

**DEALING WITH ACCULTURATIVE STRESS AMONG
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN GHANA: INFLUENCES
OF ASSERTIVENESS, SELF-EFFICACY AND SOCIAL
SUPPORT**

BY

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DECLARATION

I, Kwasi Gyasi-Gyamerah, author of this thesis, hereby declare that except for references to other people's works which have been duly acknowledged, the work presented here was done by me as a PhD candidate of the Department of Adult Education and Human Resource Studies, University of Ghana, Legon, under the supervision of Dr Samuel K. Badu-Nyarko, Professor S. A. Danquah, and Dr Joseph Osafo. This work has never been submitted in whole or in part for any degree elsewhere.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my son, Samuel Nana Kwaku Owusu Gyasi-Gyamerah and my wife, Dr Angela Anarfi Gyasi-Gyamerah for the prayers, inspiration and support throughout this journey. I am grateful.

It is also for my mother Elizabeth Owusua Aning, your sacrifices have brought me this far. You are appreciated Mama.



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ABSTRACT

Acculturation is both a cultural and a psychological process and contributes greatly to the stress of adapting to a new environment. Universities in Ghana continue to attract international students who enter every year and/or semester to study. As result, it is envisaged that the Ghanaian socio-cultural and academic environments may pose acculturative stress for international students. The study therefore sought to investigate the acculturative stress for international students living and studying in universities in Ghana by examining how assertiveness, self-efficacy, and social support help international students in dealing with the effects of acculturative stress. To achieve these, the study employed the explanatory sequential mixed methods approach (QUAN-qual technique). Participants for the study were drawn from University of Ghana (UG) representing a public university and

Wisconsin International University College (WIUC), representing a private university all in Accra. For the survey, 256 participants completed the International Students Acculturative Experiences Questionnaire (ISAEQ) comprising socio-demographics, Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students (ASSIS), Student Stress Inventory, General Self-Efficacy Scale, Rathus Assertiveness Schedule and the modified Index of Social Support. Fifteen (15) indepth interviews were also conducted. Data analysis was done by descriptive and inferential statistics as well the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith et al. 2009). Overall, the study established that international students in Ghana do experience acculturative stress ($M=2.59$; $SD=0.58$), socio-culturally and academically, though not a debilitating one. Health, homesickness and perceived discrimination were found to be the top three sources of acculturative stress for the students, whereas fear and guilt were the least sources of acculturative stress. Analysis of Variance conducted revealed a complexity of acculturative stress experience continentally

($F=12.842$, $p<.05$), with African international students experiencing the most acculturative stress ($M = 2.73$, $SD = 0.58$). In dealing with acculturative stress, the study established that being assertive ($r = -.13$, $p<.05$) and also receiving social support ($r = -.19$, $p<.05$), mainly from friendship networks established with Ghanaians and other international students, were significant in helping international students deal successfully with the experience of acculturative and academic stress. International students did not feel supported by administrators and teaching faculty of the universities they attended, and that having a sense of self-efficacy was not significant in dealing with acculturative stress. In conclusion, international students studying and living in Ghana are generally a vulnerable group as they find adapting to Ghana's new socio-cultural environment as well as the academic culture of the universities a challenging experience. Recommendations for curriculum development where specialized intercultural course(s) to make international students gain some cultural awareness as well as cultural literacy will help reduce acculturative stress levels. Adult education programmes where university staff and faculty and governmental bodies are trained to provide support for international students is recommended. An institutionalization of a monthly Town Hall meeting where international students have the opportunity share their experiences, challenges and successes will help make the international student's experience a worthy one. Also, two (2) sessions per semester on how to successfully navigate the academic culture of the universities as well as how to effectively manage examination-related anxiety will help deal with acculturative stress for international students. Directions for future research are discussed.

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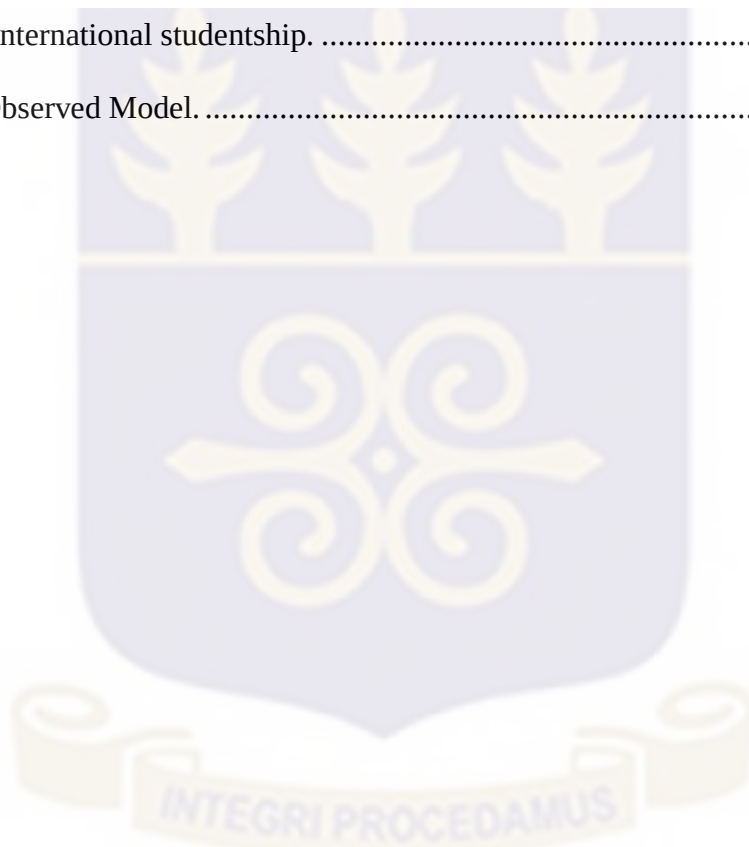
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

The phenomenon of studying in a country other than one's own whether for a short or a long period has been on an upward trend since the middle of the twentieth century and there are no indications of this trend letting up any soon. According to the International Educational Board Ireland (2008), the demand for education beyond national boundaries has increased by 40% over the last decade. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2010), also reported that there were more than 3.3 million tertiary international students worldwide, and estimated that this figure will rise to at least 6 million by 2020. According to the 2009 Open Doors Report by the Institute of International Education (IIE, 2009), the number of Americans studying abroad has increased by 8.5%, from 223, 053 in the 2006/2007 academic year to 262,416 in the 2007/2008 academic year. The Open Doors Report (IIE, 2009) also points out that this increase builds on decades of steady growth with four times as many US students participating in study abroad programmes in 2007/2008 than in the 1987/1988 academic year. It further reports that the number of international students studying in US colleges and universities has increased by 8% to an all-time high of 671,616 in the 2008/09 academic year since the 1980/81 academic year.

It is important to establish that the pursuit of international education is not limited to countries in North America and Europe. While the OECD (2010) reports that more than half of all the 3.3 million international tertiary students choose to study in the US (19%), UK (10%), Germany (7%), France (7%) and Australia (7%), it is important to point out that the Open Doors report (IIE, 2009) indicated that there were particularly significant increases identified among students going to less traditional destinations to study, with China, Ireland, Austria and India (up about 20%), as well as Costa Rica, Japan,

Argentina and South Africa (up nearly 15% each) being among the leading destinations for pursuit of international education. The Open Doors Report (IIE, 2009) further states that in 2007/08, students electing to study in Africa increased by 18%, while those going to Asia increased by 17%, and those going to Latin America increased by 11%, a development which requires serious attention due to the challenges of acculturation and stresses associated with it.

In Ghana, national data on the number of international students in the country's institutions of higher learning is generally unavailable. However, data from the International Programmes Advisory Board Report (2009) at the University of Ghana, Legon reveals that the total number of international students studying at the University of Ghana grew from 778 in the first semester of 2008/2009 academic year to 902 a year later in the first semester 2009/2010, representing a 16% growth rate. From this data, study abroad students referred to as Special Admissions contribute about a third of the total number of international students, and this number also equally grew from 231 to 262, a 13.4% growth rate. This growth rate of international students at University of Ghana is in consonance with the growth rates as reported by the Open Doors Report (2009), that international students electing to study in Africa grew by 18% (Institute of International Education, 2009). A more recent data from the Institutional Research and Planning Office of the University of Ghana (2016) reports that there was a total of 786 international students as at the 2014/2015 academic year studying at the University of Ghana, a 1% rise compared to the numbers in 2008/2009 academic year.

It is imperative to note that the presence of international students on a host institution's campus promotes diversity, fosters international understanding and provides the forum for both host national students and international students gaining a wider world's perspective on a wide range of issues. According to Sandhu and Asrabadi (1994), foreign students on US campuses help their American classmates broaden their world

perspective and they add cultural diversity to their campuses. Research (for e.g. Bevis, 2002; Harrison, 2002) have reported that international students are individuals who enrich the countries where they go to study with their diverse heritage and perspectives, thus serving to increase cultural awareness and appreciation. Likewise, Smith and Khawaja (2011) noted that international students bring with them a wide range of knowledge and skills across many disciplines, thereby contributing to the intellectual capacity of their host countries.

Also, international students are an important financial commodity to the economies of host countries (Australian Education International, 2010; NAFSA, 2010; United Kingdom Council for International Students Affairs, 2010). In 2003, education was one of the biggest export earners in New Zealand as the contribution of the whole export education industry to GDP was 3.6% with a value of over NZ\$2.2billion (Statistics New Zealand, 2005). The presence of international students, it must be noted, is a mutually beneficial endeavor both for the host nation and/or institution on the one hand and also for the international student themselves on the other. While the international student population contributes a number of assets to the host country and host university, the international students also benefit immensely from the culture of the host nation as well as gain their education from the host's institutions of higher learning.

While recounting the positives of the presence of international students in host countries and host universities and colleges, it is important to point out that studies (e.g., Eustace, 2007; Mori, 2000; Poyrazli, Kavanaugh, Baker & Al-Timimi, 2004; Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994) have consistently suggested that international students are highly vulnerable to stress derived from cross-cultural adjustment. Mori (2000) indicates that international students upon arrival to a new country have to adapt to stressors related to cultural differences, language barriers, academic styles, separation from home, poor social integration and problems to daily life tasks. Also, their adjustment problems vary by

country of origin, race and ethnicity (Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell & Utsey, 2005; Wilton & Constantine, 2003), language proficiency (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007), academic concerns (Yang & Clum, 1995), depression (Rahman & Rollock, 2004) and whether or not they come from collectivist or individualist cultures (Tafarodi & Smith, 2001).

International students come from diverse cultural, social, religious and political backgrounds and hold various beliefs and values similar to or different from host nations and institutions. However, regardless of the diversity, international students share some common characteristics when it comes to the process of acculturating to the new culture. O'Reilly, Ryan and Hickey (2010) point out that although the growth in the international student population is a positive development, research investigating the adaptation of international students has consistently reported that students often struggle to adapt to life in the host country. Similarly, Eustace (2007), and Yu, Chen, Li, Liu, Jaques-Tiura, and Yan (2014) indicate that due to difficulties in adapting to a new social and cultural environment, stress-related physical, psychosocial and behavioural problems are prevalent among international students.

The Statement of the Problem

A great number of studies have been conducted on acculturative stress and cross-cultural adjustment issues among international students in the United States and other Western European countries. Akhtar (2012), notes that the bulk of cross-cultural adjustment among international students have been conducted mainly in the United States (e.g. Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell & Utsey, 2005; Misra, Crist, & Burant, 2003; Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006; Wilton & Constantine, 2003; Yeh & Inose, 2003), followed by research in Australia (e.g. Burns, 1991; Khawaja & Dempsey, 2008; Rosenthal, Russell & Thomson, 2008), United Kingdom (e.g. Greenland & Brown, 2005)

and New Zealand (e.g. Butcher & McGrath, 2004). In recent years, a small body of research has been conducted in China and other Asian countries (e.g. Yu, Chen, Li, Liu, Jacques-Tiura & Yan, 2014) to investigate and understand acculturative stress among international students. Very limited scientific work has been done in Ghana such as Sam, Tetteh, and Amponsah (2015) about how this diverse group of international students who come to study in Ghana's tertiary institutions perceive their satisfaction with life while undergoing the process of acculturation.

Universities in Ghana use different strategies such as print, on-air and online advertising, physically visiting countries to interact with prospective students, as well as the utilization of exchange programmes with universities and organisations to attract international students to come study on their campuses. According to Strategies to Increase International Graduate Enrolment (2014), the University of Ghana, through the Office of the Dean of International Programmes has a goal to achieve 10% of its student body as international students. Also, the University of Ghana is to make faculty engage in ethical collaborative activities with counterparts from different parts of the world. To this end, the University of Ghana has agreements or strategic partnerships with 78 universities, colleges and third party exchange programme providers from Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas (Strategic Partners, 2015). Further, the University attends fairs and conferences and embarks upon a number of outreach activities to attract international students to study for a semester, an academic year, full degree and also pursue graduate studies.

While vigorous attempts are made by Ghanaian universities to attract international students, it is the case that generally, not much attention has been given to the acculturation and its attendant acculturative stress experiences of the international student in Ghana. Anecdotal evidence suggests international students experience acculturative stress while living and studying in Ghana, examples of which include, but not limited to, students' blogposts on issues of race and discrimination

http://www.blackenterprise.com/news/hot-topics/found-racism-country-thats-98-black/#disqus_thread, and academic challenges <http://the-generation.net/failing-the-test-the-university-of-ghana/>.

Reference to, or being labelled as “obroni” (foreigner), encountering minority status for the first time or again, and incessant marriage proposals are some of the challenges that some international students have complained about, further suggesting that they experience acculturative stress. Meanwhile international students diversify and enrich the culture of the host nation, and also promote cross-fertilization of ideas thereby enhancing intellectual capacity on the academic life of host universities.

Besides Sam et al.’s (2015) study on life satisfaction among international students in the University of Ghana, there is no empirical data on the acculturative stress experiences of international students in the country. More importantly how international students deal with acculturative stress experiences while living and studying in Ghana have not been explored. Therefore, in what ways are the influences of assertiveness, self-efficacy and social support help international students in dealing with acculturative stress while living and studying in Ghana?

Rationale for the Study

Ghana’s tertiary institutions embark upon a number of activities to attract international students to study at these institutions either for a short period or for a long period. The University of Ghana has two (2) broad categorization of international students which are the Visiting and the Regular international student. The Regular international student is the student who enrolls at the university to pursue a course leading to the award of a certificate, a diploma, bachelors and/or postgraduate degrees. The Visiting international is the one who enrolls at the university to study for a semester or for a year. The body of Visiting international students is further divided into three (3) sub-categories. The first is the Individual student who applies and enrolls to study at the University of

Ghana for one semester or one year. Individual international students are from schools that do not have partnership arrangements with the local university. The second is the Visiting student from universities across the world that has partnership arrangements with the University of Ghana. Examples include, but not limited to, University of Bergen, Tufts University and Brock University. The third group of visiting students comprise of students who enroll to study at the university for one semester or one academic year through third party exchange programmes such as Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE), International Students Exchange Programme (ISEP), and Universities Study Abroad Consortium (USAC) among other such providers. These third party exchange programmes have renewable agreements with the University of Ghana. Even though the 10% mark has not been achieved, the University has been successful at attracting a good number of international students from diverse cultures.

A more recent data from the Institutional Research and Planning Office (IRPO) of the University of Ghana (2016) reports that there was a total of 824 international students as at the 2014/2015 academic year studying at the University of Ghana representing 2% of the 40,202 total student population of the university. The international students come from various countries in Africa, Europe, Asia and the American continents. Private universities such as Wisconsin International University College (WIUC) also has regular and visiting international students. As at First Semester of 2015/2016 academic year, WIUC has an international student population of 991 of the 3673 total student population representing 29% of the total student population of the university (J. A. Idun-Acquah, personal communication, March 10, 2016). It is important to point out that almost all the international student population in WIUC are from the African continent (<http://www.wiuc.edu.gh>) and are pursuing courses that lead to the award of a certificate, degree or post-graduate degree. Recently however, WIUC has signed a memorandum of

understanding with Concordia University in Irvine where students from Concordia come to study for a semester at WIUC (Wisconsin Hosts US International Students, 2016).

Despite the presence of a large and diverse groups of international students in Ghanaian universities. Coupled with the fact that studies such as Duru and Poyrazli (2007) and Akhtar (2012) establishing that international students experience high acculturative stress in the new environments they live and pursue education in, it is imperative that similar studies are conducted in Ghana. The lack of empirical knowledge and understanding of how international students adapt to life in a new sociocultural environment in Ghana, academically and socially, makes it an imperative area to explore and understand. The rationale for this study is therefore to subject international students' experiences to a scientific inquiry to understand and have empirical knowledge of what constitutes acculturative stress to them as there is the need for such critical empirical information to fill the knowledge gap presently existing so far as the acculturative stress experiences of the international student in Ghana is concerned. And also to come up with practical interventions and interculturally sensitive programmes to assist in dealing with acculturative stress among international students in Ghana.

Aims and Objectives of the Study

The main aim of this study is to investigate what constitutes acculturative stress for international students in Ghana and how they deal with it. The specific objectives are therefore to:

1. Investigate what constitutes acculturative stress for the international student in Ghana's socio-cultural and academic environment.
2. Determine whether there are differences in the acculturative stress experiences of the different groups of international students.

3. Establish how social support influences the acculturation process of the international student.
4. Establish how assertiveness affects the acculturation process of the international student.
5. Find out how international students' sense of self-efficacy influences the acculturation process and its attendant acculturative stress.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because in spite of the presence of international students on the campuses of Ghana's universities, they rarely are a focus of research. Even more specifically is the absence of research of the acculturative stress experiences of the international student in Ghana. This study will provide the first in-depth analysis of the acculturative stress experiences of the international student while studying in Ghana. This study will also contribute to the body of literature on international students' acculturative stress experiences by throwing light on the relationships between assertiveness, self-efficacy and social support on the one hand and acculturative stress on the other. Projections by the OECD (2010) indicate a continuous growth in the numbers international students across the world. By having reliable indicators of acculturative stress, social support and intrapersonal characteristics usable tools will be created and strategies prepared to enhance the well-being of the international student as well as promote intercultural competencies of students in Ghanaian universities.

As universities in Ghana strive to attract, retain and continue to grow international students' presence on its campuses, the universities will benefit from this study through the acquisition of indicators that could impact potential internationalization policy and education programmes that will positively enhance the international students' adaptation outcomes. Academic and administrative professionals who work with international

students will benefit from this study because as they understand the acculturation process of the international student and apply their understanding to the work they do, it will enable them become actively engaged in the development, implementation and evaluation of intercultural educational programmes and activities aimed at promoting intercultural understanding.



CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RELATED LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter begins by discussing the two (2) theoretical frameworks upon which this study is based and their relevance to this study. It also reviews literature that is pertinent to this study, discusses the proposed conceptual model to be tested and ends with statements of hypotheses that this study seeks to test.

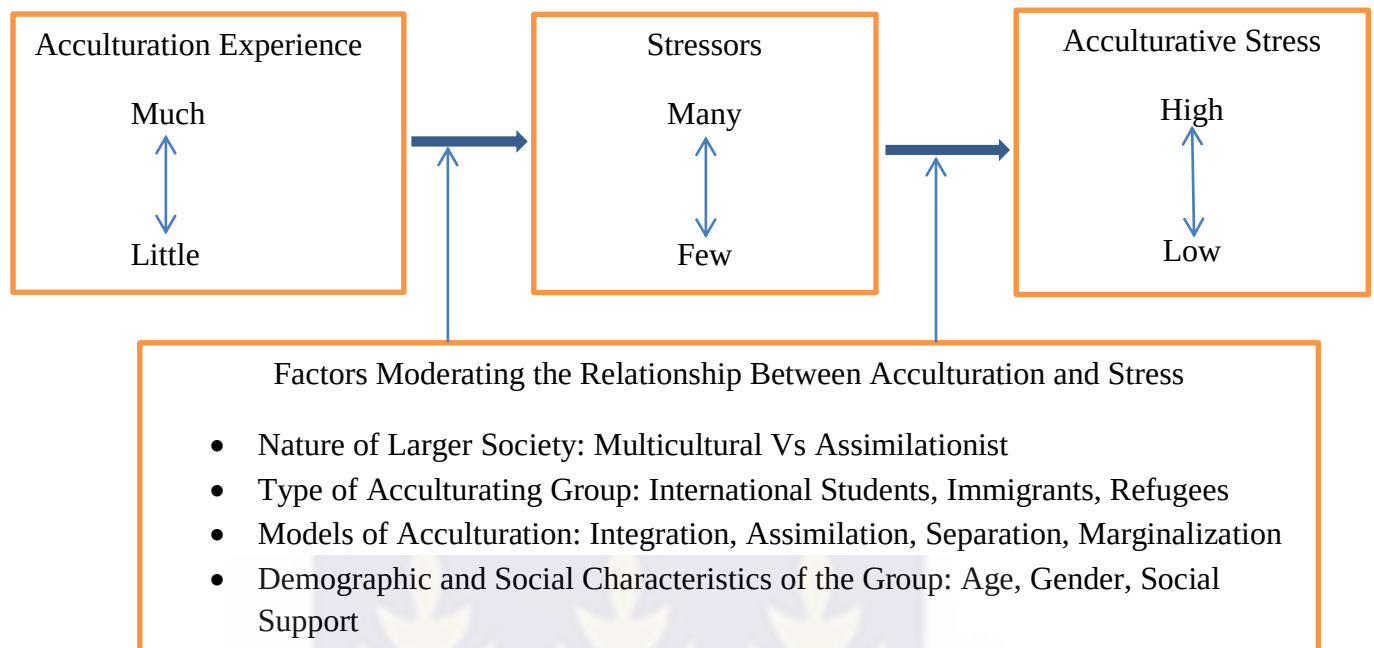
Theoretical Framework

The acculturative stress model. In order to understand the acculturation processes and outcomes of acculturating individuals and groups, Berry et al., (1987) proposed the acculturative stress model. Eustace (2007) asserts that the Berry et al. theory emphasizes the importance of examining acculturative stress as a manifestation of acculturation when an individual or group of people comes into contact with another cultural group. It is important to point out that as individuals we are shaped by values, norms, beliefs, patterns of traditions, symbols and meanings that underlie our home culture. Since the social roles and socialization processes that pertain in one's culture may not be what pertains in another culture, when two or more groups of individuals from different cultures come into contact, and repeatedly so, with each other, there is the potential of the occurrence of the processes of cultural and psychological change. It is this dual process of cultural and psychological changes that Berry (2005) refers to as acculturation.

Berry et al., (1987) indicated that while the experience of acculturation sometimes enhances one's life chances and mental health, it also has the potential to virtually destroy one's ability to carry on when one enters a new cultural environment. The latter is what is referred to as acculturative stress. The concept of acculturative stress according to

Williams and Berry (1991) refers to the kind of stress where the stressors are identified as having their source from the acculturation process itself, often leading to a particular set of stress behaviours that include anxiety, depression, feelings of marginality and alienation, heightened psychosomatic symptoms and identity confusion.

The model (Figure 1) illustrated by what Berry et al., (1987) refers to as acculturation experience, on the left hand side of the figure, shows that acculturation occurs in a particular situation or cultural environment. This acculturation experience could be a migrant community, a native settlement, or sojourners and/or international students who are permanently or temporarily resident in a foreign country. The individual persons participating in and experiencing these changes do so to varying degrees. Either they are experiencing very little changes, or that they are experiencing a rather great deal of changes in the new environment. In the middle section of Figure 1 referred to as stressors, the model illustrates that an individual could experience stressors which could come about as a result of the varying degrees of acculturation experiences they may have had. While for some people the acculturative changes they may have experienced may all be in the form of stressors and are therefore experiencing many stressful situations/stressors, others may perceive the acculturative changes as opportunities for personal growth and development, or as benign stressors in the new environment. On the right side of Figure 1, the model shows the variations of acculturative stress, high or low, that may become manifest due to acculturation experience and stressors.



Source: Berry et al., (1987)

Figure 1. Acculturative Stress Model.

As logical as this model is, this is not a “quid pro quo” kind of phenomenon. Berry et al., (1987) asserts that the model is not in any way deterministic but rather very probabilistic. This is because the relationships among the three major concepts of acculturation experience, stressors and acculturative stress are very much dependent on a host of moderating factors such as the nature of the larger society within which the individual or group find themselves, the type of acculturating group, the mode of acculturation being experienced, a number of demographic and social characteristics of the group and finally the psychological characteristics of the individual persons.

The first moderating factor is whether the nature of the host society or larger society has tolerance for diversity, that is, whether it is a society that embraces pluralism or operates on a more multiculturalist ideology, or it is a society that operates on a more assimilationist ideology where members of the society and foreign persons are pressurized to conform to a certain single cultural standard. Studies by Williams and Berry (1991) in Akhtar (2012) have posited that it is reasonable to expect the stress levels of persons

experiencing acculturation in culturally diverse societies to be less compared to those experiencing acculturation in societies who follow a policy of forced inclusion. The second factor is the type or nature of the acculturating group. If the acculturating group are those who willingly and consciously made the decision to go through the process of acculturation, they are less likely to experience stress compared to those with little choice in the matter. Thus, Berry et al., (1987) assertion that the variations in the degree of voluntariness, movement and permanence of contact have the tendency to affect acculturative stress levels of acculturating groups. Furthermore, if the group are sojourners or international students, such persons could only be in temporary contact with host culture and less likely to have permanence of social support and therefore could experience more mental health challenges compared to those who are permanently settled (Berry et al., 1987).

Another factor that moderates the process of acculturation is/are the strategies that people or groups going through acculturation adopts. Berry et al., (1987) suggested that two major cultural dimensions will inform the mode of acculturation. These cultural dimensions according to Sam and Berry (2010) are firstly, the extent to which people wish to maintain their heritage cultures and identities and the second is the extent to which people wish to maintain contact with persons of the host culture and seeks to participate with them in the daily life of the larger or host society. The degree of preference to either cultural dimension will lead to the adoption of 4 different acculturation strategies or modes of acculturation. According to Berry et al., (1987) these strategies are integration, assimilation, marginalization and separation. The integration mode of acculturation is used by individuals who maintain contact with his/her original culture and at the same time seek to participate in meaningful ways as an important part of the host culture.

Assimilation is where people seek close interactions with members of the host culture and do not wish to maintain any aspect of their cultural identity, a strategy which is

referred to as “going native” in anthropological parlance. The separation strategy is defined by individuals who place a high value on holding on to their original culture and avoid interaction with members of the new society (Sam & Berry, 2010). Finally, marginalization is defined by little or lack of interest in cultural maintenance [for reasons of enforced cultural loss] and little interest in having relations with others [for reasons of exclusion and discrimination] (Sam & Berry, 2010). Individuals with a marginalization or separation inclination are more likely to experience stress and adjustment difficulties compared to those who are integration and assimilation inclined (Berry et al., 1987).

The fourth factor moderating the effects of acculturation and its attendant stresses is the demographic and social characteristics of the acculturating individual such as age, gender, level of education, and intercultural experiences prior to entering host culture among others. Berry et al., (1987) posit that these characteristics are likely to moderate the acculturation process and outcomes. Finally, an individual’s psychological characteristics such as attitudes towards change whether negative or positive; cognitive appraisal of the situation whether controllable or threatening; and coping skills of the individual impacts how a person adapts to life in a new culture. Different persons deal with the pressures of encountering new and different cultural situations differently leading to a highly variable stress outcomes. This is because there are persons who perceive changes to be rather easy to accomplish, through those who perceive change as a serious conflict leading to acculturative stress; to those who perceive changes in cultural context to exceed their capacity to cope leading to psychopathology such as clinical depression or incapacitating anxiety (Berry, 1997).

Social Cognitive Theory. This study can also be understood from the perspective of Albert Bandura’s (1986) Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) which asserts that people have the ability, through fore-thought and self-regulation, to influence their own behaviour and the environment in a purposeful, goal-directed fashion. Rooted in the view of human

agency, social cognitive theory posits that individuals are agents who can make things happen by their own actions by proactively engaging in their own development. At the very core of SCT is the concept of self-efficacy, which refers to a human person's belief in, or a judgement of, his/her capabilities to successfully initiate and execute specific tasks (Bandura, 1997). Bandura (1997) contends that people's behaviour is often not as a result of what the person is actually and objectively able to accomplish but rather by the beliefs they hold in their abilities. Thus, people's accomplishments tend to be better predicted by their self-efficacy beliefs. According to the Social Cognitive Theory and the concept of self-efficacy, individuals' behaviours are better predicted by the beliefs they hold about their capabilities than by what they are actually capable of accomplishing (Pajares, 2002).

In the context of pursuing education in a country other than one's own which could present psychological and sociocultural challenges, studies such as. Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, & VanHorn (2002), and Li & Gasser (2005) have demonstrated that self-efficacy beliefs are very important for individuals to be successful in dealing with acculturative stress that tend to characterize cross-cultural interactions. In a longitudinal comparative study that surveyed a total of 298 international and domestic students, Hechanova-Alampay et al. (2002) found that international students' general and social self-efficacy was significantly positively related to their adaptation to the new culture and negative related to their stress levels. Similarly, Harrison et al. (1996) cited in Briones, Tabernero, Tramontano, Caprara, & Arenas (2009) found that the greater the cross-cultural self-efficacy of American expatriates the more they report better adjustment in Europe.

This study examined how self-efficacy beliefs among international students is beneficial or otherwise in the international student's exercise of control over new, challenging and diverse demands that the new environment in Ghana poses whether socially, culturally or academically.

Review of Related Studies

Numerous studies such as Akhtar (2012), Eustace (2007), Klomegah (2006), Mori (2000), Sandhu & Asrabadi (1994) and Sue & Sue (1999) have reported that international students face multiple stressors related to acculturation. Such stressors tend to make it very difficult for them to adjust to life in a new environment due to the range and complexity of demands placed on the individual, hence a prevalence of stress related physical, psychosocial and behavioural problems among international students. According to Smith & Khawaja (2011), these changes that the international student is faced with could become stressors if they are cognitively appraised as being a difficulty. Below is an overview of some of the most frequently documented acculturative stressors encountered by international students.

Language development and usage. Pedersen, Neighbors, Larimer and Lee (2011), refers to this as one's active attempt to learn the local language and one's use of the local language during interaction with others. It is important to note that language barriers according to Dillion (1993), and Heikinheimo and Shute (1986), are among the most prognostic issues of difficulty when it comes to adjustment among international students. Lin and Yi (1997) showed that among Asian students in the US, lack of adequate language skills led to low self-esteem which in turn led to anxiety and depression among them. Academically, Chen (1999) and Mori (2000), have indicated that language barriers can impede assignment writing, understanding lectures, oral and written examinations and the ability to ask questions in class. A study by Poyrazli and Kavanaugh (2006) in the US found that international students achieving low grades reported lower levels of English proficiency and greater overall adjustment strain. Socially, the quality of time that an international student has with host country's nationals as well as the amount of time spent with them is very much dependent on whether the international student understands and is able to use the host country's local language (Pitts, 2009). An

essential ingredient in acculturation whether short-term or long-term is language acquisition (Berry, 2003).

Homesickness. Homesickness, an affective difficulty that one experiences when attempting to adjust to life in a host culture is one of the most commonly reported stress factor among many international students. Homesickness, manifested as missing family, missing friends, feeling lonely, experiencing adjustment problems and home ruminations (Hull, 1978 cited in Pedersen et al., 2011) have been linked with limited social contact with host country nationals. Sandhu and Asrabadi (1994) established that international students experiencing homesickness are the ones who often think about what family and friends are doing in their home countries and therefore miss food, clothes, news and entertainment as well as natural climate found back home.

Homesickness can also be considered a “minigrief” whereby relocation and adjustment to college life may turn into significant stressors when resources and coping strategies are lacking (Stroebe, van Vliet, Hewstone, & Willis, 2002). Tartakovsky (2007), in a longitudinal study using 211 high-school adolescents who immigrated from Russia and Ukraine to Israel without parents, found that perceived social support from friends and teachers negatively correlated with acculturative stress and homesickness. Also, Yi, Giseala & Kishimoto (2003) found that among international college students studying in the United States, homesickness was the most frequently reported concern. In a study of New Zealander international students, a greater amount of host national interaction was associated with significantly less homesickness (Ward & Kennedy, 1993).

Discrimination and prejudice. Discrimination and prejudice which manifests in variety of forms such as being treated less favourably compared to host country nationals, feelings of inferiority, direct verbal insults, to even physical attacks have been noted by Smith and Khawaja (2011) as a potential acculturative stressor for international students. Research suggests that experiences of prejudice and discrimination has a negative impact

on international students' adaptation and has been linked with poor psychological well-being and depression (Atri, Sharma & Cottrell, 2006; Jung, Hecht & Wadsworth, 2007) and have also been found to predict higher levels of homesickness (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007) as well as having the tendency to dissuade international students from making friends with locals (Chen, 1999; Mori, 2000).

According to Pedersen (1991) cited in Akhtar (2012), greater levels of discrimination and prejudice are likely to occur among international students who are from cultures that are very different from the host country. For instance, compared to the European international students and domestic US students, international students from countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East tend to report significant perceived discrimination (Hanassab, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007, Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). This is further buttressed by studies done in countries such as Canada, the United States and New Zealand where it has been found that international students experience some form of intentional and unintentional racial discrimination (Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986; Pedersen, 1991). It is imperative that countries that host international students must take pragmatic steps towards addressing issues of prejudice and discrimination against international students as such hostilities, covert or overt, that create fear and causes acculturative stress.

Isolation/Alienation. There are international students who for variety of reasons are very interested in the country where they have chosen to study. However, even for such students, Eustace (2007) notes that due to cross-cultural differences friendships and relationship formation could be problematic. Such difficulties with making friends in the host culture could lead to an apparent feeling of isolation and alienation among international students (Arthur, 1999). Feeling lonely, alienated and isolated can be difficult during the initial phase of the adjustment process when students are experiencing difficulties in accessing familiar support networks (Pedersen, 1991). In the United

Kingdom, Bradley (2000) reported that although U.K. students were outwardly friendly, their relationships rarely went past superficial stages, and, as a result, international students felt lonely, marginalized and isolated making most international students turn to their co-nationals (students from the same country) for gaining a sense of belonging.

To find helpful information to address the retention of international students on US college campuses, Rajapaska and Dundes (2002), compared 182 international students to their US counterparts and reported that although international students felt satisfied with their decision to study abroad, about 29% attested to experiencing loneliness, 30% cited frequent homesickness, and 46% “felt they had left a part of themselves at home”. This study confirmed that social network is important in the acculturation of international students.

Loss of social support. Losing the familiar networks of family, friends and significant others’ support is one of the acculturative stressors that international students have to deal with. The literature (e.g. Pedersen, 1991; Sandhu, 1995) suggests that students run the risk of losing their familiar support networks which could lead them to experiencing acculturative stress when they make the decision to study in a foreign country. Having lost their familiar support networks, international students are faced with the added challenge of making new friends and developing a new social support system which tends to be difficult due to differences in social interaction styles in a new environment (Cross, 1995), and language and cultural differences as another barrier in friendship formation (Sadowsky & Plake, 1992 cited in O’Reilly, Ryan & Hickey, 2010).

Pedersen (1991) cited in Akhtar (2012) makes the point that loss and lack of social support in particular have been found to lead to lower academic achievement and negative psychological experiences such as tension, confusion and depression. Yeh and Inose (2003), conducted a study among 359 international students on social support satisfaction and social connectedness as predictors of acculturative stress and concluded that

international students who were satisfied with their social support networks experienced less acculturative stress than those who were not. Ye (2006) further buttresses the point that students who were more satisfied with their interpersonal support networks had less perceived discrimination, less perceived hatred and less negative feelings caused by change than those who were not satisfied. The literature (e.g. Ye, 2006; Yeh & Inose, 2003) suggests the debilitating effect of the loss of social support for the international student as they go through acculturation, as well as the importance of the presence of social support and how it can lead to students' successfully acculturating.

Financial challenges. Concerns surrounding finances can become a problem among international students and has the potential to contribute to their levels of acculturative stress as they transition into new environments. A number of studies such as Li and Kaye (1998), Poyrazli and Grahame (2007), and Yang and Clum (1995) have reported that the majority of international students experienced for reasons such as reliance on limited graduate assistantships that hardly cover living expenses (Kuo, 2004); the international student's need to find jobs on campus which are typically limited in supply (Lee, Koeske & Sales, 2004); and work restrictions in the host country as well as substantially greater tuition fees (Chen, 1999; Mori, 2000). It is these challenges which when experienced by the international students could contribute to their levels of acculturative stress.

However, Butcher and McGrath (2004) make a distinction among international students by reporting that there are international students who travel abroad with large sums of monies and there are those who struggle to pay for their daily meals and has no means of returning home during holidays. This means that even though studies have shown that financial challenges are among the frequently reported acculturative stressors among the majority of international students, there are international students who may not cite financial concerns as contributing to their levels of acculturative stress. A study by

Poyrazli, Arbona, Bullington, and Pisecco (2001) showed that Turkish students awarded scholarships from their government indicated higher levels of stress than those Turkish students with no scholarships because those on scholarships often reported that they often had trouble receiving their monthly remittances due to delayed wiring services between Turkey and the United States.

Educational stressors. The international student is first and foremost a student. Therefore, as is usually the case with all students, performing well academically is very important for the average international student. However, a number of educational factors are likely to cause acculturative stress for the international student and these include, but not limited to, a mismatch in academic expectations; a mismatch in expectations regarding the provision of quality and efficient services by host educational institutions; and adjustment to teaching styles of the host country. For the international student the mismatch in their academic expectations in comparison to the realities of the academic culture of a host university can be a major acculturative stress. It is the expectation of the international student to perform academically well or even better in the host country as they did in the home country (Chen, 1999; Mori, 2000). The reality sometimes is that they perform poorly. According to Smith and Khawaja (2011), such poor academic performance may be due to the acculturative stressors of studying and adapting to a new educational, cultural, and social environment. Chen (1999) notes that if international students are unable to overcome the stressors of the realities of the academic culture of the host university, they may experience decreased confidence in mastering their new environment and could adversely impact their adaptation.

Adjusting to teaching styles can be a major acculturative stress factor for international students. Aubrey (1991) cited in Smith and Khawaja (2011) noted that students from countries where the focus is on rote learning may find it difficult adjusting to a more interactive lecture style like in western universities where premium is placed on

critical thinking. Liberman (1994) examined the educational experience of Asian international students in the USA through 682 qualitative informal interviews. The international students reported that it was difficult to adjust to the interactive teaching style and critical thinking approach to learning even though they acknowledged it was beneficial for their learning. They also expressed concern about the classroom informalities and felt that students were being disrespectful to the faculty. The point must be made that academic stress does not affect the international student alone. All university students experience such stress.

However, academic stress is likely to be intensified for international students due to the added stress of second language anxiety and adapting to a new educational environment (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). The intensification of academic issues become even more imminent when host nationals (students and faculty) have limitations in cross-cultural communication skills which will make them appreciate differences and exercise patience in understanding people who speak differently or even speak a different language. According to Beykont and Daiute (2002), host faculty and students' recognition of cultural barriers is an important cultural/social need for international students' positive adjustment.

Socio-Cultural and Demographic Contextual Predictors of Acculturative Stress among International Students

According to Berry (1997), certain socio-cultural and demographic contextual factors such as cultural distance, religion, health, continent of origin, age, gender, marital status, length of stay in the host country and prior inter-culture travelling experience could serve as predictors of acculturative stress among international students. This study does not aim to determine the influence of demographic predictors (age, gender, marital status) of acculturative stress per se. It is however important to review the literature on

demographics considering that this study has a qualitative component within which the effect of such factors may emerge.

Cultural distance and Religion. Cultural distance according to Berry (1997) refers to how different or dissimilar two cultures are to each other. The extent to which one culture is distant from the other can be found in the language, religion, climate, food preferences, traditions and dimensions such as individualism or collectivism. There is research evidence (Berry et al., 1987; Yeh & Inose, 2003) that suggests that the greater the difference between the home and host cultures the greater the stress. The cultural dimension of individualism-collectivism is one of the four cultural dimensions (the other 3 being masculinity, uncertainty avoidance and power distance) that Hofstede's (1980, 1991, 1997, 2001) extensive work with more than 100,000 employees of the multinational IBM in 40 countries have sought to explain how cultures vary from one another. The dimension refers to how people define themselves and their relationships with others. In an individualist culture, the interest of the individual prevails over the interests of the group. Ties between individuals are loose. People look after themselves and their immediate families. In a collectivist culture, the interest of the group prevails over the interest of the individual. People are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups that continue throughout a lifetime to protect in exchange for unquestioning loyalty (Hofstede, 1997). According to Eustace (2007), the individualism-collectivism cultural dimension has implications for the international students' acculturation experience and its concomitant stresses. It is noteworthy that Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai and Lucca (1988) cited in Eustace (2007) reveals that the individualism-collectivism cultural value orientation is the most promising dimension of cultural distance.

Research on international students' acculturative stress as reported by Swagler and Ellis (2003) and Zhang and Rentz (1996) suggest that students who originate from societies with collectivistic values, such as countries in Africa and Asia, experience

difficulties when in contact with societies that emphasize individualist values such as countries in North America and Europe. A recent study by Akhtar (2012), found international students from Asian and African countries studying in Germany experiencing higher acculturative stress compared to their counterparts from other European countries. An earlier study by Eland (2001) on international students from collectivist societies studying in the United States reported that competition in U.S. educational setting takes away their opportunity to learn and also to relate, thus experiencing acculturative stress. In the same vein, international students from individualist societies that value self-promotion, self-assertion and competition studying in societies that are collectively inclined who place value on modesty, interdependence and in-group harmony are likely to report acculturative stress. Therefore, it will be useful to explore the relationship between cultural distance and acculturative stress from the collective culture angle.

There is extensive literature that suggests that religion comes to the forefront as a way to deal with stress for many individuals (Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005; Chatters, 2000; Ellison & Levin, 1998). Religiosity in the form of church attendance, involvement in church-related activities, and frequency of prayer and religious coping defined by Tix and Frazier (1998) cited in Sanchez, Dillion, Ruffin and De La Rosa (2012) as the use of cognitive and behavioural techniques when confronted with stressful life events, are important predictors of acculturative stress. Researches done among African-Americans (e.g. Holt, Lewellyn, & Rathweg, 2005; Reid & Smalls, 2004) suggest that the use of religious resources such as prayer and religious service attendance tends to temper the effects of discrimination as well as other forms of psychological stress.

Also, Finch and Vega (2003) investigated Mexican-origin adults and found that participants who engaged in religious support-seeking behaviours experienced less acculturative stress, and were less likely to report being in poor health. Conversely, Ellison, Finch, Ryan, and Salinas (2009) reported that religious involvement appeared to

exacerbate the effects of acculturative stress on depressive symptoms of Mexican-origin adults, using the same data set that was previously used by Finch and Vega in 2003. In a more recent study, Yu et al., (2014) established that international students studying in China who were part of an organized religion especially Christians and Muslims experienced more difficulties finding partners and locations for religious activities leading to acculturative stress as they scored high on homesickness. However, the same study found that persons who identified as Hindu or Buddhists scored higher on cultural competence.

From the above, the literature on religion and acculturative stress is quite conflicting. According to the 2010 Population and Housing Census (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012) 95% of the Ghanaian population identify themselves as religious with a greater percent being Christian followed by Muslim. It will be important to explore the impact that religion, a central value of Ghanaian society, has on acculturative stress among international students in Ghana.

Health and Acculturative Stress. All travels, including international travels, have the potential of exposing the traveler to one form of disease or another, whether communicable or non-communicable. International students being a globally mobile group carry some disease with them from their home countries or encounter some disease in the host country. A number of studies (e.g. Hartjes, Baumann, & Henriques, 2009; Laver, Wetzels, & Behrens, 2001; Lopez-Veles & Bayas, 2007) have established a relationship between perception of physical health risks and worrying, and/or psychosocial distress states among travelers, including international students. These studies have established that even when international students are traveling to developing countries where there is the likelihood of encountering infectious diseases, they tend to considerably underestimate the associated health risks, leading to inadequate preparation to avoid contracting these diseases.

Heywood, Zhang, MacIntyre and Seale (2012) conducted a survey using a total sample of 1663 students, international and domestic, in Australia with the aim of assessing travel-associated health risks and preventative behaviour among this group. They found that overall, the participants in the study reported a low risk perception of travel threats with a correspondingly low concern for these health threats. They went on to find that the lowest likelihood and worry scores were found in relation to diseases such as dengue, hepatitis A and B, and measles. Similarly, Hartjes et al., (2009) conducted a cross-sectional survey with 318 American study abroad students to investigate travel health risk perception and their prevention behaviour. The study found that respondents had very low travel health risk perception and therefore did not report being worried. It is important to note that self-efficacy played a significant role in the travel risk perception and behaviour of the respondents since majority of them (94%) rated themselves as confident or very confident about their ability to engage in personal risk-reduction skills in all phases of travel.

Akinola (2014), investigated health problems associated with international students in India and found that international students are confronted with a number of communicable and non-communicable diseases such as pneumonia, tuberculosis, intestinal infections, cholera, typhoid fever, malaria, lymphatic filariasis, and sexually transmitted infections, as well as adjustment issues. International students traveling to developing countries, including Ghana, are more likely to encounter physical health threats as indicated in India. According to Ghana's Ministry of Health (2010), malaria was estimated to account for 38.2% of all out patient attendance; 34.9% of all admissions and 33.7% of under 5 mortality in the country. The recent outbreak of Ebola Viral Disease (EVD) in the West Africa region in 2014, and the debilitating effect it had on the health infrastructure of affected countries like Liberia and Sierra Leone makes it worth

investigating how international students perceive physical health risks and health infrastructure, and whether it is a source of acculturative stress for them.

Age, Gender, and Marital Status. The age of the international student according to Berry (1997) is an important determinant when it comes to acculturation. The argument is that older individuals are at risk of experiencing problems during acculturation compared to younger persons. And so, adolescents and older youths due to development related challenges, including but not limited to identity, are at risk of experiencing substantial problems of acculturation compared to children. It is imperative to point out that the literature on age and acculturative stress is quite mixed. According to Poyrazli et al., (2001), the older an international student the more difficulties they experience compared to younger students because the younger students are more socially involved and therefore makes it easier for them to transition to the new culture. Meanwhile Eustace (2007) found that age is not a significant predictor of acculturative stress among international students studying in US colleges. At the same time there is data (e.g. Junius, 1997; Msengi, 2003) showing that younger international students due to immaturity and inability to deal with new responsibilities in new cultures experience the most acculturative stress compared to older international students.

Studies on gender and acculturative stress have produced mixed results. According to Berry et al., (1987), female persons tend to experience greater stress when they are compared to their male counterparts. A study by Berry (1997) attributed the reason why females experience greater stress to cultural nuances such as gender-role expectations when students go abroad to study. Studies examining international students and acculturative stress such as Leavell (2001) and Msengi (2003) have given credence to the hypothesis that females experience greater stress. To them female international students from countries practicing less freedom than in the U.S. were more likely to experience greater adjustment difficulties. In a recent study by Lee and Padilla (2014),

where they examined acculturative stress and coping among 86 Korean international students at an American university they found that Korean males experienced the greatest amount of general acculturative stress overall, especially with regard to language and cultural ties and to discrimination. Meanwhile, Eustace (2007) found that being male or female is not a significant predictor of acculturative stress among international students studying in the US. Similarly, studies (e.g. Misra, Crist & Brunant, 2003; Galloway & Jenkins, 2005; Goyol, 2002; Knowles, 2003 cited in Eustace, 2007) suggest that there are no significant gender differences on the overall adjustment process of international students.

An international student's marital status as a predictor of acculturative stress has produced mixed results just as the demographic variables of age and gender. While there are studies that have found married international students have fewer adjustment problems than single students (Junius, 1997; McCoy, 1996; Msengi, 2003; Ng, 2001; Perrucci, & Hu, 1995; Salim, 1984), there are those that found no significant differences between married and single students (e.g. Klineberg & Hull, 1978; Pruitt, 1978). To support the hypothesis that married students experience less stress, Poyrazli and Kavanaugh (2006) conducted a study to assess the relation of marital status, ethnicity and academic achievement in relation to the adjustment strains experienced by 141 international graduate students attending five universities in the United States. Their study revealed that marital status and students' level of social adjustment were significantly related, with married students experiencing lower levels of social adjustment strain than single students.

Prior inter-culture travel experience. According to Berry et al., (1987) variables which consider prior intercultural travel experiences have a relationship with acculturative stress. They note that persons who have had extensive travel experiences to different cultures experience less acculturative stress and difficulties in a new cultural environment when compared with persons with no such prior travel experience. In an overview of a

series of studies on the experience of acculturative stress by a variety of cultural groups in Canada, Berry et al., (1987) found that students with prior travel experiences, knowing more languages and having lived in a culturally plural society or urban society was predictive of lower acculturative stress after arrival in a new culture. In a more recent study among international students in Germany, Akhtar (2012) corroborated the finding that prior intercultural travel experiences significantly predicted lower acculturative stress. She reported that students with prior intercultural travel experiences had a fair idea of what to expect in a new culture, how to react in intercultural situations and were better prepared to stay longer in a foreign country compared to their counterparts with no such experience.

Acculturation and Acculturative Stress

The process of adapting to the new culture and the stressors thereof is what is known as acculturation. Pioneers of acculturation research such as Berry and colleagues (e.g. Berry, 1992, 2005, 2006; Berry & Kim, 1988; Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987; Williams and Berry, 1991) cited in Smith & Khawaja (2011) have defined acculturation as the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members. International students' experience of stressors emanating from their encounter with a new culture can lead to a kind of stress commonly referred to as acculturative stress which is the psychological and physical discomfort experienced within a new cultural environment (Lee, Koeske & Sales, 2004). It must however be pointed out that Fritz, Chin and DeMarinis (2008) assert that individuals, in this case international students, who are able to manage their anxieties and uncertainties by accurately understanding the hosts' behaviours and attitudes experience less stress in the acculturation process.

How adjustment develops is multifaceted and depends upon reasons for migration, cultural differences and similarities, the host society's way of responding and the migrant's personality (Berry, 2005; Bourhis, Moise, Perreault, & Senecal, 1997). Since acculturation is also a psychological adaptive process occurring on an individual level, besides it being a cultural process, international students' level of assertiveness and sense of self-efficacy, which are part of their personality, are important intrapersonal variables that could impact the acculturation process upon their arrival into a new social and cultural environment. According to Poyrazli, Arbona, Nora, McPherson and Pisecco (2002), international students upon arrival in their new environment experience many problems of which the most commonly reported ones are decreased self-esteem and lack of assertiveness as well as language barriers, academic demands, homesickness, and loss of social support and status.

Dealing with Acculturative Stress

Self-efficacy and acculturative stress. Several studies (e.g. Kim & Omizo, 2005; Lin & Betz, 2009; Poyrazli et al., 2002; Yusoff, 2011) acknowledge that self-efficacy is a crucial factor in dealing with acculturative stress among international students. Yusoff (2011), invited a sample of 185 international undergraduate students from a variety of countries such as China, Indonesia, Finland, Canada, Thailand, France, Saudi Arabia, Korea, Maldives, Nigeria, Singapore, Cambodia, Sudan, Iran and the United States who were studying in one of the public higher education institutions in Malaysia to participate in a study with the aim of investigating the relationship between self-efficacy, social support and socio-cultural adjustment. Participants found in the library, those attending tutorial classes and others attending lectures volunteered and completed a questionnaire. Findings indicated that there was a positive correlation between self-efficacy and cultural empathy. Thus, international students who were more self-efficacious were better in

cross-cultural situations that were more stressful and entailed more uncertainty compared to those who were less self-efficacious. This finding supports the critical role that self-efficacy plays in how international students deal with acculturative stress socio-culturally and psychologically.

Some of the respondents admitted difficulties in understanding the survey questionnaire due to their weak English proficiency skills. Hence their responses had implications for the accuracy and reliability of the findings of the study. To ensure accuracy and reliability of the findings of this present study the employment of phenomenological inquiry, in addition to the survey, will provide the opportunity for the international student with English proficiency challenges, through the interview process and probes, to fully understand the questions posed as they share their lived experiences of what constitutes acculturative stress and how they deal with it.

Lin and Betz (2009), using a sample of 203 Chinese and Taiwanese international students enrolled in a midwestern university in the US, evaluated how levels of social self-efficacy varied among international students when interacting in social situations which required English speaking or speaking in their native language. It is important to note that several studies such as Pedersen et al., (2011) and Pitts (2009) have identified language barrier to be arguably the most significant predictor of acculturative stress among international students and immigrants. The results of the Lin and Betz (2009) study indicated significant differences in social self-efficacy as a function of language setting. Additionally, they also found that self-efficacy was negatively related to acculturation stress. Participants were made to complete a battery of measures either online through the survey-monkey platform or paper-pencil based. Counseling services were made available to participants who wished to utilize such services upon completion of the battery of measures.

A pilot study was conducted and feedback from participants were incorporated to ensure accuracy and reliability of the battery of measures as well as length of administration. The Lin and Betz (2009) study emphasized the critical role that self-efficacy plays when interacting in social situations and also in dealing with acculturative stress among international students in the context of language use. The study used a largely homogeneous sample of Chinese international students who were mostly graduate students and therefore makes it difficult to generalize the findings of the study to a much more heterogeneous group consisting of Africans, other Asians and even Europeans whose native language is not English. The present study has a heterogeneous representation across the continents and across year of study to enhance the generalizability of its findings. The present study also employs the phenomenological data collection technique which will make the international student share their lived experiences whether negatively and/or positively since there are opportunities for growth and development in the acculturation process.

In a survey conducted among 156 Asian-American college students enrolled in an Asian American course at a US West Coast University, Kim and Omizo (2005) examined how general self-efficacy, cognitive flexibility and collective self-esteem moderated acculturative stress among the students as they sought to adhere to Asian and European American cultural values. Participants comprising of 76 (48.7%) first-year students, 44 (28.2%) sophomores, 21 (13.5%) juniors, and 15 (9.6%) seniors with age ranges of 18 to 24 were made to complete a questionnaire with a number of self-report inventories and received course credit for participation. Results of the study indicated that adherence to European-American values was positively associated with general self-efficacy, suggesting that Asian-Americans who adhere strongly to European-American cultural values perceived themselves as having increased capacity to cope with novel situations and have competence to deal effectively with the demands of these situations. The general

homogeneity of the sample added to the fact that the participants were all enrolled in a particular course makes the findings of the study difficult to generalize to a heterogeneous population group of international students who are also enrolled in a complex of courses. The present study has a heterogeneous population representing 4 continents and are enrolled in a complex mix of courses, Humanities, Education through Sciences, at the University of Ghana and Wisconsin International University College, Ghana, which will make the findings generalizable to international student populations in different contexts.

Apart from students, self-efficacy has been explored among immigrant populations and there too it has been found to play a pivotal role in dealing with acculturative stress. Subsequently, de Saissy (2009) compared a convenience sample of 108 Chinese immigrants to 98 Northern Irish participants on levels of acculturation, self-efficacy and social support and found that there was a significantly positive relationship between Chinese immigrants' self-efficacy and their scores on acculturation. The purpose of the study was to ascertain the extent to which previous findings concerning acculturation can be generalized to a Chinese immigrant population in Northern Ireland, a country characterized by segregation.

Assertiveness and acculturative stress. Affectively, behaviourally and cognitively, assertive people are capable of expressing and reacting to positive and negative emotions without undue anxiety or aggression (Gladding, 1988). Studies by Eskin (2003) and Lee and Ciftci (2014) have established that good assertiveness skills have been linked to students' sense of control over new, challenging and diverse demands that a new cultural environment presents. For example, Lee and Ciftci (2014) in a web-based survey examined the influence of assertiveness, as well as variables including multicultural personality, social support and academic self-efficacy, on socio-cultural adjustment among 330 Asian internationals studying in the U.S. They found that assertiveness among the students helped them to speak up during class, ask for assistance

from colleagues and professors whenever they needed, helping them to successfully complete academic tasks and by so doing successfully dealing with acculturative stress. It is important to point out that even though the Asian international students were from collective cultures where sharing individual opinions or speaking up tend to be seen as a disregard toward other people especially authority figures, those who displayed the skill of assertiveness successfully dealt with acculturative stress.

This finding is revealing as it makes it generalizable to other cultures that are collective inclined. The response rate of 9% in this study was very low making the results of this study difficult to generalize since it was purely a quantitative study. The low response rate was a result of using only the web-based approach where an email was sent randomly to 4000 international email addresses from the registrar's office, which email addresses could not be verified as whether active or not. In order to forestall the weakness of low response rate, a face to face administration of questionnaires was conducted in this study to ensure a representative sample where findings could be generalized.

Korem, Horenczyk and Tatar (2012) examined the intra-group and inter-group assertiveness among adolescents as well as compared these two domains of assertiveness between cultural groups in Israel. They administered questionnaires to 441 immigrants from the Former Soviet Union (FSU), 242 immigrants from Ethiopia and 333 non-immigrants and found that FSU and Ethiopian immigrants' inter-group assertiveness was lower in comparison to non-immigrants. Ethiopians reported the lowest levels of assertiveness as they could not express their thoughts, feelings and beliefs honestly and directly even though they perceived racist attitudes towards them in Israeli society, which perception made them angry and resentful. Korem et al., (2012) further indicated that the Ethiopians' non-assertiveness could be the result of how their original cultural values are so deeply rooted in them that it dominates their social interactions. The study was successful at finding differences in assertiveness among the immigrant groups but was

unable to examine in more depth how immigrants dealt with or cope with acculturative stress. This present study employs, in addition to quantitative inquiry, the qualitative inquiry of phenomenological data collection and analysis which will provide the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of international students lived experiences as they deal with acculturative stress.

In a cross-cultural comparative study examining the self-reported assertiveness of 652 Swedish and 654 Turkish high school students, Eskin (2003) found that highly assertive students, whether they were from individualist inclined Swedish culture which values assertiveness or collective inclined Turkish culture where traditional cultural values still prevail and therefore does not give much premium to assertiveness, reported having more friends and perceiving their friendships as more socially supportive than did less assertive adolescents. The finding further suggested that one's level of assertiveness determines the extent to which the person benefits from social relationships. Even though the sample size in the above mentioned study is quite high, there is no way to determine its representativeness to the general population of Turkish and Swedish students, nor even the urban middle class students in both countries. In this present study, the employment of the Scheafer, Mendenhall and Ott (1986) formula for selecting a scientifically representative sample from a population will make the results of this study to be generalizable to the larger population of international students.

In earlier cross-cultural comparative study, Niikura (1999) compared the modes of self-expression as they reflect the quality of assertiveness among 97 Japanese, 147 Malaysians, 114 Filipinos, and 92 US Americans. Results of the study established that non-assertive behaviour such as deference of individual opinions to group consensus and other styles of group-oriented behaviour which were characteristic of the Japanese were also present in the other Asian sample (Fillipinos and Malaysians). However, behaviours which emphasized the centralness of a person's needs, thoughts and feelings were those

that were observed among the US respondents, a sharp contrast to those observed among the Asian sample. This study limited itself to investigating only the modes of self-expression without factoring in the psychological variables that could impact such modes of expression irrespective of one's culture. The present study seeks to examine self-efficacy, a critical psychological variable that could have an impact on an individual's assertiveness even though there is a strong connection between culture and assertiveness.

Social support and acculturative stress. In a survey to explore the relationships between acculturative stress, interpersonal social support and use of online ethnic groups, Ye (2006) asked 112 Chinese international students attending 2 large and diverse universities in the US to complete questionnaires about their feelings of life in the US, their social support and their use of internet. Findings of the study suggested that students who were more satisfied with their interpersonal social support networks reported less acculturative stress in the form of less perceived discrimination, hatred and negative feelings caused by cultural change. Also, it was found that among those who had used online ethnic social groups, those who reported receiving higher amounts of informational support from these online ethnic groups experienced lower levels of acculturative stress. It is important to point out that the Ye (2006) study provides a deeper understanding of the links between acculturative stress and social support. Yet, the study did not explore the possible impact that social support participants may have received from family and friends may have had on their lowered reported levels of acculturative stress. This present study will therefore explore the influence of social support from family and friends from home country that international students may be receiving in addition to support from host country and how they impact on acculturative stress.

Hendrickson, Rosen and Aune (2011) surveyed 84 international students by examining the relationships between friendship networks, social connectedness, homesickness, contentment and satisfaction and found that international students with a

higher ratio of individuals from the host country in the social support network were more satisfied, content and less homesick. Also, participants who reported more friendship variability with host country nationals described themselves as more satisfied and more socially connected. This study establishes critical role that social support in the form of friendship networks with host country nationals helps the international student to deal with acculturative stress. However, the sample of this study was not representative of the population of international students (1,620) who were studying at the University of Hawaii at the time of the study. The sample represented only 5% when according to Scheafer et al., (1986), a sample must at least be 10% of the population in order to make findings generalizable. In this present study, the sample size will be guided by Scheafer et al., (1986) and the Nasiurma (2000) formulae for selecting a scientifically representative sample in order to make the results generalizable to the entire international students studying in Ghana's universities.

Poyrazli et al., (2004) sampled 141 international students from four (4) different US colleges with the aim of examining relationships among social support and demographic variables on acculturative stress. The study found that social support uniquely contributed to the variance in acculturative stress among international students. The study further established that students who primarily socialized with their own co-nationals than with host nationals experienced more acculturative stress. In a more recent study, Lee and Ciftci (2014), found that social support did not have any impact on the socio-cultural adjustment of Asian international students studying in the U.S. A finding contrary to findings of studies on social support and acculturative stress earlier reviewed. It is noteworthy that the study did not separately explore how social support from students' home country affected adjustment from social support received from host country. The lumping together of social support, irrespective of where it is being received, could have affected the findings of this study since there are studies that give premium to

support from host nationals as effective in dealing with acculturative stress (Poyrazli et al., 2004; Hendrickson et al., 2011) and those that give premium to support from home country (Eustace, 2007; Thomas & Choi, 2006).

In this present study it will be important to find out what the situation is in the Ghanaian context by ensuring a clear distinction between social support from the Ghanaian society in dealing with acculturative stress and how support students receive from their home country affects their dealing with acculturative stress.

Conceptual Model

Based on the literature reviewed above as well as the discussion of the theory underpinning this study, acculturation, a cultural as well as a psychological process is moderated by factors such as assertiveness, self-efficacy and social support as well as by socio-cultural factors of the acculturating individual or group. When one reports that they are self-efficacious, assertive and receives social support then the stresses associated with the process of acculturation become minimized and they are able to have fulfilling experiences in the new socio-cultural environment they are in. Conversely, high acculturative stress is associated with persons with low or no social support; are not assertive; and do not have a sense of self-efficacy. With this understanding, a conceptual model was developed and tested to determine whether the results of this study would confirm or disconfirm it. This study will also shed light on how socio-cultural factors affect the process acculturation and its attendant acculturative stress.

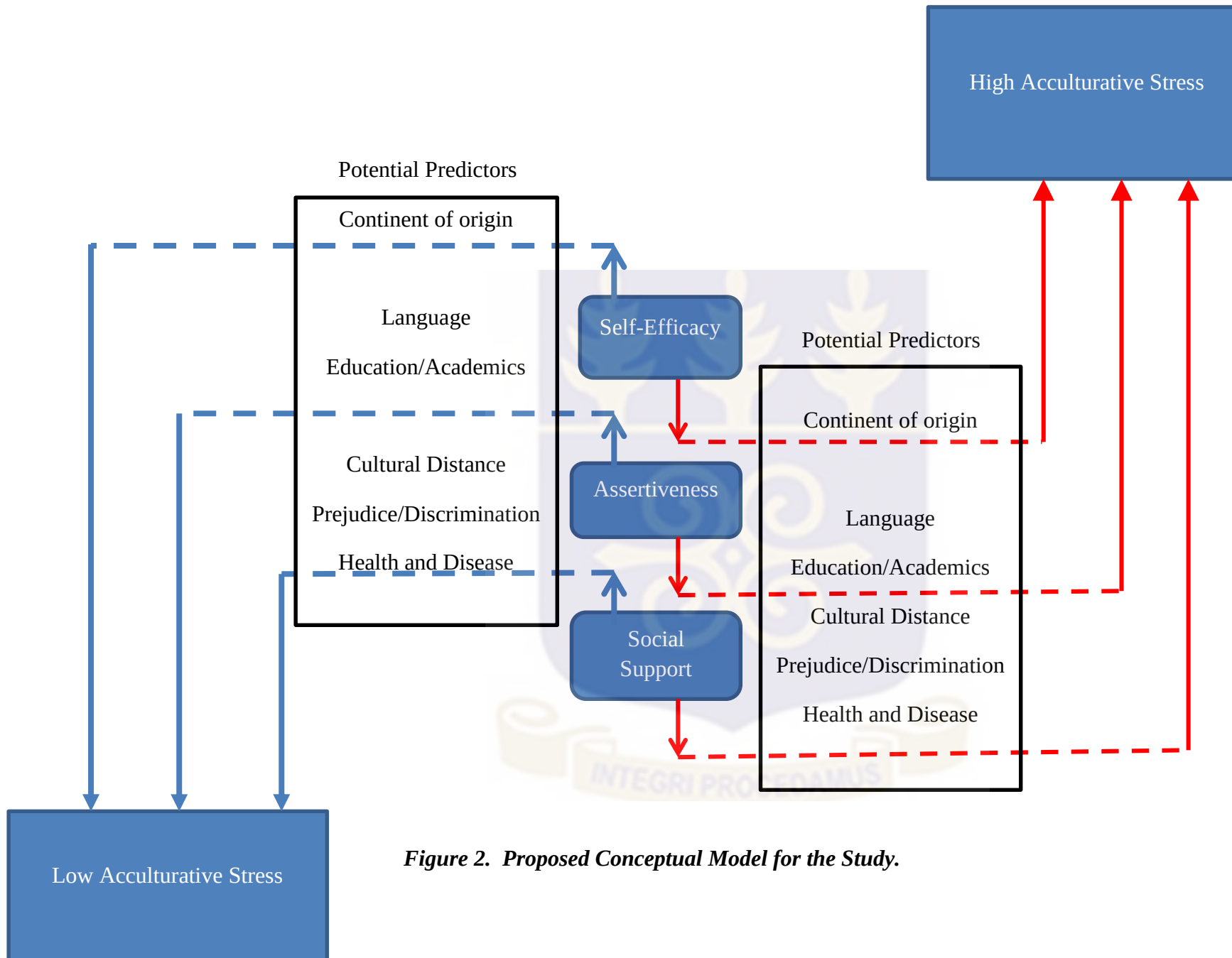


Figure 2. Proposed Conceptual Model for the Study.

In the proposed model (Figure 2) above, the variables of interest in this study are depicted in the round-edged rectangular shapes. The upward pointing blue arrows on each of the round-edged rectangular shapes indicate the possession of high levels of the variables of interest, while the downward pointing red arrows indicate low levels of the variables of interest. The dotted lines (blue and red) indicate the interaction effects of the variables of interest with potential predictors which leads to low or high acculturative stress depicted by sharp-edged rectangular shapes on the left and right side of the figure. Further, the reviewed literature and discussion of the model and theory underpinning this study helped in the formulation of the following hypotheses and research questions.

Hypotheses and Research Questions

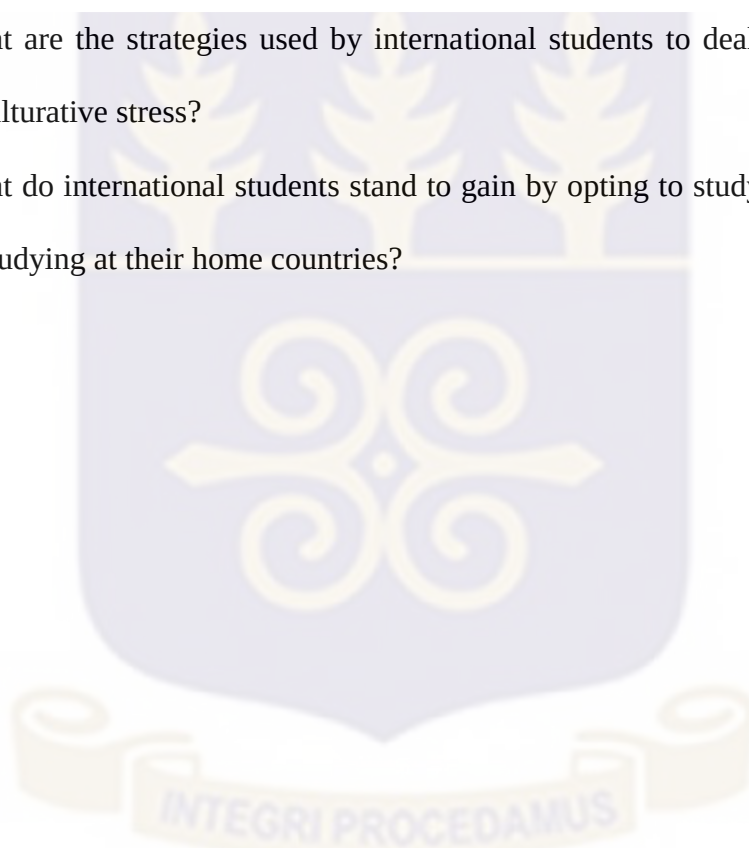
For the quantitative part of this study, the following hypotheses were tested:

1. There will be a significantly negative relationship between psychosocial variables (assertiveness, social support, self-efficacy) and acculturative stress.
2. There will be significant continental differences in acculturative stress levels of international students.
3. Regular international students will experience more academic stress than visiting international students.
4. International students in private universities are unlikely to experience academic stress compared to their colleagues in public universities.
5. Visiting international students will experience more acculturative stress than regular international students.
6. There will be significant differences in acculturative stress levels between international students in private universities and those in public universities.
7. There will be no significant continental differences in assertiveness, self-efficacy and social support levels of international students.

8. There will be a significant difference between regular and visiting international students in their social support levels
9. There will be a significant difference in social support levels between international students in private and public universities.

The following questions guided the study.

1. Does the Ghanaian sociocultural and academic environment pose acculturative stress for international students?
2. What constitutes acculturative stress for the international student in Ghana?
3. What are the strategies used by international students to deal with the effects of acculturative stress?
4. What do international students stand to gain by opting to study abroad as opposed to studying at their home countries?



CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter provides detailed information on the setting, research design and approaches and methods used in data collection. It therefore entails a discussion of the quantitative and qualitative approaches of participant selection and data collection procedures used in this study as well as the philosophical justification for the use of such mixed methods. For each of these approaches, the chapter discusses the inclusion criteria for selecting participants, the instruments used in the data collection and how they were tested through a pilot study.

Study Setting

Two settings were used for this study, and these are the University of Ghana (UG) and Wisconsin International University College (WIUC). The reason for the choice of UG is that it is the premier university in Ghana. In comparison to other public universities and colleges in Ghana, UG attracts a very high number, as well as a diverse group of international students who come to study from practically all the continents of the world (Basic Statistics, 2012). It was also chosen because of its proximity. The international students at UG come to either pursue a course of study, as regular international students, leading to the award of a certificate, diploma, bachelor and post-graduate degree, or as visiting international students who study for a semester or a year. According to the report Strategies to Increase International Graduate Student Enrolment (2014), the University of Ghana's strengths are found in the university having a wide range of infrastructural facilities on campus for students' residential purposes; it is an old institution with a high pedigree and reputation; and promotes cultural and religious diversity. UG therefore offers proximity and accessibility to international students.

Additionally, UG offers a wide range of courses ranging from African Studies, Education, Humanities, to Health Sciences and Basic and Applied Sciences which attract a number of international students. The University of Ghana is currently vigorously pursuing the policy of internationalization with the aim of ensuring that ten percent (10%) of its student body are international students. The total number of students at the University of Ghana during the 2011-2012 academic year was 38,562 of which 1,122 (approx. 3%) were international students from the continents of Africa (680), Americas (345), Europe (55) and Asia (42) (Basic Statistics, 2012). At the time of collecting data for this study, figures from the University of Ghana Institutional Research and Planning Office (IRPO, 2016) indicated that there was a total of 786 international students studying at the University.

Wisconsin International University College (WIUC) also has regular and visiting international students. As at the First Semester of the 2015/2016 academic year, WIUC had an international student population of 991, representing 29% of the 3,673 total student population most of whom are African international students from the West Africa sub-region. WIUC also hosts a small number of US American students through a MoU with Concordia University that allows students from Concordia University to come and study for a semester at WIUC. WIUC was also chosen as a setting for the study because of its proximity, its pursuit of internationalization and the fact that it can be considered as representative of private universities and colleges in Ghana.

Research Design

The sequential explanatory mixed method is the research design that was used for this study. Specifically, the QUAN→qual technique was adopted as a lot of the data collected was done through questionnaire administration and a relatively smaller data was collected through qualitative in-depth interviews. The Theory of Structuration (Giddens,

1985) forms the basis for the adoption of the QUAN→qual mixed methods approach. The theory seeks to draw together the two principal strands of social thinking, Marxism and Positivism, on the one hand and the Phenomenological and Hermeneutic traditions of Humanistic theory on the other. It acknowledges the constant interplay between the structure or social systems and the human agent by debunking the assertion that structures or social systems occupy a position of primacy over agency, while at the same time debunking the assertion that agency occupies a position of primacy over structures or social systems. Additionally, a key feature of mixed methods research is its methodological pluralism or eclecticism which frequently results in superior research compared to monomethod research (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Since this study's findings would be significant for the development of strategies to attract, retain and continue to grow international student numbers, the choice of mixed methods affords the opportunity to have a more complete knowledge and deeper understanding of how international students deal with acculturative stress in the Ghanaian society.

For the quantitative aspect of this study, the exploratory survey method was used since the literature so far has shown that not much scientific research has been done on international students' acculturative stress experiences in Ghana. For the qualitative aspect, the Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (IPA) was employed. As a research method, the IPA is designed to explore and understand the everyday lived experiences of people. The adoption of this technique was therefore to gain insights into the reality of the lived experiences of international students as they go through the process of acculturation and its attendant stressors. Using a self-authored interview guide, in-depth interviews were conducted with participants who were willing to participate in the study after consent had been sought. Details of how these approaches were employed are discussed subsequently.

Quantitative Methods

Population and sampling. The population for this study comprised of 786 and 991 international students at UG and WIUC respectively. Using Scheafer, Mendenhall, and Ott's (1986) formula for calculating a representative sample, the sample size for the survey at University of Ghana was 213 representing 27% of the population of international students (see calculation below).

$$n = \frac{Np(1-p)}{(N-1)B^2/4 + p(1-p)}$$

$$n = \frac{786 \times 0.24(1-0.24)}{(786-1) \times 0.05^2/4 + 0.24(1-0.24)}$$

$$n = 213$$

Where, N=Population size; p= proportion of people to be identified (p is always measured at 0.24); B=0.05 representing the confidence level.

It was observed that majority of international students at WIUC were African international students. Since the majority of the international students at University of Ghana was also African, the large presence of Africans in the sample for the study had to be critically considered to avoid the results of the study being skewed in a particular direction. As a result, the Nasiurma (2000) formula for selecting a representative sample was used in arriving at the sample for WIUC.

$$n = \frac{NC^2}{C^2 + (N-1) e^2}$$

Where, N=Population size; n= sample size; C=co-efficient of variation (0.5) and e=level of precision (0.05). Using this formula, the sample size for WIUC was found to be 91

representing approximately 10% of the total international student population at WIUC (see calculation below).

$$n = \frac{991 \cdot 0.5^2}{0.5^2 + (991-1) \cdot .05^2}$$

$n = 90.9$

At the time of collecting data for this study, it was on record that in UG, African internationals represented approximately 73% of the entire international student population, North Americans represented approximately 20%, while Europeans and Asians represented approximately 4.1% and 3% respectively of the entire international student population. A stratified sampling technique was therefore employed to ensure that these identified sub-groups within the population were duly represented in the same proportion in the sample. Also, since the females were more in the population, a lot more female participants were targeted. In the case of WIUC, since African internationals were more than the non-Africans, efforts were made to get as many of the latter as was possible to be part of the sample of 91 targeted participants.

The expected total sample size for the study was 304. A total of 256 international students from both UG and WIUC eventually participated in the study representing a response rate of 84%. The mean age of participants was 21.89 years ($SD = 2.94$). Sixty-four percent (64%) of the total participants were female while 36% were male. Details of their demographics are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variables	Frequency (<i>n</i> = 256)	Percent (%)
<u>Gender</u>		
<i>Male</i>	92	36
<i>Female</i>	164	64
Age (17-34 years)	<i>M</i> = 21.89, <i>SD</i> = 2.94	
<u>School</u>		
<i>UG</i>	180	70.32
<i>WIUC</i>	76	29.68
<u>Continent</u>		
<i>Africa</i>	168	65.6
<i>Asia</i>	15	5.8
<i>Europe</i>	15	5.8
<i>America</i>	58	22.6
<u>Religion</u>		
<i>No Religion</i>	36	14
<i>Christianity</i>	180	70.32
<i>Islam</i>	30	11.7
<i>Traditional</i>	3	1.17
<i>Other</i>	6	2.34
<u>Duration of Study</u>		
<i>One Semester</i>	69	26.9
<i>One Academic Year</i>	12	4.7
<i>Undergrad (Degree-seeking)</i>	161	62.8
<i>Graduate</i>	11	4.3
<i>Other (English Proficiency)</i>	3	1.17

Instruments

The main instrument for the survey was the International Students Acculturative Experiences Questionnaire (ISAEQ) which comprises of 4 sections. Section A deals with the socio-demographics of participants. Section B consists of the Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students (ASSIS) developed by Sandhu and Asrabadi (1994) and

the Student Stress Inventory by Zeidner (1991). The original ASSIS is a 36-item inventory rated on a 5 point likert (1=Strongly Disagree to 5= Strongly Agree) scale that assesses adjustment problems. It comprises of seven subscales, including *Perceived Discrimination* (8 items; e.g., I am treated differently in social situations), *Homesickness* (4 items; e.g., I feel sad leaving my relatives behind), *Perceived Hate/Rejection* (5 items; e.g., Others do not appreciate my cultural values), *Fear* (4 items; e.g., I feel insecure here), *Stress due to Change/Culture Shock* (3 items; e.g., I feel uncomfortable to adjust to new cultural values), *Guilt* (2 items; e.g., I feel guilty that I am living a different lifestyle here), and *Nonspecific Concerns* (10 items; e.g., I worry about my future for not being able to decide whether to stay here or to go back). It has been reported that ASSIS' internal consistency ranges from .87 to .95 for the total items (Poyrazli et al., 2004; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Sandhu and Asrabadi (1998) reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.94 and Guttman split-half reliability of 0.96 for all 36 items in the scale. Construct validity was supported by a positive association with depression (Constantine, Okazaki, & Utsey, 2004) among international students.

The ASSIS was modified for this study as two new items (37 and 38) were added to specifically tap the stress of health and disease which was the 8th subscale of this inventory. These items are, "*I find it difficult to know what to do and where to go when I am ill*" and "*I worry a lot because in the event of a disease outbreak I don't think the health care system here can manage the situation*". The pilot study found a Cronbach's alpha of 0.86 for the entire scale while the added subscale of health and disease also had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.68. It must be pointed out that with the exception of the Homesickness subscale for which the pilot study found a Cronbach's alpha of .23 the Cronbach's alpha values of the remaining seven subscales of the ASSIS were moderate to high with values ranging from 0.42 to 0.83. In spite the low value of the Homesickness

subscale, it was included in the scale as it is an important acculturative stress factor.

Therefore, all items were kept and included in the scale.

The original ASSIS provides a sum score for total acculturative stress as well as scores for the seven subscales of acculturative stress, with higher scores indicating greater acculturative stress. Scores ranging between 115-190 indicates greater acculturative stress. A score of 77-114 indicate moderate acculturative stress and a then a score of 38-76 indicates low acculturative stress. For the purposes of this study, a mean score of 2.59 and above on a 5 point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree to 5= Strongly Agree), on the ASSIS indicate persons experiencing high acculturative stress while scores below the mean value indicates low acculturative stress.

Originally consisting of 53 items rated on a 5-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 (Not at all stressful) to 5 (Extremely stressful), the Student Stress Inventory (SSI) reported a high internal consistency among a sample of Jewish (coefficient $\alpha = 0.94$) and Arab (coefficient $\alpha = 0.93$) college students. Zeidner and Schwarzer (1996) found an alpha reliability coefficient of .93 for Israeli and .92 for German college students. Akhtar (2012) modified the SSI to a 26-item inventory with a Cronbach's alpha of .92. For the purpose of this study, 2 items ("*conflict between work and study demands*" and "*study/classes after hard day's work*") were taken out of the modified version of the SSI since international students in Ghana do not work alongside schooling. Items 8, 23 and 25 were modified to suit the purpose of current study. Hence, the SSI for this study was a 24-item inventory and had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.91. A mean score of 2.98 or above indicated high academic stress while scores below the mean indicated low academic stress.

Section C comprises of the 30-item Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (RAS) developed by Rathus (1973) and the 10-item General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSS) by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995). The RAS measures how people would behave in specific situations in which assertive and outgoing behaviour can be used. The schedule is

shown to have moderate to high test – retest reliability ($r=.78$; $p<.01$). On a scale of +3 through to -3, scores on the assertiveness schedule can vary from +90 to -90 with a score of 26 for women indicating they exceeded 80% of women in the sample, while a score of 15 for men indicate exceeding 55-60% men in the sample. The pilot study found a moderate internal consistency (coefficient $\alpha = 0.64$) for the RAS and a mean value of $-.03$. Therefore, scores above the mean value on the RAS indicated high assertiveness while scores below indicate low assertiveness for participants in this study.

The GSS assesses a general sense of perceived self-efficacy with the aim of predicting coping with daily hassles as well as adaptation after experiencing all kinds of stressful life events. Its Cronbach's alpha ranged from .76 to .90, with the majority in the high .80s. Responses on the GSS are made on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (Not at all true) to 4 (Exactly true). Total scores are obtained by summing up all 10 items to yield the final composite score with a range from 10 to 40. Scores ranging from 10-19 on the GSS indicated low self-efficacy, 20-29 was indicative of persons who show moderate self-efficacy while scores ranging from 30-40 was indicative of high self-efficacy. For the current study, Cronbach's alpha obtained from the pilot study was 0.74 with a mean value of 3.06. Values below the mean value indicated low self-efficacy.

The final section of the questionnaire, Section D, measured social support among international students. Here, the modified version of the Index of Social Support by Eustace (2007) was used. The modified ISS is a 44-item inventory with a Cronbach's alpha of .90 reliability higher than .81 found by Yang and Clum (1995) in the original 40 item inventory. Also, the modified ISS was administered on 606 international students with F1 or J1 visas studying in the United States while the original ISS was administered only to Asian international students in the U.S. Participants were rated on a 5-point likert scale ranging from 0 (not applicable) to 4 (often). A composite social support score is obtained by adding all the scores on the items with higher scores indicating higher levels

of social support. For the current study, the mean value for the modified ISS obtained from the pilot study was 2.34 with scores below the mean indicating low social support. The pilot conducted also found a Cronbach's alpha of 0.88 for the modified version of the Index of Social Support.

Procedure

In keeping with ethical principles of conducting research using human subjects, approval for conducting this study was sought from the Ethics Committee of Humanities of University of Ghana (see Appendix D). Prior to the actual data collection process, a pilot study was conducted with final year Regular international students and Visiting international students in the second semester to ensure that these students were no more on campus to participate in the main study to ensure the integrity of the study. The pilot was done by administering the ISAEQ to twenty (20) international students of the University of Ghana of which fifteen (15) questionnaires were returned. Of the 15 returned questionnaires, three (3) were incomplete. Therefore 12 completed questionnaires were used to conduct the pilot. The participants comprised of 6 Africans, 4 Americans, 1 Asian and 1 European. Five (5) of the participants were male and seven (7) were female. The aim of the pilot study was to ascertain the appropriateness, reliability and validity of the adopted tests. It was also conducted to ascertain whether participants would have any difficulty responding to the measures and also to determine the estimated time for the completion of the tests during the main study. Participants did not report any difficulty understanding the items of the questionnaire and it took approximately 25 minutes for each participant to complete the questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha (Internal Consistency) was run for each scale and their respective sub-scales.

After approval was granted by the ECH, the actual data collection process began. All participants in the study were made to sign a consent form to indicate their willingness

to participate in the study. They were reminded of the confidentiality of the study and the fact that their responses would not be traceable to them since the study is anonymous and unlinked. Participants were also informed that they are at liberty to discontinue participation if at any point in the questionnaire administration or interviews they felt the need to do so. To be selected for inclusion in this study, a participant had to be an international student enrolled and studying at UG or at WIUC at the time of data collection. They must also have spent a minimum of 2 months in Ghana. It was believed that two months was time enough for a participant to have experienced and dealt with novel and challenging situations in their new environment making them able to provide information relevant to the study.

International students who were participants in this study were approached through various avenues which included reaching out to them during lectures in lecture halls, in their rooms in their on-campus residences, in the offices of the exchange programmes they were participating in, or at the computer lab of the International Programmes Office. In all cases, questionnaires were given to participants to complete and return upon completion, only after they had agreed to participate, signed 2 copies of the consent forms, kept one and returned the other. In the lecture halls at the Legon campus of UG, permission was sought from the Lecturer(s) or Teaching Assistant(s) during lectures and tutorials before proceeding with questionnaire administration. The purpose of the study was explained to the entire student body in the class but targeted at international students. Questionnaires were then distributed to willing participants to complete and return the following week when the class met. For international students at the University of Ghana Medical School (UGMS), Korle-Bu campus, a written permission was sought and granted by the School's administrator (see Appendix E) before the data collection started. The same procedure as was used on Legon campus was followed.

In the lecture halls, it was difficult identifying African internationals and even international students with skin colour the same as most Ghanaians. This difficulty was circumvented by explaining to the students that international students comprised of both regular and visiting internationals. Data collection through this avenue therefore provided for the successful administration and collection of quite a number of questionnaires. Another avenue of data collection was by going from room to room in the on-campus residences at Legon and Korle-Bu campuses of UG. Here, the services of a Research Assistant was employed to assist in the data collection process. The assistant was trained to know how to identify and select participants for inclusion in the study; double-check questionnaires retrieved to ensure they had been properly completed by the participant and ask participants to properly complete questionnaire if any omissions were identified. For this part of the process, participants were sought from room to room and the questionnaires were distributed to willing students. The room numbers of those who volunteered to participate were taken down and the questionnaires were collected either 30 minutes later after receipt of the questionnaire, or at a day and time mutually determined. To ensure that there was not a situation where one participant completed the questionnaire twice, they were asked if they had participated in the study already, and if they had, then they were excluded.

For international students on exchange programmes, questionnaires and consent forms were given to the programme directors/coordinators to be distributed to their students. Completed questionnaires were collected as and when they were ready. International students who had come to use the computer lab at the International Programmes Office at University of Ghana were approached, the purpose of the study explained to them and if they agreed to participate they signed the consent form, completed the questionnaire and returned it to the research assistant. At WIUC, data collection was done mainly in the lecture halls and the same procedure as was used in the

UG lecture halls was followed. As a token of appreciation, all participants were made to keep the pens that were given them to complete the questionnaire. None of the respondents reported any emotional challenge during or after completing the questionnaire hence none of the participants were referred to the Counseling and Placement Centre of the University of Ghana even though that service was available. The data collection process lasted for a little over 4 months.

Qualitative Methods

Population and sample. The sample for the qualitative part of the study was drawn from the same international student population as was done for the quantitative aspect of the study. A total of fifteen (15) participants, 8 males and 7 females, were interviewed. Two (2) of the in-depth interviews, out of the total, were conducted among international students at WIUC (1 African male and 1 African female) as most of the students approached were unwilling to sit through an interview with excuses that they had a class, an assignment to prepare for or simply declined to participate. The rest of the in-depth interviews were all conducted in University of Ghana. Table 2 shows the profile of participants indicating their gender and continent of origin. The table also shows that participants in this phase of the study fairly represent the distribution of international students in the study setting where African international students were the largest population in relation to other international students from Asia, Europe and America.

Table 2. Profile of International Students Interviewed (N=15)

	African	American	Asian	European	Total
Male	4	1	2	1	8
Female	3	2	1	1	7
Total	7	3	3	2	15

Participants had been studying at the 2 universities for a period of between 3 months and 4 years. They ranged in age from between 19 years to 35 years. Two (2) of the African participants (1 male and 1 female) were graduate students with the male pursuing a Master's programme in Agricultural Science and the female pursuing a PhD in Sociology. The remaining were undergrads who were in the Business School, Medical School, Psychology and Sociology majors while the Visiting international students were taking courses mainly in the Colleges of Humanities and Basic and Applied Sciences.

Interview Guide. A self-developed In-Depth Interview (IDI) guide was employed. The IDI guide asked participants to talk about what it means to be an international; whether there are any benefits; whether there are any acculturative stress challenges they face as international students, what these challenges are; and finally, how they are dealing with these challenges. The questions in the IDI guide were open-ended to enable participants freely express and share their lived experiences.

Procedure. Selection of participants for this aspect of the study was done through convenient sampling with the help of a Research Assistant (RA). Prospective participants who were in the computer laboratory of International Programmes' Office, in libraries or in their rooms at the hostels were approached, informed of the study and asked if they would be interested in participating. When the student agreed to participate in the study then an appointment for the day and time suitable for the participant was scheduled. The first name and telephone number of the participant was taken. Participants were called by the RA a day before the agreed interview date and time to ensure that they will be present. This procedure was however successful with only 4 participants as there were situations where participants who had initially agreed will tell the RA that they could not make it due to class work, lecture attendance or personal reasons. A snowball technique was then employed by requesting that these 4 participants tell their friends about the study and ask if they would like to participate. Those who agreed to participate through this means were

directed to the venue of the interview. It was through this snowball technique that the rest of the interviews were conducted successfully.

All the interviews were conducted one-on-one and were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The shortest interview lasted for 40 minutes while the longest interview lasted an hour and 28 minutes. Before each interview began, participants were given consent forms to read and understand, ask questions if they needed clarity on anything, sign 2 copies of the consent, kept one and returned one before interview began. They were assured of the confidentiality of the information they provided, the anonymous nature of the interview, and the fact that they could discontinue with the study even if they had started the interview. Each participant was given a pen, a bottle of soft drink and snacks as a token of reciprocity.

The theory of phenomenology guided data collection as participants were made to tell “what is their experience of being an international student studying in Ghana.” Using a semi-structured in-depth interview guide, deep engagements were established with the participants during the interviews through a very strong rapport that was built at the very beginning of the interview session. The initial strong rapport allowed for participants to narrate their experiences freely and openly. Ethical assurance on the consent forms they had read, understood and signed also allowed for the open and free expression of experiences. Responses provided were probed rigorously to learn more about their experiences and how they dealt with stressful intercultural situations academically and with the larger Ghanaian socio-cultural environment.

Transcription. The in-depth interviews were audio tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure that participants’ responses were captured in their true and original state. Interview questions represented by “I” were typed separately from participants’ responses represented by “R” on different paragraphs. Transcripts of IDIs were named

using participant's gender, continent of origin and a number depending on the order in which they were interviewed. The first male IDI participant from the African continent was named "M1, African", and the first female IDI participant from Asia was named "F1, Asian" and so on. In order to ensure that ethical standards of confidentiality and anonymity are adhered to, these name tags were used for all extracts taken from transcripts to illustrate a finding. The same name tags were used to differentiate an extract taken from one transcription to another.

Analyses. In analyzing the data, the Smith et al. (2009) IPA guide for analyzing large sample was what was followed since the total number of in-depth interviews conducted (14) was quite a large sample and therefore the typical idiographic rigor characteristic of analyzing individual transcripts with the depth of detail required was not followed. The steps followed as outlined by the Smith et al (2009) guide was that each transcript was read and re-read to assess the key emergent themes for the whole group allowing for what Smith and Osborn (2003) describe as an iterative process as there was a very close interaction between reader and text. At the second step, linkages between quotes that shed light on group level themes were established and they were further linked to recurrent themes. Finally, themes were verified, summarized and analytical connections were made among the themes (Smith et al., 2009), to ensure a sound, coherent and analytical write up.

There were three (3) main themes, twelve (12) sub-themes and eighteen (18) sub-sub-themes that were derived from the in-depth interviews conducted. The themes and sub-themes derived from the interview transcripts are represented by a thematic map where oval shapes are representative of the main themes, sharp-edged rectangular shapes representing the sub-themes and round-edged rectangular shapes represented by sub-sub-themes (see Figures 3, 4, & 5 in Chapter 5). The first major theme was "Uncomfortable Experience" which had six (6) sub-themes. The sub-themes were "Language",

“Misperception”, “Differential Treatment”, “Academics”, “Identity” and “Religion”.

Each of the 6 sub-themes, except Religion, had sub-themes that emanated from them (see Figure 3 in Chapter 5). The second major theme was “Me, My Friends and Family”, had 3 sub-themes “Friendship networks”, “Local Hosts/Family” and “Personal Initiative” (see Figure 4 in Chapter 5). The third and final major theme was “Benefits of International Studentship” also had 3 sub-themes emerging from it and these were “Being bilingual”, “Personal growth” and “Quality Education” (see Figure 5 in Chapter 5).



CHAPTER FOUR

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter contains the results of the quantitative data for this study. The SPSS version 20.0 was used to process the data of the study. The earlier part of this chapter dwelt on the descriptive statistics of the results. The Pearson's Product Moment Correlation, One Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), Two-way Analysis of Variance and a One-Way Multiple Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) were used in analyzing the stated hypotheses for this study. Where significant differences were found in the ANOVA and MANOVA tests, the Bonferoni Multiple Comparison test was used to determine where the differences existed among the various groups of international students.

Descriptive Data Analyses

To check the assumption that the variables for this study were normally distributed, values of skewness and kurtosis (measures of distribution) were calculated. According to Hair, Anderson, Tatham and Black (1998) values of skewness and kurtosis within the range of -1 to +1 is indicative of normal distribution whereas values that fall outside the range indicate a substantial departure from normal distribution. Table 3 is the summary table for the means, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis for the Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students (ASSIS), Student Stress Inventory (SSI), Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (RAS), General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE) and the Social Support Scale (SS).

Table 3. Summary of Variable Distribution for the Study (N=256)

Variable	Mean	SD	Raw Score	Skewness	Kurtosis
Acculturative Stress	2.59	0.58	98.66	-.01	0.26
Academic Stress	2.98	0.64	71.60	-.32	0.23
Assertiveness	-0.03	0.75	-1.02	-.46	1.86
Self-Efficacy	3.06	0.55	30.66	-.66	0.42
Social Support	2.34	0.64	103.33	-.58	1.28

The ASSIS and the SSI were both measured on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 means Strongly Disagree and 5 means Strongly Agree, with lower scores indicating less stress. The RAS was measured on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from +3 to -3 where positive scores indicate being assertive and negative scores indicating unassertiveness. The GSE was measured on a 4-point Likert scale with higher scores indicating being self-efficacious. Finally, the social support was measured on a 5-point Likert scale with higher scores indicating receiving support and vice versa.

The skewness values for the scales used for this study indicate that the data distribution was normal. With the exception of positive kurtosis values of assertiveness and social support scales, indicative of scores being far from the mean values of these variables, the data was largely normally distributed. Further, it is evident in Table 3 that the mean value of $M=2.59$, $SD=0.58$ among international students on the acculturative stress scale is indicative of a group who are experiencing a good amount of acculturative stress even though it is not a debilitating one. Thus, the changes that they have encountered on a personal, social, and environmental level, upon arrival in Ghana have been a somewhat stressful experience for them. With regards to stress related to academics, it was evident that international students reported that the academic experience in Ghanaian universities posed a somewhat challenging experience for them based on mean and standard deviation values of $M=2.98$ and $SD=0.64$ respectively.

Considering psychosocial variables of assertiveness, self-efficacy and social support, which aid in dealing with acculturative stress, it was evident in Table 3 that international students were generally an unassertive group ($M=-0.03$, $SD=0.75$). This is an indication that they were generally unable to speak up when faced with challenging experiences. However, international students had a good sense of self-efficacy ($M=3.06$, $SD=0.55$), an indication that they had a sense of belief in selves that they could deal with challenging situations when confronted in their new environment. Finally, the students reported receiving some level of social support ($M=2.34$, $SD=0.64$) while living and studying in Ghana.

In order to find out if there was any association between the study variables among the different groups of international students, a correlation test was conducted and Table 4 shows the summary of correlations that were established among the study variables.

Table 4. Correlation Matrix among Study Variables

Variables	Acculturative Stress	Academic Stress	Assertiveness	Self-Efficacy	Social Support
Acculturative Stress	-	.30	-.13	-.07	-.19
Academic Stress		-	-.17	-.03	-.08
Assertiveness			-	.16	.14
Self-Efficacy				-	.19
Social Support					-

It is evident from Table 4 that a positive correlation was found between acculturative stress and academic stress indicating that students who experienced higher levels of acculturative stress were also experiencing higher levels of academic stress. Results in Table 4 went on to show a negative relationship between acculturative stress and academic stress on the one hand and assertiveness, self-efficacy and social support on the other hand even though these relationships are weak. The results mean that the more

assertive an international student is, the more self-efficacious they are; and the more social support they received, the lower their acculturative and academic stress experience. Also, there was a positive correlation between and among the psychosocial variables of assertiveness, self-efficacy and social support but here too the relationships are weak. These results mean that an international student who is able to speak up and express their feelings had the ability to have control of novel situations in the new environment. At the same time those who felt in control of events in the new environment sought, found and reported experiencing good social support.

Sources of Acculturative Stress among International Students. The determination of the sources of acculturative stress for international students in Ghana was arrived at by calculating the mean of the means of scores of students on the eight (8) sub-scales of the modified ASSIS for this study. Responses on the modified ASSIS was on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 indicating strongly disagree to strongly agree respectively.

Table 5 shows that the most critical source of acculturative stress for international students in this study, based on the means and standard deviation was the issue of health ($M=2.90$, $SD= 1.24$). International students' fear of getting sick and not knowing what to do as well as the lack of belief that the health care system in the country could take care of their needs in the event of disease outbreak was foremost on their minds. At the time of data collection, the ebola outbreak was a major concern in the West African region, besides the endemicity of malaria, and therefore participants' concerns with health concerns could be understood from that perspective.

Table 5. Health Subscale Items in Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students with Means and Standard Deviation

Rank	Subscale and Item content	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Health Subscale (2 items)		2.90	1.24
37	<i>I find it difficult to know what to do and where to go when I am ill</i>	256	2.81	1.23
38	<i>I worry a lot because in the event of a disease outbreak I don't think the health care system here can manage the situation.</i>	256	3.00	1.26

Table 6 indicates that Homesickness (M=2.89, SD=0.85) ranked as the second most important source of acculturative stress for the participants in this study with participants reporting how dearly they missed the people of the countries they come from. Obviously, participants were experiencing some level of distress as a result of being separated from members of their family, friends and relatives as well as the way of lives they are used to prior to studying in Ghana.

Table 6. Homesickness Subscale Items in Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students with Means and Standard Deviation

Rank	Subscale and Item content	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
2	Homesickness Subscale (4 items)		2.89	0.85
1	<i>Homesickness for my country bothers me</i>	256	2.81	1.25
6	<i>I feel sad living in unfamiliar surroundings here</i>	256	2.08	.95
21	<i>I miss the people and country of my origin</i>	256	3.91	1.19
35	<i>I feel sad leaving my relatives behind</i>	256	2.74	1.31

The third major source of acculturative stress for participants in this study was the issue of perception of discrimination with a mean and standard deviation values of M=2.84 and SD= 0.69 respectively (see Table 7). International students' reports of being treated differently in social as well as receiving unequal treatment was a major source of stress for them in their experience in Ghana.

Table 7. Perceived Discrimination Subscale Items in Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students with Means and Standard Deviation

Rank	Subscale and Item content	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
3	Perceived Discrimination Subscale (8 items)		2.84	0.69
3	<i>I am treated differently in social situations</i>	256	3.56	1.09
9	<i>Others are biased towards me</i>	256	2.96	1.11
11	<i>Many opportunities are denied to me</i>	256	2.50	1.18
14	<i>I feel that I receive unequal treatment</i>	256	3.13	1.15
17	<i>I am denied what I deserve</i>	256	2.57	1.73
23	<i>I feel that my people are discriminated against</i>	256	2.77	1.29
26	<i>I am treated differently because of my race</i>	256	2.67	1.30
29	<i>I am treated differently because of my colour</i>	256	2.59	1.27

All three items in the subscale of Stress due to Change posed major stressful challenges for participants in this study and ranked as the fourth most stressful acculturative experience among international students. It is obvious from Table 8 that adjusting to new foods and tastes as well as eating habits was found to be a stressful experience for the study participants. In other words, getting used to the tastes of local dishes in Ghana which could be quite different from the foods and tastes international students are used to from their home countries caused some acculturative stress for the study participants.

Table 8. Stress due to Change Subscale and Items in Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students with Means and Standard Deviation

Rank	Subscale and Item content	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
4	Stress Due to Change Subscale (3 items)		2.82	0.92
2	<i>I feel uncomfortable to adjust to new foods and/or new eating habits</i>	256	3.01	1.32
13	<i>I feel overwhelmed that multiple pressures are placed upon me after moving here to study</i>	256	2.84	1.14
22	<i>I feel uncomfortable to adjust to new cultural values</i>	256	2.62	1.12

Table 9 shows that the subscale of Perceived Hatred ranked fifth in terms of how much of an acculturative stress it is causing international students. Being treated with disdain and disrespect by persons of a host society engenders feelings of being unwelcomed in the new culture hence a source of acculturative stress. Table 9 shows that some participants felt rejected as their values were denigrated and/or rejected by locals. Also, it can be found that there were participants who reported experiencing some level of hatred by the Ghanaian people, albeit non-verbally.

Table 9. Perceived Hatred Subscale and Items in Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students with Means and Standard Deviation

Rank	Subscale and Item content	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
5	Perceived Hatred Subscale (5 items)		2.48	0.82
4	<i>I feel rejected when people are sarcastic toward my cultural values</i>	256	2.95	1.18
15	<i>People in this country show hatred toward me non-verbally</i>	256	2.58	1.17
20	<i>I feel rejected when others don't appreciate my cultural values</i>	256	2.32	1.15
24	<i>People in this country show hatred toward me through their actions</i>	256	2.40	1.14
33	<i>People from here show hatred toward me verbally</i>	256	2.14	1.07

The subscale of Non-Specific concerns ranked sixth in descending order in terms of how much acculturative stress these factors cause the study participants. In Table 10, it was found that some international students' feeling that locals do not understand the cultural values they hold dear was a source of acculturative stress for them. Also, experiencing minimal to no association with locals was also a source of stress for the international students as they did not feel a sense of belonging in the new socio-cultural and academic environment. Meanwhile communicating in English language (M=1.96, SD=1.19) did not engender much of a stressful experience as the mean value for that item was one of the lowest in comparison to other items in this subscale. In other words,

students felt some level of confidence communicating in the English language as they might have prepared prior to arrival knowing that English is the official language of Ghana.

Table 10. Non-Specific Subscale and Items in Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students with Means and Standard Deviation

Rank	Subscale and Item content	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
6	Non-Specific Subscale (10 items)		2.43	0.65
5	<i>I feel nervous to communicate in English</i>	256	1.96	1.19
8	<i>I feel intimidated to participate in social activities</i>	256	2.53	1.65
12	<i>I feel angry that my people are considered inferior here</i>	256	2.48	1.35
16	<i>It hurts when people don't understand my cultural values</i>	256	3.06	1.15
19	<i>I feel low because of my cultural background</i>	256	1.67	.80
25	<i>I feel that my status in this society is low due to my cultural background</i>	256	2.11	1.00
28	<i>I don't feel a sense of belonging (community) here</i>	256	2.68	1.19
30	<i>I feel sad to consider my people's problems</i>	256	2.63	1.14
32	<i>I feel some people from here don't associate with me because of my ethnicity</i>	256	2.75	1.27
36	<i>I worry about my future for not being able to decide whether to stay or go back</i>	256	2.40	1.21

Participants generally reported feeling safe and secured while living and studying in Ghana. This means that in spite of where participants came from, they found Ghana as a generally safe and comfortable environment where they could go about their daily activities without entertaining any fears of insecurity whether for their person nor their belongings. Table 11 indicates that the subscale of fear ($M=2.23$, $SD=0.82$) was one of the acculturative issues that was of least concern for the participants in this study.

Table 11. Fear Subscales and Items in Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students with Means and Standard Deviation

Rank	Subscale and Item content	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
7	Fear Subscale (4 items)		2.23	0.82
7	<i>I fear for my personal safety because of my different cultural background</i>	256	2.41	1.15
18	<i>I have to frequently relocate for fear of others</i>	256	1.83	.91
27	<i>I feel insecure here</i>	256	2.34	1.16
31	<i>I generally keep a low profile here due to fear</i>	256	2.36	1.10

Results in Table 12 indicate that the other acculturative stress issue of least concern for the study participants was guilt ($M=2.16$, $SD=1.05$). Study participants reported not experiencing much emotional nor cognitive distress as a result of living a different kind of lifestyle in Ghana because of the belief that they have not compromised any value by living and studying in Ghana as international students.

Table 12. Guilt Subscale and Items in Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students with Means and Standard Deviation

Rank	Subscale and Item content	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
8	Guilt Subscale (2 items)		2.16	1.05
10	<i>I feel guilty to leave my family and friends behind</i>	256	2.06	1.00
34	<i>I feel guilty that I am living a different lifestyle here</i>	256	2.26	1.11

Results in Table 13 show that there were some differences in the sources of acculturative stress for international students based on whether they were Visiting internationals who are studying for a short term (one semester or one academic year) or Regular degree-seeking international students.

Table 13. Summary of Differences in Sources of Acculturative Stress between Visiting and Regular International Students

Rank	Stressor	Visiting Intl* M (SD)	Rank	Stressor	Regular Intl* M (SD)
1.	Perceived Discrimination	2.85 (0.69)	1.	Health	3.12 (0.99)
2.	Health	2.43 (1.01)	2.	Homesickness	3.11 (0.82)
3.	Homesickness	2.40 (0.70)	3.	Culture Change	3.09 (0.83)
4.	Culture Change	2.24 (0.84)	4.	Perceived Discrimination	2.85 (0.74)
5.	Non-Specific Concerns	2.24 (0.65)	5.	Perceived Hatred	2.73 (0.80)
6.	Guilt	2.01 (0.86)	6.	Non-Specific Concerns	2.51 (0.63)
7.	Fear	1.95 (0.69)	7.	Fear	2.36 (0.84)
8.	Perceived Hatred	1.93 (0.58)	8.	Guilt	2.23 (0.79)

**Intl=International*

Health concerns engendering acculturative stress were either first or second for regular and visiting students respectively. Among visiting international students, the major source of acculturative stress was the perception of discrimination ($M=2.85$, $SD=0.69$) where they feel that they are treated differently or receive unequal treatment in social situations. Regarding sources of acculturative stress that were of least concern, results in Table 13 for Regular international students corroborate results in Tables 11 and 12 for all international students. However, for visiting international students, perceived hatred ($M=1.93$, $SD=0.58$) was the least source of stress for them.

Following from the information in Table 13, it was imperative to find out how the various groups of international students from different continents experienced acculturative stress as well as how they fared on the other study variables. Table 14 shows the means and standard deviations of the study variables among the international students from the continents of Africa, Asia, America and Europe.

Table 14. Means and Standard Deviations of Study Variables among International Students

		Europe (N=15) M (SD)	American (N=59) M (SD)	Asia (N=15) M (SD)	Africa (N=168) M (SD)
Stressors	Acculturative Stress	2.12 (0.26)	2.30 (0.48)	2.69 (0.47)	2.73 (0.58)
	Academic Stress	2.81(0.44)	2.79 (0.79)	3.10 (0.57)	3.05 (0.59)
Psycho-Social Variables	Assertiveness	0.18 (0.35)	-0.03 (0.99)	-0.16 (1.19)	-0.04 (0.62)
	Self-Efficacy	3.18 (0.35)	3.24 (.48)	2.92 (0.55)	3.07 (.58)
	Social Support	2.68 (0.37)	2.59 (0.60)	2.39 (0.44)	2.22 (0.65)

It is evident in Table 14 that international students from the African continent were the ones who reported a comparatively higher acculturative stress ($M=2.73$, $SD=0.58$) and also reported experiencing the least social support ($M=2.22$, $SD=0.65$). International students from Europe ($M=2.12$, $SD=0.26$) on the other hand experienced the least acculturative stress and reported experiencing high social support ($M=2.68$, $SD=0.37$). When it came to stress related to academics, international students from the continents of Asia ($M=3.10$, $SD=0.57$) and Africa ($M=3.05$, $SD=0.59$), based on their mean values, were more academically stressed compared to their American ($M=2.79$, $SD=0.79$) and European ($M=2.81$, $SD=0.44$) counterparts. On the intrapersonal psychological variables of assertiveness and self-efficacy, international students from Asia had the least sense of self-efficacy ($M=2.92$, $SD=0.55$) and were the least assertive ($M=-0.16$, $SD=1.19$) compared to international students from Africa, America and Europe. European international students' value on assertiveness ($M=0.18$, $SD=0.35$) was the highest, whereas international students from the American continent ($M=3.24$, $SD=0.48$) had a high sense of self-efficacy.

The study further examined whether there would be differences in acculturative stress, academic stress and social support among international students (visiting or regular) and where they were studying, whether in public or private universities. Table 15 shows

the means and standard deviations for international students in public and private Universities on Acculturative stress, Academic stress and Social Support. It also shows the means and standard deviations for regular and visiting international students on Acculturative stress, Academic stress and Social Support.

Table 15. Summary Table of means for type of Institution and type of student on dependent variables

Variable	Acculturative stress	Academic stress	Social Support
	<i>Mean(SD)</i>	<i>Mean(SD)</i>	<i>Mean(SD)</i>
Public university (N= 180)	2.49(0.56)	2.98 (0.68)	2.40 (0.64)
Private university (N=76)	2.82 (0.55)	2.98 (0.53)	2.1 (0.58)
Regular students (N=173)	2.73 (0.57)	3.04 (0.58)	2.21 (0.64)
Visiting students (N=83)	2.29 (0.47)	2.85 (0.74)	2.62 (0.55)

It is obvious from Table 15 that international students in private universities (M=2.82, SD=0.55) experienced higher acculturative stress compared to their peers in public universities (M=2.49, SD=0.56). Also, regular international students (M=2.73, SD=0.57) whether they were studying in a public or a private university experienced high acculturative stress compared to visiting international students (M=2.29, SD=0.47) in either public or private universities. Similarly, regular international students (M=3.04, SD=0.58) were more academically stressed compared to visiting international students (M=2.85, SD=0.74).

Further, it is imperative to point out that visiting international students (M=2.62, SD=0.55) reported receiving more social support than their counterpart regular international students (M=2.21, SD=0.64) irrespective of whether they were studying in a private or a public university. Finally, international students in public universities (M=2.4,

SD=0.64) reported receiving more social support than their peers in private universities (M=2.1, SD=0.58).

It was pertinent to find out where international students in Ghana received their social support. Table 16 ranks in order of hierarchy where international students reported receiving the most social support while studying in Ghana.

Table 16. Ranking of International Students Sources of Social Support

Ranks	Stressor	Mean	Standard Deviation
1.	Local Friends	3.40	1.09
2.	Home Country	3.01	1.24
3.	Religious support	2.51	1.35
4.	Intl Office/Center	2.30	0.70
5.	Faculty Support	2.14	1.27
6.	Community/Student Organization	1.82	0.89
7.	Host/Local Family	1.61	1.58

They report that support received from new friendship networks formed locally (M=3.40, SD=1.09) was the foremost source of support as they deal with the acculturative and academic stress issues they encounter in Ghana. Seeking support from family and friends from home country was the second major source of social support for international students. Host/local family support was where participants in this study reported receiving the least social support (M=1.61, SD=1.58).

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis 1. Hypothesis one (1) stated that there will be a significantly negative relationship between psychosocial variable (assertiveness, social support, self-efficacy) and acculturative stress. The summary of results of the Correlation Matrix performed to test this hypothesis as in Table 17 shows that there was a significant negative correlation

between assertiveness and acculturative stress ($r = -.13, p < .05$). Also, there was a significant negative correlation between social support and acculturative stress ($r = -.19, p < .05$). However, there was no significant correlation between self-efficacy and acculturative stress among the respondents ($r = -.016, p = .79$).

Table 17. Summary of Pearson's Product Moment Correlation among Study Variables

Variables	Acculturative Stress	Academic Stress	Assertiveness	Self-Efficacy	Social Support
Acculturative Stress	-	.30*	-.13*	-.07	-.19*
Academic Stress		-	-.17*	-.03	-.08
Assertiveness			-	.16*	.14*
Self-Efficacy				-	.19*

$p < .05$

Hypothesis 2. Hypothesis 2 stated that there will be significant continental differences in acculturative stress levels of international students. This hypothesis was tested using the One-Way ANOVA.

Table 18. Summary of One-Way ANOVA on Acculturative Stress and Continental Differences

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	16479.06	3	5493.02	12.84*	.00
Within Groups	107787.71	252	427.72		
Total	124266.77	255			

$p < .05$

From Table 18, significant differences were found in the acculturative stress levels of international students and the continent where they come from ($F=12.842, p < .05$). However, it was unclear where these differences lay hence a Post Hoc analysis of the mean scores was conducted using Bonferroni Multiple Comparison test to find where

these differences lay. Table 19 summarizes the results of the post hoc analyses using the Bonferroni Multiple Comparison test.

Table 19. Bonferroni Multiple Comparison of Acculturative Stress and Continental Differences

Continent	Continent	Mean Difference
Africa	Asia	1.40
	Europe	22.94*
	America	16.11*
	Africa	-
Asia	Europe	21.53*
	America	14.70
	Africa	-
	Asia	-
Europe	America	-6.82

$p < .05$

It is evident that there was significant difference in the acculturative stress levels between international students from Africa and Europe. The mean scores in Table 14 shows that African international students experienced higher acculturative stress ($M = 2.73$, $SD = 0.58$) compared to European international students ($M = 2.12$, $SD = 0.26$) thereby giving credence to the findings in Table 19. Also, there was significant difference in the acculturative stress levels between international students from Africa ($M = 2.73$, $SD = 0.58$) and America ($M = 2.30$, $SD = 0.48$). This means that African international students reported higher acculturative stress than their American counterparts. Finally, there was significant difference in the acculturative stress levels between international students from Asia ($M = 2.69$, $SD = 0.47$) and Europe ($M = 2.12$, $SD = 0.26$). Thus, Asian international students had higher acculturative stress levels than the European students.

Hypotheses 3 and 4. Hypothesis 3 stated that regular international students will experience more academic stress than visiting international students. Hypothesis 4 also stated that international students in private universities are unlikely to experience

academic stress compared to their colleagues in public universities. A 2-Way ANOVA was used to test these hypotheses. Table 20 summarizes the results of this analysis.

Table 20. Summary of 2-Way ANOVA for Type of University and Type of Student on Academic Stress

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Private and Public Univ*	651.52	1	651.52	2.76	.09	.01
Visiting and Regular Intl**	1184.12	1	1184.12	5.03	.02*	.02
Univ*Intl Student	416.62	1	416.62	1.77	.18	.00
Error	59316.52	252	235.38			
Total	1373871.00	256				

$p < .05$

*Univ=University

**Intl=International

Results show that a significant difference was observed in the academic stress experiences of visiting and regular international students ($F_{(1, 256)} = 5.03, p < .05$). This finding is corroborated by the mean values in Table 15 indicating that regular international students ($M=3.04, SD=0.58$) were more academically stressed compared to visiting international students ($M=2.85, SD=0.74$). No significant differences were however observed in the academic stress experiences of international students irrespective of whether they were studying in a public or private university.

Hypotheses 5 and 6. To test hypotheses 5 and 6 another 2-way ANOVA was conducted. Hypotheses 5 stated that visiting international students will experience more acculturative stress than regular international students. And hypothesis 6 stated that there will be significant differences in acculturative stress levels between international students in private universities and those in public universities. Table 21 summarizes the results.

Table 21. Summary for 2-Way ANOVA for Type of University and Type of Student on Acculturative Stress

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Private and Public Univ*	825.10	1	825.10	1.99	.15	.00
Visiting and Regular Intl**	7238.03	1	7238.03	17.50	.00*	.06
University*Intl Student	2567.33	1	2567.33	6.21	.01*	.02
Error	104184.86	252	413.43			
Total	2616521.00	256				

$p < .05$

*Univ=University

**Intl=International

It is evident in Table 21 that there was no statistically significant difference ($F_{(1, 256)} = 1.99, p > .05$) in the acculturative stress experiences of international students whether they are in private universities or in public universities. However, a statistically significant difference was found ($F_{(1, 256)} = 17.50, p < .05$) between Visiting and Regular international but the hypothesis was not confirmed as the regular international students rather had more acculturative stress experiences. The mean values in Table 15 corroborate the significant differences in acculturative stress experiences of Regular internationals ($M = 2.73, SD = 0.57$) and visiting internationals ($M = 2.29, SD = 0.47$).

Hypothesis 7. This hypothesis stated that there will be no significant continental differences in assertiveness, self-efficacy and social support levels of international students. Significant continental differences were observed among international students on the psychosocial variables of self-efficacy ($F_{(3, 252)} = 3.18, p < .05$) and social support ($F_{(3, 252)} = 6.73, p < .05$). A multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to test the stated hypothesis results of which are summarized in Table 22.

Table 22. One-way MANOVA for Continental differences on Assertiveness, Self-Efficacy and Social Support

Source	Dependent Variable	Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	<i>df</i> error	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Continent	Assertiveness	869.85	3	252	289.95	.56	.64	.00
	Self-efficacy	291.60	3	252	97.20	3.18	.02*	.03
	Social support	15256.58	3	252	5085.52	6.73	.00*	.07

$p < .05$

To determine where the continental differences were, a Post Hoc analysis was conducted using the Bonferroni Multiple Comparison test as summarized in Table 23.

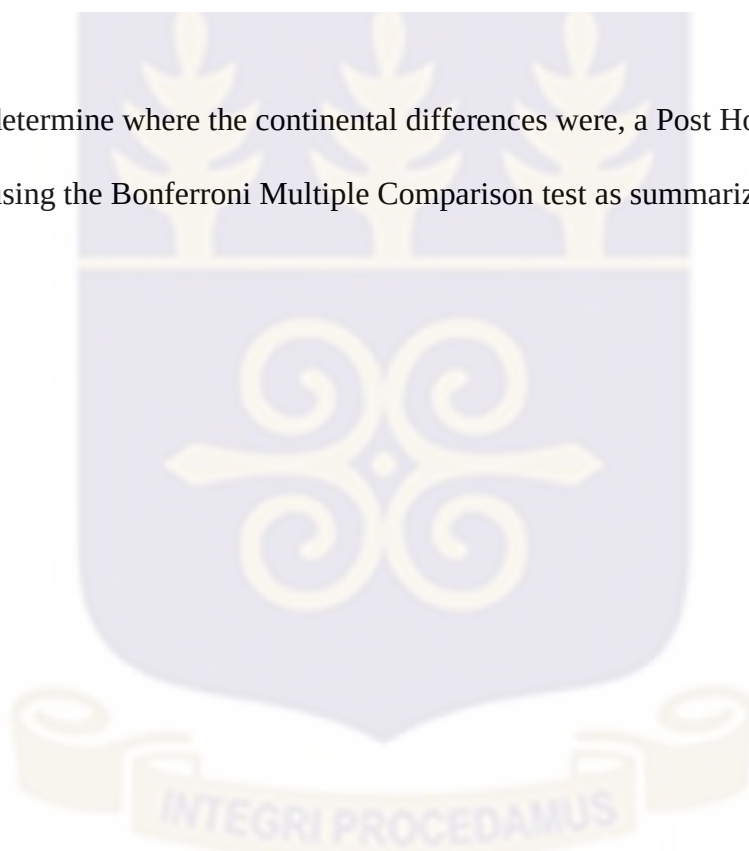


Table 23. Bonferroni Multiple Comparison of Psychosocial Variables and Continental Differences

Dependent Variable	Continent	Continent	Mean Difference
Assertiveness	Africa	Asia	3.68
		Europe	-6.71
		America	-.20
	Asia	Africa	-
		Europe	-10.40
		America	-3.88
	Europe	Africa	-
		Asia	-
		America	6.51
Self-Efficacy	Africa	Asia	.87
		Europe	-1.79
		America	-2.33*
	Asia	Africa	-
		Europe	-2.66
		America	-3.20
	Europe	Africa	-
		Asia	-
		America	-.54
Social Support	Africa	Asia	-7.23
		Europe	-20.36*
		America	-16.27*
	Asia	Africa	-
		Europe	-13.13
		America	-9.03
	Europe	Africa	-
		Asia	-
		America	4.09

p<.05

Regarding self-efficacy, the table illustrates that international students from America were significantly more self-efficacious compared to their counterparts from Africa. The results also showed that international students from the continent of America reported receiving significantly higher social support than those from Africa. Similarly,

European international students reported receiving significantly higher social support than their African counterparts.

Hypothesis 8 and 9. Hypothesis 8 stated that there will be a significant difference between regular and visiting international students in their social support levels. And hypothesis 9 also stated that there will be a significant difference in social support levels between international students in private and public universities. Both hypotheses were also analyzed using the 2-Way ANOVA as summarized in Table 24.

Table 24. Summary of 2-Way ANOVA for Type of University and Type of Student on Social Support

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Private and Public Univ	123.32	1	123.32	.171	.68	.00
Visiting and Regular Intl	5719.22	1	5719.22	7.916	.00*	.03
University*Intl Student	1686.79	1	1686.79	2.335	.12	.00
Error	182072.93	252	722.51			
Total	2939095.00	256				

* $p < .05$

Results from Table 24 indicate that no differences existed ($F_{(1, 256)} = .171, p > .05$) in the social support international students reported they received in spite of the schools they attended. There was however significant differences ($F_{(1, 256)} = 7.91, p < .05$) between the social support visiting international students reported they received and what regular international students reported they received.

Summary of Quantitative Findings

Acculturative stress experiences of African international students was significantly higher in comparison to their colleague international students. Regarding psychosocial variables of self-efficacy and social support, international students from America were

more self-efficacious and reported receiving high social support compared to their peers. Similarly, international students from Europe received significantly higher social support than their African peers. Further, a significant but weak inverse relationship was found between the psychosocial variables of assertiveness, social support and the acculturative stress experiences of international students.

The study found that regular international students were significantly stressed academically when compared to visiting international students. Finally, no differences were found in the academic or acculturative stress experiences of international students whether they were in private or public universities.



CHAPTER FIVE

QUALITATIVE RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter presents the qualitative data for the study which was based on the philosophical underpinnings and analytical methods of the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). By using the IPA, the qualitative data helped to understand in greater depth and detail what was found in the quantitative data. The aim of the qualitative study was to understand in greater detail what constitutes acculturative stress for the international student in the new socio-cultural environment of Ghana and also the academic environment present in the universities they attend. The qualitative data also gave a voice to the study participants about their experiences as international students and goes further to examine the resources participants employ in dealing with the phenomenon of acculturative stress. Smith (1996) developed the IPA with the aim of exploring how persons make sense of their personal and social world and the meanings they make of encountering such phenomena.

As a methodology and as a theory, the IPA according to Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) views the individual person as having a wealth of subjective knowledge about a phenomenon that can be examined. The IPA rests on three theoretical grounds. These grounds are phenomenology-the study of the lived experiences of a person (Lavery, 2003); hermeneutics- where one seeks to make sense of events and experiences of the other person through interpretation (Smith et al., 2009); and finally ideography where there is commitment to *the particular* to allow for a detailed and in-depth analysis of an event (Smith et al., 2009). It is worth reiterating that the theory of phenomenology guided the conduct of this phase of the study.

Acculturative Stress Experiences

Uncomfortable Experience. This theme seeks to bring to the fore the challenging life experiences international students living and studying in Ghana encounter on a daily basis whether on university campuses, in the city of Accra or in the country as a whole. It also seeks to present how international students are treated, or perceived they are treated, in their daily interactions in the Ghanaian society. Life as an international student was presented by a good number of the international students, ten (10) out of the 15, as a terrible and frustrating period which was generally described as an uncomfortable experience. Almost all the respondents irrespective of continent of origin found life a difficult, frustrating and a terrible experience.

For the African student, financial considerations were found as a major source of stress. The fast rate of price increases for certain basic items like food and water as well as being targets of exorbitant pricing of items when they go to the markets and when taking taxi cabs was a source of stress for them. They believed that prices are doubled or tripled by virtue of not being Ghanaian and making them feel quite uncomfortable in the country. These are explained in the statements provided here:

“Generally in Ghana I dare say it’s not easy. It’s not easy for somebody coming from a country like mine, I can say that it’s not easy. In that in my country we don’t have problem with water; we don’t have problem with food. But those commodities are very very expensive here in Ghana” (M5, African).

“I don’t know but I don’t really like the status of being an international student because I think life is really hard for us. When you are taking a taxi, they remark that you are not a Ghanaian... you don’t know how to speak Twi. They will charge you more. And normally at the market...anywhere you are” (F2, African).

“... And there’s also that thing when you go to the market. When the woman finds out that you are not a Ghanaian, they’ll triple the price for you. It’s the same thing with the taxi drivers too” (F3, African).

Also, the belief that in spite of the fact that they were making such significant financial contribution to the Ghanaian society and to the universities by virtue of the school fees they pay yet not being accorded the needed recognition was a source of stress for them. In their estimation, payment of such high fees to the universities should ordinarily translate into being given some preferential treatment. However, the opposite was what was being experienced as they were treated as local students, and worse still subjected to insults and disrespect by Ghanaians. The quote below illustrate the frustrations of an African student.

“Well, honestly to me I can say I’m having a very terrible experience. I don’t feel appreciated here at all as an international student. So it’s like I’m a local student here...To be specific, as a Nigerian it is believed that Nigerians pay most of the money as international students here because when you think about it, Nigerians have to convert their monies to dollars and things like that... So we believe that Nigerians pay most of the monies here. But then Nigerians are the ones getting the most insult from the local people around.” (M2, African).

Lack of information on changes made on the academic front for international students without a good understanding of the academic environment was a source of stress for some of the study participants, as the example below indicates:

“I feel kind of outside of the loop sometimes. I know that I’ve had classes cancelled or moved and somehow all of the local students knew; but none of the international students did. So that’s why sometimes I feel it’s a little bit harder to get information or I don’t know much about how this system works” (F5, American).

Also, wrongful perceptions of being wealthy was a major source of acculturative stress for a number of European and American students.

“Specifically with wealth I think there is always the issue of paying for certain course material. And I guess some students...especially my geography and politics classes...when the object of money comes up, a lot of students protest a little bit. They don’t want to pay for it. But I think that people kind of assume that it’s nothing for me” (M8, European).

With female international students, especially those from Europe and America, the frequency of marriage proposals received almost daily by Ghanaian men was a major source of acculturative stress. This was expressed the following way:

“It has been a frustrating period of time for me... Since I’ve been here I’ve never gone a week without being propositioned for marriage; take me back to America, you know, assuming that I have money to take myself and you back to my hometown and support you there... Things like that” (F6, American).

“You can barely have a meaningful conversation with guys here whether in trotro or in class. Everybody says they love you. I can tell all they want is to have an affair with me, it is as if they think I am here to have sexual affairs all over the place” (F5, American).

Some of the international students from Asia reported that the hot Ghanaian climate as well as the lack of and/or slow speed of internet facilities on the university campuses make life difficult for them. *“When I came first it was embarrassing because of the weather. The weather is so hot. Very hot. And it’s difficult to walk around here. It’s very hard to...it’s just the weather” (M7, Asian).* Another also stated, *“In Korea you can use the internet or Wi-Fi. It’s so fast. But international hostel and IPO, we don’t have fast Wi-Fi and internet speed so it’s a little bit uncomfortable” (M4, Asian).*

It is obvious that there are some variations accounting for the difficult experiences of international students. While finances was a major source of stress for students from the African continent, their counterparts from America, Asia and Europe did not mention finances as a challenge. In fact, some of them found the fees cheaper in Ghana compared to other parts of the world as international students. This is what an Asian student said:

“Because firstly, I want to learn English; and this country speaks English. And this is a good place to come here for school; and the school fees is not very high. In America, UK and the rest may be one year, 30,000 dollars. So I came here” (M7, Asian).

Rather, the hot weather, lack or slow speed of internet facilities and lack of information in the event of a cancellation or rescheduling of classes, activities and/or events makes life stressful for the international student from Asia, Europe and America. This is because they compared the local conditions in Ghana to what pertains in their home countries where due to technological advancement, information is accessed fairly easily and the generally temperate nature of weather in some of their countries of origin. Being perceived as rich and wealthy, sometimes wrongly, by locals leading to request for favours was another source of stress for the non-African international students irrespective of gender.

There were six (6) subthemes, language, misperceptions, differential treatment, academic challenges, identity, and religion, that were derived as a result of probing further the broad theme of “an uncomfortable experience” reported by the study participants.

Language Difficulty. Language, especially the use of the local language (Twi), proved to be a major source of acculturative stress for the international student in Ghana. Respondents indicated that their inability to speak the Twi language makes their everyday engagement with taxi cab drivers, market women, and petty traders an uncomfortable experience. They intimate that their inability to speak the local language makes them pay more for services that under normal circumstances they could pay and access for less cost.

“First of all I don’t understand Twi and most of the Ghanaian population in Accra speaks Twi. So sometimes even in the “trotro” if I say I don’t understand Twi, they look at me like ei, who is this girl that doesn’t understand Twi? It’s awkward sometimes; it’s really awkward” (F1, African).

“Yes. The language. Sometimes we go to the market and we will be speaking English and some of them don’t understand what we are saying. Some of them will be using the Twi language to be saying something and once you say something they will feel like you are insulting them. So the language is one thing...I think just the language; nothing else for now....Yeah, some of them will be speaking in a

harsh way and you think that maybe they are insulting you or something; so for me I think language is one of the toughest challenge for now” (M1, African).

Relatedly, inability to speak or communicate well in English for some of the African international students, especially those from French speaking countries and those from Asia proved a challenging and uncomfortable experience as it adversely affected their social engagements. This led to some form of social isolation as the network of friendships they could make was limited to only those from their home countries despite the presence of local students and a good mix of international students present on the university campuses. Below is an expression of language difficulty:

“As an international student coming from a French country, I have difficulties to be sociable because the language is like...because my English is not good, I might fail to speak to other people like Nigerians, Ghanaians or...so I am always in my room with my French people” (F2, African).

“... And also it’s very difficult to get real friends. Yeah. Like Ghanaian real friends. They’re just there to you know, I need this and I need that. But real friends to be there when you need them and also you’ll be there for them too. The two ways” (F3, African).

Misperceptions. Another source of acculturative stress for a number of the international students was the wrong perceptions that they reported Ghanaians, non-students and fellow university students, had of them as being arrogant and proud. Arrogance and pride are such negative stereotypes that being labeled as such by locals made them have uncomfortable experience as it does not present a true reflection of them. The quotes below depict the experiences of the students:

“Some people have this perception of Nigerians that we are arrogant, we’re proud so sometimes some people actually meet you with that stereotype before they actually get to know you and it’s always a shock for me” (F1, African).

“.... I can remember the first time when I came here. When I stated that I was a Nigerian they were like you are a Nigerian; you can't tell me you are a Nigerian. If you are a Nigerian then you have to stop hanging out with your people. I was like what is the reason? Why do you tell me to stop hanging out with my fellow people? Like you Nigerians, you people are criminals, you're thieves. You people are disrespectful, you are arrogant, you are this, you know, insults like that. So it made me feel bad. So far my stay here I've seen a lot of wonderful Nigerians. Even though I know we are all children; we can misbehave. We misbehave a lot of times but then right now I have seen a lot of nice Nigerians...well behaved. So those are the kind of insults I'm talking about” (M2, African).

Participants also reported that the perception of a foreign person signifying wealth and/or riches was a stressful experience for them as it is a wrongful assumption of them. This lived experience is illustrated by quotes such as, *“And most people have the perception that Nigerians are very rich people so the strangers I meet are like 'oh you, you have money so...' yeah” (F1, African).*

“The most common one is about me being from America and that I have a lot of money at my disposal, which isn't true.... I honestly didn't expect the wealth thing to be such a big thing just because I don't come from a wealthy family so it just never occurred to me that people might think that” (F5, American).

Differential Treatment. International students also reported receiving a different kind of treatment where people, including faculty and administrators of the university, look out for them and try to seek their welfare and interest whereas the same treatment is not provided local students. Such differential treatment even though positive makes them feel some level of discomfort as expressed in this finding:

“.... One time a professor called me before the class and he asked me how the class is going. And that was a little bit strange because I know he would never ask that question to other Ghanaian students” (M7, Asian).

“Some of the local students always think the university is being...how should I put it? They would say that oh, just because we are whites from foreign countries, the university is praising us like we are gods” (F7, European).

“As an international student I think we are treated somehow differently because sometimes, from what I’ve observed, in the local halls we used to fetch water. But in international students hostel most at times we have water so you don’t need to go somewhere else to fetch water. And then when we were in level 100, between ISH one and ISH two we have jubilee hall. That’s a local hall. So sometimes (when we were in level 100) when lights goes off, we the two halls have generator but they don’t have. So I think we are treated better. And I also think this difference in treatment is because we pay much higher than the local students” (F4, Asian).

Within the international student body, there was the perception of discrimination where some of the African international students stated that the university staff and certain offices that serve the needs of international students gave the “white” international students special attention compared to them.

“The whites...they are treating the whites like they are more international than us. All of us we are international students but once the whites come they would want to give them more special treatment than us. For example when we are doing our registration, all of us we are...they told us that we should go outside and that they were going to call us one by one; but when the white people come they just allow them to enter and give them a lot of special treatment” (M1, African).

Such incidents or reported cases of discrimination perpetuated against the African internationals by Ghanaians who they see as their fellow Africans was a major source of stress that made their experience an unhappy and an uncomfortable one. It also made them question the very essence of the Ghanaian culture as to why they treat some foreign persons better than others. This is illustrated by statements such as, *“Special treatment comes only for the white people. I’m like why do they appreciate white people so much?” (M2, African).* And also,

“I’m not happy with that.... I’m black, you’re black so why are you treating me....why can’t you treat us the same? They are students, I’m a student. I paid the same thing they paid so why can’t you treat me the same? When we went to immigration they told us to sit aside but when the white people came they just allowed them to enter. Some of them when they take your passport and they see you are from an African country they will tell you to go outside and they will allow the white people to enter. So they are not treating us equally” (M1, African).

The discrimination perpetuated against African internationals is shared by other international students who believe that it is unfair that such treatment is meted out to African international students by their Ghanaian hosts. The quote below drives the point home:

“I think once you are in the international hostel you are getting the same treatment on the hall basis. But when you are out of the university setting, I think we that have a clear physical appearance are treated differently than those Africans who are not Ghanaians. Because for example when we are crossing the road on campus, and a taxi sees us afar and sees that we want to cross the road, he stops for us to cross. Initially I didn’t see this to be anything special because I think that is the...for the drivers they have to stop for pedestrians to cross. One day I was coming to international house with two Nigerians and then we were crossing from the law faculty to the IPO car park. They were leading me. When they stood by the road side, the cars just passed and passed. When I came to stand with them, one taxi just stopped for us to cross. And then one of them started complaining that because they are as black as Ghanaians, they don’t...the girl was like she has to go and bleach herself otherwise no one is stopping for her” (F4, Asian).

It is however imperative to point out that even within the African international students’ body, there were complaints of discrimination. It was found that certain African international students were given preferential treatment by locals in comparison to others. Such discriminatory treatment by locals made a cross section of the African internationals experience acculturative stress as they felt they were the lowest in order of preference, with white students being the first in order of preference.

“Yeah. No. Americans come first...The Nigerians come and the other nationalities. That’s how I see it...Like let’s say all the people coming from the cold regions. That’s how I see it...The exchange programme students, they are more guided than us” (F3, African).

Academic Challenges. Since the study participants were first and foremost students whose success at academics was very important to their very decision to study in Ghana, academic issues were also found to be a major source of stress for a good number of the participants interviewed. Issues such as lecturer and students absenteeism especially on the first day of class, changes of class meeting venues, and the absence of an online portal where all courses offered at all departments could be found were reported as stressful for the international student, especially those from the Asian, European and American continents. The stressful academic experiences were the result of students comparing their previous universities to the universities sampled in this study. This is what some participants said:

“When I was registering courses, I have to go to each department which was hard to me because I don’t know where is the department; and where should I go to and so...I wonder why do I have to go to the department personally? We first register by website. That’s all. In Korea it’s just register by website. But I didn’t know about why I go to the department. So I wonder a lot” (M4, Asian).

“First and foremost, UG (referring to University of Ghana) is rather unorganized, at least compared to my school in the United States. For instance, course schedules can only be found on the bulletin boards outside each department as there is no master list online. On top of this scheduling errors are not uncommon. At the start of the semester, I signed up for (... Name of course), but when I showed up to class the first week no one was there. I found out later that the class was being held on a different day and at a different time than what was I had seen on the course schedule as a result I had to drop the class and find a replacement. Similarly, my professors haven’t shown up to class on several occasions. For me this was frustrating” (F5, American).

The lack of class exercises in the form of continuous assessment which will enable students know how well or badly they are performing in a course, except Interim Assessments (IAs) done once was a source of academic stress for some of the respondents.

“Ok. Firstly I don’t know how to learn it because we don’t have so many exercise. After class we just read and before IA...my friend told me to buy past questions. But it’s not answered so I don’t know my answer is true or false. So I don’t know how to do..... in China after class we have so many exercise; assignments. When we finish we will submit our exercise book and the teacher mark it. We can check the answer or teacher will talk about the question in class. But here it’s not like that.” (M7, Asian).

“Personally, I don’t get that many homework. Most of my friends do and it gets them to work a lot more than I do. Personally I would like to work a little more than what I do right now. I would like to have homework that would get me to study a little bit more. It gives me an incentive to study and it’s something I don’t get here. The homework is scarce. In my school, so far it’s been scarce. You get homework let’s say for one or two courses during the semester. Also the 70% final is very intimidating” (M8, European).

The different teaching style where in some cases notes were dictated verbatim was a major source of challenge for some of the students. These were stated this way:

“Sometimes it’s really hard to get the specific words that professors say. In my 300 level politics class, the professor reads his script or reads from his sheet and we have to dictate the content of what the professor says. So when I don’t understand words, it’s a little bit crucial that I don’t really get what the professor says. That is actually one of my big challenge” (M7, Asian).

“And the style of teaching has really been different too. She has prepared this course book for us; and every single class, she just kind of picks a few students to take turns. They just read out loud from the course book.... Yes, for like an hour or so. And when we have covered the amount of information she wanted covered, she leaves. And then we have our tutorial section right after.....And sometimes she asks us that oh, underline that; that’s important. So we are listening and occasionally

underlining. So it was kind of reading out loud for 10 weeks. It was not what I was used to and I am more used to more engaging and interactive” (F5, American).

Not having a good understanding of English language, which is the medium of instruction in Ghana, made the academic experience for some of the international students a difficult and uncomfortable one.

“In class. At the beginning, the lecture was so difficult sometimes... Your first time to take a lecture in English... You can get only one word...you can miss the whole tense because of one word; because you don’t understand the words. Sometimes your English too is not....so we have to tell the lecturer say ok, it’s difficult for us” (M3, African).

“But I think the vocabulary I don’t know so much. In the class I don’t understand what is the meaning of that. Sometimes people say things that I don’t know. Vocabulary is my problem” (M7, Asian).

Closely related is the fear of getting poor grades as their English language comprehension is, according to some of them, not up to par thereby making it difficult for them when answering essays questions during final exams. This fear is illustrated by the quote *“And during the exam, sometimes especially in the essay parts, it is difficult” (M3, African).* Another also states:

“My grades... In exam, I always forget how to spell the words. And I always forget the sentence; what I remember before exam. It’s like I’m nervous so I forget. So it’s not easy to write. I think if it’s an English student, you just read it and they can memorize; so it’s easy to write. But for me I remember and I repeat again and again before I can write. So the English is my problem” (M7, Asian).

Identity (Visible or Hidden). The identity of a person in terms of who they are, how they are perceived by others, their personal characteristics which could be unique to them or shared as well as the values and beliefs they hold has a direct impact on their sense of self-worthiness. In a different culture a person’s identity could be impacted and

could lead to some form of identity crisis. The physical characteristic of being a white person and being called names by locals made some of the European, American and Asian international students feel disrespected leading to an uncomfortable and challenging experience for them. Such feelings are represented in these quotes, *“I don’t know but everywhere I go I am seen since I am tall, blonde white woman from America and people call me obroni...obroni”* (F6, American), and *“I am very noticeable and stand-out not because of my academic achievement or skill, but just because I am a foreigner”* (M8, European). Another student who feels disrespected by name-calling also stated that, *“And I think some Ghanaian men are not polite. They always call me china or Chinese.... China China like that. They don’t call me my name”* (M7, Asian).

For some of them, being in Ghana led to some aspects of their identity becoming hidden and/or people confusing their nationality with that of other nationalities. Since identity is such an important marker to all persons, a certain loss of some or all of it for any reason, was a stressful and uncomfortable experience for them. For example, according to some of the students:

“It’s a little bit similar to what I said but on the streets apart from people calling me white, people frequently call me china or china man. And that is also a challenge for me because I’m Japanese. So my first challenge is whether I should correct it or not....I think it’s just a natural thing and most frequently an Asian is Chinese in Ghana so people don’t have a huge feeling or negative feeling by calling me Chinese. But I found myself feeling uncomfortable when people just call me Chinese or china” (M5, Asian).

“It’s really new for me that people call me white person. Because I have never identified myself as white person” (F4, Asian).

Such new identity references have pushed some of the students to frontiers they have never averted their minds to, especially on the issue of race and racial dynamics which was a source of confusion for them.

“...here many people have called me white person and made me change my perspective or my feeling towards so many issues or how I see the world. And for example the racial issue; black, white dynamics...I have never felt because I’m not part of them. I’m not white, I’m not black. But here, maybe people don’t really have that deep connotation about they calling me white but for me if they call me white, that has totally different meaning on me. Just because some people call me white, I feel like maybe some other people might feel like I am white even though they don’t call me white... For example when I travelled to Cape Coast castle, I was kind of forced to think things and see things as a white person with a white perspective. I was really new and I was not ready to think through that from that perspective and that is confusing me” (M5, Asian).

Religion. Religion, especially Christianity played a major role in causing stress for a good number of the international students as the issue of religion came up in their everyday interactions and even in classrooms. Some of the participants were frustrated because time that should be spent teaching them are spent on religion and proselytization to the extent of even being made to feel unworthy because they were not ascribing to one form of religion or another. The quote below illustrates the frustration of a study participant:

“And then also I have a Teaching Assistant (TA) for my history course. He spends a lot of the tutorial sessions talking about religion..... He somehow incorporates it into his discussion. And sometimes when he is using examples to help people relate, he’ll say like if you want to be really successful in your community, you become a high ranking member of your church and help spread...you know stuff like that. And he said to the class that if you are not religious, then your life isn’t worth living. He said almost those exact words, I think. And I was thinking ‘why I’m I paying money to go to school here and to listen to someone take time out of my day to listen to him tell me that my life is not worth living” (F5, American).

International students whose religious orientation deviates from the two main religions in Ghana, Christianity and Islam, reported having stressful acculturative experiences. The experience of being of being perceived as a non-believer in God

because one is of a different religious orientation made life as an international student an uncomfortable one for some of the participants. These found expression in the following statement:

“Ok, church. So many people ask me to go to church with me but I’m not very like that. In Ghana religion is... But in china religion is not important, I think. Because in our university we don’t have this course; and we have not only Christians. We have Buddhists. And I’m not a Christian but people always ask me do I know bible? What’s my religion? If I say Buddhist, they told me I should go church. I say I’m Buddhist but they always ask me to go to church with them; and that I should believe God” (M7, Asian).

Finally, the frequency of being invited to Church and to other Christian programmes and activities as well as sometimes being bluntly told that the devil is controlling non-Christians were also some uncomfortable experiential moments for a number of the international students. The quotes below illustrate the frustrations and challenges of the students:

“The church part. They take it more serious here than we take it in Benin.... Here when you don’t go to church on Sunday, they’ll say you have an evil. But in my country when you don’t go to church on Sunday, she doesn’t feel like going to church she’ll just sleep” (F3, African).

“At one point I was having dinner and my host mum’s daughter was sitting with me and just telling me about Christianity; and she said that people who don’t accept Jesus Christ were still in control of the devil and they had no control over their lives. I don’t know... that really shocked me at first and I was angry a little bit that she said that to me” (F5, American).

Figure 3 summarizes the theme and sub-themes of this finding.

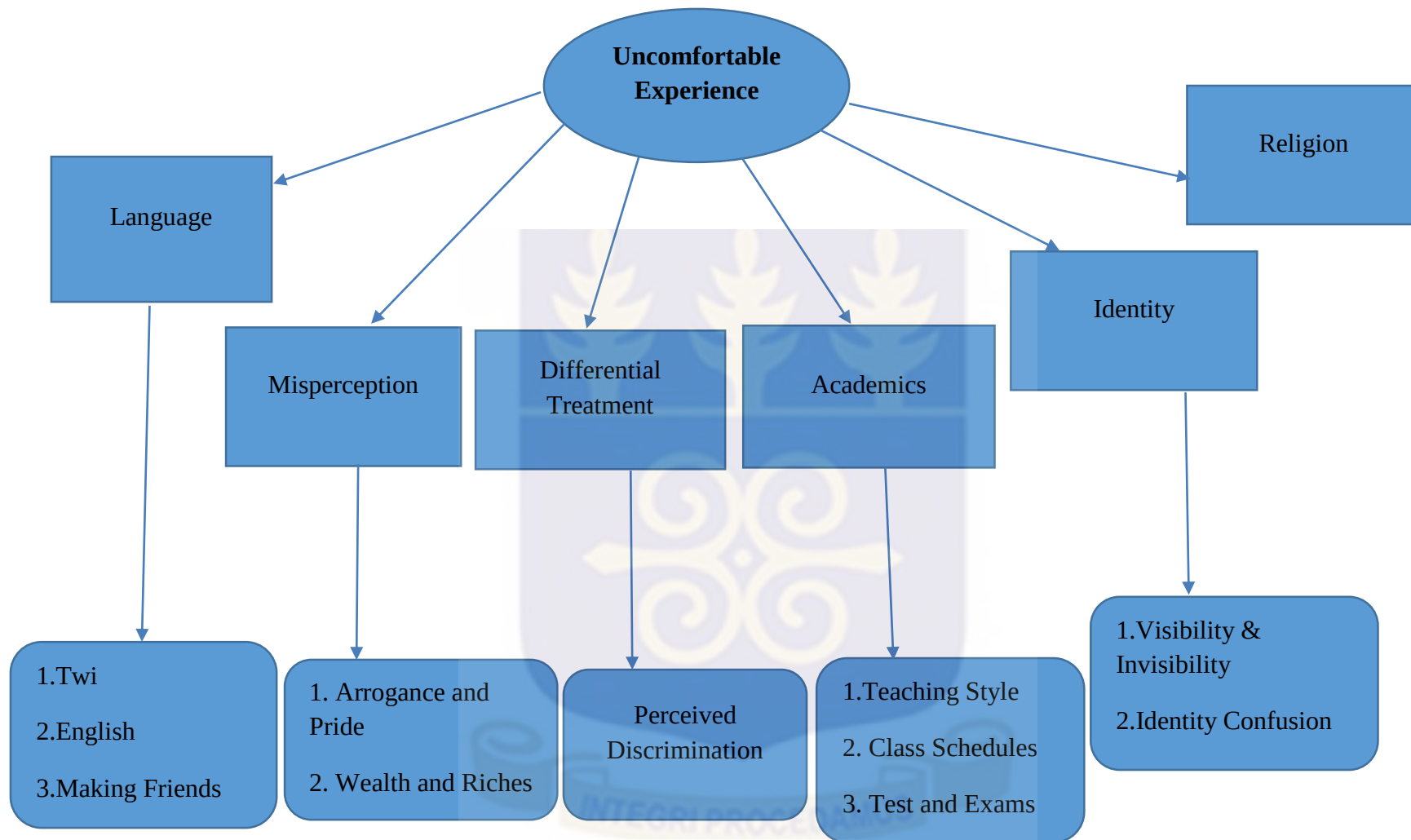


Figure 3. Thematic Map showing sub-themes and sub-sub-themes of the theme of uncomfortable experience.

Support in Dealing with Acculturative Stress

Since life as an international student was generally a negative experience, it was imperative to find out how the students were dealing with these socio-cultural and academic challenges that made life an uncomfortable experience for them. Seeking social support from friends, especially local friends and fellow international students as well as from local hosts/family were the main avenue respondents used to deal with the stressful experiences they were having.

Local Friendship Support. Regarding local friendships, it was found that even though making local friends was initially challenging, it proved to be the main social support avenue international students utilized in dealing with academic and acculturative stressful experiences. Cultivating local friendship networks helped in getting the right information regarding classes and how to navigate and understand the academic environment to know what is happening in order to perform well during class tests, assignments and examinations. The responses below are what some of the students gave:

“I tried making at least one friend in each class and study together with them so I can fill out what I didn’t get.....At the beginning it was not successful at all but towards the end I made several friends in each class and actually we are studying together for the final exam” (M4, Asian).

“I try to make friends because if you don’t make friends, let’s say in school, you won’t get information; you won’t know what is going on. So I have to” (F2, African).

“... And I have a lot of friends in level 200 so I always talk with them. They give me advice. In the first I should look for the course advisor in business; my programme. So they told me how to do it. And they also told me that after class, if I have any problem, I should go to say our lecturer that teach us and talk with them.....This semester yes. This semester, after class I read book and if I have a problem, I go to see them. And I find a good way... I think it’s a good way for me. I should do the past question, write my answer and when I’m not sure I should go and see my

lecturer and show him my exercise so they check the answer for me. Maybe I will do it in next semester” (M7, Asian).

In order to deal with local language challenges and everyday issues, local friendship networks proved to be equally helpful for the students. The quotes below depict how helpful local friendships are:

“When I came first, some local friends helped me to get to Accra mall and how to get to use “trotro”; and the market. He was ready to teach to me; so he taught me” (M4, Asian).

“I have made a lot of friends so I used to take some of them. I tell them that please help me to interpret this, help me to press this down, help me to do this and they will do it; that’s all” (M2, African).

“Most of the time when I want to go to the market, I go with a Ghanaian friend. So she will discuss the price with them. So when I get to know the price, the next time I can go alone” (F3, African).

Fellow International Friendships Support. Friendships with fellow international students, and especially those from the same countries who have been in the country and at the university for a while provided a more practical avenue to deal with the everyday challenges experienced. As is expressed in these quotes, *“Whenever I really need someone to talk to, I would probably go to one of my friends on the programme” (M8, European), and “For most of the issues I mostly go to friends on the programme” (F6, American).* Some of the students preferred turning to their fellow international students when they need help with thing or another. The quote below further buttresses the reliance of international students on their fellow international students for assistance.

“More practical advice... I think an older student...the older students really helped me a lot; older Nigerian students who I met. They really helped me a lot in terms of getting to know stuff, getting to know how things work, getting to know the places to not go to, getting to know the places to go to. If you want to find this or go out to

have a drink or go have dinner...you know familiarizing yourself with the places or things that you need to absolutely be familiar with” (M1, African).

Local Hosts and Local Family Support. Besides friendships with local and fellow international students, participants reported that local hosts and local family networks they have in Ghana helped in dealing with some major as well as every day challenges. The quotes below is indicative of the important role local hosts/family play in helping them handle some local issues.

“Obviously sometimes I had to call him that reverend I need to buy this, I need to do this, you know. Sometimes he’ll come and pick me up; we’ll go there. I remember the time I went to buy a lot of things for my room. He picked me up; we went to makola and then we bought stuff. Yeah and they also took me to the place where I had to get my permit...my non-citizen card. So he took me to that place and I did that. So he was a bit more helpful with moving around. He told me how much I should averagely pay for things. He told me oh, a cab to this place shouldn’t be more than this...or alternatively you can take a trotro although you are not used to a trotro” (M3, African).

“...If it was something major, I’m sure I would probably go to....I would go to my host mum first” (F6, American).

Personal Initiative. Participants reported that taking personal initiative such as reading, watching movies in English with English subtitles, taking local language classes and intentionally making the effort to make friends were helpful in dealing with some of the socio-cultural and academic stressful challenges encountered. These quotes illustrate the personal efforts by some of the participants:

“For the local language, I had a great interest of learning Twi but none of my friends were ready to teach me. So I did UGRC Twi in level 200 but after the examination, I don’t seem to remember them anymore” (F4, Asian).

“Yeah in the beginning it affects the grades but now, to deal with that we read a lot. We google, find a course and read before going to class. So that if you go,

when the teacher is speaking, you can understand what he means. And I like to watch movies in English a lot; the subtitle in English. When they are speaking I watch the movie a lot. I have a dictionary. When I don't understand some word I read it. I think that helps me” (M3 African).

It is noteworthy that the personal initiatives that international students took was very influential in the friendship networks they created with Ghanaian students and non-students as well as fellow international students which friendships as already explained, helped in dealing with acculturative stress. Similarly, personal initiative was influential in the international student seeking support from host family when encountering a difficult cultural situation. Figure 4 summarizes the themes and sub-themes of this finding.

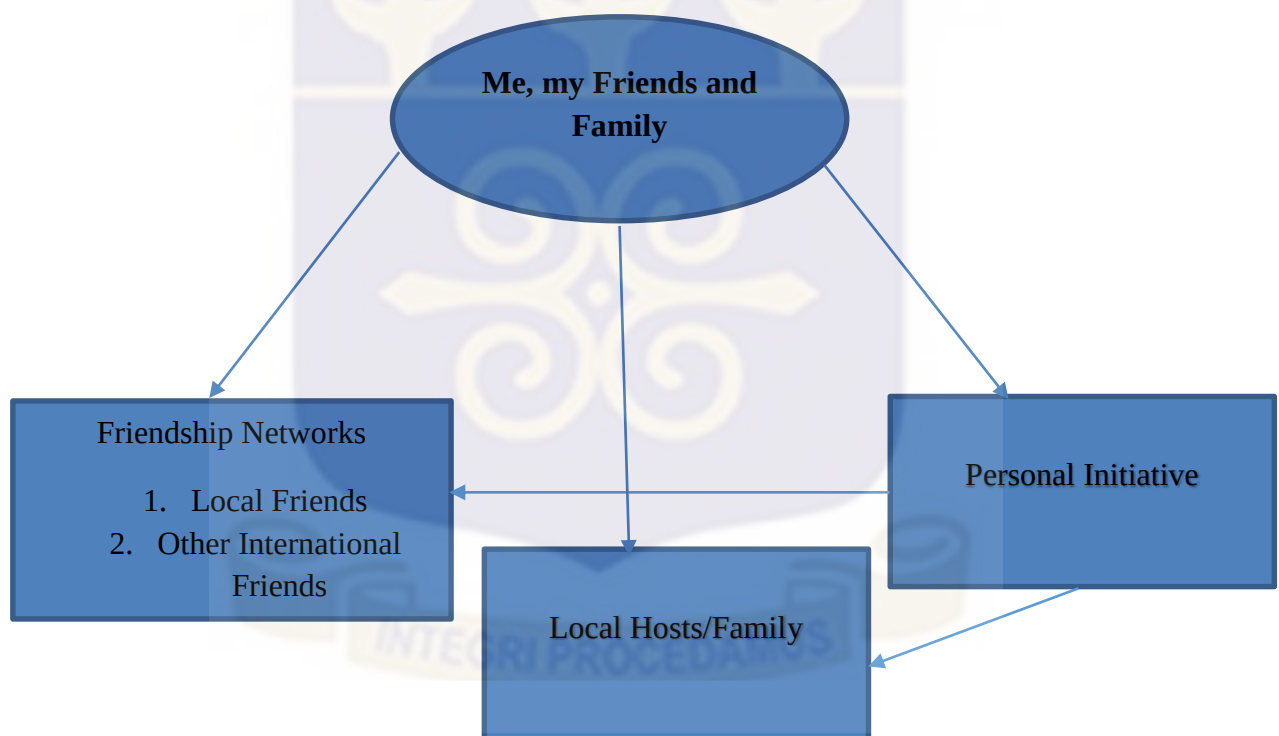


Figure 4. Thematic Map showing sub-themes and sub-sub-themes of the theme of social support.

University Support

It was instructive to learn that in dealing with academic stress as well as acculturative stress, none of the participants made mention of the availability of support by the university they attend. Participants were therefore asked whether there was support from the university community in dealing with the acculturative and academic stressors they reported was making life an uncomfortable experience for them. Participants' responses were mixed in the support they reported receiving from the university in general and administrators of the international office in particular. Some participants reported feeling supported because at least there is a place to go and tell someone of the challenges being experienced. For example:

"...They (the University) are doing their best. I know it's not easy but they are doing what they can do.... First of all, when we came, we have an office for international students. If you have any challenges, you come and you explain your problem. If they can resolve the problem they'll settle it for you. The fact that you have a building for international students, that's good. You have any challenges you come here, you explain your problem" (M6, African).

"Well...supportive. I don't know if...I mean for the fact that the IPO exists, to start with I think that's a foundation for support. A place you can go to as an international student and get ready information. Sometimes there's been lights out at the hostel and we can come here and use the electricity here, to do your homework and use the internet. So for the fact that they've set up this place, I think that is support to an extent. But I do think that they haven't empowered this place enough, you know, I don't think they've empowered this body enough to be able to do more for international students, to be honest with you. I know some of my friends will say that there's a lot more done for the visiting students than the international students" (M2, African).

Meanwhile, there were those who reported that there was no support for them and that all the university was interested in was the financial gains they make from

international students. The quotes below illustrate how unsupported some of the students feel:

“I’m very sorry but I don’t think so. I really really don’t think so. I know international students have their organizations; the alumni tries once in a while. But then at the end of the day I sincerely feel that it’s just about the money that the international students bring to campus. Like personally that’s how I feel” (F1, African).

“I have one friend who I don’t know if he has but he just feels that at the end of the day, it’s not a Nigerian that is there so he wouldn’t really be listened to. I think he had that feeling; he had that perception... think he had that feeling that at the end of the day, you just an international student who is bringing in money. No one really cares about your welfare” (M3, African).

Compounding the lack of support was the issue of racial discrimination suffered at the hands of some university administrators in the hostel who are to offer them support. The quote below illustrates the discrimination some of the African international students reported:

“Being a Nigerian, I know what some of my Nigerian fellow people have been at the receiving end of this because they are Nigerians in the hostel. I know there’s this...I don’t know how they put it but it’s not so...there is a little bit of friction between some of the people at the hostel. Porters, staff and all of that. I know there are some one or two altercations between Nigerian students and them. Not that I can remember any but in terms of treatment, there is a lot of preferential treatment with the exchange students; maybe because of the color of the skin...I don’t know. But then I’m doing a course this semester that kind of goes back to African slavery. It’s not related to that but I’m just saying, you know... You can’t tell me that because she’s an exchange student, she’s white, and this guy is a Nigerian student and he’s just a regular student, she can have her friends over beyond 12 and he can’t. It’s not justifiable. Or is it because you don’t know how to tell her? Or is it because you think that because she’s just next door; two countries away so you can

pretty much treat her anyhow, you know. But I think in terms of treatment I think there should be a lot more...” (M3, African).

The students are coping with these stressful acculturative experiences by discussing their frustrations with their fellow international students, especially those who come from the same countries as them. They would prefer to seek redress with the authorities and administrators at the universities, however they do not trust that their concerns will be addressed. This feeling can be found in the expression, *“Oh not really. I haven’t gone to an authority or administration because the student’s themselves they say they have no option, the authorities they are just there”* (M1, African).

Benefits of International Studentship

Much as life as an international student posed some challenges for the study participants, they also reported being an international student had a lot of benefits that they are enjoying now and/or will enjoy in the future. Being bilingual, becoming culturally self-aware in terms of personal growth, gaining intercultural understanding, high status recognition as a result of studying in respected educational institutions of higher learning leading to easy acquisition of jobs were some of the benefits international students reported.

For a number of the students, becoming bilingual as a result of studying and being taught in English language was a major benefit for them. They reported that being bilingual makes them better placed to easily find jobs upon return to their home countries. The quotes below illustrate this point:

“As a French speaking student, as a francophone student, I have huge advantages over my peers who are Anglophone. I am a bilingual. I have command over French; I’m a French native speaker. I can teach from KG to University level. I can boast about it by the grace of God. Because from the basic I took my French very seriously. If you don’t understand the language in which you are being taught, you can’t go far. And English, as you can see, I can do something. So I am a

bilingual. To gist, we have the story of Kofi Annan, who contended with Olusegun Obasanjo for the position of General Secretary, UN General Secretary and he won. Most people said it's because Kofi Annan was bilingual. And so I believe that being a bilingual is a very great advantage over my peers. And the second advantage is that, I am going to be awarded with a bachelor's degree, which is an international certificate with which I can travel anywhere in the world to get a job” (M6, African).

“First of all, because of the language, English. In my country, especially the French countries, for the job opportunities, if you can speak both French and English it's easy to get jobs there” (F3, African).

“Because firstly, I want to learn English; and this country is speak English” (M7, Asian).

Another benefit that quite a number of the students made mention of was the fact that the experience has made them gain a certain level of self-awareness through the cultural experiences they have had. Closely linked to this is the intercultural understanding they have had as a result of the local and other international friendship networks they have created as well as some of the courses they are studying. For example:

“Yeah, definitely. I've learnt a lot about Ghanaian culture and myself. I think throughout the semester, there is...especially staying with a host family has opened my eyes a lot to different dynamics; being with different people. And I just think that here, one thing that is really huge for me is how certain things seem much more important culturally; does that make sense? The clothing that I see and the dance, the music, you know the ways that certain foods are prepared. And I just...I feel like as a result, I have come to appreciate little details like that a lot more being here” (F5, American).

“Yes. I am confident that I'm gaining a lot from this experience...being in a different culture is about thinking about myself... I have set of cultural standards or norms or common sense that I formed while I grew up; while I was young. But being in different culture is destroying that standard or what I thought was common sense is common...People have different set of concepts and always each

time I face cultural difference, that makes me think that oh, why was I thinking this as common sense or why was I not doubting this? And that goes really inward...Being in Ghana was a huge gain for me and I'm really happy that I came here to experience a different set of cultural standard; and that destroys my standards in a positive way" (M8, European).

"As an international student there are other things that I can get. I can meet people from other countries. First we have Ghanaians. I know in University of Ghana we have a lot of foreigners...and learn from other cultures also" (M6, African).

Studying in Ghana has according to some of the students changed the perception they had about the country in particular and the African continent as a whole. From the quote below it is obvious that the story of Africa has been re-written and has helped them to deconstruct an earlier held one-sided image of a continent experiencing poverty, squalor, disease and death, to a reconstructed image of balanced society where there is a mix of an educated, forward thinking and industrious people while at the same time there is unemployment and poverty.

"What we learnt is that in Africa a drop of water is much expensive than a drop of oil. So it's good that we are having a life experience in Ghana because you know exactly how African continent is. So it's like you know more about how this world is so when you mention about Africa, what comes into mind is not only HIV...those kind of things" (F4, Asian).

"Yeah. My major is West Africa so it's very benefit for me; because after graduation, I wanted to do business in West Africa country so it is benefit for me. If I base in West Africa region, I have to know about the West Africa culture and the lives or something like that" (M4, Asian).

It is important to point out that some of the international students reported that the Ghanaian culture was challenging for them but it was a valuable experience because this experience was the most challenged they have ever felt. These positive experiences in the face of challenges can be found in the expressions below:

“Yeah I do. Just because I think it’s the most challenged that I have ever really been; the most out of my comfort zone and I think that even aside from everything else, that is really important and valuable experience to get so yeah” (F5, American).

“I think it’s a new experience so it’s something I can learn from. I hear people complaining about a lot of things all the time; and especially francophones. Francophones and people who are here on exchange. They don’t just complain; they actually love the place too. I hear a lot of complains. But I think this is an experience you need to have as a person in order to grow to be a man or a woman and of course it’s stressful; but you need to cope with it” (M6, African).

The generally good perception that there is high quality education in Ghana and also studying in one of Africa’s prestigious universities resonated well with a good number of the international students especially those from Africa. They reported that the certificate from Ghana’s universities will make them have a lot more opportunities to continue education in other parts of the world and that they will receive a lot more status and recognition than their peers upon their return. For example:

“Yes it has. Now I have more opportunities I can choose among. I’m not limited because I have the English. So if I want to go and study in US, it won’t be a big problem. They’ll recognize my this thing too... my certificate” (F3, African).

“People were talking about good universities in West Africa and they mentioned University of Ghana.....They said University of Ghana is part of the great universities in West Africa....Yes. I went online and checked everything on google and I said ok. And I checked the different courses at Legon and I said ok, it’s good. I’ll come” (M6, African).

“Yes. So when I’m done with my academic course here I’ll go back to Nigeria. I’m not going to get the kind of treatment that local students will get...They are going to treat me like I went for a higher education than them and the kind of status I’ll get, I’m not sure they will get the same thing” (M1, African).

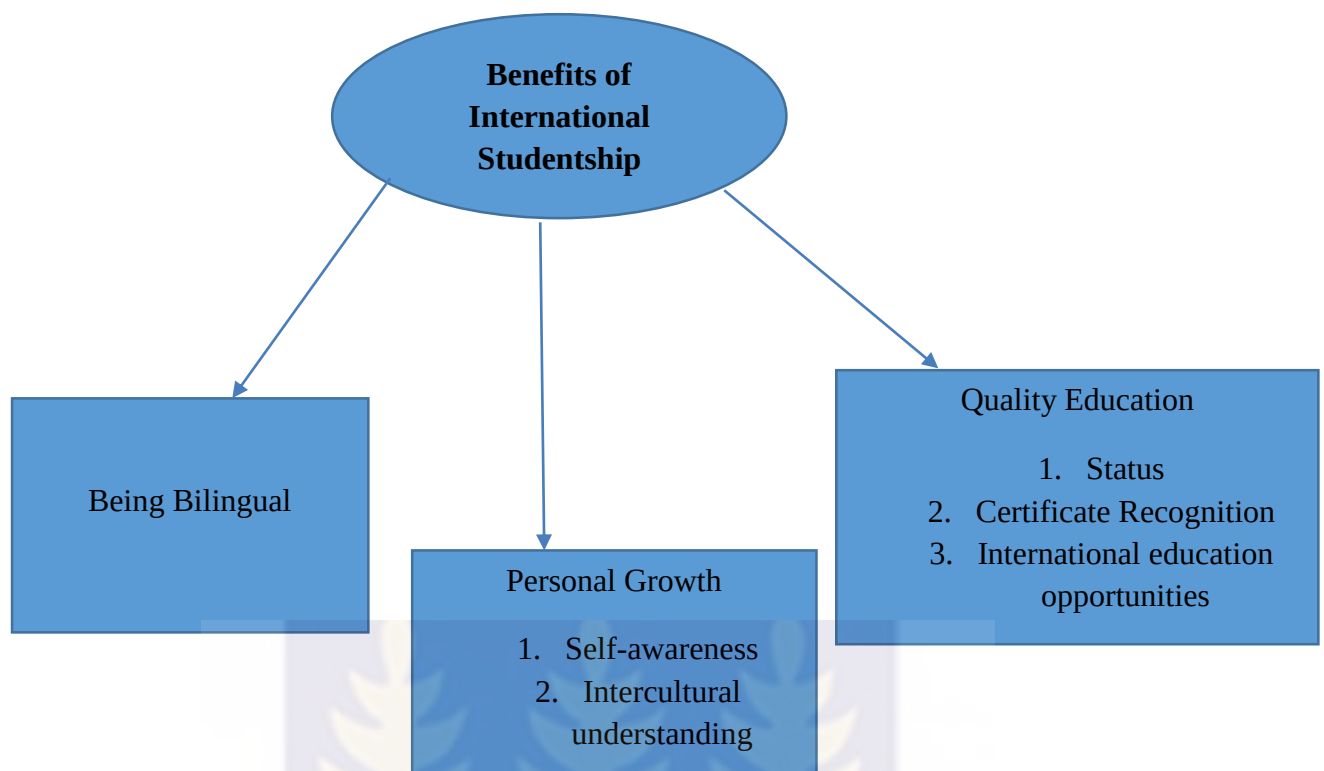


Figure 5. Thematic Map showing sub-themes and sub-sub-themes of benefits of international studentship.

Additional Findings

Parental influence and personal initiative. For a good number of Africans who participated in this study, irrespective of gender, the role their parents played in the decision to study in Ghana was quite significant. The internationally recognizable image of Ghanaian educational system, as well as the general stability of the educational system in comparison to the educational systems in other parts of Africa were some of the reasons parents impressed upon their children to study in Ghana. The quotes below illustrate this assertion.

“My mother has been in Ghana before and she asked me to come here and study”
(M6, African).

“I started over there but my dad wanted me to come here so I came... He wanted me to do Finance so I just came to do finance...No. I was in the medical school. So I dropped and I came here” (F3, African).

“It’s actually my parents who made that decision. I wanted to study in Nigeria but then we have the issue of strike... The strikes are very serious. So at the end of the day, a course that you can use 6 years, you’ll end up using 8 to 10 years of your life. So to be on the safe side, you just go where you know that if it’s 6 years, it’s 6 years” (F1, African).

“To be honest University of Ghana is not my first university... but for some reasons my father did not want me to go far away from him because of one two things he has for me. So it was like, if I feel like I have to study outside Nigeria, I have to be close. I mentioned South Africa and he said no...I have to be in West Africa. So in West Africa I had no choice. University of Ghana is one of the best universities in West Africa because of their international status” (M2, African).

“They start crying....no. in fact my dad was like ‘please be going’” (M3, African).

International students from the Asian continent indicated that elderly people in their home universities especially university professors were influential in the decision to study in Ghana. This what a student said *“The biggest person to recommend it was my professor in politics in my university” (M7, Asian).*

For the European and American student however, personal decision featured prominently in them deciding to study abroad.

“No parental role. I didn’t discuss it with them really at all. I’m sure I talked to them about it but it was never like what do you think? It was always just I’m thinking of this. And they were supportive” (F6, American).

The differences in parental and personal role in the decision to study in Ghana is symptomatic of the general culture in Europe and America where the societies tend to be individualistically inclined whereas their African and Asian counterparts are cultures with collective tendencies.

Accommodation. In terms of accommodation, while study participants in the public university reported that there was assurance of accommodation at the same time

they gain admission, those at the private university report they were at the mercy of landlords and ladies who charge exorbitant fees because the private university does not guarantee accommodation upon admission.

Health. As to whether issues surrounding health had an impact on the experience of being an international student, the responses were quite mixed. Some of the participants had very little belief that the health care system could take care of them if they were to fall sick due to certain negative experiences they have had with hospitals and other health delivery facilities in the past. For example:

“It wouldn’t be on equal sides. The treatment I will receive here in Ghana will be lower than what I will receive in my country... When I went to the clinic the treatment was not nice. I didn’t like it. So I was very worried. So I just pray I don’t fall sick” (M6, African).

“I’m very glad that I’m a very healthy person because ever since I came to Ghana, I’ve got only malaria once... I was hospitalized. It wasn’t nice. Too much injection and I think the medicine they used for me wasn’t good; it hurt my liver. So I couldn’t eat” (F4, Asian).

“...in terms of rapid response I know there was during the period when there was a girl who had an asthma attack. During the break all the students were at home. She was having an asthma attack and...those potters eh...ei God. Students had to carry this girl into a taxi. My roommate was one of them; to take her to the hospital. She was shouting and screaming and the porter came that ok, let me call the ambulance. 5 minutes gone, 10 minutes gone, 15 minutes gone, this girl was still finding it hard to breathe. So they were like let’s just take her. So in terms of rapid response I don’t know” (M3, African).

On the other hand, there were those who reported that they had every confidence in the health delivery system because they knew which health facilities, clinics, and hospitals to go to seek healthcare and they had experienced professionalism in terms of quick

service, and competence on the part of health professionals that they and/or their friends have encountered. For example:

“My friend was sick and so I took him to Accra mall and checked for typhoid or malaria. So I hope that I can check my body for typhoid or malaria if I... So I had to go to Accra mall. Accra mall is very fast” (M4, Asian).

“Yes, there are a lot of places to go to. There is Legon hospital here, there is the Legon clinic also on campus. Last semester they asked us to come for x-ray to check us and all those things. So all of us we went there and it’s quite good. I like the way they were treating everybody there. Everything...the equipment. So for the health, the health is very good” (M1, African).

“I know a friend of mine is doing a road carnal on his tooth so I think that is some expertise. So I think they must have some good facilities there” (M3, African).

Summary of Qualitative Findings

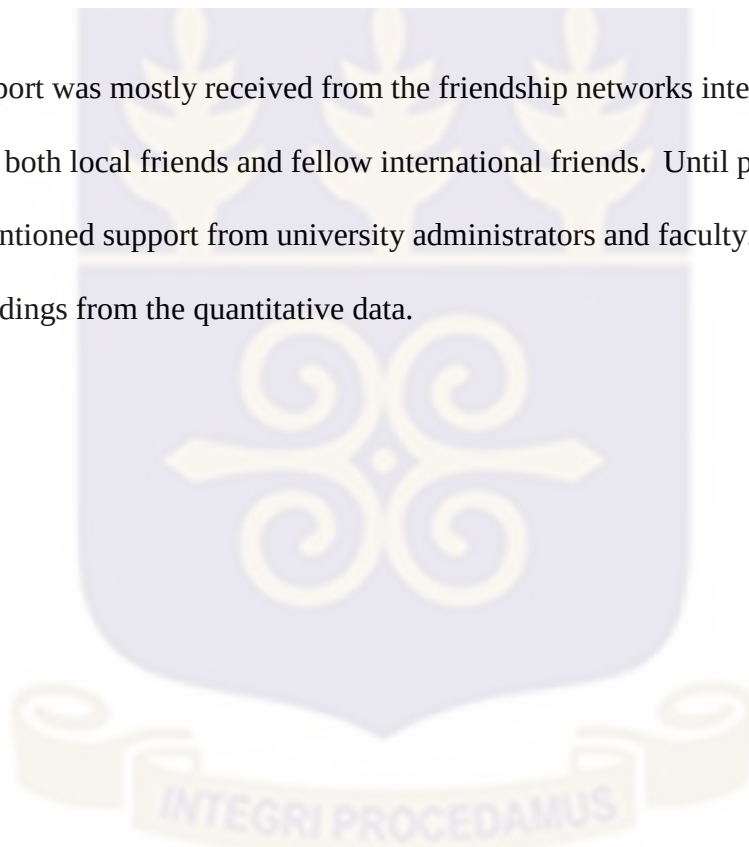
The qualitative phase of the study found that almost all the respondents irrespective of continent of origin were experiencing acculturative stress even though there were some differences as to what was causing the stress depending on the continent of origin of participants. While being perceived as wealthy and rich leading to locals asking for all kinds of favours was causing acculturative stress to European, American and Asians. Their counterparts from Africa were also experiencing stress because there were not been accorded the respect due to them in spite of the significant financial contributions they are making to the Ghanaian society and to the universities, which should have ordinarily translated into being given some preferential treatment. Health concerns were a source of acculturative stress even though responses were mixed.

Relatedly, African internationals reported facing discrimination from locals while European and Americans were favoured. The perception of discrimination was causing major acculturative stress experiences for them. This finding is in consonance with the

quantitative finding where significant continental differences were observed in the acculturative stress levels of international students with African international students obtaining higher mean scores compared to the other international students.

Academically, it was found that all the participants exhibited some level of stress as they were concerned with the grades they will receive since there were no continuous class tests, lecturers and students were sometimes absent in class especially during the first week of class and also the issue of lack of information when there were class scheduling changes.

Support was mostly received from the friendship networks international students established, both local friends and fellow international friends. Until probed, none of the students mentioned support from university administrators and faculty. This finding also supports findings from the quantitative data.



CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Introduction

This study explored acculturative stress among international students in two (2) Ghanaian universities by investigating what constitutes acculturative stress and its ramifications for international students in Ghana's socio-cultural and academic environments. The study also sought to determine whether differences existed in the acculturative stress experiences of the different groups of international students living and studying in Ghana. Further, the study examined how international students dealt with acculturative stress experiences through the utilization of psychosocial variables of self-efficacy, assertiveness, and social support. To this end nine (9) hypotheses were tested. Based on the quantitative results of the study, four (4) of the stated hypotheses were confirmed, five (5) were not. Results from the qualitative phase of this study illuminated the quantitative results since participants shared lived experiences as international students in Ghana's universities. This chapter therefore presents a discussion of the major findings in chapters four and five of this study. The chapter further discusses a growth orientation that was observed among international students in this study called the Post Acculturation Growth. Lastly, this chapter discusses the observed model showing how some aspects of the proposed model were confirmed or otherwise.

Relationship between Psychosocial Variables and Acculturative Stress

This study revealed that there was a significant inverse relationship between international students' assertiveness levels and their acculturative stress experiences ($r = -.13, p < .05$). This means that although the study participants were only slightly assertive, they were able to speak up for themselves and were able to openly and freely express their thoughts and feelings about a situation. This psychosocial skill of assertiveness proved to

be an effective tool for them in dealing with acculturative stress in an effective and appropriate manner without being offensive or aggressive. This finding is consistent with studies by Eskin (2003) and Lee and Ciftci (2014) which established a link between assertiveness skills and students' sense of control over new, challenging and diverse demands that a new cultural environment presents.

It is imperative to point out that being assertive affects one's self-disclosure and therefore when international students were confronted with situations such as inability to communicate in the local language, receiving unequal treatment or perceiving they were being discriminated against, they were able to disclose these experiences openly and appropriately with colleague international students and also with locals. By so doing, it served as a way of releasing pent up emotions. It could also be that through such disclosures and discussions, they may have come to terms with multiple perspectives of the interculturally stressful situations and understood how colleagues and/or locals dealt with similar stressful situations.

Academically, some of the student participants indicated in the qualitative interviews that they would seek clarity in class with the professor when they did not understand what was being taught; that they tried to make at least a friend in each class they attended so that they could get their lecture notes corrected in cases where there were errors in the notes they made. This finding is in consonance with the Lee and Ciftci (2014) finding that among Asian students in US colleges, those who displayed the skill of assertiveness successfully dealt with acculturative stress as they were able to speak up during class, ask for assistance from colleagues and professors whenever they needed help.

Also, the same hypothesis established a significant inverse relationship between social support and acculturative stress among international students in Ghana ($r = -.19$, $p < .05$). This finding is consistent with Poyrazli et al., (2004) who found an inverse

relationship between social support and acculturative stress experiences in US colleges. It is important to point out that being assertive made it easier for the international students to create friendship networks, especially with local students. Participants in the study found such friendship networks very meaningful and proved supportive in dealing with acculturative stress. With a mean and standard deviation of 3.40 and 1.09 respectively, Table 16 indicated that the local friendships they cultivated was the most socially supportive and meaningful source of support in dealing with acculturative stress. This finding is similar to Eskin's (2003) finding that highly assertive students, irrespective of culture of origin, report having more friends and perceiving their friendships as more socially supportive in dealing with stressful sociocultural encounters.

This finding was corroborated by the qualitative phase of the present study as participants reported that the friendship networks they formed was foremost in helping them deal with acculturative stressful experiences. The students formed meaningful friendships with locals who assisted them in understanding the local language, assisted them in getting a good grasp of activities they would be engaged in on an everyday basis such as understanding the "trotro" system-a major public transport system in Ghana, knowing the right prices of certain items and where these items are sold in the market or in the malls. Also, these local friends helped them to get important academic information such as when a class is changed from one venue to another, where to find the relevant course material for the courses they are taking and also to go to the departmental and main libraries for copies of past questions to help them in preparing well for impending examinations and interim assessments. The friendship networks with Ghanaian students and the pertinent informational support they received from them proved helpful for international students to understand the culture and society of Ghana as well as the academic culture of the universities thereby helping them become adjusted to the socio-cultural and academic environments of the country as well as the universities. Studies

such as Hendrickson et al., (2011) have established the critical role that friendship networks with host country nationals helps the international student to deal with acculturative stress.

Further, friendship networks created with fellow international students was helpful in dealing with emotional situations such as feeling homesick since most of the students indicated that if they really needed someone to talk to, it is the fellow international student they will turn to. Turning to fellow internationals for emotional support is tenable as all of them could be going through the process of understanding a new cultural environment and therefore could be better understood by someone who is also going through such emotional challenges of adapting to a new culture. Even though friendship networks with fellow international students may not lead to an understanding of the host culture, it provides an environment of safety, security, emotional and moral support among international students creating a sense of “I am not alone in this” mentality thereby attenuating acculturative stress. Incorporating new literature, Woolf (2007) intimates that as international students go through the same emotions in a new environment, their interactions, intellectual exchanges and discussions with and among themselves helps in gaining an understanding of the new culture.

Finally, in relation to this hypothesis, self-efficacy was inversely correlated with acculturative stress even though the relationship was not significant ($r = -.016, p = .79$). This finding is consistent with earlier studies by Yussoff (2011), Lin and Betz (2009) and Hechanova-Alampay et al. (2002) who found that students who were more self-efficacious were better in cross-cultural situations that were more stressful and entailed more uncertainty compared to those who were less self-efficacious. Generally, international students in this study exhibited a high sense of self-efficacy (see Table 3). Participants believed that they possess the necessary psychological resources to deal with any challenging unforeseen intercultural situations that the Ghanaian sociocultural and

academic environment presents. Findings of the present study gives credence to Bandura's (1997) Social Cognition Theory by demonstrating that indeed self-efficacy beliefs are very important in successfully dealing with acculturative stress which tend to be characteristic of cross-cultural interactions. Further, the present study makes the point that irrespective of culture of origin when international students are assertive, receive good social support and have a sense of self-efficacy they experience minimal acculturative stress, or are better able to deal with stressful cross-cultural situations.

Continental differences in Acculturative Stress levels of International Students.

Significant continental differences were found in the acculturative stress experiences of students of the study ($F=12.842, p<.05$), with African international students being the most stressed in comparison to the other international students (see Table 18). Even though this finding is consistent with studies done in different parts of the world such as Akhtar (2012), Sam et al. (2015) and Yu et al. (2014), this was not expected in this present study. It was assumed that international students from societies where the culture is different from what pertains in Ghana will be the most stressed. However, contrary to studies by Berry et al. (1987) and Yeh and Inose (2003) suggesting that the greater the difference between the home and host cultures the greater the stress, it was rather African international students who reported experiencing the most acculturative stress. It is important to point out that this finding is consistent with Sam et al. (2015) study which revealed that West African students in University of Ghana were less satisfied with life compared to their colleagues from the "western world".

Some of the probable explanations for the high acculturative stress experiences of African international students as was observed in the qualitative phase of the study was that, the participants reported being discriminated against by members of the local Ghanaian community, local students and also by some officials of the universities, in

favour of other international students, especially white students; when indeed they were all international students paying the same amount of fees and therefore should be accorded the same treatment and privileges. A possible explanation for locals not granting the African international students any preferential treatment, which was perceived by the African students as unfair and unequal, was that locals may have felt Ghana would be closer to home for the Africans and would therefore not need any form of hand holding to navigate and understand the Ghanaian culture, when indeed there is so much cultural differences and complexities in terms of food, language, marriage and other traditional practices and beliefs within Ghana let alone between Ghana and other African countries.

It could also be as a result of expectations. Where African international students may have expected the Ghanaian society and academic culture to be similar to what they already know and may therefore not have prepared emotionally for the experience. Thus, they may not have expected culture shock. Meanwhile, it is possible that other international students who are not from the African continent may have come to study and live in Ghana with the expectation of difference, hence may have arrived in the country prepared for the experience of a difficult and challenging new culture. It is possible they may have read about Ghana or they may have received some of pre-departure orientation prior to arrival in Ghana. The expectation of difference and therefore prior preparations may have equipped the non-African international with skills and resources to better deal with acculturative stress.

Another explanation could also be the possible communal lifestyles that most of the African internationals have lived in their home countries where family, friends and relatives are always readily available to assist in one way or another. In communal societies the value orientation tend to promote group harmony and cohesion while debasing self-autonomy. By way of introducing new literature, Gyekye (2003) notes that among Africans, values tend to be derived from the experiences of the people trying to

live together in harmony. Therefore, going away from home and not having such family presence anymore would engender a heavy sense of loss and homesickness among them. Meanwhile, the European or American who reported the least acculturative stress (see Table 14) may have lived a fairly independent life and may not necessarily be experiencing that level of familial loss. These are coupled with the fact that Ghanaians would be giving European and American international students preferential treatment or even in some cases deferring to them.

Academic stress

Consistent with Akhtar (2012) findings, the present study found that regular international students, that is, those pursuing diploma, degree and graduate level courses were significantly stressed academically in comparison to their colleague visiting international students who are studying for a semester or one academic year. For regular international students, it is plausible that their academic performance is very crucial to their continued studentship at the university, as well as their overall academic success on the one hand. On the other hand, they have to perform well if they have any aspirations of continuing to seek higher degrees. Therefore, as was found in the qualitative phase of the study, the infrequent continuous assessment to gauge one's academic performance, teacher absenteeism, and a weak understanding and comprehension of English language intonation rather than phonetics which is the medium of instruction in Ghana's universities were causing the students quite a bit of consternation in the academic realm. It is important to point out that most of the regular international students were African. Meanwhile the African international students were the ones experiencing the most acculturative stress. Since adapting to a new cultural and social environment has a tendency to affect international students' ability to perform creditably in school as stated by Smith and

Khawaja (2011), it could well be the reason why regular international students were stressed academically.

However, for some visiting international students a possible explanation why they did not experience academic-related stress could be that the grades they receive while studying in Ghana may not even count towards their grade point average (GPA). In some cases, the grades may not even be transferable to their home schools. Also, O'Reilly et al. (2010) noted among short term international students in Ireland that the possible transient nature of their stay gave them the opportunity to see the period of study as less integral to their overall academic success. The perception that academics in Ghana is less integral to their overall academic success could well explain their low level of academic stress.

Relatedly, international students in private universities, most of whom were regular international students, were academically stressed just as their counterparts in public universities for reasons such as teacher absenteeism, infrequent continuous assessments, and none or slow access to internet for academic purposes. This was revealing since it was assumed that private universities would have a more client-based approach to providing for the needs of its students in comparison to public universities. However, the International Programmes Office of the private university studied was a “one-man” office. This staff, even has the requisite academic qualification, could definitely not have catered for the diverse needs and demands of international students in the university singlehandedly. It is imperative to point out that through observation, most International Programme Offices in various universities in the country are understaffed or are not staffed with the quality of personnel who can deal with the emotional, academic and cross-cultural challenges international students encounter studying and living in countries other than their own.

Continental Differences in Psychosocial Variables

The hypothesis that there will be no significant continental differences in assertiveness, self-efficacy and social support levels of international students showed that indeed there were significant differences in self-efficacy and social support among international students. American international students in the present study were more confident in themselves, believed that they had the capabilities and competence to cope with the novel conditions that were present in the Ghanaian environment better than their counterparts. A possible explanation for this high sense of self-efficacy among the American students could be the result of their continued adherence to the values of the society they come from where a high premium is placed on independence, self-belief, self-confidence, and a can-do-spirit, which values make one a unique individual in American societies. This finding is consistent with the Kim and Omizo (2005) finding among Asian-Americans that being adherent to American values was positively associated with general self-efficacy, suggesting that persons who adhere strongly to American cultural values perceived themselves as having increased capacity to cope with novel situations.

Regarding assertiveness, even though significant continental differences were not found, it is imperative to point out that mean values of the various groups of international students (see Table 14) showed that some differences were present with European international students exhibiting higher assertiveness levels, followed by the American internationals with African and Asian international students following in that order. The mean values gave an indication that European international students could speak up and could freely express their feelings, thoughts, and beliefs about culturally and academically stressful issues they were confronted with in the Ghanaian society better. This could also be explained from the standpoint of culture where European and American students from societies that value self-promotion, self-assertion, and competition, continued to live by these values in the new Ghanaian socio-cultural and academic environment. This finding

is in consonance with Niikura's (1999) study where a sharp contrast was established between US students' assertive modes of self-expression compared to their Asian counterparts' non-assertiveness characteristic of their cultures of origin.

European and American international students reported receiving significantly better social support than their African and Asian peers (see Table 22). From the above, European and American international students are more self-efficacious and also more assertive. The possession of such an important psychosocial variable tends to enhance their ability to initiate and create friendship relations with locals and with fellow internationals who will serve as both informational and emotional support for them to enable them cope with the novelty of the socio-cultural and academic environments they find themselves. These friendship networks assist them by directing them to where they could find support, explain challenging intercultural misunderstanding and miscommunication issues to them and even help them understand logistical and welfare issues they would have to deal with daily.

Another reason Europeans and Americans received significant social support could be that these students tend to study in Ghana's universities on programmes that have staff and/or accompanying faculty support such as (www.ciee.org) besides support that may be available at the universities, at least academically. Meanwhile, the Africans and Asians tend to pursue their studies individually without any programme staff support. The African and Asian international is unable to identify university level support and pursue it, because they are a generally non-assertive group and do not have the sense of self-efficacy. Thus, making friends and believing that they could deal with challenging cultural situations become a chore for them.

Further, it is possible that the local Ghanaians provide support to the European and American more readily seeing that they are from cultures quite different from that of Ghana. Whereas in specific reference to the African international students, they may not

even be perceived as international students so to speak. In addition, it is possible that where Africans are perceived as international students, they may not readily be offered support because the culture they came from may be perceived as not too distant and distinct from Ghanaian culture both socially and academically. With the Asians, since they were the least assertive (see Table 14), it could be that because they could barely express their thoughts and feelings, making friends was a challenge which adversely affected their ability to seek support.

Social Support and Type of International Student

The present study confirmed the hypothesis that there will be a significant difference between regular and visiting international students in their social support levels. Visiting international students reported receiving more support than their fellow regular internationals ($F_{(1, 256)} = 7.91, p < .05$). Visiting international students in this study found the Ghanaian sociocultural environment a friendly one as they reported receiving meaningful support, tangible as well as moral, from the friendship networks they created with local and fellow international students. It is imperative to point out that all the visiting international students in this study were American and European who reported significantly less acculturative stress. It is evident from this present study that international students with social support which they perceive as meaningful and rewarding have low acculturative stress. This finding is consistent with Poyrazli's (2004) finding. Incorporating literature establishing the relationship between social support and acculturative stress, this finding fits into Bai's (2016) study where it was established that international students with sufficient social support have low acculturative stress levels.

A possible explanation why visiting students report receiving significantly higher social support could be as a result of such students living and studying in Ghana through exchange programmes who tend to have programme staff who provide a wide range of

ongoing support such as welfare and logistical services through onsite orientation sessions and academic advising, peer-partnerships, as well as organizing field trips and excursions. Visiting students, at University of Ghana, tend to benefit from all of these besides the support they sometimes receive from the university through the Office of International Programmes who offers at least an onsite orientation for two half days which may not necessarily be adequate to adapt to life on campus but is a good beginning to gain some level of exposure to an unfamiliar academic and socio-cultural environment.

Type of University and Social Support

The hypothesis that there will be a significant difference in social support levels between international students in private and public universities was not confirmed by the results of this study. Since international students are first and foremost, students, the school environment is where they are likely to come into contact primarily with local culture. As noted by Bai (2016), school support, which is support from classmates, faculty and staff members is very important for international students in their acculturation process. The assumption underlying the formulation of this hypothesis was that private universities tend to have a more client-like relationship with their students and will therefore offer a certain level of support which may not be matched by a public university fraught with all kinds of challenges.

International students irrespective of the university they attend rarely received support from the universities' faculty, and staff members as in Table 14. The qualitative phase of this study corroborates the rarity of support received by international students from the universities. Some of the students indicated the existence of some minimal level of support from the Offices of International Programmes by both universities, whereas others indicated that support was non-existent. The rarity or non-existence of support by university faculty or staff is an indication that there may be the physical presence of

facilities and/or persons to attend to the needs of international students. However, if students do not find the environment welcoming in terms of interpersonal communication skills, human relations skills, quality of information dissemination, sensitivity to the plight of the international student among other professional service skills by personnel in these office spaces, students will feel there is no one to attend to their needs and stressful intercultural experiences and hence will not feel supported. In situations where they bring the concerns to the offices, they may feel minimally supported because their needs may not be professionally addressed. It is noteworthy that some even accused the university of being only interested in the financial contributions of international students while accusing some university administrators of perpetrating racial discrimination against them.

Sources of Acculturative Stress

Results of the present study indicates that overall international students in Ghana were experiencing quite a high level of acculturative stress which is similar to results of studies done in western societies in Europe and America as provided by Akhtar (2012), Poyrazli et al. (2007) and Constantine et al. (2004), as well as studies done in non-western societies of Asia including Yu et al. (2014), and more specifically Ghana by Sam et al. (2015). Regarding region of origin and acculturative stress levels, the finding of this study bears striking semblance with the findings of Yu et al. (2014) where Asians in China experienced high acculturative stress, together with Africans, despite the cultural similarity that existed between Asian countries and China. Similarly, this study also found that African international students were particularly stressed per their acculturative experience, together with Asian international students, despite the similarity of culture that exists between the Ghanaian sociocultural environment and that of other African countries.

Regarding specific acculturative stressors, the subscale of health was the top most reported source of stress for international students in Ghana. Students in this study reported that they found it difficult knowing what to do and where to go when they fall sick and they were equally stressed because of the perception that the health infrastructure in Ghana may not be able to support them in the event of a disease outbreak. This finding however is at variance with studies done by Hartjes et al. (2009), Lopez-Veles and Bayas (2007) and Heywood et al. (2012) who have established that when international students are traveling to developing countries where there is the likelihood of encountering infectious diseases, they tend to considerably underestimate the associated health risks. It is plausible that international students who come to study in Ghana take their physical health into account quite strongly. It is also possible that the 2014 Ebola Viral Disease (EVD) outbreak and the wide media attention it received in local and international media may have accounted for health being the topmost reported stressor among the study participants.

It is noteworthy that regular international students, a large majority of whom are Africans, reported health as the foremost acculturative stressor (see Table 13). The qualitative results illuminated this finding since most of the African international students have actually had direct experiences with the Ghanaian health system as a result of having had malaria and not having a pleasant experience with the quality of health delivery, hence their stress levels in relation to health. It is also possible that since finance was a major source of stress for African international students, in times of sickness they utilized public health facilities which facilities tend to have lower quality care delivery. Also, the devastating effects of EVD in the West Africa region and how it brought health infrastructure to its knees in some of these countries could have informed the stress levels of Africans in relation to health as an acculturative stressor.

Feeling of homesickness was also a major source of acculturative stress for students in this present study. Quite a number of the students in this study were going through a process of grieving as a result of missing people (friends, family, relations), places and activities they were used to back in their home countries. Coupled with missing family and their familiar home environments is the difficulty of establishing a network of friendships in the new environment due to the demands the new culture places on them. This finding is consistent with Akhtar (2012) finding that homesickness was a major source of stress for international students studying in Germany. By way of introducing new literature, the study finding is also consistent with a Malaysian study by Rajab, Rahman, Panatik and Mansor (2014), where they found that homesickness was the second most critical acculturative stress factor for international students. Similarly, Yi. et al. (2003) found that among international college students studying in the United States, homesickness was the most frequently reported concern.

It is possible that the inability to communicate, especially in the local language may have made the international students become homesick because it has the tendency to hinder their ability to make friends especially with locals. Where they have friends, they probably do not have the requisite local language to express how they feel to their peers. Where international students express in English, some of them may not have the requisite language skills to communicate their feelings as they may not be native English speakers. For those who may be native English speakers, there could be the situation of cross-cultural miscommunication between them and their Ghanaian peers. Such experiences may have contributed to the students' homesickness. It is important to note that Rajab et al. (2014) asserted that language barriers can develop into homesickness.

Perceived discrimination which has been found to predict higher levels of homesickness (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007) as well as having the tendency to dissuade international students from making friends with locals (Chen, 1999; Mori, 2000) was the

third major source of acculturative stress for international students in the present study. The nature of perceived discrimination was quite complex. Being treated differently where in some cases international students received better treatment than local Ghanaian students was a source of acculturative stress for them. An example is residential facilities, where international students at University of Ghana tend to live in housing such as the International Students Hostel that has amenities and facilities such as generator sets to ensure uninterrupted electricity supply, boreholes to ensure uninterrupted water supply, living in double-occupancy rooms and in some cases single occupancy. The absence of some of these facilities in the housing facilities where majority of Ghanaian students live is perceived as discriminatory. Such differential treatment made international students stressed because of the perception that local Ghanaians are being discriminated against because of the international student. Probably international students want to be treated as every other student and not be given preferential treatment by virtue of being an international student.

Discrimination surrounding race was also found in this study, corroborating studies (e.g. Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986; Pedersen, 1991) which found international students experiencing some form of intentional and unintentional racial discrimination. In this case, Ghanaians' unequal treatment of international students based on continent of origin also contributed to the perception of discrimination hence acculturative stress. African international students report being treated as second rate internationals in comparison to other international students even though they are all international students. The negative stereotypes associated with African international students manifest in insulting and unfriendly behaviour towards them by their Ghanaian hosts proved harmful to the acculturative stress experiences of the African international student. This finding is corroborated by studies such as Hanassab (2006), Lee and Rice (2007) and Poyrazli and Lopez (2007) who established that compared to the European international students and

US students, international students from countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East tend to report significant perceived discrimination.

Further, it is imperative to point out that even within the African international cohort, there were perceptions of discrimination based on whether one is a Nigerian international student or not. The sheer numbers of Nigerian international students studying in Ghana and therefore being the dominant African international group may have contributed to this perception by other African international students that Nigerian students were treated better than other African international students. This perception of discrimination within the African students has the tendency to create superiority and inferiority complexes among the students. It also has the tendency to create tension and conflicts leading to an aggravation of divisiveness, mistrust, and disunity when international education should be promoting an understanding of diversity and intercultural competence.

Fear and guilt as acculturative stressors engendered the least stress for international students in Ghana. On the issue of fear, the finding suggests a group of international students who feel very safe in the country and in the university campuses irrespective of where they came from. The possible explanation is that they may have received very thorough safety and security protocols during their stay. Consequently, having lived in Ghana for at least two months, they could compare Ghana to their countries of origin and found Ghana to be a very safe haven for them personally as well as their belongings.

Similarly, on the issue of guilt as a source of acculturative stress, the finding of this study is indicative of a group that are not experiencing self-blame for leaving their families behind to pursue studies in Ghana. The possible explanation for this finding could be attributed to the influential role parents played in the wards pursuing studies in Ghana especially among Regular international students. For visiting international students who are from Europe and North America, the values of independence, self-belief, and self-

confidence could account for their lack of guilt as the decision to pursue international education was made independently. The finding that guilt and fear are the least sources of acculturative stress is consistent with Akhtar (2012) finding among international students in Germany.

Benefits of Being an International Student

The challenges and stress associated with pursuing international education has been extensively discussed with support of existing literature in the present study. It is however imperative to point out that studies for example by Sandhu and Asrabadi (1994), Bevis (2002), Harrison (2002) and Smith and Khawaja (2011) have established that there are a number of positives associated with pursuing international education. In similar vein, the present study also found that there are a number of immediate and future-oriented benefits for being an international student in Ghana.

The prestige of receiving a Ghanaian education which according to study participants is one of the best in Africa and in the West Africa region, makes them have a high sense of status and recognition for pursuing their education in Ghana. This is especially the case for the African international student who indicated that they were already being perceived back in their home countries as receiving one of the best forms of education in comparison to that being received by their peers in their home countries. Also, their belief that a certificate from Ghana allows them to pursue further education in other parts of the world added to the feelings of status, recognition and pride. The future prospect of easily finding a job or a better paying job with a Ghanaian education upon return was an additional benefit.

Gaining intercultural understanding and attaining some level of personal growth was one of the benefits alluded to by participants in this study. The indication that encountering the Ghanaian sociocultural and academic culture was a valuable experience,

even though it was a challenging one, is indicative of the gains that participants have made. Also, the friendship networks with domestic and fellow international students they have created and will continue to have is an attestation of the benefits of pursuing international education in Ghana. This is in consonance with studies by Andrade (2006), Bevis (2002), Furnham and Bochner (1986) who reported that the opportunity for pursuing international education provides the student with a broadening of their perspectives, an understanding of another worldview, as well as the promotion of professional, academic, and personal growth. For participants from countries where English language is not the medium of instruction, receiving education in English and therefore becoming bilingual proved to be a major source of benefit for them.

Post Acculturation Growth. Based on the benefits of intercultural understanding, gaining a broader perspective and the experience of personal growth alluded to by international students in this study, it is evident that in spite of the initial experiences of acculturative stress as one sought to navigate the new Ghanaian socio-cultural and academic environment, some of the international students developed an intercultural and growth orientation I termed Post Acculturation Growth (PAG). The PAG is a growth orientation where one utilizes resources in the environment in which they find themselves as well as their own internal dispositions to create, enhance and improve their experiences in an environment which initially was acculturatively stressful. In this study, international students' utilization of social support through the friendship networks they created with Ghanaian and other international students; to some extent support from staff of the universities they attended; as well as the utilization of psychological variables of assertiveness and self-efficacy proved helpful in ensuring that despite the initial acculturative stressful experiences, some of them were able to make their experience a meaningful one. Perhaps acculturative stress is a useful experience to have in order to be

able to have an interculturally competent and growth oriented experience if one decides to live and study in an environment different from the one they are used to.

Linkage between Study Findings and Acculturative Stress Model

This study gives credence to the Berry et al. (1987) acculturative stress model. The degree of voluntariness affected acculturative stress experiences of international students. Most of the African internationals who are Regular international students indicated their desire to study in Ghana was based on their parent's influence. Also, some Asian internationals had their professors influencing their decision to pursue education in Ghana. Meanwhile, the opposite was the case with most of the Visiting internationals who made a personal decision to study in Ghana independent of any parental or authority figure influences. Also, the generally low assertiveness and self-efficacy beliefs among the African and Asian counterparts coupled with the low social support the African internationals in particular reported receiving from local hosts (for plausible reasons earlier discussed) adversely affected the process of acculturation since they perceived marginalization, isolation, discrimination, and unfriendliness as they engage with the Ghanaian society. Such challenging experiences made them experience high acculturative stress levels.

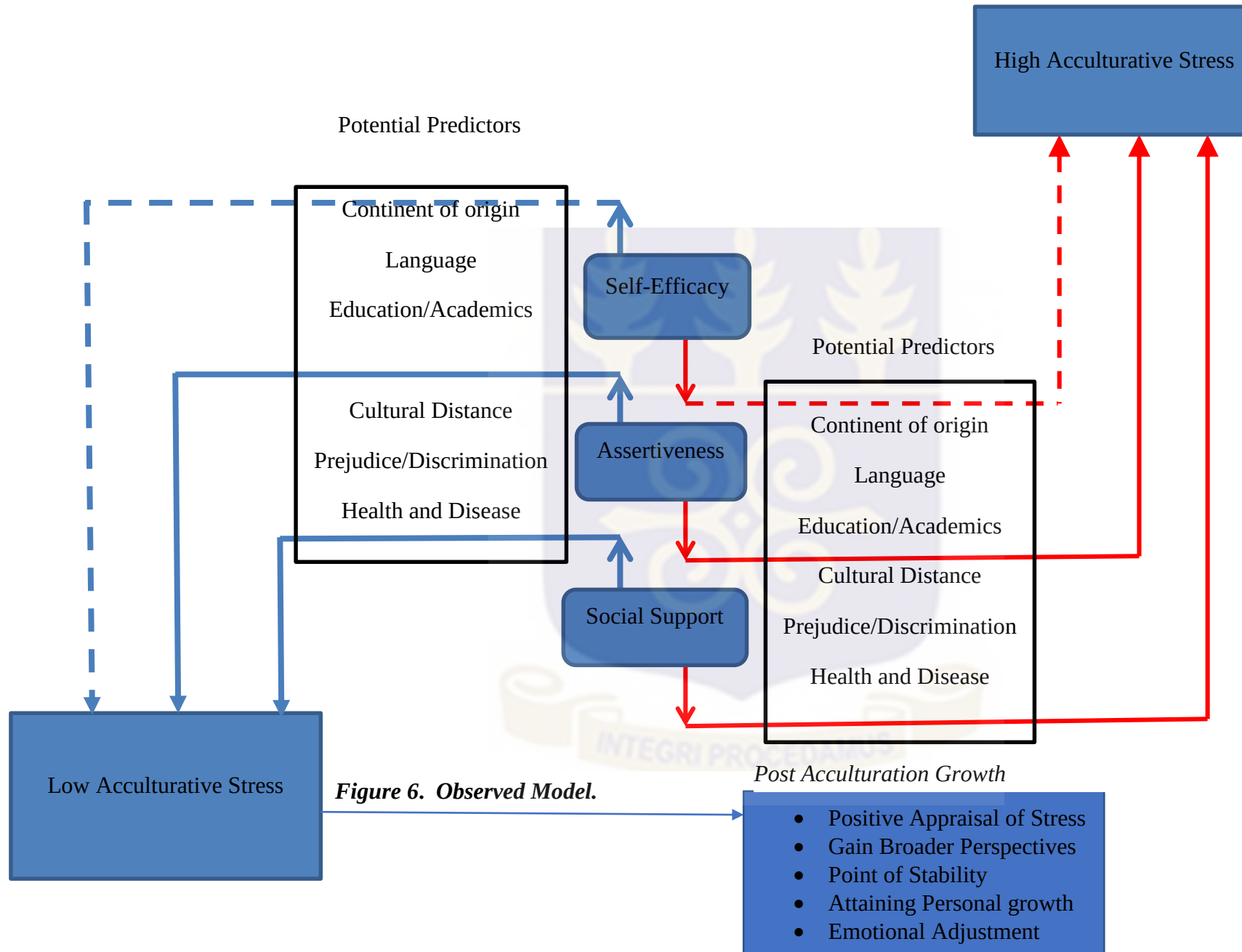
Observed Model

Findings of this study and the discussions that followed from the findings indicated that psychological characteristics played a critical role in whether international students in Ghana experienced acculturative stress or not. The present study established that when international students exhibited assertiveness, were self-efficacious and received social support, then they experience low acculturative stress in spite of the presence of certain factors in the new environment that could pose a challenge to their experience. The

experience of low acculturative stress was as a result of them cognitively appraising factors in the new environment as opportunities for growth instead of being stress-inducing. On the other hand, it was established that international students who were not assertive, were not self-efficacious and received little or no support in the new environment experienced high acculturative stress due to cognitively appraising socio-cultural factors in the new environment as a debilitating experience. The observed model, Figure 6, was therefore developed to reflect the findings of this study.

This study was conducted with the expectation that when international students report that they are self-efficacious, assertive and receive social support then their acculturative stress experiences will be low and they will therefore be able to have fulfilling experiences in the new Ghanaian socio-cultural environment. Conversely, international students with low or no social support, un-assertive and do not have a sense of self-efficacy will experience high acculturative stress. The presence of a number of socio-cultural factors were also expected to affect the process acculturation and its attendant acculturative stress. With this understanding, a conceptual model was developed and tested to determine whether the results of this study would confirm or disconfirm it (see Figure 2).





From Figure 6, the variables of interest in this study are depicted in the round-edged rectangular shapes. The upward pointing blue arrows on each of the round-edged rectangular shapes indicate the possession of high levels of the variables of interest, while the downward pointing red arrows indicate low levels of the variables of interest. The dotted lines (blue and red) indicates that the possession of the psychological characteristic of self-efficacy did not significantly affect the acculturative stress experience of international students even though an inverse relationship was found between the two variables. Thus, the belief in self that one possesses the resources to deal with challenges associated with novel environments could be helpful in mitigating stressful experiences in certain situations but not all. Perhaps, the Ghanaian socio-cultural and academic environments require a deeper and a more nuanced understanding which self-efficacy alone could not adequately deal with.

The thick blue lines show that international students who were more assertive and received social support had a significantly positive intercultural experience as they could speak up, openly and freely express their thoughts and feelings when they encounter culturally different situations. Relatedly, they employed the skill of assertiveness to seek and receive support from friends (local and international) who offered them meaningful support in dealing with differences in intercultural situations. Such low acculturative stress led to students experiencing a growth orientation called Post Acculturation Growth where the international student has identified mechanisms to successfully deal with acculturative stress interpersonally and intrapersonally. Here, the student perceives the novelty of environmental factors as opportunities for growth, becomes emotionally intelligent, does not perceive difference as negative but another valid way of doing things, and gains multiple perspectives on cultural values, norms, and mores. On the contrary, the thick red lines indicate that when international students are not assertive and do not

receive social support then they experience significant acculturative stress as they navigate the new socio-cultural and academic environments.



CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of the Study

The rationale for this study is to investigate and understand acculturative stress as experienced by international students studying in Ghana and find out whether Ghana's sociocultural and academic environment poses acculturative stress for the international student. International students' presence on university campuses promote diversity, fosters international understanding, and provide the forum for both host national students and international students to gain a wider world's perspective on a wide range of issues. However, the host institution could also pose a challenge to these students. Hence the focus on international students in the present study. To this end, the study's objectives were to explore acculturative stress among international students in Ghanaian universities by investigating what constitutes acculturative stress to them, determine whether differences exist in the acculturative stress experiences of the different groups of international students and finally examine how international students dealt with acculturative stress experiences.

The present study can be understood from the perspectives of Acculturative Stress Model (Berry et al. 1987) and Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986). The Acculturative Stress Model helps in understanding the process of acculturation and its outcomes. The model posits that when individuals or groups from different cultures come into contact a process of cultural and psychological changes occur. Depending on a number of psychological and socio-cultural factors, the cultural and psychological changes have the potential to enhance one's life chances and mental health or virtually destroy one's ability to carry on when one enters a new cultural environment. Rooted in the view of human agency, Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) posits that individuals are agents who can make things happen by their own actions by proactively engaging in their

own development. At the very core of SCT is the concept of self-efficacy, which refers to a human person's belief in, or a judgment of, his/her capabilities to successfully initiate and execute specific tasks. Thus, if an international student has the belief in their ability to successfully engage a new culture, then they could be successful. The opposite will also hold.

The research design for this study was the sequential explanatory mixed method. The QUAN→qual technique was specifically adopted. The response rate for the questionnaire administration was 84% i.e. a total of 256 participated out of 304 questionnaires that were administered. Selection to participate in the survey was purposive where only those who were willing and able to participate were selected. At the same time to ensure sample representativeness, a stratified sampling technique was used in the selection of participants to ensure that the sample distribution was in consonance with the population distribution of international students.

A total of 15 in-depth interviews were conducted with the philosophical underpinnings and analytical methods of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as a guide to explore the lived experiences of international students. International students from the continents of Africa, Asia, America, and Europe were duly represented in the sample as they were in the international student population of the study settings of University of Ghana and Wisconsin International University College. The following nine (9) hypotheses and four (4) research questions guided the conduct of this study. The hypotheses were:

1. There will be a significantly negative relationship between psychosocial variables (assertiveness, social support, self-efficacy) and acculturative stress.
2. There will be significant continental differences in acculturative stress levels of international students.

3. Regular international students will experience more academic stress than visiting international students.
4. International students in private universities are unlikely to experience academic stress compared to their colleagues in public universities.
5. Visiting international students will experience more acculturative stress than regular international students.
6. There will be significant differences in acculturative stress levels between international students in private universities and those in public universities.
7. There will be no significant continental differences in assertiveness, self-efficacy, and social support levels of international students.
8. There will be a significant difference between regular and visiting international students in their social support levels
9. There will be a significant difference in social support levels between international students in private and public universities.

The under-listed are the research questions:

1. Does the Ghanaian sociocultural and academic environment pose acculturative stress for international students?
2. What constitutes acculturative stress for the international student in Ghana?
3. What are the strategies used by international students to deal with the effects of acculturative stress?
4. What do international students stand to gain by opting to study abroad as opposed to studying at their home countries?

Summary of Findings

Upon analyzing the data for this study, the following findings were made:

1. The study found significant but weak inverse relationship between the psychosocial variables of assertiveness ($r = -.13, p < .05$), social support ($r = -.19, p < .05$) and the acculturative stress ($M=2.59, SD=0.58$) experiences of international students. Support was mostly received from the friendship networks international students established, both with local friends and fellow international friends.
2. Relatedly, significant continental differences were found among international students on the psychosocial variables of self-efficacy ($F_{(3, 252)} = 3.18, p < .05$) and social support ($F_{(3, 252)} = 6.73, p < .05$) where international students from America were more self-efficacious and reported receiving high social support compared to their peers from Africa and Asia. Also, students from Europe reported receiving higher social support than their African peers.
3. Significant continental differences were observed in the acculturative stress levels of international students ($F=12.842, p < .05$) with African international students obtaining higher mean scores followed by the Asian, American and European international students in that order. African internationals reported facing discrimination from locals while European and Americans were favoured. The perception of discrimination was causing major acculturative stress experiences for the African international. Also, health was the leading cause of acculturative stress for international students since they believed the health delivery system will be unable to take care of them in the event of a disease outbreak.
4. Also, it was observed that Regular international students who are pursuing courses leading to the award of degrees and diplomas were significantly stressed academically in comparison to Visiting international students who are taking courses only for one semester or for only one academic year.

5. Finally, in comparing international students in private and public universities, no significant differences were found in the acculturative stress nor academic stress experiences of the students. Similarly, no significant differences were found in the social support that international students reported they received whether in private or public universities.

Conclusions

This study has established that when international students have successfully navigated acculturative stress, they develop an intercultural and growth orientation called Post Acculturation Growth (PAG), which provides them with the opportunity to have a positive approach to stressful experiences. Consequently, they gain the ability to have multiple perspectives of a given situation, leading to being interculturally competent. PAG also makes the international student emotionally adjusted, stable and intelligent.

It is the position of this study that the utilization of psychosocial resources of assertiveness, where international students are able to speak up and do a self-disclosure of how they are feeling when they encounter challenging intercultural experiences; and social support, specifically utilizing friendship networks with local Ghanaians and other international students were effective in dealing with acculturative stress experiences whether sociocultural and academic related. Thus, while cultural similarity or dissimilarity could engender acculturative stress, an international student's psychological resources play a significant role in how they deal with acculturative stress experiences.

This study has established that the main factors that engender acculturative stress for international students while studying and living in Ghana are perceived and/or real discriminatory practices that they encounter in the sociocultural and academic environments; health issues where health infrastructure is perceived to be ill-equipped in

the event of a disease outbreak; and homesickness where they go through a mini-grieving period as a result of missing family and friends from the cultures they come from.

Academically, teacher absenteeism, especially in the first week of classes; poor or lack of communication in the event of changes in teaching schedule, the lack of a centralized place where class syllabi could easily be accessed, and also the general absence of continuous assessment tests for students to gauge how they are performing are sources of stress for international students.

Strengths of the Current Study. One of the strengths of this study is the choice of mixed methods where results obtained qualitatively using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), illuminated results obtained from the quantitative phase of the study. In so doing, the study was able to align statistics with the lived experiences of study participants ensuring a deeper understanding of the acculturative stress experiences of international students. Also, the present study ensured that a clear distinction was made between the acculturative and academic stress experiences of Visiting international students and that of Regular international students who are also short term and long term international students respectively. This was done to bring to the fore the heterogeneity, at least in length of studies, of the international student in Ghana such that interventions could be tailor-made to suit the specific needs of specific international students.

Furthermore, the present study explored and found continental differences in the acculturative stress experiences of all international students represented on the campuses of the study settings. Thus, the acculturative stress experiences of international students from Europe, Asia, Africa and America were distinctly examined. It may be the first of its kind in the country since an earlier study conducted in Ghana by Sam et al. (2014) examined the experiences of West Africans and Westerners on the University of Ghana

Legon campus. Finally, the employment of the Scheafer et al. (1986) and Nasiurma (2000) formula for calculating a representative sample ensured that the sample for the study was indeed representative of the population of international students studying at the study settings used for the present study.

Recommendations/Implications of the study

Based on the findings of this study recommendations for curriculum development, practical intervention strategies and adult and continuing education programmes are made. These recommendations are to ensure that the effects of international students' acculturative stress experiences are properly managed and the effects reduced. Also, the recommendations are to ensure that Ghana's universities reap the full benefits of internationalization by attracting, retaining, and growing international student numbers in the country's universities and other institutions of higher learning.

Curriculum Development. The universities, through the offices and centers for international programmes, can design specialized intercultural course or courses targeted at international students for them to acquire knowledge and develop skills to navigate the novelty of the culture they find themselves in. Such a course or courses will bring to the fore certain cultural values, norms, beliefs, mores, and practices in the Ghanaian society to make international students gain some cultural awareness as well as cultural literacy to reduce their acculturative stress levels. This could be a required course for all students.

The course could also share practical examples of critical incidents that border on perception, prejudice, stereotypes, and intercultural communication challenges as well as other challenging encounters international students may have had in order to gain understanding of such critically challenging intercultural encounters. This way international students could gain intercultural sensitivity skills which could reduce their acculturative stress experiences. Courses such as Intercultural Communication and

Leadership (ICL) designed by international education providers such as Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE) and taught at CIEE Study Centers across the world for all CIEE programme participants can serve as a guide in the universities designing such a course.

Since Twi is the most widely spoken local language, efforts must be made to ensure that a more experiential and communicative Twi language class is available for all international students, even if it is not for credit. This course must have practical, continuous face to face dialogue sessions with students (who can speak the language), taxi cab drivers, at least those who drive on the university campus, and sellers at the various markets on the university campus. This way, international students will overcome the language barrier that engenders acculturative stress.

Practical Intervention Strategies. Cultural awareness events which are university-sponsored, such as durbar for international students by the University of Ghana's Office of International Programmes, with the active involvement of the wider university community especially students, is a good way to change the stereotypes and prejudicial attitudes of the university community towards international students and must be emulated by other institutions. Such activities must be held at the beginning and also midway through each semester. Jung et al. (2007) notes that international cultural events which are university-sponsored, and held in a culturally open and supportive campus environment has a tendency to positively affect the acculturative experiences of international students.

Orientation sessions for international students must span a period of three (3) to five (5) days where important cultural and academic issues are extensively discussed and addressed. A workshop and/or seminar style of orientation using role plays and the use of vignettes will serve as a very good starting point in understanding the challenges they are likely to face and how to address them. An institutionalization of a monthly Town Hall

meeting session throughout the semester where international students get the opportunity share their experiences, challenges and successes will go a long way to make the international student's experience a worthy one.

African international students form the majority of international students in Ghana's universities. Since the present study has established that they are the group that experiences the most acculturative stress, a mentorship programme where African students who would be identified as having successfully navigated their experience in Ghana would mentor their peers and serve as peer advisors for new and continuing students who still experience acculturative stress. These mentors can offer targeted ongoing orientation sessions and Town Hall meetings to address some practical academic and cultural issues the students could be facing. The mentorship programme could be replicated for all groups of international students.

Universities have a responsibility to inform its international students of all the avenues of support available at the university, such as counselling, academic, health, safety and security and all forms of harassment, so that international students will know where to go when they are faced with challenging intercultural situations. These avenues must be continuously advertised and have dedicated round the clock telephone contact or hotlines that are be easily accessible. The Counseling Centers of the various universities with all the counselling, psychological and psychiatric expertise at their disposal, must help international students by providing them with cognitive and behavioural resources and skills to know how to deal with challenges of homesickness and the perception of discrimination as well as social rejection. Also, the Counseling Centers must provide international students with assertiveness training sessions so that international students will know how to speak up, seek assistance, and engage with persons in the universities in a culturally competent and effective manner. Such interventions have the tendency to minimize acculturative stress and helping the international student with the overall

adjustment process. Universities that do not have the services of such critical personnel to support international students must ensure to hire such persons.

Universities must organise at least two (2) sessions per semester on how to successfully navigate the academic culture of the universities as well as how to effectively manage examination-related anxiety since academic issues are a major source of acculturative stress for international students. Additionally, faculty must endeavour to be present and teach on the first day of class, make course syllabus available, and make interim assessment scores available to students in a timely manner, discuss the interim assessment performance with the students so that the academic stress levels of international students, and local students, will be reduced. Here, graduate teaching assistants (Masters and PhD) will assist faculty in the successful discharge of this important academic mandate. Also, smaller size classes will go a long way to make this intervention a very successful one. Peer partnership programmes where local students are trained and engaged by the universities to serve as cultural ambassadors for international students will be helpful for international students to have “go-to” persons when they encounter difficult intercultural situations which could engender acculturative stress.

Implications for Adult and Continuing Education Programmes. The various staff development offices in the country’s universities such as the one in University of Ghana must design intercultural competence and sensitivity training sessions, workshops and seminars for faculty and administrators of universities, using the principles of Adult Psychology to provide a supportive campus environment for international students as well as all students. Governmental institutions like Brand Ghana, Ghana Tourism Authority and the Ministry of Tourism and Culture who are tasked with the responsibility of promoting tourism in Ghana must engage with other stakeholders to organize targeted adult education programmes on intercultural competence and sensitivity training sessions and workshops for public transport operators such as “trotro” drivers and mates and taxi

cab drivers to dress professionally, be polite and respectful towards people and especially visitors into the country, having a good sense of the layout of the cities in which they operate in order to provide assistance to visitors and also being cultural ambassadors for the country in their own rights will go a long way to reduce the stress and strains international visitors encounter upon entry into a new environment. Similar sessions must be organized with market women, and street side sellers, public transport operators and traders, since they tend to be the first points of contacts for international students and visitors in the Ghanaian community.

Recommendations for Future Research. The study sample was purposively selected since it was only the international students who were interested enough in the topic took part. The results of the study using purposive samples are generally not generalizable to other populations. Hence, it will be difficult generalizing the findings of this study. It is recommended that future studies must select participants using the random sampling technique after satisfying the representativeness of the sample to ensure generalizability. Also, even though Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions was not the main focus of this study, it is evident from the findings of this study that the cultural dimension of individualism-collectivism impacted the assertiveness, self-efficacy and social support of international students in dealing with their acculturative stress experiences. Future research must consider analyzing the role of cultural dimensions of nations and how they affect dealing with acculturative stress among international students.

Contribution to Knowledge

It must be pointed out that this study and its recommendations has practical utility for higher education in Ghana and especially for persons and professionals who deal with international students. At the same time, it is useful for all institutions and professionals in the country who are tasked with the responsibility of promoting Ghana through tourism

and development as well as all persons who deal with visitors into Ghana. Finally, the observed model (Figure 6) is a clear manifestation that there could be positive outcomes of the experience of acculturative stress considering the intercultural competence and growth orientation of international students post acculturation. This observed model with the name Post Acculturation Growth orientation is a contribution to the body of knowledge of studies focusing on international students in particular and intercultural studies in general.



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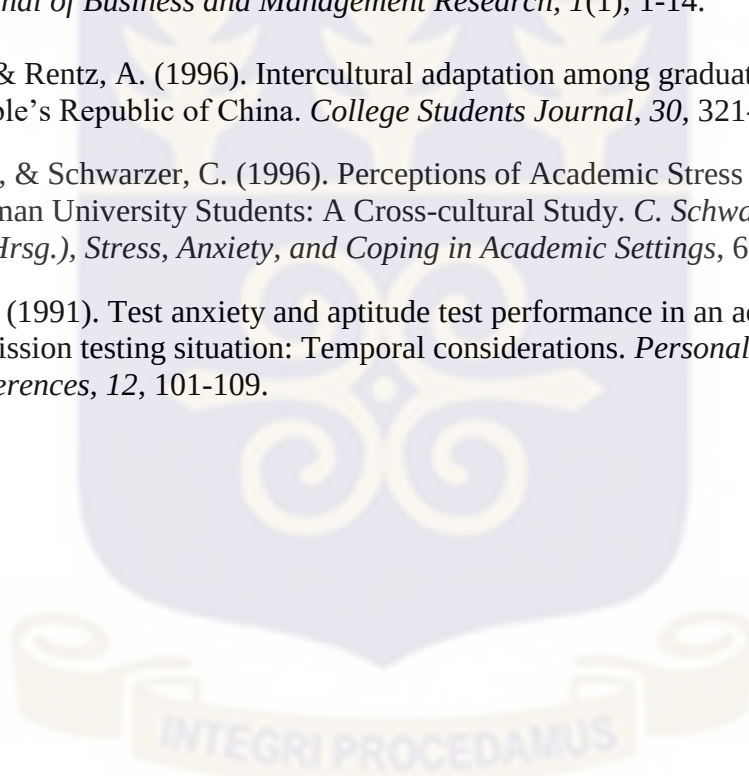
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APPENDICES

Appendix A: International Students Acculturative Experiences Questionnaire

(ISAEQ)

Section A

1. Age
2. Gender
3. Country of Origin
4. Continent of Origin a. Africa b. Asia c. Australia d. Europe e. America f. Other(specify)
5. Marital status a. Single b. Married c. Other
Specify_____
6. Are you studying in this university for:
 - a. One semester
 - b. One year
 - c. Diploma (*skip to Q.10 if you tick this*)
 - d. Bachelors Degree (BA, BSc.) (*skip to Q.10 if you tick this*)
 - e. Graduate Level (MA, MPhil, PhD) (*skip to Q.10 if you tick this*)
 - f. Other_____ (Specify) (*skip to Q.10 if you tick this*)
7. If you ticked **a and/or b** in Q.6 are you studying at this university through any of the underlisted. (Tick the one applicable to you):
 - a. An exchange programme. (e.g. ISEP, USAC etc) What programme?_____
 - b. A direct exchange between my university and this university (e.g Concordia, Tufts, Leeds etc). What is the name of your university?

 - c. I am studying here not through any exchange programme nor direct exchange with my university. It is my individual decision.
 - d. Other (*Specify*)

8. If you ticked a in Q.7 above, do you have programme staff in Ghana? 1. Yes
2. No
9. If you ticked b in Q.7 above, do you have programme staff in Ghana? 1. Yes
2. No
10. How long have you been studying at this university?
11. Have you ever travelled outside your country before coming to study in Ghana?
Yes No
a. If yes, indicate the country (ies) you have visited below

12. Religion
- a. Christian
 - b. Muslim
 - c. Traditional Religion
 - d. No religion
 - e. Other (Specify)

Most cultures in the world are described as either Individualistic or Collectivistic based on where they fall along various points in the Individualism-Collectivism continuum.

Individualistic culture values center towards independence in individual decision making, responsibilities, and benefits by holding the individual as the primary unit of reality and ultimate standard of value.

Collective culture values center towards interdependence in group in group interaction by holding the group as the primary unit of reality and ultimate standard of value.

- | | | |
|--------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Individualistic | 2. Mostly Individualistic | 3. Somewhat Individualistic |
| 2. 4. In-Between | 5. Somewhat Collective | 6. Mostly Collective |
| 7. Collective | | |

13. On a scale of 1-7 as above, how would you rate the values, beliefs and behaviours of:
- a. Your country of origin _____
 - b. Ghana _____

Section B**ACCULTURATIVE STRESS SCALE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS**

As foreign students you have to make a number of personal, social and environmental changes upon arrival in a new land. This may provide a cultural-shock experience which might acculturative stress. This scale is designed to assess such acculturative stress you personally might have experienced. There are no right or wrong answers. However, for the data to be meaningful, please answer each statement given below as honestly as possible **by ticking only one option**.

***Because of my different cultural background as a foreign student, I feel that:**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Homesickness for my country bothers me.	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. I feel uncomfortable to adjust to new foods and/or new eating habits.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. I am treated differently in social situations.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. I feel rejected when people are sarcastic toward my cultural values.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. I feel nervous to communicate in English	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. I feel sad living in unfamiliar surroundings here.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7. I fear for my personal safety because of my different cultural background.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8. I feel intimidated to participate in social activities.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9. Others are biased toward me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10. I feel guilty to leave my family and friends behind.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
11. Many opportunities are denied to me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree Agree	Strongly
12. I feel angry that my people are considered inferior here.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
13. I feel overwhelmed that multiple pressures are placed upon me after moving here to study	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
14. I feel that I receive unequal treatment.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
15. People in this country show hatred toward me nonverbally.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
16. It hurts when people don't understand my cultural values.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
17. I am denied what I deserve.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
18. I have to frequently relocate for fear of others.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
19. I feel low because of my cultural background.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
20. I feel rejected when others don't appreciate my cultural values.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
21. I miss the people and country of my origin	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
22. I feel uncomfortable to adjust to new cultural values.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
23. I feel that my people are discriminated against.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
24. People in this country show hatred toward me through their actions.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
25. I feel that my status in this society is low due to my cultural background.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
26. I am treated differently because of my race.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
27. I feel insecure here.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
28. I don't feel a sense of belonging (community) here.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
29. I am treated differently because of my color/race.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
30. I feel sad to consider my people's problems.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
31. I generally keep a low profile here due to fear	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
32. I feel some people from here don't associate with me because of my ethnicity.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
33. People from here show hatred toward me verbally.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
34. I feel guilty that I am living a different lifestyle here.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
35. I feel sad leaving my relatives behind.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
36. I worry about my future for not being able to decide whether to stay here or to go back.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

- | | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Not Sure | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 37. I find it difficult to know what to do and where to go when I am ill. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 38. I worry a lot because in the event of a disease outbreak I don't think the health care system here can manage the situation. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

STUDENT STRESS INVENTORY

The inventory is designed to find out sources of academic stress in students. Consider how much the following stressors are source of stress for you on a scale below. Please choose the option that best reflects your response.

- | | Not at all Stressful | Little Stressful | Neutral | Stressful | Extremely Stressful |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Academic Exams | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 2. Overload of regular Study assignments. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 3. Securing study materials. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 4. Poorly integrated course of study. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 5. Competitive academic atmosphere. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 6. Excessive amounts of course assignments. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 7. Lack of time to pursue hobbies. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 8. Academic registration bureaucracy(e.g. online registration, departmental long lines, forms and documentation). | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 9. Assimilating new study study material. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

	Not at all Stressful	Little Stressful	Neutral	Stressful	Extremely Stressful
10. Poor academic instruction.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
11. Uncomfortable physical conditions (study halls, chairs, etc.)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
12. Excessive amount of material to study.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
13. Studies don't meet personal expectations.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
14. Unable to keep up with new Professional developments	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
15. Poor faculty-student relations.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
16. Excessive daily time constraints.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
17. Making changes in course of study.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
18. Presenting oral report before class/group.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
19. Changing major	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
20. Failing a course	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
21. Coping with academic Material after a long pause from previous study	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
22. Meeting deadlines in submitting paper.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
23. Difficulty in receiving good grades	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
24. Preparing study schedule.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Section C**RATHUS ASSERTIVENESS SCHEDULE**

This scale is a measure of one's assertiveness across a wide range of socio-cultural situations. Do you initiate relationships with attractive people, or do you shy away from them? One way to gain insight into how assertive you are is to take the following self-report test of assertive behaviour.

Directions: *Indicate how well each item describes you by ticking the box applicable:*

	very much like me	rather like me	slightly like me	slightly unlike me	rather unlike me	very much unlike me
1. Most people seem to be more aggressive and assertive than I am						
2. I have hesitated to make or accept dates because of "shyness."						
3. When the food served at a restaurant is not done to my satisfaction, I complain about it to the waiter or waitress.						
4. I am careful to avoid hurting other people's feelings, even when I feel that I have been injured.						
5. If a salesperson has gone to considerable trouble to show me merchandise that is not quite suitable, I have a difficult time saying "No."						
6. When I am asked to do something, I insist upon knowing why						
7. There are times when I look for a good, vigorous argument.						
8. I strive to get ahead as well as most people in my position.						
9. To be honest, people often take advantage of me.						
10. I enjoy starting conversations with new acquaintances and strangers						
11. I often don't know what						

to say to people I find attractive.						
	very much like me	rather like me	slightly like me	slightly unlike me	rather unlike me	very much unlike me
12. I would rather apply for a job or for admission to a college by writing letters than by going through with personal interviews						
13. I find it embarrassing to return merchandise						
14. If a close and respected relative were annoying me, I would smother my feelings rather than express my annoyance.						
15. I have avoided asking questions for fear of sounding stupid.						
16. During an argument, I am sometimes afraid that I will get so upset that I will shake all over.						
17. If a famed and respected lecturer makes a comment which I think is incorrect, I will have the audience hear my point of view as well.						
18. I avoid arguing over prices with clerks and salespeople.						
19. When I have done something important or worthwhile, I manage to let others know about it.						
20. I am open and frank about my feelings.						
21. If someone has been spreading false and bad stories about me, I see him or her as soon as possible and "have a talk" about it						
22. I often have a hard time saying "No."						

	very much like me	rather like me	slightly like me	slightly unlike me	rather unlike me	very much unlike me
23. I complain about poor service in a restaurant and elsewhere.						
24. When I am given a compliment, I sometimes just don't know what to say						
25. If a couple near me in a theater or at a lecture were conversing rather loudly, I would ask them to be quiet or to take their conversation elsewhere						
26. Anyone attempting to push ahead of me in a line is in for a good battle						
27. I am quick to express an opinion						
28. There are times when I just can't say anything						

General Self-Efficacy Scale

The scale assesses the general sense of perceived self-efficacy with the aim in mind to predict coping with daily hassles as well as adaptation after experiencing all kinds of stressful life events. Tick the box applicable

1 = Not at all true 2 = Hardly true 3 = Moderately true 4 = Exactly true

	1	2	3	4
1. I always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough				
2. If someone opposes me, I can find the means and ways to get what I want.				
3. It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals.				
4. I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events.				
5. Thanks to my resourcefulness, I know how to handle unforeseen situations.				
6. I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort.				
7. I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities.				
8. When I am confronted with a problem, I can usually find several solutions.				
9. If I am in trouble, I can usually think of a solution.				
10. I can usually handle whatever comes my way.				

Section D**Index of Social Support**

Read each statement carefully and decide how well you think these different sources of support have been helpful to you. Reflect on your experience and choose the number that BEST number that describes the support you receive.

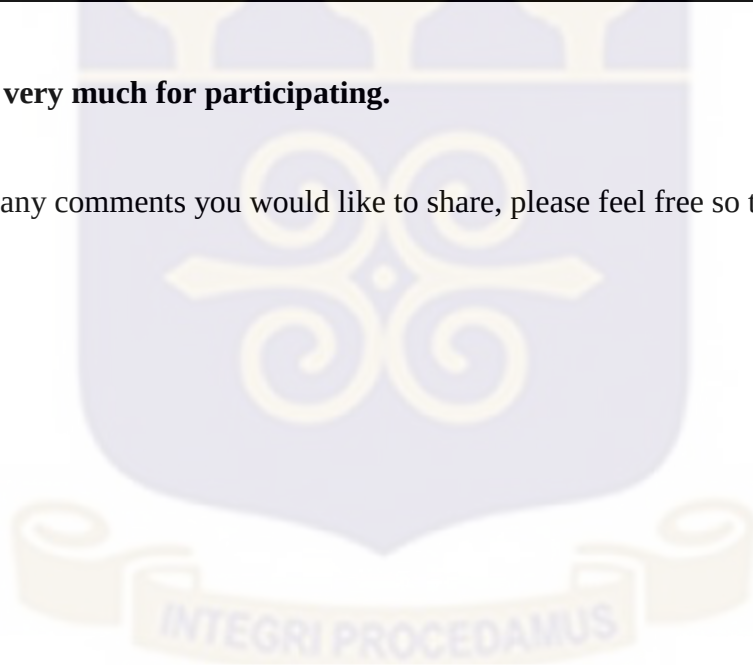
0=Not Applicable 1=Never 2= Rarely 3= Sometimes 4= Often

	0	1	2	3	4
1. I have contact with my old friends in my home country.					
2. I trust my secondary families (uncles, aunts, etc).					
3. I trust the international student center on campus					
4. My secondary families (uncles, aunts, etc) are available when I need them.					
5. I am satisfied with my old friends in my home country.					
6. I have contact with the international student center on campus.					
7. My old friends in my home country are available when I need them.					
8. I trust my old friends in my home country.					
9. My secondary families (uncles, aunts, etc) mean a lot to me.					
10. I am satisfied with the international student center on campus.					
11. I am satisfied with my secondary families (uncles, aunts, etc).					
12. The international center on campus is available when I need it.					
13. My old friends in my home country mean a lot to me.					
14. The international student center on campus means a lot to me.					
15. Community activities here mean a lot to me.					
16. I am satisfied with student organizations on campus.					
17. I have contact with student organizations on campus.					
18. I participate in community activities here.					
19. I trust the people I meet in community activities.					
20. The student organizations on campus are available when I need them.					
21. People I meet in community activities are available when I need them.					
22. Student organizations on campus mean a lot to me.					
23. I am satisfied with community activities here.					
24. I trust student organizations on campus.					
25. My new friends in Ghana are available when I need them.					
26. I trust my family.					
27. I trust my new friends in Ghana.					
28. My family is available when I need it.					
29. I am satisfied with my new friends in Ghana.					
30. My new friends in Ghana mean a lot to me.					

31. I have contact with my new friends in Ghana.					
32. I trust my religious place (e.g. church, mosque) here.					
0=Not Applicable 1=Never 2= Rarely 3= Sometimes 4= Often	0	1	2	3	4
33. I have contact with my religious place (e.g. church, mosque) here.					
34. I trust my advisor/faculty for support.					
35. My religious place (e.g. church, mosque) here means a lot to me.					
36. I am satisfied with my religious place (e.g. church, mosque) here.					
37. My religious place (e.g. church, mosque) here is available when I need it.					
38. My host family means a lot to me.					
39. I trust my host family for support.					
40. I rely on my host family for support.					
41. My host family is available when I need it.					
42. I rely on my advisor/faculty for support.					
43. My advisor/faculty is available when I need them.					
44. My advisor/faculty means a lot to me.					

Thank you very much for participating.

If you have any comments you would like to share, please feel free so to do below



Appendix B: International Students Acculturative Stress Interview Guide

As an international student pursuing education and living in a different environment, you go through the process of acculturation which is the process of adjusting to the norms, mores, values, beliefs and attitudes of the host country and its nationals. This process of acculturation has positive effects on personal growth and development, and a deeper understanding of intercultural situations. However, it may have debilitating effects, also known as acculturative stress on the individual in the form of psychological and socio-cultural challenges.

There are no right and wrong answers so feel free to express your experiences.

- 1 Tell me a bit about yourself and how you came to study in Ghana/University of Ghana.
- 2 What does it mean to be an international student in Ghana? What did it mean to leave your country to come and study in Ghana?
- 3 How did you decide to come and study at University of Ghana?
- 4 What do you think you stand to gain as an international student compared to if you had done all your studies at your home country?
- 5 Living and studying abroad as an international student can be stressful. Tell me about some of the things that make your experience stressful.
- 6 How are you dealing with this/these challenge (s)?
- 7 Would you say you have successfully dealt with the challenge? If Yes, How?
- 8 If No, how do you mean?
- 9 Would you say there has/have been any learning opportunity(ies) for you? What have this/these been? (Describe your experience or experiences).

Thank you very much for your participation in this interview.

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

Title: Dealing with Acculturative Stress among International Students in Ghana: Influences of Assertiveness, Self-Efficacy and Social Support

Principal Investigator: KWASI GYASI-GYAMERAH

Address: Department of Adult Education and Human Resource Studies, University of Ghana, Legon

Introduction

This Consent Form contains information about the research named above. In order to be sure that you are informed about being in this research, we are asking you to read (or have read to you) this Consent Form. You will also be asked to sign it (or make your mark in front of a witness). We will give you a copy of this form. This consent form might contain some words that are unfamiliar to you. Please ask us to explain anything you may not understand.

General Information about Research

As an international student pursuing education and living in a different environment, you go through the process of adjusting to the norms, mores, values, beliefs and attitudes of the host country, the host university and the nationals of the country also known as acculturative stress. The purpose of this study is to investigate and understand the acculturative stress as experienced by international students studying in Ghana. It is also to have empirical evidence of the specific acculturative stressors in the Ghanaian academic and socio-cultural environment affecting international students.

This research will mainly involve the completion of questionnaires which cover the following areas, demographic information, stress inventories (Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students and Student Stress Inventory), assertiveness, self-efficacy and social support.

Expected duration required to complete the questionnaire is between 45 minutes to 60 minutes.

Benefits/Risk of the study

It is anticipated that there would be no physical risks associated with the study. However, as you recount your acculturative stress experiences, it is possible you could become quite emotional and even experience emotional challenges. In the event of an emotional challenge, you will be referred to the University of Ghana's Counselling and Placement Centre for support.

Confidentiality

Participation in the study is strictly anonymous and unlinked to you as a participant. Data from this study is for academic purposes only and will be kept completely confidential.

Your personal information will not in any way be associated with the data collected nor with any written reports, presentations, or publications that may result from this study. Future use of the data collected will be for the same purposes as stated above and will be subjected to the same confidentiality guidelines.

The principal investigator is the only one who will have direct access to the research records at any particular point in time. It is important to note that the research supervisors may sometimes look at your research records. However, the research will be aggregated and so even if the supervisor looks at the data set, there is no way he/she can link the information to you the respondent.

Compensation

There would be no compensation packages available for participants who participate in the study.

Withdrawal from Study

Participation in the study is purely voluntary and participants can withdraw from the study at any time they experience any form of discomfort whether physically or emotionally.

There are no penalties in refusal to participate or withdrawal from the study.

Contact for Additional Information

If you have any complaints or concerns or questions about this study, contact Kwasi Gyasi-Gyamrah of the department of Adult Education and Human Resource Studies, University of Ghana on 026-4622251 or by e-mail KGyasi-Gyamrah@cjee.org or kgyasi.g@gmail.com

This project is being supervised principally by Dr. Samuel Badu-Nyarko, the head of the department of Adult Education and Human Resource Studies, University of Ghana, Legon. You can contact him by e-mail skbnyarko@u.edu.gh or on phone on 0277428319.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant in this study you may contact Dr. Samuel Badu-Nyarko, the head of the department of Adult Education and Human Resource Studies, University of Ghana, Legon. You can contact him by e-mail skbnyarko@u.edu.gh or on phone on 0277428319.

Volunteer Agreement

"I have read or have had someone read all of the above, asked questions, received answers regarding participation in this study, and am willing to give consent for me, my child/ward to participate in this study. I will not have waived any of my rights by signing this consent form. Upon signing this consent form, I will receive a copy for my personal records."

Name of Volunteer

Signature or mark of volunteer

Date

If volunteers cannot read the form themselves, a witness must sign here:

I was present while the benefits, risks and procedures were read to the volunteer. All questions were answered and the volunteer has agreed to take part in the research.

Name of witness

Signature of witness

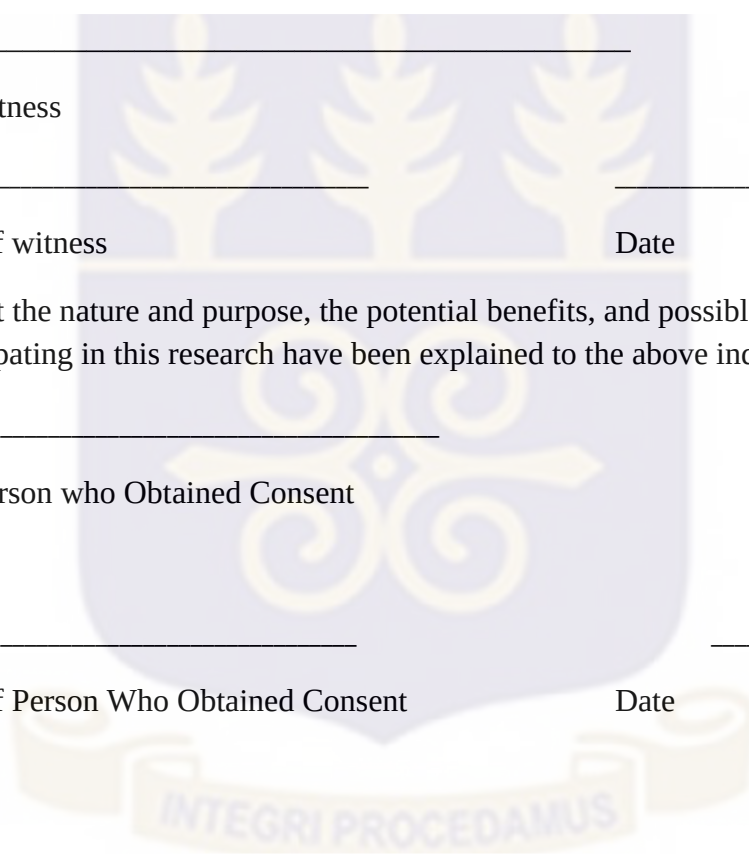
Date

I certify that the nature and purpose, the potential benefits, and possible risks associated with participating in this research have been explained to the above individual.

Name of Person who Obtained Consent

Signature of Person Who Obtained Consent

Date



Appendix D: Ethical Clearance



UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

ETHICS COMMITTEE FOR THE HUMANITIES (ECH)

P. O. Box LG 74, Legon, Accra, Ghana

My Ref. No.

27th January, 2016

Mr. Kwasi Gyasi-Gyamerah
Department of Adult Education and Human Resource Studies
University of Ghana
Legon

Dear Mr. Gyasi-Gyamerah,

ECH 059/15-16: DEALING WITH ACCULTURATIVE STRESS AMONG INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

This is to advise you that the above reference study has been presented to the Ethics Committee for the Humanities for a full board review and the following actions taken subject to the conditions and explanation provided below:

Expiry Date:	25/01/17
On Agenda for:	Initial Submission
Date of Submission:	3/12/15
ECH Action:	Approved
Reporting:	Bi-Annually



Please accept my congratulations.

Yours Sincerely,

Rev. Prof. J. O. Y. Mante
ECH Chair

CC: Dr. S. K Badu-Nyarko, Department of Adult Education and Human Resource Studies,
University of Ghana.

Tel: +233-303933866

Email: ech@ug.edu.gh | ech@isser.edu.gh