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Acculturation process of Bhutanese students in American classroom

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BHUTAN TO THE U.S MEXICO BORDER: ACCULTURATION
EXPERIENCES OF BHUTANESE STUDENTS IN AMERICAN CLASSROOM

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Master's Program in Sociology

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Dean of the Graduate School

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Jigme Choden

2017

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this study to everyone whose paths I have crossed.

FROM BHUTAN TO THE U.S MEXICO BORDER: ACCULTURATION
EXPERIENCES OF BHUTANESE STUDENTS IN AMERICAN CLASSROOM

by

JIGME CHODEN, B.A

THIS

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The population of international students is growing across American universities (Gacel- Avila, 2005; International Education, Open Doors, 2016), yet we still have a lot to learn about their educational struggles and the tools they use to navigate classrooms in the United States (U.S.). An international student is defined as *an* “individual who temporarily resides in a foreign place for activities such as work and education” but they are also referred to as “sojourners” (Gullekson & Vancouver, 2010, p. 315). U.S. education in the 21st Century is becoming increasingly diverse (Leong, 2015). Part of this increasing diversity in American classrooms is attributed to an increase in the number of international students. In 2015-16, the international student population consisted of 1,043,839 and increased to 1,078,822 in 2016-17 (International Education, Open Door, 2017). Therefore, the student population on English–Speaking campuses represents more foreign countries than ever before (Gacel- Avila, 2005).

This study is based on the classroom experience of students from Bhutan, a small country in the Himalayas located in between India and China, at a southwestern university in the U.S. To date, scholarship on the experiences of Asian international students at U.S. institutions has largely focused on students from India, China, Korea, and Japan (e.g., Mallinckrodt & Wang, 2006; Chang & Dao, 2007). Yet, the experiences of other international Asian students have been neglected or studied under the pan-ethnic category of Asian (e.g., Chung, 2001; Park, Song, & Lee, 2014). This is a concern given that students with pan-Asian backgrounds represent different cultural backgrounds and values and thus cannot be treated as a homogenous group (Fritz, Chin & DeMarinis, 2008).

The general objective of this study is to examine the acculturation patterns of Bhutanese students in a university considered a Hispanic Serving Institution. Thus far, literature

on international students has largely focused on topics like, eating habits, psychological, cultural, and emotional challenges (Wu & Smith, 2016; Yan & FitzPatrick, 2016; Suh, van Nuenen, & Rice, 2016). Therefore, large portions of the literature on international students are found in the disciplines of Psychology and Health and Sciences (Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Wang, Wei, Zhao, Chuang, & Li, 2015; Zhang & Goodson, 2011).

Yet, the sociology of education can contribute to examining the transition for international students from their home country to America, which is overwhelming due to differences in culture, structures, and services (Mesidor, 2016). International students face challenges in adapting to the college and classroom environments being that it differs from their own countries (Slaten, Elison, Lee, Yough, & Scalise, 2016; Terrazas-Carrillo, Hong, & Pace, 2014; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Further research is needed in several areas of internationalization of education including ways in which international students are accommodated into campus programs (American Council of Education, 1984; 1998).

This study is based on the acculturation experiences of the Bhutanese students in a Southwestern American University classroom. Additionally, I will examine different strategies of acculturation that Bhutanese students employ in American classrooms. All these experiences will be based on data from twenty Bhutanese international students gathered through the photovoice and semi-structured interviews. The interviews will allow for an in-depth understanding on how the Bhutanese students understand the new environment accompanied by the participants' photographs. This study will expand on the acculturation of international students in the U.S, especially with respect to acculturating in the classrooms, through the experience of the Bhutanese students.

Bhutan

Bhutan is small country with a population of 779,666 (National Statistics Bureau, Bhutan). Bhutan, known as the land of the Thunder Dragon is a small mountainous country nestled in the Himalayan range and lies in between the two giant countries of the world, China and India (Figure 1). The country provides free universal education (Phuntsho, 2000; Thomson, 2006) and health care services and has also banned all tobacco products (Thomson, 2006).



Figure 1.1: Map of Bhutan Source: <http://www.tourism.gov.bt/map>

Bhutan was under the leadership of the Wangchuck dynasty from 1907 until 2008. In 2008, Bhutan became a constitutional democracy; the transition from monarchy to democracy came from the fourth under the leadership of King Jigme Singye Wangchuck. Bhutan was one of the last nations in the world to embrace modernity and launch the process of modernization. It was in the middle of the twentieth century with the reign of the third king when Bhutan's modern era began, the third King, Bhutan remembers as the father of modern Bhutan. In the second half of the twentieth century, Bhutan saw the introduction of modern legislative, judiciary and administrative mechanisms, monetization of the economy, development of infrastructure such as roads, enhanced communications with the outside world, and the secularization of education. As a consequence, Bhutan also saw the arrival of urban,

capitalist industrial, and technological developments associated with modernization (Karma Phuntsho, 2013). Dessallien, the author of *Democracy, Good Governance and Happiness* describes some views from the Kingdom of Bhutan describe the King as follows;

The King is widely considered benevolent and wise. The people are not clamoring for multi-party democracy, neither the masses nor the elite. The King has repeatedly explained that no governance system heavily dependent on the character and designs of a single person is good for the people in the long run. Therefore, of his own accord, he set about realising a grand plan to transition the country from an absolute to a constitutional monarchy, within a parliamentary democracy (Dessallien, 2005, p. 2).

The isolation of Bhutan was to protect the country from fast-paced globalization and modernization from the outside world. However, in 1999, Bhutan opened its door to the outside world with the introduction of cable television and the Internet. Until this date Bhutan had succeeded in limiting exposure to global trade, foreign capital investment, and tourism (Thomson, 2006).

Bhutan is now globally known for its developmental model of the Gross National Happiness (GNH) as opposed to Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The fourth King Jigme Singye Wangchuck derived the concept of GNH in 1972, observing, “Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross National Product.” Since then, the fifth King, Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck proposed that the government policies should formally pursue around the various dimensions relating to the quality of life, beyond the mere materialism measured by GNH (Tshiteem & Everest-Phillips, 2016). The GNH framework is based on four pillars; 1) equitable and sustainable socio economic development, 2) cultural values 3) natural environment, and 4) good governance (Tshiteem & Everest-Phillips, 2016).

Theoretical Framework

Acculturation

When international students decide to enroll for higher education in a new country, they have to adjust to the new daily difficulties regarding life, academics, and their emotional attachment to family and friends they have left behind (Iwamoto & Liu, 2010). A challenge that almost all the international students face would be adapting to a completely new culture (Iwamoto & Liu, 2010), and in the case of Bhutanese students, western values and lifestyles in the United States which are different from their upbringing in their own country. International students, however, usually do not intend to settle in the host country and plan on returning to their home country after they graduate (Garza, 2015). Therefore the acculturation framework provides a useful lens to examine the experiences of Bhutanese students.

Initially acculturation was defined and described as a unilinear model. In this model the acculturating group or individual acculturated to the dominant society's mainstream culture. The acculturating group or individual is likely in an agreement with the dominating society's values and behavior, and therefore, less likely to hold onto their own values and behaviors from their home culture (Berry & Annis, 1974; Szapocznik, Scopetta, Kurtines, & Aranalde, 1978). The literature on acculturation further developed and researchers presented acculturation was not necessarily a unilinear process (Berry, 1980, 2005; Cameron & Lalonde, 1994). Discussion later presented that acculturation can occur in various ways and does not necessarily result in structural assimilation. Acculturation, for instance, could also be reactive where both acculturating group and the dominant group resist to change, or creative where that new cultural forms that are not found in both the home or the receiving societies are driving

acculturation (Social Research Council, 1954). The acculturation theoretical framework is important in this study because it relays the process of acculturation based on the experiences of the Bhutanese students. Therefore, the four strategies define the experiences of the Bhutanese students at different point in their acculturation process.

A useful theoretical tool is to examine Berry's (1980) four strategies of acculturation. The acculturating strategies describe the various methods that groups or individuals, utilized to acculturate in their new environment. Below is a description of each of the four strategies of acculturation (Berry 1980, 1997).

Assimilation is generally used to describe when groups / individuals do not wish to maintain their own cultural identity and adopt or seek daily interaction with other/ or the dominant culture (Berry, 1997). **Separation** occurs when the group or individual actively try to maintain their culture in the host society and even distance themselves or avoid any interaction with others or the dominant culture. **Marginalization** occurs when the outside group/ individual shows "little possibility or interest in cultural maintenance (often for reasons of enforced cultural loss) and little interest in having relations with others in the host society (often for reasons of exclusion or discrimination)" (Berry, 1997, p. 11). **Integration** refers to when the out-group/individuals express interest in maintaining their own culture, but still interact with others in the dominant group and participate in a larger mainstream social daily. According to the concept of integration, not only do out-groups/individuals adopt to dominate societal values, society also has a responsibility to modify national institutions (e.g. education, health, and labor) to fit the needs of the out-group in order to have a pluralistic society (Berry, 1997). Integration is also referred to as biculturalism (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005). The benefit of integration/biculturalism is that once it is achieved, it is easier for groups/individuals to become

adjusted and display pro-social interactions in the dominant society (Chen, Benet-Martínez, & Bond, 2008; Schwartz, Zamboanga, & Jarvis, 2007).

When examining the acculturation patterns of international students it is important to keep in mind that most of them have no intentions of settling in the host country. I hypothesized that international students may seek to integration as the mode of acculturation so that they can adopt to the new culture but still maintain strong ethnic ties with their home country. It is also possible for out-groups/-individuals to use different strategies in different situations. Therefore, while international students may adopt a different strategy to acculturate to their host society they may utilize a different strategy in the classroom. The objective of this thesis is to examine the acculturation strategies that Bhutanese students use in American classrooms.

Literature Review

International students enter into an environment different from their own in terms of culture, language, educational setting, and traditions, and have to adjust to different and new things (see Bista, 2015). When students transition into a new country and a new university. The international students have to adjust to the education system of the country and the state in which the students are studying (Mesidor & Sly, 2016). For example, Mesidor & Sly (2016) also found that international students could be challenged with the process of registering for classes, as it is different from their country of origin. When it came to understanding the curriculum, the international students are not well informed about the curriculum and the course structure (especially the credit system), students are overwhelmed (Mesidor & Sly, 2016) because the students followed a different system in their home countries.

Being close to the border brings a lot of diversity in the subjects and the classroom as a whole for the students to explore. The acculturation of international students was previously studied in examining the international students' sense of belonging on campus and Asian international students' sense of belonging, as well as implications for concealing psychologists, including the interventions at individual and institutional levels (Slaten, Elison, & Yough, 2016). Earlier studies have found international students' use of the mass media before and after coming to U.S. as a strategy for their acculturation process in the U.S (Reece & Palmgreen, 2000). Researchers have also studied international students difficulty in the transition to American higher education as the international students from China struggled with language, social, and academic acculturation through programs developed to acclimate students to life at an American University (Dixon, 2014).

English Language Proficiency

Although English is widely spoken globally, most countries use their national/native language for communication and as a medium of instruction in the classrooms (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1991). English is a second language in most countries, and thus the international students do have some exposure to English, albeit they are not as fluent and proficient as their American peers (Wang et al., 2015). International students come from diverse backgrounds and their educational experiences may also be different from the standards and the expectations of U.S academic standards and expectations (Grab, 2017). Therefore, the international students limited English proficiency causes challenges in writing assignments, understanding lectures, (Smith & Khawja, 2011) and conversationally (Telbis & Kingsbury, 2014). As a result, international students may need assistance in adapting to the U.S's academic requirements (Angelova & Riazantseva, 1999).

Another example is the language difficulty, the use of slang used by American students. When conversing with American students, international students have a difficult time understanding due to the high usage of slang words (see Zimmerman, 1995). This in turn can create difficulty-understanding peers in the classroom (Li, 2017). Zimmerman (1995) recognized several needs for effective communication, such as the proficiency in the English language, networking with American students and friends that international students might have ignored to ease their transition into the American classroom settings. International students feel they needed to put in more effort in the class to understand the conversations in the class and the professor and students who spoke very fast (Li, 2017). Furthermore, international students often laugh at jokes because they do not understand them (Li, 2017). Hence, even when international students speak English, they still have to make an effort to speak like the American

students. The student is also worried they will not be able to articulate their thoughts (Girmay, 2017). Therefore, international students feel their lack of proficiency in the English language limited their class participation, comprehension, and their confidence to develop friendships, which leads to miscommunications and misunderstandings (Leong, 2015; Li, 2017; Grab, 2017).

Student –professor interaction

Another possible challenge that international students experience is understanding the student –professor relationship. The Chinese international students described their relationship with their college professors in the U.S more like a friendship and feel that the students can ask anything in addition to calling the professor by their names (Leong, 2015). On the contrary, international students from Sweden felt that professors in their home country were more like friends and that professors in America were more formal (Leong, 2015).

Another possible obstacle is the variation in how international students are socialized to interact in classrooms versus American students. According to Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping, & Todman (2008) both the Chinese and American students perceived Chinese students as conservative and obedient, while American students were seen by the Chinese participants as questioning and independent. This contrast in student behavior can be important given that American teachers are seen and regarded as facilitators who encourage learner autonomy, in contrast to those in China (Leong, 2015). Moreover, the professors in China simply use lectures (Leong, 2015) and thus do not require as much student interactions in class. It is also difficult for international students to approach faculty for help both in and outside of the classroom. The international students in Girmay's (2017) study found that international students may also face difficulty in approaching faculty for help since they do not want to be perceived as questioning

and disrespecting their authority. Consequently, international students might not know to start a conversation with a faculty member or professor, which can challenge their academic achievement and acculturation to American classrooms (see Gillette, 2005; Leong, 2015, Zhou et al., 2008). In particular, this is a concern since communication with faculty and instructors is essential for international students who may face additional challenges and where instructor motivation is essential (Trice, 2001). In turn, international students become more successful when the professors show concern and try to incorporate different learning styles in the classroom (Kumi-Yeboah, 2014 & Trice, 2001). Liu (2016) acknowledges that participants found it helpful when professors were willing to provide assistance and adjust their lecture to help international students understand. Furthermore, students also added that knowing and receiving emails from the dean and the professors reaching out to the students to ask if they did not understand the class was very helpful (Liu, 2016). Unfortunately, not all professors are as aware of the needs of international students. Trice (2001) stated that there are other professors who said they are unaware of the needs of international students or simply perceived that they should be taught to follow the American learning style.

Developing friendship with classmates

The literature on international students and their friendships with their classmates in particular is limited. However, the literature does address the international students and their interactions with their classmates (Rienties, et al., 2012, Li, 2017). Having friends can also have a positive impact on the student's' academics by providing motivation and encouraging international students to strive for good results (Lui, 2016). For example, Chinese international students felt encouraged when the classmates asked them if they understood the professor's

lecture (Liu, 2016). Leong (2015), for example, found that having American friends benefitted in improving the Chinese international students English skills. However, and despite the benefit American friends could provide, the Chinese international students found developing that friendship was difficult. The participants felt it was difficult developing friendships with the classmates because the students in the class had different class schedules, whereas in China, everyone in a class would have the same schedule. The participant in the study added, his classmates come to class before the class starts and leaves right after class is finished, so there is no chance to talk to the classmates (Leong, 2015).

Li (2017) in the study shows how Chinese international students encountered challenges in the classroom setting, and found that Chinese international students expressed barriers in connecting with the American classmates even to have a casual conversation. The Chinese participants felt that their lack of knowledge on American culture, pop culture, and language made it challenging to have conversations. Therefore, felt neglected during such conversations because of which one of the participants felt like he/she does not know how to talk with foreigners. Therefore, it is concerning when the majority of the international students do not have any family or friends in America who can help them when they arrive to the new environment (Justice & McLachlan, 2009). The transition from the student's home country to the U. S. causes a shift in the student's social support. For example, Chinese international students said their own parents were their primary source of support while in China (Bertram, et al., 2014) and they continue to be so while in America where they are still dependent on their parents for serious matters related to extreme stress, significant life events, or financial matters (Bertram, et al., 2014). Yet, Chinese international students felt that when students faced challenges with schoolwork, they depended on friends (Bertram, et al., 2014). In such

situations, Chinese students in America perceived that they could not depend on their parents for help with schoolwork (Bertram, et al., 2014).

In addition to not having to rely on the assistance from relatives in the new environment, not being familiar with the host country's cultural norms can impede international students from developing friendships (Justice & McLachlan, 2009; Khawaja & Smith, 2011). As mentioned previously, developing friendships is particularly important for international students who depend on friends to navigate schoolwork (Bertram et al., 2014). However, the process of making friends with American students is slow for the international students (Rienties et al., 2012; Zhou et al, 2011). Yet, once international students interact more with other students, including the American students, it is not difficult to maintain those friendships (Fehr, 1996; Duijn, Zeggelink, Huisman, Stokman & Wasseur, 2003; Wimmer & Lewis, 2010).

My Experiences as an International Student

This study is important because this transition for Bhutanese students does not just affect them geographically and culturally but academically, the sole purpose for their journey to the U.S and this study. It is useful to understand the challenges the Bhutanese students face in their classrooms considering the difference in the educational setting and structure in the U.S. Therefore for context, I would like to share my educational experiences as an international student from Bhutan. As an international student from Bhutan, acclimating to technology can be difficult because we come from a country that has only recently adapted to the Internet and cable television in 1999. Post 1999, my exposure to the world beyond Bhutan was overwhelming. With so much content on the television from other countries, it became hard to filter the inflow of information that I was receiving.

The educational experiences for Bhutanese students are different in many aspects compared to the U.S. education system, from having school uniforms, to the classroom setting, to teaching learning styles. When I came to the U.S., my perception of the U.S. education experience was drawn from movies and television series that include spending more time on social activities compared to time spent in the classroom.

The importance of this topic, acculturation of Bhutanese students in the U.S., surfaced as a result of my own experiences as an international student from Bhutan. As I thought of my experiences I immediately considered acculturating to a new learning environment, which was the largest challenge. Acculturating to my new environment became a pressing issue. Acculturation is broadly defined as a process that involves the adjustment and adaptation of individuals or groups as they begin to settle into a new socio-cultural environment (Berry, 1980). My experiences of encountering a new educational setting along with a new method of

learning and understanding that differed from my own, challenged my learning in the classroom made me wonder if other Bhutanese students went through the same challenges.

Figure 1.2 represents my adjustment to a new educational environment. When I was studying in Bhutan I did not use the library as much, nor did I learn to use the resources the library had. Retrospectively, when I was in high school in Bhutan, I had one class period of forty-five minutes to an hour every week to be in the library. It was scheduled in my weekly class timetable as library period. That was the only time I went to the library. I turned in physical copies of my assignments and work. Here in the U.S., in contrast, I constantly found myself spending more time in the library learning to use resources like the online library, taking advantage of tutoring from the writing center, and taking advantage of the silent floors to work on my writing assignments.



Figure 1.2. My university library here in the U.S.

I initially thought I should not have a difficult time adapting to the transition from Bhutan to the U.S. with regards to lifestyle and academics. I was very confident on my ability to speak and write English. Yet, English is not my first language. Since I was always taught in English from pre-school through high school and I did not struggle with English during my undergraduate education in India, I did not expect to struggle with English here in the U.S.

I never considered the challenges or the complexities of acculturation in the classroom until I began to experience them first hand. When I started graduate school I embodied the Bhutanese philosophy of happiness. I was excited to read the course descriptions and I generally felt positive even if I tended to downplay the difficulty. On the first day of class, however, the Bhutanese happiness philosophy was difficult to sustain as I became overwhelmed and questioned my academic abilities. I felt this way because I never had to read multiple materials in an analytical and critical manner. My experience as a student did not train me to critically evaluate textbooks but only to read and to memorize material taught in class. In my experience as a student in a Bhutanese high school and undergraduate college in India, there was not enough focus on writing critical analysis or about variations in academic writing. The variations in training differed from what was expected of me as a graduate student in the U.S.

Figures 1.3 and 1.4 represent my transition from an under-graduate in Bhutan to an international student in the U.S. In Figure 1.3, I am planning my outline for my paper for my class; I remembered feeling overwhelmed with the assignment. I outlined my paper first on my notebook to get an idea of how and what to write before I began to type. Figure 1.4, represents the use of all available resources, technology and books used to schedule my study time. As I planned my study time I made more time for difficult assignments, but I also scheduled

appointments with my classmates and professors who could help me understand certain topics or problems.

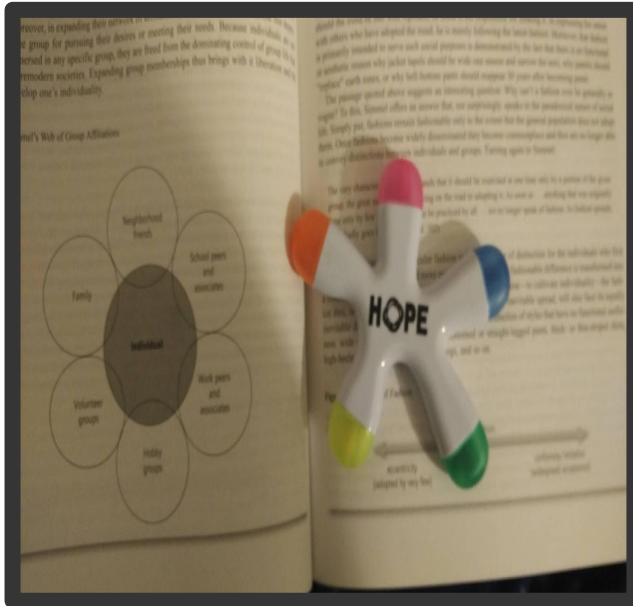


Figure 1.3: Planning my paper

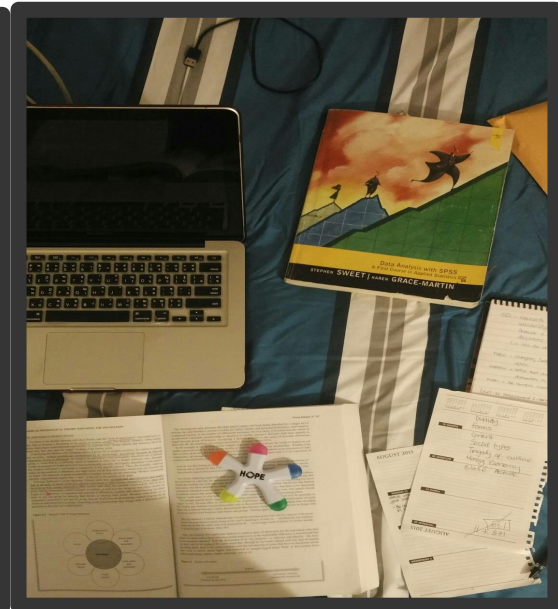


Figure 1.4: Scheduling my timetable

These photographs represent my transition to American education because writing is one of my biggest challenges. In fact, I do not remember writing an academic paper in my undergraduate education. I am not alone in this experience. Writing is a major challenge for international student generally (Grab, 2017; Khawaja & Smith, 2011; Yu et al., 2003). As I submit my assignments for my classes, I am continuously nervous about my writing. The challenge of writing academically is a skill most international students do not develop in high school. Therefore, this is one of the biggest challenges for me to acculturate to in American classrooms. This challenge can also become a hindrance for educational attainment among international students in the U.S (Selvadurai, 1991-2). Similar to my own experience, when I am not confident in my writing, I fear that I am not delivering my content well.

Aside from writing, in American classrooms, students are expected to participate actively and ask questions. However, when I was in school in Bhutan, I would not ask any questions in class, I was too scared to say I did not understand and I do not recall my classmates asking questions either. I cannot tell if I was scared of the teacher or if it was the fear of feeling stupid amongst the other students. I carried that experience with me when I entered graduate school. It was hard to be a part of the conversation or to ask questions. Earlier studies also show this as a challenge for the international students in their acculturation process in academic achievement (Gillette, 2005; Leong, 2015, Zhou et al., 2008). However, I decided to put in more time to understand my course material and reach out to the professors and classmates for help. I had to get out of the traditional notion of being too shy to ask for help.

Prior to experiencing this personally, I had only heard stories of how some Bhutanese students studying in a foreign land faced challenges that led some students to return home before graduating. Therefore, this study will build on prior studies about acculturation of international students (Hamamura & Laird, 2014; Leong, 2015; Lowinger, He, Lin & Chang, 2014; Li, Marbley, Bradley, & Lan, 2016; Glass, & Westmont, 2014; Bertram Poulakis, Elsasser, & Kumar, 2014; Sullivan, & Kashubeck-West, 2015; Park, Song, & Lee, 2014; Glass, 2014; Jackson, Ray, & Bybell, 2013; Glass, Gómez, & Urzua, 2014; Du & Wei, 2015; Almohanna, Conforti, Eigel, & Barbeau, 2015; Hirai, Frazier, & Syed, 2015; Han & Pong, 2015; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015) by examining acculturation experiences in the classroom and how social networks are used to navigate these environments. Prior studies have examined the acculturation of international students in American Universities in leisure activities both on and off campus, leisure constraints, language, and social networking to successful adaptation to university life (Gómez, Urzúa, & Glass, 2014). I built on these studies by closely

examining acculturating to a new learning environment. I also contribute to the literature on acculturation and higher education by examining a group that is under-represented in literature; Bhutanese students in a context that is also represented in higher education literature in the southwest.

Chapter2: Data and Methods

Participants

All the Bhutanese students at the University were asked to participate in this project. As a Bhutanese student myself, I know and have access to this population. It is significant to note that I am one of the only three graduate students from Bhutan. Effective Of Spring 2017, thirty (undergraduate) Bhutanese students were enrolled. I had approached all thirty Bhutanese students about participating in the study. Out of the thirty Bhutanese students, twenty agreed to participant. The remaining ten either had a very busy schedule or initially agreed to be part of the study but later was not responsive to emails or text messages during the follow up. The remaining ten Bhutanese students either had a very busy schedule and few of them agreed but were not responsive to emails or texts during the follow up. From those twenty, only sixteen students participated in the photovoice portion of the study. Below is the list of Bhutanese students who were part of this study.

Table 1.1: List of participants

	Pseudo Name	Year	Age	Gender	Major	Are you on scholarship
1	Zuki	Freshman	18	F	Pre Business	No
2	Wangda	Freshman	19	M	Accounting	No
3	Samden	Junior	21	F	Physics	Yes
4	Yoedhen	Freshman	21	F	Nursing	No
5	Yangzo	Freshman	19	F	Math	Yes
6	Lhendup	Junior	22	M	General Finance	No
7	Thinley	Junior	22	M	Finance	No
8	Tandi	Junior	24	M	Environmental Science	No
9	Selzom	Junior	21	F	Nursing	No

10	Dechen	Junior	23	F	Accounting	No
11	Choney	Sophomore	21	F	Accounting	No
12	Denka	Junior	21	F	Accounting	No
13	Yarphel	Sophomore	20	M	Engineering	No
14	Khando	Sophomore	21	F	Nursing	No
15	Sangay	Freshman	21	M	Pre Business	No
16	Choying	Junior	20	F	Math	Yes
17	Selden	Junior	21	F	Physics	No
18	Yangki	Freshman	20	F	Economics	No
19	Penjor	Sophomore	19	M	Math	Yes
20	Dorji	Junior	21	M	Accounting	No

Methods

First-phase: Photovoice

The first-phase of the study is based on photo-voice methodology that allows students to be a part of the project and not merely respondents (Wang & Burris, 1994). Through photovoice, the students are empowered to document their stories or issues through photography. Photovoice does not limit the respondents to only document what the issue or concern is, but also allows the respondents to document what they see and feel are the strengths. According to Harper (2012), in a photovoice project, the photographs are not important on their own, but they are important for the role and the interpretation of the person who takes the photographs. Therefore, the Bhutanese students in this study photographed their acculturation process as an international student in this southwestern university. Pseudo names are used to protect the confidentiality of all the respondents.

I am using photovoice as one of my methods because of my own experience, of documenting my transition as a Bhutanese international student in the U.S classrooms. I enjoy photography and as an international student I began to document my experiences here through photographs. However, I considered using photo voice as a method after learning the value of photographs and their interpretations from the Visual Sociology Class for which I was a Teaching Assistant. I learned it would be an interesting and a valuable avenue for my participants to share their acculturation experience through photographs and by interpreting what their photographs meant. I felt this avenue of documenting the adjustment to American classrooms, is especially valuable given that English is not our native language. Therefore, I began with a photovoice project with the Bhutanese students to get a sense of how they interpreted their transition from Bhutan to the U.S classroom through the avenue of photographs.

Photovoice Instructions

In the photo-voice portion of the study, sixteen Bhutanese students were asked to think about how they are adjusting to the transition from the educational system in Bhutan to their classroom experiences in the U.S. The Bhutanese students were given a month starting November 4, 2016 to submit a minimum of 5 and a maximum of 10 photographs each. In total I received 138 photographs. The respondents could photograph anything they felt was a part of their acculturation process. The respondents did not have to worry about the technical aspect of photography. The photographs had to be taken by the respondent and so they were not allowed to download pictures from the Internet or use a picture that someone else took. The respondents were not allowed to edit the pictures using any photo editing software. All of the respondents had access to a camera on their phones. Most students used their phones to take pictures, and a few Bhutanese students submitted pictures they took before they came to the U.S to show their transition into the U.S. The pictures have to be clear to be usable in the study. The Bhutanese students submitted a lot of pictures of themselves and other people. However, the study will blur faces of the other people in the picture because the participants do not have consent from other people in the picture. The Bhutanese students were aware these pictures were going to be used for the study and all the sixteen students who took part in the photo voice signed the photo consent forms. However, to protect the identity of the Bhutanese students and other people in the picture, none of the pictures that would identify the students and other individuals in the photographs were used.

Twenty Bhutanese students signed the consent to be interviewed. All twenty Bhutanese students also agreed to have their interviews recorded. This study received approval from the International Regulatory Board.

Second- phase: In-depth interviews

The second phase of the study involved in-depth semi-structured interviews. All twenty Bhutanese students took part in the in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews took place from November 2016 to June 2017. The semi-structured interview questions were asked about the students' academic and social transitions from Bhutan to the U.S classrooms. To reach the research objectives, this study will use photovoice and in-depth interviews. All interviews were transcribed verbatim. The data was coded for the following: acculturation, culture, functionality, classroom experience, networking with professors and classmates, and making friends (see Appendix A for interview guide). The interviews lasted between thirty to forty-five minutes. All of the interviews were conducted in English. Thirteen respondents were interviewed on campus at my office and seven in a private residence. The interviews that were conducted were all recorded with the respondents' permission. The Bhutanese students were not promised any cash or other gifts for being a part of the study. All respondents were offered non-alcoholic beverages and snacks before and after the interview.

My personal Bias

I did consider and self-reflect on whether my own personal bias as a Bhutanese influenced my analyses. In order to minimize this concern I was aware of my gestures and language during the interview. I made sure not to show any leading expressions in terms of my tone to the Bhutanese students' responses. I also did not share any of my views with the participants as it might have led them to thinking I would want specific answers to certain questions. I was consistent in telling the participants that I wanted to hear their views

and their experiences and that I am not looking for specific answers from them. This did put my participants at ease, as they knew the questions did not have a correct answer.

Chapter 3: Findings

Acculturation Experiences

The findings reveal the complexity involved in acculturating to American classrooms for Bhutanese students. The most common acculturative stressors that I found are what Ying (2005), Berry, Kim, Mind, & Mok, (1987) categorizes as cultural (e.g. cultural differences) and functional (e.g., academic difficulties). The findings in findings section demonstrated the experiences the Bhutanese students encountered as international students in their classrooms. Therefore, the findings below show the different challenges and experiences the Bhutanese students found in a new learning space. However, it is important to remember all the experiences and the example the Bhutanese students refer to regarding their schools in India and Thailand are subjective and cannot be generalized for all educational institutions. Below I will first discuss cultural and functional stressors to acculturation among Bhutanese international students, followed by findings on the tools that these students use to navigate these barriers.

In examining the acculturation of Bhutanese students, the findings became very evident that adapting to the American educational culture is among the most important factors for the academic success of Bhutanese students. First, the Bhutanese students felt the stress from the onset of the first semester when choosing an elective. This is consistent with Mesidor & Sly (2016) who also found that international students experienced difficulty with course selection and in understanding the course structure, which is very different from their home countries. From twenty Bhutanese students, fifteen of them expressed concerns about choosing classes and electives. For example, Selden (a junior) explained her confusion of seeing so many different classes to choose from, many of which she had never heard of. In particular, Selden stated, " It was kind of hard for us in the beginning because we don't have these types of classes

in Bhutan. I don't think we have the idea of the kind of courses we were going to take so it was difficult for us." The variations in educational requirements in Bhutan and America challenges acculturation to American classrooms. For example, the university here in the U.S had so many electives to choose from and the Bhutanese students were not sure why they needed electives. Choying, a junior, similarly stated that "In Bhutan we don't have a lot of classes to choose from so we did not know what classes to take [in America], we did not have to register for classes online and we did not know how the registration of classes worked here in the University." The option to choose electives in colleges in Bhutan are very limited, and earlier studies also show international students is challenged with a new system of registering for classes (see Bista, 2015; Mesidor & Sly, 2016).

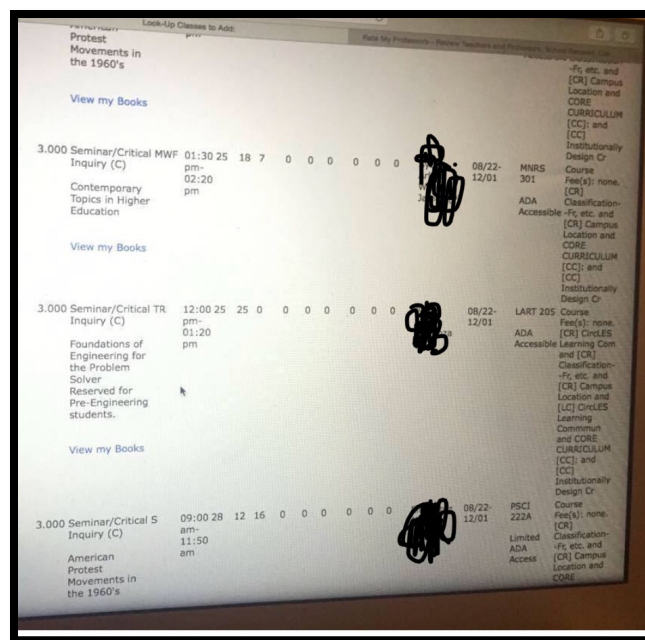


Figure 1.5: Selden's picture showing an online registration of classes

Selden was so stressed about the registration process that in the photovoice portion of the study (where I asked students to document their educational experiences) she submitted a

picture of courses available during online registration (Figure 1.5). Not having familiarity with the American educational system and even labor market requirements jeopardizes the Bhutanese students' ability to pick the correct courses. While the Bhutanese students have the opportunity to choose classes, they still face the confusion of what the class entails and whether they would enjoy the class.

The study also found the Bhutanese students expressed cultural differences between their home country and the U.S., challenged class participation. For example, Yarphele a sophomore expressed that "...being Bhutanese we are not used to speaking up our mind, so even if we don't understand anything we don't have the confidence to approach the teacher." The Bhutanese students also held themselves back in their class discussions because of both cultural variations in communication styles and a lack of fully understanding English. Samden, a junior, for example did not feel comfortable to speak out in class and notify the instructor when she did not understand the discussion. Similar, Zuki a freshman, was overwhelmed to see how her classmates who had been educated in the U.S. comfortably participated in class, which made her feel subconscious about your own class participation. In particular, Zuki explained:

Recently in class, one of the professors was saying something and the students were participating so actively in the class. There was a lot of participation and it kind of made me feel dumb because I wasn't participating much. In most of my classes the students participate and they ask more questions. I guess they are like more confident or comfortable saying like whatever they want to and that makes me feel dumb because I don't do that and I still don't do that in my classes. But its nice to see that there is active participation; I did not see that in my high school class in Bhutan.

Zuki recognized the difference between her classroom culture in Bhutan and in her current university. Unfortunately, rather than recognizing those differences as cultural differences, she internalized it by questioning how smart she was. She felt like she did not have the confidence to engage actively in class and observed her classmates abilities to ask questions when in doubt. Yangki, a freshman shared a similar experience when commenting that, “sometimes, I think my questions will sound silly, and I cannot ask... I ask only if I feel it is important.” Dechen, a junior, even avoids situations where she needs to participate in class discussions. Specifically, she stated:

It’s also difficult for me to do everything that is required in class as far as speaking up and participating because when I went to school [in India] it’s not that they didn’t want us to do it, it is just not emphasized as much so I find it very difficult to be able to talk in front of labs. I have noticed that I try to avoid situations where I’ll need to speak up in class and I won’t go because I’m required to do so but that does not hinder my classroom experience.

The second challenge is communication. Communicating with the professor is essential for college success of all students (Liu, 2016; Kumi-Yeboah, 2014 & Trice, 2001). Therefore, cultural variations in student-professor communication and relationships between Bhutan and America can hamper educational success. Consistent with Girmay (2017) international students face challenges in approaching the professor because in their home country it is disrespectful to question authority. The Bhutanese students experienced the same, as they were not able to ask their doubts in class. Denka, a junior said she could not even share her opinion let alone ask questions. The study found the Bhutanese students perceived their teachers as an authoritative figure and questioning them was not common through the cultural lens. In

most Asian cultures this was seen as questioning the person in authority instead of the information presented. In addition, in a Bhutanese setting classroom, the Bhutanese students felt asking questions made them feel like they were being judged. Therefore, their experience translates to their experience here in the U.S. Samden a junior was over taken by her nervousness and shyness at the same time – she was shy and could not say she did not understand the information or that she had a question.

Additionally, Bhutanese students are unsure about how to reach out to professors in the university. For example, Kaka a junior, felt anxious when he learned he had to set an appointment to see his professor because he had never had to set an appointment with any Bhutanese teachers before. Kaka explained that as a high school student “in Bhutan we don't have to set appointment to see the teacher, as soon as we see the teacher we go and talk to them.” Similarly, Selden, a twenty-one year old sophomore, explained the challenge of reaching out to her professor, especially when she missed classes and wanted to inform her professor. In particular, she stated:

We write leave letters (and send it through a friend or parents who take the letter to the teacher in school in Bhutan), so we had very little email etiquette. At first when I typed email I thought I had an idea of what to do, but then when I tried typing it, I didn't know what to put... I didn't know how to address them, back in Bhutan addressing our elders is different than here in the United States, here we can address them by their name or call them professor; in Bhutan we address them by different titles. So it was a little difficult for us to get used to the email, and reaching out to professors.

Therefore, from the above findings, cultural variations in communication in academia such as sending a hand written letter vs. emailing the professor is an example of a cultural adaptation that challenges the acculturation process in a new learning environment.

Third, the findings showed that the Bhutanese students face challenges developing networks with their classmates. However, the challenges are not because of the participants' English language proficiency as earlier studies have shown (see Leong, 2015, Mokua, 2012; Li, 2017). The challenge is the large number of students in a class. Another challenge is having different classmates for different classes. Sangay, a twenty one year old freshman, explained that his experience in Bhutan and India; you have the same classmates for almost all of your classes. In the American setting, it is more difficult to make friends because you only have one class together (see Leong, 2015). However, the study found that the Bhutanese students did not have a lot of challenges in making friends. When asked if making friends were a challenge, the Bhutanese students said it was not a challenge. Out of the twenty Bhutanese students, seventeen of the twenty Bhutanese students felt it was not difficult to make friends. Zuki, who is a freshman, said it was not difficult for her to make friends. She described herself as an out spoken person and did not really face challenges making friends. The Bhutanese students described themselves as friendly and approachable, therefore, it is not always challenging for them to make friends. Denka, a junior, said she had friends from different countries and they all come from different cultural backgrounds.

However, Selzom, a twenty one- year old junior said she did not seem to benefit much from her classmates, because her classmates did not cooperate during group assignments and the participant ended up doing all the work. Yoedhen said her initial experience with her classmates, especially her group, was not at all pleasant because there were no interactions

among the group members. She then went and changed her group where she had group members who were active, interactive and friendly.

There are also cultural stressors associated with transitioning from Bhutan to American classrooms that can hinder the Bhutanese students' acculturation process. The difference in the classroom culture between Bhutan and the U.S. impacted the Bhutanese students classroom acculturation process in their interaction with the faculty and in the classroom. Such findings imply that Bhutanese students in the first few months could be experiencing separation, rather than, assimilation or marginalization. Separation, as described by Berry (1997), means maintaining one's culture while avoiding interacting with the dominant culture. In this study, the Bhutanese students were challenged, confused, and overwhelmed in having to figure out academic cultural variations in Bhutan and the U.S. I found a pattern of being silent and nervousness to participate in class among the Bhutanese students. Also, symbolic of separation rather than questioning the cultural differences in education between Bhutan and the U.S., some students internalized it as a deficit in their learning abilities especially in the first semester. However, the Bhutanese students experienced integration at the same time. Integration (Berry, 1997) the out-group maintains their original culture and interacts with the host culture at the same time. While the Bhutanese students did show a process of separation, the study also portrayed that the Bhutanese students were slowly learning to integrate into the new learning environment. As the Bhutanese Students reach their fourth semester, they are more comfortable with their interaction with their professors. While the Bhutanese students don't call their professors by their first name, the Bhutanese students do call their professors; 'Professor.' Selden, a junior, said it was hard in the beginning, but she got used to calling her professors as

professors, “I think at first I was not able to adjust to it, I always call my professors or elders sir or madam, I’m not used to this, it’s disrespectful in my country.”

The study found all the Bhutanese students in this study who are at different stages in their programs have not dropped out of college because of the challenges they faced in acculturating into a new university. The earlier studies have found that international students are challenged to complete their program as the course structure, content and the academic standards can also be a hindrance to the attainment of academic goals as an international student in the United States (Leong, 2015; Liu, 2016: & Selvadurai, 1991-2). However, at this point in the study, the findings do not support the literature (Leong, 2015; Liu, 2016; & Selvadurai, 1991-2) of international students academic achievement being hindered by the challenges faced in the process of acculturation. Therefore, the Bhutanese students determination to complete their academic program embodies the Bhutanese students integration process and can be reassured with the students maintaining their G.P.A as high as 4.0 and the lowest being 2.5.

In addition to cultural barriers, there are functional challenges or learning barriers that Bhutanese students face in a new academic environment. The functional challenges entail adapting to new technologies and learning techniques and academic writing, all of which pose a challenge for acculturation. In this section, I will discuss challenges with the use of technology in an American classroom.

Recall that Bhutan adopted the Internet in 1999, and as such acculturating to the technology is a challenge for Bhutanese students. When talking to the Bhutanese students about the transition into an American classroom, the Bhutanese students made reference to the contrast in their learning environment in Bhutan and India. The students recalled that in Bhutan and India, their classrooms were not as well equipped with technology such as projectors and online

platforms designed for students such as Blackboard and a personalized school email. The Bhutanese students who completed high school in Bhutan (also see Roder, 2011 & LaPrairie, 2014) and India expressed that they did not use technology as a learning medium, such as Internet, in their classrooms. For example, Samden, a twenty-one-year-old junior, majoring in Math, stated that "the classes [in the U.S.], were all high tech and I'm not really used to advanced technology, because Bhutan is really backward, technological wise." In fact, the students were used to using notebook to take notes and submitting hand written assignments. This is consistent with the literature on international students where technology in the new educational environment presented a challenge (see Mesidor, 2016; Leong, 2015; Liu, 2016).

From a total of twenty students, seventeen Bhutanese students said they were used to their teachers using the chalkboard instead of PowerPoint slides or other online platforms. Selden, a junior, explained the process of adjusting to new learning methods here in the U. S.:

In Bhutan, the only teaching style I know, in my experience, is chalkboard— chalkboard and the chalk. Other than that we don't have any other teaching techniques. In America there are lots of teaching techniques, teachers put games and videos, so it is more interactive.

Selden, in a nutshell, described the challenges other Bhutanese students face as well, the challenge of learning to adapt to a new form of leaning; learning through interactive approaches in the class versus the traditional lecture based classroom in Bhutan.

All the Bhutanese students expressed their challenge of adjusting to Blackboard, which is central to all schoolwork, classes, and communication. Following up on a photovoice picture Samden, a junior, explained, "Using Blackboard to submit most of my assignments was

something I struggled with because I had never done that before" (Figure 1.6).

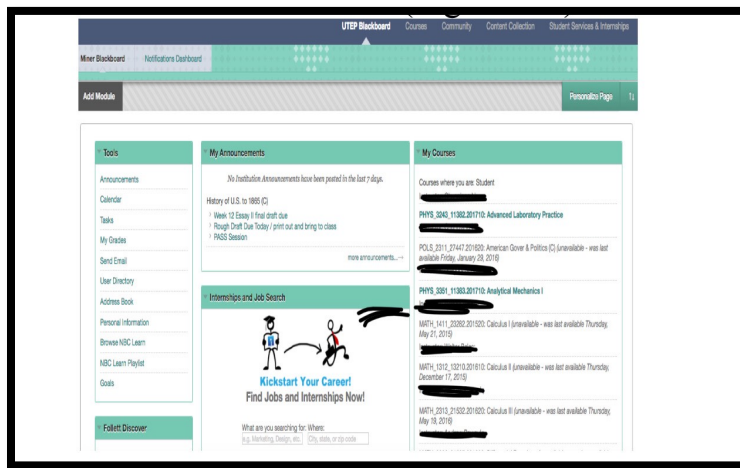


Figure 1.6: Learning to use Blackboard

Similarly, Denka, a junior majoring in Accounting, recalled the "shock" when the professor mentioned submitting assignments via blackboard. Denka explained that she actually missed her assignments for the first week because she was trying to figure out how to use blackboard for schoolwork.

I received from fourteen students, pictures of blackboard and other online sites they use for class as a way of adjusting to a new medium of learning (for example, see figure 1.6 and 1.7). Similarly, Lhendup, a first-year student, also showed how he is learning to do his homework and submit his homework online (Figure 1.7). He commented that, "This picture is of me doing the math homework electronically through a site...where we submit our answers."

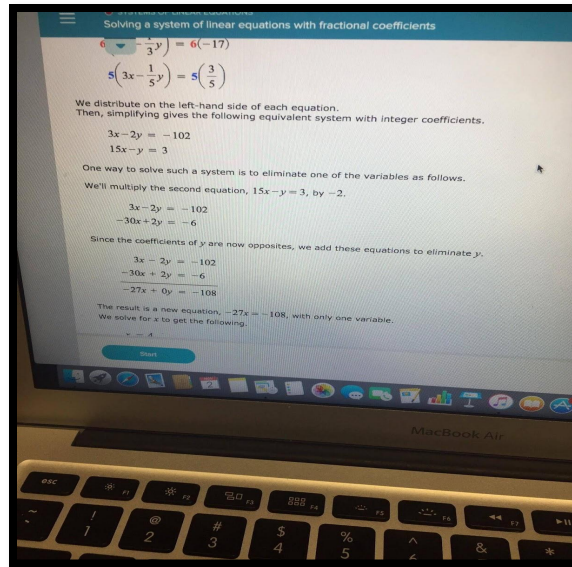


Figure 1.7: Lhendup's showing his online homework platform

Based on the findings above, the study found the Bhutanese students faced challenges' that are necessary for their classroom experience in the U.S. The findings found that the challenges the Bhutanese students faced, especially in the first semester, are in regards to the way the education system is structured in the U.S. The Bhutanese students expressed how the classroom and the courses are designed completely different from their schools in Bhutan; hence the Bhutanese students were challenged in transitioning into a new educational system right after high school. For example, technology is an important medium for teaching and learning here in the U.S, however, the Bhutanese students expressed that technology is not the main medium for teaching and learning in Bhutan. The Bhutanese students did not have to depend on any form of technology as a medium of learning. For example, the findings showed the Bhutanese classrooms were of a traditional setting. Therefore, understanding and navigating platforms such as Blackboard and other online platforms for various classes were a major challenge for the Bhutanese students. In other words, the functional challenges were caused by the structure of the education system and not necessarily because of culture. However, the closest acculturation

strategy for this challenge is assimilation. Assimilation is the closest strategy because, the Bhutanese students transitioned from a classroom environment where teachers used chalkboards and students submitted hand written home works and assignments to classrooms where everything is mediated through online platforms.

Language as both functional and cultural acculturative stressors

The fluency of the English language in speaking, writing, and reading is an obstacle towards the acculturation of Bhutanese students. Therefore the English language is both a cultural and functional barrier to acculturate in American classrooms. Language is a cultural challenge because English is not spoken or interpreted in the same manner as Bhutanese students learned it. Yet, language becomes a functional challenge in regards to the technicality of writing.

Firstly, Bhutanese students experienced cultural barriers to the English language. In particular, in interpreting classroom lectures and discussions, as well as one-on-one conversations with peers and instructors, because it is difficult to understand American English. For example Samden, a junior, was frustrated that people do not understand her English. This is in part because she learned British English back home, which differs from American English. Although British and American English are similar, they differ in how words are spelled, and pronounced, in which it impacted the learning experience. Samden also commented, “It was hard for me to grasp [American English].... I was kind of shy to ask or tell them [professor] I don’t understand you and most of it was some word, which are synonyms, which I didn’t have a clue. ”

This study found that even if students spoke English, other factors like pronunciation and enunciation of words, use of slang (also see Jung et al., 2008, Li, 2017), and meanings of phrases became a hindrance. While the previous literatures (Khawaja & Smith, 2011) have shown that speaking English is a challenge for international students, there is less research on how international students are challenged in respect to interpreting the language. Wangda, for example, is a first-year student and said although he has been taught in English since kindergarten, when he arrived in the U.S. and heard people speak English he had a difficult time. In particular, he explained:

Coming here and hearing this weird American accent and the way they present themselves, and the way they use the words ... there are so many things that meant something different back in my country. It was absolutely different here, such as, the first thing I can phrase is, “I’m down.” That is something that I’ve learned here, after coming here, because, I thought that they don’t want to agree with something, if they say “I’m down,” but later on I figured out, that it means they are willing to do it.

The frequent use of slang among American students, and even some faculty, was challenging for Bhutanese students to understand. While English is the dominant language, particularly in the classrooms, Spanish is widely used among students, staff, and faculty. This can be challenging for Bhutanese students since they have limited familiarity with Spanish. While Dechen, a junior accounting major, did not feel uncomfortable communicating in English, the pervasive use of Spanish (and Spanglish) did pose a barrier to integration. The Bhutanese students observed that their classmates and co-workers would speak Spanish when in small groups and this made them feel left out. Similarly, Dechen expressed the wide use of Spanish in-

group work, during lunch, and at campus employment. Similarly, Selden, a junior, expressed that when she saw students who were comfortably speaking in both English and Spanish she simply stayed away from the conversation. Yangki, also felt uncomfortable when her peers conversed in Spanish but she did feel her peers were unconscious of her presence.

Language is a problem for the Bhutanese students in respect to academic writing because the Bhutanese students did not learn the analytical form of English writes ups in high school in Bhutan, India, or in Thailand. However, it is important to note this is only in reference to the high schools the Bhutanese students attended and cannot be generalized to all the schools in India and Thailand. Although all the Bhutanese students spoke English and were taught in English back in Bhutan, India, and Thailand, the study found language to be a challenge. This is consistent with the findings of other Asian international students in the U.S. (see Zhang & Mi., 2010; Dillinger, 2014). Zhang & Mi. (2010), for example, found that despite taking additional English classes, Chinese international students were not adequately prepared with communication skills. In my study, from a total of twenty Bhutanese students, fifteen students had to take the required additional language courses called the English as a Second Language (ESOL) or Rhetoric Writing (RWS) for international students whose second language is English. Bhutanese students who were more proficient in English had been educated in India or Thailand. The struggle of the Bhutanese students was well expressed by Selzom who struggled to write academic papers since she had not had the training previously. In particular, she stated:

... in Bhutan I guess we majored either in science or commerce , so like we did not have to write so much papers , all we had to do was focus on physics and stuffs like memorizing , knowing math and not doing research. So I guess that was new for me.

The findings also showed from a total of twenty participants', three Bhutanese students were nursing majors, one environmental science and the remaining sixteen were business and accounting majors (see Table 1.1). Although all the majors except environmental science do not require academic writing, the Bhutanese students as stated above had to take language classes in the beginning, as the school required it for all the majors. The contrast in instruction in Bhutan challenged acculturation in American classrooms where instruction is more focused on writing. Similarly, when asked about why academic writing is a challenge, Lhendup, a junior said, it is because of how students in Bhutan used memorization as a form of learning and not analyzing the content. This is consistent with those who found Eastern education is focused more on memorizing, learning concepts, and preparing for tests, which hinder the students' preparation in American classrooms (Henze & Zhu, 2012). Nineteen Bhutanese students shared the same experience. Lhendup narrated, "there is a very big difference because back home, you know, its more of studying and memorizing stuff and at the final you have to like write everything you learned but here its more like accumulation of what you know."

The study found having prior knowledge of the English language further strengthened the Bhutanese students acculturation process through biculturalism. The benefit of biculturalism is that once integration/ biculturalism is achieved, it is easier for the individual/ group to become adjusted in the dominant society (Chen, Benet- Martínez, & Bond, 2008; Schwartz, Zamboanga & Jarvis, 2007). Although the national language of Bhutan is not English, the education system uses English as a medium of instruction. Therefore, learning English in school definitely assisted their acculturation process in the U.S. Hence, the study found that the Bhutanese students had decent English proficiency even though English is not

their first language, which definitely helped the Bhutanese students in their integration. The Bhutanese students said they were better than other international students who did not learn English in school.

On the contrary, English is a challenge as the Bhutanese students stated they did not learn the analytical / technical writing in High School. Therefore, the Bhutanese students used their knowledge and proficiency of English from high school as they learned analytical writing and other classes such as communication classes. The Bhutanese students, to an extent, were able to translate their thoughts and opinions from Dzongkha (national language) into English for their writing assignments, however were challenged in organizing the content of paper while writing.

Strategies to navigate acculturation

The aspect of networking emerged in the study as being an important tool for the Bhutanese students to navigate their acculturation process. The study found the networks that the Bhutanese students developed had a positive impact in the Bhutanese students overall classroom integration. This section on the strategies the Bhutanese students used to navigate their acculturation process demonstrated the strategies that evolved after the Bhutanese students experienced challenges in a new learning environment. Hence, in the acculturation process, the Bhutanese peers and professors are the strategies the Bhutanese students developed to integrate.

The findings demonstrated the Bhutanese students developed a network with the academic advisor as a strategy to counter their challenges in a new environment. First, students did find formal academic advising mechanisms helpful. The findings showed that getting advice from the academic advisor had positive results. The advising sessions cleared the Bhutanese

students confusion and nervousness on picking their classes and especially in understanding their degree plans. Students such as Lhendup said getting advised from his academic advisor helped him because he did not know what classes he should take. Samden is a junior, and found academic advising to be very effective because her advisor went through her degree plan and advised her where she stands in her course. Her advisor advised her on classes she needed to take and the electives that are beneficial based on her major. Samden stated she was advised to take her easy classes with few of the difficult classes, so as to refrain from taking only easy classes or hard classes. Other Bhutanese students like Zuki (first-year), Selden (Sophomore), Choying (junior) and Denka (junior) have similar stories to share about their advising experience.

Despite the positive experiences with academic advising, Bhutanese students still needed more guidance and they relied on networks with each other to learn more about acculturating to this university. In particular, the Bhutanese students depended on senior Bhutanese students for advice. The study found the senior Bhutanese students' were an asset for the Bhutanese students. Having fellow Bhutanese seniors made it easier for the Bhutanese students to understand the challenges and the strategies to adjust in a new environment. The Bhutanese students based their advice on the challenges they faced earlier due to the different academic culture in Bhutan. The senior Bhutanese students explained the nature of the classes in terms of class participation and the professors' interaction with the students in the class. Getting information as such was important for the Bhutanese students as they hesitated or refrained participating in class. The Bhutanese students also shared the challenges including the level of difficulty of the class and if the professor was strict and/or a difficult grader. The senior Bhutanese students also advised to get involved in a lot of class participation, presentations and

group works since the Bhutanese students came from a traditional lecture based classroom setting. The senior Bhutanese students also advised on emailing the professors if they had trouble submitting assignments on time and to ask for extensions for deadlines. The senior Bhutanese students often encouraged the juniors to reach out to their professors because Bhutanese students' are usually shy and often are anxious about meeting people. Yangzo, freshman said, "they (senior Bhutanese students) are my go to person with questions and with anything related to my classes or anything that I have to do, they are like the first person and people that I go to." As such networks with senior Bhutanese students were essential to gain more insights on the classes and also learned about the level of difficulty of the classes. Khando a sophomore said she received advise from not only her advisor but also from her senior Bhutanese students because that gave her a better understanding of what choices to make. They also asked seniors for advice on which class and professors to register with. Zuki stated that a major reason for this was so she had an idea of the professor's teaching style and exam patterns. Selden used the same strategy as Zuki and Sangay, however, she says she usually ends up taking classes recommended by her Bhutanese seniors if there were no conflicts in timing with her other classes.

Despite a large class, Bhutanese students made the effort to build networks with their U.S. classmates to ease their acculturation process in the classrooms. Selden, twenty one-year old, explained how it could be difficult to network with professors and classroom peers, however, she tried to at least develop a close tie with a classmate to help navigate classroom learning:

Classrooms here sometimes they're pretty large, the classes that I take, chemistry and psychology they were like three hundred people. So we

don't get much time to interact with the classmates or the professor,..., also if I sit next to somebody, I try to talk to them, because it's good to have friends in class, because, if I miss class, then I can text them or email them to say what did I miss? So I think it's important to have a friend in the class, try to talk to them.

Selden, despite being in a large classroom where interaction with the professor is challenging, and remembering the classmates in a class of three hundred students is difficult, she still tried to know the person sitting next to her. This was important for Selden because she could at least have someone from class to ask questions if she ever missed class.

While studies show international students have a challenge making friends (see Lena, 2016; Leong, 2015, Mokua, 2012; Li, 2017) this study showed that Bhutanese students did not see it as a big challenge. From a total of twenty Bhutanese students, seventeen Bhutanese students stated that it is not a challenge to make friends. Zuki, eighteen- years old and is a freshman, said, "It is not a challenge for me to make friends because I am active and cheerful." She referred to her classmate Betty (name changed) from her class who is very helpful. Zuki describes herself as outgoing and outspoken. "... I don't think that people would have a hard time finding friends because people are really friendly." Yarphel, a sophomore, surprised himself when he realized his circle of friends in class increased. For Yarphel, being with his classmates helped him study as well. Yarphel explained " We have study groups here and I have learned a few words in Spanish from them and they have learned a few words from me in Bhutanese. The Bhutanese students felt sometimes friendship developed because the Bhutanese students are international students and their American friends want to know about them. For instance, Selden a junior, said, the students are very approachable and knowing that she is an international student,

other students showed interest and curiosity in learning about her culture. Selden further added, once they (classmates) know she is not familiar with their culture, the students offer their help and that eases her integration process.

The study found the Bhutanese students internalized the value of calmness, happiness and patience while adjusting in a new learning environment for their academic achievement. The Bhutanese students when required to make presentation for class and at work choose to talk about Bhutan and Gross National Happiness. The Bhutanese students expressed that talking about Bhutan with other students helped them develop their knowledge about other cultures as well. This also became a strategy to overcome their fear of speaking in class and finding ways to develop friendships. This helped the participants in their academics and the workplace encouraged the participants to improve their communication skills by interacting with other people and making presentations. The study found the Bhutanese students in making presentations, welcomed feedbacks and comments from their professors and their co- workers. The Bhutanese students valued receiving feedbacks because feedbacks are viewed as constructive.

Selden, a junior, explained that her supervisors and co-workers helped her improve her presentation through feedback and also found them very approachable. Wangda, a freshman also shares the same experience like Selden. Wangda explained the support and the guidance from his supervisor and co-workers helped him improve his confidence in effective communication. Khando, a sophomore, described her supervisor's support at work,

... even though there is a mistake, they are not like - you have a mistake...They make me feel like I need to talk in a crowd, I wasn't able to talk when I was in a crowd, ... my supervisor she tells me, you're an amazing person, you have a strong personality... So I'm trying best to be open with everyone else.

Based on the findings above, the study found that the Bhutanese students acculturation process, as international students, is best defined through integration. This is the case because Bhutanese students are actively maintaining their own culture but still interact with others in the dominant group and have adopted enough of the mainstream cultural norms to participate in academic endeavors. The findings all point towards the Bhutanese students who are integrating into developing new networks that contributes towards the Bhutanese students experiences in the classroom. From the findings above, the Bhutanese students referred to their professor with their title as Dr., Mr., Miss, or Professor, but never referred to any of the professor by their first name, that translates as using their values from home to adjust to the new norms in the classroom. Yangki, a freshman, said sometimes she thinks her question is really important and would ask questions in class.

The findings above also show that Bhutanese students have connected with their co-nationals. It is important to address that the Bhutanese students develop friendships with other Bhutanese students to help maintain their culture. In turn, sharing a culture allows for Bhutanese students to interact with more members of their student community who have been there longer and can provide some guidance. The Bhutanese students did maintain their values of being a collective community with fellow Bhutanese students and encouraging each other.

The Bhutanese students were all aware of the cultural differences they experienced. However, the Bhutanese students internalized the values and approach of happiness and compassion to integrate into the new learning environment. For instance, Choying, a junior, stated that having an open mind and learning to accept that everyone is different and that differences should be embraced. She adds, “Just because they are different from you does not mean that it’s not good or does not mean that you can’t be friends.” Choying

added she was worried she would not be able to “fit in” however; everyone was so nice it was not as difficult as she thought.

While the cultural factors such as new learning environment challenge the Bhutanese students acculturation process, the study found that Bhutanese students use their own cultural experiences to learn and integrate in the new environment. Wangda, a freshman, said talking about culture in general gives him the opportunity to share his culture and learn the different cultures here as well, which helped his integration process. “It gives me an opportunity to exchange our knowledge’s and experiences and similarities, we bond over them. That helps me adjust here.”

Conclusion

The overall aim of this study was to examine the acculturation processes of Bhutanese students in American classrooms. Given insights from my own experiences as a Bhutanese international student in a university in the Southwest, I use acculturation as a theoretical framework to examine the classroom challenges and the cultural tools that Bhutanese students use in their new learning environment. All the participants for this study were Bhutanese undergraduate students studying at a university in the Southwest. The study was conducted through mixed methods consisting of photovoice followed by semi-structured interviews.

The study found two major findings that attributed to the Bhutanese students acculturation process in American classrooms and identified strategies to navigate the acculturation process. The first major findings concern the cultural and functional stressors (Yang, 2005) that Bhutanese students encounter in American classrooms. Cultural stressors, such as adjusting to a new learning environment and cultural attributes in developing relationships with faculty and classmates, impacted the Bhutanese students' academic experiences. In particular, due to the cultural differences between Bhutan and the U.S. in terms of English language proficiency, style and variations in classroom cultures, the Bhutanese students faced challenges in contacting professors and participating in class discussions. The Bhutanese students expressed that participating in class was challenging because they were not used to the setting of a discussion-based classroom. Therefore, faced challenges in expressing their opinions and asking questions in class. Contacting the professors were also initial challenges because the Bhutanese students were surprised to know they had to email the professor to set an appointment. The study found the Bhutanese students in their high schools

would walk up to the teacher and never needed to send an email to their teachers or the faculty to set meeting appointments.

The functional stressors for Bhutanese international students were challenges in adjusting to various technologies used in their everyday learning. Transitioning from notebooks to personalized emails and online learning applications such as Blackboard, posed barriers to their educational integration. Being that the country of Bhutan was a landlocked country and they only adopted the Internet in 1999 meant that Bhutanese students had limited experiences with using technology in their learning environment in the U.S. Therefore, it was challenging to adjust to new learning methods that integrated technology including PowerPoint and online learning platforms like Blackboard, for both classwork and homework. The transition from paper and face-to-face lectures to new learning technologies that required using Blackboards, PowerPoint presentations, electronic submission of assignments, emails, and internet based research posed barriers for Bhutanese students who do not have access to these learning methods in Bhutan. Since technology such as Blackboard was the main medium where all the courses were stored and communication is largely electronic I found Bhutanese students were overwhelmed and challenged. Therefore, functional stressors as a result of learning various technologies hampered the educational experiences of Bhutanese students.

An educational stressor that was both cultural and functional is language. Although students do learn English in Bhutan, variations in how English is spoken and interpreted is different in the Southwest versus Bhutan posed a communication challenge. Since the university in the southwest is a Hispanic serving institution, the students and the professors speak Spanish widely on campus. Thus, this also hindered the Bhutanese students educational experience of learning. The Bhutanese students expressed that during group work, the group

discussions would be dominated in Spanish and thereby affecting their ability to participate. Bhutanese students would have to often tell the group “No Española” during such occasions. Also, the Bhutanese students did not have any or little experience with academic writing, generally, much less in English, which caused a significant challenge to their learning in the U.S. The second major finding involved the tools Bhutanese students used to navigate the American academic system and acculturation in the classrooms. In particular, Bhutanese student’s interaction with co-workers contributed to the acculturation in American classrooms. Despite the language barriers and the differences in communication styles, Bhutanese students interaction and contacting the professors / advisors, co-workers and classmates in the U.S served as a strategy for acculturation. The Bhutanese students interaction with the different groups on campus directly and indirectly had a positive impact in the academic acculturation process in the classroom, including advisors and professors, co-workers, and co-national Bhutanese students. While interactions with advisors and professors and co- workers on campus provided them with cultural resources, it helped them to build confidence in speaking and developed a feeling of integration in the classroom. These interactions and connections helped the Bhutanese students develop their language skills and learning the new communication styles of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. The Bhutanese students in the study also agreed their academic acculturation process was facilitated with the help of other Bhutanese students on campus. Therefore, the Bhutanese students always guided and helped each other with registration for classes and in helping contact advisors for advise. They also helped each other on how to use blackboard, home works and assignments’ as well.

Considering both the challenges, such as cultural and functional stressors, and the cultural and networking tools that Bhutanese students used to integrate into American

classrooms, I argue that the acculturation stage that best describes the Bhutanese experiences is integration. Integration or biculturalism occurs when out-groups are able to adopt the cultural norms of the host culture while maintaining their culture (Berry, 1997). Despite the acculturative stressors described above, Bhutanese students performed well academically. At the time of the interview, for instance, all the international students had G.P.A.s (for that particular semester) above 2.5 the highest was a 4.0. While being mindful and appreciative of their own culture, Bhutanese students sought to learn American and border cultures that are integrated in classrooms.

In conclusion, my findings on the academic integration of Bhutanese international students into university classrooms in the southwestern, U.S. provides us insights on the acculturation processes. The study also contributes to the literature, as reference on Bhutanese students in the U.S. Through this current study, I found the Bhutanese students could experience different acculturation stages at different times or at the same time. While I found integration best described the acculturation experiences of the Bhutanese students, I also found the Bhutanese students experience is a continuous process. The study found the acculturation strategies do not necessarily happen in any order. The Bhutanese students process of integration varied at different situations. For example, the Bhutanese students experienced integration in the classroom by talking about Bhutan in class and then learning about the American culture from their classmates helped the students develop contacts and practice their presentation skills. However, in the initial stages, the Bhutanese students stated they did not participate in class and would avoid situations if they could. Therefore, acculturation is not just a single phenomenon but also a multi phenomenon, which needs to be further explored.

At the policy level, the finding of this study can be a source of reference for teachers, students and other education related agencies in both Bhutan and the university of the Southwest. This study can serve as a reference for schools or related agencies in Bhutan and at this university in the southwest to develop an orientation program focusing on the changes in teaching, curriculum, and learning pedagogy in American colleges and universities. The teacher training institutes and curriculum development agencies in Bhutan can also refer to this study to revise material that includes concerns from Bhutanese students that have academic experiences abroad. Such instructions should address variations in classroom student engagement, analytical writing, communication styles in classrooms between faculty and peers, and changes in learning styles such as critical analysis in contrast to only memorizing content.

Limitations of the study

This study is not without limitations. Firstly, this study is not representative of a larger group of Bhutanese students in the U.S. universities or studying in other countries. The study also is limited to only Bhutanese students in a southwestern university in the U.S. Therefore, it is likely that the integration experiences of students in this campus are easier given the large number of Bhutanese international students. Secondly, this study does not encompass all of the challenges that Bhutanese students may encounter. As a sociologist, I was also concerned about possible experiences with racism, yet the data does not support this. This could be attributed to the concept of “race” not being socially constructed is same in Bhutan as it is in the U.S.

Future Research

Further studies should examine the role of the community, outside of the classroom, on the acculturation experiences of international students from Bhutan. In particular, I suspect that the Mexican cultural influences found outside the university may help the students integrated better into the community and by extension to the classroom. The Latin influence in the university has some culture resemblance to Bhutan such as a general philosophy of community and happiness that is in contrast to Western cultural ideals of individualism. Moreover, future research should study of Bhutanese students longitudinally to gain a fuller picture of the acculturation processes from marginalization and separation to integration. For example, how long do students stay in the marginalization phase? Once students get to the integration phase, do they remain there or with time do they get to the assimilation phase where they lose their benefits associated with their native culture?

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Appendix A

Demographics

1. How old are you?
2. What course are you in?
3. What semester are you in currently?

Photovoice Questions

1. What do the images represent?
2. Can you explain?

Interview Questions

1. What are your experiences on campus?
2. What are your educational experiences in the classroom ?
3. Can you tell me about your building contacts with your professor or faculty?
4. What are your experiences with your classmates? Can you please explain?
5. Is language is a problem for you? Please explain.
6. Can you tell me about what was new and challenging for you while adjusting to life here? Please explain.
7. Are you in frequent contact with other Bhutanese students? How important are those connections?
8. Do you have a job on campus? Can you describe your relationship with your colleagues?
9. Do you have any questions for me?
10. Can I contact you if I have follow up questions?

Vita

My educational journey began from Bhutan where I completed my high school; I then received my undergraduate degree from India. I am currently working on my graduate degree at UTEP.

My work experience all revolves around the non -profit community and education.

I worked as a program officer at the Bhutan Center for Media and Democracy (BCMD) over seeing the media literacy project with schools and other institutions.

I also managed a radio drama on culture of democracy and civic participation starting from brain storming till it went on air. The radio drama is two seasons. The drama then was reproduced as a comic book in 2017 for which I worked on revising the script. Currently is in the process of turning it into a Television series.

I am still actively involved with BCMD (2011-2015).

I am a full time volunteer and a member of the Voluntary Artists Studio, Thimphu (VAST), and the only non- profit organization that works in community development through art. VAST is also the only contemporary art community in Bhutan. At VAST I am more involved in program management (2000-present).

I worked as a graduate teaching assistant at UTEP (2016-2017). I worked in assisting the professor in developing activities and assignments for class.