Academic and Sociocultural Adjustment Experiences of International Students

Studying in Kazakhstan

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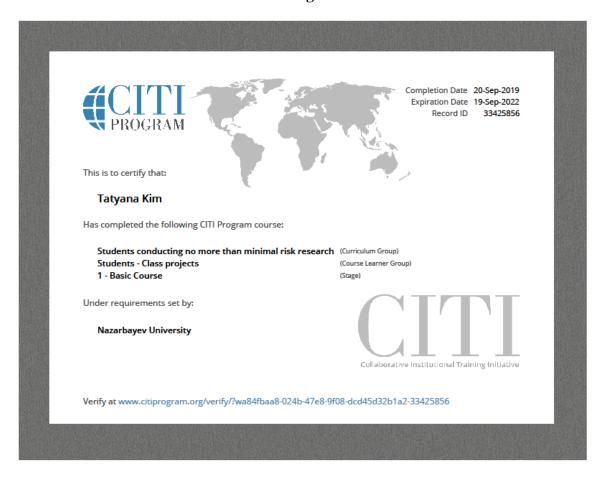Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Abstract

ACADEMIC AND SOCIOCULTURAL ADJUSTMENT EXPERIENCES OF

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS STUDYING IN KAZAKHSTAN

Internationalization of higher education has gained momentum over the last three decades and is now an integral part of strategies and policies at both national and institutional levels. However, research on internationalization in general, and on international students' adjustment experiences in particular, has received scant attention in Kazakhstan. This study is an attempt to address this gap. Using case study design, the research was undertaken at one private Kazakhstani university hosting a relatively large and diverse body of international students. Fourteen overseas students and four university administrators were interviewed to identify the students' adjustment experiences and factors affecting them, as well as to reveal how the university contributes to the students' integration into the host community. The findings suggest that proficiency in local languages was the most important factor that affected the overseas students' adjustment experiences. Those who spoke the Russian language upon arrival in Kazakhstan adjusted better. Meanwhile, their peers, who were not proficient in local languages, started feeling more adjusted after acquiring either of them. Gender and country of origin were the second most influential factors. Whereas female students experienced issues connected with accommodation to local food, their male peers reported being exposed to bullying. Due to similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds, overseas students from post-Soviet countries adjusted faster than their peers from other countries. Language barrier and cultural differences were major factors that inhibited overseas students' adjustment. In contrast, faculty support, engagement in friendship networks on campus, as well as cultural proximity, prior cross-cultural encounters, and openness to cultural diversity contributed to the students' smoother adjustment. The research may be of benefit to current and potential

international students, as well as to university administrators. In addition, this study may

contribute to the expansion of local and global knowledge pools on academic and

sociocultural adjustment of international students.

     Keywords: academic adjustment, higher education, international students,

Kazakhstan, sociocultural adjustment, university support

Аңдатпа

ҚАЗАҚСТАНДА БІЛІМ АЛЫП ЖАТҚАН ШЕТЕЛДІК СТУДЕНТТЕРДІҢ

АКАДЕМИЯЛЫҚ ЖӘНЕ ӘЛЕУМЕТТІК МӘДЕНИ БЕЙІМДЕЛУІ

Жоғары білім беруді интернационалдандыру ауқымы соңғы отыз жылдың ішінде күннен күнге кеңейіп келеді, бүгінгі таңда ол ұлттық деңгейде де, институционалдық деңгейде де стратегиялар мен мақсатты бағдарламалардың ажырамас бөлігі болып табылады. Алайда жалпы интернационалдандыру және соның ішінде шетелдік студенттерді бейімдеу бойынша зерттеулерге Қазақстанда жеткілікті деңгейде көңіл бөлініп отырған жоқ. Ұсынылып отырған зерттеу жұмысы осы олқылықтың орнын толтыруға бағытталған талпыныс болып табылады. Ахуалды талдау (case study) әдісіне негізделген осы зерттеу жұмысы салыстырмалы түрде әртүрлі елдерден келіп білім алып жатқан студенттерінің саны көп қазақстандық бір жеке меншік университеттің қабырғасында жүргізілді. Студенттердің бейімделу үдерісі мен оған әсер ететін факторлар туралы, сондай-ақ студенттердің оқуға келген елдегі қоғамдық ортаға сіңісуіне университеттің қандай әрекеттер жасап жатқаны туралы мәлімет жинау үшін университеттің шетелдік он төрт студентімен және әкімшілік-басқару қызметкерлері құрамының төрт мүшесімен сұхбат жүргізілді. Алынған нәтижелер жергілікті халықтың тілдерін меңгеру шетелдік студенттердің бейімделу үдерісіне ықпал ететін ең маңызды фактор болып табылатынын көрсетті. Орыс тілін білетін студенттердің Қазақстанға келгеннен кейін бейімделуі жеңілірек екені көрінді. Ал басында жергілікті тілде сөйлемеген студенттер жергілікті халықтың тілдерінің бірін үйренгеннен кейін өздерін әлдеқайда жайлы сезіне бастаған. Сырттан келген студенттің жынысы мен туған елі оның бейімделу үдерісіне әсер ететін факторлардың ішінде маңызы жағынан екінші орынды иеленеді. Студент қыз балалар көбіне жергілікті ас мәзірімен байланысты

қиындықтарға кезіксе, студент ер балалар буллинг қыспағына ұшыраған. Өткен тарихындағы мәдени және тілдік орталарының ұқсастығына байланысты посткеңестік елдерден келген шетелдік студенттер өзге елдерден келген студенттермен салыстырғанда тезірек бейімделген. Тілдік барьер мен мәдениетіндегі айырмашылықтар шетелдік студенттердің бейімделуіне кедергі келтіретін негізгі факторлар болып шықты. Университет қабырғасындағы оқытушылардың қолдау көрсетуі, достық қарым-қатынастар орнату, сондай-ақ мәдениеттердің жақындығы, бұған дейінгі мәдениетаралық орталарда болу тәжірибелері және өзге мәдениеттермен танысуға деген адамның ашық ниеті студенттердің анағұрлым бірқалыпты бейімделуіне ықпал еткен. Зерттеу жұмысы қазіргі және әлеуетті шетелдік студенттерге, сондай-ақ университеттердің әкімшілігіне пайдалы бола алады. Сонымен бірге бұл зерттеу жұмысы жергілікті деңгейде де, халықаралық деңгейде де шетелдік студенттердің академиялық және әлеуметтік мәдени бейімделуі туралы білім ауқымын кеңейтуге ықпал ете алады.

Түйінді сөздер: академиялық бейімделу, жоғары білім, шетелдік студенттер, Қазақстан, әлеуметтік мәдени бейімделу, университет тарапынан қолдау

Аннотация

АКАДЕМИЧЕСКАЯ И СОЦИОКУЛЬТУРНАЯ АДАПТАЦИЯ ИНОСТРАННЫХ СТУДЕНТОВ, ОБУЧАЮЩИХСЯ В КАЗАХСТАНЕ

Интернационализация высшего образования приобретает всё большие масштабы последние три десятилетия и в настоящее время является неотъемлемой частью стратегий и целевых программ как на национальном, так и на институциональном уровнях. Однако исследованиям по интернационализации, в целом, и адаптации иностранных студентов, в частности, уделяется недостаточно внимания в Казахстане. Настоящее исследование является попыткой восполнить данный пробел. Используя метод ситуационного анализа (case study), данное исследование было проведено в частном казахстанском университете, в котором обучается относительно большое количество студентов из разных стран. Для получения данных о процессе адаптации студентов и факторов, влияющих на него, а также о том, как университет способствует интеграции студентов в общество страны пребывания, были проведены интервью с четырнадцатью иностранными студентами и четырьмя членами административно-управленческого персонала университета. Полученные результаты свидетельствуют о том, что знание местных языков является наиболее важным фактором, влияющим на процесс адаптации иностранных студентов. Студенты, которые знали русский язык по прибытии в Казахстан, адаптировались лучше. Тем временем студенты, которые не владели местными языками, стали чувствовать себя более комфортно после изучения одного из них. Пол и страна происхождения являются вторыми по значимости факторами, влияющими на процесс адаптации. В то время как студенты женского пола испытывали проблемы, связанные с адаптацией к местной еде, студенты мужского пола подвергались буллингу. Из-за схожей культурной и языковой среды в прошлом

иностранные студенты из постсоветских стран адаптировались быстрее, чем студенты из других стран. Языковой барьер и культурные различия были основными факторами, препятствующими адаптации иностранных студентов. Поддержка преподавателей, установление дружеских отношений в стенах университета, а также близость культур, предыдущий опыт пребывания в межкультурной среде и открытость по отношению к иным культурам способствовали более плавной адаптации студентов. Исследование может быть полезным для нынешних и потенциальных иностранных студентов, а также для администрации университетов. Кроме того, данное исследование может способствовать расширению знаний об академической и социокультурной адаптации иностранных студентов как на местном, так и на международном уровнях.

Ключевые слова: академическая адаптация, высшее образование, иностранные студенты, Казахстан, социокультурная адаптация, поддержка университета

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Problem Statement

Internationalization of higher education has gained momentum over the last three decades and is now an integral part of strategies and policies at both national and institutional levels (OECD, 2012). Internationalization of higher education is an umbrella term that encompasses many facets, such as academic mobility, internationalization of the curriculum, convergence of world education systems, just to name a few (Sanders, 2019, p. 415). In a nutshell, it represents a worldwide competition for talent (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009) and is a logical and natural response to globalization (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009). In other words, increasing integration of global economies has led to the growing demand for graduates with global perspectives and international skills and qualifications (OECD, 2012).

However, international students, who might enjoy superiority in globalized labour markets, are not the only beneficiaries of internationalization. In fact, internationalization brings tangible profits to the national economies of host countries and spurs the development of their economic, education and innovation systems (Anwar, 2012; OECD, 2016). As a rule, international students pay higher tuition fees than their host peers. Furthermore, their living expenses are a substantial contribution to the host country's economy (OECD, 2018). Thus, according to the ex-president of the Center for International Programs, Zhanbolat Meldeshov, each international student brings Kazakhstan around $5 thousand a year (Radionov, 2018). In the longer run, highly literate international students might join the host country's labour market, "contributing to knowledge creation, innovation and economic performance" (OECD, 2018).

However, internationalization is not only about material benefits. Overseas students can bring new perspectives and enhance cultural competence in the host society (OECD,

2017). Besides, they can foster long-term diplomatic cooperation between the home and host countries. Consequently, internationalization might have an intangible, yet extremely advantageous effect.

Having recognized its benefits, a growing number of countries have given top priority to the internationalization of higher education. As a result, the number of international students around the globe sky-rocketed from two to five million between 1999 and 2016 (OECD, 2018). By 2025, this figure is forecasted to reach eight million (OECD, 2012).

In response to this trend, a growing number of universities worldwide exert their best efforts to recruit high-potential overseas students who might contribute to the improvement of their reputation and revenue growth. For these purposes, they open overseas satellite campuses, provide distance courses and double degrees, streamline admission procedures for international students, opt for widely spoken foreign languages as a medium of instruction, and offer international scholarships (OECD, 2018). Meanwhile, Kazakhstan is experiencing an outward flow of students. As of 2018, the number of national students pursuing their studies abroad amounted to over 100 thousand (Panchenko, 2019) whereas the number of international students enrolled at Kazakhstani universities was five times less and comprised around 20 thousand (Radionov, 2018).

According to the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Askhat Aimagambetov, there is an ambitious goal to transform the country into an educational hub in Central Asia and recruit students from India, China, Turkey, Pakistan, Egypt, Russia and other countries (Baigarin, 2018). Thus, increasing the share of international students in Kazakhstan from two to five percent is on the Ministry's short-term agenda. The former Minister of Education and Science, Yerlan Sagadiyev, during his time in office followed a similar strategy and aimed at recruiting 50 thousand international

students by 2020 (Urankayeva, 2017). In the long run, the Ministry is committed to ensure that the percentage of overseas students in Kazakhstan keeps growing (Baigarin, 2018). Hence, in order not to be shot out of this race for intellectual capital in an increasingly competitive global higher education landscape and attain the above goals, Kazakhstani universities need to develop effective internationalization strategies.

Research suggests that international students tend to choose a host country depending on the kind of sociocultural experiences they might get during their studies (Tsegay, Zegergish, & Ashraf, 2018) and on how welcoming the country is to overseas students (QS, 2019). Thus, it is crucial for Kazakhstani universities to gain a deeper understanding of international students' adjustment process in order to be able to make their academic and sociocultural experiences more fulfilling and rewarding. Greater overseas students' satisfaction, in its turn, might create word-of-mouth effects that could foster the influx of such students into the local universities.

Given that internationalization of higher education has been in the spotlight over the last few decades, it is not surprising that a wealth of studies around the world is devoted to this topic. However, scarce research on internationalization in general, and on international students' experiences in particular has been initiated in the Kazakhstani context. The few existing studies have focused on general aspects of internationalization of higher education in Kazakhstan (Jumakulov & Ashirbekov, 2016; Maudarbekova & Kashkinbayeva, 2014; Maudarbekova, Mizikaci, & Dyusembinova, 2015), the internationalization of research (Jumakulov, Ashirbekov, Sparks, & Sagintayeva, 2019), psychological adaptation of international students (Ibrayeva et al., 2018), and academic motivation of international students (Ospanova, 2018).

Maudarbekova and Kashkinbayeva (2014) conducted a survey at two universities in Kazakhstan and investigated the faculty's and students' awareness of what

internationalization means and what it aims at, as well as of the main obstacles that impede the process of internationalization. As a result, the respondents named the conformity of the quality of education and research to the international standards as the core principle of internationalization while the development of international research projects was most frequently named as the key objective of internationalization. The main obstacles obstructing the internationalization in Kazakhstan, according to the participants, were lack of funding and poor foreign language proficiency. Interestingly, the only open-ended question requiring the participants to explain, in their own words, what internationalization means remained unanswered. This might suggest that, in general, the surveyed faculty and students had insufficient knowledge of the topic.

Jumakulov and Ashirbekov (2016) initiated a documentary research to shed light on the goals, forms, approaches and key drivers for the internationalization of higher education in Kazakhstan. The authors drew an inference that most internationalization efforts in Kazakhstan were taken by the Ministry of Education and Science through introducing structural reforms, supporting student and faculty academic mobility, signing intergovernmental educational agreements, establishing a Western-style flagship university, and joining the Bologna Process. The researchers also emphasize the fact that the internationalization of higher education in Kazakhstan is still influenced by the Soviet legacy. This legacy is seen "both in outbound and inbound student mobility" (Jumakulov & Ashirbekov, 2016, p. 51). As of today, Russia is viewed as the top choice study-abroad destination for Kazakhstani students while nationals of the post-Soviet countries make up the lion's share of overseas students studying in Kazakhstan.

A quantitative study undertaken by Ospanova (2018) at a Kazakhstani medical university focused on academic motivation. Sixty third-year medical students participated in the study, including 30 students from India and 30 local students. The findings indicate

that local students possess stronger academic motivation than their international counterparts. According to the researcher, overseas students' lower level of academic motivation might be attributed to the challenges they face in the host environment, namely the language barrier, climatic conditions and changes in the lifestyle. Interestingly, the study by Ibrayeva et al. (2018) had similar sample composition. This quantitative research focused on the rates of anxiety, depression and somatic distress and involved 1478 first-year students studying at three Kazakhstani medical universities, 750 of whom were international students from India. According to the results, higher rates of depression, anxiety and somatic distress were observed in female students. The participants demonstrated lower suicidal ideation compared to the statistical average reported in the literature. However, of international students who expressed suicidal thoughts, an overwhelming majority were males. The hypothesis that overseas students demonstrate higher depression rates than their local peers was not supported by the results of the study.

The reviewed studies employed either a quantitative approach or documentary research. Hence, there is a lack of qualitative research offering a deeper insight into international students' thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Moreover, the samples in the above studies consisted only of Indian students. This is indicative of the underrepresentation of overseas students from other countries in research conducted in the Kazakhstani context. Furthermore, it is thought that the higher education system of Kazakhstan is still infused with the Soviet legacy. Consequently, a study that compares the experiences of international students from the post-Soviet countries, who share similar historical, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds with local students, and those from countries outside the former Soviet Union, might provide a more comprehensive picture of the issue. Alongside addressing the issue of international students' academic and

sociocultural adjustment, which has received scant attention in Kazakhstan, this study is an attempt to address all the above gaps.

1.2 Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore academic and sociocultural adjustment experiences of international students studying in Kazakhstan. In order to reach the purpose, the following objectives were set:

1. To explore academic and sociocultural adjustment experiences of international students studying in Kazakhstan.

2. To identify factors hindering academic and sociocultural adjustment of international students studying in Kazakhstan.

3. To shed light on factors contributing to academic and sociocultural adjustment of international students studying in Kazakhstan.

4. To reveal how the university supports international students' academic and sociocultural adjustment in Kazakhstan.

1.3 Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are academic and sociocultural adjustment experiences of international students studying in Kazakhstan?

2. What factors impede international students' academic and sociocultural adjustment in Kazakhstan?

3. What factors facilitate international students' academic and sociocultural adjustment in Kazakhstan?

4. How does the university support international students' academic and sociocultural adjustment in Kazakhstan?

This study argues that proficiency in local languages was the most important factor that affected the adjustment experiences of international students studying at one private university in Kazakhstan. Thus, the overseas students who knew the Russian language upon arrival in the host country adjusted better. Meanwhile, their peers, who were not proficient in local languages at the outset, started feeling more adjusted after learning either of them. The findings demonstrate that gender and country of origin were the second most influential factors. Whereas female students experienced issues connected with accommodation to local food, their male peers reported being exposed to bullying. Due to similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds, international students from post-Soviet countries adjusted faster than their peers from other countries. The language barrier and cultural differences were major factors impeding the overseas students' adjustment. In contrast, faculty support, engagement in friendship networks on campus, as well as cultural proximity, prior cross-cultural encounters, and openness to cultural diversity contributed to the students' smoother integration into the host community. This thesis also argues that the involvement of overseas students in social life on campus is the university's main tool aimed at facilitating the students' adjustment.

1.4 Significance and Contribution of the Study

The research may be of benefit to a number of stakeholders. International students participating in the research had a chance to reflect on their adjustment-related experiences and communicate their needs, perceptions and concerns to the university administrators. Current international students studying in Kazakhstan and the ones who are planning to do so may draw valuable insights from the participants' experiences and develop their own adjustment strategies and coping mechanisms. Based on the research findings, Kazakhstani university administrators may gain a deeper understanding of overseas students' needs and enhance services for them. This may contribute to the increase in international students'

level of satisfaction. Greater satisfaction, consequently, might create word-of-mouth effects that could boost the influx of overseas students into Kazakhstani universities. In addition, the study may contribute to the expansion of the knowledge pool on academic and sociocultural adjustment of international students.

1.5 Summary

This thesis is composed of six chapters and a reference list. This chapter delineates the problem statement, the purpose of the study and the research questions. Furthermore, it explains the significance of the study and its potential benefits for the key stakeholders. Chapter 2 analyzes, compares, contrasts, synthesizes and summarizes empirical studies focusing on academic and sociocultural adjustment experiences of international students. The chapter concludes with the theoretical framework that underpins and guides this research. Chapter 3 describes the methodology used for this study. Chapter 4 presents the research findings while Chapter 5 discusses and interprets these findings through the lens of prior studies. Finally, Chapter 6 summarizes the key findings that provide answers to the research questions, acknowledges the limitations of the study, identifies implications for the key stakeholders, and offers recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The past thirty years have seen a rapidly growing literature on internationalization that has looked at the issue from various angles. This study focuses on one of the key facets of internationalization, which is academic and sociocultural adjustment of international students. Hence, this chapter seeks to scrutinize existing literature on this topic.

2.2 Conceptualization of Academic and Sociocultural Adjustment

To set the background and facilitate the understanding of the central phenomenon, key concepts used in this study need to be operationalized. Although plenty of terms have been employed to describe the process that overseas students go through when transitioning from the home to host environment, "adjustment" and "adaptation" appear most frequently in the reviewed literature. While some researchers use the two concepts synonymously (Busher, Lewis, & Comber, 2016; Wu & Hammond, 2011; Yu & Downing, 2012), others hold forth on differences between them (Schartner & Young, 2016; Young & Schartner, 2014). In an attempt to differentiate between the two terms, researchers suggest that adjustment means getting accustomed to unfamiliar teaching and learning styles at the host university while adaptation is related to academic achievements (Young & Schartner, 2014, p. 548). Hence, adjustment can be defined using qualitative research methods whereas adaptation can be assessed through quantitative indicators, such as academic grades (Schartner & Young, 2016, p. 374). Considering that this research is interested in the process of international students' accommodation to the host environment and their related experiences rather than in the measurable outcomes of such accommodation, the term "adjustment" fits better in the context of this thesis.

Kim (2005) defines adjustment as "the entirety of the evolutionary process an individual undergoes vis-a-vis a new and unfamiliar environment" (as cited in Akhtar, Pratt, & Bo, 2015) while Anderson (1994) considers it as a person's attempt to fit to a changing environment (as cited in Wang & Hannes, 2014). Young, Sercombe, Sachdev, Naeb, and Schartner (2013) refer to adjustment as "the fit between students and their academic and social environment" (p. 152). The last definition suits this study better as it covers the two domains of adjustment that this research focuses on, namely academic and sociocultural.

Various researchers define academic adjustment differently. While Ramsay, Barker, and Jones (1999) see it as a fit between students and the academic context, Schartner and Young (2016) define academic adjustment as accommodation to the specific academic demands, such as teaching styles and processes, which an international student has not encountered before. Baker and Siryk (1999) claim that academic adjustment goes beyond students' academic potential and includes their motivation to study, ability to meet academic demands, purposefulness and satisfaction with the academic environment. This study borrows the definition from Baker and Siryk (1999) for not only does it embrace the two latter definitions, but it also looks at the phenomenon from different angles, thus providing a more explicit explanation of it.

Research evidence suggests a strong positive correlation between academic and sociocultural adjustment (Gong & Fan, 2006; Mustaffa & Ilias, 2013). In other words, the more international students adjust academically, the easier they integrate into the sociocultural environment of the host country.

According to Kim (2001), sociocultural adjustment takes place when an individual relocates from his or her home culture to an alien cultural environment and tries to build and maintain stable, mutually rewarding and functional relationships with the host

environment. Ward and her colleagues conceptualize sociocultural adjustment as "the ability to "fit in", to acquire culturally appropriate skills and to negotiate interactive aspects of the host environment" (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001; Ward & Kennedy, 1999; Ward & Searle, 1991). This research employs the definition proposed by Ward and her colleagues for it provides more profound explanation. Whereas Kim's (2001) definition only specifies what international students need to do for successful integration, Ward and her colleagues' definition stipulates how they can do it. According to the researchers, for successful adjustment, overseas students need to learn thoroughly the culture patterns and social skills accepted in the host society (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001; Ward & Kennedy, 1999; Ward & Searle, 1991). Ward (1996) also adds that the degree of international students' sociocultural adjustment might depend on the following aspects: length of stay in a host culture, cultural knowledge and sensitivity, and host language proficiency (as cited in Akhtar et al., 2015).

Whereas this section has been devoted to defining the main concepts, the next sections will shed light on general adjustment experiences of international students, as well as on factors that influence the process of adjustment. They will also illustrate how universities contribute to overseas students' integration into the host society.

2.3 Academic and Sociocultural Adjustment Experiences of International Students

Studies focusing on overseas students often report that female international students face a bigger number adjustment issues than their male peers (Ge, Brown, & Durst, 2019; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Tang & Dion, 1999). Such maladjustment is frequently attributed to gender roles. Gatua (2014), who studied Kenyan women pursuing their higher education in the United States, argued that one of the factors adversely affecting the participants' educational and sociocultural experiences was juggling multiple responsibilities, namely studies and family commitments. In a similar vein, Tang and Dion

(1999), who investigated acculturation attitudes and traditionalism by surveying 106 Chinese undergraduate students in Canada, concluded that females experienced greater adjustment hardships than males. The female students struggled because, on the one hand, they strived for personal fulfillment, but, on the other hand, they had to perform traditional gender roles in order to not become isolated from their families. Two decades later not much has changed. An ethnographic study aiming to investigate Chinese international students' experiences at a Canadian university showed that "family pressures and cultural expectations" were additional sources of stress for female participants (Ge, Brown, & Durst, 2019, p. 592). Required to balance their studies and family responsibilities, married female international students reported having limited opportunities to socialize on campus. Thus, most of them had few friends and felt isolated and lonely. In contrast, none of the married male international students viewed family commitments as an impediment to their academic or social integration.

Another stream of literature finds no difference in international students' adjustment across gender (Al-khatib, Awamleh, & Samawi, 2012; Suprapto, Saragih, & Al Ardha, 2019). Research focusing on overseas students' life adjustment in Eastern Taiwan reported no significant difference between male students and their female peers (Suprapto, Saragih, & Al Ardha, 2019, p. 624). Similarly, Al-khatib, Awamleh, and Samawi (2012), whose quantitative study aimed at measuring the degree of students' adjustment to college life in Jordan, revealed that gender was not a predictor of adjustment (p. 13).

Whereas many researchers see gender role as an adjustment stressor for female international students (Ge, Brown, & Durst, 2019; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Tang & Dion, 1999), Lee, Park, and Kim (2009) suggest that it can also be "a strong motivator for adjustment" (p. 1218). Their quantitative study sought to examine gender differences in the academic adjustment of Korean students enrolled in U.S. universities. In this research,

Korean female international students demonstrated a higher level of adjustment than their male counterparts. According to the researchers, a possible explanation of such findings is that gender role expectations are changing, and this trend results in international female students demonstrating better academic achievements and cultural adjustment (Lee, Park, & Kim, 2009, p. 1225).

Another aspect which, as suggested by the reviewed literature, might affect international students' adjustment experiences is accommodation (Forbes-Mewett & Nyland, 2008; Lee & Rice, 2005; Li & Kaye, 1998; Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006). A mixed methods study aiming to investigate how 126 Chinese students, taking a foundation course, adjusted to a university in the UK revealed that the students' experiences varied depending on the type of accommodation they lived in (Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006). Those who lived in the dormitory were quite content with the physical conditions of the accommodation but very displeased with the constant noise and the mess made by other residents. The ones who chose to stay with a local family reported many restraints and hardships in communicating with their hosts. Hence, most of the participants opted for sharing an apartment with co-nationals rather than staying in the dormitory or with British hosts. When choosing this option, the international students traded off the opportunities to practice English for psychological comfort (Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006, p. 48).

Forbes-Mewett and Nyland (2008), who interviewed 55 student representatives, staff, and senior management working closely with international students in an Australian university, sought to explore the security issues the students faced. The study reports numerous accommodation-related problems that overseas students encounter, such as living in poor housing conditions but paying high rent, abusive actions of landlords, and unaffordable cost of on-campus accommodation. What makes matters worse is that international students were discriminated against based on their gender as some rental

property owners preferred to rent out accommodation only to females (Forbes-Mewett and Nyland, 2008, p. 197). Most of the research participants held the opinion that overseas students needed to live on campus during their first semester, and the university was required to expand on-campus accommodation and help students tackle their accommodation-related issues. Lee and Rice's (2005) qualitative study focusing on the experiences of 24 international students at a U.S. university also showed that organizing accommodation is one of the "daunting tasks" for international students (p. 386). The authors place accommodation alongside such issues as language barrier, homesickness, and financial straits and argue that it markedly affects overseas students' social and academic integration.

Research suggests that food is another element of daily life in the host country that causes concern for overseas students (Alakaam, Castellanos, Bodzio, & Harrison, 2015; Almohanna, Conforti, Eigel, & Barbeau, 2015; O'Sullivan & Amirabdollahian, 2016; Tsegay et al., 2018). While international students whose home cuisine is similar to the host's one show better adjustment to the host environment, their peers who are used to having completely different eating habits back home face certain challenges (Tsegay et al., 2018). Skipping meals, eating fewer fruits and vegetables, and consuming more junk food are the most common changes in overseas students' eating patterns during their stay in the host country (Alakaam et al., 2015; Almohanna et al., 2015; O'Sullivan & Amirabdollahian, 2016). Besides, international students report having limited access to their traditional dishes due to their unavailability or high cost (Alakaam et al., 2015). This all results in decreased appetite (O'Sullivan & Amirabdollahian, 2016) and, at times, health issues (Alakaam et al., 2015; Lyonga, Eighmy, & Garden-Robinson, 2010). Two studies conducted at U.S. universities revealed that consumption of uncustomary food increases the risk of foodborne disease in international students (Alakaam et al., 2015;

Lyonga et al., 2010). As self-reported by the participants, dietary changes entailed weight gain, high blood pressure, and increased blood sugar and cholesterol levels (Alakaam et al., 2015). According to Lyonga et al. (2010), the international students who stayed in the host country longer reported a higher percentage of foodborne illnesses.

As is evident from the foregoing, international students are exposed to completely different experiences depending on their gender, dietary habits and the type of accommodation they live in.

2.4 Factors Impeding International Students' Academic and Sociocultural Adjustment

Research shows that the key factors inhibiting overseas students' successful integration into a host community include communication gap (Abu Rabia, 2017; Busher et al., 2016; Heng, 2017; McMahon, 2018; Tsegay et al., 2018; Wang & Hannes, 2014), limited social interaction with local students (Heng, 2017; Young et al., 2013; Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping, & Todman, 2008), and cultural differences between overseas students and the host community (Gatua, 2014; Heng, 2017; Jean-Francois, 2019; Pham & Tran, 2015; Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006; Tsegay et al., 2018).

2.4.1 Communication gap.
Of all factors impeding international students' adjustment to a host society, the communication gap appears to be the most frequently mentioned in the reviewed literature. International students pursuing their degrees at a university in the south-west of England reported English language proficiency to be the "key contributing factor" and the "gateway" to their academic and sociocultural adjustment (McMahon, 2018, p. 39). Their counterparts studying in the Midlands of the country similarly noted that due to language deficiency they experienced difficulties in understanding teachers and grasping course materials, as well as making friends with local people (Busher et al., 2016).

Communication challenges escalate when the language of instruction and the host country's language do not coincide. Thus, Asian international students studying at a university in the Flemish community of Belgium claimed to experience a dual challenge: developing English language skills for academic purposes and mastering Dutch for daily social interactions with local people (Wang & Hannes, 2014, p. 77). In a similar vein, international students pursuing their graduate degrees at Chinese universities reported communication problems with locals as the former possessed poor Chinese language skills whereas the latter barely spoke English. The research participants argued that such communication gap was a serious barrier for their sociocultural adjustment to the host country (Tsegay et al., 2018, p. 190).

As evidenced by prior empirical studies, the communication gap adversely affects international students' academic success (Abu Rabia, 2017; Busher et al., 2016; Heng, 2017; McMahon, 2018; Tsegay et al., 2018; Wang & Hannes, 2014) and social interactions with the local community (Abu Rabia, 2017; Busher et al., 2016; McMahon, 2018; Tsegay et al., 2018). Moreover, it restricts their access to academic and non-academic services and resources (Tsegay et al., 2018; Wang & Hannes, 2014) and hampers cultural understanding (Tsegay et al., 2018).

2.4.2 Limited social interaction with local students. A plethora of studies have evidenced that friendships with host students make international students' experiences in a host community more satisfying (Heng, 2017; Young et al., 2013; Zhou et al., 2008). A quantitative study in China found a strong relationship between international students' friendships with host peers and their sociocultural adjustment (Akhtar et al., 2015, p. 108). In other words, the wider the circle of host friends, the more international students enjoy their lives in the host society. However, numerous studies report vain attempts of internationals to build friendships with hosts (Akhtar et al., 2015; Busher et al., 2016;

Heng, 2017; Heng, 2019; Jean-Francois, 2019; McMahon, 2018; Pham & Tran, 2015; Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006; Suprapto et al., 2019; Wang & Hannes, 2014; Wu & Hammond, 2011; Young et al., 2013; Zhou et al., 2008).

International students in the UK reported detachment from their local peers despite attempts of the former to establish relationships with the latter (McMahon, 2018, p. 40). As a result, the overseas students found themselves outsiders and felt that "their skills, knowledge and culture are not valued in their new academic environment". To make it worse, overseas students around the world report discriminatory practices towards them (Heng, 2017; Pham & Tran, 2015). Thus, Chinese students pursuing their studies in the U.S. claim that local students tend to attach labels to international students based on media information (Heng, 2017, p. 841). These students reported to be stereotyped by locals as quiet, shy and too clever, as well as disliked for their skin color and being "America's enemy". Pham and Tran (2015) arrived at the same results in Australia, where international students perceived their local counterparts to be disrespectful and non-inclusive towards them (p. 212).

When it comes to reasons why international and host students fail to build connections with each other, research shows equivocal results. However, linguistic barrier (Busher et al., 2016; Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006; Tsegay et al., 2018; Young et al., 2013), lack of occasions for interaction (Pham & Tran, 2015; Tsegay et al., 2018; Wang & Hannes, 2014; Wu & Hammond, 2011; Young et al., 2013), and differences in cultures and lifestyles (Heng, 2017; Heng, 2019; Jean-Francois, 2019; Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006; Young et al., 2013) appear to be the most frequent themes occurring in the current literature.

Spencer-Oatey and Xiong (2006), Tsegay et al. (2018), and Young et al. (2013) revealed that insufficient language skills limit international students' ability to make host

friends. Other research findings suggest that due to university policy that separates local students from international ones by organizing separate classrooms, extracurricular activities and accommodation, the latter have limited chances to interact with the former both academically and socially (Pham & Tran, 2015; Tsegay et al., 2018). Likewise, Asian international students in Flanders saw lack of student organizations and clubs at the university as a barrier to establishing close relationships with their Belgian hosts (Wang & Hannes, 2014, p. 76). Additionally, participants of various studies explained that unfamiliar behavioral patterns (Heng, 2017, p. 842), "clash of values" and "lack of things in common" (Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006, p. 50), completely different ideas of what it means to be friends and "interpretations of fun" (Heng, 2019, p. 11), as well intolerance to alien cultures (Jean-Francois, 2019, p. 1076) in a host society, create an abyss between international and local students.

Despite linguistic and cultural barriers, international students tend to take the initiative to approach their local counterparts (Wu & Hammond, 2011, p. 436). Particularly, overseas students develop strategies aiming to improve their chances to befriend host peers (McMahon, 2018; Wang & Hannes, 2014; Wu & Hammond, 2011). Thus, Asian and Middle-Eastern overseas students in Britain tried to create friendship networks with locals through volunteering, pursuing part-time jobs and going to church (McMahon, 2018, p. 41) while their peers in Belgium joined sports teams for this purpose (Wang & Hannes, 2014, p. 76). East Asian international students in the UK chose to spend more leisure time with their host counterparts in hopes of getting closer to them (Wu & Hammond, 2011, p. 432). However, all those strategies had a limited or short-term effect and, at the end of the day, international students felt excluded and not valued (McMahon, 2018; Wang & Hannes, 2014; Wu & Hammond, 2011).

All things considered, it can be said that stereotypes and discrimination persisting in a host society, along with linguistic barrier, universities' host-sojourner separation policies, and differences in values and lifestyles, enhance the level of detachment between international and host students.

2.4.3 Limited cultural understanding. Whereas some researchers are convinced that international students prefer to keep company with co-nationals who possess the same cultural background (Busher et al., 2016; Jean-Francois, 2019; McMahon, 2018; Young et al., 2013), others maintain that overseas students desperately wish to get familiarized with the host culture (Heng, 2017; Tsegay et al., 2018).

Overseas students studying in China noted that, despite a considerable amount of time spent in the host country, they still had limited knowledge about its culture and history. The students argued that their universities hardly ever organized cultural events and activities (Tsegay et al., 2018, p. 196). Research undertaken by Heng (2017) confirmed that limited cultural understanding arrested international students' integration into the host community. The participants noted that they applied great efforts to understand "what seemed like common sense" to locals (Heng, 2017, p. 839). Hence, the students participating in this research wished that their teachers and host peers would share more context-specific historical, social, political and cultural information (Heng, 2017).

Contrary to the above research, some studies show international students' reluctance to accept local culture (Abu Rabia, 2017; Gatua, 2014; Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006). According to a mixed methods study in the UK, overseas students from China reported difficulties in getting used to local traditions, lifestyle and values as they were extremely different from their own. To be more precise, the participants referred to the "drinking culture in the UK" which seemed unacceptable for Chinese internationals (Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006, p. 51). Likewise, one of the participants in qualitative

research conducted in the U.S. among Kenyan female students noted that she would not integrate into the local culture as "the idea of having one foot in American culture and leaving the other foot in Kenyan culture" did not seem right to her (Gatua, 2014, p. 42). A study undertaken among Arab international students saw the reason for their non-acceptance of the American culture as the differences in religion and cross-gender relationships. Both male and female participants could not easily communicate with teachers and peers of the opposite gender as cross-gender interactions between unmarried people were unacceptable in their home countries. They also noted that, with all due respect to the American culture, the host community's values were way too different from those of Arabs. Consequently, Arab overseas students' reluctance to accept local culture may hinder their adjustment to the host society (Abu Rabia, 2017).

As research suggests another reason behind cross-cultural misunderstandings is a lack of cultural sensitivity in a host community (Gatua, 2014; Heng, 2017; Jean-Francois, 2019; Pham & Tran, 2015; Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006; Tsegay et al., 2018). According to international students, locals look down on them (Jean-Francois, 2019, p. 1076), take no interest in developing closer relationships with them (Heng, 2017, p. 841), and make insulting comments about their home countries (Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006, p. 48). Moreover, overseas students reported cases when local professors had provided inappropriate and offensive cross-cultural examples in class (Gatua, 2014; Pham & Tran, 2015).

Based on the foregoing, it can be concluded that cross-cultural understanding is a two-way road that requires mutual efforts by both international students and the host community.

2.5 Factors Facilitating International Students' Academic and Sociocultural Adjustment

While some factors hinder overseas students' academic and sociocultural adjustment to a host community, others make the process more enjoyable. Such facilitating factors may include, but are not limited to, faculty support (Busher et al., 2016; Heng, 2017; Jean-Francois, 2019; Young et al., 2013;), building and maintaining networks of relationships (Busher et al., 2016; Jean-Francois, 2019; Wu & Hammond, 2011; Young et al., 2013), and prior overseas experience (Akhtar et al., 2015; Schartner & Young, 2016; Tsegay et al., 2018).

2.5.1 Support of academic staff. Previous studies have reported faculty support as one of the major factors positively affecting international students' adjustment (Busher et al., 2016; Heng, 2017; Jean-Francois, 2019; Young et al., 2013). According to Busher et al. (2016), who explored the adjustment of 20 full-time international students living and learning in England, academic staff significantly assisted international students in developing an understanding of the learning processes they had never encountered before (p. 59). The above research echoes the findings of other studies claiming that faculty's care and responsiveness motivate international students to persist in their studies despite the hardships (Jean-Francois, 2019; Young et al., 2013).

Heng's (2017) research gives another solid piece of evidence to the importance of student-faculty interactions for international students' adjustment. When asked how institutional communities could enhance their college experiences, most of the research participants expressed a desire for their teachers to show more care and interest, be more patient and inclusive, and be proactive in establishing relationships with them. According to the international students, if the faculty did so, it would reduce the level of anxiety and elevate motivation, self-esteem, and emotional well-being in international students. Some

of the participants explained that when teachers showed an interest in their academic and

social lives, the students felt more a part of "an otherwise alienating environment" (Heng,

2017, p. 840).

Summarizing the above, academic staff appear to play a crucial part in international

students' adjustment to a new environment. Hence, universities striving to recruit more

international students need to take this fact into consideration and pay closer attention to

student-faculty interactions.

2.5.2 Engagement in networks of relationships. Ample studies suggest that

international students tend to use any opportunity to engage in relationships that may

facilitate their integration into a host community (Busher et al., 2016; Jean-Francois, 2019;

Wu & Hammond, 2011; Young et al., 2013). Common places for overseas students to

develop their friendship networks are accommodation (Busher et al., 2016; Young et al.,

2013), student organizations (Busher et al., 2016, Jean-Francois, 2019; Wu & Hammond,

2011), campus events (Jean-Francois, 2019; Wu & Hammond, 2011), as well as

employment and volunteering activities (Jean-Francois, 2019). Besides, international

students appear to make friends in the classroom (Jean-Francois, 2019) and such

approaches as group work and collaborative learning smooth the way to the formation and

development of such relationships (Busher et al., 2016).

According to Ward et al. (2001), international students tend to enter into three types

of social relationships, namely with compatriot international students, host students, and

non-compatriot international students. Each of the relationships might yield certain

benefits to overseas students. Through friendships with co-nationals, overseas students

may preserve their cultural heritage, values and beliefs, while host students can help them

gain deeper familiarity with a host country's culture, thus making their adjustment

smoother. International students from other countries might provide relevant support as

they, more often than not, face the same challenges. These three types of friendship networks are identified as monocultural, bi-cultural and multicultural (Ward et al., 2001, p. 147).

Several studies mirror the findings of the above research and claim that engagement in relationships with compatriots is a frequent occurrence among international students (Busher et al., 2016; Jean-Francois, 2019; McMahon, 2018; Young et al., 2013). Jean-Francois (2019), whose purpose was to study overseas students' perceptions of a U.S. university campus climate and analyze their social and academic adaptation strategies through interviews and focus groups, argues that the students tend to form racially and ethnically segregated groups (p. 1075). Young et al. (2013) see the reason behind such a tendency in the fact that, given their similar cultural backgrounds, compatriot international students may go through the same challenges and experiences in adjusting to a new and unfamiliar setting (p. 165). Hence, co-nationals group together to offer support to one another, be it practical, such as shopping and renting a place to live, emotional, academic, or linguistic (McMahon, 2018, p. 42).

As existing literature suggests, host students contribute to overseas students' enhanced social, psychological and academic adjustment experiences (Zhou et al., 2008, p. 70). Research on Chinese international students studying at American universities revealed that friendship with local students helped the former better integrate into the new culture by understanding the lifestyle of the latter (Heng, 2017, p. 844). A mixed methods study that aimed to identify factors contributing to international students' successful adjustment to a UK university found out that exposure to similar challenges in adjusting to a new academic system and an extraneous environment promotes friendships among international students from different countries (Young et al., 2013, p. 165).

Despite different purposes and research questions, all the above studies arrived at an understanding of the significance of friendship networks for international students' better adjustment.

2.5.3 Cultural similarities and previous overseas experience. Several studies suggest that the more similarities there are between host and home cultures, the better international students adjust to the host community (Kim & Kim, 2016; Tsegay et al., 2018; Ward & Kennedy, 1993). The research exploring sociocultural adjustment of international students at Chinese universities revealed that the participants whose home culture and lifestyle were similar to those of China adjusted better than their peers from culturally distant countries (Tsegay et al., 2018, p. 198). Kim and Kim (2016), whose research aimed at comparing Asian and European overseas students' adaptation at U.S. universities, presented similar findings. The researchers found that, due to ethnic proximity, the European participants experienced less difficulties when adjusting to the American sociocultural environment than their Asian counterparts (Kim & Kim, 2016, p. 75).

A positive correlation between international students' prior overseas experience and their successful adjustment to a host community has been depicted in recent studies (Akhtar et al., 2015; Schartner & Young, 2016; Tsegay et al., 2018). Thus, qualitative research in China found that international students who had studied outside the home country prior to pursuing their degrees at Chinese universities had better adjustment experiences (Tsegay et al., 2018, p. 197). Similarly, a study by Akhtar et al. (2015), which was also conducted in China but was quantitative in design, revealed that previous cross-cultural experience was a statistically significant predictor of African students' satisfaction with and adjustment to Chinese universities (p. 108). The above findings mirror the results of a mixed methods study undertaken in the UK. The study claims that international

students who had been previously exposed to overseas experiences showed better academic adjustment to a host university (Schartner & Young, 2016, p. 379).

The above results suggest that international students with prior overseas experience might have developed certain coping strategies when they had first encountered an alien culture. Hence, whenever they find themselves in a new environment, be it academic or sociocultural, they are expected to be more equipped to deal with the challenges.

2.6 University Support Services

When it comes to overseas students' successful adjustment, the importance of university support can hardly be overestimated. Existing research recognizes that timely institutional support may reduce frustration, stress and depression in international students (Heng, 2017; Tsegay et al., 2018). However, this is not intended to suggest that support services offered by a host university will automatically enhance international students' adjustment experiences. Much depends on how these services are provided and how effective they are (Roberts, Boldy, & Dunworth, 2015).

2.6.1 Awareness, usefulness and importance. Recent studies show that universities do not provide sufficient support to ensure international students' better adjustment (Heng, 2017; Jean-Francois, 2019; Tsegay et al., 2018). According to Jean-Francois (2019), orientation days organized by a host university for overseas students hardly contribute to their integration into a new academic and sociocultural environment. The study participants argued that the orientation was organized too soon after their arrival and they were too exhausted to be able to process the enormous amount of information (p. 1076). Hence, the participants suggested that universities needed to organize follow-up activities to make sure that overseas students had properly understood how to use resources and services both on and off campus (Jean-Francois, 2019, p. 1079). Similarly, Heng

(2017) revealed that international students in the U.S. suffered because of poorly run orientation and lack of support from advisors and the international office (p. 842).

Nevertheless, with a view to boost cultural exchange and bolster international students' sense of belonging to a host community, universities tend to organize extracurricular activities. However, studies conducted in Australia suggest that many international students are not aware of these events (Pham & Tran, 2015; Roberts et al., 2015). Moreover, some participants were dubious about the usefulness of such activities as local students tended to avoid participating in them. In a similar vein, research conducted in the UK found that Chinese international students rarely resorted to the support services offered by their university (Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006, p. 49). On the one hand, the students were unaware of available services. On the other hand, they were skeptical about the value of such services. Another important view the research participants were unanimous about was that universities needed to organize more events of interest to both international and host students so that students from different cultures could develop closer relationships (Pham & Tran, 2015; Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006).

It seems that it is part of a host university's responsibility to equip overseas students with the necessary tools to reduce their levels of anxiety and facilitate their adjustment to the unfamiliar environment (Tsegay et al., 2018). However, it is apparent from the foregoing that universities need to invest more efforts in increasing awareness of the support services and maximizing their effectiveness and usefulness.

2.6.2 Barriers to use. Lack of awareness about the host university's support services and extracurricular activities, as well as skepticism about their usefulness, restrain overseas students from using them as a tool for better integration into the host environment (Pham & Tran, 2015; Roberts et al., 2015; Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006). However, language barrier appears to be the major reason why international students are reluctant to

resort to university support services (Suprapto et al., 2019; Tsegay et al., 2018). Thus, overseas students studying in Eastern Taiwan claim that they do not have equal access to the services and events since the announcements and emails are mostly written in the Chinese language, which they do not understand (Suprapto et al., 2019, p. 630). Research focusing on sociocultural adjustment of international students at Chinese universities and, more specifically, on the support they obtain and the challenges they face, demonstrated similar results (Tsegay et al., 2018, p. 191). The overseas students were exposed to considerable challenges when trying to use university services since most of the administrative and support staff did not speak English and the students could not adequately express themselves in Chinese. Thus, a communication gap, coupled with inadequate university support, has negative implications for overseas students as it significantly prolongs their adjustment process (Tsegay et al., 2018).

2.7 Theoretical Framework

This study employs Lysgaard's U-curve adjustment theory (1955) as a guiding framework to discuss and interpret the findings. The theory suggests that adjustment is a four-stage process that usually follows a U-shaped curve (Abu Rabia, 2017, p. 132). The initial stage called "honeymoon" is characterized by individuals' fascination with the new culture. The second is "disillusionment" or "culture shock" stage, during which the individuals feel frustrated, lonely and unhappy as they face and work through challenges evoked by the limited knowledge of the new culture (Abu Rabia, 2017; An & Chiang, 2015; Wu & Hammond, 2011). The name of the third stage, "adjustment", speaks for itself. This period is characterized by the individuals who have come to terms with the new culture (An & Chiang, 2015, p. 662) and have learned how to behave appropriately in the host society (Wu & Hammond, 2011, p. 425). At the final stage, which is referred to as "mastery", the individuals become more integrated and can function effectively in the new

environment (Abu Rabia, 2017; An & Chiang, 2015; Wu & Hammond, 2011). According to Ruben and Kealey (1979), the four stages of adjustment take approximately a year (as cited in An & Chiang, 2015, p. 662).

As mentioned earlier, this study seeks to explore the process of international students' adjustment rather than the outcomes of such an adjustment. Lysgaard's U-curve adjustment theory (1955) is chosen as a guiding framework for this study because it views adjustment as a process that takes place over a stretch of time.

2.8 Summary

The examined literature leaves little room for doubt that, as an integral part of the internationalization of higher education, academic and sociocultural adjustment of international students should be given considerable attention. While host students need to get used only to the academic environment, international students are required to acclimatize themselves to the cultural and behavioral norms of the host society. Thus, overseas students feel discomfort when going through such a challenging period of adjustment. The studies reviewed in this chapter suggest that insufficient adjustment may entail the feeling of isolation and even depression in overseas students (Heng, 2017; Tsegay et al., 2018). In another vein, successful adjustment makes international students' academic and sociocultural experiences in the host environment much more enjoyable (Tsegay et al., 2018). Hence, it is crucial for universities, whose strategies include the recruitment of a considerable body of international students, to be aware of such students' adjustment experiences, challenges and needs.

This chapter synthesized global literature on international students' academic and sociocultural adjustment to the host community. More specifically, it shed light on general adjustment-related experiences, the factors positively or negatively affecting the adjustment, and host universities' support services. The cases depicted in the reviewed

literature provided a foundation for further exploration of the issue within the Kazakhstani

context.

Chapter 3. Methodology

This chapter focuses on the methodology employed in this study. It starts with a detailed discussion of the research design, research site and sample and explains the rationale behind choosing them. The consequent sections center around the procedures for data collection and data analysis. Finally, it covers measures taken to avoid ethical issues.

3.1 Research Design

Having a thorough research design is quintessential in the research process. The selection of the research design depends on its capacity to "address the research purposes, objectives and questions" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018, p. 175).

The purpose of this research was to explore academic and sociocultural adjustment experiences of international students studying in Kazakhstan. Taking into account the nature of the research purpose and research questions, a qualitative approach was opted for in this study. This method is renowned for allowing the researcher to explore a problem, gain deeper insight into a central phenomenon (Creswell, 2012, p. 16) and "bring the voice of participants into the findings" (Jean-Francois, 2019, p. 1073). As noted by Sandelowski and Barroso (2007), a qualitative approach is a perfect match when the researcher seeks to explore how humans "understand, experience, interpret, and produce the social world" (p. 40).

The issue of academic and sociocultural adjustment of international students studying in Kazakhstan was explored using case study design. It was selected because it endeavors to depict "participants' lived experiences of, thoughts about, and feelings for, a situation" (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 377), investigate a phenomenon in its real-life setting (Yin as cited in Gray, 2004, p. 123) and "uncover a relationship between a phenomenon and the context in which it is occurring" (Gray, 2004, p. 124).

Despite the fact that case study design appears to be a perfect fit for this research, it possesses certain limitations. Wellington (2015) questions replicability and generalizability of case studies while Shaughnessy, Zechmeister, and Zechmeister (2003) claim that participants' self-reporting might be subjective and biased as it is based solely on their selective memory (as cited in Cohen et al., 2018). To address the issue of subjectivity and bias, the study explored the issue from the perspectives of multiple stakeholders. As for the generalization of findings, this was not the aim of this study; it rather sought to examine the participants' lived experiences in order to develop a deeper understanding of the issue.

3.2 Research Site

The research was undertaken at one private university in Almaty. In 2019, the university's student population accounted for around 4,500 students, including 230 overseas students representing 17 countries. The university offers a wide range of foundation, bachelor's, master's and Ph.D. programs at four schools: Business School, Faculty of Law and Social Sciences, Faculty of Education and Humanities, and Faculty of Engineering and Natural Sciences. The majority of the university's local undergraduate students are state grant holders.

The university is among the few in Kazakhstan that have been offering academic programs with English as a medium of instruction since being established. As an overwhelming majority of international students around the world prefer to study in English (OECD, 2017; OECD, 2018), it is no wonder that the sampled university is popular as a study abroad destination.

The research site was selected for several reasons. First of all, the sampled university hosts a relatively large and diverse body of international students. Besides, in its current strategic plan, internationalization has been declared as the number one priority. Moreover, the university sees international student recruitment as an opportunity to expand

revenue streams. This leads to the assumption that the university administration is therefore expected to be more prepared to host overseas students and, thus, give valuable insights into the topic. Another reason for selecting the university lies in the fact that it offers fields of study that international students around the globe mainly enroll in, namely science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), business and law (OECD, 2018). Thus, this research provides insights into the experiences of international students enrolled in the most popular academic programs worldwide. For ethical reasons, the name of the university is kept confidential.

3.3 Sample

Since this research focuses on a specific case of international students' adjustment to living and studying in Kazakhstan, the participants and sites cannot be selected randomly as they need to meet specific requirements (Bryman, 2012, p. 206). Therefore, non-probability purposive sampling strategy intended to target a specific group (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 217) of "information rich" people (Bryman, 2012, p. 206) who possess particular features (Bryman, 2012; Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell, 2012) was chosen for this research. This type of sampling is not aimed at the generalizability of findings, it rather seeks to obtain detailed information from the participants to investigate the phenomenon in greater depth (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 219).

Thus, using a non-probability purposive sampling approach, 14 full-time undergraduate international students, who had lived in Kazakhstan for at least one year, were recruited for this research. As argued by Ruben and Kealey (1979), it takes an individual approximately one year to complete the course of adjustment to a new environment as per Lysgaard's (1955) U-curve adjustment theory (as cited in An & Chiang, 2015, p. 662).

The reviewed literature on the topic suggests that international students' gender, cultural differences, as well as proficiency in the local language tend to affect their experiences in the host country. Therefore, it was crucial to recruit participants of both genders, as they might have completely different adjustment-related experiences. The country of origin was another sample inclusion criterion. To be more specific, representatives of both post-Soviet countries and countries outside the former Soviet Union were recruited. While the former, owing to history, might be familiar with local culture and language, the latter may find themselves in a completely alien cultural and linguistic environment. Several studies indicate that overseas students, whose home culture is similar to the host one, adjust better than their counterparts from culturally distant countries (Kim & Kim, 2016; Tsegay et al., 2018; Ward & Kennedy, 1993). In addition, international students with poor command of a host country's language tend to experience more difficulties (Suprapto et al., 2019; Tsegay et al., 2018; Wang & Hannes, 2014). Hence, the two groups of international students were compared to substantiate or refute these assumptions. The country of origin of Participant 4 is not indicated for ethical reasons. Since she is the only representative of her country at the university, her identity can be easily disclosed. Finally, overseas students from all four schools were involved in the study assuming that their academic experiences might differ depending on their majors (see Table 1).

With the help of gatekeepers, 149 international students from the sampled university, who possess the above-mentioned characteristics, were sent an email with a request to participate in the study. It is worth noting that I had three gatekeepers, who occupied the positions from faculty members to mid-level administrators. Since only one international student agreed to participate in the study after the initial and follow-up emails, the gatekeepers contacted the overseas students through WhatsApp group chats.

Thus, seven more participants were recruited. The rest of the participants were involved in the study via snowball sampling, which allows the researcher to seek help from informants (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 220). In other words, international students who had volunteered to take part in the research were asked to connect me with their peers who satisfy the sample inclusion criteria.

Table 1

Students' Characteristics

No.	Pseudonym	Gender	Home country	Years spent in host country	School/Faculty
1	Participant 1	M	Mongolia	4	Faculty of Law
2	Participant 2	M	Kyrgyzstan	2	Faculty of Engineering
3	Participant 3	M	Turkey	4	Faculty of Education
4	Participant 4	F	South Asia	1	Business School
5	Participant 5	F	Turkmenistan	3	Business School
6	Participant 6	F	China	4	Faculty of Education
7	Participant 7	M	Mongolia	1	Faculty of Engineering
8	Participant 8	F	Russia	3	Faculty of Education
9	Participant 9	M	Turkmenistan	2	Faculty of Law
10	Participant 10	F	Uzbekistan	3	Faculty of Education
11	Participant 11	F	China	4	Faculty of Education
12	Participant 12	F	Mongolia	4	Faculty of Engineering
13	Participant 13	M	Turkey	3	Faculty of Education
14	Participant 14	F	Tajikistan	3	Business School

As the issue of overseas students' adjustment is multifaceted and complex (Busher et al., 2016; Heng, 2019), this study looked at it from different perspectives. Thus, it was decided to define the university administrators' viewpoint of the case. Identification of both students' and administrators' perspectives on the issue may help reveal miscommunication, if any, and gain deeper insight into the topic. As the research required to recruit the university administrators who closely worked with international students and were privy to the information about their lives and experiences, reputational case sampling was employed. It is a type of purposive sampling, in which key informants recommend the participants based on neat inclusion criteria provided by the researcher (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 219). More specifically, two gatekeepers were asked to suggest the university administrators who were in charge of recruiting and supporting international students and, thus, were particularly knowledgeable about their experiences. Initially, six university administrators were invited to take part in the research. However, only four of them agreed (see Table 2). The interviewed administrators included two directors, one deputy director, and one assistant of the relevant departments.

Table 2

Administrators' Characteristics

No.	Pseudonym	Gender	Time in current position	Department
1	Administrator 1	M	3 months	International Relations Office
2	Administrator 2	F	8 years	International Relations Office
3	Administrator 3	M	1 year	Student Service Center
4	Administrator 4	M	2 years	Social Affairs Department

3.4 Data Collection Tools

This research applied semi-structured interviews as the data collection tool and there were several reasons for that. Unlike structured interviews, they provide a certain degree of flexibility that allows the researcher to readjust the emphases in case an important issue, that is of particular interest to the researcher, emerges (Bryman, 2012, p. 470; Creswell, 2012, p. 218; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 1002). Moreover, semi-structured interviews allow asking additional questions to clarify vague responses and obtain in-depth information from the participants (Gray, 2004; Wilson, Onwuegbuzie, & Manning, 2016). An argument in favor of semi-structured interviews over unstructured ones was that some structure was required to secure comparability of the views of the two groups of participants, namely international students and university administrators.

To determine the perfect number of interviews is rather an arduous task. Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006), whose research focused on determining sample sizes for various types of purposive sampling, found that in most cases 12 interviews would be sufficient to reach saturation, i.e. the point when no new information is occurring in the data (p. 59). Consequently, 14 interviews with students and four interviews with administrators appear to be enough to get a coherent picture of the case.

The interviews were conducted one-on-one and lasted on average 40 minutes. The one-on-one interviews were chosen for the reason that the participants might feel more comfortable when there are no other people around and, thus, give unconstrained and uninfluenced answers. All questions asked during the interviews were open-ended as they allowed for more detailed information about the participants' experiences (Abu Rabia, 2016, p. 134).

An interview protocol, containing instructions for the interview process and relevant questions (Creswell, 2012, p. 225), was developed and is presented as an

Appendix E hereto. In the course of interviews, the order and wording of the questions were changed when needed and as appropriate (Bryman, 2012; Cohen et al., 2018). Prior to real interviews, two pilot interviews were conducted to ensure that the interview questions were understandable, to the point and designed in a way to address the research questions. The pilot interview participants were selected based on the criteria set forth for the actual research participants. However, data collected from the pilot interviews were not included in the findings. Finally, all the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

3.5 Data Collection Procedures

While waiting for ethical approval from the Graduate School of Education Institutional Research Ethics Committee (GSE IREC), I inquired about access to the research site. Thus, I sent a request letter to the person who was in the position to permit conducting research at the university. Once ethical approval for research was obtained and access to the site was granted, one of the gatekeepers compiled a list of students who met the sample inclusion criteria. These students were sent an email with a request to take part in the study. The recruitment letter contained the purpose of the study, its significance and potential benefits for the participants. To recruit the university administrators, I again resorted to the gatekeepers. As insiders, they were able to narrow down a list of potentially information-rich administrators.

The data collection process started in November 2019 and took approximately one and a half months. All interviews were held at the time and place most convenient to the participants. Prior to the interview, each participant was given a consent form to be signed and asked for permission to audio-record the conversation.

3.6 Data Analysis

The process of qualitative data analysis involves making sense of the text to create new meaningful data combinations, summaries and syntheses (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 644).

It is worth noting that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to analyze qualitative data and the researcher should choose one depending on how the approach fits the purpose (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 643).

Once recorded interviews were transcribed, the data was coded using open coding, i.e. segmenting and labeling pieces of texts (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 671) to form "initial categories of information about the phenomenon" (Creswell, 2012, p. 424). Some codes were inspired by the literature review while others emerged from the data collected during the interviews. Through axial coding, open codes that possessed similar attributes and features were organized into groups (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 671). After that, the axial codes were aggregated together to form broad themes that were described in detail in the Findings chapter. In a nutshell, the process of research data analysis was organized in a way that allowed forming answers to the research questions most effectively (Creswell, 2012, p. 236).

3.7 Ethical Issues

When initiating research involving human subjects, the researcher must take into consideration any effect that such research might have on participants and, thus, protect them and "their dignity as human beings" by all reasonable means (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 112). Following ethical principles, the data collection process was initiated only after ethical approval from GSE IREC was obtained. Participation in the study was voluntary. The participants were given all relevant research-related information, including the purpose of the study, its significance, as well as possible benefits and risks. Besides, they signed the informed consent form before the interviews. The participants were informed of the right to refuse to answer any question or to opt out of participation at any time if they feel uncomfortable to continue. Any information obtained during the interviews was kept confidential. Electronic research-related materials containing the participants' personal

data were stored in a password-secured laptop while hardcopy documents were kept in a key-locked drawer. The data was accessible only to the researcher and the research supervisor. Any information that could somehow reveal the identity of any participant was removed from the final version of the thesis.

This chapter provided a detailed description of the methods applied in this study and the rationale behind choosing them. In addition, it depicted the procedures for data collection and analysis that were best suited for answering the research questions. Next chapter introduces the research findings.

Chapter 4. Findings

This chapter presents findings based on an analysis of interviews with 14 international students and four administrators from one private university in Kazakhstan. It is divided into four main sections. The first section presents general academic and sociocultural adjustment experiences of international students. Section two sheds light on factors that adversely affect the overseas students' adjustment while section three reveals factors that make their integration into the host society smoother. Finally, the fourth section explores what support the university provides to facilitate the international students' adjustment process.

4.1 Academic and Sociocultural Adjustment Experiences of International Students

To get a more detailed picture of the participants' adjustment patterns, it is important to consider the findings in the light of the theoretical framework that underpins this study. According to Lysgaard's U-curve adjustment theory (1955), when adjusting to an unfamiliar cultural environment, an individual goes through four stages, namely "honeymoon", "disillusionment", "adjustment" and "mastery". More detailed characteristics of the four stages are provided in Chapter 2.

It is worth noting that out of 14 overseas students taking part in this research, six were from post-Soviet countries while eight were the citizens of countries outside the former Soviet Union. All eight participants from far-abroad countries experienced difficulties at the outset whereas three international students from post-Soviet countries remembered feeling heavy-hearted (Participants 5, 9 and 14). Of them, five students reported feeling lonely, stressed or even depressed upon arrival in Kazakhstan (Participants 1, 4, 9, 12 and 14).

For the majority of the participants, the initial maladjustment was entailed by the language barrier. As Participant 9 recalled, "When I came here I didn't know the Russian

language… I could not connect with people. So, I was alone". The above findings lead to two conclusions. First, the language barrier appears to be the major factor that holds back overseas students' adjustment at the outset. Second, 11 participants out of 14 reached the "disillusionment" stage without experiencing the "honeymoon" period. During the "disillusionment" or "culture shock" period an individual encounters first challenges in the host community and tries to tackle them (Wu & Hammond, 2011). Anxiety and confusion caused by the unknown cultural norms and patterns result in the individual's homesickness, loneliness or depression (Abu Rabia, 2017).

In contrast, the three remaining participants remembered feeling quite comfortable from the very beginning. This can be attributed to the fact that all of them were from post-Soviet countries and knew the Russian language. In other words, since their home countries shared similar historical, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds with the host one, their integration into the host environment might have been easier. The findings indicate that two of these students have gone through the "honeymoon" stage as they felt not just comfortable, but elated when they arrived (Participant 8 and Participant 10). Revisiting her prior experiences, Participant 8 remarked, "I could not believe that I was really admitted to the university in Kazakhstan. I told everyone that I wanted to go to Kazakhstan and my dream came true. Although everyone spoke Kazakh to me, all events were held in Kazakh, I always had a positive attitude".

The two participants' excitement might be explained by the fact that they deliberately chose Kazakhstan as their study abroad destination. Meanwhile, other participants' choice of the host country was conditioned by other circumstances: parents' choice (Participants 6, 7, 9, 11 and 14), failing exams at a university in another country (Participant 2 and Participant 3), limited options (Participant 1 and Participant 4), or closure of the university where they had studied before (Participant 12 and Participant 13).

By the time of the interviews, the participants had been living in Kazakhstan from one to four years and all of them seemed to have come to terms with the host community. One third of the participants even reported being treated as locals (Participants 2, 3, 5, 8 and 10) and two of them admitted that Kazakhstan felt like home (Participant 3 and Participant 5). As Participant 5 commented, "I'm now very comfortable here. Even when I go back home on my holidays, I want to come back here quickly. It's like my home now".

When it comes to the length of the adjustment process, the participants can be divided into two groups. Those from former Soviet countries, except Participant 9, self-reported to adjust, on average, within one month after arrival (Participants 2, 5, 8 and 10). For Participant 9, the adjustment process took approximately one year. Unlike his peers from the post-Soviet countries, he was not proficient in the Russian language at the beginning. That is the most probable reason for his longer integration into the host community. These findings therefore suggest that host language proficiency was the key factor that contributed to the participants' better adjustment.

The adjustment periods of the participants from countries other than the post-Soviet ones varied from four months to two years (Participants 1, 4, 6, 7, 11, 12 and 13) and took, on average, one year. The only exception was Participant 3, who adjusted much faster. He gave credit for his smooth accommodation to the host environment to the social skills he had developed during his prior overseas experience.

When reflecting on what was the game-changer that made the international students feel as part of the host community, six overseas students underscored bridging the language gap (Participants 1, 3, 5, 7, 9 and 11). As Participant 5 puts it, "Now my Kazakh is quite well and they [local people] usually don't even realize that I am an international. They're treating me as a local".

Thus, all the participants seem to have achieved the "adjustment" stage, which means that they have become more familiar with the host environment through learning its cultural norms and behavioral patterns (Wu & Hammond, 2011, p. 425). A noteworthy finding is that Participant 2 skipped the first and second stages and made it straight to the "adjustment" phase immediately after his arrival in Kazakhstan. When recalling his feelings upon arrival, he noted, "Honestly, there were no particular emotions. I felt just the way I am feeling now". He then added, "When I arrived, I was able to make friends immediately. My friends always helped me. If I wanted to go somewhere, they explained me how to get there or just took me there. That's why I faced no difficulties". The participant's quick adjustment can be explained by several concurrent factors: being from the neighboring country with the culture and lifestyle similar to those of the host country, good knowledge of the Russian language, and one-year study abroad experience before arrival in Kazakhstan.

The majority of participants appear to take a step further. Not only do they know the host cultural norms and patterns, they can effectively use the acquired cultural knowledge to guide other international students. They seem to go through a transformation from the person who needs help to "the person who is helping others" (Participant 10). This might be evidence for the participants' reaching the "mastery" stage, when one becomes more integrated into the host environment (Wu & Hammond, 2011, p. 425) and "can properly perform the necessary behaviors to function effectively and without anxiety due to culture differences" (Black & Mendenhall, 1991, p. 240). Assuming that, at the "mastery" stage, the individual is expected to function effectively in the host country, it seems that not all the participants have attained it. Participant 4, who does not know the local languages, is still unable to perform certain actions without assistance.

Most participants reported to be generally satisfied with the host academic environment. However, when comparing the host and home education systems in terms of quality and complexity, the participants' opinions were divided. Thus, the international students from post-Soviet countries consider education in the host country to be of better quality and more complex than their home countries' one (Participants 5, 10 and 14). As Participant 5 noted, "I like the education system here. In our country, education is not of high quality. I know that in Turkmenistan I can't learn as much as I can here". On the contrary, the participants from countries outside the former Soviet Union find the academic program at the host university to be easy (Participants 3, 4, 11 and 13). As Participant 3 mentioned, "One individual studying in Turkey will not pass the exams with the same amount of study that he does here. What I mean is passing the exams here is really easy". Participant 11 noted a low complexity level of not only examinations but also of textbook content, "Stuff in our course book is easier than in China. And examinations are easier too. It's like a game… In China you need to calculate and write a lot of things to prove your ideas". It can be inferred that, while Kazakhstan might be outperforming some post-Soviet countries in terms of the quality of education, it seems to lag behind some other countries.

Getting back to the sociocultural experiences, alongside the language barrier many participants mentioned accommodation issues. It is noteworthy that the sampled university provides fee-based accommodation to freshmen and sophomore students. It includes not only a place for living, but cleaning and catering services. Because of the limited capacity, senior students have no opportunity to stay in the dormitory, and thus have to rent an apartment. At this point, the participants face such challenges as hindered communication with landlords because of the language barrier (Participant 1 and Participant 12), exorbitant rent at residential compounds near the university (Participant 2), and adjustment to the new flatmates' lifestyles (Participant 10 and Participant 11).

Interestingly, the findings revealed gender-specific preferences of one type of accommodation over another. While male overseas students (Participants 1, 7 and 9) opt for living in the dormitory, their female counterparts (Participants 8, 10, 11, 12 and 14) give preference to renting an apartment. The male international students explained their choice in favor of the dormitory as follows: "Everything is ready for you. All you need to do is study, sleep and eat" (Participant 7). Participant 9, who has had an experience of living in both types of accommodation, remarked, "When I came here for the first time, I rented an apartment for six months… Dorm is better. Dinner is on time. So, it's better".

The first reason why the female participants opt out of staying in the dormitory lies in the fact that they are not allowed to cook there (Participant 8 and Participant 12). As Participant 8 puts it, "I lived in the dormitory but I didn't like the food. That was the main factor. I love cooking for myself. I have very specific eating habits". The second factor urging female students to rent an apartment is that it is cheaper than the dormitory (Participant 12 and Participant 14). Participant 14 explained, "There are very good conditions in the dormitory, but it is expensive for me. So, I decided to move out and rent an apartment". Apparently, as accommodation provided by the university includes cleaning and catering services, the monthly fee is relatively high and thus unaffordable to some students.

Five interviewed students mentioned issues connected with food (Participants 4, 5, 8, 10 and 11). The interesting thing is that all of them were females. Although Participant 10 notes that food in Kazakhstan is quite similar to that in her home country, she still faces a certain inconvenience: "I found that there is a lot of food that I cannot eat. I have to find the sticker which says "halal". In my country, I'm not used to checking it all the time". Another food-related problem mentioned by the participant was consuming less fruits and vegetables than she used to when living in her home country. For Participant 4 and

Participant 11 things seem to be even more complicated since their home cuisines are completely different from the host one. For Participant 4 the home country's food is almost inaccessible because she is not allowed to cook in the dormitory and cannot afford regular visits to the restaurants that serve her national cuisine. The issue becomes even more significant when one considers the consequences it might entail. Thus, for Participant 5 problems with food resulted in certain health issues:

> Food is one of the things that I miss the most. We can't cook in our dormitory and that's the main problem here. All the time we have to buy ready meals or fast food. And it's so unhealthy. And every time I go home, I go to the doctors to check-up. I have some problems with my stomach because of eating cold meals. Dinner is served for us in the dormitory, but it's usually quite cold by the time we go there. At home, you can cook everything you want to eat. That's the disadvantage of being here.

It is evident from the aforementioned that male international students can trade off their eating habits and a high lodging cost against comfortable living conditions. This finding might be attributed to the fact that an overwhelming majority of the participants are either from Asian or Middle Eastern countries where people tend to adhere to traditional gender roles. In other words, cooking and cleaning are considered to be traditionally female household chores in those countries. Hence, the female participants might be aware of how to manage a household whereas their male peers may find it problematic. In addition, the male participants may prefer the on-campus accommodation for security reasons. They reported being bullied by "some hooligans" outside the campus (Participant 1 and Participant 7).

The findings show that host language proficiency was the major factor affecting the participants' experiences. The overseas students who knew the Russian language upon arrival in Kazakhstan adjusted better. Meanwhile, their counterparts, who were not proficient in the local languages, started feeling more adjusted after learning one of them. The participants' gender and country of origin were the second most important factors. Female participants experienced issues with local food whereas their male peers faced

bullying. Due to similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds, the participants from post-Soviet countries adjusted much faster than the representatives of countries outside the former Soviet Union.

4.2 Factors Hindering International Students' Academic and Sociocultural Adjustment

The findings suggest that there are two major barriers to international students' integration into the host environment. These are the language barrier and cultural differences between the host and home societies.

4.2.1 Language barrier. All the participants unanimously named language barrier as a crucial factor that adversely affects many aspects of their lives in the host society. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that the language of instruction and the host country's language do not coincide. Due to the Soviet legacy, overseas students pursuing their studies in Kazakhstan find themselves in a bilingual host environment. More specifically, the host country's population speaks two languages, Kazakh and Russian. Meanwhile, the university employs English as a medium of instruction.

According to the overseas students, being proficient in one of the local languages is not enough. One definitely needs to learn both Kazakh and Russian to be able to effectively communicate within the host community (Participants 3, 8, 6, 11, 12 and 13). Participant 13, who managed to master only the Kazakh language, notes that she always finds it troublesome to get services at governmental agencies since the employees speak only Russian. Meanwhile, Participant 8 and her co-nationals, whose first language is Russian, claim that "everyone speaks Kazakh" and "some people would not speak Russian to them as a matter of principle". Participant 6 claims that, when speaking Kazakh, local people tend to "add a Russian word in every sentence", and since "this word is important" she fails to make sense of the whole utterance. Hence, the participants are exposed to a

triple linguistic challenge: they need to develop English language skills for academic

purposes and acquire Kazakh and Russian languages for social interactions within the host

community.

The participants' responses revealed that international students who do not speak

either of the local languages have limited access even to the basic services. They cannot

ride in a taxi, make a payment in a bank or rent a flat without external help (Participants 1,

3 and 12). As Participant 3 mentioned, "Once you are out of the university, it's a little bit

hard for you to adapt because of the language". He then shared his experience of getting

bank services, "I remember one time I was in a bank. I was trying to pay for nostrification.

So, I was alone and I was using a dictionary on my phone... I was not able to talk to them

[bank clerks]. And I remember myself almost crying".

Some participants, however, claim that communication inside the university is also

hindered by the language barrier (Participant 4 and Participant 5). The overseas students

mentioned that they could not obtain services properly because most of the university's

administrative staff had poor command of English, and hence communication between the

former and the latter was impossible. For the same reason, some participants had no

opportunity to make host friends upon arrival in Kazakhstan (Participants 1, 4, 9 and 11).

Participant 4 is still unable to befriend local students as she has not mastered any of the

local languages. Consequently, the language barrier creates a communication gap which

may confine overseas students' access to academic and non-academic services and

resources. Moreover, it hampers international students' social interactions with the local

community, both on and off campus.

The collected data also indicated that the language barrier has a negative influence

on international students' academic success. Despite English being the official language of

instruction, several subjects, such as History of Kazakhstan or Basics of Law, are taught

purely in local languages due to the absence of English-speaking teachers (Participants 1, 4 and 5). In such cases, international students who have not acquired either Kazakh or Russian are put in a situation in which they are less likely to succeed than their peers:

> Language creates a very big problem. We have compulsory classes that we have to take and pass, but they are taught in the language that I don't understand. I barely pass those classes by just begging the teachers to give me a project or something that I can do. And I get points for that. It can affect my GPA, so it's even more annoying for me. (Participant 4)

The majority of the interviewed students emphasize that some teachers "have a habit of switching" to local languages when delivering classes that are supposed to be in English (Participants 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 12, 13 and 14). As Participant 8 and Participant 12 claim, this tendency is caused by two reasons: local students, who constitute an absolute majority at the university, understand the course content better while teachers feel more comfortable when explaining topics in the host languages. In this situation, it is only the international students who seem to be put at a disadvantage. In fact, the language switching creates negative implications for them, such as making additional time for watching "the explanation videos on YouTube" as "teachers explain the most important part in Russian" (Participant 12), focus issues (Participant 4), and loss of motivation to study (Participant 8). Participant 3 reported even worse outcomes created by the language switching: two of his friends decided to discontinue their studies at the sampled university while the other one transferred from the Faculty of Engineering to the Faculty of Education in hopes that the courses there would be delivered in English.

Summarizing the above, the language barrier takes a heavy toll on international students. It might make some academic and non-academic services inaccessible, restrict social communication with the local community, both inside and outside the university, and negatively affect overseas students' academic success.

4.2.2 Cultural divide. The findings indicate that different mindsets, biased attitudes, separation, stereotyped thinking, intolerance and bullying persisting in the host society can make international students' adjustment even more complicated. Thus, different lifestyles and opposing perspectives create a distance between overseas students and their local counterparts. As commented by Participant 1, if "a guy dyes his hair" or wears unusual clothes he can be criticized by local male students for displaying non-masculine behavior, whereas in his country no one would pay attention to such things. He believes that "the religion is also a big problem". As Participant 1 is an atheist and his local peers are mostly Muslims, they tend to have opposing views towards the same things or situations. He mentioned cross-gender relationships as an example. According to Participant 1, he disagrees with some of his local peers' perspective that a husband has a decision-making priority over his wife. Similarly, when comparing her home society with the host one, Participant 8 noticed gender bias. As she commented, females in Kazakhstan are shamed for many "normal" things and feel pressured "to get married at a young age".

Stereotypes can also be an obstacle to creating closer relationships between international and host students. Participant 6 and Participant 11 mentioned that just because they are from China, some local students "think that you are dirty, or someone who likes insects" and "eats snakes". To handle such situations, Participant 6 tries to explain to those who attach certain labels to her co-nationals that "people are the same" and "can be good or bad" irrespective of their nationality. Interestingly, despite the differences in cultures, religions, lifestyles and views, the majority of the participants reported having friendly relationships with the local students.

When asked about their relationships with local people outside the university, two thirds of the participants reported having very few or no connections with them. The international students saw the reason behind this tendency in the language barrier

(Participants 3, 4 and 11), stereotyped thinking and biased attitudes towards them (Participants 9, 12, 14), and bullying (Participants 1, 7 and 9).

Some overseas students try not to take the labels that local people attach to them too personally (Participant 8 and Participant 10) while others find that being stereotyped based on their country of origin is rather offensive (Participants 1, 7, 11, 12 and 14). As Participant 14 from Tajikistan recalled it, "To be honest, I was very hurt when they [local people] said that all my compatriots were unskilled laborers here". Similarly, Participant 10 from Uzbekistan was once asked by her flatmate if she knew the people who were fixing the apartment next door, implying that those people were her co-nationals. Participant 9 from Turkmenistan noted that international students "from European countries and America" are more welcome in Kazakhstan than the representatives of his country. The above findings might be connected with the growing trend of inbound labor migration from the Central Asian countries. In other words, difficult economic situations in countries like Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan have resulted in migration of population to Kazakhstan to escape unemployment and low wages. Therefore, overseas students from the Central Asian countries might be exposed to biased attitudes based on the assumption that their co-nationals are mostly employed in low-paid and non-prestigious jobs in the host country.

Two male overseas students (Participant 1 and Participant 7) reported to be exposed not only to stereotyped thinking, but bullying outside the university:

> When I can't speak Russian or when I speak Kazakh with a little accent, they [local people] are trying to bully me… It's so difficult to communicate with them and that's why I actually hate communicating with people outside my university. They are trying to say bad things about my country and that's the most difficult thing in my life and my experience here. (Participant 1)

As noted by the majority of participants, most of the serious cases of intolerant attitudes towards them took place off campus. As Participant 7 noted, the people on

campus are friendly while some people outside the university are "separating us" and "unkind to us". In a similar vein, when comparing his on and off campus experiences, Participant 3 referred to the people at the university as more "open-minded" and "curious about knowing people".

The participants seem to be exposed to completely different experiences inside and outside the university. This can be explained by the fact that international students encounter a predominantly educated population on campus. Meanwhile, the people who display intolerance or bully them outside the university are most probably not educated ones. As Participant 12 emphasized, most of the local people who "react strangely to foreigners" are not "educated people" or "people who think globally". The other reason behind different attitudes towards overseas students on and off campus may be the influence of Western culture on the university atmosphere. As the university's environment is an English speaking one, some faculty members, administrators and students may have been educated in the West, where tolerance towards cultural diversity is given pride of place. Moreover, they most probably read education-related literature written in the context of Western culture which promotes inclusivity and tolerant attitude. This all might have contributed to shaping a non-discriminatory environment on campus.

4.3 Factors Contributing to International Students' Academic and Sociocultural Adjustment

The study shows that there are several factors that contribute to international students' academic and sociocultural adjustment. These include faculty support, creating monocultural, bi-cultural and multicultural friendship networks on campus, as well as cultural proximity, prior cross-cultural encounters and openness to cultural diversity.

4.3.1 Faculty support. The participants unanimously underscored a positive role that faculty play in their lives. The students shared cases when faculty offered them moral

support when they experienced academic challenges (Participant 13 and Participant 14),

provided extra materials for better insight into the course content (Participant 1 and

Participant 3), gave additional assignments so that they could get a better grade (Participant

2 and Participant 4) or provided a more detailed explanation of the local context when they

failed to understand it (Participant 10). In fact, "helpful" and "friendly" were the most

frequent words the participants used to describe their teachers.

Interestingly, for some international students the faculty's friendly attitude towards

them was a completely new experience (Participant 3 and Participant 4). When comparing

his home and host countries' interactions with teachers, Participant 3 noted:

> If you study at a university in Turkey, the relationships between students and
> teachers are never close. You see the teachers only in the classroom and then they
> disappear. You want to talk, ask something about the lesson or share your problems -
> that never happens. There is always a distance between students and teachers. But
> here we are friends with teachers. They are all here, we can go to their offices and
> see them. We can see them even outside of the university.

Participant 4 similarly admitted that "it's easier to study" in a "really nice" and

"humorous" atmosphere created in the host classroom than in a "not friendly" and "only

formal and really strict" academic environment she was exposed to in her home country.

From the responses, it can be seen that the atmosphere that the faculty members create in

the classroom contributes to international students' academic success.

The faculty's role at the sampled university seems not to be confined to giving only

academic recommendations. In fact, the participants note how easily approachable and

helpful the teachers are, even outside the classroom (Participants 3, 11 and 14). These

findings may be attributed to the fact that every student at the university is assigned to a

certain advisor, who is a faculty member. The advisor is more of a mentor who an overseas

student can resort to in case of any concern, be it academic or not. During the interviews,

some participants noted that the advisor was the "first" point of contact they seek support

from whenever they face difficulties (Participants 6, 8, 10, 13 and 14). Hence, it is apparent

that not only do the faculty members facilitate the international students' academic lives, but they also try to help them overcome sociocultural challenges.

4.3.2 Friendship networks. The interviews revealed that the participants willingly developed friendship networks on campus. More specifically, they engage in three types of friendly relations: with co-national international students, local students, and overseas students from other countries.

The findings suggest that most of the participants tend to develop all three types of friendship networks simultaneously. However, they seem to have closer connections with one circle of friends than with the other two. The majority of them tend to engage in closer relations either with compatriot internationals students (Participants 3, 5, 7, 9, 11 and 14) or with host students (Participants 1, 2, 6, 8 and 12).

As the analysis of the interviews suggests, international students make friends with co-national overseas students because they have a lot of "similar topics" for discussion, face "same problems", "understand each other very well", and support one another (Participants 3, 5, 7 and 11). As Participant 11 confessed, "Every time I see girls from China, I feel like they are my relatives. It's easier to make friends with them than with local students". She then explains, "Because we have a lot of common topics, so it's easy to communicate with them".

In their responses, some participants mentioned that they mostly resort to the local students when they need help (Participants 1, 2 and 10). Being familiar with the local context, the host students, apparently, have more opportunities to offer effective solutions to overseas students' problems. Participant 1 gave a great deal of credit for his better adjustment to his local peers: "At first, the culture, the religion and even handshaking were strange for me. It was a handshake with a hug. My [local] friends helped me understand the greetings, the lifestyle, taught me some words, and showed me around the city". Hence,

support provided by the local students to their international counterparts in terms of understanding the host culture and lifestyle might have reinforced the ties between them.

Participant 4 was the only one who preferred to make friends mostly with non-compatriot overseas students. Her engagement in the monocultural friendship network was impossible due to the fact that she was the only representative of her country at the university. What stopped her from developing closer social relationships with the host students was the communication gap, as she fell short in her efforts to acquire any of the local languages. As she commented, "Otherwise, I would have got along with most of them, but there is a language barrier". Hence, Participant 4 seemed to have no alternative, but to develop social connections with non-compatriot international students.

When voicing their opinions of what brings international students from different countries together, the participants mentioned similar challenges, being on the same page in terms of imperfect understanding of the local context, and mutual support (Participants 8, 10 and 13).

Since international students spend most of their time on campus, they appear to have more opportunities to get involved in the networks of close and durable relationships there. Besides, the participants might have more things in common with their peers at the university since they are exposed to similar academic experiences. Similar cultural backgrounds and challenges faced in the host country bring co-national overseas students together while support in understanding the local context strengthens friendly ties between international and host students. Finally, exposure to similar problems when adjusting to a new environment and mutual help promote friendship among overseas students from different countries.

4.3.3 Cultural proximity, prior cross-cultural encounters and openness to cultural diversity. The data suggests that international students' culture-related

backgrounds, experiences, and attitudes may facilitate their adjustment. Thus, some

participants from post-Soviet countries attributed their smooth and quick accommodation

to the host environment to similar home and host cultures (Participants 2, 5, 8 and 10).

Flashing back to his adjustment-related experiences at the outset, Participant 2 noted, "I am

Kyrgyz and I feel no difference since our countries are fraternal ones. Everything in

Kazakhstan is similar to my home country. So, it was easy for me to adjust here".

According to Participant 5, students from Central Asian countries adjust to the life in

Kazakhstan more seamlessly than students from Africa as the latter have more problems

with the food and the language.

Participant 3 and Participant 4 named previous exposure to an alien culture as one of

the factors contributing to their better adjustment. Due to his prior cross-border experience,

Participant 3 had gained confidence and social skills that were useful for him in the host

country. In order to demonstrate how he benefited, he compared himself with a friend who

had not had any overseas experience before arriving in Kazakhstan:

> I went to the Philippines and stayed there for 3 months. And it was actually helpful
> for both language skills and social skills. For example, I have a friend, who came
> here for the first time. He is having really hard times. He doesn't even know how to
> talk to people, he doesn't have that confidence in talking to people… It's really hard
> for them to, you know, break their confidence. When I was in the Philippines, I had a
> lot of friends. I talked to them to improve my English… It really helped me to
> socialize.

Interestingly, Participant 4 reported to be exposed to cultural diversity without even

leaving her homeland. As she explained, the cultures across her home country differ from

region to region. Since she lived outside her home city for seven years, she got to

experience very diverse cultures. That is why, as Participant 4 commented, she "got an

experience to adjust anywhere".

It can therefore be assumed that overseas students with previous cross-cultural

experience might have developed certain coping mechanisms when they had first faced a

foreign culture. Hence, when encountering a new culture again, they might be more prepared to effectively communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds and deal with the challenges.

The findings indicate that some international students believe that one's adjustment depends on how interested he or she is in exploring the new culture (Participants 3, 8, 10 and 13). According to Participant 8, she was excited about examining the host country in great detail and learning the Kazakh language. To underscore the importance of mastering the local language, she cited Nelson Mandela's famous quote, "If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his own language, that goes to his heart". She then noted that her compatriot international students who newly arrived in Kazakhstan tended to bunch together and showed less interest in the host community. Participant 8, who supervises the newcomers, believes that it might slow down their adjustment process:

> When I arrived here, I was alone. Due to this, I adjusted faster. And they [compatriot internationals students] are adjusting longer, because they hang out only with each other. They've created a comfort zone which impedes the development. When someone holds an event in Kazakh, they are like "we don't understand" and go back to their shells.

It can be inferred that international students who tend to have a positive attitude towards the host culture and take a proactive approach to experiencing it might have smoother and quicker adjustment.

4.4 University Support

4.4.1 Services and activities. The sampled university strives to become a leading international university in Central Asia. Hence, one of the KPIs in its strategic plan is to increase the share of international students to 20% within five years (Administrator 2). This goal inspires the university to recruit more international students, mostly from the Central Asian republics and Russia.

In order to provide comfortable conditions for overseas students, the university created a special department, the International Relations Office (IRO). This office is divided into two subdivisions: the first one deals with international students' documentation whereas the second one is responsible for the organization of social activities for the students. Hence, IRO assists the overseas students in getting the following services: visa support, registration with the migration service, nostrification, getting an Individual Identification Number, making bank payments, just to name a few. Besides, the IRO staff helps overseas students to settle accommodation-related matters and organizes social events for them, such as international cultural festivals, picnics, parties, and mountain hiking. A special club was opened at the university to unite the overseas students from different countries. The AIS (Association of International Students) club now consists of 50 members and takes an active part in arranging the university's events and activities for international students. Besides, the students are welcome to join any of the university's 28 clubs.

Whenever the university students, including international ones, face academic issues, be it technical problems with course registration, a failed examination or a transfer to another school, they resort to the Student Service Center. Along with the International Relations Office, the Student Service Center is frequently visited by international students. Besides, every university school has a Dean's Office which the overseas students can refer to when they experience academic challenges.

Among the most useful services offered by the university to overseas students is a compulsory language course. The students may choose to learn either Kazakh or Russian. Besides, the university provides feed-based accommodation and special scholarships for international students.

4.4.2 Usefulness, satisfaction and areas for improvement. Since the issue of international students' adjustment, due to its complexity, requires deeper exploration, four university administrators were involved in this study. The administrators were interviewed as soon as all the interviews with the overseas students were completed. Such a sequence secured the opportunity to ask the university administrators to clarify the issues that could emerge during the interviews with the overseas students.

The majority of the participants reported to be generally satisfied with the services provided by the university (Participants 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13 and 14). According to them, in most cases the university administrative staff are helpful and respond to their needs promptly and effectively (Participants 5, 6, 8, 10 and 13). The participants underscored the university's good support with documentation required for visa and migration registration. Participant 8, who had studied at another Kazakhstani university for one year and could therefore compare the services at the two universities, commented, "The Student Service Center and the International Relations Office provide good support. I am always amazed at how promptly they respond. I would spend weeks at my previous university, but here everything is much faster".

Several overseas students remembered the situations when they could not pay a tuition fee on time for various reasons and the university administrative staff helped them resolve the issue (Participants 3, 6 and 9). Participant 9 from Turkmenistan recalled, "It is so difficult to send money from my country and they [administrative staff] understand that and wait. I can study here for three or four months without paying money". He also remembered a case when his compatriot was allowed to stay at the dormitory although fourth-year students, as a rule, do not have the opportunity to live there. The above findings evidence that the university administrators consider the overseas students' issues on a case-by-case basis and try to address them.

However, some interviewed students declared to be partially satisfied (Participants 1, 2, 3 and 12) or dissatisfied (Participant 4) with the provided services and wished that the university would put more efforts to make their adjustment smoother. As a matter of fact, those participants find certain university services ineffective.

Engaging the international students in social life on campus appears to be the university's main approach aimed at making their adjustment smoother (Administrator 1 and Administrator 4). For this purpose, the university administrative staff created the AIS club, organize cultural events every year, arrange outdoor activities and try to involve overseas students in different clubs. Administrator 1 believes that there is a positive correlation between the students' academic success and their social life, "One of the ways to motivate students to study is getting them involved in social life. If students lead active social life, they will be active in their classes". However, Participant 3 thinks that this strategy "doesn't work" because of the language barrier. Since everybody speaks local languages during the club meetings, international students are reluctant to join those clubs (Participant 3).

The university administrators are aware that the language barrier is a major challenge that the overseas students encounter (Administrators 1, 2 and 3). According to Administrator 1, to address this issue the university organized language clubs and compulsory Kazakh and Russian language classes. However, Participant 4 reported facing issues when taking the mandatory language course organized especially for international students. The problem lied in the fact that the course was delivered in the local language, not in English. As she recalled her experience:

> Russian is quite a hard language to pick. Especially for people like me, because my language is not in the same belt as either Russian or Kazakh... So I can't pick those languages easily. And here they are not taught really well. I've been taught Russian in Russian. So, I just ended up learning nothing.

Administrator 1 does not see any problem in the way the local languages are taught to the overseas students. On the contrary, he finds this teaching method to be effective. He thinks that if the overseas students are immersed into a monolingual environment during the lesson, they will master the language quicker. He then explains that his opinion is based on his own experience of learning English. More specifically, he managed to learn the English language quickly because he was not allowed to speak any other language during the class. Administrator 1 then admitted that the lessons were monolingual not only for methodological purposes, but also because the teachers' level of English proficiency was not sufficient.

The overseas students also note that they do not have convenient access to services since most of the university administrative staff do not possess sufficient English language skills (Participants 3, 4 and 5). Besides, most of the meetings and conferences are held in the local languages. As Participant 3 commented, "So, what's the purpose of us going there? If there are locals, they [administrative staff] speak Russian and Kazakh. If there are only the internationals, of course, they speak English. But if there are others, they don't".

The administrators acknowledge that the university's "sensitive issue" is that most of the administrative staff members do not speak English (Administrator 2 and Administrator 3). They admit that it causes certain inconveniences to the international students when they try to obtain the services. To solve this issue, the university provides English language courses to the staff. When reflecting on this issue, Administrator 3 noted:

> Of course, the fastest solution to the problem would be to hire someone who knows English. But in this case, you need to terminate contracts with experienced employees who have been working here for 5 years or more. The solution to this issue has yet to be found and requires a great deal of thought.

Apparently, good command of English has not been a rigorous job requirement given that currently the university hosts 230 overseas students, which is only 5% of the total student population. However, taking into account the university's ambitious goal in

terms of internationalization, the administration needs to take a closer look at overseas

students' problems and apply their best efforts to remedy them.

Some international students claim that they hardly ever refer to the university's

administrative staff because of ill-mannered attitudes towards them (Participant 2 and

Participant 12). After encountering rudeness displayed by one of the administrators at the

Dean's Office, Participant 2 tries to stay away from there. The participants also reported

cases when the International Relations Office failed to provide necessary support

(Participants 1, 2 and 3). When reflecting on her experience of getting services from the

Student Service Center, Participant 12 commented:

> The Student Service Center workers really hate the students, I think. I'm afraid to
> get into the Student Service Center. Maybe it's the same with local students, I don't
> know. If you ask them about something, they are like "How don't you know that?
> You are studying here". And I think they are supposed to give that information
> because they are here to do that. And sometimes I think they forget about that. I
> know that you're working with all the students, the systems are very complicated,
> it's hard to do that, but you have to have good relationships with students.

It can be inferred from the aforementioned that the university administrative staff

put efforts to make the international students feel more comfortable in the host community.

However, some areas of their work require improvements. When voicing their opinions of

what could be improved, the overseas students wished that all the lessons would be

conducted in English (Participants 3, 5 and 14) and no language switching during the

classes would persist (Participants 4, 8 and 12).

Administrator 4 explained why, despite English being a medium of instruction, the

university still delivered some subjects in local languages. It turns out, the university is

obliged by the Ministry of Education to teach certain basic subjects such as History of

Kazakhstan, Kazakh Language, Basics of Law, Political Science, just to name a few. Those

classes are mandatory for all students, but the teachers who deliver them do not have a

good command of English. Due to this factor, the university is unable to ensure "a 100%

English-medium education". However, Administrator 4 assures that the university is "now negotiating this issue with the Ministry".

The language switching issue was also clarified by Administrator 4. According to him, the university has to accept state grant holders irrespective of their levels of English proficiency. As the state grant does not cover the foundation program, all the state grant holders automatically become first-year bachelor students. Since many of them have insufficient English language skills to successfully acquire English-medium course content, the teachers are forced to explain it in local languages. However, in the future the university plans to get all state grant holders tested for English language proficiency upon enrollment. Those with insufficient levels of English will be obliged to take an intensive language course and will be denied access to other courses unless they attain the required level of English proficiency (Administrator 4).

The interviewed administrators appear to be well informed about the international students' major challenges and needs. Moreover, they admit the downsides in the provided services and try to find ways to remedy the situation. Nevertheless, the findings suggest that the university needs to exert greater effort in maximizing the effectiveness and usefulness of the support services.

Chapter 5. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate academic and sociocultural adjustment experiences of international students studying at one private university in Kazakhstan. Fourteen international students and four administrators from the sampled university were interviewed to shed light on the topic. This chapter looks at the findings through the lens of prior studies.

5.1 General Adjustment Experiences of International Students

This study questions Lysgaard's U-curve adjustment theory (1955) which claims that, when encountering a new cultural environment, one goes through four stages of adjustment (Abu Rabia, 2017; An & Chiang, 2015; Wu & Hammond, 2011). In fact, an overwhelming majority of the participants appeared not to have the "honeymoon" period at the beginning. Besides, the findings show evidence that one of the students did not achieve the "mastery" stage. The major observable trend in most participants was starting the sojourn from the "disillusionment" period and reaching the remaining two stages over time. The most compelling explanation for the present set of findings is that most of the participants faced the biggest challenges at the outset. Not only were the overseas students required to get accustomed to the academic setting, but also to blend into a new cultural and linguistic environment of the host society. This academic, cultural and linguistic adjustment, coupled with homesickness, made the participants feel lonely, stressed or depressed rather than excited during the early days of their sojourn.

Language was the major factor affecting the participants' adjustment experiences. Hence, the overseas students who were proficient in the Russian language upon arrival in the host country adjusted much faster and smoother. Meanwhile, their peers, who did not speak Kazakh or Russian at the outset, started to feel adjusted after becoming functional in either of the host languages.

The above results suggest two conclusions. First, overseas students are most in need of facilitation in the early stages of their sojourn. Second, mastering the local languages is what can make international students' lives in the host country more comfortable. Hence, to make the students' experiences more satisfying, the university administrators need to place special emphasis on enhancing the support services that overseas students receive upon arrival, especially the language courses.

Gender-based differences between overseas students in terms of adjustment to the host community were evident in this study. Unlike earlier studies (Ge, Brown, & Durst, 2019; Lee, Park, & Kim, 2009; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Tang & Dion, 1999), this research has not revealed who adjusted better, males or females. However, it identified the gender-specific challenges that the participants faced in the process of adjustment. While female students were found to experience food-related issues, their male counterparts faced bullying.

Similar to the findings of previous studies (Forbes-Mewett & Nyland, 2008; Lee & Rice, 2005; Li & Kaye, 1998; Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006), the current research has shown that international students face issues connected with accommodation. While being satisfied with the physical conditions of the on-campus accommodation, several participants were displeased with its high cost. This is consistent with the results of prior studies conducted in Australia and Britain (Forbes-Mewett & Nyland, 2008; Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006). However, the current study goes beyond previous reports by revealing gender-specific preferences of one accommodation over another. More specifically, the female participants opted for living in an apartment while their male peers preferred to stay in the dormitory. The main reason why the female international students preferred not to live in the dormitory was the inability to cook there. On the contrary, their male peers were satisfied with catering and cleaning services included in the on-campus

accommodation. This might be explained by the fact that most participants were from Asian or Middle Eastern countries which tend to have clearly differentiated gender roles. More particularly, in such countries cooking and cleaning have been regarded as traditionally feminine chores. Thus, the female participants might have been more prepared to manage a household than their male counterparts. Besides, since several cases of bullying taking place off campus were reported by the male participants, it can be inferred that they tend to choose the on-campus accommodation for security reasons.

The current research mirrors the food-related issues reported in previous studies conducted in the U.S. (Alakaam et al., 2015; Almohanna et al., 2015; Lyonga et al., 2010), the UK (O'Sullivan & Amirabdollahian, 2016) and China (Tsegay et al., 2018). Similar to their peers studying in China (Tsegay et al., 2018), the participants whose home cuisine was completely different from the host one experienced more difficulties. Besides, the overseas students in this research, like those studied by Alakaam et al. (2015), reported having limited access to their national cuisine due to its unavailability or unaffordability. In addition, the participants admitted eating less fruits and vegetables while consuming more junk food, which is in line with a number of earlier studies (Alakaam et al., 2015; Almohanna et al., 2015; O'Sullivan & Amirabdollahian, 2016). Finally, consistent with what has been found in previous studies undertaken at American universities (Alakaam et al., 2015; Lyonga et al., 2010), foodborne health issues were self-reported in this study.

What distinguishes the present findings from those depicted in prior studies is gender-based difference with regard to the attitude to host food. To be more specific, in the current study only female international students reported difficulties concerning the adjustment to local food. These findings may also be attributed to the participants' cultural backgrounds. The male participants who, unlike their female peers, most probably lack cooking skills had no other option but to become accustomed to the local food. Apparently,

that is why the food-related issues were voiced only by the female participants. Hence, this research extends prior findings on overseas students' food-related challenges by exploring the gender dimension.

5.2 Factors Inhibiting International Students' Academic and Sociocultural Adjustment

The results strongly imply that the language barrier is the key factor that impedes overseas students' adjustment. Due to poor English language skills of the university administrative staff, the participants who do not speak local languages have hindered access to some services on campus. For the same reason, the participants find it troublesome to gain access to the services off campus. Besides, the language barrier is the main reason why the participants often failed to befriend local students at the outset and have limited social communication with local people outside the university. One of the participants who has failed to acquire the local languages is still struggling to make friends with the host peers. A similar pattern of results was obtained in prior studies, which have demonstrated that the language barrier can negatively influence international students' social interactions with host community (Abu Rabia, 2017; Busher et al., 2016; McMahon, 2018; Tsegay et al., 2018) and limit their access to academic and non-academic services and resources (Tsegay et al., 2018; Wang & Hannes, 2014).

What is more, current literature provides evidence that the language deficiency can have negative influence on overseas students' academic success (Busher et al., 2016; Heng, 2017; McMahon, 2018; Wang & Hannes, 2014). In line with the studies conducted in the UK (Busher et al., 2016; McMahon, 2018), this research has shown that the language barrier affects international students' academic performance. Due to the lack of English language proficiency, overseas students studying in the UK found it difficult to understand their teachers and grasp the course materials. However, when comparing my

results to those of older studies, it must be pointed out that the academic challenges faced

by participants in this study differed from those of international students from the UK.

Unlike their peers studying in England, the majority of the participants have had sufficient

English language skills to comprehend the course content. However, despite English being

a medium of instruction, several subjects at the sampled university are taught purely in

local languages due to the absence of English-speaking teachers. In addition, during

English-medium lessons, local teachers tend to switch to host languages when explaining

the material. This all has a negative influence on the participants' academic success.

Recent empirical studies maintain that international students face more challenges

when the host country's language and the language of instruction are completely different

(Tsegay et al., 2018; Wang & Hannes, 2014). In such a case, the overseas students are

exposed to a dual linguistic challenge. Due to the Soviet legacy, Kazakhstan is a bilingual

country where the population speaks Kazakh and Russian languages. Given that the

university's language of instruction is English and the host community speaks two

languages, some participants experience a triple linguistic challenge. They need to enhance

English language skills for academic purposes and learn Kazakh and Russian to

communicate with the host community.

This study revealed that, due to different cultures and religions, the participants'

mindsets, values and viewpoints differ from those of their local peers. A similar conclusion

was reached by previous studies (Abu Rabia, 2017; Gatua, 2014; Spencer-Oatey & Xiong,

2006). However, whereas past researchers have found that the inability or reluctance to

understand each other's cultural patterns, lifestyles and values resulted in limited

interactions between overseas and host students, the present study has shown that the

differences were not a barrier for the former to make closer friends with the latter.

In accordance with a stream of literature, a lack of cultural sensitivity in the host society causes international students to encounter discriminatory practices (Gatua, 2014; Heng, 2017; Pham & Tran, 2015; Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006). More specifically, they face stereotyped thinking, disrespect and non-inclusiveness both on and off campus. The present findings partially resemble those of prior research. Similarly, the participants have been stereotyped and discriminated against by the local community. The difference is that, in the vast majority of cases, intolerant attitudes towards the participants took place outside the university. This difference can be explained in part by a relatively higher concentration of educated people inside the university, rather than outside. People who obtain a higher education are exposed to more experiences and different types of individuals. They therefore tend to be more tolerant to differing views and beliefs, as well as to people with diverse experiences and backgrounds. The findings might also be explained by the influence of Western culture on the university environment. Since the university's language of instruction is English, chances are that some faculty, administrators and students may have been educated in the West or read Western literature that advocates inclusivity and tolerance towards cultural diversity.

5.3 Factors Promoting International Students' Academic and Sociocultural Adjustment

All the participants admitted that the support they obtained from their teachers was a crucial factor that contributed to their better adjustment. Not only did the faculty members provide academic support, but they also helped the students to keep up their spirits in the face of challenges. These findings echo those of several recent studies (Busher et al., 2016; Jean-Francois, 2019; Young et al., 2013). A possible explanation for this might be that faculty are well placed to bridge the international students and the host community. They have an opportunity to promote positive learning experiences for

overseas students and create a classroom climate where cross-national interactions may thrive.

Data suggests that another factor that facilitated the participants' integration into the host environment was making friends on campus. Almost all the participants engaged in three types of friendship networks: with co-national international students, host students, and non-compatriot international students (Ward et al., 2001). Echoing the findings of prior studies (McMahon, 2018; Young et al., 2013), having similar backgrounds, encountering the same issues, as well as mutual support created bonds between the overseas students in the current study with their co-nationals. The host students' help in providing deeper insights into the local culture and lifestyle to the participants brought the former and the latter together (Heng, 2017). Finally, by helping each other to tackle similar issues in the host country, the participants and their peers from other countries developed closer relationships (Young et al., 2013).

The findings revealed that cultural proximity, prior cross-cultural encounters and openness to cultural diversity made the participants' adjustment to the host environment smoother. Thus, the majority of the participants from former Soviet countries, who share similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds with the host community, got accustomed to the local environment much faster than their counterparts from other countries. The consistent results were found in a number of studies (Kim & Kim, 2016; Tsegay et al., 2018; Ward & Kennedy, 1993). When exploring Asian and European overseas students' adaptation experiences at U.S. universities, Kim and Kim (2016) found that the participants from Europe, who self-reported a higher level of ethnic proximity, adjusted better than their Asian peers. Tsegay et al. (2018), who conducted research at Chinese universities, discovered that overseas students who came to China from culturally proximal areas adjusted better than their counterparts from culturally distant countries.

The participants who had had an experience of living in an unfamiliar cultural environment before coming to Kazakhstan admitted that this factor contributed to their better adjustment. A number of studies arrived at the same result (Akhtar et al., 2015; Schartner & Young, 2016; Tsegay et al., 2018). It can be inferred from the foregoing that these participants had developed necessary coping strategies during their first exposure to a foreign culture. Thus, upon arrival in Kazakhstan, they might have been more prepared to address the challenges.

Finally, a positive attitude towards the new culture made some participants' adjustment smoother. Apparently, as they were excited about the host culture, they took a proactive approach to getting to know it better. It motivated the participants to learn the host languages and cultural patterns faster and, hence, become more integrated into the local community.

5.4 University's Contribution to International Students' Adjustment

The university provides various support services that focus on academic issues, documentation, language courses and accommodation. While the majority of participants reported satisfaction with the support services, some of them noted several drawbacks. Of all the mentioned flaws, the language deficiency seems to be the most crucial one. Thus, some participants who do not speak the local languages face challenges when trying to obtain the university services since the majority of administrative staff has poor command of English. The studies on overseas students undertaken in China and Taiwan demonstrated similar results (Suprapto et al., 2019; Tsegay et al., 2018). Hence, international students at Taiwanese and Chinese universities had hindered access to the services since most of the administrative and support staff did not speak English.

However, the language barrier is not the only reason why some participants in this study are sometimes hesitant about resorting to the university services. The international

students reported cases of ill-mannered attitude towards them demonstrated by the administrative staff. As previous research suggests (Heng, 2017; Tsegay et al., 2018), such ineffective institutional support may result in international students' frustration, stress and depression. A lack of cross-cultural literacy might be a reason why ill-mannered treatment of overseas students persists at the university. Another reason might be staff burnout caused by a hectic work schedule and poorly organized work processes. Hence, trainings on raising cross-cultural awareness and counselling support for the administrative staff, as well as a thorough reconsideration of the workload and operating procedures might be an appropriate solution.

Past literature shows evidence of host-sojourner separation policies at universities, including separate classes, accommodation, and social activities (Pham & Tran, 2015; Tsegay et al., 2018). Furthermore, overseas students in the study conducted in Flanders attributed their little interaction with the host peers to the lack of student organizations and clubs on campus (Wang & Hannes, 2014). In contrast, the sampled university makes every effort to connect the overseas and local students. For this purpose, the university administrators organize various events and clubs where the overseas and local students can learn more about each other's cultures and make closer friends. In fact, involving the overseas students in social life on campus through clubs and events is the university's key strategy targeted at facilitating the international students' adjustment to the host community. However, as argued by the participants, the language barrier is the reason why this strategy is not always effective. To be more specific, the international students opt out of joining those clubs because everyone speaks local languages at the club meetings.

In general, the university administrators are aware of all the challenges voiced by the participants and try to address them to the extent possible. However, the university needs to develop more effective avenues for solving such major problems as the

administrative staff's language deficiency or ensuring a 100% English-medium education.

Otherwise, these issues might jeopardize the realizations of the university's ambitious

internationalization strategy.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

This chapter presents a summary of the key findings that provide answers to the research questions, acknowledges the limitations of this study, identifies implications for the main stakeholders and gives suggestions for further research.

The purpose of this research was to explore academic and sociocultural adjustment experiences of international students studying in Kazakhstan. The study was guided by the following questions:

1. What are academic and sociocultural adjustment experiences of international students studying in Kazakhstan?

2. What factors impede international students' academic and sociocultural adjustment in Kazakhstan?

3. What factors facilitate international students' academic and sociocultural adjustment in Kazakhstan?

4. How does the university support international students' academic and sociocultural adjustment in Kazakhstan?

The findings suggest that proficiency in local languages was the major factor that affected the adjustment experiences of international students studying at one private university in Kazakhstan. Hence, those who knew the Russian language upon arrival in the host country adjusted better. Meanwhile, their peers, who were not proficient in the local languages at the outset, started feeling more adjusted after acquiring either of them.

Gender and country of origin were the second most influential factors. Whereas female students faced issues connected with accommodation to local food, their male peers reported being exposed to bullying. Due to similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds, overseas students from post-Soviet countries adjusted much faster and smoother than their peers from other parts of the world.

The language barrier and cultural differences were found to be the key impediments to the overseas students' smooth integration into the host environment. In contrast, support of academic staff, engagement in friendship networks on campus, as well as cultural proximity, prior cross-cultural encounters, and openness to cultural diversity proved to be the major factors that facilitated the students' adjustment.

In order to contribute to the international students' better accommodation to the host society, the university provides various support services that deal with academic issues, language courses, documentation, and accommodation. However, engaging the international students in social life on campus through clubs and cultural events is the university's main strategy aimed at making the students' adjustment smoother. The findings, however, show that there are areas in the university services that require improvements and that more effective ways for addressing the overseas students' challenges need to be developed.

This research has several limitations. First, it encompasses the case of one university and involves only 18 participants (14 international students and four university administrators). Since the sample is not representative, it is difficult to generalize the findings to the entire international student population in Kazakhstan. However, to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the issue despite the small sample size, I ensured the representation of international students of different genders, from various countries and all four university schools, as well as administrators who occupy from lower to highest administrative positions at three university departments.

Another limitation of this study is that all the interviews were conducted either in English or Russian. For the overwhelming majority of the participants, neither of the two languages is their mother tongue. Therefore, some participants could have given more detailed or accurate answers had the interviews been conducted in their first language. To

minimize this limitation, the interview questions were simply worded so that the participants could easily understand them. Besides, to avoid misinterpretations, the participants were asked additional questions if the clarification of ambiguous responses was needed.

Despite the limitations, this study provides good insights into overseas students' adjustment experiences as it explored the issue from the perspectives of multiple stakeholders, revealed the differences in students' adjustment depending on their host language proficiency, gender and country of origin, identified impeding and facilitating factors that affected the adjustment process, and shed light on how the university supported the students throughout their adjustment period. Furthermore, since the issue of academic and sociocultural adjustment of international students has been relatively underresearched in the Kazakhstani context, the current study represents a valuable piece of information which can be useful for students, faculty, university administrators and other researchers who will look further into the issues.

Certain limitations of this study can be addressed in future research. Conducting multiple case study research involving a number of local universities and employing both quantitative and qualitative designs may produce results that would mirror the situation with international students' adjustment in the entire country. Whereas quantitative data will give the opportunity to see the big picture of the issue, qualitative findings may provide a deeper understanding of the statistical patterns. In addition, research that involves a more detailed investigation of the impact of gender, country of origin and field of study on overseas students' adjustment experiences may provide more insights into the topic.

The findings suggest several implications for a number of stakeholders. The international students who took part in this research had an opportunity to share their adjustment-related experiences and voice their challenges and concerns. Current overseas

students who chose Kazakhstan as a study-abroad destination and those who are planning to do so might distill valuable information from the participants' experiences and become more prepared to address the challenges. Kazakhstani university administrators may gain a deeper understanding of the topic and develop more effective international students' recruitment and retention strategies. In addition, this research may contribute to the expansion of local and global knowledge pools on academic and sociocultural adjustment of international students.

On a final note, this study has been a challenging yet extremely rewarding journey that allowed me to grow personally and professionally. Flashing back to those days when it all began, I remember how frustrated I was about choosing a research direction, narrowing down my topic to specific research questions, and exploring endless piles of existing literature. However, as the thesis work progressed, I acquired and gradually enhanced my research skills. Finding a gap in literature, posing research questions, searching for scholarly articles in highly reputable journals and synthesizing them into a literature review, rationalizing the methodological choices, analyzing and interpreting extensive data, and presenting the findings are among some of the valuable skills I gained as a researcher. Furthermore, I have learned a lot as a future educator. Now that I have a more detailed understanding of the topic, it might be easier for me to create an atmosphere promoting cross-cultural interactions in the mixed-culture classroom. In addition, I have definitely benefited as a person. When negotiating access to the research site and establishing rapport with the participants during the interviews, I enhanced my interpersonal communication skills. Finding the relationship between extensive pieces of information and structuring them when reviewing literature and analyzing the collected data contributed to the development of my analytical and critical thinking skills. As each stage of the thesis work was accompanied by certain challenges, I had a chance to improve

my problem solving skills. However, the most rewarding part of my research was the realization that it provided an opportunity to give voice to those who might not otherwise be heard. Hopefully, all the knowledge and skills I acquired during this amazing research journey will contribute to reaching my future career destinations and personal development goals.

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Appendix A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM No. 1

For students

Academic and sociocultural adjustment experiences of international students studying in Kazakhstan

DESCRIPTION: You are invited to participate in a research study on academic and sociocultural adjustment experiences of international students studying in Kazakhstan. You are kindly asked to take part in one-on-one audio-recorded interview, which will last from 30 to 60 minutes. In case you refuse to be audio-recorded, the researcher will take notes. Any information obtained during the interview will be kept confidential and your identity will not be disclosed. Electronic research-related materials containing your personal data will be stored at a password-secured laptop while hardcopy documents will be kept in a key-locked drawer. The data will be accessible only to the researcher and the research supervisor. Once the research is completed, the interview recording, notes and informed consent form will be destroyed.

TIME INVOLVEMENT: Your participation will take approximately 30-60 minutes.

RISKS AND BENEFITS: The potential risks associated with the research are minimal. Data obtained during the interview will not be disclosed to the university administration/faculty/staff or any third party. You might feel uncomfortable when answering some interview questions. Please be informed that you may refuse to answer any question or opt out of participation at any time, if you feel uncomfortable to continue. Taking into consideration your busy schedule, the interview will be held at the time and place most convenient to you. No other risks are expected from this research.

The research may be of benefit to a number of stakeholders. By taking part in the study you will have a chance to reflect on and share your adjustment-related experiences. Based on the research findings, the university administration will gain a deeper understanding of your experiences, needs and concerns and might enhance services for you and other international students. Current international students studying in Kazakhstan and the ones who are planning to do so may draw valuable insights from your experiences and develop their own adjustment strategies and coping mechanisms. And last but not least, by participating in this research you will make small, yet important, contribution to the knowledge pool on academic and sociocultural adjustment of international students.

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS: If you have read this form and have decided to participate in this study, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. The results of this research study may be presented at scientific or professional meetings or published in scientific journals. Your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Questions: If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this research, its procedures, risks and benefits, contact the Master's Thesis Supervisor for this student work, Dilrabo Jonbekova, dilrabo.jonbekova@nu.edu.kz, or the researcher, Tatyana Kim, tatyana.kim@nu.edu.kz, +77019882277.

Independent Contact: If you are not satisfied with how this study is being conducted, or if you have any concerns, complaints, or general questions about the research or your rights as a participant, please contact the NUGSE Research Committee to speak to someone independent of the research team at +7 7172 709359. You can also write an email to the NUGSE Research Committee at gse_researchcommittee@nu.edu.kz

Please sign this consent from if you agree to participate in this study.

- I have carefully read the information provided;
- I have been given full information regarding the purpose and procedures of the study;
- I understand how the data collected will be used, and that any confidential information will be seen only by the researchers and will not be revealed to anyone else;
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason;
- With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

Signature: _____   Date: _____

The extra copy of this signed and dated consent form is for you to keep.

According to the law of the Republic of Kazakhstan an individual under the age of 18 is considered a child. Any participant falling into that category should be given the Parental Consent Form and have it signed by at least one of his/her parent(s) or guardian(s).

Appendix B

ФОРМА ИНФОРМИРОВАННОГО СОГЛАСИЯ № 1

Для студентов

Академическая и социокультурная адаптация иностранных студентов, обучающихся в Казахстане

ОПИСАНИЕ: Вы приглашены принять участие в исследовании на тему академической и социокультурной адаптации иностранных студентов, обучающихся в Казахстане. Просим Вас принять участие в индивидуальном интервью, которое будет записано на диктофон и продлится от 30 до 60 минут. Если Вы не дадите свое согласие на аудиозапись, исследователь будет делать заметки. Любая информация, полученная в ходе интервью, считается конфиденциальной. Ваши персональные данные не будут разглашены. Связанные с исследованием электронные материалы, содержащие Ваши персональные данные, будут храниться на защищенном паролем ноутбуке, а бумажные документы - в закрытом на ключ ящике. Доступ к данным будут иметь только исследователь и научный руководитель. После завершения исследования аудиозапись интервью, заметки и форма информированного согласия будут уничтожены.

ВРЕМЯ УЧАСТИЯ: Ваше участие займёт 30-60 минут.

РИСКИ И ПРЕИМУЩЕСТВА: Потенциальные риски, связанные с исследованием, минимальны. Данные, полученные в ходе интервью, не будут разглашены администрации/профессорско-преподавательскому составу/персоналу университета или третьим лицам. Некоторые вопросы интервью могут вызвать у Вас чувство дискомфорта. Вы вправе не отвечать на определенные вопросы или отказаться от участия в исследовании в любое время, если дальнейшее участие не представляется возможным. Учитывая Ваш плотный график, Вы сами выбираете удобное для Вас время и место проведения интервью. В остальном данное исследование не несет в себе никаких рисков.

Исследование может быть полезным для ряда заинтересованных сторон. Принимая участие в исследовании, Вы сможете поразмышлять и поделиться своим опытом, связанным с процессом адаптации. Результаты исследования помогут администрации университета глубже понять опыт, потребности и проблемы, с которыми Вы сталкиваетесь. На основании полученных данных, администрация университета может рассмотреть возможность улучшения сервисов для Вас и других иностранных студентов. Иностранные студенты, обучающиеся в Казахстане, и те, кто планирует получить образование здесь, могут извлечь ценную информацию из Вашего опыта и разработать свои собственные стратегии и механизмы адаптации. И, наконец, что не менее важно, участвуя в данном исследовании, Вы внесете небольшой, но важный вклад в накопление знаний об академической и социокультурной адаптации иностранных студентов.

ПРАВА УЧАСТНИКОВ: Если Вы прочитали данную форму и решили принять участие в данном исследовании, Вы должны понимать, что Ваше участие является добровольным и что у Вас есть право отозвать свое согласие или прекратить участие

в любое время без штрафных санкций и без потери социального пакета, который Вам предоставляли. Также Вы имеете право не отвечать на какие-либо вопросы. Результаты данного исследования могут быть представлены или опубликованы в научных или профессиональных целях. Конфиденциальность Ваших личных данных будет соблюдаться во всех опубликованных и письменных материалах, связанных с настоящим исследованием.

КОНТАКТНАЯ ИНФОРМАЦИЯ:

Вопросы: Если у Вас есть вопросы, замечания или жалобы по поводу данного исследования, процедуры его проведения, рисков и преимуществ, Вы можете связаться с научным руководителем магистерской диссертации Дильрабо Джонбековой, dilrabo.jonbekova@nu.edu.kz, или с исследователем Татьяной Ким, tatyana.kim@nu.edu.kz, +77019882277.

Независимые контакты: Если Вы не удовлетворены проведением данного исследования, если у Вас возникли какие-либо проблемы, жалобы или вопросы, Вы можете связаться с Комитетом Исследований Высшей Школы Образования Назарбаев Университета по телефону +7 7172 709359 или отправить письмо на электронный адрес gse_researchcommittee@nu.edu.kz.

Пожалуйста, подпишите данную форму, если Вы согласны участвовать в исследовании.

- Я внимательно изучил представленную информацию;
- Мне предоставили полную информацию о целях и процедуре исследования;
- Я понимаю, как будут использованы собранные данные, и что доступ к любой конфиденциальной информации будут иметь только исследователи;
- Я понимаю, что вправе в любой момент отказаться от участия в данном исследовании без объяснения причин;
- С полным осознанием всего вышеизложенного я согласен принять участие в исследовании по собственной воле.

Подпись: _____   Дата: _____

Дополнительная копия настоящей подписанной и датированной формы согласия предназначена для Вас.

Согласно Закону Республики Казахстан, лицо в возрасте до 18 лет считается ребенком. Каждому участнику, попадающему в эту категорию, должна быть предоставлена форма согласия родителей, и она должна быть подписана, по крайней мере, одним из его родителей или опекунов.

Appendix C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM No. 2

For university administrators

Academic and sociocultural adjustment experiences of international students studying in Kazakhstan

DESCRIPTION: You are invited to participate in a research study on academic and sociocultural adjustment experiences of international students studying in Kazakhstan. You are kindly asked to take part in one-on-one audio-recorded interview, which will last from 30 to 60 minutes. In case you refuse to be audio-recorded, the researcher will take notes. Any information obtained during the interview will be kept confidential and your identity will not be disclosed. Electronic research-related materials containing your personal data will be stored at a password-secured laptop while hardcopy documents will be kept in a key-locked drawer. The data will be accessible only to the researcher and the research supervisor. Once the research is completed, the interview recording, notes and informed consent form will be destroyed.

TIME INVOLVEMENT: Your participation will take approximately 30-60 minutes.

RISKS AND BENEFITS: The potential risks associated with the research are minimal. Data obtained during the interview will not be disclosed to any third party. You might feel uncomfortable when answering some interview questions. Please be informed that you may refuse to answer any question or opt out of participation at any time, if you feel uncomfortable to continue. Taking into consideration your busy schedule, the interview will be held at the time and place most convenient to you. No other risks are expected from this research.

The research may be of benefit to a number of stakeholders. By taking part in the study you will have a chance to share your knowledge and experience in working with and supporting international students. Based on the research findings, you may gain valuable information about international students' experiences, needs and concerns and enhance services for them. This may contribute to the increase of international students' level of satisfaction. Greater satisfaction, consequently, might result in word-of-mouth marketing that could boost the influx of international students into your university. And last but not least, by participating in this research you will make small, yet important, contribution to the knowledge pool on academic and sociocultural adjustment of international students.

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS: If you have read this form and have decided to participate in this study, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. The results of this research study may be presented at scientific or professional meetings or published in scientific journals. Your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Questions: If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this research, its procedures, risks and benefits, contact the Master's Thesis Supervisor for this student work, Dilrabo Jonbekova, dilrabo.jonbekova@nu.edu.kz, or the researcher, Tatyana Kim, tatyana.kim@nu.edu.kz, +77019882277.

Independent Contact: If you are not satisfied with how this study is being conducted, or if you have any concerns, complaints, or general questions about the research or your rights as a participant, please contact the NUGSE Research Committee to speak to someone independent of the research team at +7 7172 709359. You can also write an email to the NUGSE Research Committee at gse_researchcommittee@nu.edu.kz

Please sign this consent from if you agree to participate in this study.

- I have carefully read the information provided;
- I have been given full information regarding the purpose and procedures of the study;
- I understand how the data collected will be used, and that any confidential information will be seen only by the researchers and will not be revealed to anyone else;
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason;
- With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

Signature: _____   Date: _____

The extra copy of this signed and dated consent form is for you to keep.

According to the law of the Republic of Kazakhstan an individual under the age of 18 is considered a child. Any participant falling into that category should be given the Parental Consent Form and have it signed by at least one of his/her parent(s) or guardian(s).

Appendix D

ФОРМА ИНФОРМИРОВАННОГО СОГЛАСИЯ № 2

Для администрации университета

Академическая и социокультурная адаптация иностранных студентов, обучающихся в Казахстане

ОПИСАНИЕ: Вы приглашены принять участие в исследовании на тему академической и социокультурной адаптации иностранных студентов, обучающихся в Казахстане. Просим Вас принять участие в индивидуальном интервью, которое будет записано на диктофон и продлится от 30 до 60 минут. Если Вы не дадите свое согласие на аудиозапись, исследователь будет делать заметки. Любая информация, полученная в ходе интервью, считается конфиденциальной. Ваши персональные данные не будут разглашены. Связанные с исследованием электронные материалы, содержащие Ваши персональные данные, будут храниться на защищенном паролем ноутбуке, а бумажные документы - в закрытом на ключ ящике. Доступ к данным будут иметь только исследователь и научный руководитель. После завершения исследования аудиозапись интервью, заметки и форма информированного согласия будут уничтожены.

ВРЕМЯ УЧАСТИЯ: Ваше участие займёт 30-60 минут.

РИСКИ И ПРЕИМУЩЕСТВА: Потенциальные риски, связанные с исследованием, минимальны. Данные, полученные в ходе интервью, не будут разглашены третьим лицам. Некоторые вопросы интервью могут вызвать у Вас чувство дискомфорта. Вы вправе не отвечать на определенные вопросы или отказаться от участия в исследовании в любое время, если дальнейшее участие не представляется возможным. Учитывая Ваш плотный график, Вы сами выбираете удобное для Вас время и место проведения интервью. В остальном данное исследование не несет в себе никаких рисков.

Исследование может быть полезным для ряда заинтересованных сторон. Принимая участие в исследовании, Вы сможете поделиться своими знаниями и опытом в работе и поддержке иностранных студентов. Основываясь на результатах исследования, Вы сможете получить ценную информацию об опыте, потребностях и проблемах иностранных студентов и улучшить сервисы для них. Улучшение сервисов может способствовать повышению уровня удовлетворенности иностранных студентов. Большая степень удовлетворенности иностранных студентов может привести к тому, что Ваш университет будут чаще советовать, и, таким образом, способствовать увеличению притока иностранных студентов. И, наконец, что не менее важно, участвуя в данном исследовании, Вы внесете небольшой, но важный вклад в накопление знаний об академической и социокультурной адаптации иностранных студентов.

ПРАВА УЧАСТНИКОВ: Если Вы прочитали данную форму и решили принять участие в данном исследовании, Вы должны понимать, что Ваше участие является добровольным и что у Вас есть право отозвать свое согласие или прекратить участие в любое время без штрафных санкций и без потери социального пакета, который

Вам предоставляли. Также Вы имеете право не отвечать на какие-либо вопросы. Результаты данного исследования могут быть представлены или опубликованы в научных или профессиональных целях. Конфиденциальность Ваших личных данных будет соблюдаться во всех опубликованных и письменных материалах, связанных с настоящим исследованием.

КОНТАКТНАЯ ИНФОРМАЦИЯ:

Вопросы*:* Если у Вас есть вопросы, замечания или жалобы по поводу данного исследования, процедуры его проведения, рисков и преимуществ, Вы можете связаться с научным руководителем магистерской диссертации Дильрабо Джонбековой, dilrabo.jonbekova@nu.edu.kz, или с исследователем Татьяной Ким, tatyana.kim@nu.edu.kz, +77019882277.

Независимые контакты: Если Вы не удовлетворены проведением данного исследования, если у Вас возникли какие-либо проблемы, жалобы или вопросы, Вы можете связаться с Комитетом Исследований Высшей Школы Образования Назарбаев Университета по телефону +7 7172 709359 или отправить письмо на электронный адрес gse_researchcommittee@nu.edu.kz.

Пожалуйста, подпишите данную форму, если Вы согласны участвовать в исследовании.

- Я внимательно изучил представленную информацию;
- Мне предоставили полную информацию о целях и процедуре исследования;
- Я понимаю, как будут использованы собранные данные, и что доступ к любой конфиденциальной информации будут иметь только исследователи;
- Я понимаю, что вправе в любой момент отказаться от участия в данном исследовании без объяснения причин;
- С полным осознанием всего вышеизложенного я согласен принять участие в исследовании по собственной воле.

Подпись: _____   Дата: _____

Дополнительная копия настоящей подписанной и датированной формы согласия предназначена для Вас.

Согласно Закону Республики Казахстан, лицо в возрасте до 18 лет считается ребенком. Каждому участнику, попадающему в эту категорию, должна быть предоставлена форма согласия родителей, и она должна быть подписана, по крайней мере, одним из его родителей или опекунов.

Appendix E

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL No. 1

For students

Academic and sociocultural adjustment experiences of international students studying in Kazakhstan

Hello. My name is Tatyana Kim. I am a master's student at Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education. Thank you for your participation in the study. The purpose of this study is to explore academic and sociocultural adjustment experiences of international students studying in Kazakhstan. The interview will approximately take one hour and will be audio-recorded with your permission. Before we start the interview, could you please sign the informed consent form.

Date:
Time:
Place:
Interviewee:
Nationality:
Gender:
Age:
Year of study:
Major:

Questions:

Questions	Category
- Could you please briefly tell about yourself? Where are you from? Which year are you in? What do you study? How long have you stayed in Kazakhstan?	Background information
- Why did you choose to study in Kazakhstan? - Did you have any overseas experience before coming to Kazakhstan? If yes, could you please tell more about it? - What is it like to be an international student in Kazakhstan? - What are the biggest differences between education in your home country and education in Kazakhstan? - What has been the biggest academic challenge during your study in Kazakhstan? How did you overcome this challenge? - What other academic challenges have you encountered? What helps you address these challenges? Where do you seek support? - How would you describe your relationships with your professors/instructors? - What is the most exciting part about studying in Kazakhstan?	Academic adjustment
- Did you have any preconceptions about Kazakhstan before you came here? Did those preconceptions prove to be correct? - Can you describe your feelings/emotions when you just arrived in Kazakhstan? Do you feel different now? If yes, in what way?	Sociocultural adjustment

- How would you describe your relationships with local students / international students from your country / international students from other countries studying at your university? - How would you describe your relationships with local people outside the university? - Can you describe a situation in which you needed to clarify erroneous stereotypes or assumptions about your home culture? How did you handle that situation? - What are the biggest differences between culture/lifestyle in your home country and culture/lifestyle in Kazakhstan? - What is the most challenging part about living in Kazakhstan? How do you overcome the challenges? Where do you seek support? - What is the most exciting part about living in Kazakhstan?	
- What support services does the university provide to the international students? - How do you find out what university support services are available? - Do you use the support services provided by the university? If yes, what services do you use? If no, what stops you from using them? - How would you describe your relationships with the university administration/staff? - Are you satisfied with the support services provided by the university? If no, could you please explain why? - Are there any areas for improvement in the university services provided to the international students? If yes, what would you recommend to improve?	University support
- What advice would you give to the administration/faculty/staff of a university hosting international students? - What advice would you give to prospective international students who are planning to study in Kazakhstan? - Is there anything you would like to add before we finish the interview?	Concluding remarks

Thank you for participation in the interview!

Appendix F

ПРОТОКОЛ ИНТЕРВЬЮ № 1

Для студентов

Академическая и социокультурная адаптация иностранных студентов, обучающихся в Казахстане

Здравствуйте! Меня зовут Татьяна Ким. Я учусь в магистратуре Высшей школы образования Назарбаев Университета. Спасибо, что согласились принять участие в исследовании. Целью данного исследования является изучение академической и социокультурной адаптации иностранных студентов, обучающихся в Казахстане. Интервью займет около часа и будет записано на диктофон с Вашего разрешения. Прежде чем мы начнем интервью, не могли бы Вы подписать форму информированного согласия.

Дата:
Время:
Место:
Респондент:
Национальность:
Пол:
Возраст:
Год обучения/курс:
Специальность:

Вопросы:

- Не могли бы Вы вкратце рассказать о себе? Откуда Вы? На каком Вы курсе? Что Вы изучаете? Как долго Вы живете в Казахстане?	Биографические сведения
- Почему Вы решили учиться в Казахстане? - Был ли у Вас опыт жизни/учебы за рубежом до приезда в Казахстан? Если да, не могли бы Вы рассказать об этом подробнее? - Каково быть иностранным студентом в Казахстане? - Каковы самые большие различия между образованием в Вашей стране и образованием в Казахстане? - Не могли бы Вы описать самый сложный момент, связанный с учебой в Казахстане? Как Вы справились с данной трудностью? - С какими еще трудностями академического характера Вы сталкиваетесь? Что помогает Вам преодолевать эти трудности? Куда Вы обращаетесь за поддержкой? - Как бы Вы описали Ваши взаимоотношения с преподавателями? - Что самое интересное в обучении в Казахстане?	Академическая адаптация

- Были ли у Вас какие-либо предубеждения относительно Казахстана до Вашего приезда сюда? Эти предубеждения оказались верными? - Можете описать Ваши чувства/эмоции, когда Вы только приехали в Казахстан? Вы чувствуете себя по-другому сейчас? Если да, то в чем заключается разница? - Как бы Вы описали Ваши взаимоотношения с местными студентами / иностранными студентами из Вашей страны / иностранными студентами из других стран, обучающимися в Вашем университете? - Как бы Вы описали Ваши взаимоотношения с местными жителями за пределами университета? - Можете ли Вы описать ситуацию, в которой Вам нужно было разъяснить ошибочные стереотипы или представления о Вашей культуре? Как Вы справились с этой ситуацией? - Каковы самые большие различия между культурой/образом жизни в Вашей стране и культурой/образом жизни в Казахстане? - Что самое сложное в жизни в Казахстане? Как вы преодолеваете эти сложности? Куда Вы обращаетесь за поддержкой? - Что самое интересное в жизни в Казахстан?	Социокультурная адаптация
- Какую поддержку оказывает университет иностранным студентам? - Как Вы получаете информацию о сервисах, предоставляемых университетом? - Пользуетесь ли Вы сервисами, предоставляемыми университетом? Если да, то какими сервисами Вы пользуетесь? Если нет, что мешает Вам пользоваться ими? - Как бы Вы описали Ваши взаимоотношения с администрацией/персоналом университета? - Довольны ли Вы поддержкой, предоставляемой университетом? Если нет, не могли бы Вы объяснить, почему? - Есть ли необходимость в улучшении сервисов, предоставляемых университетом иностранным студентам? Если да, что бы Вы порекомендовали улучшить?	Поддержка университета
- Что бы Вы посоветовали администрации / преподавателям / персоналу университета, в котором обучаются иностранные студенты? - Что бы Вы посоветовали будущим иностранным студентам, которые планируют учиться в Казахстане? - Хотели бы Вы что-то добавить, прежде чем мы закончим интервью?	Заключительные замечания

Спасибо за участие в интервью!

Appendix G

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL No. 2

For university administrators

Academic and sociocultural adjustment experiences of international students studying in Kazakhstan

Date:
Time:
Place:
Interviewee:
Job position/title:
Years of experience:

Hello. My name is Tatyana Kim. I am a master's student at Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education. Thank you for your participation in the study. The purpose of this study is to explore academic and sociocultural adjustment experiences of international students studying in Kazakhstan. The interview will approximately take one hour and will be audio-recorded with your permission. Before we start the interview, could you please sign the informed consent form.

Questions:

- Could you please briefly tell about yourself?	Background information
- What is your job position? - How long have you been working in this position? - Could you please briefly describe your job duties?	Job-related information
- How often do you communicate with the international students? - Why is your university interested in recruiting international students? - What support services/activities does the university offer to the international students? - How does the university make sure that the international students are aware of the support services provided? - How often do the international students resort to support services provided by the university? - What university support services do the international students use most frequently? - How would you describe the relationships between the university administration/staff and the international students? - Do you think that the international students are generally satisfied with the support services provided by the university? - Are there any areas for improvement in the university support services provided to the international students? If yes, what do you think needs to be improved?	University support

- Is the university planning to introduce new services that would facilitate the international students' adjustment to the host environment? If yes, could you please tell about them? - Is there anything you would like to add before we finish the interview?	

Thank you for participation in the interview!

Appendix H

ПРОТОКОЛ ИНТЕРВЬЮ № 2

Для администрации университета

Академическая и социокультурная адаптация иностранных студентов, обучающихся в Казахстане

Здравствуйте! Меня зовут Татьяна Ким. Я учусь в магистратуре Высшей школы образования Назарбаев Университета. Спасибо, что согласились принять участие в исследовании. Целью данного исследования является изучение академической и социокультурной адаптации иностранных студентов, обучающихся в Казахстане. Интервью займет около часа и будет записано на диктофон с Вашего разрешения. Прежде чем мы начнем интервью, не могли бы Вы подписать форму информированного согласия.

Дата:
Время:
Место:
Респондент:
Должность:
Опыт работы:

Вопросы:

- Не могли бы Вы вкратце рассказать о себе?	Биографические сведения
- Какую должность Вы занимаете? - Как долго Вы работаете в этой должности? - Не могли бы Вы вкратце описать Ваши должностные обязанности?	Информация о работе
- Почему Ваш университет заинтересован в привлечении иностранных студентов? - Как часто Вы общаетесь с иностранными студентами? - Какие сервисы/поддержку предоставляет университет иностранным студентам? - Как университет доводит информацию о предоставляемых сервисах/поддержке до сведения иностранных студентов? - Как часто иностранные студенты пользуются предоставляемыми университетом сервисами/поддержкой? - Какими сервисами университета чаще всего пользуются иностранные студенты? - Как бы Вы описали взаимоотношения между администрацией/персоналом университета и иностранными студентами?	Поддержка университета

- Считаете ли Вы, что иностранные студенты в целом удовлетворены предоставляемыми университетом сервисами/поддержкой? - Есть ли необходимость в улучшении сервисов, предоставляемых университетом иностранным студентам? Если да, то что, по Вашему мнению, необходимо улучшить? - Планирует ли университет вводить новые сервисы, которые облегчили бы адаптацию иностранных студентов к новой среде? Если да, не могли бы Вы рассказать о них? - Хотели бы Вы что-то добавить, прежде чем мы закончим интервью?	

Спасибо за участие в интервью!

Appendix I

Coding Sample

Interview Transcript	Codes	Themes
- Thank you very much for participating in this research. This interview will take 30 minutes to 1 hour. **Could you please briefly tell about yourself?** - My name is [participants' name]. I am from [participants' home country]. And I've been living in Kazakhstan for a year on and off. I went to exchange last semester. So, this is my second year in here. I study business management. And I am 20. **- Why did you choose to study in Kazakhstan?** - I was actually searching... I had already started my university. I was nearly end of my first semester but I wanted to study abroad. I didn't have much options because very few universities were taking my credits. In my country bachelor's is not that higher rank of a degree. So I was not ready to spend too much on my bachelor's. So this was a country which I culturally could adjust to and it wasn't too expensive, and they accepted my transfer. **- Did you have any overseas experience before coming to Kazakhstan?** - No, it was my first time. **- What is it like to be an international student in Kazakhstan?** - I was expecting more discrimination but I didn't get it. I was told it's because of [university name] I don't feel it. Because you're in [university name] and the thing. I was always told that. But you are still a foreigner and you feel it because of language mostly and people look too different. And you are treated kind of a bit different than everyone usually would be. But it's not always bad, I think. Except language, everything is pretty easy. **- What are the biggest differences between education in your home country and education in Kazakhstan?** - In my country, actually we study at school for 12 years. So, last two years are	Reason to study in Kazakhstan Feeling to be different Language issues	CULTURAL DIVIDE LANGUAGE BARRIER

only focused on your specialty. The first year at university here we studied what I had studied in eleventh and twelfth year at school in my country. In my first semester here I had studied like 4 subjects. Those 4 subjects were in second year. Even till second year, second semester I had one of those subjects. So specialty starts in very higher level there and I have pre-studied the basics in eleventh and twelfth year at my school. If you have business specialty, you have three years of bachelor's degree in my country.	Easy to study	ACADEMIC ADJUSTMENT
- What has been the biggest academic challenge during your study in Kazakhstan?		
- Not all but few teachers have a habit of switching languages while they're teaching. Because in few of my classes I am the only international who doesn't speak Russian or Kazakh. So, the teacher literally switches the language and then looks at me, and then switches back to English. So teachers always make sure to translate it for me but when you switch language I stop listening after that point. To start focusing back it can get really, really difficult at some point.	Teachers switch to local languages at the lessons	LANGUAGE BARRIER
- What other academic challenges have you encountered?		
- It's not that hard actually. Studies in [participant's home country] is very theoretical and there are very few projects and assignments that you can do. And you have written exams and projects. It can get really pressuring. But here if teachers want, they can choose either project or written exam and it's very helpful.	Easy to study	ACADEMIC ADJUSTMENT
	Differences between home and host education	ACADEMIC ADJUSTMENT
- So, basically you don't experience any academic challenges, do you?		
- No, not necessarily.	No academic challenges	ACADEMIC ADJUSTMENT
- How would you describe your relationships with your teachers/instructors?		
- Very good. It's not only formal and really strict. Because teachers in my country, they are not friendly at all. You are very professional in your classes. Here it's very easy. If there's a break time, you can joke with the teacher. It's alright. And sometime	Friendly relations with faculty	FACULTY SUPPORT

teacher would say something humorous in class and it's with the flow. It's really nice. It's easier to study that way.

- What is the most exciting part about studying in Kazakhstan?

- I get to experience a completely different culture. Because it's too different from what I am used to. My state is a religious state and we know what we're doing with our religion. In Kazakhstan most people don't know what they're doing in that perspective. So it's fascinating to see their perspective and see something different for a change.

Different culture	CULTURAL DIVIDE	
Different attitudes to religion	CULTURAL DIVIDE	

- Did you have any preconceptions about Kazakhstan before you came here?

- I didn't know there was a country named Kazakhstan. Because people in my country know only Russia and the USSR. We don't know what is in the USSR. We would know maybe Uzbekistan and that's it. We don't know Tajikistan or Turkmenistan, and especially Kazakhstan. No one knows about it. When I told my friends that I'm going to Kazakhstan and they're like "Where is it?" That was the main thing. Other I didn't know anything about this country. I just read something on Wikipedia and that was not that informative. So, I just came.

- Did what you had read prove to be correct?

- There wasn't much about it. It just said about the history, a bit demography, that's it. There was not much. I didn't have much time to actually see through it and so I just came.

- Can you describe your feelings/emotions when you just arrived in Kazakhstan?

- First few weeks... it was very confusing because studying here is a bit more Western style. Let's say for basic example, classrooms. Here every subject is in different classes. We would have one class for one batch and the teachers will change. So I got really confused in the beginning for all of those things. Others... I came a bit late and like few not all few teachers expected me to just catch up the second I

Different academic systems	ACADEMIC ADJUSTMENT	

came here. It was very like... first few weeks for few subjects I just went crazy. I had the quiz the first day I came to university and I had no clue what I'm studying. I did a crash course in first hour and the second hour I had the quiz. I don't know what I did in that. Other teachers were very understanding because I came in the middle of February. So they had already done first quizzes and they were about to do the second quiz. So my most teachers were like you write this third quiz and we will give you points accordingly, similar to your first and second. Or they gave me an extra project. I could submit it later on and they would give my points according to that. So I did the same with other subjects.

- Do you feel different now? If yes, in what way?

- Yes, a lot. Actually I have lived outside my city for seven years. I've lived not in my own city in [participant's home country]. The culture is very different everywhere, so I got an experience to adjust anywhere. So that was not a big problem for me when I came here. So I don't feel that different… but yeah something like that. I don't know exactly.

- Compared to the time when you just came, is it easier or more challenging now?

- It's easier. I stopped caring after some point. In the beginning, I'd be like why not everyone's talking… because most Kazakhs are really shy to talk in English because English is not their main language. So I would feel alone and I would not like it that much. But now I used to stop caring at all. I found a few people who are ready to talk to me in English. And I just stick with them. And one of the major changes, I'm way more confident than I used to be.

- How would you describe your relationships with local students?

- I found not all but very few who are ready to actually get to know me but others are just like, "oh, she's a foreigner, just stay away from her because she won't talk in Russian". They would mostly stay away

Helpful teachers	FACULTY SUPPORT
Prior cross-cultural encounters	FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SOCIOCULTURAL ADJUSTMENT
Limited interactions with local students	LANGUAGE BARRIER
Feeling lonely at the outset	
Feeling comfortable over time	
Limited interactions with local students	LANGUAGE BARRIER

from me. But I found a few who are actually ready to know, listen and understand, okay oh what's this, why are you doing this. And they are ready because they want to learn English basically. Others are just like we don't bother with English. Otherwise, I would have got along with most of them, but there is a language barrier.

- What about other international students from countries other than yours?

- I am the only one from my country actually.

- What about international students from other countries?

- I am great with them actually. Most of my friend group includes other international students because it's way easier to connect with them.

| | Friendship with non-compatriot international students | FRIENDSHIP NETWORKS |

- If you describe your circle of friends. Who is in there?

- It's 90% international and 10% Kazakh basically.

- How would you describe your relationships with local people outside the university?

- I got to get along with very few of them because they don't know English, most of them. But if I go in main center of Almaty I would find people who can talk and who are…Sometimes I have to ask something and they would be ready to help out and that's mostly it. I don't go out much from the university.

| | Local people don't speak English | LANGUAGE BARRIER |

- You don't go out much because of…

- Language.

| | | LANGUAGE BARRIER |

- Can you describe a situation in which you needed to clarify erroneous stereotypes or assumptions about your home culture?

- We have a very big stereotype here. Everyone thinks like, "oh, do you dance in the middle of the street or do you sing, can you sing for us". Like I never sing. I don't know how to sing. Why do you do this in movies? Go ask the producers. I don't know.

| | Stereotypes | CULTURAL DIVIDE |

- How do you handle these situations?

- I mostly just laugh it out and explain it slowly it's not like that. It's just movies. Nothing much okay. **- What do you miss the most about your home country?** - Food. Very much. There are a few [participant's home country] restaurants but they are very expensive. So it's not something I can you go regularly to. **- Can you cook here?** - You know I'm in dorm. You're not allowed to cook in dorm.	Food issues	FACTORS IMPEDING SOCIOCULTURAL ADJUSTMENT
- What are the biggest differences between culture/lifestyle in your home country and culture/lifestyle in Kazakhstan? - People are more open in my country or maybe I feel that because I'm local there. Here people stay away from internationals way more than they are doing back home. Cultures actually are complete opposites. Nothing's the same. People dress differently. I found people are more cold here compared to my country.	Different cultures	CULTURAL DIVIDE
- What is the most challenging part about living in Kazakhstan? - I would say the language. After a point people just assume that you should know the language. You know, Russian is quite a hard language to pick. Especially for people like me, because my language is not in the same belt as either Russian or Kazakh. So I can't pick those languages easily. And here they are not taught really well. I've been taught Russian in Russian. So, I just ended up learning nothing. **- When you experience such challenges, where do you seek support?** - I have a friend. She used to work as an assistant in the International Relations Office. And right now she's the head of the International Students Club. And we would just mostly stick to her. She knows all the documentation and she knows Russian. So I mostly go to her. **- What is the most exciting part about living in Kazakhstan?** - I can do whatever I want and I can just get a pass by being a foreigner.	Some university services are not useful	UNIVERSITY SUPPORT

- What support services does the university provide to the international students? - Just the International Relations Office. And they only do the paperwork, but not even all the paperwork. We need to get someone else's help. They'll just tell you the basics and that's it.	Services provided by university	UNIVERSITY SUPPORT
- Do you find the services provided by the university useful? - Not so much. The university could do much more because the number of international students is not really huge. So they could have more informal meetings. And now we have the AIS Club so we're starting to do that with them. So, yeah, they can do much more informally to help us adjust in the starting than they are doing now.	Inadequate support of international students	UNIVERSITY SUPPORT
- How do you find out what university support services are available? - We just try to go to the International Relations Office and ask them. That's it. **- How would you describe your relationships with the university administration/staff?** - I can't talk to 90% of them, they don't speak English. I have to bring one friend with me everywhere. I think in my department, there's only one English speaker in the office and maybe somewhere else there are few people who speak English. In my Dean's Office only the Dean speaks English. And in the lower administration, there's only one assistant who speaks English and I have to take her everywhere with me.	Most of administrative staff do not speak English	LANGUAGE BARRIER
- Are there any areas for improvement in the university services provided to the international students? If yes, what would you recommend to improve? - The one big thing - language. Okay we understand if the lower stuff doesn't speak English, but the ones who directly interact with students like Dean's Office, accounting office, at least, put one person there who speaks English because I literally have to...	Areas for improvement	UNIVERSITY SUPPORT
if I need some paperwork done I had to check it with my friend's timetable.	Limited access to university services	LANGUAGE BARRIER

When she is free and then we have to go together. I can't do anything alone here.		
- What about documentation? Is it in English or in local languages?		
- All in Russian mostly. Ninety percent of them are in Russian. I think only documents for visa we fill out in English and maybe few international relations office documents. Everything else is in Russian.		
- What advice would you give to the administration of a university hosting international students?		
- First, make sure that all of your teachers always speak only English. Even if students ask questions in another language, they should answer in English. Because of the strain of focus. You stop focusing when you don't understand what's going on. And then getting back on track can be hard. The language is the problem everywhere. Anything else the students can manage themselves. But when you don't understand anything, you can't do anything about it. So it gets annoying after a point.	Areas for improvement	UNIVERSITY SUPPORT
- What advice would you give to prospective international students who are planning to study in Kazakhstan?		
- Try to learn the basic Russian. I know people who are in USSR belt, they know Russian or they can catch it up very easily. But for other Asian countries Russian is like gibberish. Or even Kazakh. They don't get it at all. If we try to learn it by ourselves, we can't go after the alphabets. I tried to study it myself and I know the basics and after one semester I was like "no, I am not doing it".	Difficulties in learning local languages	LANGUAGE BARRIER
- Does the university provide language courses?		
- We have compulsory language classes but they are taught in local languages. Russian is taught in Russian and Kazakh is taught in Kazakh, Turkish is taught in Kazakh. And I don't know Kazakh. They are organized specially for internationals. There was Kazakh for foreigners and Russian for foreigners but they were also taught in either Kazakh or Turkish or half Turkish/Russian mixed. Because 90% of	Some subjects are taught in local languages	LANGUAGE BARRIER

students in this university are either Turks, Tajiks, Turkmens or Yakuts, they know these languages. I think in my batch there's only me and one Afghan who don't know either of these languages. And they don't, they can't do anything for like two or one student. It's weird.		
- Is there anything you would like to add before we finish the interview?		
- Most international students because they know they're going to a foreign country they're prepared for it. But when they don't understand what's going on they can't do anything about it. Language creates a very big problem. We have compulsory classes that we have to take and pass but they're in language that I don't understand. I barely passed those classes by just begging the teachers to give me a project or something that I can do. And I get points for that. It can affect my GPA so it's even more annoying for me. Most Russian and Kazakh teachers understand but I will get 80 or 85, I still got a B, I could have got an A. But because of that I can't even do anything about it.		LANGUAGE BARRIER
- Other than that, are all the classes provided in English?		
- Yes, they are all in English. Teachers switch sometimes but most teachers don't.	Teachers switch to local languages at the lessons	LANGUAGE BARRIER
- Are you satisfied with the quality of education?		
- 75% yes. It's quite good. Teachers are really friendly. The students are okay. Everything is going smoothly.	Satisfaction with education	ACADEMIC ADJUSTMENT
- Thank you very much for your contribution to this study.		

Appendix J

Recruitment Letter

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS NEEDED!

*Are you a full-time undergraduate **international student**?*

*Have you been **living and studying in Kazakhstan** for **more than one year**?*

*Are you willing to **share your story** about adjustment to living and studying in Kazakhstan?*

THEN WE ARE LOOKING FOR YOU!

You are invited to participate in research on **academic and sociocultural adjustment experiences of international students studying in Kazakhstan**. By taking part in the study you will have a chance to reflect on and share your adjustment-related experiences. Based on the research findings, the **university administration** will gain a deeper **understanding** of **your experiences**, **needs** and **concerns** and might **enhance services for you** and other international students.

All you need to do is take part in an **interview** that will take you **no more than an hour**. The interview will be held at the time and place most convenient for you. Any information obtained during the interview will be kept **confidential** and your **identity** will **not** be **disclosed**. If you would like to participate or ask any questions about the study, please send an e-mail to **tatyana.kim@nu.edu.kz** or call/whatsapp on **+7 701 988 22 77**.

DON'T MISS THE OPPORTUNITY TO VOICE YOUR OPINION!