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by

Saira Rab

May 2016

ONLINE LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE
STUDENTS

A Dissertation Presented to the
Faculty of the College of Education
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Educational Psychology and Individual Differences

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Abstract

Education is the fifth largest export of services in the U.S creating approximately 23 billion dollars in revenue to the U.S. economy (IIE, 2003; Lee & Rice, 2007; Thompson, 2013). Understanding experiences of international graduate students at institutions of higher education in the U.S. is critical to retaining a competitive edge and delivering a high quality, transformative pedagogical experience. For example, seven of every ten graduate students earning their degrees in electrical engineering in the U.S., and 50% of graduate students in other engineering fields are international students (Anderson, 2014). A significant portion of our higher education exports consist of online courses (Anderson, 2014; Dykman & Davis, 2008; Thompson, 2013). The growth of international graduate students' challenges with online courses has emerged as a relatively new phenomenon in higher education (Chen, Bennett, & Maton, 2008), such as lack of immediate feedback within online courses. With the projected growth of international graduate students as a special population in higher education and in online education (Thompson, 2013), there is a critical need to study online education with international graduate students. This primary research project sought to identify the challenges and benefits faced by international graduate students within online learning, with an emphasis on how student experiences, attitudes, and perceptions vary by country of origin and their major. Additionally, the qualitative interviews add to the prior research themes to identify what challenges international graduate students face when they shift, not only from one country to another, but also from one modality of learning to another. This qualitative approach can help researchers and university administrators/international student

counselors to understand the unique challenges of the largely ignored international graduate student population within the online learning context (Dykman & Davis, 2008). International participants included two Chinese, two Middle Eastern, two European, and six Indian graduate students. A semi-structured interview session took place and follow-up interviews were conducted to reach saturation in the themes. Overall, ten common themes among the international graduate students was created, for example, all participants (N = 12) preferred face-to-face courses, wanted communication with professors in person even if the course was online (for clarification or putting a face to a name), and stated that online courses are beneficial if you have a full-time job, kids, or live far away. The themes presented highlight issues and benefits international graduate students face as they take online courses.

Keywords: International students, online courses, internationalization, qualitative interview, attitudes and experiences.

Table of Contents

Chapter	Page
I. Introduction	1
Problem Statement.....	1
Conceptual Framework for the Study.....	2
Statement of Purpose	3
Significance of the Study.....	4
Procedures.....	5
Limitations of the Study	5
Organization of the Study	6
II. Literature Review.....	7
Internationalization of Higher Education	7
Cultural Awareness.....	11
Lack of Online Education Experience.....	13
Cultural Differences.....	14
Phenomenological Research Perspective.....	21
III. Methodology.....	25
Site of Study.....	25
Technology Resources.....	27
Participants.....	27
Procedure	39
Phase 1.....	40
Phase 2.....	40
Recruitment Procedures.....	41
Open Codes.....	42
Data Sources	44
Interview Protocol.....	44
Field Notes and Data Journals.....	44
Data Analysis.....	45
Validity	46

Statement of Trustworthiness	49
IV. Results.....	50
Pilot Study.....	50
Interview Analysis	50
Data Analysis.....	51
Dissertation Study Findings	51
Cultural Transition to U.S. Education Themes	52
Cultural Transition to U.S. Education Themes	54
Online and Technology Themes	57
Themes across College Majors	67
V. Discussion	89
Interpretation of Findings	89
Conclusion	96
Implications	97
Limitations	98
Future Research Suggestions	100
References.....	102
Appendix A Pre-screen Survey.....	110
Appendix B Semi-structured interview questions	113
Appendix C Pilot Study Transcript.....	117
Appendix D Interview Open Codes and Codebook.....	122
Appendix E IRB Approval.....	131

List of Tables

Table	Page
1. Student Residency Breakdown - Fall 2015.....	25
2. Percentage of International Graduate Students by College - Fall 2015.....	26
3. Participants' Demographics and Online Course Experience from the Pre-screen Survey	30
4. Breakdown of Educational Level of Online Courses taken in U.S. or Home Country.....	31
5. The Overall Common Themes among All Twelve Participants.....	52
6. Benefits and Challenges within Online Courses across Participants' Majors	68

List of Figures

Figure	Page
1. Trend of International Students Attending U.S. Higher Education Institutions	9
2. International Graduate Student Country of Origin - Fall 2015	27
3. Pre-screen Survey Data of Participants' Country of Origin	29
4. Cultural Comparison of USA to Interviewees Home Country Culture.	32

Chapter I

Introduction

Education is the fifth largest export of services in the U.S. (International Education Exchange, 2003; Lee & Rice, 2007), and international students add approximately 12 billion dollars to the United States (U.S.) economy each year. It is projected that by the year 2025, there will be roughly eight million international students as compared to two million in 2004 (Albach, 2004; Sadykova, 2014). International students will add 23 billion annually by 2025 to the U.S. economy (Thompson, 2013) through the internationalization of higher education (Croese, 2011). By adding more online courses to accommodate large class enrollment, there is a projected increase of tuition revenues at U.S. higher education institutions. Online learning is not just an additional tool for instruction, but also provides an advanced educational learning environment for various objectives throughout one's degree progress. Contemporary students increasingly view online sources, electronic textbooks, and other online resources as important components of their courses (Lee, 2011; Wang & Reeves, 2007).

Problem Statement

More online courses are offered to students in public four-year universities and community colleges; this provides an opportunity to examine online course experiences of the international graduate student population (Anderson, 2014; Croese, 2011; Erichsen & Bolliger, 2011). In this booming era of learning with technology, more studies with international graduate students would improve our understanding of the consequences of the globalization of online courses. It is important to study how cultural and individual differences influence students' course learning in other countries. For example,

examining international graduate students' prior online course experience or perception may differ from the results in previous studies that did not include a large international graduate student sample.

International graduate students who hold an F-1 or J-1 Visa can only take one online course per semester according to federal guidelines (Papa & Whelan, 2015). M-1 international professional students are not permitted to take any online courses, unless the courses require at least the student's physical attendance for participation or examination (Papa & Whelan, 2015). Papa and Whelan said, "these restrictions have become outdated as technology continues to improve and online coursework becomes more prevalent" (2015, p. 36). There is a shortage of qualitative research on the experiences of online learning for international graduate students pursuing higher education in the United States. In-depth qualitative interviews with international graduate students enrolled in online higher education courses in the U.S. would greatly enhance our understanding of their experiences, challenges encountered, and factors contributing to a successful experience.

Conceptual Framework for the Study

The conceptual framework in this study relies upon cultural dimensions from Geert Hofstede (1980, 1986). Specifically, focusing on the individualistic-collectivistic and uncertainty-avoidance dimensions. According to Hofstede, a collectivist society is tightly integrated; an individualist society is loosely integrated" (1986, p. 307). Hofstede (1986) added that, "cultures with a strong uncertainty avoidance are active, aggressive, emotional, compulsive and intolerant" whereas, "cultures with a weak uncertainty avoidance are contemplative, less aggressive, unemotional, relaxed, and more accepting

personal risks” (p. 308). International graduate students from Asian societies who are more collectivistic may have difficulty transitioning into an individualistic educational system. The Asian international graduate students may have strong uncertainty avoidance with online courses if they are unfamiliar with the new format of learning.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to identify online learning challenges that are unique to international graduate students, such as participation and familiarity within online courses, language barriers, and cultural norms surrounding education. The U.S. universities and colleges are interested in attracting additional international graduate students; as international graduate students continue to grow as a special population in higher education (Anderson, 2014). Also, the current rates of graduation are higher among international graduate students, as 70.3% more international graduate students than national graduate students are earning their degrees in electrical engineering (Anderson, 2014). Additionally, 50% more international graduate students are receiving their degrees in other fields of engineering from U.S. higher education institutions compared to their national counterparts (Anderson, 2014).

Qualitative research on international graduate students and their experiences in online courses is limited, and often focuses only on one particular country, region, or origin (Al-Harti, 2005; Chen, Bennett, & Maton, 2008; Zhang & Kenny, 2010). As suggested by Miliszewska (2007), a multinational international sample would be desirable to expand upon the generalizability of prior qualitative findings. Studying the experiences of multinational international graduate students provides a unique

perspective as they alone have the educational experience to compare their transition from their home country to the U.S. higher education system.

Research Questions

This study seeks to understand the experiences of international graduate students who have transitioned into a U.S. public university and taken face-to-face and online courses. There are two general research questions in this study: 1) using a qualitative interviews, what are some online learning opportunities and challenges that occur for international graduate students who have transitioned into a U.S. public university? 2) Similar to prior research, can these online opportunities and challenges among international graduate students be grouped into common themes?

Significance of the Study

Online courses may contain an absence of strictly guided instruction, which poses a challenge for some international graduate students (Zhang & Kenny, 2010). For example, Chinese and Indian international graduate students are commonly less aware of how Western online education and learning works (Chen et al., 2008; Robinson, 1999; Liu, Liu, Lee, & Magjuka, 2010). Previous research indicates that international graduate students may experience significant difficulties when taking online courses designed for U.S. domestic consumption (Sadykova, 2014; Shattuck, 2005; Thompson & Ku, 2005; Zhang & Kenny, 2010). The difficulties of coming to a new diverse country, attending a new educational program, and building new interactions with others linked to a number of factors where educational, cultural and language-related backgrounds are most visible (Sadykova, 2014).

Adding to these pre-existing stressors, learning a new format of educational technology (e.g., Blackboard) can be difficult for some international graduate students to navigate through as they may lack familiarity within their respective educational culture (Zhang & Kenny, 2010). Students in U.S. are work-oriented, self-reliant and desire to work alone to pursue personal goals, unlike international students who work collectively to pursue group-oriented goals (Anakwe, Kessler, & Christensen, 1999). Online courses require the individual to be self-reliant and therefore, this cultural learning difference along with technology advancement can trigger educational concerns.

Procedures

This study used a qualitative phenomenological approach to investigate the online learning experiences of international graduate students at a public U.S. university. In addition, this research adds to how online course environments relate to international cultures. In particular, using a qualitative study to describe participants' transitional educational experiences from their home country to their current university was best, as a survey would not have captured the true meaning and depth of their responses to the interview questions. Participants first completed a pre-screen survey to self-identify as an international graduate student, with at least one online course experience. Afterwards, the researcher contacted the participant if they agreed to partake in the interview session.

Limitations of the Study

There are a few limitations in this study. First, qualitative research is subjective and the interviewer must take what participants say as face value regarding their online course experiences. However, qualitative research does enhance understanding to comprehend the perspectives of individuals (Stoner, 2010). Secondly, none of the

findings in this dissertation is generalizable to the entire international graduate student population in the U.S. As I present the findings with this study, I hope the readers can determine transferability—the ability to apply findings in similar contexts or settings (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Thirdly, a statement of trustworthiness will deter any limitations regarding personal bias about technology or any cultural biases that may arise. Lastly, in this study, there may be more female international graduate students interviewed compared to males, but every effort was made to add more males in this study.

Organization of the Study

Specifically, the primary research project sought to identify the challenges faced by international graduate students within online learning, with an emphasis on how student experience, attitudes, and perceptions vary by country of origin and major. The following dissertation will begin with the literature review that delves into what previous studies regarding international graduate students found in terms of their online learning experience, cultural differences, Hofstede's cultural dimensions, and why they are an important population to study for higher education within the online learning context. Afterwards, I will explain the research question, methodology that includes site of study and participants. Then, I will elaborate on the data sources and data analysis of the study. I will provide a detailed results section of the themes that were found in the study and finally, offer my discussion about the implications, limitations, conclusion and suggestions for future research.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Despite the enormity of general issues international students face, such as cultural adjustment or financial stress, the literature lacks qualitative studies about the challenges international graduate students face in online learning environments (Bailey, 2015; Chen, et al., 2008; Healey, 2008; Zhang & Kenny, 2010). More non-U.S. citizen students are applying to other countries for higher education, especially in the U.S. (Croese, 2011); therefore, promoting international graduate students' preparation and experience for online learning is needed to alleviate attrition and isolation experienced by international graduate students in online courses (Chen & Bennett, 2012; Kwon, Han, Bang, & Armstrong, 2010). The transition from another country's educational system to the U.S. educational system needs to be further studied to address international graduate students' issues with online learning. With more research in this area of education, better policies, advanced pedagogical online teaching strategies and building additional practical online courses for international graduate students attending a U.S. institution can improve online education.

Internationalization of Higher Education

According to the 2015 Open Doors Report on International Education Exchange (IIE), more than one million international students studied at colleges and universities in the United States during 2014-15. It is predicted that by the year 2025, there will be about 8 million international students as compared to 2 million in 2004 (Albach, 2004; Sadykova, 2014). Internationalization or 'globalization' is often presented in popular discourse as an early 21st century phenomenon, driven by innovations in information and

communication technologies and underpinned by English as the common language of business, politics and science (Crystal, 1997; Healey, 2008). Internationalization is now under various banners such as multiculturalism cultural diversity and leans strongly with cultural relativism (Popov, 2009). Lee and Rice stated that, “internationalization has been defined and utilized in many different ways; some have used it interchangeably with globalization, transnational education, or international education and some have tied it to specific forms of globalization or intercultural exchange” (2007, p. 384).

Internationalization is on the premise of assumptions about international graduate students and has explicit focus on issues related to English language proficiency, accents, international graduate student enrollments, and deficit models of internationalization (Popov, 2009). Healey (2008) displayed in figure 1 information about the “forecast global demand for international higher education” (p. 351). The global market will increase in higher education demands, and the United States will economically benefit from increased international graduate student enrollment (see Figure 1). International graduate students are beneficial for academic programs at U.S. institutions, as they are crucial in assisting with research that attracts top faculty and strengthens the academic programs at U.S. institutions (Anderson, 2014). International graduate students ensure their dominance with research in the science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields (Anderson, 2014). According to Anderson, “a policy of welcoming international students helps America maintain its leadership as a center of learning and innovation” (2014, p. 12). Considering students’ culture in online education without knowing the challenges or benefits that these international graduate students face requires further research.

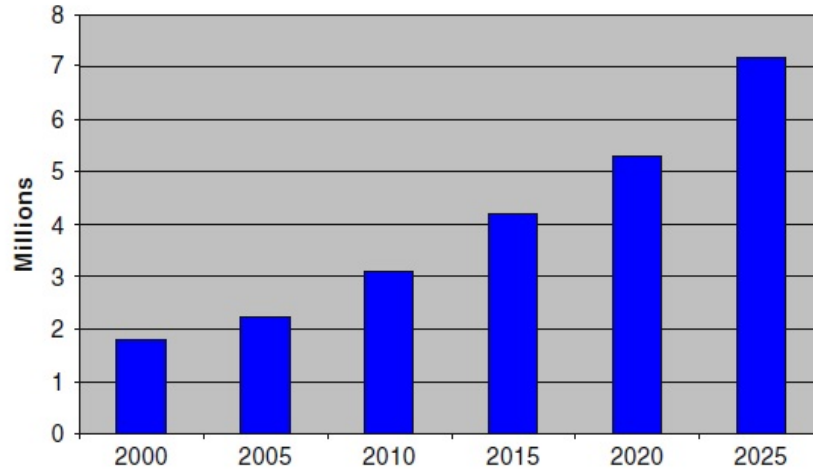


Figure 1. Trend of International Students Attending U.S. Higher Education Institutions

Source: IDP (2003) from Healey (2008)

Internationalization of online learning is important to higher education, not only due to the economic gains, but also because of the global relations with other countries and the diversity it brings into the university (Croese, 2011; Dykman & Davis, 2008). Future studies should include experiences and satisfaction of international students enrolled in these online courses, if internationalization is the goal (Dykman & Davis, 2008). Enrolling a number of international graduate students to an online course, without understanding their struggles and lack of experience in the online environment, does not equate a positive learning experience. There is a lack of literature on variations in the international graduate student populations and their experiences of online learning. Similar to the Chen et al. (2008) study, there is mostly a large number of Chinese international graduate students interviewed in the literature, and this only offers one perspective from the diverse international graduate student population in the United States. Students from other countries differ from the literature with a large Chinese

international student population; this study will add to the diverse issues of research by interviewing students from a variety of different countries.

There is a growing discrepancy between education for economic growth and individual empowerment, all of which relate directly to the impact of higher education partnerships on marginalized students (Bailey, 2015). For example, Indian students are the largest contingent of international graduate students entering the U.S., with a growth rate of nearly 37 percent over the past decade (Bailey, 2015; Bhandari & Choudaha, 2010). For U.S. institutions, their interest stems from the knowledge that “between \$700 million to \$1 billion dollars is spent every year on purchasing higher education abroad” (Kapur & Mehta, 2004, p. 7). U.S. universities are adding online courses for marketization purposes to adapt to the highly competitive demands of student needs for education (Miliszewska, 2007). As international graduate student population increases, so will class sizes and therefore, the shift towards a global market will demand online learning to accommodate international graduate students (Dykman & Davis, 2008). However, international students (on F-1 visas) are limited to enrolling in one online course per semester at their U.S. institution; this policy created after 9/11, is a federally mandated to ensure in-person verification of identity (Papa & Whelan, 2015). Universities have become more like a business, they add more online courses to increase profit revenue and to enroll a larger transnational body of students to their institution (Dykman & Davis, 2008; Healey, 2008; Miliszewska, 2007).

International graduate student services, teaching assistant arrangements and immigration questions is dealt with in offices of international studies, where specialized staff members intercede with institutional policy matters for individual students. There is

often nowhere for international graduate students to ask for help in an online course without asking the instructor (Sadykova & Dautermann, 2009). The mismatch between previous educational experience in the student's home culture and the requirements of the host institution embedded into the host culture may result in international graduate students' confusion, frustration, attrition, unmet course expectations, or disappointment with the learning process and results (Pan, Tsai, Tsai, Tao, & Cornell, 2003; Sadykova & Dautermann, 2009; Shattuck, 2005). International graduate students face general challenges in their transition to U.S. education. In particular, previous research has found: language barriers, discrimination related to students' race, culture, or status as foreign residents, instruction interactions issues, application versus memorization style of assessments, discrepancies between U.S. and other countries' academic policies and stress being a full-time student and working full-time at the same time. (Lee & Rice, 2007; Liu, Liu, Lee, & Magjuka 2010; Ku & Lohr, 2003; Pan et al., 2003).

Cultural Awareness. It is important disassociate all Asian international graduate students' experiences in one category to represent all international graduate students' experiences. According to Kiang as cited in Zou and Trueba (2002), "Asian immigrants also show wide differences in educational achievement that reflects the filters of U.S. immigration preferences and the structure of the U.S. postindustrial economy" (p. 224). Therefore, this study will identify other international graduate students and their transition to the American educational system from their respective country. It is important to study all types of international graduate students instead of one type and this should include international graduate students across a wide variety of disciplines. Liu et al. (2010) suggested that future research should extend previous findings in the literature

by adding “international students from multiple disciplines” (p. 187). Along with their suggestion, I also take in the importance of Wang and Reeves (2007) study to take culture and online learning into consideration of improving online education. They further state that with little research about online learning and culture, an argument must highlight the importance of culture in U.S. education, even in online courses (Wang & Reeves, 2007).

A major reason why it is important to study international graduate students in higher education is due to cultural awareness. According to Spindler (2000), “cultural awareness is one vital aim of each course, but not merely generalized cultural awareness; the aim is to create in the teacher an awareness of how culture influences specifically what he does as a teacher, and how to think about, observe, and analyze this influence” (p. 60). For example, international graduate students come off as passive in online courses, and they lack online course familiarity with the U.S. education system (i.e., cannot argue a point with the instructor) (Chen et al., 2008). One student from the Chen et al. (2008) study stated that the online medium of learning was ‘emotionless’ (p. 316), and similar findings may occur in my study.

Identifying themes that may be similar to prior studies can build better knowledge for online course instructors with international graduate students. For example, a possible theme of language barriers in online course could be due to the lack of cultural awareness in online courses. Similar to the findings from Zhang and Kenny (2010), there was a language barrier in the online course, but in Liu et al.’s (2010) study, students provided with audio and video lecture were able to help with any mistranslation or miscommunication to overcome their language barrier. Further qualitative interviews will add to the previous literature and themes from other research to identify what challenges

international graduate students face when they shift, not only from one country to another, but also from one modality of learning to another.

Lack of Online Education Experience. Previous research has found that international graduate students may not participate in the online learning environment as much as domestic or national students (Al-Harti, 2005; Hannon & D'Neto, 2007; Zhang & Kenny, 2010). Zhang and Kenny (2010) used a mixed-methods approach to examine how international graduate students perceive their learning in an online course and what were their biggest challenges in the online learning environment. Findings from the thirteen international graduate students demonstrate that participants had a wide variety of online course experiences. One participant specifically stated that they “felt insecure in [the] online environment because of the lack of nonverbal cues” (Zhang & Kenny, 2010, p. 24). Previous research has identified some issues with online course problems in participation or satisfaction for international graduate students (Chen et al., 2008; Liu, Liu, Lee, & Magjuka, 2010). The current study adds to the limited research literature and adds more relevancy and consistency to online learning issues among international graduate students.

International graduate students are also not as active in their online learning at U.S. institutions. An important finding from the Liu et al. (2010) focus group was the lack of experiences in regard for international graduate students' communication with American students and the instructor in the online course. According to the interviews, many international graduate students had not taken an online course in their home country (Liu et al., 2010). Shattuck (2005) found that international graduate students felt alienated in online courses compared to American students who were highly interactive

online. Based on international graduate students' home culture, the general theme was that the quality of learning via online courses was less satisfactory if participants were unfamiliar with online learning (Al-Harthi, 2005; Hannon & D'Neto, 2007; Zhang & Kenny, 2010; Zhu, 2011).

Research has found mixed findings on the benefits of the online format for students with limited English proficiency. Some international graduate students who struggled with English also had difficulty in online conversations and used spell check often (Zhang & Kenny, 2010). However, some research showed that online learning was easier for communication than face-to-face (FTF) because international graduate students were less stressed or embarrassed and could proofread their text before responding on the discussion posts (Al-Harti, 2005; Zhang & Kenny, 2010). Overall, in the literature, most of the international graduate students felt less knowledgeable in their online course environment compared to North American students. It is necessary for online educators to be aware of the needs and expectations of international graduate students.

Cultural Differences. For methodological comparison of general Eastern education, where teachers have absolute authority, to Western education, where interaction is encouraged and challenging the teacher is part of the self-development process, the international graduate student population must be studied further as they transition from Eastern to Western Education (Biggs & Watkins, 1996; Chen & Bennett, 2012; Liu et al., 2010; Robinson, 1999). Additionally, a qualitative study of international online MBA students conducted by Liu et al. (2010) tried to identify the cultural barriers and awareness of diversity needed for online course improvement. An Indian international student noted that, "culturally we like to work in teams, but the students in

the U.S. tend to be more independent” (Liu et al., 2010, p. 183). There are very limited empirical studies examining students’ online experiences, attitudes towards these innovative learning environments, comfort with online participation, and other online learning issues from international students with distinct cultural and educational experiences (Chen, et al., 2008; Smith, Coldwell, Smith, & Murphy, 2005; Zhu, 2011).

Al-Harti (2005) found that anxiety and resistance to online distance education are not unique to Arab students, and that these fears and worries about taking online courses could be a common theme among students from other countries. Many Arab students felt comfortable participating with instructors face-to-face instead of posting online and “current trends in the educational systems of Arab States encourage student participation in the classroom, while maintaining a level of power distance between students and teachers” (Al-Harti, 2005, p. 10). Previous research suggested that online courses would be good for international students but those studies did not provide enough context in the benefits of online courses (Thomson & Ku, 2005; Wang & Reeves, 2007). Therefore, online courses may contain a lack of instructional content and absence of strictly guided instruction that Chinese and Indian students are accustomed to from their Eastern education system (Chen et al., 2008; Robinson, 1999; Liu et al., 2010). If we study the phenomenon of cultural differences with international graduate students and online learning challenges, then we can fix any issues that emerge from the themes.

Adding to the cultural differences, there are language barriers in the field of research on international graduate students in online courses. Sadykova and Dautermann (2009) found that international students might misinterpret postings and assignments due to misreading communicative strategies, vocabulary, criticizing, apologizing, grammar

structures and professional slang. According to Sadykova and Dautermann, “idiomatic expressions, colloquialisms, regional or professional slang, references to local pop culture may also confuse second/foreign language speaker” (2009, p. 98). Besides feeling at ease communicating via face-to-face, a participant stated that “academic language” was easier to understand online compared with face-to-face (Al-Harti, 2005). These studies elaborate on the qualitative research as to why international students are resistant to online course interaction. Therefore, qualitative phenomenological studies should categorize cultural meanings and build a deeper understanding of international graduate students’ experiences with online learning (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Stoner, 2010); the findings can inform educational policies and have implications for improving online learning. The conceptual framework of cultural dimensions by Hofstede connects to previous studies and I am connecting his theoretical framework to this current study.

Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions. Hofstede (1980, 1986, 2001) identified and labeled four dimensions of cross-cultural values that include power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism-collectivism, and masculinity-femininity. The individualistic cultures stress the individual's goals, while the collectivist cultures emphasize group goals (Hofstede, 1980, 1986). “Hofstede’s national culture dimensions have been applied as the theoretical framework in numerous studies and have come to be regarded as useful constructs describing cultural difference” (Wang & Reeves, 2007, p. 342). Geert Hofstede created a website based on his theories of the various countries and their dimensions of cultures (Hofstede, 2003). Hofstede (2003) applied U.S. and other countries to certain cultural dimensions; those with higher cultural dimension scores on individualism are less collectivistic and those with higher scores on uncertainty

avoidance are more likely to have high preferences for avoiding uncertainty (Hofstede, 2003). I am associating the individual-collectivism and uncertainty avoidance dimensions to interviewees' country of origin's education system. This cultural context is group phenomenon and is not measurable at an individual level as they may differ from their home country's cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 2003).

Individualism-Collectivism. Hofstede's (1986) model describes four dimensions of the culture model within the social differences of teacher/student and student/student interactions. The power distance dimension regards individuals with high social status exert great power and influence; the individual-collectivism dimension highlights individuals who are independent of their society versus those whose culture values collective well-being or achievement in society (Hofstede, 1986; Liu et al., 2010). This conceptual framework of individualism-collectivism explores the different views of international graduate students' experiences from transitional education changes in modalities of their learning. Students that have grown up in a collectivistic society may face some unique challenges in online learning environments of an individualistic institution due to cultural differences. This construct of cultural differences can explain what specific issues international graduate students face in online learning environments. Specifically, Anakwe et al. (1999) studied international cultural differences with a large sample of undergraduate and graduate students at two universities in the U.S. and they found that students from individualistic cultures are more receptive in communicating online compared to those who come from collectivistic cultures. Additionally, they found that those who were more individualistic learners tended to be more competitive even in non-interactive online courses (Anakwe et al., 1999).

Individualists are also more likely to prefer technology and online communication, whereas multiple studies have indicated that collectivists do not generally prefer online communication (Anakwe et al., 1999; Liu et al., 2010; Wang & Reeves, 2007). “Western students are generally portrayed as verbal/analytic learners who are ready to critically analyze ideas, voice their own opinion, and challenge instructor’ or peer’s point of view, while Asian students are considered visual/holistic learners who perceive presented content and ideas as unquestionable and instructor’s status indisputable and absolute” (Sadykova & Dautermann, 2009, p. 98; Thompson & Ku, 2005). Individualistic and collective cultural differences did influence how international graduate students interacted in a class with their instructors or other students (Croese, 2011; Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002), especially in an online setting (Ku & Lohr, 2003; Liu et al., 2010; Wang & Reeves, 2007).

Looking at the connection with Hofstede’s individualistic and collectivistic societies, in online courses at U.S. institutions of higher education, quietness is interpreted as a lack of participation and can hurt international Asian students academically and socially (Park & Jun, 2003; Li, 2005). Perceived challenges of learning online such as reduced input from the teacher, absence of a teacher-student relationship, absence of a learning community or communication, no enforcement of learning, acculturation experiences, and strategies were some common themes from previous research with Chinese international students (Chen et al., 2008; Croese, 2011; Wang, 2004). According to Ku and Lohr (2003), Asian international graduate students come from a country where the instructor is an authority figure, and have challenges based on cross-cultural differences in values, language barriers, and learning format preferences.

Ku and Lohr's (2003) study also found that Chinese and Taiwanese students liked the idea of building an online community among their peers and instructors, which reflects their collectivistic culture. Based on prior research, a collectivistic versus individualistic theme may be present in the study of international graduate students' experience and transition to Western education (Kwon, Han, Bang, & Armstrong, 2010; Lee, 2011; Liu et al., 2010).

Uncertainty Avoidance. Uncertainty avoidance (UA) dimension is where individuals from a culture with high UA feel threatened by uncertain or unstructured ideas/situations; masculinity-femininity is the degree which society prefers established gender norms (Hofstede, 1986; Liu et al., 2010). Uncertainty Avoidance is established when a lack of familiarity is in the situational environment (Hofstede, 1986, 2003). In this study, individualistic-collectivism and UA are the two most salient dimensions to understand the international graduate students as they transition into an online course experiences in an individualistic society.

In this study, lack of experience in regard to interactions within online courses may be a common issue for those international graduate students that have little to none online course experience in their home country (Liu et al., 2010). Previous research highlights the uncertainty avoidance dimension of Hofstede's (1986) model, and Liu et al. (2010) found that how international graduate students learn is different; for example, Chinese students view tests as memorization and lack application-oriented assignments in their country compared to the U.S. An interesting finding, contrary to previous research, is that international participants seemed ready to accept the differences and looked for the positive aspects that cultural differences bring (Liu et al., 2010). However, if instructors

are not culturally sensitive to their students then international graduate students will feel a lack of connection to the online course (Liu et al., 2010; Wang, 2004).

Apathy and unwillingness to attempt understanding another's previous experience translates into rejection of international graduate students' cultural identities (Dykman & Davis, 2008). As evidence from previous interviews reveals, an international student stated, "I feel that teachers do not teach in an online course. They raise many questions for us to discuss. What do they teach us? They teach us nothing." (Chen et al., 2008, p. 315). Interviews with two international Chinese students over the course of a year indicated that there was reduced interaction and lack of structure in online learning from their perspectives (Chen et al., 2008). In all of the literature, there was a distance of interaction and lack of communication from international students taking an online course, as they may be uncertain about this new format of learning.

According to Robinson's (1999) study findings, Western online courses offer disadvantages to Chinese learners as they focus on active, collaborative, and reflective practice in an online format where it is unfamiliar in the Chinese education system. Therefore, I am interviewing international graduate students in regard for their online learning experiences, attitudes, and perceptions that is unidentified using a larger representative sample (Liu et al., 2010). I used the conceptual framework of cultural differences to evaluate participants' responses from their comparative educational online course experience in the U.S. and their home country as a primary focus of this phenomenological study. This study will include multiple cultures of international graduate students and Hofstede's theory is useful to understand this diverse population.

Phenomenological Research Perspective

Phenomenological perspective is a type of qualitative research design, and “individual constructs are elicited and understood through interactions between researchers and participants” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 111), “with participants being relied on as much as possible” (Creswell, 2009, p. 8). This type of qualitative interviewing allows international graduate students to describe any lack of presence or any other challenges they face when taking an online course in the U.S. higher education system through dialogue and conversations (Spindler, 2000). “Interpretive methodology is directed at understanding the phenomenon from an individual’s perspective, investigating interaction among individuals as well as the historical and cultural contexts which people inhabit” (Creswell, 2009, p. 8). Examples of this methodology include “case studies (in-depth study of events or processes over a prolonged period), phenomenology (the study of direct experience without allowing the interference of existing preconceptions), hermeneutics (deriving hidden meaning from language), and ethnography (the study of cultural groups over a prolonged period)” (Scotland, 2012, p. 12). The methodology and importance of this qualitative study add important findings to the internationalization of online learning environments.

Quantitative data does not answer the “how” or “why” questions that arrive from research; qualitative data provides real-life findings that bring awareness to improve pedagogy for online instructors (Fetterman, 2010; Murchinson, 2010). Lastly, research regarding online learning and technology needs replication in order to understand if prior research findings are consistent as technology changes. Qualitative findings provide emerging themes from the current experiences international graduate students have

within online learning environments. It should be noted that these themes and findings might change ten years from now as technology and online courses change. As the world increases its technology usage, qualitative interviews also examine trends and themes that need to be further studied for this international graduate student population.

Since technology is consistently changing, most studies dealing with online or technology constructs should include a qualitative method to include exploratory or unknown confounding variables. Previous research has found determining online satisfaction among international students can depend on the structure of the online course, students' accessibility with technology and the online instructor's response time or immediate feedback, and facilitation of online course participation (Bolliger & Martindale, 2004; Hannon & D'Neto, 2007). Additional qualitative research findings can strengthen the gaps in the literature to identify consist themes among international graduate students and their online learning experience.

Some weaknesses of the qualitative method are the subjectivity of the research, lack of generalizability, and line-by-line coding process can be time-consuming (McDuffie & Scruggs, 2008; Stoner, 2010). In addition to being time-consuming, qualitative researchers strive to (a) collect enough data to adequately represent participants' views, (b) analyze the data systematically, (c) confirm that participants were truthful, (d) and report the findings clearly (Stoner, 2010). The weakness of subjectivity can address qualitative research as it uses confirmability to determine the accuracy or credibility of the findings through specific strategies (i.e., triangulation, respondent validation, or member checks) (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Stoner, 2010). While collecting qualitative data, attrition may occur, the themes may or may not reach saturation,

documentation of methods used to establish trustworthiness and credibility could be unclear, a clear audit trail may be missing, and there could be difficulty obtaining the targeted sample from the desired population (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson 2005; Creswell & Miller, 2000; McDuffie & Scruggs, 2008).

Universities offer online courses to utilize links to the global education markets to access many new markets (Dykman & Davis, 2008). Qualitative findings from this study can describe the issues within online learning environments, as additional international graduate students are enrolling in U.S. institutions of higher education. Even though online courses are flexible and convenient, an unstructured and passive online course can make international graduate students not want to take future online courses (Chen et al., 2008). The future of online courses must alter to accommodate students who come from a different educational background. By exploring online learning issues with international graduate students, I have described the people, explained a phenomenon, and described factors that may improve online learning environments in U.S. institutions (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012).

Based on the literature section above, “online technology is beginning to drive a basic shift in the scope and aspirations of educational institutions around the world.” (Dykman & Davis, 2008, p. 14). It is important to study what individual differences influence students’ experience, knowledge or attitudes about online learning with students from other countries. My purpose of providing findings from international graduate students through a qualitative lens is to identify the gaps and determine if experiences, perception, and attitudes towards online learning differ from their home country education to the U.S. education system. The literature review leads to the main

research questions of my dissertation: using a qualitative framework, what are some online learning opportunities and challenges that occur for international graduate students who have transitioned into a U.S. public university? What are the common themes among the international graduate students?

Chapter III

Methodology

Site of Study

The study took place at a large urban public university in the southwestern United States that has a diverse student population with a high number of international graduate students. The university defines international students as nonresident alien - “A person who is not a citizen or national of the United States and who is in this country on a visa or temporary basis and does not have the right to remain indefinitely” (Office of Institutional Research, 2015). International studies made up 9.6% of the total student population during the 2014-2015 academic year. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the total number of international graduate students attending the university during the semester of data collection.

Table 1

Student Residency Breakdown - Fall 2015

Student Residency	Number	Percent
Texas		
Harris County	22,813	53.4
Adjacent Counties	9,993	23.3
Other Texas Counties	4,509	10.6
Subtotal Texas	37,225	87.2
Out-of-State	1,330	3.1
International	4,119	9.6
Subtotal Non Resident	5,449	12.8
Total	42,704	100.0

Source: The Office of Institutional Research (2015)

Table 2 displays the percentage of international graduate student per college at the site of study. These numbers included both masters and doctoral students considered as

graduate students. A majority reside within College of Engineering, with the fewest number of international graduate students in the College of Social Work. (Table 2).

Table 2

Percentage of International Graduate Students by College - Fall 2015

College	Total Graduate Students	Total Count of International Graduate Students	Percentage within College
Architecture	81	20	24.7
Business	1,020	265	26.0
Education	676	48	7.1
Engineering	1,312	1,015	77.4
Hotel & Restaurant Management	86	49	57.0
Law	130	40	30.8
Liberal Arts & Social Sciences	1,081	143	13.2
Natural Sciences & Math	975	595	61.0
Optometry	43	19	44.2
Pharmacy	79	50	63.3
Social Work	405	15	3.7
Technology	374	164	43.9

Source: The Office of Institutional Research (2015)

Figure 2 displays the country of origin from the university. The top three countries or origin for international graduate students to the university is China, India, and Vietnam. The figure data is from the Office of Institutional Research public data about the university's graduate student demographics.

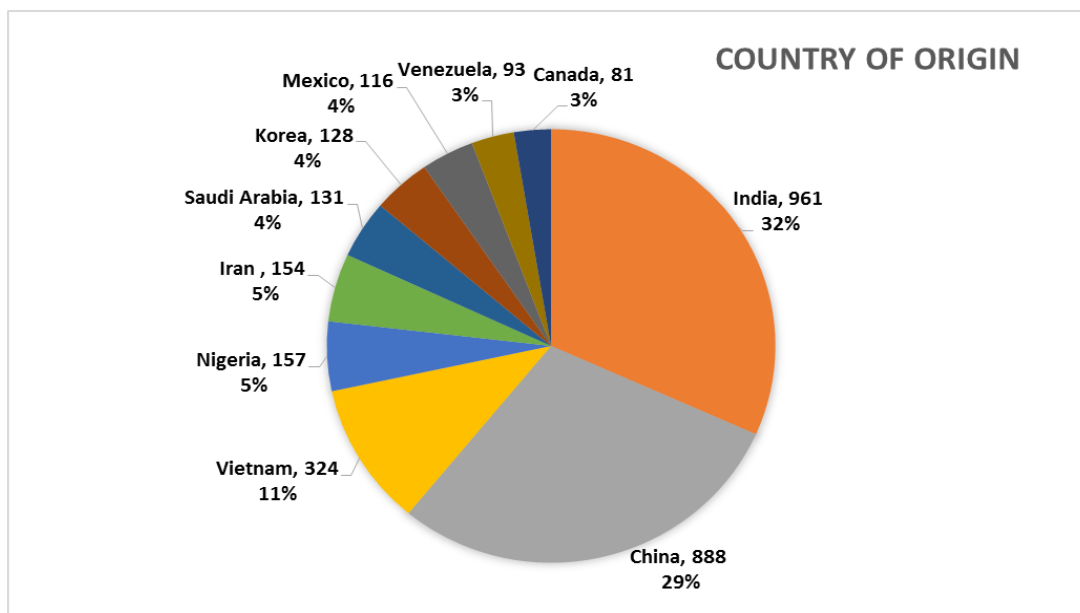


Figure 2. International Graduate Student Country of Origin - Fall 2015

Source: The Office of Institutional Research (2015)

Technology Resources. All students at the university have access to on-campus computer labs, printers, and copy machines in the libraries. Some departments also have their own computer labs and printing services for students in their college. Students living in dormitories also have access to dorm computer labs. All students have access to blackboard, IT services, and access to library workshops to gain skills with Microsoft Word, PowerPoint and other basic software. While on campus, students have wireless internet access. If students do not own a personal computer, there are many ways to use one at the library or college department. The investigation of student access to internet off campus is in the study and 100% of participants had internet access at home.

Participants

Recruited participants were from various departments and international student organization groups via emails, flyers and Facebook group postings. Prior to the completing a pre-screening survey, all participants read and signed the consent form in

order to understand the study, incentives, and agree to participate in the interview for IRB documentation only. Based on an initial screening survey, I contacted preferred participants for interviews who have taken at least one online course throughout their U.S. education. Participants were all above 18 years of age and qualified as an F-1 international student based on self-report in the prescreen survey. All participants held a bachelor's degree or equivalent, and enrolled in courses at the post-baccalaureate level.

Figure 3 displays a breakdown of international students' country of origin based on the pre-screen survey. Seventy-six international graduate students completed an online pre-screen survey and this included all types of international graduate students (e.g., Master's or PhD). From the 76 international students that completed the survey, only 65 international graduate students agreed for an interview contact. Out of those 65 international students, only 45 international students qualified for the interview (i.e., took an online course in the U.S., were an international graduate student, and/or wrote their email address). Unfortunately, the recruitment out of 45 international graduate students only led to 12 participants that showed up for the interview session. Out of the 12 participants, only three interviewees agreed for a follow-up interview for clarification purposes. Remaining participants either declined further follow-up sessions or reached saturation and a follow-up session was not necessary. I have some individualistic cultures in my data, but mostly collectivistic cultures are determined from interviewees' home country institutions. Most of the interviewees also had medium amounts of uncertainty avoidance; further explanation of each interviewee's cultural dimension and educational major with additional information is in the interviewee sections.

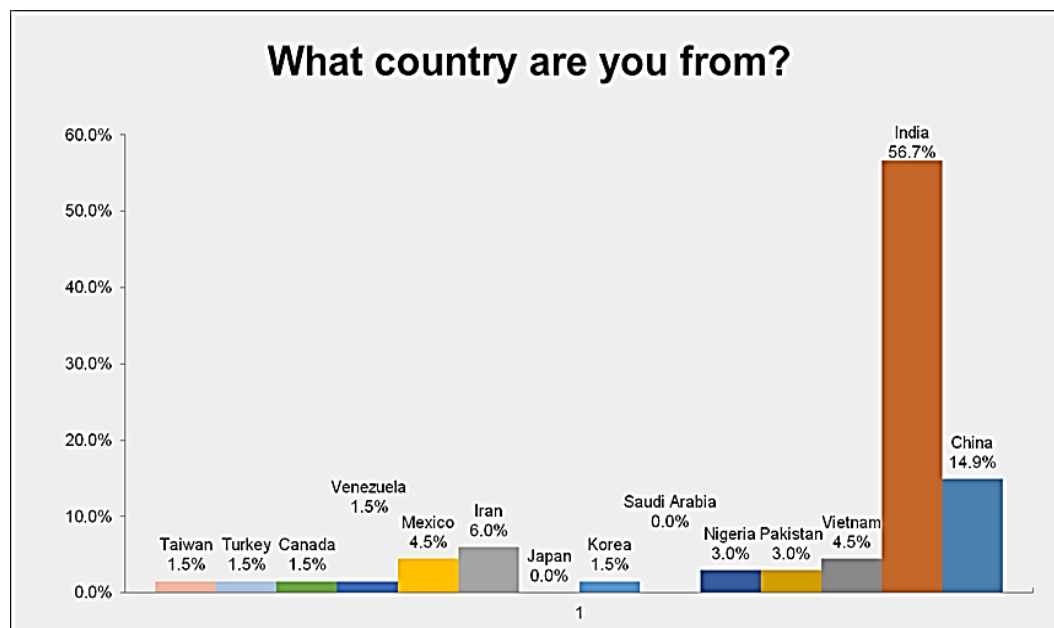


Figure 3. Pre-screen Survey Data of Participants' Country of Origin (N = 76)

A few participants had only online experience in their home country since they had started their first semester at the university during data collection. In particular, two interviewees had just arrived to the U.S. during the beginning of the Fall 2015 semester when this study began interviewing participants. They agreed to participate in the interview and this consideration of interviewing participants with both online experience in home country and U.S. was difficult to conduct. Even though some participants were not able to have online courses taken in the U.S. during the time this study took place, those participants remained for the qualitative analysis. Additionally, they added to develop themes as they provided important feedback with their unique experiences. The tables below describe each participant in detail and the pseudonyms provided are for confidentiality purposes (Table 3 & 4). Additionally, figure 4 provides a comparison of participants' country of origin cultural dimensions regarding individualism-collectivism and uncertainty avoidance with their current U.S. cultural dimension.

Table 3

Participants' Demographics and Online Course Experience from the Pre-screen Survey

International Graduate Student Participants			Online Course Experience in Home Country			Online Course Experience in U.S.		
Pseudonym	Gender	Country of Origin	Online Courses	MOOCs	Non-accredited	Online Courses	MOOCs	Non-accredited
Amy	Female	Canada	0	0	0	6	0	0
Lee	Male	China	0	0	2	0	0	0
May	Female	Turkey	0	0	0	2	1	1
Shay	Female	China	0	0	0	1	0	1
Rani	Female	Pakistan	1	0	0	8	1	0
Sammi	Female	India	0	0	0	1	0	0
Mona	Female	India	0	0	0	1	0	2
Leah	Female	U.K.	0	0	0	3	0	10+
Annie	Female	India	0	0	10+	0	0	0
Mina	Female	Iran	1	0	0	6	0	0
Shriv	Male	India	0	1	1	0	1	1
RJ	Female	India	0	0	0	2	0	0

Note: For confidentiality purposes, India is listed as the country of origin for one participant from a neighboring country that was deemed identifiable.

Table 4

Breakdown of Educational Level of Online Courses taken in U.S. or Home Country

Pseudonym	Which level were the Online Courses Taken in the home country?				Which level were the Online Courses Taken in the U.S.?			
	Under-graduate	Masters	PhD	Other (e.g., work-shops)	Under-graduate	Masters	PhD	Other (e.g., work-shops)
Amy	0	0	0	0	2	3	1	0
Lee	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
May	0	1	2	0	0	1	0	0
Shay	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
Rani	1	0	0	0	9	0	0	0
Sammi	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mona	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
Leah	0	0	0	0	2	1*	0	10+
Annie	4	0	0	10+	0	0	0	0
Mina	1	0	0	0	0	6	0	0
Shriv	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	1
RJ	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0

Note: I added an asterisk (*) to represent the online course experience reported during the interview conversation.

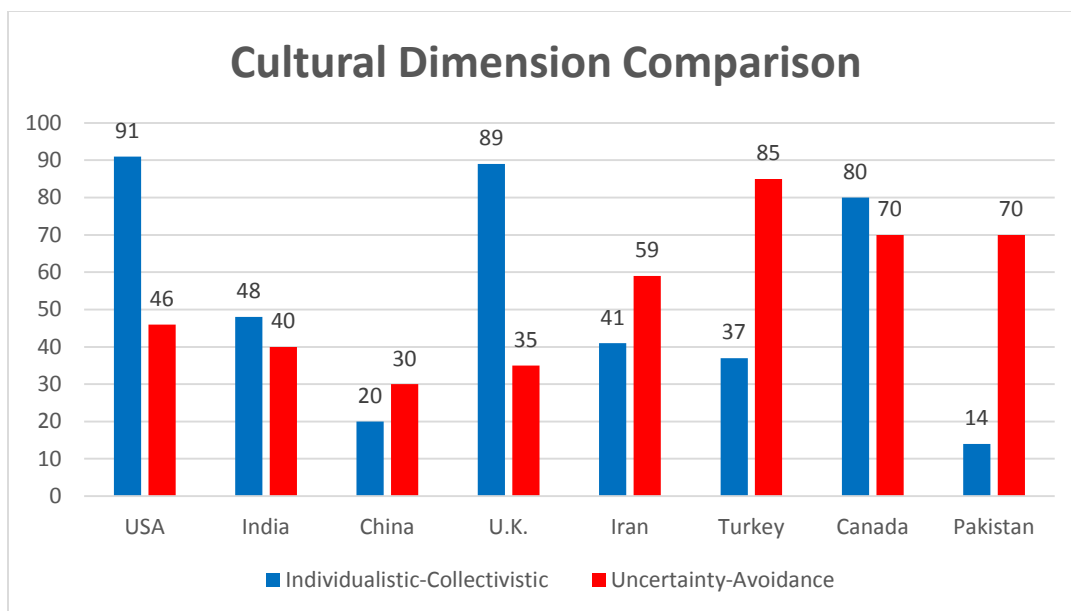


Figure 4. Cultural Comparison of USA to Interviewees Home Country Culture.

Source: Hofstede (2001; 2003)

Interviewee 1. Amy is a Canadian international Ph.D. student in the College of Education. Her home country's culture is more individualistic and has high uncertainty avoidance. She stated during the interview that she does not have an accent and seemed to be familiar with the university as she has been an international student since her undergraduate years. She is often mistaken as a national American citizen instead of an international student. However since she classifies as an international graduate student, I proceeded to interview her. As we discussed her background in her home country, she stated that she had to be more independent in the U.S., and that Canada does have an individualistic society, universal healthcare, higher taxes for education, and generally better benefits for their citizens. In particular, Amy stated that she had to “learn very quickly to be independent” as her culture is naturally more individualistic than collectivistic society. Amy had plenty to state about online courses and we scheduled a follow-up interview to clarify her responses to the first interview session.

Interviewee 2. Lee is a Chinese international student in a Ph.D. program in the College of Education. His home country's culture is more collectivistic and has low uncertainty avoidance. He attended a Chinese university for his Bachelor's degree, and then came to U.S. for his Master's degree in Public Relations, so he is not very familiar with Education as his degree recently changed. The university in China where Lee completed his undergraduate degree is a large university, and Lee stated that class sizes ranged from 50-200 students depending on the course. Lee is the only participant who has had both online and hybrid teaching assistant experience. This information is valuable as he was able to see participants interact differently in the two course formats. In the first interview, Lee provided very few details about his experience as a Chinese international student in the U.S., so we completed a follow-up interview for clarification in a second session.

Interviewee 3. May is a Turkish international Ph.D. student in the College of Education. Her home country's culture is more collectivistic and has somewhat high uncertainty avoidance. She has been living in the U.S. for nearly six years and has other Turkish international student roommates. May stated that, "Turkish people are always late" as she waltzed into room about 15 minutes late for our interview session. When she learned that the interviews were for my dissertation, she stated that she was willing to help as much as possible. I appreciated her kindness to even offer to send my prescreen survey to other Turkish international students. As we discussed each question, she paused to think before speaking as to try to recall information from years ago, and asked for rewording of the questions if she did not understand what I was asking her to answer. She seemed to provide enough information that a follow-up interview was not needed as

saturation had occurred and she often stated, “As I said earlier” as that provided no need for furthering probing or follow-up questions.

Interviewee 4. Shay is a Chinese international Ph.D. student in the College of Social Work. Her home country’s culture is more collectivistic and has low uncertainty avoidance. Her department is transitioning to a completely online Master's in Social Work program. Shay wanted to highlight that her online MSW program transition was the reason why she wanted to partake in this study. Shay spoke very fast and had the most to say about every question, sometimes she would delve off then refer back to the original question. Lastly, I scheduled a follow-up interview session as Shay’s interview lasted an entire hour and could have continued even longer if she did not have to attend class that day.

Interviewee 5. Rani is a Ph.D. student in the College of Engineering and arrived early to her interview session. Her home country’s culture is more collectivistic and has high uncertainty avoidance. She introduced herself to me and immediately asked if I am Pakistani and I replied yes; she then went on to say that, the reason she was interested in participating is because she noticed in the recruitment email that my name was of Pakistani origin. She seemed more interested in meeting me than the actual interview session. It was a pleasure meeting someone outside the discipline of social sciences; she went to a private high-tech university in Pakistan and she stated that not all Pakistani colleges are high-tech and technologically advanced. She also discussed how she has a brother who is an international graduate student, and offered to recruit him for an interview. Our interview session ended shortly due to a room scheduling overlap. Overall, I believe she provided plenty information about her educational background,

transition to the U.S., and has very good experiences with online courses and technology in general as her department relies heavily on technology. A follow-up interview session was to be scheduled later in the Fall 2015 semester, but unfortunately, she never responded to my emails.

Interviewee 6. Sammi is an Indian international student in the College of Social Work and had just started her Master's in Social Work program. Her home country's culture is collectivistic and has medium amount of uncertainty avoidance. She wore a traditional Indian tunic and clothes. She studied in an Indian University and is now a returning, older student. She had just moved from Calcutta two months earlier. She came to U.S. on her own, as she wanted to pursue her higher education in the U.S. as a social worker. Her lifelong goal is to become a professor someday. She only had only taken a course-related online workshop as part of her courses this semester. She stated that her alma mater in India may offer online courses now, but they were not available when she was a student. During the interview session, Sammi did not understand some questions due to my American accent and asked for some questions to be rearticulating. I also established conceptual saturation with Sammi as she stated, "As I said" and "Did I already answer that question" or "Going back to what I previously stated" in which she did not understand. She did not have enough ways to elaborate her response in English with clear details (i.e., when asked what classes were like in her home country she replied with I did Economics). She also stated that she did not want to complete a follow-up interview or participate in the member check focus group.

Interviewee 7. Mona is from the College of Education, an Indian international graduate student, and she was a bit late for the interview session. However, when I hit

record, she corresponded her response to each question with thorough detail. Her home country's culture is collectivistic and has medium amount of uncertainty avoidance. Unfortunately, she did not sign-up for the focus (optional) group. She stated her experience as a TA for an online course and was very familiar with the online course limit policy on international graduate students. She also had taken online course workshops and discussed how the workshops were in the form of MOOCs from other universities.

Interviewee 8. Annie was the only participant who reached out to me for an interview. She even provided some background information and emailed me her resume. I was interested to follow-up with her as soon as possible. There was a misunderstanding my email stated dissertation recruitment study; she assumed recruitment meant as a job recruiter. After we established that I was not recruiting anyone for a job opportunity, she still agreed to participate in the study. Annie is from India and just started her MBA program in the U.S. Her home country's culture is more collectivistic and has medium amount of uncertainty avoidance. Her responses were very direct, confident, and some responses were one-worded. When I asked her for further detail, she said that she had nothing else to add. She was one of the only focus group participants who took more than ten non-accredited online courses. Many of this experience was due to her previous job. She worked for a firm in India that offered online courses as part of the professional development for her job. She did not find online courses to be very difficult, but like everyone else, she preferred face-to-face courses.

Interviewee 9. The interview with Leah was quick as she was 20 minutes late. She received the pre-screen survey from a mutual friend. She was an ambassador for the

online Masters of Social Work program and had positive attitudes towards technology. I noticed her Scottish accent and she stated that she was from the United Kingdom. Her home country's culture is individualistic and has low amount of uncertainty avoidance. In terms of the responses, the participant was quick to answer and did have her moments where she held her head in her hands to recall information. The interview was quick, but she did explain that she had taken one online course at her home country and forgot to list that in the pre-screen survey. An asterisk is in Table 4 to represent the online course experience reported during the interview conversation. She had plenty of feedback on her MSW program that is transitioning fully online, but she could not recall detailed online interaction or communication-related information about her online courses that she took in the UK as an undergraduate. She was barely able to recall the content of all the online workshop of MOOC courses that she has taken as she stated taking more than ten of them over the course of years.

Interviewee 10. Mina is my first participant from Iran and her home country's culture is collectivistic and has high amount of uncertainty avoidance. She also arrived 15 minutes early to the interview session and I noticed right away that she was nervous. She is a Master's program in the College of Technology. As we started the interview session, she disclosed during the interview that the reason she wanted to participate in the study was to discuss her online courses. She is in a program that offers more online courses than FTF or hybrid. I asked her if she was familiar with the policy on taking three credit hours of online courses per semester, and she said that as an F-1 visa student she was able to take more than one online course (3 credit) per semester. This information contradicted University policy as she is currently in the third year of her Master's program. We

discussed University social life and she stated how she barely has any friends. She also seemed to want to stay and chat after the interview session was completed. After the interview, we talked about the international Bridges program, social events, our departments, trying to become faculty members, the PhD process/dissertation, and on our individual cultural backgrounds. Overall, she spent 35 minutes answering the interview questions and roughly 20 minutes off-the-record discussing our personal opinions about the University and in general, our lives.

Interview 11. Shriv is an international Engineering graduate student who had just arrived from a South Asian country to the U.S. in August 2015. His home country's culture is collectivistic and has medium amount of uncertainty avoidance. He seemed very shy or nervous, as we were the only two people in room. He would also smile a lot when answering the questions asked of him. The interview was brief as he stated all his answers and I had no follow-up questions for him as he stated very few examples. He did mention his experience with MOOCs in his home country and even used Coursera here in the U.S. to learn about additional engineering content. He was currently taking an online course in his Master's program through his department. Shriv talked about his home country briefly.. His responses about his online course experience did not result in the need for a follow-up session.

Interview 12. RJ is an international student from India, enrolled in the College of Engineering program. Her home country's culture is collectivistic and has medium amount of uncertainty avoidance. She arrived to the U.S. in August 2014 and works on campus. She smiled during interview session as we discussed her online course experience and overall campus life. She has taken two online courses in the U.S. during

her Master's degree, but has no experience of online courses in her home country. She provided plenty of information about her experience within online courses in the U.S. Her responses did not need a follow-up session because we reached saturation within the first interview session.

Procedure

This research took a phenomenological approach to understand the experiences of international graduate students in online courses. Phenomenological studies are “the meanings people make of their lived experiences” (Brantlinger et al., 2005, p. 197). The study was comprised of two phases that took place within one semester: phase one was the pre-screen survey method and phase two was the qualitative component. The data analysis method uses phenomenology to establish themes for the research questions. The second phase had participants to partake in answering semi-structured interview questions, and this lasted about an hour or two. The reason for why I needed to collect two interview sessions is that “one of the benefits of long-term qualitative fieldwork is that informants tend to become more willing to share information with you as they become more familiar with you and your work” (Murchison, 2010, p. 112). Additionally, saturation is “usually explained when no new data emerges” from the respondents, and saturation is used to develop categories and themes from sufficient sampling (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 143).

After more than ten participants scheduled for interview, the second phase took place on campus and follow-up interviews collected for clarification purposes and saturation may occur in the first interview session. The interviews were all completed individually, as participants’ responses is confidential and can allow participants to fully

disclose their experiences and answer the questions with a one-on-one correspondence. Since I needed more sessions to find consistent themes, the number of interview sessions changed based on saturation; the more information that participants provided, then it resulted in clear and consistent themes.

Phase 1. The first phase consisted of prescreen questions and demographic information in the form of an online survey. The survey included the following measures: age, gender, major (program name), educational year (if undergraduate is selected, then they will exit the survey), frequency of online courses taken (this includes MOOCs or any online mini-session courses), frequency of where they have taken online courses (U.S. and country of origin), ethnicity, country of origin (a U.S. born citizen will not qualify for interview selection), part-time or full-time student, access to internet at home, and their email address for the phase two follow-up (see Appendix A). The pre-screen survey consisted of 13 items and took no more than 15 minutes to complete.

Phase 2. The scheduling of interview sessions was over email with participants that responded back. I then proceeded to greet each interviewee and used the opening script as a guide to remind the participants about the study. Afterwards, they signed a consent form agreeing to participate in the interview sessions, and then I began to record the session to start asking the interview question. A semi-structured interview session consisted of questions regarding their experiences about online course, any transitional issues from one modality of learning to the next, and general attitudes towards online courses (see Appendix B). The interview ended with the closing script and thanking the participant for their time, I told them that they would be entered for the incentive for the gift card drawing and asked the participant if they would like to meet up for the focus

group. All participants understood that I might interview them again if I needed a follow-up for clarification or if I had any additional questions. Some of the participants agreed to the focus group and others decided not to partake in the focus group for the member checks.

Recruitment Procedures. International graduate student groups that facilitate cultural dialogue, support a diverse campus, assist international students in acclimation and creating a social network (Office of Institutional Research, 2015) were be targeted to gain participants. I used a representative sampling procedure to match the representative international graduate student population, with Indian (56.7%) or Chinese (14.9%) international students being the predominant sample (see Figure 3). I emailed the survey link to recruit participants for an interview session to International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS), a religious student organization that targeted international students, and International Students Organization (ISO), which includes student organizations such as Graduate Indian Student Organization (GISO). The total number of participants who clicked “Yes, I consent to this study” was 120, yet only 76 participants fully completed the entire survey and 65 participants agreed to partake in the interview. Of those 65 international students contacted, only 12 participants attended the interview session. From the first phase of the proposed research project, I selected international graduate students who have taken at least one online course to follow-up for the second phase. Unfortunately, some had online MOOCs or non-accredited online experience, however, they contributed their experiences and were able to answer most of the interview questions.

The prescreening survey information used a theoretical sampling procedure to identify that interview participants. According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), a theoretical sampling purpose is to “collect data from places, people, and events that will maximize opportunities to develop concepts” (p. 143). Therefore, theoretical sampling is not the same as statistical sampling and planning my interview sample before data collection was difficult. However, a representative sample was the initial plan to gain a sample size that matched the international graduate student population on campus. Theoretical sampling continued in this study “until all categories are saturated” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p.157). Representative sampling was accounted to obtain a sample that would match the international graduate student population in order to avoid sampling bias (Marshall, 1996). By combining both representative and theoretical sampling, “the size of the sample is determined by the optimum number necessary to enable valid inferences to be made about the population” (Marshall, 1996, p. 522). Lastly, I randomly gave the incentives, which were in the form of gift cards, to participants who completed the interview process. Once participants had completed the interview session they entered a drawing for the \$20 gift cards as an incentive for their time.

Open Codes. Based on the open codes, which I reviewed with a faculty advisor, I was able to create nodes, which are categories in NVIVO, to create these open codes (see Appendix D). I went from general open codes based on the questions asked, and then I went into more codes that are specific in order to create consistent and clear themes. This coding was low-level as it began to reconstruct meaning and other forms of analysis at appropriate places in the transcripts (Carspecken, 1996). While coding the transcripts, I utilized the Carspecken (1996) book to analyze the interviews in multiple ways. For

example, I used foreground, which is to identify an immediate direct quote, as a direct meaning of what the interviewee claimed (Carspecken, 1996). I used background, a quote that has broader terms of context depending on the understanding of the statement, which could help identify experiences that were indirectly mentioned from foregrounded statements (Carspecken, 1996). Normative evaluative claims identified if the quotes were in third person and stated general beliefs or values (Carspecken, 1996), which was often heard when participants discussed their home country. The coding procedures used line-by-line analysis to create themes that were redundant and immediate (Brantlinger et al., 2005).

The saturation occurred when I noticed that all participants were saying the same thing, but just in different ways. For example, Mona (Indian International student) and Shay (Chinese International student) both stated in the transcripts that they liked taking their respective online class, but overall preferred face-to-face courses. Furthermore, the ten themes created were in relation to types of questions asked, for example, online course attitudes, beliefs or perceptions was a topic that I ended the interviews with after the participants talked about their online course experiences, which was delved into right after background information and introduction. The order of the questions remained throughout the interview session, there was some deviation in terms of follow-up questions but each participant answered all the questions from Appendix A. In order to immerse myself in the participant answers and to confirm that the interview questions were hitting on key research questions, I transcribed the first few interviews. All subsequent interviews were transcribed by a service called TranscriptionWing, I reviewed all transcripts with audio playing to match verbatim what was written and to

correct any misinterpretations of the audio. Lastly, I coded transcripts with ‘respondent’ and ‘interviewer’ so there was not any breach of confidentiality. The use of transcription services allowed me to quickly review and code transcripts so that they could serve a basis for the follow-up interviews.

Data Sources

Interview Protocol. The interview protocol (Appendix B), used open-ended questions to inquire what courses were like in home countries of the participants and how they did in online courses. The questions also included their responses regarding views about online courses and their idea of an effective online course. Additional follow-up questions were used to clarify their responses and provide additional information for further analyses, such as what mode of learning did they prefer (i.e., face-to-face or online)? The goal is to gain a deeper understanding through the perspective of an international graduate student of their beliefs and experiences about online courses. This interview uses interpretive theory, which uses micro level of individual analysis to others, to gain meaningful responses about individual differences of comparing online course experience from two different educational societies (Dr. Zou, Lecture, Oct 27, 2014).

Field Notes and Data Journals. Prior to the first interview session, I began a detailed record of field notes and journal entries. I recorded a journal entry after each interview session to reflect on the discussion with the participants. This journal not only kept track of my thoughts during the interview period, but also assisted with building concepts/themes that may emerge from the interviews. The data journals were labeled as a memos and included the date, I used the memos to build an audit trail whenever it leads to making a finding (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Member check

participants were able to review and confirm the accuracy (or inaccuracy) of interview coded transcripts or field notes (Brantlinger et al., 2005; McDuffie & Scruggs, 2008).

The field notes, memos, and interview transcripts served as data triangulation to provide valid interpretations of the findings.

Data Analysis

This study used a comparative analysis to form common themes, conceptual saturation to determine when to stop collecting data, and open coding to establish the themes. Based on Corbin and Strauss (2008), the definition of open coding is “breaking data apart and delineating concepts to stand for blocks of raw data. At the same time, one is qualifying those concepts in terms of their properties and dimensions” (p. 195). Coding had begun as soon as interview sessions began and completed once I reached conceptual saturation. This means that once the process of establishing significant data to develop each theme from content analysis was complete, and then further interview sessions needed from the participants stopped. “The aim of content analysis is to attain a condensed and broad description of the phenomenon” (Elo & Kyngas, 2008, p. 108). According to Murchison (2010), when I “regularly hear informants using the same phrase or word, [I] may discover that this word or phrase has a particularly important meaning or connotations for [my] informants.” (p. 96). I coded themes and findings from the interviews by how many mentioned specific phrases or experiences, along with frequencies of other themes with similar importance and meanings.

In this study, the outcome of content analysis is to develop categories, better known as themes, to describe a phenomenon. This study used inductive content analysis which “is recommended when there are no previous studies dealing with the phenomenon

or when knowledge is fragmented” (Elo & Kyngas, 2008, p. 113). Therefore, in order to make sense of the data, developing a meaning within the transcripts was the primary analytic process. By using an inductive approach, it is best to find themes using open codes and creating a codebook based on frequency of statements or saturation in the transcripts. I also listened for collectivistic, individualistic, or high uncertainty avoidance dimensions and had Hofstede’s (1986; 2003) cultural framework in mind when asking questions about educational background and interviewees’ transition to the U.S., also I used Hofstede’s dimensions while coding the transcripts. I transcribed and analyzed the interview sessions via NVivo software (Version 10). Open coding, attached as Appendix D, used to create themes after coding with ‘nodes’ in NVivo is for organization of certain categories. For example, all data using technology experience nodes categorized into each participants’ experience, while comparing it to the overall themes listed in the results section using direct quotes from participants’ responses to the questions. Additional follow-up interview questions were asked during the second phase (interview sessions) for clarification purposes to establish validity. Each participant completed no more than two interview sessions, which I audiotaped and transcribed a few, before hiring a transcription service.

Validity. According to Creswell and Miller (2000), qualitative researchers use member checking, triangulation, thick description, peer review, and external audits. I created an audit trail to establish the inquiry process through my journal logs and memo documents. By keeping a research log of the activities, development of data collection procedures, and recording data analysis clearly using time logs and notes, I was able to consult with my methodologist to review the documentation of interview process. My

faculty advisor served as a form of peer review. She was an external reviewer of my data analysis and provided feedback throughout the data collection and analysis process. “A third lens may be the credibility of an account by individuals external to the study” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 125). Her expertise in online learning research proved valuable in reviewing the emerging themes.

I used thick description by asking a number of interview questions to capture the full experience of the students in online classes. I conducted follow-up interviews when needed to capture a detailed description from participants. This not only establishes an audit trail, but also includes a thick description and a peer debriefing of the audit trail, which increases credibility (McDuffie & Scruggs, 2008). A second validity procedure in this study is triangulation, which is used for convergence of multiple and different sources of information to form themes (Creswell & Miller, 2000; McDuffie & Scruggs, 2008). I sorted through the transcribed data and used a systematic lens to sort common themes to eliminate overlapping areas. The process is completed through the two interview sessions, possible documentation from online course (i.e., discussion board posts with names blanked out), and different individual participants from various countries (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The research process does not use a single incident or a single type of international graduate student from one department; instead, by interviewing all types of international graduate students from various departments and countries, I can include different perspectives of online learning issues that may occur.

Thirdly, in this study, I used the participants as a second lens to establish validity through member checking. This validity procedure was crucial for establishing credibility. Transcribed data and a draft of interpreted themes back to the participants to

gain confirmation that the information and narrative interpretation of the themes is accurate (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Stoner, 2010). This validity procedure was completed at the end of the Fall 2015 semester, participants who have completed the interview process were asked to participate in the form of a focus group to review the findings. There was no identifying information as the focus group were asked “if the themes or categories make sense, whether they are developed with sufficient evidence, and whether the overall account is realistic and accurate” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 127).

Unfortunately, only two Chinese participants were able to partake in the member check, they both provided beneficial responses that helped shaped the overall themes. In addition, the idea of separating themes of online course benefits and challenges across majors was an idea provided during the member check process. Specifically, they told me that it would make more sense to separate the major themes by the various college departments from which the interviewees came from, rather than across each individual’s online course background. I agreed with their suggestion, and found it easier to group participants by majors as they had similar online course experiences within their department and grouping familiar and consistent themes was easier to complete.

The last validity procedure is a statement of trustworthiness, which was included in the data journals prior to conducting the interviews. I self-disclosed any assumptions, beliefs, and biases that may shape my inquiry about the interview sessions with each individual participant (Stoner, 2010). I still use the lens of a researcher but clearly “reflect on the social, cultural, and historical forces that shape the interpretation of the themes” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 127). The statement of trustworthiness is a separate section

in the data journal as a memo to provide a description of personal experiences that reduced the potential biases and beliefs that occurred while coding the transcribed data.

Statement of Trustworthiness

The role of the researcher as the primary data collection instrument and my disclosure of any personal values are in this qualitative study (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Creswell, 2009). I self-disclose that I am of Indian/Pakistani descent (Desi), can fluently speak Hindi and Urdu, and can communicate well with students who come from those countries as I am familiar with their culture and language. My background as a graduate student makes it easier to communicate with the participants because of our shared educational perspectives and with Asian international students' collectivistic attitudes. In addition, I have positive attitudes toward technology and am familiar with online courses in the U.S. Throughout the interview sessions I did my best to deter from my personal ideas, preferences, or attitudes towards the interviewees. Even though I am not an international student, my cultural experiences may shape the way I understand participants' experiences and the way I interpret the data collected from the interviews. This may lead to certain biases, although I made every effort to ensure the results were code without biases.

Chapter IV

Results

Pilot Study

In conjunction with an Ethnographic Research course, I conducted a pilot study as a preliminary exploration of both the purpose and methods of this proposed dissertation study. The purpose of collecting this pilot data was to test the interview questions for easy comprehension and understanding. I exchanged multiple interview sessions and emails to gather data from one international graduate student participant. I wrote down detailed field notes and recorded responses via digital recorder. From this pilot study, the research questions and I established interview questions for this dissertation.

Pilot Study Participant. The participant (N = 1) MEA (Pseudonym) is an Indian international graduate student in the College of Education. MEA had little previous exposure regarding online courses until she started her program in the U.S., and took “one online course in India and four in America,” MEA struggled in adjusting to online courses at her U.S. university. Specifically, MEA “had to do a lot of work on [her] own to figure out what was happening in her [online] course.” MEA “never submitted online coursework” in India. Her specific challenges were to become familiar with online courses on her own time. This led to a slight transitional issue when she took her online courses in the U.S.

Interview Analysis. The interviews were digitally recorded and I established their relevance by using in-text quotes, I also provide the interview questions and a transcript from this pilot study (see Appendix C). The responses, which emerged from this interview, were personal online course experience, beliefs and thoughts about online

courses, STEM majors more likely to gain online course experience, and convenience of online courses. The themes that that I derived from this pilot study included: 1) convenience of online courses, 2) not familiar with online course structure, and 3) more time to adjust in an online class. There was a lack of a theoretical framework, which I now used in this current study, since the focus was on testing and revising the interview questions and protocol. Overall, the participant understood the interview questions and follow-up questions are also included in Appendix C.

Data Analysis. I sorted and coded the results in a systematic and meaningful way by NVivo software. I coded the pilot data as frequency of themes or keywords that occurred during interview sessions. If the same words or themes emerged during the interview sessions over time, then saturation had occurred. Provided throughout the interview coding is subjective knowledge and the themes conducted are in relation to the research questions (Brantlinger et al., 2005). I used subjective interpretations for this pilot study and frequency count of the transcript provided the researcher with experience organizing, familiarizing, generating categories and themes from interpretation and social meaning. Documentation of methods used to establish trustworthiness, confirmability, and that credibility should be clear (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Stoner, 2010). My written reflection about my personal positions and perspectives are in the form of data journals.

Dissertation Study Findings

Using NVivo software (ver. 10) and the open codes, I used comparative analysis to infer 12 common themes based on participants' experiences with technology in home country and in the United States. Table 5 lists below the overall common themes and each overall theme supports a direct quote from the interviewee. The themes are mostly

related to online course attitudes, general experience with technology, and were created by how many times participants discussed these findings. However, in understanding cultural differences within online courses, two established themes discussed general issues faced as an international graduate student and these two themes are at the beginning of the table below (see Table 5). Although not all of the participants mentioned these themes, they are discussed first as appreciating the general transitions is beneficial to understanding how the course modality may affect the overall student transition. These two themes were unrelated to online courses but came up as the main cultural transitional issues faced by international graduate students.

Table 5

The Overall Common Themes among All Twelve Participants

Overall Themes	Direct Quotes	N = 12
Cultural Transition to U.S. Education Themes		
1. Heavy self-reliance on individual learning with only midterms and finals in home country	"I like the teaching and everything here because in India, they just only grade you based on your final exam. Here it is like percentage for everything you do the entire semester. It's not like the final one or so."	n = 10
2. International graduate students expressed individual stress from navigating the U.S. university system on their own.	"I think, having to figure things out on your own in graduate school was difficult."	n = 8
Online and Technology Themes		
3. Preferred face-to-face courses over online courses	"I am more of a personal person and therefore I do enjoy face-to-face classes and discussion and dialogues. Therefore, whenever possible, I choose not an online class."	n = 12

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| 4. Immediate feedback needed in online courses for clarification, help, and to avoid miscommunication. | “I like the face to face component, especially if you can walk to a professor at the end of class and have an informal conversation to have a discussion or clarify a point. Whereas if you’re on an online class you have to try and email back and forth with written communication, even you’re a very good writer it can still be misconstrued.” | n = 12 |
| 5. Online courses are convenient if you have a full-time job, children, commute far away, or want a flexible schedule. | “Yes, definitely. I think if you can fit [online courses] around your schedule if you have kids and a full-time job, then awesome. I can see that definitely working for you, but yes, that thing would be the biggest one.” | n = 12 |
| 6. Hybrid courses are a good medium for international graduate students | “I think that I prefer a mix of both, so having face-to-face and then having the same recorded lectures would be awesome.” | n = 10 |
| 7. Lack of access to technology and internet in home country did not provide opportunities for online courses to be taken. | “There were no online courses so most of the students who took the online experience, who have the online experience; they either go for online courses which are also from other sites. Most of the classes, they are face to face.” | n = 10 |
| 8. Technical difficulties in online courses leads to stress if students are not familiar with Blackboard. | “First meeting for each classes for students, professors should explain how to use [the course technology] and where to find the lectures, where to find the assignments, where are the deadlines, where are the due dates.” | n = 7 |
| 9. More likely to procrastinate or even cheat in online courses | “You have to be on top of doing your course work because if you're not very well time managed then you're not going to do it.” | n = 6 |
| 10. Frequent communication to build relationships in online courses. | “Just that I missed the interaction component [in the online course], because here in the United States, interaction and like classroom participation is very important. It accounts too much of your grade. That’s very important. That part was missing.” | n = 5 |
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The following themes are under two separate headings dealing with the cultural transition of coming to the U.S. for higher education. Hofstede's cultural dimensions helped to create the cultural transition themes. The second heading discusses the rest of the overall themes are under a separate heading called 'Online and Technology Themes'.

Cultural Transition to U.S. Education Themes

Heavy Self-reliance on Individual Learning. This theme, which discussed the educational self-reliance in their home country, was a theme that was universal among the Asian international graduate students. The theme called "heavy self-reliance on individual learning with only midterms and finals in home country" was a theme consistent among Asian international graduate students, even some Middle Eastern students interviewed. This theme was most interesting because I had generally asked what education was like in their home country, and most Asian international graduate students had similar experiences of mostly tests and no group work assignments in their undergraduate years. Regardless of their major or age, the students from Asian or Middle Eastern countries had a final and a midterm as the only course assessments for their grades. I used the nodes, such as cultural difference or pedagogical differences, from the open codebook to create this theme (see Appendix D). Shriv discussed his education and how grades are differently assigned in his home country compared to the U.S.:

The teacher comes in, give us assignments, the finals. The weightage of the midterms that's given in the US, it's not the same back in my home country. Most of the weightage for the marks, it's shortly on the finals. That's it.

May stated how her education in Turkey was similar to the Indian or similar Asian education curriculum in which tests make the final grade. Therefore, when May heard that in one of her courses in the U.S. she had a midterm, she was shocked:

We did not have that much assignments, papers, we studied hard for midterms and finals and just passed. Well, Turkey is based more on memorization and teacher-centered, it is more different [in the U.S.], it took me some time to get used to this and I was very surprised to learn that I had a midterm this semester. It has been three years since I have had a test...I was surprised I was coming from a culture with tests and here in three years, I am surprised that I am having a test next week.

Overall, eight participants out of the 12 interviewed mentioned this reliance on one or two major assignments. Many students shared similar stories about having midterms and finals only, especially in a classroom setting where you rely on memorization of the content.

International Graduate Students Expressed Individual Stress. The theme called, “international graduate students’ expressed individual stress from navigating the U.S. university system on their own” is unrelated to any of the online course questions asked in the interviews. The international students who felt stressed were the ones who came to U.S. for the first time, were usually by themselves, and had little to no understanding about their department or resources offered on campus. The theme about individual stress differs from online or technological stress, as the international graduate students in this study had talked about experiences outside of their course format learning issues. The node from the codebook that created this theme was transition to the U.S.; education in

the U.S. and their cultural differences, and their responses about these stressors faced as an international graduate student was unique to participants. Some interviewees stated that they felt lonely, financial burden was a stress for them, that they felt overwhelmed with coursework, and others stated that they felt stressed about campus safety. This theme about individual stress expressed from international graduate students had been mentioned by ten participants; however, that does not mean other interviewees do not experience stress, they just did not mention it. Nevertheless, it is an important theme as international graduate students do face an enormous amount of issues in U.S. universities, for example, Lee stated that the stress varied from his home country to the U.S.:

Yes, because in China the stress only occurs at the end of the class. During the final exam. But here the stress [is] divided into different parts.

When further asked about what different parts, Lee stated that he had to play multiple roles as a teaching assistant, researcher, student and that these roles would be stressful throughout the semester, and other interviewees felt the same way also. In particular, May's stress was a combination of being overwhelmed by a U.S. syllabus and being alone when she first arrived to her U.S. university:

Let me tell you my first course here, in the United States, so they gave me the syllabus, and I looked it over and I left the class and I was sitting by the pool and was crying. I was thinking I can't do that and just wanted to go back to Turkey. It felt like I had to finish all those 14 weeks by tomorrow. A different experience for me, I never had that experience, we would never go over what we were supposed to do in 14 weeks. It just felt so much!

Similarly, when I talked to Mina, who came by herself from Iran, she had issues of no one helping her in her department. This disassociation from her department and lack of understanding her environment led her to change her major. She stated that she had experienced so many difficulties at first semester and could not find professors because she did not know nor was familiar with the department building. She said, “No one showed us the building, the professor’s room and anything.” These stressors of feeling lost displayed a cultural detachment for international graduate students to understand and become familiar with their U.S. institution and department.

The remaining themes represent online courses and technology related experiences from the international graduate students. These related overall themes discuss the stress of transitioning to another country, as the online and technology themes include experiences participants had to learn in their U.S. institutions.

Online and Technology Themes

Technical Difficulties in Online Courses Leads to Stress. This theme is separate from the general stress experienced as a new international student. Most graduate students were unfamiliar with blackboard if they had no exposure to it in their home country; in particular, Mina felt lost in blackboard:

...so we just have some papers on the screen and I didn’t know – I mean, there were so many lectures and papers, that I should download them, and I didn’t know how to start, which one is the first step to find out what should I do and anything. I think there should be some videos or at least, at classes, some [meeting]. I don’t know.

May even found discussion board to be a bit confusing:

And one other thing that I did not like with my online discussion board is [that it is] all over the place. There were, I don't know, I had a hard time catching up. We had discussion pages for each week's assignments and there were some other pages where people would posts under names such as 'general question' or 'Problems'. That was a little confusing for me.

Besides the layout and structure issues of online courses in the U.S., the nodes used from the codebook to identify technological stress were the interviewee's technology-related experience and issues within online course. A majority of interviewees felt that they needed direction and clarity on what to do. For example, many stated that the online exams would lose internet connectivity and they would stress out, as they did not have information about what to do when they disconnect from an online exam. Some students stated that they felt stressed if they needed to submit an assignment on Blackboard, and due to technical difficulties, the website would be down. There were concerns from the interviewees that they wanted instructors to be understanding that technology is not perfect and that issues may occur; this understanding would provide some alleviation from technology-related stress in which international graduate students would have little to no control over in their course.

More Likely to Procrastinate or Cheat in Online Courses. This theme, which discusses procrastination in online courses, was a common theme among half of the participants. The theme I created from nodes in the codebook that discussed issues in online courses, their online course experience, and their negative attitudes toward technology. For example, May said that she waits until the last minute to submit her online posts, and while she disclosed this information, she did understand that is was her

fault for procrastinating online. She stated that being in an online course allows graduate students to procrastinate on readings and assignments:

Sure, they make them available for this week's stuff on Monday and you are supposed to do your initial posts by Thursday and do the other posts by Sunday that is the due date. I usually post by 11, even though you must post by 11:59 pm. A lot of people like me.

The theme of procrastination was clear as many stated that they will not finish an assignment as quickly online, less likely to read for an online course, or if it is worth few or no points then they will not complete it at all. Students reported they would even procrastinate in a free MOOC and only finish the MOOC if it provides course credits:

I went online and I applied for a [MOOC] course and I believe it was called public policy of the 20th century and I thought that was interesting. But I never took the second week assignment and it was like, you could take three months to finish the first module. I never finished it, it is still waiting and I don't think I'll go, but this other one is part of my course and it will give me credits.

Other international graduate students even stated that they cheat in online courses, but many said that instructors know that you are not supposed to use notes or complete exams with other students, but did so anyways. Rani went into thorough detail about her instructor who made sure students had recorded themselves via webcam during an exam in order to prevent cheating. Some international graduate students who were also teaching assistants also discussed how easy it is to cheat in online exams and "bullshit" on certain assignments. This idea that one can complete online course assignments at the last minute and it is easy to cheat displays the negative issues within online courses.

Preferred Face-To-Face Courses over Online Courses. This theme related to online courses was consistent among all participants and they discussed enjoying face-to-face courses, not liking online courses. This was the first theme to reach saturation as interviewees made it very clear that they did not prefer online courses as much in U.S. higher education. Even when I asked Leah on how she would do if her entire graduate program was to be online, she responded:

I think as I mentioned, I kind of prefer the face-to-face aspect of things and therefore I think I would struggle with having them all online.

Others also responded in similar ways, May and her class had the same response:

Yes, we discussed this in an urban education course, also when someone was doing a seminar this was the topic and they asked all of us about what we think about online courses. I believe majority of the class said they would prefer face-to-face but they liked how easy it was to access the content and they didn't have to drive during the rush hour, that kind of stuff...But the rest of the class, I think a lot of us said we prefer face-to-face courses.

The clear and repetitive theme as established information considers as foregrounded information. Participants had disclosed that they disliked taking online courses but would take them if they had no choice. Some of the interviewees stated that they knew their department would not want them to take more than one online course per semester, and that deterred them away from enrolling in online courses. Others had stated that they would enroll in short term online workshops or MOOCs instead of an online course at the university. Additionally, they would rather enroll in shorter and free online workshops to improve content knowledge, as it was cost and time efficient for them.

Immediate Feedback Needed in Online Courses for Clarification, Help, and to Avoid Miscommunication. For this theme, I incorporated their issues of online courses and their online experience nodes from the open codebook and saw similar responses regarding why they would not want to enroll in online courses. Most of the reasoning was that they wanted immediate feedback from their online courses. The reason why I included miscommunication within the category of immediate feedback is that some interviewees would state they wanted more communication with both instructors and students, specifically asking for help or avoid miscommunication. The immediate feedback response along with desire to ask questions in person was foregrounded data

There was a detailed story that one participant named Shay who discussed how her online post was taken the wrong way as she and a classmate got into an argument via Blackboard message. It got so bad that the classmate emailed the faculty to intervene, but Shay was not meaning any harm, and was just providing constructive criticism to her classmate. The tone or meaning behind some online text can be “misconstrued”, especially when you barely know your own classmates at the very start of your education.

Most of the interviewees responded that they would prefer online courses where they can receive immediate feedback from both the instructor and peers. For example, Mona described her need for immediate feedback in an online statistics course:

I wouldn't prefer taking an online stats course, because if I have any questions, I need to email the faculty. I have to wait until I get to that point where I can clarify it rather in class, I can immediately ask the faculty.

In addition to immediate feedback, Lee responded more about why he prefers face-to-face courses as an international student:

I think for me, it's the immediate feedback. That is the best way for me to study and learn. For all classes and courses, you know me, I am an international student.

I think face-to-face is easier to understand than online.

In both these situations, international graduate students want to experience immediate feedback, as they may be uncertain to the new environment. The interviewees do not prefer waiting for a response for a single question, and many interviewees want an immediate interaction and not wait for their professor to clarify a question when asking for help.

Online Courses are Convenient. The theme where most participants stated that they were happy not to drive to campus or be able to work on coursework from home was 'that online courses are convenient if you have a full-time job, kids, or live far away'. A few students even stated that online courses are beneficial for faculty because they do not have to drive to campus also, in particular, RJ stated:

It is a good thing. I know some of the professors who work outside and they do part-time lecturing here and they have to drive from very long distance to come here and teach. Maybe, it'll be more effective for them [too] because if it is very tough for them, even then they should drive long distances and have to come here and have to give the lecture on it. I think posting online will be more effective.

Apparently, the commute to campus is tough during the traffic rush hours and for May, this is why an online course seems convenient to her. She stated that it was convenient for her to have an online course because she has to "drive one hour for 11 miles because driving here is tough." May went into further detail along with other international graduate students, that they have limited financial needs, so transportation

costs add up for them. Many international students stated that they have to rely on public transportation and online courses are flexible to match with their busy schedules. Some interviewees went on to state that those with families or a full-time job would benefit more from enrolling in online courses. When asked about “why are there more online courses being offered in U.S. universities?” Amy provided her response:

...because most people that come back to do a graduate degree have family and they're working full time, there's a lot of other factors generally for a graduate degree so I could see that favoring more online.

With the increasing online courses added into U.S. education, even at the site of study, international graduate students do understand the convenience of having an option. This theme was relevant not only to all interviewees, but as I asked the interviewees about the general benefits of online courses, this theme was the most common response. Even interviewees that had yet to take an online course in the U.S. understood the flexibility of asynchronous online courses for graduate students.

Hybrid Courses are a Good Medium. This overall theme discussed why hybrid are better than online courses and it was unexpected to hear about hybrid courses from the international graduate students as my questions pertained mostly about online course experiences. Leah and others responded that an effective online course is one that would be hybrid. For example, Leah describes her ideal effective online course in the following quote:

Okay. I would say an effective one would be the hybrid kind of class where you have half and half. I think that was more effective than online, if that answers your question.

May even states why she would choose hybrid over online courses:

The hybrid courses I think are usually better because then you can still have the face-to-face component while having the online component...

Overall, the international graduate students in this study discussed that hybrid courses allow the opportunity for more face-to-face interactions and getting to communicate in person, while also having the flexibility to complete assignments or exams online. They suggested that offering an international students, in general, a hybrid course to understand the technical layout of Blackboard, allows a chance to interact and ask questions in person. Many of the interviewees also enjoyed being in a hybrid course where the face-to-face meetings were only once or twice a month, this allows them to have flexible schedules. It is interesting to note that even though I did not ask questions about hybrid course experience, the interviewees still disclosed that information under the questions about their online course experiences.

Lack of Access to Technology and Internet in Home Country. This theme explains why some international students did not have exposure to an online course in their home country. For example, Annie discussed how in India there was an Internet connectivity issue:

Internet connectivity was a problem when I was using it in India. Yes, because some of the courses, like I said, because it was a recorded one. So I had to write a lot of emails, keep a snapshot of the questions I had, and then frame everything, which took a lot of time rather than the person available at that time.

For Annie and many other Indian and Chinese international graduate students, Wi-Fi connection is a problem since they did not have internet readily available compared to the

U.S. Mona's parents sent her to private classes to learn how to use a computer because her schools did not have one:

I started using computers in college, on a regular basis in college, but I had taken private - like my parents had sent me to learn computers in eighth grade. So I was familiar with using computers, but not on a regular basis. Even in college, we were not required to use computers. All our tests that we had to take, it was in the paper and pencil method. We had to sit for four long hours to write examinations - for our examinations and to take the tests.

Some international graduate students never had the chance to take MOOCS, as they are now recent and new, especially in the Asian countries. MOOCS and Coursera are also relatively new, some of the interviewees stated that these online tools were not available at the time when they were an undergraduate. In particular, Sammi, an older returning international graduate student, stated that in the 90's they did not rely on technology as much as education does now. She also stated that there are more resources for younger students to pick up online, whereas her courses had face-to-face learning in her era. This information is important to consider, as we now understand that the same tools or format of learning is not culturally universal.

Frequent Communication to Build Relationships in Online Courses. This theme was interesting as not many interviewees discussed the relationships they wanted to build in online courses through messages, discussion board posts, or even with instructor's emails. The nodes used to create this theme from the open codebook were issues within online courses and their online course experience. This last overall theme led Sammi to further state what can happen in online communication:

...that the teachers are on the opposite side and I can - not only the keyboard chat, I can talk to him and chat like Skype. I think those would be interesting. Those would be human-like. It should not be so robot-like.

Additionally, Shay strongly stated that she felt, “you don't really build your social network for friends in an online course” and said that it is true about online courses, since if you do not personally know the person than a critique may sound like a criticism to some graduate students. Shay went on to discuss how most graduate students in Social Work department want to make friends and it is very difficult to do so over online discussion posts. These interviewees even stated that being able to see the professor and meet other students in person was the motive for them to attend a U.S. university in person. It was concise and consistent, as interviewees repeatedly wanted social interaction, and believed that the online course format would not provide that.

Frequent communication, also measured as participation in U.S. education, is why international graduate students enjoy meeting new people in person and receive a grade for it. Communication online is very “boring” or just “busy work” as some interviews stated that they would like to meet other students in their department and try to become friends. It was more common with the Chinese, Indian and Middle Eastern international graduate students to have a desire to make friends, especially in the same department. For example, Shay stated that it was awkward for her to message someone in an online course to get to know him or her or ask them to go to lunch; whereas in a face-to-face setting, it is more natural to ask a fellow classmate to go to lunch with her. This desire for frequent communication and interaction with instructor or students is preferred face-to-face for immediate feedback; this theme was consistent and repetitive in each of the interviews.

These overall themes were categorized using the open codes, and I went on to seek common themes across major as I noticed that some international graduate students were repeating the same issues and benefits of online courses as their peers. The themes across majors represent the bulk of information that was important to hear from the interviewees in the same college or department.

Themes across College Majors

Further delving more into the transcripts, I decided to code across common majors as I noticed that all Graduate of Social Work students mentioned that their MSW program was transitioning to be fully online in the start of Fall 2016 semester. Another way that I looked at the data was to seek themes with deeper meaning. I had originally planned on comparing themes across online courses experiences (those with low online courses taken compared to those with more online courses taken). However, while conducting my focus group with two of my participants, one who was in College of Education and the other in College of Social Work, indicated that it would make more sense to find themes across majors.

This data provided to be more valuable as I can present this to each college and department by stating what was found regarding only benefits and challenges of online courses. It made sense to break apart the data and use an inductive reasoning to find general themes of issues and challenges across majors. Engineering and Technology international graduate students were merged because of the similar responses found during data analysis. Table 6 displays the common issues and challenges of online courses by majors and examples of each benefit and challenge of online course, which is after the explanation of each themes across majors listed below.

Table 6

Benefits and Challenges within Online Courses across Participants' Majors (N = 12)

Common Themes within Majors	Benefits or Opportunities within Online Courses	Challenges or Issues within Online Courses
College of Education (n = 4)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Structure of online course depends on the instructor. 2. Blackboard system is not complicated and we have a good IT department. 3. Online courses in department are less difficult than face-to-face courses in terms of workload and content delivery. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Forced interactions or online assignments can lead to boring discussion board posts for the sake of busy work. 2. Lack of guidance, self-regulation, and deadlines in online courses leads to more pressure since some participants (n = 3) stated that they procrastinate online. 3. Difficult to get to know faculty or students as they are less likely to chat online compared to chatting in-person.
College of Engineering and Technology (n = 4)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Online content resources are more available in the U.S., therefore, Engineers and Technology students are more open to taking MOOCs. 2. More online courses are available in STEM departments because faculty are doing fieldwork research. 3. Recorded lectures and organized online structures are beneficial for international students in these fields 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "On your own" in online courses, lack of friends as students rarely meet in-person. 2. F-1 online policy limit rules are vague with confusion of department requirements. 3. Faculty accents in online courses (i.e., recorded lectures) can be distracting for international students. 4. Technical difficulties online could lead students to be stressed.

College of Social Work (n = 3)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Online GSW program created to bring in financial revenue. 2. Open to taking online courses if it is new or refreshing, not boring. 3. Convenient and flexible for those who have families, internships/practicum or full-time jobs. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Less likely to recall information from online courses. 2. Face-to-face courses are more meaningful for practical programs like Social Work. 3. Will procrastinate in online courses or not do all required readings as compared to face-to-face courses.
College of Business (n = 1)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Well-designed, organized, flexible, and small-sized online courses are beneficial for Business majors. 2. Wifi is not an issue and many online resources (i.e., Coursera) are available online in the U.S. 3. Not commuting to campus is great! 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Desire to meet new people is needed; therefore, online courses are boring. 2. Professional development online courses are expensive. 3. Being available online (synchronous) or immediate feedback is necessary for team group projects.

Education Major Benefits in Online Courses. Among all College of Education majors, regardless of their program, each participant stated that the online course structure and effectiveness depended on the actual instructor. The first theme among Education international graduate students was that the ‘structure of online course depends on the instructor’. For example, Amy found that online courses provided more “busy work” to show that students were active online. She went on to say that effective online courses have to be really structured and “online assignments should be meaningful” and not just given to take online attendance. Which she then went on to state that, “motivation varies by the way class is structured” and that went into relation how online courses vary across faculty. Adding to further saturation of the theme, Mona stated the in her online

courses, she had an amazing instructor who did not just provide busy work, but had meaningful interactions with the class. This quote added to the benefit within online courses in the Education department that structure of online course depends on the instructor:

In this online class that I took, we regularly used to get feedback and instructions, clear instructions and directions from faculty, which was a different experience. Both experiences were equally good and I wouldn't say that any one particular delivery style is better than the other, but it depends on the situation, the needs, and the specifications of the course.

The second benefit, with all Education majors interviewed, was that 'blackboard was not complicated and the Information Technology (IT) staff in their department was great'. May even provided a short story where an IT staff member, who was also the instructor of the online course, helped add a link to her online course assignment. This quote led to the second benefit of the online courses having great IT staff in the College of Education:

The link included my name and the [IT] instructor knew me, my name, and he emailed me. But if he didn't know me then I would not get feedback on the assignment I don't know if he would have asked ... That was my chance to put the name in naming my assignment so he could find me. And he knew who I was, but I should have posted the right link in the first place.

The last benefit that both Amy and Lee stated was that online courses are "moderately difficult" and are "not as intense as face-to-face courses because you can get away with not reading assigned chapters in online courses." This adds to the last benefit

of online courses; the theme is that ‘online courses in department are less difficult than face-to-face courses in terms of workload and content delivery’. For example, May even added stating that her online digital story-telling class was enjoyable and easy compared to her face-to-face statistics course. She described a situation in which she did the assignment on her own, and found that the online course content was easy, but this could be because she stated she enjoyed the course as it was fun and was interested to take the course in the first place.

Education Major Issues in Online Courses. However, just because an online course is not difficult, does not mean that it should lead to the issue that ‘forced interactions or online assignments can lead to boring discussion posts’ if only for the sake of busy work. Another quote that concluded how discussion board posts in courses are because of required participation and to foster some sort of communication.

[When] we're doing online we do discussion and we have to have a minimum 300 word initial [discussion] posts. [Then] you have to respond to at least two other people post and I can understand they are trying to foster conversation but it is much easier to study like that for when we are all sitting at the table. [Students] can have conversation here raising an opinion then online, because online I'm realistically not going to read everybody's response and respond and everybody gets on at different times...

This quote provided further saturation to the first challenge of online courses among the education majors, which leads to the second challenge within online courses. The second issue within online courses was ‘procrastination in online courses’, May went on to add to the saturation of the first issue by adding that, “content in online courses is

less difficult than face-to-face courses” and to the second issue in stating that, “procrastinating in online courses is very common.” Amy also added that time management is important for online courses and Mona stated that, “Most of the learning was self-learning.” Amy stated that:

You have to be on top of doing your course work because if you're not very well time managed then you're not going to do it. The downside that I feel to strictly online courses work is that some of the assignments you feel like busy work, rather than going into a topic.

Even if students consider the online assignments as busy work, it is important to stay on top of it and that is why students need time management in online courses.

Interestingly, Amy stated that she could not recall an online course experience in Canada and added that she missed the face-to-face component while enrolled in online courses in the U.S. With lack of interactions, this led to the last issue that ‘it is difficult to get to know faculty or students as they are less likely to chat online compared to chatting in-person’. Mona gave a quote that fit well within the last issue of online courses:

All I can say that what I missed in an online class was the interaction with the faculty. That was missing. The interaction with the faculty, with my classmates, that component was missing. Especially, I would say I missed the interaction with faculty. With classmates, we had the discussion board so we had to do regular postings. That helped with the interaction, but I still personally feel that having a face-to-face interaction with faculty and classmates is much more enriching.

Overall, the themes among all College of Education interviewees highlighted benefits that online courses varied among instructors, IT department was helpful and that

online course content is less difficult compared to face-to-face format. Whereas, the issues for these international graduate students in the College of Education were: procrastination could occur in online courses, forced interactions of online ‘busy work’ assignments lead to ‘boring’ interaction, and interaction with faculty and students is missing within online courses.

Engineering and Technology Major Benefits in Online Courses. In regards to using a comparative analysis, I grouped the one technology international graduate student with engineering international graduate students, as they are part of the STEM field. Some themes from the technology international graduate students were unanimous among the engineering majors interviewed, and the first benefit is that ‘online content resources are more available in the U.S.’, therefore, Engineers and Technology students are more open to taking MOOCs. Shriv stated that:

Students from countries where they do not have access to certain subjects or certain studies or certain study materials, I’ve heard from my friend. He took a course, which was totally new to him which is offered – it was an online course. He said that it was good learning concepts from them. I think it’s good.

Additionally, Rani discusses the ease of using MOOC resources from various colleges; finding online courses that are free and easily available added to the benefit:

I think it’s very - like even right now, there are so many online programs that are just completely online. So many colleges are offering that.

The second benefit is that there are ‘more online courses, which are available in STEM departments because faculty are doing fieldwork research’. RJ stated that having online courses helps the part-time faculty who live far away and work elsewhere too:

It is a good thing. I know some of the professors who work outside, they do part-time lecturing here, and they have to drive from very long distance to come here and teach. Maybe, it'll be more effective for them to because if it is very tough for them, even then they should drive long distances and have to come here and have to give the lecture on it. I think posting online will be more effective.

Mina stated that faculty even offer a sub-section online course to be supplemental to those students that cannot attend the face-to-face course, this quote adds to the second benefit of online courses:

Actually one of the courses I'm taking from College of Technology, it is a face-to-face session but he offers the online course, too. Some of the people are taking face-to-face and some of them are taking online one. It is like going to face-to-face and if I miss any of the class, I attend the online one and we'll have the online lectures in it. We do tape all the lectures in the face-to-face session and he'll post it.

The last benefit, which discussed how 'recorded lectures and organized online structures are beneficial for international students' in these fields. Adding to this benefit, Rani stated that, "I think the online one, it's much easier and better because the way they record the lectures, they're very helpful. So, it's just like being in class." She further added by stating that everyone has a different study behavior and that recorded lectures are the most effective for her. She went on to further detail about the benefit of having recorded lectures for international graduate students:

...because I really like to go back and listen. Sometimes, the meaning is hidden in what the professor said and you don't remember that. So, you could just go back

and look at it again. The second thing is of course posting the course material, the slides online, but recorded lectures for me are the most helpful.

Shriv even stated that his face-to-face course professor uploads his lectures online so that students may re-listen to the content:

...since the subject that I'm currently pursuing is a technical subject. I don't think that students will be comfortable understanding and grasping the concepts and there's a lot of Mathematics involved. Like I said, one of the lectures that – there is a professor [that creates] video lectures and uploads them in Blackboard...that's proven to be pretty helpful so that we can revise back the contents.

Engineering and Technology Major Issues in Online Courses. Among all College of Engineering and College of Technology majors interviewed, students displayed some challenges or issues where they had to learn online navigation on their own and this led to a lack of social interactions online. This led to the first issue that international graduate students in engineering and technology felt 'on their own in online courses, and had a lack of friends as students rarely meet in-person'. Mina, in particular, had a lot to add to the first challenge of navigating online on her own:

First of all, I didn't know anything about the syllabus and anything so we just have some papers on the screen and I didn't know. I mean, there were so many lectures and papers, that I should download them, and I didn't know how to start, which one is the first step to find out what should I do and anything. I think there should be some videos or at least classes, [or] some [meeting].

She was even offering ways to fix the challenge that she faces on her own, she requested that, “professors should explain how to use [Blackboard] and where to find the lectures, where to find the assignments, where are the deadlines, where are the due dates.” Most of the international graduate students in the engineering department felt similarly to Mina’s issue. Other engineering international graduate students also felt that they were “on their own” and the quote below indicates RJ’s response in regards to relying on herself in an online course:

I generally went to the professor and talked regarding that but, most of the time, I didn’t go because if I have any doubts, I used to just Google it and all. If it is regarding the exams and so forth...

RJ stated that she would Google any questions regarding exams; and when she had any doubts she would use her own methods to find the answers. Mina added to RJ’s statement by saying, “I preferred to follow YouTube and other videos instead of my professors’ videos.” This “on their own” mentality experienced by international students was common in the STEM field. Mina stated that online courses should have teaching assistants, because it would be easier to ask questions to them rather the professors:

Also, there were no teaching assistants for courses, for online courses. I think this is not the reason to [not] have teaching assistant[s] for online courses, because students need someone to answer their questions.

Engineering and Technology international graduate students also listed another challenge that ‘F-1 policy limit for online courses are vague’, some stated that they were taking two online courses during the semester and some even went on to state that they could not take online courses during their last semester. For example, RJ learned from her

peers that she could not take an online course for her last semester, even if she went part-time:

Other international students, I think [everyone] feel[s] like it is a good one to take online courses but many of them think that when there is only one course left in your final semester, many of them try to take it online and they want to stay in other place[s] searching for jobs and everything. I don't know why the university doesn't allow it.

This F-1 limit policy for online courses confused most of the engineering students, as they were familiar with it, but were told otherwise according to their department. RJ, in particular, does not understand why her department would not let international students enroll in an online course during their final semester. International students, as stated by RJ, are looking for jobs during their final semester and more than likely do not want to attend face-to-face classes as they have interviews to attend. This provides uncertainty for international graduate students, as federal policies should be universal across disciplines, but is not and other departmental rules override the students' choice of learning format.

The third issue is regarding the faculty in the STEM departments, who are mostly international faculty themselves, have accents that are hard for graduate students to understand. Rani and other students from the engineering department stated that their faculty, who are from all parts of the world, have hindered their ability to learn complex course content with their accents. The following quote below is a perfect example of this theme that explained how international faculty with accents are difficult to understand, even if they record and upload their lecture online:

I think this is not a good thing to say, but I think the professor online, they shouldn't have any accent. They shouldn't be international, I think. Because most of the time I couldn't understand their accent and you know it's online. How can I get that? How can I get the new issues? Whenever [the professor] was from another [foreign] country, I couldn't get [their accents] so sometimes I had difficulties to understand it.

This accent or 'language barrier' is difficult to understand for international graduate students as they have to re-watch or re-listen to the online recorded lectures. Online course instructors should not have a hard-to-understand accent, but it is interesting to note that engineering faculty with American accents are easy to understand, and international engineering graduate students stated that they had no "difficulties to understand American accents" as their English is clear compared to international faculty with an accent to their English.

The last theme that led into another difficult issue in online courses, which was that 'technical difficulties lead to stress, especially if the students are off-campus or lose connectivity online'. Many international graduate students face financial difficulties and that can affect which students have access to internet at home, or even have a computer at home. Mina stated that, "sometimes the internet, some students, they're living off campus and they can't make it to come to the university every day. Sometimes they have no access to the internet". Additionally, she stated, "the internet speed and everything is a concern. Also, sometimes for myself, I don't know what happened but I cannot open the exam or assignment." These technical issues can alleviate to stress if international students are not familiar what to do in these situations. The issue of lack of internet

access or familiarity is a concern when exams or assignments are due on Blackboard, and especially if international graduate students do not know who to ask for help.

In sum, the benefits with the Engineering and Technology majors are that online content resources are more available in the U.S., more online courses offered in the department, and recorded lectures and organized online structures are beneficial for international students. The issues are that they had to learn online navigation on their own which led to a lack of social interactions online, the F-1 online course limit policy is vague or confusing, international faculty themselves have accents that are hard to understand, and technical difficulties online can lead to stress. All of these issues and benefits relate to the interviewees in the Colleges of Engineering or Technology, and some of these themes overlap with the overall themes provided earlier.

Social Work Major Benefits in Online Courses. Among all three of the Social Work (GSW) graduate students interviewed, they each mentioned that their Graduate of Social Work Master's program (MSW) was transitioning to being fully online, both Sammi and Shay even stated that it was to bring in more students for financial purposes. This is the first benefit of online courses as their 'online MSW program will bring money into the department' and can provide funding for their graduate students. Shay went into further detail comparing another university's online MSW program to her department's decision and compared the departmental decision to other universities who have done the same. The motive that she stated to add the online MSW program was to attract more students virtually and allow international students to bring in more money, since they would have to pay more than the national students did for the online MSW program. Shay further delves into the reasoning that international graduate students will pay

whatever fees necessary to gain an education from a well-renowned university. Shay even added that, “there are lots of international students that want to get their diploma at [a reputable university]. So they will just pay whatever.”

Shay went onto to state how the online program will have increased enrollment and hopefully, the MSW funds could support the Social Work Ph.D. students:

It is expanded to the world and they have students that are all over I don't know, they have international students so that [is] because it's online; it's kind of like there is no limit of number of enrollment or it is less limited so they can take as many students. That's where they get their money so they use the online program to get more money and use that money to pay back their classroom setting students. That's why our college is also doing online because we're doing mostly for the money online.

This added online MSW program theme leads into the second benefit of ‘being open to taking an online course, even if the interviewee does not prefer online courses’. Leah, who is an ambassador for the transitioning MSW program, displays how beneficial online courses are, but her openness to online courses does not relate strongly to the entire online program being beneficial:

I know that in 2016, fall of 2016, they are offering a completely online MSW.

Yes. Do I like it? No. I think if you were to ask - because I am an ambassador, I do get asked a lot about the class structure and the how the professors are...

Therefore, yes, online is helpful. It's good to make your schedule around it and your work schedule if you have work and kids, I completely understand, but if

you have the chance, I would say go in class and do it in class. Therefore, I can see it moving more towards online. Is it my preference? No.

Shay, on the other hand, wanted to take an online course to become familiar with the format of learning:

I took two online courses; it was good...I wanted to give it a try because I didn't get a chance to take an online course in China. I was wanting to see how it works and then I know that in the future I can make the decision, better I can kind of [tell] myself, "Oh, I did it before and it doesn't work for me, I won't do it anymore". But actually [the online course] was pretty good.

For both Leah and Shay, they had different reasons for wanting to take an online course, as they know that their department will offer more online courses, they understand the changes happening within their program. Sammi stated that she is not “mentally prepared” to take an online program. Sammi said that, “I am traditional, I already studied traditional studies, so mentally I’m not prepared to take that.”

Additionally, Sammi even stated that though she will have a learning curve and will need to adapt to the online program, that she is openly willing to learn and continue with her MSW degree progress, even if the format of learning changes.

The third and final benefit is that ‘online courses will be convenient for those with families, full-time jobs or even internships’. Even though, Sammi, an older MSW international student, does not like the idea of an online MSW program, she understood how it is beneficial for those with a busy schedule and believed that the younger generation of students are busy so they need flexible course schedules. “The young generation may [like online courses] because they're [busier]...” said Sammi and Leah

even stated that those with families or full-time jobs need an online course option. Shay went on to disclose that internships keep MSW students busy and if possible, spending three hours on campus is not preferable when you have to be there for clients, so during internship or practicum stages of their education, an online course format is needed.

Social Work Major Issues in Online Courses. There are issues, for example, ‘less likely to recall information from online courses’ is an issue within Social Work majors, and Shay and Leah had stated that they could not recall content information taken online for their undergraduate courses. More specifically, Leah stated that she recalls information more from face-to-face courses than her online courses:

I’ve had a completely online class in my undergrad, which I think was a genetics class, and I also did a statistics class that was completely online. I don’t really remember anything I’ve learned from it. [*Laughter*]

Leah had also stated that it is easier to forget online material if the length is too long and that while recalling short and immediate information online is easy, the materials for long reading chapters are difficult to recall. She said, “Online courses, if the materials are of short length, then I think it is not really difficult to do. It is easy. I mean it is [user] friendly.” She suggested that for exams or assignments that the material be shorter and instructors should not assign big chapters as online information overload may occur.

The second issue of online courses is that ‘face-to-face courses are more meaningful for practical programs like Social Work’ and Leah even stated that she does not prefer the online MSW program transition. Going back to her quote under the benefit of ‘open to taking online courses...’ she stated that face-to-face contact and the experiences she had in the classroom were the “richest part of her master’s degree.” Shay

stated that internships and practicum would be difficult to complete online and she further goes into detail about the face-to-face component being practical for her program:

...GSW, my college is going online, they are launching in 2016 a Master in social work online program. But I definitely want to point out to researchers that is very difficult for practical majors to be online. We are supposed to be doing internship, so if we go online, that is going to be really hard to track it online.

With Shay and Leah, the issue of their college transitioning their MSW program to be fully online raises some concerns of the feasibility of their department. Sammi, on the other hand, while she is not resistant to the change, has a different reasoning behind why a face-to-face component would be more useful for her MSW program:

... if I have to go online, study a single [journal article] for two hours, then I think it will be quite boring...[and] for our [face-to-face] course, we have to sometimes do a role play. These are not possible in online.

It would be boring to have her program fully online if there were no activity within the two hours. Adding to her role-play needed in her course, it would not be beneficial online, and she said that she had not started her practicum course yet, and stated, that the practicum component “is completely customer-oriented, it means client-oriented. That is not possible...fully through online.” The final issue is that ‘procrastination may occur in online courses’ and this was also a similar overall theme; Leah displays her concerns with procrastination and online distractions (i.e., social media). She stated that she plans to complete her online course assignments ahead of time, but then she procrastinates:

I kind of say at the beginning of the semester, “I’m going to have this online class finished by September,” and then it’s now November, almost November, and I haven’t done that. So I think I would have good standings at the beginning to get it finished early, but in reality, things happen, life happens...

Realistically, Leah knows that time management is important to complete an online class, but procrastination also occurs in online courses more than face-to-face courses. For Sammi, she states that procrastination could occur in lengthy online courses where the tendency is to sit online and finds synchronous online courses to be stressful. Sammi stated that if any online course requires her to sit there for more than one hour, then it will be stressful and she will have “the tendency to avoid it.”

Overall, the graduate students in Social Work have the benefits and issues of online courses adapted by the practicality of their majors. Specifically, the Social Work international graduate students stated that they believe their online MSW program will add financial revenue to their college, are open to taking online courses, and more online courses benefit those with families, who have a full-time job or internships/practicum. The issues are that it is difficult to recall information taught online, online courses are not practical for social work students, and procrastination may occur in online courses. It is interesting to note that the even though some themes did overlap with the overall themes, the context of these themes for the Social Work department differ when you add the information about their online MSW program.

Business Major Benefits in Online Courses. For the one business international graduate student, Annie had stated benefits that online courses, ‘if small and short, can be highly beneficial for business majors’ and since business major do have to complete

professional development workshops, they can add up and become pricey for international graduate students. Annie, who had taken plenty of professional courses online through her job in India, was well aware how effective Coursera and other online workshops were for her particular MBA program. She told me about ATL, “Anytime Learning”, which is the workshop online platform that her job offered for her to complete. For example, her online economics course was flexible as it had online timeslots to attend the course for completion. Annie said, “ATL and Coursera [courses], those are amazing... I don’t know about the professors in India, but the professors aboard have designed the online courses really well. I was exposed to those courses.” She stated that the short online professional development workshops were very well structured and had easy navigation to learn the content.

Leading into the second benefit, she repeatedly stated that ‘Wi-Fi connectivity is a huge issue in India’ and that internet was faster in the United States. This is a similar theme to the overall theme that ‘lack of access to technology and internet in home country did not provide opportunities for online courses to be taken’. Therefore, resources online are more available in the U.S. and she stated that:

So it’s completely different from India...The [online] resources are easily available because of the online systems, which was very difficult for me in India.

The last benefit was ‘online courses are convenient for those who live far away from campus’, as Annie stated that she relies on public transportation, it is difficult for her to come to campus. The benefit for students to not drive to campus for online courses is more convenient, international students can rely on recorded lectures from the comfort of one’s home and she stated that:

Benefits is just not to commute, like if you're not being able to commute...it saves time. The recorded lecture helps at times because you have it ready whenever you want to see it back.

Annie also mentioned the online lectures that some of her faculty in the MBA program upload. This benefit theme mentions several times throughout the findings of this research study. The convenience of online courses is a repetitive theme, and found across the majors of various international graduate students interviewed.

Business Major Issues in Online Courses. There were also issues that were synonymous with other majors. For example, the theme of 'desire to meet new people is needed; therefore, online courses are boring' was a similar common overall theme. Annie had a strong desire to meet with other people and she wanted to seek out connections in her field of business. She stated that:

Because being an international student, this is a way I'm able to meet new people, know about the culture, and know about the society. So, I think it's important to have one-on-one [face-to-face] classes.

The second theme which was an issue for her in particular within her College of Business, 'professional development online workshops were expensive' and was required for her to obtain an MBA. After explaining her professional development courses, she stated that some online workshops were expensive and if they were not so costly, then she would attend more for her MBA. She stated that she had to pay for the professional development online workshops, as the cost of the workshops deducted from her salary pay from her job in India.

The final theme was the issue that ‘being available online (synchronous) or immediate feedback is necessary for team group projects.’ Just as many others interviewed, she missed the immediate feedback in her online courses. She stated that if the online course were not synchronous, then immediate feedback within group work assignments was difficult. In her field of business, group works and teammates are important for achieving deadlines with projects, and she stated that:

I mean suppose [the faculty is] teaching you a course, a new topic which you were never ever exposed to. So, you have a lot of questions coming, “Oh, how come this...? Oh, how come that...?” Maybe that is really silly [question], but it’s a very small question to wait for an email reply the next day.

In the College of Business, the benefits are that Wi-Fi is easier to connect to in the U.S. than in India, shorter more flexible and structured online courses are suitable for her major, and not commuting to campus is good for those enrolled in online courses. The issues faced in online courses in the College of Business are lack of immediate feedback, missing social interactions and the high cost of accredited online courses or workshops. Even though I had only interviewed one person from the College of Business, she added a lot of information regarding her experiences with online course workshops and had added to the themes. She took 10+ non-accredited online courses in India, which made Annie the interviewee with the most online course experience in her home country.

Overall, the themes presented in this study provided insight of online course challenges and benefits. With the help of the member checks, I was able to use cross-analysis to compare themes across majors within a diverse international graduate student sample. Themes derived from the open codes that were redundant and intersecting. The

only unison was in the overall themes presented and in general, all participants enjoy face-to-face courses, want immediate feedback with instructors or students, and find online courses to be convenient for those with busy lives and families. With the themes across majors, there were some consistencies with the overall themes, in particular the theme from the College of Business about ‘desire to meet new people is needed; therefore, online courses are boring’ is similar with the ‘frequent communication and interaction with instructor or students is preferred face-to-face for immediate feedback’ theme. The findings and their discussed implications are in the conclusion along with the cultural and policy-related implications for international graduate students.

Chapter V

Discussion

Interpretation of Findings

What I found from the overall themes is that most of them are consistent with the literature. In addition, there are common themes among the diverse representation of international graduate students in this study. I also wanted to look more deeply in the general overall themes and therefore, began to cross-analyze the finding across different majors. The focus group with the member checks of these themes allowed me to be more specific in the themes across majors. In using NVivo nodes from the open codebook along with integrating the feedback from the member checks and peer debriefing, I was able to use the phenomenological approach to study online course experiences with this growing student population.

There are very limited empirical studies examining students' online experiences, attitudes towards these innovative learning environments, comfort with online participation, and other online learning issues from international students with distinct cultural and educational experiences (Smith, Coldwell, Smith, & Murphy, 2005; Wang, 2004; Zhu, 2011). The literature provided data on the expanding international student population, and higher education institutions should be mindful of the economic benefit from international students (Albach, 2004; Anderson, 2014; Bhandari & Choudaha, 2010). These in-depth qualitative interviews with international graduate students, who enrolled in online higher education courses in post-secondary education, will enhance our understanding of online experiences, challenges encountered, and factors contributing to a successful experience.

This multinational international student sample from various disciplines adds to the desirability to expand upon prior qualitative findings (Liu et al., 2010; Miliszewska, 2007). Interviewees in this study preferred more face-to-face courses compared to online courses. All the interviewees also believed that online courses were beneficial to those with families, a full-time job or lived far away. These two overall themes are self-explanatory regarding the convenience of online courses and interviewees stated their general preferences of face-to-face courses, which is similar to previous research (Al-Harti, 2005; Liu et al., 2010; Zhang & Kenny, 2010).

Interviewees wanted immediate feedback for clarification, avoiding miscommunication and asking for help. This finding of online miscommunication has not been seen in previous research with international students, but does indirectly relate to the language barrier in online courses, as some terms or sarcasm online are clearly misunderstood (Liu et al., 2010; Thompson & Ku, 2005; Wang, 2004). This theme may be related to a mismatch in culture preferences between the individualistic tone we use in U.S. education, where students are comfortable arguing or disagreeing with instructors and other students (Anakwe et al., 1999; Hannon & D'Neto, 2007; Zhang & Kenny, 2010). This 'tone' of I, me, and other individualistic terms are added to course content which is different from Asian countries, where the authority figure has the influence over what is said and taught in class (Wang & Reeves, 2007). Therefore, immediate feedback is necessary in online courses to avoid miscommunication and ask for clarification. In general, international graduate students' preferences are against an online course, they want more immediate feedback with instructor or students in an online course, and they

agree that online courses are convenient (Croese, 2011; Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002; Zhang & Kenny, 2010).

In addition, in this study, interviewees expressed what they considered to an effective online course, some interviewees said hybrid courses are a good medium for international graduate students. There is a lack of known research on blended or hybrid courses with international graduate students; this topic of study could add to future research. This study did not specifically ask questions about hybrid courses, and mentioning the topic of hybrid courses came from some interviewees who experienced hybrid courses as a teaching assistant or enrolled in a hybrid course. Just because some of the participants did not specifically mention a hybrid course, does not mean that they do not believe that hybrid courses are good, it just means that the opportunity to discuss hybrid courses never arise.

Then, interviewees disclosed the lack of access to technology and internet in their home country did not provide opportunities for taking online courses. The relationship between familiarity and experiences of online courses can relate to prior positive online course experience, satisfaction and comfort levels for online course (Al-Harti, 2005; Dykman & Davis, 2008; Liu et al., 2010). Additionally, according to Ku and Lohr (2003) as cited in Liu et al. (2010), research found that Asian students feel “uncomfortable with the nonlinear nature of their online courses, which the researchers attributed to the uncertainty avoidance dimension of Asian cultures” (p. 180). Therefore, a lack of prior experience with online courses in their home country could dissuade Asian international graduate students from choosing online courses in the future. My study included Asian

students who had similar findings as Liu et al. (2010) regarding their online course experience in home country.

Adding Hofstede's (1980, 1986, 2001) research into the findings, some themes were related to individualistic-collectivism dimensions and others were related to uncertainty-avoidance dimensions. Interestingly, the interviewees who stated that they had heavy self-reliance on individual learning with only midterms and finals in their home country came from Asian societies that corresponds Hofstede's (1986) collectivistic society dimension. Students from Asian countries tend to be more studious and do not have as many group projects or papers, as compared to their testing of memorized course material (Thompson & Ku, 2005; Zhang & Kenny, 2010). The themes in this study build further support that differences in school practices of one's home country may influence a student's transition to the U.S. Heavy reliance on memorization then switching into less memorization and more application of testing and evaluation is a significant change for international graduate students.

The international graduate students in this study who stated individual stress from navigating the U.S. university system on their own was a consistent theme with general research about international students' transition to a new country (Pan et al., 2003; Sadykova & Dautermann, 2009; Shattuck, 2005). The uncertainty-avoidance dimension is associated with this stress of attending a new country's education system; international graduate students navigating a new situation tend to avoid stressful scenarios (Hofstede, 1986; Zhang & Kenny, 2010). For example, Mina had expressed stress from trying to understand her department that she changed her major, and May was overwhelmed with a syllabus for the first time that had all 14 weeks of assignments in it. Turkey and Iran both

had high scores in their country's cultural dimension of uncertainty avoidance. Both situations cause a learning curve and take time to adjust, but if there is no prior knowledge on what to do, then international students will not know who to ask for help or feel 'on their own'.

The interviewees who had technical difficulties in online courses conveyed stress if students are not familiar with Blackboard. Once again, this theme has a relationship to the uncertainty-avoidance dimension, which explains why students are unfamiliar in new situations and tend to avoid changes new environment situations (Hofstede, 1986, 2001; Wang & Reeves, 2007). Procrastinating online could be due to an inactive or emotionless online course (Chen et al., 2008). For example, the international graduate students who stated that they were likely to procrastinate or even cheat in online courses was a new finding compared to previous research with international students' online course experience. This finding does relate to interviewees' uncertainty of a new format of learning, and procrastination may occur if students are unfamiliar or do not know how to ask for help in their new environment (Croese, 2011; Liu et al., 2010).

A few international graduate students discussed frequent communication for building new relationships in online courses. The satisfaction of online courses relates to students' active participation of adding their personal experiences or application to online course content (Bolliger & Martindale, 2004; Zhang & Kenny, 2010). International students may feel isolated in online courses and "online socialization is more complicated than face-to-face socialization for international students who seek to build friendship with peers and learn their culture" (Sadykova, 2014, p. 40; Thompson & Ku, 2005). If international students are expressing such acute social isolation in their U.S. online

courses, “then we should heed their requests for help and look to find ways to better support them in a more holistic sense” (Erichsen & Bolliger, 2011, p. 322). The uncertainty avoidance, if high, will deviate international graduate students to make friends through a format that is unfamiliar to them. Therefore, instructors should have inclusive social assignments in online courses (e.g., icebreaker activity) to harness a better online relationship and build interactions for international students.

Lastly, about the themes in the majors, a few of them overlapped with the themes in the overall findings. Interviewees’ individual culture was not prominent in the challenges and benefits of online courses, the culture of their department that has more impact on their online course experience rather than their country of origin. Hofstede (2003) did state culture as a group phenomenon yet I would argue that in education, the majors or colleges of the international graduate students is more important when studying online course experience and their transition from one country’s education to U.S. higher education. The level of uncertainty avoidance did contribute to the adaption of online courses, if interviewees were unwilling to use it, as some were unfamiliar with online courses. However, individualism-collectivism mostly related to some findings, but the usefulness of Hofstede’s theory in this study was to understand the willingness for international graduate students to adapt and absorb a new modality of learning. Hofstede’s research needs further studies regarding experience in online course research, especially with international students from various domains of disciplines.

However, a few themes were unique to each of their own college departments and relative to the situations of online course experienced within their respective colleges at the university. For example, the College of Education majors had specifically focused on

the forced interactions of online discussion, which can be boring or lead to just busy work. This particular finding is interesting to note because Park and Jun (2003) found that only one of their interviewee posted more than the required discussion board postings for course credit. The researchers also indicated that there may be a power inequality and that American and international students do not respond to each other's' discussion posts, especially since international students stated they felt instructors were not active and that is why had passive participation in online discussion (Park & Jun, 2003). The interviewees in this study elaborated that 'busy work' in an online course is when you have to reply to two students' discussion posts to agree or disagree with their statement, it seems very one-sided and that may be why international students do not actively participate online (Li, 2005).

Another finding was that faculty who had international accents were distracting for the international engineering and technology graduate students. I did not come across much research on international faculty accents, but there is an abundance of language barriers in online course research (Al-Harti, 2005; Liu et al., 2010; Sadykova & Dautermann, 2009), and this accent issue should not be mistaken for sarcasm, or academic versus colloquial words used in online recorded lectures by international students (Al-Harti, 2005). The last online course issue or challenge unrelated to the research about international graduate students was that the College of Social Work were less likely to recall content information from online courses. I have not come across research that discusses a lack of recalling taught online information for international students. There is research on students feeling overwhelmed by the lack of enforcement on memorized learning and international students do experiences a wide range of

strategies provided by their online course instructors (Chen et al., 2008; Crose, 2011; Wang, 2004). There are no known studies that I found which had similar themes across various disciplines using a diverse international graduate student population.

Conclusion

An overall assessment of what I have found in this qualitative study adds to the limited literature on international graduate students and their online course experiences. I will conduct future mixed-methods research to focus more about hybrid course experiences too. Through qualitative interviews and quantitative measures, a qualitative lens can add more to future mixed-methods studies by providing important connections and themes about a certain phenomenon (Stoner, 2010). The goal of this study was to indicate transferability, find new themes among a diverse representation of international graduate students, and the findings in this study highlighted both benefits and challenges of online courses. Interview findings suggest what connects to an effective online course, or not an effective online course, but the findings are only applicable to the interviewees in this phenomenological qualitative study (Zou & Trueba, 2002).

I believe there are multiple strengths in this study, for example, the access to a large sample of international graduate students was beneficial and made data collection easy. The goal of interviewing ten participants turned into twelve and each individual participant provided valuable feedback that was necessary for the findings. Another strength is that the diversity of various majors did represent the site of study, as noted in Table 2, 77.4% of international graduate students come from the College of Engineering and the engineering graduate students did make a significant portion of the pre-screen and interviewed sample. Students from India relate to the largest growing international

graduate student population entering the U.S. (Bailey, 2015). Representatively, Indian international graduate students were the most interviewed sample from country of origin. Contrary to previous research, which had mostly Chinese participants, I only had two Chinese students interviewed (Chen & Bennett, 2012). I did not expect to interview international students from United Kingdom or Canada, or even Iran, but they each had their own individual experience that collectively added to the overall themes.

Implications

Based on the findings it is plausible that international graduate students' cultural values differ from the remainder of the population because their online course experiences does provide both benefits and challenges. Many of my interviewed international graduate students are confused about the F-1 policy limit for online courses. Some of the miscommunication occurring at the departmental level and at the administration level. Papa and Whelan (2015) found that the U.S. has a majority of international graduate students in STEM fields, by incorporating an updated F-1 online course limit policy across all majors, not just STEM fields; international graduate students will not be confused in their departments regarding this policy. Policy makers may want to reassess the limit of online courses as "eighty-nine percent of four-year public colleges and universities and sixty percent of four-year private schools offer online classes" (Papa & Whelan, 2015, p. 36). In considering this, they may want to consider the challenges of learning practical course content in an online format and to be able to enroll in online courses during their last semester. In addition, considering some of the benefits for international graduate students to enroll in two online courses per semester; for example, allowing them to work from home, so they can search for job and interview at the end of their educational journey that one international graduate student expressed in this study.

Additionally, a suggestion for universities to hire online course designers can help create more well designed, organized, flexible and structured online courses. The reasoning behind hiring online course designers for instructors is because in this study, throughout the themes across majors, international graduate students stated effective online course were organized and structured for easy navigation. This organization and structure of online courses could become a professional development workshop for online course instructors, as it would not only benefit international students, but would improve an online course to be effective for all students.

Lastly, international administrators and counselors can also assist with challenges face by international graduate students. Hiring administrative staff who work in college departments with an understanding of international policies may assist international graduate students to understand federal guidelines. Adding university support for departments to understand policies, especially regarding online course limits, can help the international students in their departments. By suggesting clearer guidelines with an updated F-1 online course limit policy, international graduate students will be less confused at their institutions and can enroll in more online courses to graduate without restrictions.

Limitations

Limitations are in this dissertation study, mostly regarding the outreach of more male participants to interview. There are mostly female international graduate students interviewed and only two males interviewed, even though I emailed more male participants from the pre-screen survey, most of them did not respond back. There might have been a cultural gender limitation as the interviewer was female and male

international graduate students would not want to meet a female graduate student. From this study, considerations about including a male interviewer could address the issue of recruiting more male participants. The online course experiences varied for the interviewees as their undergraduate versus graduate experience and general amount of online courses taken in home country and U.S. differs for each participant. This affected their familiarity of online courses, I did not predict this would happen but some interviewees only had one online course experience. Some participants had yet to enroll in an online course in the U.S., but those particular participants had recently begun their graduate degree program.

Adding to statement of trustworthiness limitation is that I spoke Urdu or Hindi to graduate students whom I interviewed that were Indian or Pakistani. I was able to have small talk easily before and after the interview session compared to the other non-South Asian international graduate students. This is a cultural limitation to the study as the language connection could have allowed Indian or Pakistani participants to feel more comfortable have small talk before the interview session started. Another limitation of qualitative research is that it “does not contribute directly to questions of causality or whether interventions or practices work” but it can assist in the identification of various contextual factors and offers important contributions to society (McDuffie & Scruggs, 2008, p. 94). In particular, none of the findings from this study is generalizable to an entire population of international graduate students; some similar themes found in previous research, but qualitative research is subjective and cannot contribute to factual statements regarding a population.

Future Research Suggestions

According to Zou and Trueba (2002), participants interviewed in their study highlighted important connections and did share their own struggles, what they witnessed through their classroom interaction and course work. Similar to their research, this study found themes to understand what challenges international graduate students face in an online learning environments (Zou & Trueba, 2002), the next step in further research is to develop measures or ways to improve online courses. The future research suggestion for the first three overall themes is that online courses need more quantitative research studies on these similar themes. In addition, the particular case studied was only international graduate students for this dissertation, but future studies can expand to include international undergraduate students.

Liu et al. (2010) suggested that future research should study international graduate students' experiences from various disciplines, and this study did just that. The themes found across each major had indicated issues and benefits that needs more research at those departments. In particular, some themes overlapped and provided consistency in the research of online courses and international students, specifically the themes that reached saturation with most interviewees about online interaction. The theme that also addresses the challenge international graduate students' face when trying to receive immediate feedback needs further research with online course instructors. Future research should study international graduate students' online course instructor to understand what educators can do to overcome specific challenges found in online courses from the current study. Hofstede's cultural dimensions (1986, 2001, 2003) were in this study, but I did not use all of the dimensions; looking into the other dimensions with online or even

hybrid courses should provide more findings that are support Hofstede's theory. From the themes, we can improve online courses across departments and universities in order to satisfy our ever-growing special population.

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Appendix A

Pre-screen Survey

Phase one survey questionnaire

Demographics

1. Are you an international student attending University (i.e., F-1 or J-1 Visa holder)?

If no is selected, participants are taken to the thank you page of the survey.

2. What is your educational level at the University?

Undergraduate, Graduate, or Professional student.

If Undergraduate is selected, participants are taken to the thank you page of the survey.

3. In general, how many online courses, including MOOCs or any online mini-session courses, have you taken?

In your home country: 0 - 10+

In the U.S. (including any you are taking at the university): 0 - 10+

4. How many of those online courses were taken at each level:

Undergraduate: 0 - 10+

Master's: 0 - 10+

Ph.D.: 0 - 10+

5. Did you take any online courses that were not for college credit (non-accredited)?

Yes/No

If so, how many online courses did you take that were non-accredited: 0 - 10+

How many online courses did you take in the forms of online workshops: 0 - 10+

6. What country are you from?

China, India, Vietnam, Pakistan, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Korea, Japan, Iran,

Mexico, Venezuela, Canada, Turkey, and other (list country).

7. Gender (Male or Female or Decline to Answer)

8. Age (Must be above 18 years old)

9. Major (program name):

Architecture, Business, Communication, Education, Engineering, etc...

10. Ethnicity:

Asian, Black, Hispanic, Caucasian, Pacific Islander, Bi-racial, and other

11. Part-time or full-time student?

12. Do you have access to internet at home? (Yes/No response)

13. Their email address for the phase two follow-up:

Appendix B

Semi-structured interview questions

Semi-structured interview questions

Here is the script for use in planning my opening remarks:

“Good evening! My name is (Saira Rab) and I am from the (College of Education – Educational Psychology and Individual Differences program).

I’m here to talk about any opportunities and challenges with your educational online experiences in your home country compared to the U.S. Our objective is not to try and persuade you to take a stand on this issue, but we would like to try to gain your perspectives to better educate the public on the concerns of international students with online learning environments.

According to IRB protocol, I will need your signature to verify that this interview is completely confidential, you have the right to drop out of the study at any time, and your responses will be coded using a pseudonym as to de-identify any personal information related to your response.”

(The participant will sign the consent form agreeing to participate in the interview sessions.)

From this point, I will begin introducing the interview questions.

Background Information

1. Where is your country of origin and can you describe your experience living there?
2. Can you provide some background on what classes were like for your undergraduate years in your home country?
3. At what age did you start using a computer?
4. Describe what you used (i.e., Blackboard or a similar tool) to submit coursework for your class in your home country?
5. In terms of the classes you have taken in your home country, how would you describe the transition from a course in your home country to a course in America where assignments are constantly due on Blackboard and Turnitin?

Online Course Experiences

1. What's your online courses experience in your home country?
2. Describe your experiences with online courses in America?
3. How does your current graduate program require you to use technology for course assignments?
4. What are your current classes like, and can you tell me how would you do if it was completely online?
5. How would your (specific) courses be online (follow-up question)?

Online Course Attitudes, Beliefs or Perceptions

1. Discuss your thoughts & feelings towards taking an online course?
2. Also, with technology on the rise, what do you believe will happen to face-to-face courses?
3. What do you consider to be an effective online course?
4. What do you believe about teachers lecturing/teaching completely online?
5. How would it be difficult if you had a course completely online instead of FTF (Follow-up question)?
6. How do you think international students adapt to online education/technology?
7. Is there anything you would like to add about your opinions about online courses/learning?
8. Anything else that you would like to add?

Follow-up Question for the second interview session

The following questions are created after the first interview, these questions are examples of consists as clarification questions to the first interview session. These interview questions and responses to this session are listed below and can change depending on the participants' responses:

1. Specifically, what are some challenges you faced with online courses/learning here in America?
2. What other problems have you encountered with online courses/learning?
3. Which mode of learning do you prefer (Face-to-face or Online courses)?
4. Exactly how many online courses have you taken in your home country and in America? What were your interactions (communication with instructors or classmates) like in your online courses?
5. From what you were stating previously, am I right to understand that more online *....courses are offered to (STEM majors)...you felt more comfortable participating in online discussion...?*
6. What are some stories/opinions you've heard from other international graduate students about their online course experience(s)?
7. What good (or bad) things have you heard (follow-up question)?
8. Anything that you want to add?

Here is the script for use in closing my interview sessions:

“As we bring our interview session to a close, I want to thank you for allowing to give some of your time for this research study, and if you have any questions or comments about the study, please contact me at my email. . I would welcome the opportunity to return with another group of students to present the topic findings, which are known as themes, from this interview session. I will contact you before the end of the semester to regain your approval and input of the findings. You will now be entered for the drawing of the gift card and if you are chosen, I will contact you via email.”

(The participant will verify their email with the researcher and state whether they want to be part of the member check focus group, this validity process is not mandatory for all participants.)

Appendix C

Pilot Study Transcript

Pilot Study Interview Transcript

Interview Questions	MEA Response
1. Describe your experiences with online courses in America?	“I’ve had one course in the department which was a mixed course so I have had experience with discussion questions online and we’d reply to them, and we would also have face-to-face (FTF) interactions, meetings, and lectures. Apart from that, separately on the side I have taken some online courses without credit at Coursera, and those were basically statistics courses to help with my data analysis for my candidacy. I’ve attended webinars and CEU’s about suicide crisis and intervention and they were about six hours and let to a certificate.”
2. Discuss your thoughts & feelings towards taking an online course?	“It’s something that I did not have a lot of exposure to before coming here, most of my classes were FTF and that’s kinda been consistent here and maybe that’s because of the subject area I am in with psychology and education. I’m open to the idea of online education but a lot of faculties tend to prefer FTF meetings because we’re doing clinical work and they feel like those skills need to be part of one-on-one situation with the student. I would like to see some more use of technology in the classrooms though.”
3. What’s your online courses experience in India?	“Honestly, let’s see, again there was a stats course I did online so it’s mostly STEM courses that are online. Most of my education in psychology courses is more FTF.”
4. Also, with technology on the rise, what do you believe will happen to face-to-face courses?	“I think in clinical fields, such as psychology, there is a place for it because there are practicum and internships where we are working with clients and our work needs to be supervised. We do use technology there, we’ll use video tapes and we’ll review sessions with the bug in the ear where we’re connected with our supervisor and they can give us inputs on what we are doing. Um, I would like to see content delivery lectures over videos and things like that where students can watch and learn at their own pace. And then come into class prepared to discuss or interact with the material that they are learning.”
5. What do you consider to be an effective online course?	“One that is structured, that has a definitive pattern and there was this one course that I took at Coursera there were quizzes in the second week about content that wasn’t covered until the fourth week. So it didn’t make sense, definitely thinking ahead about what the level of students that are when designing a course. With the

	same statistics course on Coursera, it was designed for students who were more advanced but it was marketed as more as a beginner's course, which was misleading. And I had to a lot of work on my own to figure out what was happening in that course.”
6. How does your program require you to use technology for course assignments?	“We use blackboard to turn in assignments, there is one class we are doing which uses evidence-based practice, like motivational interviewing which requires videotaping and recording each other as counselors and counselees. And we rate ourselves and our supervisors rate us and our performance.”
7. What are your current classes like, and can you tell me how would you do if it was completely online?	“Right now I am taking evidence-based psychology and my practicum class, which is advanced practicum and I am doing multicultural issues in counseling psychology. Completely online is interesting, but with evidence based practice, like I was saying before, we video tape content and provide that online to students and have them review it. Maybe have them ask discussion question and respond online, the whole process of reviewing feedback with therapy we could have students submit that online and have themselves' rate online.”
8. How would the multicultural courses be online (follow-up question)?	“We're pretty heavy on the readings, so there is a lot of reading that happens and most of the reading is on our own time anyways. And what happens in class is there a review or our reactions to what we've read. So, it would be difficult to structure that class online, but having that said, this semester has been a little chaotic because it's seen multiple shifts of instructors in the beginning to where we are right now. So that's probably not a good class to talk about. Just sayin'.”
9. Describe what you used (i.e., Blackboard or a similar tool) to submit coursework for your class in your home country?	“No, we did not have to submit online coursework.”
10. Can you provide some background on what classes were like for your undergraduate years in India (follow-up question)?	“We had lectures and our assignments were turned in either directly by email and they would grade it or print hard copies and turn it in. Or we would have presentations and things like that where we would be graded FTF.”
11. What do you believe about teachers lecturing/teaching completely online?	“Online? I like the idea of that because it gives me the ability to stop instead of zoning out which doesn't happen in a classroom because you have to sit there the entire time and pay attention. And I can structure it around anything else that I have to do, so I can learn at

	<p>my pace. So I like the idea, I am open to it. Although, going back to the question about my current classes and how it would be online, my third class is a practicum class which would be very difficult to integrate and make it completely online.”</p>
<p>12. How so would it be difficult if you had a practicum completely online instead of FTF (Follow-up question)?</p>	<p>“Because in that class we are presenting cases where we are working on it currently, and we get feedback from faculty and students and I think that process is helpful when they are immediately there. And they can see you react and you can react to them.”</p>
<p>13. (Added question during our conversion) In terms of the classes you have taken in India, how would you describe the transition from a course in India, where there is not too much online interactions and opportunities, to a course in America where assignments are constantly due on blackboard and turnitin?</p>	<p>“For me it was a challenge initially, and I have to learn how to type much faster. And that’s just on me as an educational psychology major, I didn’t use computers as much there are people from India who are brilliant who have been using computers all their life, and I was slower in that way and that is something I had to work on, and I have. Besides that, the navigation of blackboard or the different apps that are used, learning to be familiar with it and where to go, what to click on, how to submit? And yeah, that was something that I had to learn.”</p>
<p>14. At what age did you start using a computer (follow-up question)?</p>	<p>“Hmm, computers came in when I was in the sixth or seventh grade, so I was about 12 years old.”</p>
<p>15. Is there anything you would like to add about your opinions about online courses?</p>	<p>“I’m definitely for integrating technology at the level where I am learning and even with the schools in pre K – 12, because I think that’s the way that kids interact with knowledge these days. Everything is freely available to them and providing education to them in a way to them that is intuitive for them, like the iPad kinda might make it helpful for them to learn how to use that technology and get where they want to go. And to make instruction more relevant to the present day.”</p>
<p>16. How do you think students who are international students adapt to online education?</p>	<p>“Well I think students from a computer science or engineering background, who are used to using technology on a more frequent basis, might find the transition easier. In terms of using technology, that’s something they have been using as well. Learning program for me was hard because I never have done that before, um but still it would be helpful if they were given instructions on deadlines, general guidelines, and how to use the technology. Because as far as my understanding is, even with STEM fields in India, the primary mode of instruction is lecture-based and they’ll have labs as well and most assignments are turned in</p>

	hard paper formats. So I guess it would help if they had instruction on that.”
17. Specifically, what are some challenges you faced with online courses here in America?	“Hmm, thinking about my schedule with the class that I am taking already, and during the weeks, when I have a lot of assignments to do I can push back my online courses cause that material is a little flexible. But I have been able to complete them on schedule, it’s just I tend to take advantage of the flexibility.”
18. What other problems have you encountered with online courses (follow-up)?	“Well, like I was telling you before, the structure of the course itself at times they had covered content in the course that have not been discussed or reviewed in the classes lectures. That was difficult, but I was able to contact the professor and he figured out a way we could work around that.”
19. What are some stories/opinions you've heard from other International Indian students about their online course experience(s)?	“Well, I’ve heard good things from them, they’ve taken a week or two to get used to the program or software used in online courses, and it does take a while for students to switch over if they’ve been used to face-to-face lectures and the discipline required to go through with an online class and be responsible, but once they get the hang of it, I’ve heard good things.”
20. What good things have you heard (follow-up question)?	“Well, they like that they can view classes on their schedule, so if they’re morning people they can wake up early or if they prefer watching it at night they can. So there isn’t that rigidity of that “ok, you have class at 6am - 12pm or whatever” and that’s one thing. And the ease of administering and receiving grades and scores on quizzes, it’s instantaneous that’s another feedback that I’ve received from people who have taken online courses.”

Appendix D

Interview Open Codes and Codebook

Interview Open Codes and Codebook

Country of Origin: (used in interviews and pre-screen survey): The individual either stated their country or described their country in further detail. This is usually an objective statement

Education in home country: (used in interviews): The individual talks about using the education system in their home country, what their education was in their home country, details about K-12 education, educational standards, and function of teacher/student roles in home country.

Education in U.S.: (used in interviews): The individual discussed their educational status in the U.S. The individual also states the importance of their classes in the U.S., what they are taking this semester/their major/their department, and familiarity or a lack of familiarity within their program or department. I also added their teaching or research assistant experience here because it is part of their education and if TA/RA experience is prevalent, then I may create a separate code for this.

Cultural differences (used in interviews): This is a broad code where the individual can also state cultural differences based on understanding new accents, new people, different learning styles, interactions with American (National) students, or any collectivistic or individualistic cultural difference inside or outside a classroom setting. Cultural differences can even occur within interview setting when I have to rephrase the interview question more than once or if they don't understand something.

Pedagogical differences (used in interviews): statements that the individual described the teaching differences from their home country to the U.S. Also,

pedagogical differences can attribute to the individual's experience with U.S. professor and the different ways of interaction (i.e. you can email a question to U.S. professors).

Personality (used in interviews): These statements are relevant to an individual's personality, "I am a ____" statement, something that is a concern to their personality development of "who am I?", "what will I do when I graduate", or "what is my purpose here?". Other personality words such as extrovert, conscientious, or outgoing are some examples of how the individual views themselves.

Values and morals: statements about the individual's upbringing, value of education, or cultural morals based on home countries' society.

Goals: the individual states personal goals related to their education or life, for example if they state that they want to become a professor that is a goal.

Technology experience (used in interviews): The individual talks about their experience using the internet, computers, and experience with softwares programs (i.e., SPSS) or even with Blackboard, email, Skype, or any similar tool.

Technology experience in education: Using course related technology to complete exams assignments, etc. This includes discussion about using Blackboard for class specific work and their experience with using technology for their educational goals.

Face-to-face technology experience: Using laptop or internet and technology (i.e., smartphones, blackboard, etc.) in classroom settings in-person.

Access to technology (used in interviews and pre-screen survey): individual described access to internet or computer use/access in home country and U.S. What age they used a computer, whether they were able to afford one, paying for an online course, and their

country's educational access to computers/technology for students. In pre-screen survey, they also stated whether they had access to internet at home and that is an objective statement.

Positive attitudes toward technology (used in interviews): The individual states that they think technology is easy, good, interesting, fun, more online courses should be offered, prefer online courses, liking and enjoying an online course or technology. These statements are good experiences with technology and online courses, pretty subjective as these statements may overlap with benefits within online courses.

Negative attitudes toward technology (used in interviews): The individual states that they do not like an online course, they prefer face-to-face courses, find ways to cheat in online courses (this could be an issue), face-to-face (FTF) courses should not disappear ("offer more FTF courses") and negative experience faced by other international students about the online course/technology.

Benefits within online courses (used in interviews): This open code can be related to positive attitudes with technology, most statements surround "I like online classes because..." or "I think some benefits are...". Benefits within online courses can include convenience, not needing to attend in person, or ease of online course.

Issues within online course (used in interviews): When the individual explains their experience or stories they have heard from other graduate students taking an online course and the issues they faced. Some issues could be unclear or unorganized online course, challenges they faced, technology-related issues such as internet dies down, microphone or webcam does not work, and lack of knowledge on how to navigate through an online course. Issues about professors within online courses could be coded

here and even challenges that professors faced in the online context (i.e., miscommunication, cheating students, or not replying or responding to students).

Hybrid courses (used in interviews): This is a straightforward code if the individual talked about hybrid course preference and their experience within a hybrid class.

Positive experience with hybrid course: a more specific mention of preference or enjoyment about taking a hybrid course.

Negative experience with hybrid course: a more specific mention of issues or dislikes about taking a hybrid course.

Online course experience (used in interviews and pre-screen survey): In the pre-screen survey, the individual responded to how many online courses they took in undergraduate, masters, and Ph.D. separated by home and U.S. education. Online courses or MOOCs offered, details about what those online courses were about, and if online courses are offered in their major/program whether in the U.S. or their home country.

Transition to the U.S. (used in interviews): The individual describes what it was like coming to the U.S., any culture shock they experienced, adjustment or acculturation (i.e. adaptation to various structures of learning).

Codebook

<i>Nodes</i>	<i>Evidence:</i>	<i>Example(s)</i>
Country of Origin	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Statement of country 2. Describing home country lifestyle, geography, facts about city, and people 3. Also found in pre-screen survey 	“India”
Education in home country	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Bachelor’s or home country university 2. Description of education system in home country 3. Other information found about education in home country (e.g., student life, courses taken, etc) 	“I went to a Private university in India, we all wore uniforms in our university.”
Education in U.S	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Statement of their major or current program at the university in U.S. 2. Courses they are currently enrolled in. 3. Description of classmates, student life, department, teaching or research assistantship. 	“I am a TA for an online class currently.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Cultural differences</i> (sub-code under education in U.S.) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Culturally related norms and differences trying to understand other cultures. 2. Confusion during interview session - “what do you mean?” 3. Something that is related to adjustment of cultural values to U.S. standards. 4. Educational differences in home country or upbringing versus education in U.S. 5. Personal beliefs related to their culture. 	<p>“In China, all we had were exam, so it is different when we have papers, assignments, and exams in the U.S.”</p> <p>“I am not sure how to email a professor because I never sent an email to my professor in India, if I had a question I would ask them in person.”</p> <p>“There is a more stress in the U.S. because I feel like everyone is on their own, or maybe I don’t know, can you repeat the question, I didn’t understand.”</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Pedagogical differences</i> (sub-code under education in U.S.). 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This is when the individual states that their professor teaches differently than what they are accustomed to. 2. Group work or assignments they never done before and having to figure it out. 3. Learning how to work with American classmates or learn things more applied rather than route memorization. 	<p>“My professor at UofH asks how are we doing, or if we have any questions. That never happened in my country.”</p> <p>“My professor in China just lectured to us, he read from his notes, in the U.S. there is a lot of group work and everything is very applied.”</p>
<p>Personality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Values and morals</i> • <i>Goals</i> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Description about the individual. 2. Ideas, morals, and beliefs based on their personality, culture, or values on a topic. 3. Personal goals for the individual - could be short-term or long-term goals. 	<p>“I like spending time with my classmates.”</p> <p>“I believe that interaction is important in higher education” (Values)</p> <p>“I want to get hired right after I graduate” (Goals)</p>
<p>Technology experience</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How their experience with a computer/technology is, if they are familiar with using a computer. 2. Also, how they are able to complete online assignments or any work that deals with computers (i.e., softwares, WORD, PPT, online presentations or discussion board postings). 3. Emailing their faculty/classmates. 	<p>“I am pretty comfortable using a computer and I can send an email to my professor if I have a question.”</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Technology experience in education</i> 	<p>Using course related technology to complete exams assignments, etc. This includes discussion about using Blackboard for class specific work and their experience with using technology for their educational goals.</p>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Face-to-face technology experience</i> 	Using laptop or internet and technology (i.e., smartphones, blackboard, etc.) in classroom settings in-person.	
Access to technology	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Accessibility to the internet or computer. 2. Having online courses offered in their department. 	“Our department has a computer lab and we do have online courses offered every semester.”
Benefits within online courses	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The pros of an online course. 2. Some benefits as to why someone would take an online course. 3. The ease of communication, access, no travel time to campus, and lectures/PowerPoint slides posted online. 	“I can go back to the recorded lectures to understand what the professor said if I am every confused, and I can rewind or fast-forward through them, that is really convenient.”
Positive attitudes toward technology	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. They find online courses to be easy or fun to do. 2. Individual enjoys using technology to learn. 3. Positive attitudes could also include convenience of not turning in hard copy assignments. 	“I enjoy taking online courses, I also find they are fun if they are well-organized and structured.”
Negative attitudes toward technology	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Displeased or does not want to take an online course. 2. Would rather communicate with professor/classmates in person. 3. Does not like assignments done online, such as blackboard discussion postings. 4. Negative terms associated with tech use/computers = too boring, not interactive, unstructured, or would not prefer to ‘email/talk to someone online’. 	“I prefer face-to-face classes, and if I had a choice, I would not take an online course.”

Issues within online course	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Specific issues or challenges that the individual has faced within and online course. 2. Challenges heard from other students about their experience. 3. Technological difficulties or lack of knowledge. 	“I don’t like taking an exam online because there could be a technical difficulty or internet would shut down and I would need to restart the exam.”
Hybrid courses	Any mention of their hybrid course experience or preference.	“I think a mix of both online and face-to-face is good.”
<i>Positive experience with hybrid course</i>	Positive beliefs or experiences in a hybrid course	
<i>Negative experience with hybrid course</i>	Negative beliefs or experiences in a hybrid course	
Online course experience	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Description of how many online courses they have taken, what the courses were about and their experience within those online courses. 2. These experiences could be positive or negative (issues or benefits), but delved into detail of their experience of the online course. 3. Familiarity of having taken an online course. 	“I am glad to have taken one online course, because now I know what it is like!”
Transition to the U.S.	Adaptation to the U.S. or when they arrived and what was it like.	“I think, having to figure things out on your own in graduate school was difficult.”
Other	If you find a code that has not been created, feel free to add it.	

Appendix E

IRB Approval

UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON

DIVISION OF RESEARCH

September 21, 2015

Ms. Saira Rab
 c/o Dr. Sara Jones
 Psychological, Health, and Learning Sciences

Dear Ms. Saira Rab,

The University of Houston's Institutional Review Board, Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (1) reviewed your research proposal entitled "Online Learning Experiences of International Graduate Students" on August 7, 2015, according to federal regulations and institutional policies and procedures.

At that time, your project was granted approval contingent upon your agreement to modify your protocol as stipulated by the Committee. The changes you have made adequately fulfill the requested contingencies, and your project is now **APPROVED**.

- **Approval Date: September 21, 2015**
- **Expiration Date: September 20, 2016**

As required by federal regulations governing research in human subjects, research procedures (including recruitment, informed consent, intervention, data collection or data analysis) may not be conducted after the expiration date.

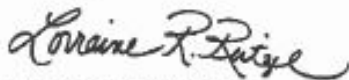
To ensure that no lapse in approval or ongoing research occurs, please ensure that your protocol is resubmitted in RAMP for renewal by the deadline for the August, 2016 CPHS meeting. Deadlines for submission are located on the CPHS website.

During the course of the research, the following must also be submitted to the CPHS:

- Any proposed changes to the approved protocol, prior to initiation; AND
- Any unanticipated events (including adverse events, injuries, or outcomes) involving possible risk to subjects or others, within 10 working days.

If you have any questions, please contact Samoya Copeland at (713) 743-9534.

Sincerely yours,



Dr. Lorraine Reitzel, Chair
 Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (1)

PLEASE NOTE: All subjects must receive a copy of the informed consent document, if one is approved for use. All research data, including signed consent documents, must be retained according to the University of Houston Data Retention Policy (found on the CPHS website) as well as requirements of the FDA and external sponsor(s), if applicable. Faculty sponsors are responsible for retaining data for student projects on the UH campus for the required period of record retention.

Protocol Number: 15627-01

Full Review: Expedited Review:

316 E. Cullen Building Houston, TX 77204-2015 (713) 743-9204 Fax: (713) 743-9577

COMMITTEES FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS.