties that they might have been experiencing. A way that this could occur, which was mentioned by Dr. Esther, was becoming involved with international student associations. This shows the international students that the faculty sincerely wish to assist them in a capacity that is greater than their general academic well-being, engaging in a mesosystem that is low stress with high social engagement. One aspect of this that every faculty that was interviewed mentioned was that they offered a lot of encouragement, making sure that the international students were aware of their capabilities, were aware of their value within the classroom and within society, and were aware of the assistance that they had available to them. This type of beneficial encouragement, which could be given individually or collectively, came from having a higher sensitivity for the students’ general well-being. The final component of this sub-theme, which was an offshoot from beneficial encouragement was that faculty might find it necessary to give ‘tough love’ to their students when deemed necessary. The technical term of ‘tough love’ in this instance is negative feedback. Negative feedback is a “part of negotiating meaning or form… convey[ing] to the learner an indication… that some ungrammaticality is present” (Ortega, 2009, p. 71). Negative feedback includes: clarification requests, recasts, and explicit corrections (Ortega, 2009). Multiple professors offered examples of this ‘tough love’, in which Dr. Winston recalled a moment with a past international student,

…her proficiency was not what it should have been. And so there I will draw someone aside to say, ‘Listen, this is something that you need to work on. These are some things
that I might suggest.’ …there the encouragement does look a little bit different. You really do want to… spur them to put forth the effort to get where they need to be (Faculty 5, Interview, December 5, 2018).

Professor Bridgette stated, “…sometimes they just need a little push, that they can learn to function, but… they have to get uncomfortable” (Faculty 2, Interview, November 27, 2018). Dr. Esther stated, “We are supposed to help our international students. We’re supposed to aid them to do better academically, and also psychologically. And here in this university, spiritually as well. But… we cannot compromise. Sometimes tough love is needed” (Faculty 3, Interview, November 29, 2018).

**Academic awareness.** Academic awareness occurs when faculty harbor the ability as educators to be intentional, noticing if their students need assistance or encouragement and being competent of the cultural variations that may exist. A general consensus among the interviewed faculty was that they were aware that it was necessary at times to slow down their rate of speaking during lectures. Intentionally repeating and purposefully enunciating were also commonly mentioned as means of making sure that their international students were given a proper chance to understand the material. Professor Bridgette mentioned the importance of minimalizing what was on the presented screen during lectures,

… I have to put less on the screen… And so less has become more. I put the essentials on there, but if I can say it in fewer words, it will make processing it easier for them. I don’t dumb it down… I just try to make sure that I pick the clearest words… and that’s good advice in general as far as writing… (Faculty 2, Interview, November 27, 2018).

Professor Bridgette continued to mention that this was done not only in the English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) 101 courses, but also with other courses that did not exclusively
have international students. Another great example was that the university made the initiative to open the ESOL 101 section for international students. Both Dr. Esther and Professor Bridgette have taught the ESOL 101 course, Dr. Esther taught it in the past and Professor Bridgette currently teaches it. Professor Bridgette stated,

…the biggest thing that I think was significant was creating an alternate section for international students, but it’s only for English 101, because it’s the composition class. Because it wouldn’t be healthy to… create that kind of separation normally, but because it’s a composition class, it allows me to target certain things (Faculty 2, Interview, November 27, 2018).

Within the previous portion of student’s personal character, it was mentioned that at times, there were international students who used their linguistic and cultural barriers as excuses to not work as hard as they could. The duty of faculty is to prevent students from doing this, making sure that the students are working to their full potential and are avoiding loopholes. One way that faculty can accomplish this is by anticipating what issues students may have before they actually occur, i.e. properly preparing to assist the students. A key part of this, mentioned multiple times previously by the interviewed faculty, is that faculty must make sure that international students know and truly believe that they are equal participants in class with the American students. The most necessary component within that statement is making sure that international students are internalizing the belief that American students are not defaulted to do better, both international students and American students are equally capable of succeeding with their academic goals while at university. Taking these important steps to assist students can help lower the amount of plagiarism that occurs, as students are getting craftier with presenting plagiarized material as their own, faculty who have a deficit in academic awareness would be
unlikely to catch this plagiarism. Furthermore, faculty should acknowledge the international students’ presence more explicitly, as Dr. Winston mentioned, and pay close attention to how the students respond to that awareness. In addition to this, it should be an important practice for faculty to spread awareness about the various factors that international students face, with their students who are native speakers. This action can help create an environment where international students feel comfortable asking their native speaker peers for assistance.

Academic awareness includes a plethora of abstract ways that faculty abet international students. If professors occasionally stopped at points throughout their lecture to make sure that students were following along and had a comprehensive understanding, then it would help lessen the chance that international students would fall behind, in comparison to their native speaker peers. In order for faculty to be proactive when helping the international students, they need to maintain an awareness of the difficulties that they face. When faculty help students, it is vital that they discern their students’ need accurately, so that they do not inaccurately assist their students. Upon assessment, it would be beneficial for professors to recognize that the students’ work is being completed in their second language. Dr. Winston discussed this point well stating,

When you’re assessing a non-native speakers’ answer to a question like that; you have to recognize that you’re looking at the answer to the question through the filter of second language proficiency, and the efforts to express an abstract concept in a second language (Faculty 5, Interview, December 5, 2018).

This is not to benefit the international students by lowering faculty expectations for them, but rather by having faculty evaluate their students’ work in a way that enables them to actively search for instances in which the international students may have made an error due to needing further clarification or explanation. Sustaining a higher overall sensitivity has many benefits. For
instance, faculty with this higher sensitivity could enable their international students to gauge their own class participation, and the faculty would then intercede to encourage the students to engage more, when deemed necessary. Lastly, faculty need to intentionally educate their students to become global citizens, which will be discussed further in the paper.

This section will review how faculty’s academic awareness can be seen in practical ways. A simple and yet beneficial way that faculty can increase their academic awareness is by reaching out to more experienced faculty members for advice and tips on how to become better educators to international students. Dr. Esther and Professor Mike were both at one point themselves international students in the United States. Dr. Esther stated the following,

A number of English faculty members actually approached me a couple of times to get some advice about how to assist their international students in their classes… I shared some tips… based on my own experience as an international student, and also some of the practices and then remedies that I do in my classes (Faculty 3, Interview, November 29, 2018).

Additionally, referring international students to the Undergraduate Writing Center at the university was a common feature mentioned amongst almost every faculty member that was interviewed. Dr. Bruce mentions,

I oftentimes recommend that they visit the Undergraduate Writing Center before submitting a final paper, just to help them… with certain rules that they might be struggling with… [e.g.] forgetting to put in definite or indefinite articles, or if it's like syntactical… (Faculty 1, Interview, November 12, 2018).

Another point that was also previously mentioned within this paper, as well as being mentioned numerous times throughout the interviews, was that faculty recognized how important it was to
continuously tell their international students that they could come to the faculty’s office, emphasizing to the students that asking for assistance is not a burden or inconvenience to the faculty. Within the scope of the ESOL 101 course, a couple of practical ways that faculty exhibited their academic awareness was realizing that they may need to explain the difference between British English and American English, as well as explaining conversion units for students, in regards to them formatting their papers. Academic awareness is a type of faculty abetment that falls within the exosystem, as it is a part of how the social structures that “…impinge upon or encompass the immediate settings in which that person is found [i.e. the university], and thereby influence, delimit, or even determine what goes on there” (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 515). The faculty’s academic awareness effects how the students are assisted, how the students learn, and how the students academically and intellectually develop.

**Individual global mindset.** Individual global mindset (IGM) is “a complex cognitive structure that consists in the predisposition, understanding, and articulation of multiple cultural… realities; the aptitude to accept the diversity of cultures…” (Felicio, Meidute, & Kyvik, 2016). Another applicable way to describe IGM was mentioned by Dr. Esther who stated,

…to understand the other person, we have to open our mind and then come out of our own, you know, set framework… So… we are helping them to understand this culture and language better. But at the same time, we have to open up the possibility and opportunity for them to contribute… to our subject (Faculty 3, Interview, November 29, 2018).

Dr. Esther exemplified the realization that it is universally beneficial when international students share their knowledge and experiences with native speakers and faculty, instead of just being expected to learn from native speakers and faculty. This makes the international student
experience two-sided and interactive instead of being one-sided and disconnected. It is this difference between making education unidirectional or bidirectional, as Dr. Esther continued by stating, “...I think one of the things that we faculty members have to remember is... we are a teacher, but we have to be ready to learn from our international students as well. Yeah, it’s bi-directional nature of education” (Faculty 3, Interview, November 29, 2018). An important consideration was mentioned for faculty gaining IGM,

...there is a categorical difference between the way faculty in the Modern Languages Department orient themselves to these issues, then people who are not in the field.

...there is a level of understanding, a level of insight into these problems that people who have gone through the process of learning a second language... they know what it's like to be on this other side of the fence in an intuitive experiential way. Take a person... who has never been in that situation; they have no... insight, they’ve got no experience

(Faculty 5, Interview, December 5, 2018).

This point made by Dr. Winston, brought forth a necessary point that faculty who themselves have been through similar situations to what the international students are currently experiencing will have a greater understanding, a greater awareness, and a greater intentional drive to make sure that these students succeed. In a sense, these professors understand the students better because they have also experienced a macrosystem environmental shift, which is not a common experience to have.

If faculty are to teach with the mindset of facilitating a bidirectional, interactive international student experience, they should (1) help international students understand the expected norms of the US and why these norms are important, (2) gain a better understanding of the international student’s first language and culture, (3) encourage more interaction between
international students and American students, and (4) help American students become aware of the factors and challenges that international students face, in comparison to native speaker students. The majority, if not all of these prompts fall within the macrosystem. Professor Mike shared,

…that’s why I said to my students… the US citizens, ‘You are very blessed.’… some people… have some restriction… Because you have a freedom as a US citizen… Just be mindful, just be grateful because… sometimes they don’t understand what international student go through, the struggles they face (Faculty 4, Interview, November 30, 2018).

It was previously mentioned in the paper under Faculty Interpersonal Awareness, and it is also applicable here; a faculty IGM finds it beneficial to become involved with international student associations. Additionally, a necessary two-component educational endeavor entails of encouraging American students to interact more with international students, and encouraging international students to seek help from their American peers. In a classroom setting, this can be encouraged by the faculty purposefully mixing students from different cultures together for group work, which can reduce prejudices and increase cultural awareness. Professor Bridgette stated,

Sometimes, I’ll also separate them when we do group work. I’ll put a Korean with a Chilean, and a Nigerian… because they’re probably not going to struggle with the same issues… If I have Americans in the class, I tend to mix them in with the international students, rather than letting all the international students be together, and all the Americans be together (Faculty 2, Interview, November 27, 2018).

Professor Bridgette mentioned an additional benefit to mixing students together for group work,
that also allows me to reinforce to my international students, ‘Just because he’s American doesn’t mean you can’t help him with his writing.’ Because they’ll tell me that can’t. I say, ‘Yes, you can. You can check the formatting… you may struggle with grammar in some areas, but he might too’ (Faculty 2, Interview, November 27, 2018).

All of these components mentioned for IGM fosters an educational environment that creates students who are global citizens. As Dr. Esther stated,

… we are not just training them to function well in this country, but rather we are training them to be a global citizen. So we ourselves, and we faculty members… we cannot confine ourselves to this country. Or the norms of this… nation, but rather we have to… think bigger because we are training our students to be a global citizen, rather than just [an] American citizen (Faculty 3, Interview, November 29, 2018).

**Academic support.** Academic support is the most straightforward subtheme within faculty abetment. Due to the linguistic performance of students, which is something that is continuously improving, it is often necessary for faculty to give international students extra time when taking exams, tests, quizzes, etc. Professor Mike stated it this way, “…[I] usually give them more time when it comes to assessment or test, because… English is a second language and I want to make sure they understand what they’re reading. And because of the time, they won’t feel pressured to rush” (Faculty 4, Interview, November 30, 2018). If the students do not feel pressured to rush, then it could potentially lower the cheating and plagiarizing levels that occur among international students. If plagiarism does occur, then faculty must remain adamant with following university procedures and hold the students accountable for their actions, which is another component of the exosystem. If faculty overlook this, or do not respond in an appropriate way, then they are doing a disservice to the student because the faculty member is, at that point,
assisting them improperly, giving ineffective instruction, and is being excessive in their efforts to help. A faculty member that does this is trying to offer academic support without upholding their academic awareness. Being an international student does not mean that the students have a deficit in any way, so faculty should not compromise their high expectations in an effort to be overly kind and generous; faculty need to generate a balance between assistance and accountability.

A balance between assistance and accountability means that faculty are able to extend extra help to international students, while still pushing them to reach their full potential, so the students can internalize their abilities and academic confidence. Professor Bridgette stated,

…I try to push them out of their comfort zone, if I can. I’ll call on them in class, even if they don’t want to… sometimes they just need a little push, that they can learn to function, but… they have to get uncomfortable (Faculty 2, Interview, November 27, 2018).

A balance between assistance and accountability means that faculty keep their way of grading the same for all students, while still offering an abundant amount of feedback, extra credit, and multiple draft attempts for papers before submission, as much as the course allows. A balance between assistance and accountability means that faculty facilitate or accommodate the need for the student based upon the amount of effort that the student is exhibiting.

**Non-academic support and facilitation.** A couple of ways in which faculty assisted international students outside of the academic environment were mentioned. Professor Bridgette mentioned that due to the differences in climate for some international students, it may be necessary to advise international students about what type of attire is appropriate for the climate here in Virginia, as well as for inside the university.
I had… a couple other students who came from really warm places, and they didn’t have any warm clothes… they didn't understand what clothes to buy. I had a student from Nigeria… and she didn't understand, because in Nigeria, it’s never cold… she could barely function indoors because of the air conditioning (Faculty 2, Interview, November 27, 2018).

Information about the climate that the international student will be coming to is not often a component that is considered to be vital information, but it is incredibly important information needed for the students to properly acclimate, especially if they are coming from a climate that contrasts greatly from the climate at the university. An additional factor is that due to the limited financial limitations that international students have in America, Professor Mike mentioned that buying international students groceries could benefit their overall wellbeing greatly, assisting to relieve a portion of their financial stress.
Chapter V: Discussion

Summary of Study

The data from this study led to results that effectively supported the study’s original research questions. For the international undergraduate students, the process of acquiring the English language presented the most challenges for their adjustment process, affecting the rate in which they were able to gain support systems, acclimate to the new environments, and succeed academically. A cause was found in which lower levels of English language ability led to more social and academic challenges. This was seen with Annie’s interview and Frank’s interview. Susie was already at a near-native level of fluency upon initial arrival. She noted the benefits of this, as she avoided many of the issues that were often experienced due to language difficulties.

The support that the students received and felt affected their affectual states the most. Little to no support caused a negative affectual state (e.g. depression or loneliness). While sufficient or high levels of support resulted in neutral or positive affectual states (e.g. contentment or a sense of belonging).

The various environments brought about many challenges, as the students had to learn and experience new things about the cultural environment, the educational environment, and the social environment. A cause linking the environmental challenges and the support that the students received and felt was that: the support received buffered the negative encounters within the environments. This support included offering insight and clarification for the students, in regard to the details and the inner workings of the various environments.

The motivation of the students were found to be a vital key, if not the vital key for the students’ overall success, academically, emotionally, and socially while at the university and while in America. As a component of personal efficacy, the students’ motivation played as either
a cause or an effect of their personal ability. More instances of motivation resulted in more successful instances that involved their personal abilities. Through the analysis, it was found that the more motivation the students carried, the more they shared insight that reflected their developmental competence. This developmental competence reflected the students’ internalized willpower and drive to succeed academically, mentally, and socially (Bronfenbrenner, 2000).

The undergraduate faculty’s perspectives on international undergraduate students’ experiences led to various findings. An international undergraduate students’ character was seen to (1) affect the students’ motivation to put in the work necessary to succeed, (2) whether the student sought assistance from their professors or sought assistance from their L1 peers, (3) if the student continued to plagiarize even after learning about how plagiarism works in America, (4) and whether or not they carried an internal confidence in their abilities. Within the subtopic of student aptitude, the faculty’s insights led to findings that pertained to the international students’ linguistic performance and linguistic competence. It was mentioned multiple times throughout the interviews that it generally takes longer for international students to process their ideas, even if their ideas are knowledgeable and academically appropriate, and it is more difficult for them to take timed tests in comparison to American students. A discovered cause was that a students’ character containing more positive attributes, such as a high level of internalized confidence, a strong motivation to succeed, and a strong sense of personal efficacy, helped offset the difficulties experienced in regards to their linguistic performance and their linguistic competence. This could have been due to many factors, such as international students who had a strong motivation to succeed would seek out assistance from their professors more often than international students who did not have as strong of a motivation.
The international students who did not have a high sense of motivation, were often seen to over-rely on their L1 peers for academic support. Lower levels of internalized confidence resulted in lower levels of academic achievement. A plausible explanation for this could be that the lower levels of internalized confidence limited the students’ potential in a similar way that the lower levels of motivation hindered students from reaching out to their professors for assistance. Since personal efficacy is comprised of motivation and personal ability, having a strong sense of personal efficacy was correlated to lower levels of plagiarism and cheating. This was likely due to the relationship between the students’ motivation and personal ability. If one’s motivation was high, then their personal ability was likely to improve over time because of the will and determination to succeed according to the standards of the American educational system.

The undergraduate faculty’s abetment was a vital part of the study, as it led to understandings about the most effective and universally beneficial strategies to assist international students. The data from the interviewed faculty showed support for the notion that faculty need to have an interpersonal awareness in order to truly connect to their international students. Causes were found for faculty who reflected characteristics of interpersonal awareness. Having interpersonal awareness caused faculty to foster stronger proximal processes with their international students. The stronger proximal processes caused greater chances of developmental success and achievement.

Faculty interpersonal awareness showed to be an effect of faculty being able to recognize and notice the true issues that the international students were facing. It should be clear why this relationship is important, as there are often times that the issue a student is facing or the problem a student is exhibiting is a result of a deeper issue or problem that needs to be addressed. If
faculty do not have a good grasp of their interpersonal awareness, then the deeper issue may go unnoticed, which means that the problems the student is facing will likely only be temporarily corrected or fixed. Faculty who have the genuine desire to understand their international students are more likely to discover the deeper reason for the issue the student is facing. In this sense, a faculty’s strong interpersonal awareness caused higher levels of academic awareness. A great advantage of this dynamic was that faculty were able to discern if their students were honestly experiencing academic hardships due to their cultural and linguistic differences, or if they were using their differences as excuses to underachieve academically. This becomes especially important as international students move up to the junior and senior years at university.

Additionally, academic awareness affected academic support, in which greater academic awareness resulted in faculty engaging in more beneficial practices of academic support for the students.

Individual global mindset was unique in that it was either the cause or the effect of all of the other subthemes of faculty abetment. The reason for this large finding was because a faculty’s IGM enabled them to create a learning environment that was two-sided or bidirectional, meaning that a mutual respect existed between faculty and international students. This mutual respect is able to develop because as faculty recognize the diverse abilities and contributions international students bring due to their various backgrounds, they are able to help international students recognize that their contributions are important. As students internalize this realization, an interactive academic environment develops, i.e. the professors are educating their students and their students are also imparting knowledge to their faculty. It is this mutually beneficial academic environment that leads to long-lasting developmental achievements. In addition to this component of IGM, faculty with an IGM realize how important it is for international students
and American students to interact more and befriend one another. As Dr. Esther mentioned, faculty need to turn their students into global citizens who appreciate diversity, seek to have cultural understandings, and know that all individuals have something that they can positively contribute to the task at hand.

**Limitations of Research**

Due to the nature of the qualitative study, there were various limitations that were at hand. Considering all of the geographic locations from which international students originate, the student body sample of this study represented a small geographic population, namely South Korean and Vietnamese students. Although this limits the generalizability of the results, it offers information and insight that specifically pertains to students from these people groups. In addition to this alternative explanation, many of the specific observations and analyses from the undergraduate faculty explicitly pertained to Vietnamese and South Korean students.

In respect to the international student year-levels, the senior level was the only representative sample obtained. This international student year-level limitation could be viewed in a different light due to the type of interviews that were conducted with international students. The researcher conducted timeline interviews with each undergraduate international interviewee. Due to the timeline interview, the shared experiential insights of each student interviewee began at a point that was before the students’ arrival to the university. The insights continued from before arrival all the way until present day, therefore aspects from freshman year, sophomore year, and junior year at the university were obtained.

The generalizability of this study is limited, as the study was conducted at a southern private mid-sized Christian university, focused on undergraduate international students with the specific representation for Vietnamese and South Korean students, and included perspectives
from undergraduate faculty from the university as well. Additionally, Liberty University is located in Lynchburg Virginia, which is a small city that does not have a lot of cultural and ethnic variation. It is possible that the experiences of an undergraduate international student at Liberty University could be slightly or very different from the experiences of an undergraduate international student at a higher institution of a highly populated area, such as New York City.

Due to this limited generalizability, which is mainly due to the setting in which the study took place, the overall external validity of the study is low. Even though the general findings from the international students’ data and the undergraduate faculty’s data are conclusions that can be replicated and found in other settings, the sample’s population was too small to be of moderate validity. The language factors, the cultural factors, and the social factors that the international undergraduate students at Liberty University faced were issues that international students at various institutions of higher education in America could also face. This was postulated because there were enough commonalities in the findings of this study between the students, that were also shared by previous studies that surveyed international students to some degree. This also implies that the findings from this study are reliable.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

Future research should continue to analyze university environments, so that a greater holistic perspective can be attained. It is suggested that future researchers gather a larger sample size in order to obtain a better representation of the overall U.S. undergraduate international student population. Earlier in this study, it was mentioned that China, India, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, and Canada are the most represented countries for international students in the U.S. (IIE, 2017, *Top 25*). With this in mind, the current study’s student sample represented two countries (South Korea and Vietnam), creating the need for further research. It would be beneficial to have
a sample that included students from the previously mentioned five countries, as well as from
African countries, Latin countries, and Middle Eastern countries, etc. The more countries
represented within a sample, the greater the chance for obtaining a sample that can actually
represent the overall undergraduate international student population in the U.S.

Another suggestion for further research involves creating a mixed study of both
qualitative and quantitative designs. This would be beneficial because the in-depth insights
obtained from qualitative studies would be present, while also obtaining concrete statistical
findings. If able, random sampling is strongly recommended, as the goal is to gather a sample
that contains international students who range from freshman to senior in year-level.

In consideration of the universities chosen for study, it would be interesting to do a
comparison study between a university that is in a small-scale city and a university that is in a
large-scale city. Liberty University is located in Lynchburg, Virginia, which is a mid-sized city
that was estimated to have a population of 80,995 in 2017 (U.S. Department of Commerce,
2017). The city of Lynchburg’s population consists of 66% White, 28.3% Black or African
American, 0.5% American Indian or Alaska Native, 2.9% Asian, and 3.5% Hispanic or Latino
(U.S. Department of Commerce, 2017). Levels of diversity typically increase as the city size
increases, so it would be plausible that international students have better experiences at
universities that are in large-scale cities. Interestingly, although there are low levels of diversity
within Lynchburg, Liberty University is a diverse campus that has many different countries and
ethnicities represented.

In consideration of this specific study, a noteworthy study would be to do a comparison
between a university that is openly known as religious and a secular university. There were
students in this study who saw some of the Christian aspects of LU to be positive, and there were
students who saw some of the Christian aspects to be negative. An overall perspective in relative comparison to a secular university would be beneficial to obtain.

**Conclusion**

The number of international students within the U.S. continues to be on the rise. Accordingly, discovering the factors that maximize international students’ success academically, socially, and inter-culturally continues to be of great importance. To ensure that international students do not struggle academically, socially, and culturally upon the initial arrival and the first year especially, universities in the U.S. need to find a more effective way of measuring international students’ English language proficiency. Additionally, culturally competent counseling and support groups should be provided to aid international students with the struggles they face in terms of support systems, stress and pressure.

Universities ultimately cannot guarantee the success of international students, or any students. To reach a state of developmental competence, international students should strive to maintain a high level of personal efficacy, realizing the importance of their motivation and abilities. If the students lack an actualized motivation to succeed, then it should not solely become a university or a faculty’s responsibility to ensure their academic and social success.

Interpersonal awareness is necessary for faculty if they desire to sincerely bond with their international students. A key component to this is developing strong proximal processes with their students. Additionally, faculty must ensure that they are accurately assisting their students. In order to do so, faculty need not only interpersonal awareness, but also IGM. Universities should ensure that their faculty have an IGM, if the university desires learning environments that are interactive and two-sided. Furthermore, an IGM within faculty fosters environments of mutual respect within the classroom. Most importantly, both faculty and international students
must realize that both parties contribute to the learning environment. In this sense, the faculty are not the only individuals teaching, as international students bring unique and valuable contributions to the classroom. Lastly, international students and American students would mutually benefit from becoming more involved and acquainted with one another. This will increase the notion of creating global citizens, valuing diversity, desiring multicultural knowledge, and appreciating the contributive potential of all individuals, regardless of whether they are international or American.

Initially, this study had the aim of seeking out the best ways to assist and retain international students at U.S. universities. As the study progressed, it was found that the more important focus should be on discovering how relationships aid international students throughout their duration at university. Two of the most influencing factors, i.e. support and proximal processes, are both components of relationships. If international students develop strong positive relationships with American students, other international students from varying countries, faculty, and their new community, then the chances that they will succeed holistically is great. Likewise, if faculty create strong positive relationships with their international students, then they will be able to understand their students more, enabling them to be more effective when teaching and offering correction, advice, and feedback. If the proximal processes developed within these relationships are genuine and intimate-enough, then the probability of the success in this journey of developmental competence will be much greater and will last much longer. In consideration of the analyzed data, the discovered causes and effects, and the previous literature, the findings from this study affirmed the research questions.
References


FACTORS AFFECTING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS


Appendix A: IRB Approval

October 10, 2018

Andrea S. Childs
IRB Approval 3444.101018: International Students in the U.S.: Aspects That Affect International Students’ Acculturation, Academic Success, Social Adjustment, Psychological Wellbeing, And Retention: Perspectives from International Students And Faculty at Liberty University

Childs,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
The Graduate School

Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971
Appendix B: Graph of Faculty Themes

- Support
- Acculturating to American University Standards
- Finances
- Student Aptitude
- Faculty Perspectives on International UG Student Experience
- Interpersonal Awareness
- Individual Global Mindset
- Academic Awareness
- Faculty Abetment
- Academic Support
- Non-Academic Support and Facilitations
Appendix C: Graph of International Student Themes

- Language
- Affect
- Environment
- Support
- Motivation

Student Core Themes
Appendix D: Interview Script for International Students

1. What challenges have you faced since arriving to the U.S., Lynchburg?
1b. What challenges have you faced since arriving at the University?

[Prompt for question 1]: Please keep in mind that these factors or challenges could have been positive or negative experiences that you faced. If you would like, then you may use the timeline sheet of paper to write down the events/memories as you remember them.

2. Have these challenges affected your academic achievement? If so, how so?
2a. Have these challenges affected your perceived social support? If so, how so?

3. From your point of view, have faculty (professors and lecturers) at the university assisted you throughout your time here? If so, how so?

4. From your point of view, has the university (staff and offices) assisted you with these challenges? If so, how so?
4a. Has this assistance helped you continue your studies at the university?

5. From your point of view, has the surrounding community/city of Lynchburg assisted you with these challenges or factors? If so, how so?
5a. Has this assistance helped you continue your studies at the university?
Appendix E: Interview Script for Faculty

1. What perceived challenges have you observed with the undergraduate international students in your courses?

[Prompt for question 1]: These challenges could be positive or negative factors/occurrences.

2. How have these perceived challenges that you have observed in this student-body population affected their academic achievement within the scope of your courses?

3. What steps have you taken to assist these students?

[Follow-up for question 3]: Have you had to or saw it useful to adjust your teaching style?

4. What steps have you noticed other faculty take while working with these students to assist?

5. How does the assistance that you give international students differ from how you assist students who are U.S. citizens?
Appendix F: Recruitment Flyer

Research Participants Needed

International Student Experience at Liberty University

- Are you 18 years of age or older?
- Are you an undergraduate international student?
- Are you an undergraduate faculty?

If you answered yes to either of these questions, you may be eligible to participate in this research study.

The purpose of this research study is to obtain information about the factors and difficulties that international students may face while at Liberty University, to gain insight about faculty’s perceptions of international students, to evaluate the success and degree to which the University has positively contributed to the acculturation, adjustment, and retention of international students up to this point. The research will involve a brief interview.

Participants who successfully complete all aspects of the study will be entered into a raffle for a $25.00 gift card. Additionally, this research study will be an approved Psychology Activity. Therefore, if a participant is enrolled in a psychology course, then they will be able to receive psychology activity credit.

Jerry Falwell Library
Liberty University
Lynchburg, VA 24515

Andrea Childs, a graduate student in the Department of Psychology at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Please contact Andrea Childs at [Contact Information] for more information.

Liberty University IRB – 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515
Appendix G: Recruitment Letter for International Students

October 2018

Undergraduate international students
Liberty University
Lynchburg, Virginia

Dear international students,

As a graduate student in the Department of Psychology at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the thesis requirement for my developmental psychology degree. The purpose of my research is to obtain information about the factors and difficulties that international students may face while at U.S. universities, to gain insight about faculty’s perceptions of international students, to evaluate the success and degree to which the University has positively contributed to the acculturation, adjustment, and retention of international students up to this point, and to suggest further ways that universities and faculty can improve in assisting the international student-body population. I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

If you are 18 years of age or older, are an undergraduate international student, and are willing to participate, you will be asked to engage in a brief open-ended interview. It should take approximately 30-90 minutes for you to complete the procedure listed. Your name and your home country will be requested as part of your participation, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please respond to the flier or recruitment email to schedule an interview. I can be reached at or by phone at .

A consent document is attached to this letter and will also be provided at the time of the interview. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Please sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the interview or send it to me via email.

Participants who successfully complete all aspects of the study will be entered into a raffle for a $25.00 gift card. Additionally, this research study will be an approved Psychology Activity. Therefore, if a participant is enrolled in a psychology course, then they will be able to receive psychology activity credit.

Sincerely,

Andrea S. Childs
Department of Psychology Graduate Student
Appendix H: Recruitment Letter for Faculty

October 2018

Undergraduate faculty
Liberty University
Lynchburg, Virginia

Dear undergraduate faculty,

As a graduate student in the Department of Psychology at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the thesis requirement for my developmental psychology degree. The purpose of my research is to obtain information about the factors and difficulties that international students may face while at U.S. universities, to gain insight about faculty’s perceptions of international students, to evaluate the success and degree to which the university has positively contributed to the acculturation, adjustment, and retention of international students up to this point, and to suggest further ways that universities and faculty can improve in assisting the international student-body population. I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

If you are 18 years of age or older, are undergraduate faculty, and are willing to participate, you will be asked to participate in a brief open-ended interview. It should take approximately 30-90 minutes for you to complete the procedure listed. Your name and how long you have been an educator in higher education will be requested as part of your participation, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please respond to the flier or recruitment email to schedule an interview. I can be reached at .......................... or by phone at ..........................

A consent document is attached to this letter and will also be provided at the time of the interview. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Please sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the interview or send it to me via email.

Participants who successfully complete all aspects of the study will be entered into a raffle for a $25.00 gift card.

Sincerely,

Andrea S. Childs
Department of Psychology Graduate Student
Appendix I: Informed Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

International Students in the U.S.: Aspects that affect International Students' Acculturation, Academic Success, Social Adjustment, Psychological Wellbeing, and Retention: Perspectives from International Students and Faculty at Liberty University
Andrea Childs
Liberty University
Department of Psychology/School of Behavioral Sciences

You are invited to be in a research study about international students in U.S. universities. You were selected as a possible participant because you are over 18 years of age, are an undergraduate international student or are undergraduate faculty. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Andrea S. Childs, a graduate student in the Department of Psychology/School of Behavioral Sciences at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to gain insight from both international undergraduate students and undergraduate faculty. For international students, the aim is to look at the various factors or challenges that international students may have faced since arriving at Liberty University. Specifically, I aim to see if these factors or challenges affect international students' academic achievement and social support. This will entail of evaluating, from the students’ perspective, how faculty, the university, and the surrounding community/city of Lynchburg have assisted them with their academic success, social success, and overall adjustment.

For faculty, the aim is to gain insight about the perceived challenges that they have noticed international students experience. Additionally, I aim to gather information about the ways or methods that faculty intentionally assist these students, in regards to the perceived challenges the international students face.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:
1. Take part in a recorded interview that should last around 30-90 minutes. The interview will take place at the university library.

Risks: The risks involved in this study “are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.” The interviewee may recall unpleasant events that occurred in the past, which may have caused psychological stress to the interviewee. The interview process minimizes this risk because the interviewee will share only information that they are comfortable sharing. The interviewees will not be asked to explain an event or memory in further detail if it is causing them noticeable distress or discomfort.
**Benefits:** Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from participating in this study.

Benefits to society may include potentially gaining more insight about the experiences international students face while in the United States, as well as university faculty’s perspectives on the academic success of international students. This could enable society to positively adjust their perspectives, as well as decrease any biased, racist, or discriminatory concepts that they may have, furthering their cultural competence.

**Compensation:** Participants may be compensated for participating in this study. This research will be an approved Psychology Activity. Therefore, the participating students will be able to receive psychology activity credit if they complete their involvement in the study. This psychology activity credit will only be relevant if the student is registered for a psychology course. Additionally, one student participant and one faculty participant will receive a $25.00 gift card through a raffle entry. Each participant will be entered into the raffle once. The student raffle and the faculty raffle will be separate. Email addresses will be requested for compensation purposes. Compensation will not be prorated if the participant does not complete all aspects of the study.

**Confidentiality:** The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I may publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher and the thesis chair will have access to the records.

- Participants will be assigned a pseudonym. I will conduct the interviews in an assigned room at the university library where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password locked computer. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher and faculty chair will have access to these recordings.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:** Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**How to Withdraw from the Study:** If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

**Contacts and Questions:** The researcher conducting this study is Andrea Childs. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at
and/or _________. You may also contact the researcher’s faculty chair, ________, at _________.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

**Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.**

**Statement of Consent:** I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

__________________________  ____________
Signature of Participant      Date

__________________________  ____________
Signature of Investigator     Date
Appendix J: Timeline Interview Sheet

Prior to arrival

Present day