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INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' VIEWS ON TEACHING AS MORAL CRAFT

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Based on the method of narrative analysis, this qualitative study explored the international graduate college students' views on teaching as a moral craft and their learning experiences. All the participants [N=30] of the study highly regarded the role of instructors' morality in student learning, such as respect, trust, engagement, and a high level of expectations. In their narratives, the participants paid a special attention to the description of their lived experiences of living and studying in the United States, and the impact of these experiences on their views of teaching, learning in the American University. The findings of the study revealed a number of challenges international students are going through, such as difficulties of their adjustment to the specifics of American education aimed at the development of critical thinking, imagination and creativity, and international students' inability to transition smoothly to this new institutional environment because of their experiences of learning in the traditional authoritarian style of education in their home countries. Prior to coming to the United States, many international students were the most academically successful among their peers in their home country; thus, they usually had high expectations about their achievement in the United States as well. Not only do these students have high personal expectations, but their families and government also place high expectations upon them, increasing the potential for a perceived failure and disappointment.

Key words: teaching, learning, morality, moral craft, international students, narratives, experience, challenge, expectations.

This qualitative study explores lived experiences of 30 international graduate college students studying in the United States, and the impact of these experiences on their views of teaching in the United States as moral craft.

Despite the increasing presence of international students in American higher education, the literature regarding the influence of these students' experiences on their professional, sociocultural and personal success in the United States is limited. In addition, the analysis of literature indicates that the majority of studies on international students focus on students from Asia (Shaw, 2010). Given this, little is known about the experiences of students from Africa (Angola, Chad, Congo, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Eritrea, Togo, Ivory Coast, South Sudan, Zambia, Kenya

and Ghana), Asia (Laos and Tajikistan) and the Middle East (Saudi Arabia), where the majority of our study participants were from. This research addresses a major gap in the theoretical literature on the influence of international students' study abroad experiences on their career paths, professional, social and personal success.

The study builds on the extensive previous international education research of one of the authors (Koshmanova, 2007; 2008; 2009; 2013; Koshmanova & Ravchyna, 2008; 2010). This research develops a conceptual model that explains the relationship between teachers and their ability to influence the development of international students' democratic thinking and practices under the conditions of social, economic and personal challenges.

All the participants of this research had studied in the United States for at least 2 years and were regularly admitted international students at a major university in the Midwest region of the United States. The study draws upon post-interpretivism theory (Pressle, 2006) as a powerful "framework for sorting human experience" (p.692). Crotty's (1998) phenomenological approach also guided the data collection and analysis. The participants shared their lived experiences and the answers to meaning of those experiences in regards to the research questions through semi-structured narratives. The researchers transcribed and analyzed each narrative accurately. The study offers practical implications for higher education professionals and contributes to the literature on cross-cultural education. This research will better help teacher educators to inform universities in the United States about this population views on effective teaching, as well as challenges and support systems for international students.

Literature Review

Study abroad as a research topic takes its beginning in 1946 when the United States Congress passed The Fulbright Act, which made studying in the United States more possible for international students (Schwietz, 2006). Since the beginning of this Act, the United States has drawn a large number of international students who come to the country to take advantage of many of the established higher education programs. But the main history of research on the experience of international students in the United States started in the 1950s when an increasing number of international students traveled to the United States to pursue education (Araujo, 2011)

Early research, however, is primarily focused on the reasons international students pursued studies in the United States. For instance, Spaulding and Flack (1976) studied hundreds of international students and found that many of them study in the United States to pursue educational training not available in their home countries. They also found that international students pursue education in the United States to learn more about the United States and to benefit from scholarship opportunities from their home countries for their educational endeavors. Most previous research has focused on developmental aspects of study abroad, such as

language learning, personal growth, intercultural awareness, and professional development.

Researchers studied how study abroad shapes global careers in the United States. Referring to Brecht, Davidson, & Ginsberg (1995), Herman (1996), and (Humigan, 1996), Norris & Gillepsie (2008) indicated that study abroad had increased dramatically since 1990. Still the vast majority of current research on the effect of study abroad focuses on the language skills (e.g.) or the psychological development of participants (Herman, 1996). A few studies have focused on how employer view the value of education abroad (Bikson et al., 2003; Thompson, 2004) or how study abroad participants, during or soon after the completion of their experience abroad, feel study abroad has affected or will affect their career goals and paths (Hamigan, 2001).

Another wing of extensive research on study abroad focuses on the difficulties international students are going through while adjusting to their life in the United States. Nearly three decades ago, academic difficulties, personal concerns, and health issues were identified as the three primary challenges among international students (Leong, 1984). A few years later, researchers identified a fourth area of challenge— culture shock (Adler, 1986). The majority of studies explored academic difficulties of international students studying in the United States. The academic and personal issues that international students experience while studying in the United States have been also examined by a number of researchers (Ward & Searle, 1991).

Overall, we can define the following five categories discussed by the authors: negotiating English language proficiency, performing in class, failing to meet academic advisors' expectations, lacking access to support services, and understanding the American educational system (Sato & Hodge, 2009; Duru & Poyrazli, 2007; Hofer, 2009).

When exploring challenges, international students are going through, researchers often refer to Adler (1986) who explored the acculturation process of international students while their study in the United States (Pedersen, 1995). According to Pedersen (1995), Adler's (1986) study is oversimplified. Despite this criticism, he referenced the following four stages that Adler suggested international students go through: (a) the Honeymoon Stage, when the student feels like a tourist; (b) Depression, when the student is overwhelmed by personal inadequacy in the new culture; (c) Autonomy, when the student sees both good and bad aspects in the host culture; and (d) Biculturalism, when the student is as comfortable in the host culture as back home (Adler, 1986, as quoted in Pedersen, 1994, p. 159). Studies have found that cultural adjustment is related to the degree to which the host and home country cultures differ from each other (Sheehan & Pearson, 1995; Ward & Searle, 1991). These studies suggest that international students who come from cultures very different from that in the United States may have a harder time

adapting to the traditions, lifestyle, and customs of the United States than international students from cultures closer to the United States.

Overall, researchers identify the following challenges international students are going through while adjusting to their life in the United States: (1). Students who majored in fields related to the arts and humanities encountered more problems in the area of health service than those who majored in science-related fields. (2). The overwhelming majority of international students believe that their culture is very different from the American culture, and no respondents state that their culture seems to be very similar to that of the United States. (3). Language barriers and discrimination based on ethnicity and culture were major obstacles to international students' adjustment to studying in the United States (Alshaya, 2005; Adler, 1986; Pedersen, 1994; Sato & Hodge, 2009; Gong & Fan, 2006).

The importance of study abroad has received new national recognition at the beginning of the millennium. One study suggested that nearly 85% of 1087 students who participated in study abroad programs between 2006 and 2011 felt that this experience helped them to build job skills (Preston, 2012). Exploring the reasons for success, the author concluded that semester-long study abroad has had a positive effect on the degree attainment of undergraduate students.

Although most previous research has focused on developmental aspects of study abroad, such as language learning personal growth, intercultural awareness, and professional development (Dole, 2009), more recent research has also focused on the impact of study abroad on academic outcomes, such as degree attainment, partly because outcomes are increasingly seen as a measure of the success of an institution (Barclay Hamir, 2011).

A certain number of studies explored international students lived experiences of Saudi Arabian students (Heyn, 2013) perceptions of achievement Leong & Chou (1996). For example, exploring Saudi Arabian students' perceptions of achievement, Leong & Chou (1996), argue that prior to coming to the United States, Saudi Arabian international students are often the most academically successful among their peers in their home country and therefore, they usually have high expectations about achievement in the United States as well. Not only do these students have high personal expectations, but their families and government also place high expectations upon them, increasing the potential for a perceived failure and disappointment (Al-nusair, 2000 and Spencer-Rodgers, 2000, as cited by Heyn, 2013).

Al-nusair (2000) explored the relationship among Saudi Arabian international students' perceptions of the college experience, satisfaction with college and educational gains, and college environment and educational gains at American colleges and universities. She used the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) to measure the amount, scope, and quality of effort Saudi Arabian students devote to the use of facilities and opportunities for learning and

development that secondary education offers them. Analysis of the 171 CSEQs returned by Saudi Arabian students in the United States show these students tend to be less involved in the following activities than students in the national comparison group: “writing experiences; art, music, and theater; personal experiences; student acquaintances; clubs and organizations; and campus facilities” (p. 71). Alternatively, the results of the study indicate that Saudi Arabian students in the United States tended to be more involved in the following activities than the national comparison group: “library experience, experiences with faculty, course learning, science and qualitative experiences, topics in conversations, and information in conversations” (p. 71). Analysis of the survey data also suggests that satisfaction with their college experiences was significantly correlated with Saudi Arabian students’ self-reported educational gains.

Shaw (2010) also examined perceptions of Saudi Arabian international students, but in a different sense. The author focused on uncovering the success strategies of 25 Saudi Arabian participants. In addition to case study research methods, she employed a fairly new technique of photo-elicitation research methods. Also known as photo ethnography, this methodology involves questioning subjects about photographs taken by a researcher or the subject. The method can help the subject recall information and helps the researcher better understand the subject’s experiences. Shaw found that the success strategies her participants developed incorporated goal setting, time management, study skills, study groups, taking advantage of campus resources, hard work, and persistence.

However, based on the literature reviewed, Saudi Arabian international students in the United States face many challenges. These challenges include simply being an international student in the United States, academic difficulties (specifically learning the English language), personal concerns (e.g., homesickness and loneliness), health issues (e.g., depression and headaches), and culture shock (Heyn, 2013). In addition, Saudi Arabian international students experience specific challenges because of negative perceptions held by some individuals in the United States about the Middle East or Saudi Arabia in general, and because many differences exist between the culture of Saudi Arabia and culture of the United States. Additionally, world events such as the 9/11 destruction of the World Trade Center Towers and the implementation of the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP) have affected the study-abroad experiences of Saudi Arabian international students (Heyn, 2013). A point that was clearly expressed in all studies just detailed was that the greatest challenge Saudi Arabian international students faced when studying in the United States was learning and using the English language (Akhtarkhavari, 1994; Shaw, 2010).

Among all the research, Mustafa (1985) nicely summarized this point by suggesting English language difficulty was a common denominator in all the past studies on Saudi Arabian students he reviewed, and included difficulties with

writing research papers, participating in classroom discussions, giving oral presentations, taking notes, and studying. While English surfaced as a common theme in all the studies, other common themes were also discerned in the studies. These themes included the value of Saudi Arabian students feeling a part of campus community activities in order to positively affect their satisfaction with their educational achievement and success perceptions (Shaw, 2010); the importance of interactions of Saudi Arabian students with American students to help the Saudi Arabian students feel less lonely and less alienated (Hofer, 2009); and findings about how age may relate to the adjustment of Saudi Arabian students in the United States (Hofer, 2009).

Most studies about international students' stressors and the strategies they used to achieve success focused on issues that international students, in general, encountered when they attended institutions of higher education in the United States (Hofer, 2009; Shaw, 2010). A review of the relevant literature indicates that most studies about Saudi Arabian international students in the United States were conducted in the 1980s and 1990s, despite the fact that Saudi Arabian students began studying in the United States in 1950. It is possible that research being done in this area prior to 1972 simply did not get shared through traditional scholarly means; however, if such research exists, it does not appear to be readily accessible to scholars today.

Most studies that have examined Saudi Arabian international students' experiences in the United States have used quantitative approaches (Akhtarkhavari, 1994; Hofer, 2009; Mustafa, 1985). Such traditional, scientific, and objective methods attempt to quantitatively describe and compare participants studied and usually offer limited focus on the experiences of individuals, and thus may be less effective at capturing the lived experiences in specific contexts.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This study was based on phenomenological narrative sought to explore the following research questions: Is US teaching a moral craft? Do instructors' pedagogical ethics and moral values influence the quality of college teaching and overall student performance? How does the factor of teacher morality influence student learning (knowledge, experience and performance)?

For the purposes of the current qualitative investigation, the researchers employed a phenomenological methodology. This methodology was based on post-interpretivism theory (Pressle, 2006) as a powerful "framework for sorting human experience" (p.692). Crotty's (1998) phenomenological approach guided the data collection and analysis.

Subject Recruitment

The sample of the study consisted of 30 international graduate college students who came to study in one of the Midwestern major public universities from a number of regions (Africa, Asia and Middle East). This university was a

nationally representative research university that included subjects from various racial, ethnic, gender, and socioeconomic backgrounds. All the participants had studied in the United States for at least 2 years and were regularly admitted international students at one of the Midwestern public universities and agreed to be recorded (audiotaped, videotaped, digitally). It was a randomly selected group; therefore, all the participants were of different gender, age, socioeconomic status, health status and cognitive status.

The informed consent was obtained prior to the collection of any data. On the date of the interview, the research assistant informed individually each potential subject about the time of the upcoming individual interview, which would be administered on a certain day according to the schedule, and that audiotaping will be one of the conditions of the interview. Subjects will be assured that their participation will be completely confidential. Potential subjects will be told that they would be given an information letter about the purpose of the study with assurances of their confidentiality. It will be especially stressed that participation would be totally voluntary and participants can stop at any time without penalty. For example, if they will not wish to participate, they may not come for the interview at all, or they will be able to skip any question they want, or will stop the interview process at any time for no reason at all.

Analysis

The researchers, with permission of the participants, transcribed each narrative accurately, and then analyzed it qualitatively using the constant comparative method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), where the investigator throughout continuous organized analysis of the data inductively derives similar categories or patterns that unite previously isolated incidents. This seeking out for patterns was undertaken to explore experiences, emotions and judgments that happen with some regularity (Luchner & Nadler, 1997). The qualitative analysis of the research data demanded attentive work and reflection. The researchers then met to compare their individual efforts, and a set of common analytic categories will be developed (Koshmanova & Ravchyna, 2008).

Findings and Conclusions

The analysis of students' responses helped researchers understand students' views on teaching as a moral craft. It also allowed defining several interrelated themes evident from the participants' narratives.

A common theme that ran across all the narratives was the theme of teaching as nurturing. All the participants demonstrated that their instructors were concerned about students learning and cared about them as individuals. The majority of the instructors were patient and understanding, they never raised their voices. The participants appreciated that everyone is welcome in the American classroom, that their instructors are "not judgmental about other people." The participants liked "general acceptance of everybody, their differences." One male

student from Kenia mentioned that “acceptance and caring for other people that are different from me in terms of their cultures and where they are coming from is something I really came to appreciate in the United States. So, that is one thing that has changed me forever.”

Another typical response was described by a student from China who wrote that “Teaching here is moral. Don’t hurt any other people, don’t hurt anyone’s presence in class...in America, we have that kind of moral quality in teaching and services...I think when teachers behave morally in class, their students will be curious about everything, and will search for new knowledge on their own. So, yeah, and that kind of thinking teaches us be more moral in our lives and in lives of our students.”

Another common theme evident in students’ responses was teaching as trust and caring. The participants mentioned that they liked that their instructors were responsible for students’ learning, their critical thinking, their successes and failures. They believed that the instructors had to know their students, their interests and inclinations, moral qualities, and conditions of living. Students wrote that they observed how instructors worked with individual students; these observations shaped their perceptions of what it meant to be a teacher. As a result, they want to these experiences and beliefs to their home countries. All participants in the study mentioned that their instructors felt responsibility for their students’ learning and were concerned about them as individuals. Many educators stressed the importance of caring and interpersonal relations. And one more typical response was shared by a female student from Ukraine: “Probably, yes, here it is their rule number 1, no cheating, this is almost a big crime not to be moral, and this is you’ll get big penalties for that. So, they trust you and care for you. If the professor is not looking at you, this does not mean that you are free to copy or plagiarize, this means that the professor trusts you. So, this is very important... Well, it’s a good teaching by own example, if they have nice morals and students see that they’re nice people, of course, this is the biggest influence for the students.”

The analysis of students’ responses also revealed a number of challenges international students are going through. These challenges are connected the specifics of the American teaching aimed at the development of critical thinking, imagination and creativity. This causes challenges for many international students who are accustomed to the traditional authoritarian style of teaching. Prior to coming to the United States, many international students are often the most academically successful among their peers in their home country; thus, they usually have high expectations about achievement in the United States as well. Not only do these students have high personal expectations, but their families and government also place high expectations upon them, increasing the potential for a perceived failure and disappointment.

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ПОГЛЯДИ МІЖНАРОДНИХ СТУДЕНТІВ НА ПЕДАГОГІЧНУ ДІЯЛЬНІСТЬ ЯК МОРАЛЬНУ МАЙСТЕРНІСТЬ

Тетяна Кошманова, Д'їмтібайе Оталбайе

*Коледж освіти і розвитку людини,
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На засадах методу нарративного аналізу це якісне дослідження вивчало погляди міжнародних студентів-випускників коледжу про педагогічну діяльність як моральну майстерність та їхні навчальні досвіди. Усі учасники дослідження [30 ст.] високо оцінили роль моральності викладачів в навчальній діяльності студентів, зокрема поваги, довіри, зобов'язання й високих очікувань. В своїх наративах учасники звернули особливу увагу на опис власного досвіду життя й навчання в Сполучених Штатах і вплив цього досвіду на їхні погляди про педагогічну діяльність і навчання в американському університеті. Результати дослідження виявили цілий ряд проблем, через які проходять міжнародні студенти, такі як труднощі пристосування до особливостей американської освіти, спрямованої на розвиток критичного мислення, уяви та креативності, а також неспроможність міжнародних студентів до гладкого переходу до нового середовища закладу у зв'язку з їхнім досвідом навчання в традиційному авторитарному стилі освіти в їхніх рідних країнах. До приїзду в Сполучені Штати багато міжнародних студентів були найбільш академічно успішними серед однолітків у своїй рідній країні; отож, зазвичай, вони також мали високі очікування щодо власних успіхів в Америці. Однак, не лише студенти мають високі особисті очікування, але й їхні сім'ї та уряд покладають великі надії на них, що посилює відчуття невдачі й розчарування.

Ключові слова: педагогічна діяльність, навчальна діяльність, моральність,, моральна майстерність, міжнародні студенти, наративи, досвід, виклик, очікування.