Exploring the lived experiences of international doctoral candidates and graduates of counselor education and supervision programs, the United States of America

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ABSTRACT

EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF INTERNATIONAL DOCTORAL CANDIDATES AND GRADUATES OF COUNSELOR EDUCATION AND SUPERVISION PROGRAMS, THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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Northern Illinois University, 2018
Teresa A. Fisher, Chair

This study explored the overall lived experiences of international doctoral candidates in and graduates of counselor education and supervision programs in four regions of the U.S. The study used a phenomenological interpretative approach that focused on exploring the subjective nature of the participants’ perspectives in-depth. Seven participants, who were selected from six U.S. counselor education and supervision (CES) programs, participated. The researcher guided this study based on Vygotsky’s sociocultural learning theory. The findings indicated that growing as a counselor educator was a journey of empowerment, but at the same time, was a very stressful and challenging process. The findings also identified the participants’ specific professional developmental needs and barriers that complicated the participants’ professional identity development. Their challenges included, but not limited to, a lack of cultural understanding and a lack of culturally-responsive learning environments. The findings also revealed the participants’ contributions to the CES programs, and the roles of their support systems, self-care, and interpersonal interactions to navigate the cultural and educational barriers. The study offers insights into CES programs and to counselor educators to understand the cultural dynamics of international students and to foster culturally-oriented learning environments. The study also provides important implications for validating and integrating
international students’ lived experiences and diverse cultural backgrounds into CES programs. The study also provides important implications for program curricula including flexibility and multicultural skills training as well as suggestions for future research.
NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
DEKLALB, ILLINOIS

MAY 2018

EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF INTERNATIONAL DOCTORAL CANDIDATES AND GRADUATES OF COUNSELOR EDUCATION AND SUPERVISION PROGRAMS, THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

BY

MASTEWAL MEKONNEN SEYENEH
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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF COUNSELING, ADULT AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Dissertation Director:
Teresa A. Fisher
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I thank the Mighty God for “Through Him all things were made, without Him nothing was made that has been made” (Jon 1:3). "The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in Him, and I am helped; therefore, my heart exults, and with my song I shall thank Him.” Ps. 28:7.

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those with whom I have had the pleasure to work during this dissertation and throughout my learning process at NIU.

Thanks all, God Bless You. God Bless America. God Bless Ethiopia!
DEDICATION

In memory of my parents Mekonnen Seyeneh and Simegn Temesgen, and my siblings Yadigal, Tizalu, and Keskis Mekonnen who wished to see my successful journey. Love you. Rest in Peace
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Literature indicates that the counseling, supervision, and learning needs of international students have been overlooked in counselor education and supervision (CES) programs. The focus of supervision is on American racial/ethnic minorities, which simultaneously overlooked the supervision needs of international students (Dao & Chang; Ng). Mori (2000) also pointed out that international students have received less attention in counseling programs and their unique needs are not met in most cases. Mori recommended accommodating the needs of international students in counseling programs and mentioned that the diverse background of international students calls counseling programs’ attention to multiculturalism.

The number of international students in United States (U.S.) universities is increasing, including those in counseling programs. According to the Institute of International Education’s (IIE, 2016) Open Doors report, the number of international students studying at U.S. colleges and universities was 1,043,839 during the 2015/16 academic year. There was a 7% increased enrollment in 2015/16 over the prior year. Simultaneously, there has been a growing number of international students in counseling preparation programs (Ng, 2006; Reid & Dixon, 2012), although Mori, Inman, and Caslie (2009) reported that the exact number of international students in counseling programs is unknown. The IIE (2016) Open Doors report also does not provide the number of international students in counseling programs despite detailing the number of international students in many fields of study. The IIE Open Doors report indicated that in
2015/2016 fiscal year, there were 19,483 in education programs, which was a 10.2% increase from the previous year. Similarly, 14,189 students enrolled in psychology programs in the same year, which also was a 10.5% increase from the previous fiscal year. The IIE Open Door (2016) report has also confirmed that the enrollment of international undergraduate and graduate students in the U.S. colleges and universities has been increasing. According to this report, international students account for the five percent of the total population of currently enrolled students in the U.S.

Because of this increasing number, U.S. colleges and universities must be aware of the needs of international students. Some researchers (Andrade, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007; Urban & Palmer, 2013) have identified that international students bring different perspectives and values to U.S. higher education in addition to increasing the diversity of the student population as well as contributing to financial revenue. New perspectives and value systems are considered useful for increasing the awareness of and appreciation for students from other countries and cultures. Through social and interpersonal interactions, international students can promote cultural understanding and enhancement, multicultural awareness, and sociocultural understanding (Andrade; Lee & Rice; Urban & Palmer, 2013).

Arkoudis and Tran (2010) conducted qualitative research to explore lecturers’ approaches and challenges in supporting international students in an Australian university. According to their findings, the presence of international students in the institutions has been beneficial for departments by enriching the learning culture through diverse work experience, helping lecturers establish international connections, and filling research assistantship for departments. Coming from different cultural and language backgrounds, international students have diverse needs during their stay in the host universities, so the extent to which host universities are adequately
addressing the international students’ diverse needs determines the students’ academic success and their sociocultural adjustment (Arkoudis & Tran, 2010; Lee & Rice, 2007).

International students have desires of studying at foreign universities; however, they fear their limited English language abilities might affect their academics and interactions with their American peers (Yeh & Inose, 2003). According to Andrade’s (2006) meta-analysis, professors in four departments of a U.S. university recognized the academic challenges of international graduate students, which mainly related to students’ English language proficiency. The limited English language skills negatively affected students’ academic performance. Such concerns sometimes required professors to offer additional assistance and support. Existing literature has documented that most of the international students in the U.S. institutions face difficulties related to language anxiety, cultural adjustment, and learning differences and barriers (Andrade, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007; Yang, et al., 2015). International students experience three common challenges in foreign universities: tuition cost issues, language concerns, and feeling of isolation and sociocultural challenges (Robertson et al., 2000 as cited in Lee & Rice, 2007).

According to research (Lau & Ng, 2012; Ng & Noonan, 2012), international students in counseling programs contribute diversity and are important bridges for the transfer of counseling knowledge and skills worldwide; however, despite their important contributions, they face unique concerns, mostly related to their intensive clinical-based training (Killian, 2001; Gaballah, 2014; Seyeneh, 2017). International students struggle to adapt new values, professional identities, and cultural differences and to handle intensive workloads and CACREP requirements. Even though they have had many challenges, their unique needs have been overlooked in the program (Ng, 2006; Ng & Smith, 2009; Rasheed, 2015; Reid & Dixon, 2012). Most often, multiculturalism discussions in counseling focus only on race and ethnic minority
groups of the U.S., which do not incorporate the diverse needs and cultural differences of international students in the program. Therefore, the voices of international students have been unheard and little attention has been given to their challenges, which may in turn affect the personal, academic, and professional growth of international students, in particular, and the internationalization of the counseling program, in general. This study presents the voices of international students and investigates their lived experiences, which can help to identify important perspectives about possible ways in which counseling programs and faculty members can facilitate inclusive and supportive educational environments for international students.

Background of the Problem

International students seek quality education to prepare them to compete in the global market. Enhancing their English ability is one of the perceived benefits for international students to attend U.S. higher education institutions (Lee & Rice, 2007). According to Gracia and Villarral’s (2014) study findings, the top four countries that are the destinations of international students are English-speaking nations: the U.S., the UK, Canada, and Australia. The findings revealed that U.S. higher education institutions are the number one choice for international students (García & Villarreal). Academic reputation and prestige are also most commonly listed reasons for international students to pursue higher education in the U.S. institutions. According to Garcia and Villarreal, international students have advantages of gaining experience and completing American college degrees. Since employers value U.S. degrees, international students are more likely to be hired in prestigious organizations when they return to their countries after graduation (García & Villarreal).
Even though international students benefit in various ways, research has examined many challenges of international graduate students in some universities in the U.S. as well as other foreign universities. According to Yang, Salzman, and Yang (2015), international students in Hawaiian universities experienced challenges and opportunities. Some of the challenges are summarized as language difficulties, cultural adjustment issues, differences in learning methods, course content difficulties, and limited course options. Their social interaction with professors and university members is also considered very limited.

Similarly, Arkoudis and Tran (2010) argued that instructors may find it difficult to accommodate the diverse needs and unfamiliar characteristics of international students. International students mostly struggle with the lack of culturally responsive accommodations. For example, in many instances, international students are not supported with positive learning environments, culturally competent supervisors/professors, and/or effective as well as specific instructional strategies (Gaballah, 2014; Rasheed, 2015). Most of the time, instructors perceive international students as lacking knowledge regarding the subject matter, although the students are conscious of the subject matter (Hellstén & Prescott, 2004). Arkoudis and Tran also noted that even though there might be some instructors who are aware of the diverse needs of international students, they do not provide the necessary background and skills to support them.

Language anxiety has been a common issue for most of the international students during their stay in U.S. and other foreign universities. Wan, Chapman, and Biggs (1992) conducted a quantitative study to explore the factors associated with the academic stress of international students in U.S. institutions. The survey was conducted in three New York universities using a sample of 689 international students. The findings revealed that students who perceived themselves as having better English language skills were less likely to experience academic
stress and felt they could handle challenges accordingly; whereas those who considered themselves as having limited English language ability were academically stressed. They also felt they were unable to cope with stresses and challenges.

Over a decade later, Özturgut and Murphy (2009) conducted a qualitative study to explore the academic writing challenges of international students. By using interviews, Özturgut and Murphy found that limited English language ability is one of the most significant barriers of international students in U.S. higher education institutions. In their interviews, international students confirmed they had been struggling with limited English language ability, particularly during their academic writings. International students were also struggling with understanding instructions of assignments and/or exams because of their limited English language skills. Hellstén and Prescott (2004) also acknowledged the language difficulties of international students. International students found it difficult to communicate in class because of the fear of making communication mistakes in front of the evaluative native speakers.

International students also faced acculturative difficulties because of their limited English language skills. Yeh and Inose (2003) conducted a quantitative survey to investigate international students’ acculturative stress using a sample of 372 international undergraduate and graduate students from an urban university in the northeastern part of the U.S. The findings indicated that international students from geographic regions of Asia, Africa and Latin/Central America were significantly more likely to experience acculturative distress than international students from Europe.

Lee and Rice (2007) in their case study documented the existence of neo-racism toward international students in the U.S. higher education institutions. The participants felt they were discriminated against in social interactions with faculty and the administration. In addition, they
reported denial of funding or job opportunities. Although Lee and Rice were not sure about how much discrimination or exclusion was based on race, language, or foreign status and how much was misperception, they reported clear evidence of discrimination against students of color. International students from Europe, Canada, and New Zealand did not report any direct negative experience in relation to their race or culture; whereas international students from Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East reported considerable discrimination. On the other hand, Perrucci and Hu (1995) reported that international students in the U.S. higher education institutions had experienced little or no discrimination. Based on their quantitative study of international students’ satisfaction, Perrucci and Hu found that international students were developing good language skills, experiencing extensive exposure to the U.S. culture, and were benefiting from getting married with U.S. citizens.

In sum, existing literature documented that most of the international students in U.S. institutions face difficulties that are mainly related to language anxiety, cultural adjustment, and learning differences and barriers (Andrade, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007; Yang, Salzman, & Yang, 2015). International students share desires of being admitted to foreign universities; however, they feared their limited English language abilities could affect their academics and interactions with host universities and communities (Yeh & Inose, 2003).

International Students in Counselor Education and Supervision Programs

The number of international students attending U.S. universities and colleges has shown an increased trend since 1961 (IIE, 2016). This demographic change is also becoming evident in counselor education programs (Ng, 2006; Reid & Dixon, 2012). Ng mentioned that most international students are enrolled in CES programs accredited by the Council for Accreditation
of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). In this case, according to Ng, nearly 50 percent of CACREP-accredited counseling programs have received international students. International students are also enrolled in non-CACREP-accredited counseling programs as well as in all five U.S. geographic locations of counselor education preparation programs (Western, Southern, North Atlantic, Northern Central, and Rocky Mountains). International students were enrolled in 70 master’s level counselor education programs, four specialist level programs, and 24 doctoral counselor education programs. This trend indicates that international students are enrolled in 53 percent of counselor education doctoral programs (Ng). The master’s and doctoral level counselor education preparation programs are training students from around the world, which can assist in expanding the counseling profession worldwide.

The increasing number of international students in counselor education programs calls attention to the programs to consider the diverse needs of these students. However, with the increasing number, counselor educators and counseling programs are faced with the challenges of understanding the unique needs and appropriate supervision strategies that demand specialized training (Dao & Chang, 2007; Ng, 2006; Reid & Dixon, 2012).

Stadler, Suh, Cobia, Middleton, and Carney (2006) confirmed that although addressing international students’ unique needs requires specific supervision models, to date no model or theory for supervising international students exists, particularly during their clinical based practices. Gardner (2002) pointed out that because of their cultural values and norms, international students are very selective in what information and feelings they share with their culturally different American supervisors, which supports the need for specific supervision
models (Stadler et al.) that can incorporate their needs and assist them with key components of clients.

Although some research has documented the experiences of international students in the U.S. higher education institutions and other foreign universities, the lived experiences of international students in CES programs are not adequately explored, and therefore, the voices of international students in CES programs are unheard. Limited research has documented the experiences of international students; for example, the counseling needs of international students (Hsu, 2003), the counseling supervision needs (Reid & Dixson, 2012), and the utilization of counseling by international students in U.S. colleges and universities (Tilliman, 2007). Rasheed (2015) also explored the lived experiences of international counselor education students only during their field-based clinical supervision in U.S. universities. By exploring the overall lived experiences of international students in counselor education and supervision programs of U.S. universities, the current study is important to fill gaps and add knowledge to the literature as well as expand existing theories of multicultural perspectives. The expansion of multicultural perspectives, in turn, can help counselor education programs to understand the professional needs of international students in their programs. In this study, broader understanding was obtained through exploring the participants’ overall all lived experiences throughout their doctoral studies in CES programs.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the overall lived experiences of international doctoral candidates in and/or graduates of CES programs in U.S. universities to give insight into the importance of understanding international students’ cultural backgrounds, learning styles,
barriers (e.g. language struggles and lack of validation), and the importance of integrating responsive and culturally-oriented learning environments in the CES programs. The current study focused on exploring the participants’ lived experiences from their adjustment processes and learning experiences, difficulties and barriers, their support systems and protective factors, and their contributions to the CES programs. Currently, various counseling preparation programs in the U.S. are accepting a growing number of minority groups, including international students (Clawson, Henderson, Schweiger, & Collins, 2004; Ng, 2006; Reid & Dixon, 2012). As a result, multiculturally oriented training has been receiving much attention to address the diverse needs of those students during their counseling preparation (Gainor & Constantine, 2002; Gardener, 2002; Toporek, Ortega-Villalobos, & Pope-Davis, 2004). However, the unique professional developmental needs and common concerns of international students are not well addressed (Ng, 2006; Nilsson & Wang, 2008; Rasheed, 2015). International students face various distinctive challenges in the new academic environment that might not be addressed by the current American Counseling Association’s (ACA) multicultural competence and social justice requirements described in the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development [AMCD] (2016). Therefore, understanding international students’ lived experiences in counselor education programs is an important step to create multiculturally-oriented support programs to empower them to fit into the new environment. This can also serve as a basis to motivate international students to grow as effective counselor educators who could have broader positive impact on the development of professional counseling programs in the international students’ native countries. Additionally, this study can have a broader impact on people across the borders; international students who grow as effective counselor educator can implement their counseling
and leadership experiences and skills to serve those who need counseling, leadership, and social support services in their countries (Yang, et al., 2015).

Lee and Rice (2007) examined the lack of awareness among staff and faculty who were not understanding and supportive of the international students’ specific needs. Even though international students are challenged by emotional and psychological dilemmas, most of the instructors were unaware of or they were insensitive to the international students’ issues, such as homesickness and alienation. Instead they criticized international students as having a lack of motivation and responsibility for their academic progress. Because of the students’ silence in classrooms, the faculty perceive them as being disinterested or incompetent. Perrucci and Hu (1995) also noted that most research focused on identifying the inadequacies of international students and accommodating them instead of considering the inadequacies of the host culture that should be opposed and changed. Issues other than language difficulties mostly involve prejudice, which emanated from the host community. Perrucci and Hu concluded that international students are viewed as having identifiable and correctable problems; therefore, in most cases, international students are forced to develop and practice coping strategies. There is a belief that international students should be responsible enough to integrate themselves into the host society, so they can persist and overcome their discomfort (Er-rafiy & Brauer, 2012; Perrucci & Hu). In the presence of multicultural competence, the programs and/or host universities’ understanding of and responsiveness to students’ cultural backgrounds (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003) is a vital aspect to empower and encourage international students to grow as effective counselor educators.
Importance of the Study

I became interested in exploring the lived experiences of international students in CES programs and believe this research is an opportunity for international students’ voices to be heard. International students have faced various challenges in CES programs (Gaballah, 2014; Rasheed, 2015; Reid & Dixon, 2012; Seyeneh, 2017). The CACREP principles require doctoral students in CACREP-accredited CES programs to complete more than 60 hours of course work and additional clinical hours (CACREP, 2009; 2016). Moreover, counseling preparation programs incorporate highly involved interactive learning styles and clinical based training that require counselor educators-in-training to actively engage in clinical supervision and counseling as well as teaching and leadership activities. However, because of the above mentioned distinctive concerns, international students are facing challenges growing as professional counselor educators (Ng, 2006; Nilsson & Wang, 2008; Gaballah, 2014). While working as counselor educators-in-training, international students can have clients with diverse backgrounds and may face serious challenges working with those clients, particularly with those clients who speak English as their first language (Gaballah, 2014; Rahseed, 2015; Reid & Dixon, 2012). The challenge is not only because international students have limited English language ability but also ways of expressions, examples, humors, idioms, and slangs affect effective communication and hinder clients’ counseling goals.

Therefore, I developed an interest in exploring the lived experiences of international doctoral students and/or graduates that can help counselor education and supervision programs consider culturally sensitive and inclusive programs for international students and to be responsive enough to provide appropriate learning environments. The current study’s findings
identified international students’ cultural issues that suggest inclusive multicultural counseling courses and incorporating cultural discussions. This, in turn, impacts programmatic issues, such as considering the cultural needs of international students as they adjust to their academic programs. In general, this research has a broader significance of advancing counseling programs and empowering international students as well as enhancing appropriate learning environments to develop international students’ counseling knowledge and skills and promote their professional identity development. Empowered international students can continue utilizing their counseling knowledge and skills with people in their home countries and expand professional counseling worldwide.

Rationale and Conceptual Framework

Choosing a theoretical framework is an important step for determining a study’s design and guiding the research process (Grant & Osanloo, 2015). Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural learning theory provided the framework for investigating the participants’ lived experiences in the CES programs. Vygotsky’s theory focuses on the importance of culture in determining how and what individuals learn. Levy-Warren defined cultural identity as a sense of feeling connected to a group based on religion, national origin, class, ethnicity, activity, sexual orientation, or geography (as cited in Castro-Abad, 1995). Individuals may develop and strengthen their cultural identity through interactions, grouping, specific activities, and practices, as well as by developing feelings of belongingness to particular groups. Vygotsky’s sociocultural learning theory puts emphasis on understanding the influence of culture and language on individuals’ experiences. The following section discusses the theory in detail.
Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Learning Theory

Vygotsky developed the sociocultural learning theory in the early 1930s based on the concept that “human activities take place in cultural contexts, are mediated by language and other symbol systems, and can be best understood when investigated in their historical development” (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p. 191). The cultural contexts include ecology, history, culture, and family organizations. Vygotsky (1978) sheds light on how individuals’ social and cultural experiences shape their ways of thinking and interpreting the world.

The sociocultural approach conceptualizes learning and literacy as social processes in which specific contextual factors influence individuals’ learning experiences (Bartlett, 2007). The approach acknowledges that socially constructed knowledge is not universally applied, but it is used within particular institutional frameworks for specific social purposes. In literacy development, the way of reading and writing differs based on the various contextual factors in which individuals are located; for example, the domains school, home, work, religious institutions, language and script, time period, cultural context, and situation play great roles making differences in literacy. More importantly, these variations suggest the term multiple literacies, where reading and writing are viewed as context dependent concepts and multimodal forms (Bartlett; Abramson, 2012). The sociocultural model gives focus to the interactions among culture, literacy, and individuals’ learning processes.

Consistent with Vygotsky’s assumptions, it is important to conceptualize that the experiences of international students are predominantly shaped by their socio-cultural backgrounds (Abramson, 2012). Learning and students’ experiences are context dependent practices acquired through personal interactions in specific cultural contexts (Abramson).
Sociocultural learning theory stresses the determinant role of culture in one’s learning process, suggesting that cultural differences can have a great influence on one’s professional and personal development (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003; John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky’s theory suggests the importance of exploring the lived experiences of international students based on their perspectives to gain deeper insights into participants’ perspectives and to reduce outsider bias and the imposition of others’ assumptions on international students. Most importantly, it reinforces the need for CES programs to consider the cultural needs of international students in their programs and to act accordingly to address these students’ unique needs.

Vygotsky (1978) considered culture as a powerful feature that influences individuals’ cognitive processes and understanding of various aspects of their lives. The theory supports the view of culture acquisition that comes through interactions and personal encounters. Supporting Vygotsky’s theory, Gutierrez and Rogoff (2003) stated that individuals are not endowed with cultural differences as personality traits, but they acquire cultural differences through engagement in specific cultural settings. Gutierrez and Rogoff added their notion that every culture has its own influence on individuals’ lives through shaping their communications and interactions with people and the ways of thinking, behaving, learning, and acting in specific social settings. Abramson (2012) also strengthened sociocultural learning theory’s assumptions. Abramson concluded that every culture has its own definition of appropriate and permitted behaviors that influence individuals’ identity development and their learning processes. Treating any culture as a deficit can bring difficulties in conceptualizing a connection between individual learning processes and culture (Abramson; Gutierrez & Rogoff; Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998).
Consistent with the sociocultural learning concepts, Hwang (2014) conceptualized culture as a set of behaviors and thoughts that guide individuals’ ways of interacting, communicating, learning, and acting. This research indicates that individuals who grow up in different cultural backgrounds may have different values and beliefs that can shape their behaviors, ways of thinking and interacting, and learning processes. Supporting this view, Jordan (2010) noted that “we all carry the wounds and privileges of our sociocultural force” (p. 58). This theoretical foundation suggests that counselor education and supervision programs should be responsive to international students’ unique personal experiences, which can have influences on their learning and professional development processes.

Additionally, in sociocultural learning theory, language is a central aspect of the learning process and experiences (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). According to Poyrazli and Graham (2007), many international students in U.S. universities have difficulty expressing their ideas in English, which can affect their active participation in classrooms that are English-speaking only. In fact, most of international students in counselor education and supervision programs speak English as their second or third language (García & Villarreal, 2014; Lee & Rice, 2007), which in turn influences their interpersonal interactions and communication with others in classrooms and/or in their clinical-based practices. Particularly, international students’ limited English language ability (Yeh & Inose, 2003) can greatly affect their clinical-based practices, especially when international students start their clinical practices early in their first semester of their first year (Seyeneh, 2017). The sociocultural learning theory suggests counselor education and supervision programs should be responsive to the limited English language abilities of international students (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003; Özturgut & Murphy, 2009; Yeh & Inose).
The process of living in a different culture can be an exciting and stimulating experience but at the same time, it brings challenges in acculturation and adaptation (Yeh & Inose, 2003). It is very important to understand that each of us has been conditioned by our family, friends, educational and religious settings, and cultural values to act, interpret, think, perceive, and feel in a certain way (Abramson, 2012; Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003; Jordan, 2010; Hwang, 2014). In counselor education and supervision programs, international students may be encouraged to interact and communicate with other group members. Through the process, there could be a shared social reality (Abramson). While interacting with different groups, the shared social reality may be complicated because of cultural differences and language difficulties. This suggests CES programs should be sensitive and responsive to the existing cultural differences (values, beliefs, behaviors, and personalities) and the interplay of culture (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003yr) in the international students’ professional developmental processes as counselor educators. Vygotsky’s (1978) theory can reinforce counselor education and supervision programs’ multicultural responsiveness to and understanding of international students’ unique concerns that can facilitate international students’ professional developmental processes (Gainor & Constantine, 2002; Gardener, 2002; Ng, 2006; Reid & Dixon, 2012; Toporek, Ortega-Villalobos, & Pope-Davis, 2004).

Most importantly, this theory directly influenced the research process by guiding me in formulating research methods (research and interview questions, data collection and interpretation procedures). Vygotsky’s (1978) theory helped me conceptualize international students’ cultural differences and definitions according to their perspectives as well as to
investigate the participants’ unique and diverse lived experiences (views of challenges, acculturation, and support systems) based on their perspectives instead of my assumptions, interpretations, biases, and generalizations.

**Research Questions**

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do recent international graduates and ABD students describe their overall experiences in counselor education and supervision doctoral programs?
2. What challenges do international graduates and ABD students face in counselor education and supervision programs?
3. How do international graduates and ABD students describe support systems during their doctoral study in counselor education and supervision programs?
4. How do international graduates and ABD students think they contribute to the counselor education and supervision programs in the host universities?

**Definition of Terms**

In this research, the term international student is defined as an individual enrolled in higher educational institutions outside his/her country of origin for whom English is not his/her native language and who holds a temporary student (F-1 or B-1) or non-immigrant visa status.

**Summary**

Research indicates that the number of international students attending U.S. colleges and universities has been increasing since 1961 (IIE, 2016). Simultaneously, counselor education and
supervision programs are accepting a significant number of international students (Ng, 2006). However, according to existing literature, unique needs and international students’ concerns are not addressed well in different programs or in counselor education and supervision. Although counselor education and supervision programs have been a focus for multicultural understanding, the diverse backgrounds and needs of international students are overlooked, limiting the focus to American ethnic and/or other minorities (Dao & Chang, 2007; Ng, 2006; Nilsson & Wang, 2008; Reid & Dixon, 2012). Because of their different backgrounds and lived experiences (Mori, 2000), international students have faced various challenges during their stays in colleges and universities, which include, but are not limited to, language difficulties, cultural adjustment problems, and differences in learning methods, course content difficulties and limited course options (Jacob & Greggo, 2001; Yang, Salzmanl, & Yang, 2015). The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of international doctoral students in and graduates of counselor education and supervision programs in U.S. universities. Five main questions were developed to explore those students’ lived experiences. Understanding the overall lived experiences of these individuals in counselor education and supervision programs is an important step to clearly articulate their professional needs and unique concerns as well as to outline necessary recommendations.

Identifying those professional needs and unique concerns is essential for programs to create culturally sensitive learning environments and supportive programs to help international students fit into the programs and grow as good counselor educators (Yang et al., 2015, Ng, 2006). This study can be important to reveal the unheard voices of international students in counselor education and supervision programs and add to knowledge about multicultural perspectives in the existing literature. Therefore, this study may have the broader significance of
empowering international students to gain appropriate counseling knowledge and skills as well as develop their professional identity, pass their knowledge and skills to people in their countries, and expand professional counseling worldwide.

Sociocultural learning theory (Vygotsky, 1978) guided the conceptual framework of this study. This perspective acknowledges the influence of culture and social interactions as well as language on the overall developmental aspects of individuals’ lives. Guiding my research based on this theory was essential in two ways. Mainly, this theory helped me as the researcher give opportunities to participants to speak out their perspectives and lived experiences in their own words without imposing my assumptions, biases, and interpretations. Second, sociocultural learning theory can help counselor education and supervision programs consider culturally inclusive learning environments to be sensitive and responsive to international students’ diverse cultural backgrounds.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Following the Second World War, the U.S. developed a major shift in foreign policy to rebuild war-affected countries and strengthen its ties with foreign nations (Choudaha & Chang, 2012). Following such policy revision, the number of international students has been growing since the mid-20th century with a slight decrease after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack (Choudaha & Chang). After the attack, the U.S. developed strict immigration laws that adversely affected international students’ visa processing requirements. Choudaha and Chang argued that compared to some countries, the U.S.’s share of international students has declined overall although the percent of international students in U.S. colleges and universities continues to grow. On the other hand, Lee (2010) contended that many international students preferred to attend U.S. higher education institutions for the quality education and to gain necessary knowledge and skills to fit into the global market. The Institute for International Education [IIE] (2012) also documented that of the 3.3 million international students around the world, 21% were enrolled in U.S. universities, which indicates that U.S. higher education is a preferable destination for international students.

Ongoing research indicates that U.S. universities and colleges are receiving an increasing number of international students every year (Jacob & Greggo, 2001). According to the IIE (2016) Open Doors report, the trend of international students coming to the U.S. increased during 2015/2016 compared to the previous fiscal year. For example, there was a 5.3% increase
in Sub-Saharan Africa students and a 9.9% growth of Asian students. Concerning the comparison among regions, 689,525 students came from Asia in 2015/16, which comprised 66.15% of the total population of international students in the U.S. This number makes Asia the number one region to send international students to study in the U.S., followed by the Middle East with 100,926 students, which represents 9.7% of the total student population.

The IIE (2016) Open Doors report also identified the leading countries sending international students to U.S. colleges and universities. China is the leading country sending nearly 32% of the total population of international students in 2015/2016, followed by India (16%), South Korea (6%), and Saud Arabia (nearly 6%). In this regard, more than half of international students in the U.S. came from these four countries in 2015/2016 fiscal year. The IIE (2016) Open door report also identified the top hosting universities in the U.S: New York University (15,543), University of Southern California (13, 340), Arizona State University (12,751), Columbia University (12,740), and University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (12,085).

McMurtrie (2011) noted that many international students prefer the U.S. as their most desirable destination for study purposes, particularly those from middle class who want to attend U.S. universities. However, in the current trend, other countries (e.g., Great Britain and Australia) are competing with the U.S. and attracting international students through lowering fees and improving economic as well as educational conditions (Alberts, 2007).

In this chapter, I review the relevant literature related to the experiences of international students fitting into their host universities. Specifically, I focus on international students’ university contributions, benefits of international students to the host schools, challenges faced by international students, and the students’ support systems and strengths.
Experiences of International Students

This section presents the contributions, benefits, challenges, and acculturation and socialization processes of international students in foreign universities and in CES programs.

University Contributions of International Students

International students come to the U.S. seeking quality education to fit into the global market. During their enrollment in U.S. universities, international students contribute to the host universities in different ways: cultural diversity, financial revenue, and teaching and research assistantships (Lee & Rice, 2007). Hosting universities may attract international students for various factors; however, the most essential reason is economic. For example, according to Lee and Wesche (2000), international students’ enrollment in Canada is an important source of revenue. Similarly, in the U.S., international students and their dependents contributed over $14 billion annually to the U.S. economy (IIE, 2005b). Currently, this trend is changing, so international students contributed over $20 billion annually (IIE, 2012) and over $30 billion in 2016 (IIE, 2016). Therefore, different countries have a desire to increase the number of international students in their higher education institutions.

International students also promote intercultural learning, which is a critical aspect in the current effects of globalization. Peterson, Bridges, Dreasher, Horner, and Nelson (1999) commented that intercultural learning is an essential aspect “to illuminate a world of cultural differences as well as to build blocks of a just and peaceful world and to create a global humility” (p.76). Moreover, international students create an understanding of global diversity and create business and trade connections. They also provide political allies and promote foreign
policy interests (Urban & Palmer, 2013). In some situations, international students stay in the country after graduation and fill gaps in some selected jobs that require specific qualifications (Gray, 2003). For example, Australia is paving the way for international students to stay in the country after graduation and fill the positions for which few nationals are qualified: information and communication technology and engineering (Colebatch, 2005).

Urban and Palmer (2013) noted that international students contribute not only to the internationalization of education and diversity but also to the highly skilled U.S. workforce. Coming from at least 185 countries around the world, international students bring diverse knowledge and skills. Most of the international students, particularly those from Asia, are majoring in science, engineering, computers, and math; therefore, they are critical to the advancement of technology and science as well as for making the U.S. globally competitive.

Existing literature documents some benefits accrued by international students while studying in the U.S.: quality education, enhancing their English language abilities, resources (learning materials and technological resources), international exposure, fitting into the global market, and learning from prestigious professors (Lee & Rice, 2007; Urban & Palmer, 2013).

Challenges and Adjustment Issues of International Students Encountered at U.S. or Foreign Institutions

Despite having many benefits, international students also face various challenges during their stay in the U.S. or other foreign universities. Most often international students’ challenges are associated with their limited English language abilities, lack of social interactions, teaching-learning differences, and cultural differences (Andrade, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007; Yang, et al., 2015). Additionally, with the increasing number of international students, universities are facing
the challenges of addressing the unique needs and common concerns of international students. Pedersen (1991) mentioned that the increasing number of international students in U.S. colleges and universities is not only a contributing factor for diversity and revenue, but it raises issues for campuses in a variety of ways.

**Limited English Language as an Obstacle for Academic Adjustment**

Many international students do not speak English fluently (Yeh & Inose, 2003). According to Yeh and Inose, students who come from Asia and the Middle East who speak English as their second language have various challenges in their academic and sociocultural development in the new academic settings. Research findings (Lin & Yi, 1997; Yeh & Inose) documented that international students are struggling with language barriers, academic difficulties, mental health, and other personal concerns, including interpersonal problems with American students as well as other international students. However, language difficulties are the most pervasive issues that hinder the students’ academic achievements and interpersonal interactions, which in turn influence the students’ psychological well-being and academic adjustment. Ramsay, Barker, and Jones (1999) have described adjustment as the fit between students and the academic environment, but in due course, adjustment issues can interfere with various aspects of international students, such as their learning styles, study habits, educational backgrounds, culture, and language proficiency (Andrade, 2006, p. 134).

Andrade (2006) reviewed various studies to examine adjustment differences between international and domestic students in the U.S. and Australian universities. International students in some universities in the U.S. and Australia had more difficulties in addition to facing distinct concerns and lower levels of engagement in educational activities compared to domestic
students. Most of the time, international students’ academic adjustment issues stemmed from their English language concerns. For example, at one of the universities in Australia, 76% of international students were required to receive intensive English language support compared to 20% of domestic students (Andrade, 2006). Ramsay et al. (1999) also mentioned that at Australian universities, the difficulties of international students in understanding lectures is mostly related to limited knowledge of vocabulary and professors’ speed of speech. International students in Australia also reported that they lacked participation in classrooms because of their limited English language abilities and sensitivity about their abilities (Gaballah, 2014; Robertson, Line, Jones, & Thomas, 2000). The students described difficulties with language, anxiety, and lack of confidence prevented their active participation. In contrast, the professors perceived that international students’ lack of active participation was more cultural than linguistic. Researchers summarized that this misunderstanding about international students’ actual challenges can create gaps in addressing the existing learning needs and the students’ distinct concerns (Gaballah, 2014; Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003; Seyeneh, 2017). Furthermore, professors should be aware of their students’ needs and learning styles, so they should provide appropriate strategies to assist international students.

Robertson et al. (2000) documented misunderstandings between professors and international students at an Australian university. The professors perceived that international students are weak in critical thinking and academic writing skills. Robertson et al. also reported that international students had difficulty in understanding spoken English, and the professors felt that international students did not take appropriate responsibility for their own learning. In contrast, the international students reported that instructors are not aware of the needs of international students, cannot manage their speed while speaking, and often used “colloquial”
English. Although support from professors would be advantageous in enhancing international students’ academic progress and their adjustment processes, according to Robertson et al.’s findings, professors rarely supported international students. In general, professors did not recognize the international students’ psychological and emotional problems (stress, homesickness, isolation, and financial challenges) that influenced their learning processes.

Similarly, the professors failed to understand the influences of culture and educational background on international students’ ways of thinking and learning, particularly how language issues affect students’ academic writing and overall academic performance (Fox, 1994). Fox reported that professors labeled international students as unable to analyze and logically develop written arguments. However, the professors failed to recognize how cultural communication styles and language syntax issues affect students’ academic writing and ways of seeing the world. Because culture and identities highly influence students’ written arguments, Fox recommended that professors should be cognizant of the ongoing concerns of international students and the impact of cultural differences. Fox contends this process will help to promote a deeper level of multiculturalism in higher education system. Gutierrez and Rogoff (2003) also recommend that instructors need to fully understand the impact of cultural background on students’ learning processes and identity development.

**Academic Challenges**

Ozturgut and Murphy (2009) reviewed relevant literature about the challenges of international students and documented the presence of a gap in accommodating the needs of international students on U.S. campuses. Their analysis identifies many good practices such as accommodating the learning needs and understanding international students’ cultural differences,
but there is a gap between the literature’s good practices and the reality actually happening on U.S. campuses. The authors commented that educational professionals do not have a clear understanding about the cross-cultural differences and their influences on international students’ academic development and sociocultural experiences. This lack of clear understanding, according to Ozturgut and Murphy, creates a communication gap between institutions and international students, which in turn affects the academic adjustment processes of international students.

Zhao, Kuh, and Carini’s (2005) findings indicated that international students have less engagement in different educational activities compared to American students, particularly in their first year. International students also experienced high academic challenges, fewer student-faculty interactions, and less time socializing and relaxing. However, international students gained greater personal and social development as well as general educational outcomes as compared to American students. In comparison among international students, Asian students socialized more, but they were less engaged in active learning and diversity-related activities and were less satisfied with the campus environment than other international students (Zhao et al.). After conducting an extensive review of the literature and current good practices, Özturgut and Murphy (2009) also concluded that “U.S. institutions of higher education are not practicing what they preach when it comes to meeting the needs of international student” (p. 374).

Holmes (2004) documented insights of international students enrolled at various universities in the U.S., Canada, and Australia. The participants strongly agreed that English language related skills were their basic concerns in their academic and sociocultural development. Skills such as listening and reading comprehension, note taking, oral communication, vocabulary, academic writing as well as classroom participation were the most
listed challenges that affected international students’ academic performance. For example, according to Holmes’s study in New Zealand, international Chinese students were hard workers at universities, but their hard work did not guarantee them good grades because of their lack of discussion skills and inadequate listening comprehension during extended lectures. “Professors’ accents, idiomatic expressions styles, humor, and choices of examples in lectures also posed problems for the students’ performance and class participation” (pp. 299-300). In relation to this, Castro-Abad (1995) recommended that international students should be cognizant of the idiomatic expressions and slang of the English language while studying on U.S. campuses. “Without this knowledge, a foreigner feels left out in conversation, confused, and is likely to misunderstand the meaning of what has been said” (p. 10). International students at Canadian universities also had English language related difficulties such as note taking, vocabulary, understanding lecture content, and managing heavy reading loads (Mendelsohn). Furthermore, international students at Canadian universities felt insecure and discouraged and were unable to find appropriate social support from their programs. International students believed that adjusting to new educational environments was their responsibility (Lee, 1997); however, they stressed the importance of professors being responsive to international students’ learning needs.

Ladd and Ruby (1999) indicated that some professors’ emphasis on publications and tenure may eliminate time to assess the needs of their students and to incorporate appropriate strategies that can consider the diverse needs of international students in their classrooms. Most importantly, by citing Grasha (1990), Ladd and Ruby stated that instructors most often employ learning strategies based on their comfort considering certain teaching procedures and content, which might overlook the learning needs and different learning styles of students in their classrooms. International students are the primary victims of such kind of learning environments.
At the same time, professors fail to incorporate valuable information international students bring to the table (social, political, and economic), which could add diversity and widen professors’ and U.S. students’ perspectives on the world. Supporting this claim, Ozturgut and Murphy (2009) argue that to remain globally competitive and attractive for international students and scholars, U.S. higher education institutions should consider incorporating appropriate knowledge and learning from others’ diverse experiences instead of focusing only on teaching the existing knowledge to others (Ozturgut & Murphy). Although research has identified a gap between what professors do in classrooms and what international students feel would be beneficial, minimal research has examined strategies to effectively engage international students in classroom activities.

Ladd and Ruby (1999) conducted a study at one of the state universities in the U.S. to assess international students’ preferences of learning styles and course interests. The findings revealed that international students learn better through direct experience, although they were used to learning through lecturing in their previous learning environments. Participants confirmed that they preferred to be directly involved in the learning materials and learn better through interactions, for example “handling objects” (p.364) and mentioned that they preferred clinical studies that allowed them to have interpersonal interactions and to make direct observations. Additionally, they preferred to pursue learning goals related to their immediate and specific individual interests. They also wanted to have warm and friendly relationships with their professors as well as perform high on the grading scale (Ladd & Ruby).
While studying overseas, international students can enhance their social interactions and their self-awareness (Bredan, Goodman, & Taylor, 2013). Additionally, they can build their self-confidence and can learn different languages. Trice (2004) also argues that through interactions with domestic students, international students can develop social skills. More often when international students encounter new learning and sociocultural environments, they can struggle for social acceptance, be faced with culture shock, and may compromise some previously held cultural values (Banjog & Olson, 2016). According to Gaballah (2014), international students face challenges of finding affordable places to live and becoming familiar with local transportation. These initial overwhelming demands adversely affect their academic progress and involvements. While adjusting to the host culture, “international students need to acquire a new set of culturally appropriate skills and negotiate the host culture’s norms, worldviews, values, and ways of being (p. 94).

Most importantly, because of limited English language abilities, international students are more likely to misunderstand others in the host universities and are more likely to be misperceived by others (Mellon, 2013). Hayes and Lin (1994) documented that international students’ limited English language ability hinders their interpersonal interactions with their American peers and/or other community members in the host universities. Like academic adjustment, international students have difficulty acclimating socially compared to American students in new learning environments.

In their findings, Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, and Van Horn (2002) reported that international students had fewer social support systems either on campus or off at
American universities. Although a small percentage of international student participants reported that they formed close friendships with American classmates, the more interaction they have with American classmates, the greater their social adjustment. Two important reasons contributed to less close friendship interactions between international students and their American classmates: lack of opportunity and preference for friendship with co-nationals.

Castro-Abad (1995) reported that international students have similarities and commonness since they left their cultural roots and became foreigners and minorities in different cultural settings. They also share the challenges of limited English language abilities and speaking with an accent. These shared traits encourage international students to make close relationships among themselves and to develop a sense of belonging. Rasheed’s (2015) findings parallel Furnham and Alibbai’s (1985) study, in that international students also confirmed that they had strong preferences for making friends from their countries or with other international students from other countries more than with American students. However, some students who established close friendships with American students mentioned that these associations helped them adjust to the new sociocultural and academic settings in the host universities.

Some researchers (Cross, 1995; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Markus & Kitayama, 1991) have noted that international students’ cultural backgrounds conflict with their interpersonal interactions and socialization processes and may prevent them from forming close friendships with American students and contribute to their acculturative stress. International students, mainly those from collectivist cultures, find difficulty interacting with American friends who tend to emphasize aspects of individualism. The research shows that international students perceived that social friendships and social relations in the U.S. are superficial, which in turn contributes to international students’ disappointment, discouragement, and feelings of
confusion during their interpersonal connections with American classmates (Cross; Mallinckrodt & Leong; Markus & Kitayama).

In Rajapaksa and Dundes’s (2002) study, international students reported that they had experienced more feelings of loneliness and homesickness compared to domestic students. Although social support systems are important for international students’ smooth transition and social adjustment, the students have limited networks and a small number of close friends (Rajapaksa & Dundes). Similar to the American context, students at an Australian university mentioned their challenges in building social networks, language struggles, and less familiarity with cultural norms and rules, which in turn affected their social adjustments (Robertson et al., 2002). International students often have to adapt to new learning and sociocultural environments as well as develop “cultural competence” (Lee & Rice, 2007, p. 386); however, universities leave the full responsibility to the students even though there are some inadequacies the host universities could have considered and accommodated.

Ladd and Ruby (1999) discussed the importance of differentiating between assimilation and acculturation to help international students adjust to new learning environments. Assimilation is “the process by which minorities lose their distinct characteristics and become indistinguishable from the dominant groups,” whereas acculturation is “the process of adjusting to the dominant culture but at the same time maintaining a separate cultural identity” (Castro-Abad, 1995, p.12). In this way, programs’ roles in helping international students should be focused on helping them adapt to the U.S. educational culture rather than encouraging international students to totally assimilate and lose their learning styles and preferred study strategies (Seyeneh, 2017). According to Ladd and Ruby, adapting to the U.S. educational culture is an essential aspect for international students’ all-round academic and social
development. Faculty and professors should encourage international students to interact with American students and join social organizations and clubs as well as student associations, in addition to encouraging mentor-mentee relationships. Such interactions can help international students practice conversational English and improve their speech, which can help them adapt easily to the U.S. way of life (Cheng, 1987, as cited in Ladd & Ruby, 1999). Cheng mentioned that adaptation and acculturation processes are very stressful for someone who is not fluent in English.

Social Acceptance and Experiences of Discrimination

Gaballah (2014) and Rasheed (2015) reported that international students were experiencing the loss of social support, alienation, and racial/ethnic discrimination. Banjong (2015) contended that international students still face various difficulties while studying in foreign universities. The common challenges of international students include, but are not limited to, feelings of loneliness and homesickness, financial stress, culture shock, discrimination or racism, and language difficulties (Faleel, Tam, Lee, Har, & Foo, 2012; Zhao, Jindal-Snape, Topping, & Todman; 2008), which in turn can affect psychological wellness, academic performance, and student-advisor-supervisor relationships (Adrian-Taylor, Noels, & Tischler, 2007).

Lee and Rice (2007) conducted qualitative research at U.S. universities in the Southwest. The participants included 24 international undergraduate and graduate students to explore their perceptions of discrimination regarding to race, culture, or status as foreign residents. The participants came from nine countries/regions: India, East Asia, Latin America, Europe, Africa, the Gulf Region, the Middle East, the Caribbean, Canada, and New Zealand. The findings


acknowledged that international students encountered various challenges, which ranged from “perception of unfairness and inhospitality to cultural intolerance and confrontation” (p. 381). Lee and Rice also argued much research is on the adjustment problems of international students linked to their limited language abilities, but much research overlooks what universities can do better to enhance the experience for international students. Although Lee and Rice were not sure about how much the students’ international status contributed to actual discrimination or exclusion, most of the international students in this study reported the presence of discrimination on campus in social interactions with either faculty or administration and denial of funding or job opportunities. These factors, according to Alberts (2007), may push international students away from the U.S and create attraction to other countries.

Lee and Rice (2007) also documented experience differences between international students of color and White international students. Students from Asia, India, Latin America, and the Middle East reported considerable discrimination, whereas students from Canada, New Zealand, and Europe did not report such experiences. Students of color reported that they have had difficulty because of their international status, language, and cultural differences. They reported the complexity of discrimination, which is not only physical exclusion but also related to cultural traits and language. According to the findings, most of the international students of color experienced direct insults, negative remarks about their countries or culture, hostility toward their non-fluency in English, cultural intolerance, and lack of social acceptance (Lee & Rice). The participants mentioned that the degree of discrimination ranged from less to severe. Some of the participants in Lee and Rice’s (2007) study described that the difference in race was not an issue when they were in their countries; therefore, they were not even conscious about
their race, except experiencing different status of social classes; however, they encountered it early once they enter to the U.S.

Acculturation Difficulties and Cultural Adjustment Issues

International students at the U.S. colleges and universities are struggling for social acceptance, face culture shock, encounter new sociocultural settings, and often must compromise some previously held values (Banjong & Olson, 2016). In such circumstances, international students do not find appropriate social support systems and help from host universities (Banjong & Olson). Castro-Abad (1995) conducted a human development workshop on the cultural identity development of international students. The research included 37 participants at Brookdale Community College. The workshop included themes such as experiences with language, cultural differences/similarities, and cultural identity. Castro-Abad concluded that international students need special attention since when they join new learning environments, they are no longer in touch with their “comfort zones” and may encounter different educational systems as well as cultural norms (p. 2). Castro-Abad presented a similar analogy when talking about being out of one’s comfort zone “When we uproot or transplant a bush or flower from one pot to another or from a pot to the ground, it needs tender loving care to flourish in the new place” (p. 3). To strengthen this analogy, Castro-Abad quoted Erik Erikson’s (as cited in Castro-Abad, 1995)) explanations of uprooted from origin:

Beyond this, you will recognize in the symbolism of ropes a variation on the theme of roots, which pervades our imagery on the subject of transmigration. There roots are torn out or are brought along, dry up in transit or are kept moist and alive, find an appropriate soil, or fail to take hold and wither. (p. 88.)
This explanation confirms that international students need social support systems and positive interpersonal interactions in the host universities to adjust well and to stay productive as well as to develop positive feelings and inner peace. In relation to uprooting, the UK Council for International Student Affairs’s [UKCISA] (2008) research indicates that most international students develop stress and culture shock when they leave their origin and travel to new sociocultural and academic settings. According to UKCISA, various factors contribute to the development of culture shock: climate change, differences in food, language, social roles, rules of behavior, and social norms as well as differences in social values.

Castro-Abad (1995) also make an analogy between a “fingerprint and individuals uniqueness, as no people [have the] same fingerprints no individuals [have the] same personality” (p. 12). Despite this fact, as individuals grow in a particular society, they tend to acquire common cultural norms, values, or common tendencies through various socialization processes and/or channels (direct observation, modeling, or vicarious learning). To assist international students in their adjustment processes, it is essential to know how their values, norms or cultural expectations can influence their adjustment processes. It is also important to understand that some cultural norms and values that are acceptable in a specific group or society might be unacceptable to another group. For example, Castro-Abad mentioned that being late for social events or appointments in the U.S. is not acceptable, whereas in most Latin American countries it is even fashionable to be late 10 to 20 minutes, especially to social events.

Although international students interact with different groups in the host university, they may face new ways of socialization that may interfere with their acculturation processes and identity development. For example, the “do’s and don’ts” (p. 12) of socializing in their country might vary greatly in the host culture. On the other hand, international students may find cultural
similarities between their origin and the host country. Castro-Abad recommended that international students’ sociocultural adjustment processes can be facilitated more easily through making them aware of the requirements and expectations of the host culture. It is also important to ask international students to describe the strengths of their culture and what contributions they may bring to the table. This helps international students feel connected and develop feelings of belongingness and acceptance in the host culture while staying positive and proud of their original cultures. International students may struggle to find inner peace because of separation from their original culture and uncertainty where they truly belong in the host culture. Therefore, “a sense of belonging is vital for international students for the development of cultural identity, the achievement of inner happiness, and the realization of inner peace” (pp. 14-15).

Urban and Palmer (2013) conducted a cross-sectional study and examined the perception of international graduate and undergraduate students regarding their engagement in cultural resources (celebrations of customs, holidays) in their host universities. The research conducted at some selected Midwest universities in the U.S. also explored how engagement affects the students’ feelings of acceptance. The findings asserted that although international students were interested in engaging in different activities and wanted to share knowledge about their culture and countries, host universities did not facilitate appropriate opportunities. The participants reported that they had limited levels of engagement with cultural resources. The findings also confirmed that the level of engagement was different among international students. International students from South and Central America had the highest desire, whereas students from European countries had lowest desire of engagement.

Obst and Foster (2007) mentioned that international students have different goals and ambitions while studying at U.S. universities, including “experiencing new ways of thinking and
acting in the chosen field of study” (p. 15). Incorporating appropriate sociocultural settings is also vital for international students’ interpersonal interaction, which can help them to develop personally and to become more independent as well as build intercultural friendship (Obst & Foster). Similarly, Ho, Au, Bedford, and Copper (2003) stated that nearly 95% of U.S. college students do not have direct international exposure, and at the same time, they do not develop firsthand international experience. Ho et al. recommended the importance of facilitating interpersonal interactions between international and domestic students as well as finding ways of tapping into and incorporating international students’ diverse experiences when appropriate.

Yeh and Inose (2003) assessed the relationship between international students’ English language fluency and their acculturative stress as well as their feelings of social connectedness. They selected a large sample of 372 international undergraduate and graduate students from 77 countries. For analysis, Yeh and Inose grouped the participants into seven regions: Asia, Europe, Central/Latin America, Africa, North America, and Oceania. The analysis revealed that English language fluency and social connectedness were significant predictors of acculturative stress. In this case, participants who were fluent in English were experiencing less acculturative stress compared to those who were not fluent. Similarly, participants who were more connected with people were also experiencing less acculturative stress. The analysis based on regions also revealed that international students from Europe experienced less acculturative stress compared to non-Europeans.

Similarly, Wilton and Constantine (2003) conducted quantitative research to explore the acculturation process of 190 international students on U.S. campuses. The research documented different levels of acculturation among international students. Students from Latin America and Asia had the highest level of acculturation stress compared to participants who came from other
regions. Although some institutions launch avenues for professional support and smooth acculturation, international students reported “being treated as uninvited guests” (p. 386). Supporting this finding, Lee and Rice (2007) summarized that those treatments may make international students lack trust in professional avenues of help. Even if support systems are available, international students may refrain from participating in and interacting freely and positively. Fearing unfair treatment and judgment, Asian students preferred off-campus informal support systems more than professional campus support systems. Researchers (Abramson, 2012; Castro-Abad, 1995; Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003) have pointed out the importance of host cultures and international students understanding and addressing cultural differences in relation to programmatic requirements. The next section presents existing research on the experiences of international students in CES programs.

Experiences of International Students in Counselor Education and Supervision Programs

This section describes international students’ experiences in counseling programs. It includes detailed descriptions of the students’ contributions, benefits, and challenges in the program.

Contributions of International Students to the Programs

International students come to the U.S. counselor education programs seeking quality training and/or because of lack of counseling programs in their countries of origin (Reid & Dixon, 2012; Seyeneh, 2017). Lau and Ng (2012) and Ng and Noonan (2012) argue that the presence of international students in counseling programs is vital to diversify the programs’ multicultural concepts and to the internationalization of the counseling profession. International
students in counseling programs are important bridges to the transfer of counseling knowledge and skills worldwide; thus, they highly contribute to the growth of the profession. In this regard, international students are the driving forces of the internationalization of the counseling profession. Moreover, international students’ diverse cultural backgrounds are important additions to counseling programs’ curricula. The counseling community such as students, faculty, and clients can benefit from the presence of international students in various ways (Ng & Smith, 2009). People in the programs can learn and grow through interactions with international students; particularly those who do not have direct international exposure can learn and widen their multicultural knowledge and understandings. International students create an opportunity for everybody to “learn and grow in a variety of ways that would be unavailable in their absence” (p. 69).

A qualitative pilot study by Seyeneh (2017) supported Ng and Smith’s (2009) argument. The participants in the pilot study mentioned that their diverse cultural backgrounds and personal experiences were great additions to their counseling programs. The participants from a collectivist culture described that their culture appreciates human interactions and belongingness, which are the corner stones of counselor-client relationships. Similarly, the findings also indicated that their culture appreciates active listening and understanding of others rather than talking too much. The participants described that attentive listening is one of the basics in counseling relationships. Therefore, they mentioned that their presence in the counseling programs is an opportunity that can help others to develop attentive listening skills. Additionally, according to Gaballah (2014), international students in her study were resilient, self-determined, goal-oriented, and open-minded, which might be helpful to their programs.
International students in counseling programs can benefit from intensive practical training and clinical-based interactions, which are rarely practiced in their countries of origin (Ng & Smith, 2009; Seyeneh, 2017). Ng and Smith pointed out that international students benefit from continuous supervisor-supervisee relationships, conferences, teaching, leadership activities, and counselor-client relationships, which were not often their experiences back home. Ng and Smith identified that international students benefited from their presence in counseling programs in three ways: training resources, academic resources, and societal resources. Similarly, as academic resources, international students have continued interactions with supportive peers and faculty. They were also supported through societal resources that include cross-cultural immersion experiences in American society: “availability of diverse population and services and greater overall acceptance for the counseling profession as compared to their country of origin” (Ng & Smith, 2009, p. 278). Moreover, international students benefited from interpersonal interactions with professors, peers, and cross-cultural social interactions such as friendships with international students and through interactions with their clients and supervisors during their clinical-based practicum and internships hours. Such interactions enhanced their English as well as promoted intercultural-learning and social skill development (assertiveness skills and survival skills). Counseling programs can also help international students realize their personal dispositions (empathy, openness, eagerness for learning, interest in multiculturalism, and the desire to help). Inman, Jeong, and Mori (2008) also identified the opportunities that international students gain in counseling programs. International students can develop awareness, knowledge,
and skill competencies, which can empower them to work with diverse individuals and/or groups.

**Challenges of International Students in Counselor Education Programs**

Even though international students in counseling programs benefit in various ways, simultaneously they are experiencing various challenges (language, adjustment, and culture) and need to adapt to the new ways of Western educational and counseling training system (Ng, 2006; Ng & Smith, 2009; Seyeneh, 2017). Literature has documented the challenges and unique difficulties of international students in counseling programs (Rasheed, 2015, Reid & Dixon, 2012); however, addressing their needs has been overlooked; therefore, the voices of international students in counseling programs are unheard. Ng argued that counseling programs do not incorporate the needs of international students in counseling training curricula. However, according to Mittal and Wieling (2006), international students’ experiences are not well documented and/or incorporated in teaching-learning materials.

According to various research findings (Ng, 2006; Ng & Smith, 2009; Nilsson & Anderson, 2004; Nilsson & Dodds, 2006; Rasheed, 2015; Reid & Dixon, 2012), little attention has been given to international students’ multicultural concerns and supervision needs as trainees in counseling programs. These researchers confirmed that much attention has been given to multicultural issues among Euro American and ethnic group trainees but has ignored the unique supervision needs of international students. Even though international students bring important elements to the counseling programs, they are underrepresented minority groups in counseling literature (Mittal & Wieling, 2006; Ng & Smith, 2009). Thus, their unique needs, challenges, training issues, and supervisory experiences are overlooked in mental health and other related
programs. Ng and Smith also pointed out the negative experiences of international students in counseling training programs. International students experienced subtle discrimination from their professors and were frustrated with the narrow focus given only for ethnic minorities, which ignore the presence of international students.

Particularly, in the first semester of their first year, international students struggled with the initial challenges of acclimatization (Nayar-Bhalerao, 2013). The initial period for international counselors/educators-in-training was characterized by lack of family support, limited resources, feeling homesick, having language barriers, feeling socially isolated, and sense of insecurity of being in a new country. The students’ limited English language abilities did not only interfere in their adaptation processes but also hampered their socialization and class participation. The international students in Nayar-Bhalerao’s study were restricted to asking questions and seeking support to understand instructions. In addition, the students were unable to express their needs, felt less confident and more confused, and needed more time to form their thoughts in classroom discussions

International students in the program experienced challenges in understanding “classroom assignments and/or pedagogical format” (Nayar-Bhalerao, 2013, p. 69). They expressed difficulties in handling lengthy research and academic writings, participating in classes, giving presentations, reading comprehensive texts, and doing group work. The teaching-learning approach, which was different from their previous experiences, also created difficulty in their academic development. Moreover, differences in teacher-student relationships and communication styles affected their professional development.

International students also have challenges adapting to differences in communication styles. Researchers (Lee, 2013; Mittal & Wieling, 2006; Nayar-Bhalerao, 2013; Nilsson, 2007;
Rasheed, 2015; Reid & Dixon, 2012) concluded that international students face challenges during their training in counseling programs. Counseling training programs require intensive communication and interaction across different individuals with diverse backgrounds, which may impose communication barriers for international students.

Experiences and Challenges of International Students during Clinical-based Training

International students in counseling programs experience adjustment difficulties and language related concerns, as do international students in different fields of study. However, international students in counseling programs have unique challenges, particularly in relation to their clinical-based training practices (Ng, 2006; Ng & Smith, 2009; Rasheed, 2015; Reid & Dixon, 2012). They have unique concerns and challenges such as adapting to the intensive clinical-based training environments, cultural and personal identity biases, less recognition, and challenges of examining the relevance and applicability of their counseling training to their cultural contexts. Moreover, they struggle to adopt new values and professional identities and to handle intensive workloads and CACREP requirements (Killian, 2001; Pattison, 2003; Seyeneh, 2017). Nilsson and Anderson (2004) summarized the challenges of international counselors-in-training: language barriers, understanding the requirements of a different culture, role ambiguity, and the absence of social support system.

Despite their interest in pursuing their degrees in the U.S., international students face challenges upon their arrival in the U.S. Many international students in Leong and Sedlacek’s (1986) study confirmed that their familiar ways of functioning were disrupted, especially when they were exposed to U.S. norms and behaviors that contrasted with their culture and values (as cited in Nayar-Bhalerao, 2013). During clinical-based training, the international students lacked
opportunities to engage actively in professional activities (conferences and collaboration research). Ng and Smith (2009) also argued that international students did not have chances for effective multicultural counseling training in which counseling topics focused on a narrow scope of multiculturalism and biased texts. Most importantly, according to Ng and Smith, international students are struggling with social acceptance, racism, biases against foreigners, and cultural differences.

Rasheed (2015) explored the lived experiences of international counselor education students in their field based clinical supervision. Rasheed’s findings indicated that international supervisees face a range of challenges and protective factors in their clinical training. The findings confirmed that international students in counseling programs were mistakenly grouped under other minority ethnic groups, and therefore, their specific needs and concerns have been ignored. International students come from different countries with diverse cultural backgrounds, different value systems, behavioral patterns, and attitudes that require special attention and integration of supportive supervision models (Gaballah, 2014; Mittal & Wieling, 2006; Nilsson & Anderson, 2004; Rasheed, 2015; Reid & Dixon, 2012; Seyeneh, 2017).

International counselors/educators-in-training in Nayar-Bhalerao’s (2013) study expressed their apprehensions about their clinical-based training (internship/practicum). They experienced challenges related to their language limitation and anxiety about seeing clients. They felt pressured and developed fear of not relating to clients because of their language limitations and cultural differences. International students in Gaballah’s (2014) study also acknowledged that their limited English language abilities and cultural differences were barriers during their clinical-based practices that provoked feelings of inadequacy and emotional distress. The participants mentioned that they needed to put in extra effort to develop understanding of their
of the participants in Gaballah’s study were exposed to language and cultural prejudice. Gaballah summarized the participants’ clinical-based challenges as follows.

   Low English proficiency provoked some participants’ feelings of inadequacy as counselors and caused emotional distress. Cultural differences created challenges for several participants upon working with clients due to their limited knowledge of the U.S. culture, which sounded a prerequisite for empathizing with American clients’ feelings and experiences therefore, participants needed to put extra efforts to develop understanding of their clients’ worldviews. Some participants were exposed to language and cultural prejudices and discriminatory attitudes from clients who preferred American therapists and refused their services because of their international status. (pp.155-156)

   Challenges in Supervisory Relationships

   Literature has documented international students’ unique needs, which might contribute to barriers in their professional interactions and supervisor-supervisee relationships (Jacob & Greggo, 2001; Rasheed, 2015; Reid & Dixon, 2012). Jacob and Greggo pointed out international students are discriminated against in supervisory relationships because of their limited English language abilities. Compared to American minority ethnic groups, international students are less acculturated, and therefore, they tend to experience more prejudice than other groups.

   Rasheed’s (2015) findings identified some risk factors of international supervisees in counselor education programs: language barriers, cultural differences, supervisors’ cultural insensitivity, and incongruity between counseling training in the U.S. and counseling practices in their home countries. Language barrier is one of the frequent challenges for international students, which adversely affects their communication with supervisors and clients. The participants in Rasheed’s study felt disappointed, discouraged, confused, stupid, and lost when they were not able to express themselves because of their limited language abilities.
In addition to the fact that international students experience various challenges in their clinical-based training, they are not supported by effective supervisory relationships (Ng & Smith, 2009; Rasheed, 2015; Reid & Dixon, 2012). International students in Ng and Smith’s (2009) study acknowledged the negative aspect of supervisory relationships that interfere in professional development. They had difficulties finding supervisors who were willing to provide effective supervision based on their cultural needs and specific concerns. Moreover, they reported difficulties finding supervisors who could mentor their growth and development as a professional. In contrast to Ng and Smith’s findings, participants in Seyeneh’s (2017) pilot study acknowledged the presence of effective supervisory relationships and were able to find supervisors with whom they could work effectively throughout their professional development. The participants felt supported and comforted by supervisors who followed open-door policies even though they were challenged by other concerns.

During clinical based training, international students must participate in verbal communication and discussion; however, their limited language abilities and cultural differences may affect their professional relationships with clients and supervisors (Gaballah, 2014, McClure, 2005, Nayar-Bhalerao, 2013). Moreover, because of different cultural norms and value systems, the students’ ways of communication might vary, which can affect their interactions and professional relationships. In such circumstances, international students are judged as incompetent, particularly by supervisors who are not sensitive and responsive to cultural differences and the students’ needs (Mittal & Wieling, 2006)

Most importantly, supervisors who lack understanding of the challenges may perceive international students as incapable; thus, discrimination against them may surface in professional relationships (Mittal & Wieling, 2006). Moreover, unequal power dynamics in professional
relationships affect international students’ communication in different ways; particularly they may be intimidated and fearful about addressing culturally different perspectives. Mittal and Wieling stated that such power dynamics can negatively affect the students’ ability to engage in meaningful and safe learning environments. Despite the presence of many obstacles (language difficulties, unequal power dynamics, cultural differences), mainstream research on supervision overlooks discussions regarding how to handle such concerns when working with international students. In relation to this, Mori et al. (2009) argued that the lack of discussion about actual differences between supervisors and their international supervisees creates miscommunication and significant dissatisfaction with the supervision relationship and its outcomes.

Nilsson and Anderson (2004) also documented that international students’ level of acculturation influenced their supervisory relationships. In this regard, Mori et al. (2009) suggested that level of acculturation is an important variable that supervisors must give attention to while working with international students. The more international students acculturated to the U.S. culture, the stronger the supervisor-supervisee bond. Sodowsky, Lai, and Plake (1991) described acculturation as a complex process balancing the integration of the majority culture and the preservation of one’s native culture (p. 196). The interplay of various factors (e.g., country of origin, religion, duration in the U.S., age, level of education, and ethnic diversity of the community) differentially affect international students’ acculturation processes. For example, according to Mori et al., the longer international students stayed in the U.S., the stronger their level of acculturation. Conversely, when international students were less acculturated, they were more likely to bring cultural discussion issues into supervision sessions (Nilsson & Anderson, 2004; Nilsson & Dodds, 2006). Nilsson and Anderson described cultural discussions as a two-
way communication between the supervisor and supervisee on the similarities and differences of
the supervisee’s culture and its influence on his/her clinical work.

Hird, Tao, and Gloria (2005) argued that less responsive and competent supervisors tend
to spend less, or no, time discussing cultural issues with their international supervisees. In
addition, Hird et al. mentioned that the quality of cultural discussion highly matters in
supervisor-supervisee relationships. The quality of cultural discussion is dependent on the
frequency, depth of discussion, and feeling safe in discussions. Hird et al. concluded that when
Euro-American supervisors engaged less in cultural discussions, particularly in cross-racial
dyads, they are perceived as having low cultural competence (Pritchett-Johnson, 2011; Rasheed,
2015). The insufficient cultural discussion can make international students feel marginalized and
uncared for. In such circumstances, international students feel unsafe openly discussing
differences. Although supervisors’ multicultural competency and cultural discussion can
facilitate supervisory relationships, Nilsson and Dodds (2006) reported that little attention is
given to incorporate cultural discussion in cross–racial supervisory relationships. Rasheed’s
findings also confirmed that supervisors’ insensitivity adversely affected international
supervisees’ personal and professional development. Participants acknowledged their struggles
of being from a different culture and working with a supervisor who is culturally insensitive.
The international supervisees expected their supervisors to prepare them well and to deal with
cultural differences; however, some supervisors were not adequately prepared to assist
international students.

Sangganjanavanich and Black (2009) noted that although supervision is an important
aspect of personal and professional development for international counselors-in-training,
supervisors face many challenges dealing with international students’ issues (e.g., language
concerns, cultural differences). In this regard, cultural competence has been an important aspect of supervisory relationships. Supervisors who lack cultural competence do not offer enabling environments for appropriate cultural discussions and do not provide necessary support and guidance to international supervisees (Sangganjanavanich & Black). If supervisors fail to facilitate enabling environments for cultural discussions, it may lead to miscommunication and misunderstanding, hidden agendas, and disconnection between the supervisor and the supervisee. Most importantly, international supervisees’ growth is positively correlated to supervisors’ cultural competence; therefore, international supervisees’ growth may be determined by effective supervisory relationships, which may not be common for international students in other discipline-based academic programs (Gaballah, 2014; Rasheed, 2015; Sangganjanavanich & Black, 2009; Seyeneh, 2017).

Rasheed (2015) reported that competent supervisors who listen to international students’ feedback and encourage them to share their experiences can support international students. However, according to Rasheed, this important element is missing, and the needs of international students are ignored. Rasheed stressed that ignoring the needs of international students is not “only stressful and exhausting” for them, but also it induces a negative effect on their “counseling developmental skills as they train in the U.S. as well as when they practice upon returning home” (p. 78). Mori et al. (2009) also suggested that supervisors must understand international supervisees’ needs and must strive to improve their cultural competence to address existing issues effectively. Supervisors should also be sensitive and responsive to the ongoing concerns of their supervisees in general and unique concerns of international supervisees in particular (Fukuyama, 1994; Leong & Wagner, 1994; Mori et al.; Rasheed, 2015; Nilsson & Anderson, 2004; Nilsson & Dodds, 2006).
Acculturation

Similar to supervisory relationships, international students in Ng and Smith’s (2009) study had difficulty in establishing positive interpersonal interactions with domestic students and university community members in their host universities. The participants’ foreign status hindered them from building relationships with faculty, peers, and clients. Most importantly, international students were viewed as being incompetent by Americans, which limited their ability to develop and display counseling competencies. According to Ng and Smith, international students’ cultural backgrounds and personal dispositions also interfered with their professional development and limited their active engagement in verbal and cultural communications.

Nayar-Bhalerao (2013) noted that counselor education programs must widened multicultural discussions beyond the Western nomenclature to serve international students in an effective manner. International students can share their concerns and seek support when faculty are willing and committed to reaching out to those students. Recognizing the students’ cultural differences and language barriers as well as available resources is mandatory to address their specific needs and challenges. Nayar-Bhalerao’s findings indicated that international students in CACREP-accredited programs emphasized the importance of adapting to the new environment. However, they noted they have had many struggles to acculturate and adopt as well as break through barriers and the interplay of multiple factors: language limitation, psychosocial, and cultural factors adversely influenced their adaptation processes.

Participants in Nayar-Bhalerao’s (2013) research struggled with multiculturalism and diversity issues. They had difficulty understanding some multicultural concepts that were
discussed in class. The participants reported that classroom discussions lacked diversity and inclusion of others’ experiences. The students were also stereotyped and racially discriminated against in classrooms and/or other social contexts. In addition to language struggles and experiences of anxiety, international students are exposed to racial tensions that exist among various ethnic groups, which is often different from their own countries.

The notions of racism and discrimination are often new experiences for international students, which can be an additional barrier in their interpersonal relationships and professional development (Jacob & Greggo, 2001). Race is not a concern for international students; however, multicultural classroom discussions often focused on it (Nayar-Bhalerao, 2013). In such circumstances, international students sometimes did not understand and relate to the content; thus, they were disappointed and developed feelings of disconnectedness from the subject matter.

Findings in Seyeneh’s (2017) pilot study supported Ng and Smith’s results. Some of the participants in this qualitative pilot study reported their cultural backgrounds interfered with their professional development. However, other participants acknowledged the importance of their cultural background as additions to the hosting counseling programs through diversifying multicultural concepts as well as creating opportunities to challenge individuals’ (faculty’s, supervisors’, peers’, and clients’) deep-rooted values and beliefs as well as facilitating openness, cultural awareness, and understanding of diversity. Cultural differences also conflicted with the students’ acculturation processes, particularly when international students strived to maintain their own cultural norms while fitting into the U.S. culture. In addition, situational or environmental factors forced the students to develop a sense of self as an international student that distinguished and sometimes led them to feelings of frustration and interfered with their needs to adapt to the foreign country (Nayar-Bhalerao, 2013).
Mori et al. (2009) reported the positive correlation between level of acculturation and cultural discussion to international students’ level of satisfaction with supervision. A higher level of cultural discussion positively related to higher levels of satisfaction (Mori et al., 2009; Nilsson & Dodds, 2006). Inconsistent with Mori et al.’s findings, less acculturated international students in Nilsson and Dodd’s research expressed more satisfaction with their supervision experiences than those who were more acculturated to the U.S. culture. Therefore, the more acculturated students in Nilsson and Dodd’s study reported their supervisors were less culturally competent, which caused them to feel discouraged and less engaged in cultural discussions. In this regard, Mori et al. recommended the importance of understanding the level of acculturation and incorporating cultural discussions in supervision as well as tailoring the discussions based on the needs of international students to facilitate supervision relationships. Most importantly, according to Mori et al., supervisors should be aware of the existing cultural differences and recognize their supervisees’ needs. This process offers culturally appropriate and enabling environments for dialogue and smooth flow of communication, which in turn can facilitate the supervisory relationships and international students’ professional development.

The international supervisees in Rasheed’s (2015) study were struggling to deal with the difficulties of cultural differences. The supervisors did not effectively address their supervisees’ cultural concerns in the supervisory relationships, which often affected communication. International supervisees’ cultures, particularly those that were collectivist, conflicted with the mainstream individualistic U.S. culture in some respects (see also Gaballah, 2014). International students were expected to be assertive, to speak their mind freely, and to express their feelings and thoughts openly, which is sometimes a very different expectation from their cultural values. Moreover, some of the international supervisees faced culture shock when they were expected to
deal with clients with different sexual orientations (e.g., gay and lesbian). International students also faced difficulty advocating for clients who had values and lifestyles against their cultural beliefs (Rasheed). Similarly, international students were confused about the concept of counseling and the process of understanding clients’ case in the U.S., which is different from the way it is handled in their country of origin. Despite the presence of such cultural differences, supervisors were not ready to address those challenges, and international supervisees hesitated to share their experiences because of unwelcoming supervisory relationships and learning environments.

The international students in Gaballah’s (2014) study were from the collectivistic culture, which operates with group-oriented and collective responsibility. The international students faced difficulties shifting from family and group-oriented, interdependent, and communal cultures into a very individualistic culture that expected them to be independent, express themselves freely, and be assertive. Moreover, international students experienced cognitive contradictions that “resulted from wrestling to find balance between the values and behavioral expectations of their culture and those present in the host culture” (p. 96).

Gaballah (2014) argued that the degree of one’s cultural divergence from the host culture determines the adaptation and acculturation processes. International students face challenges acclimatizing to the Western educational system that promotes independence and values assertiveness, while international students belong to a culture that emphasizes conformity and hierarchical learning structures. The informal relationships between teacher-student in classrooms do not give comfort to international students in counseling programs.

Participants in Gaballah’s (2014) study expressed that their difficulties were mostly related to the high demands of the doctoral program that expected them to simultaneously
prepare for teaching, research, practicum, and other services. The doctoral program in counselor 
education is time consuming, intense, very competitive, and challenging and requires 
international students to go through new self-identity and professional development (Gaballah; 
Seyeneh, 2017). The students described that the process was both very stressful and rewarding in 
that it required them go through very significant personal transformations.

Based on their findings, Mori et al. (2009) also recommended the importance of 
understanding the level of acculturation and incorporating cultural discussions in supervision as 
well as tailoring it based on the needs of international students to facilitate supervisory working 
alliances. Most importantly, according to Mori et al., supervisors should be aware of the existing 
cultural differences and should recognize their supervisees’ needs. This offers culturally 
appropriate and enabling environments for dialogue and a smooth flow of communication, which 
in turn can facilitate the supervisory working alliances and international students’ professional development.

In conclusion, Gaballah (2014) explored the training and supervisory experiences and 
challenges of international doctoral students in CACREP-accredited counselor education 
programs. Gaballah reported that although the number of international students in counseling 
programs has been increasing, their unique difficulties and needs have not had enough attention 
from the programs. Their unique perspectives and contributions to higher education are not 
incorporated into the counseling curricula. Most importantly, international students in Rasheed’s 
(2015) study faced difficulty addressing their future expectations. Neither the supervisors nor the 
counselor education programs supported and/or encouraged discussions about transferring the 
Western counseling knowledge and skills to their countries. International students in Gaballah’s 
(2014) study also reported difficulties in finding the relevance of the training to their society
back home. The supervisors overlooked this important element in supervisory relationships most often. Based on the findings, Rasheed noted that the number of international students in counseling programs is increasing; therefore, she recommends that clinical supervisors should be better prepared to help them meet their future expectations. Additionally, supervisors should receive special training to qualify them to deal with international students’ cultural differences and different communication patterns (Gaballah).

Support Systems and Protective Factors

Based on Gaballah’s (2014) findings, most international students in counselor education programs succeed in their professional development goals as either counselor educators or counselors despite the presence of many challenges and difficulties. According to Rasheed (2015), international students have protective factors that help them break through barriers and cope with adversities. Rasheed divided the protective factors into three themes: personal development, cultural sensitivity, and supervisors’ compassion. Personal development is the international students’ general attitude of being stronger, more determined, and more responsible for their leaning processes. Having such strong positive attitudes, international supervisees preferred to believe in their potential and depended more on themselves than on others when they needed resources or knowledge.

Cultural sensitivity was another important aspect that helped international supervisees to break through barriers (Rasheed, 2015). International supervisees were sensitive to the cultural requirements of the hosting program and mainstream culture, but they all shared a sense of being different from the mainstream culture and did research (Seyeneh, 2017) to adapt to the new environment. According to Rasheed, the supervisors’ compassion was also one of the important
protective factors that helped international supervisees deal with challenges, particularly in their clinical-based training. The supervisors’ support and understanding facilitated international supervisees’ counseling skill development. Supervisors, particularly those who were from minority groups in America or supervisors who had previous international experiences, were more supportive and understanding of existing differences and were willing to facilitate cultural discussions.

Gaballah’s (2014) findings pointed out that many international students exhibited a constructive and positive sense of self within the host environment. The international students had resiliency attributes and personal growth that helped them navigate challenges and barriers. According to Gaballah, international students counteracted feelings of incompetency and self-doubts by relying on their resilience and utilizing personal strengths that facilitated opportunities for growth and promoted adjustment in the hosts’ new academic contexts. Many of the international students had the ability to reframe challenges and stressors into opportunities for learning and growth. Gaballah stated that resilient participants have characteristics such as sense of determination and self-discipline, persistence and tenacity, optimistic attitudes, open minds, faith/spirituality, organizational skills and perseverance, hard work and sense of focus. They for help or guidance and searched and used available resources for personal and professional growth. Nayar-Bhalerao (2013) also acknowledged the importance of social connectedness for international students to help them navigate the challenges of isolation and loneliness. The participants in her study found ways to connect themselves with other international students and/or domestic students and community members who supported them to share experiences and to learn through interpersonal interactions.
Seyeneh’s (2017) pilot study findings also acknowledged the importance of support systems and protective factors for international doctoral students to grow as counselor-educators. Although the professional development process was challenging, the presence of various support systems (professors, classmates, and community members) and the participants’ enhanced self-care as well as their interpersonal interactions helped them to navigate through barriers. The participants mentioned that some professors and supervisors followed open door policies, in which the students could stop by their offices any time for support and guidance. In addition, some supervisors identified the participants’ unique needs and empowered them to be autonomous through various strategies (e.g., providing supportive challenges). Classmates helped the participants check in and air their anxieties and frustrations together. Programs also supported them through providing assistantships (teaching and research) that were important to solve participants’ financial challenges as well as for their professional development as counselor educators.

Nayar-Bhalerao (2013) explored the lived experiences of international counselors/educators-in-training in CACREP-accredited counseling programs. The findings identified possible ways counseling programs and faculty members can facilitate successful and supportive educational experiences. Nayar-Bhalerao’s findings indicated that counseling programs should facilitate smoother transitions for international students. According to Nayar-Bhalerao, faculty members should be aware of international students’ difficulties and should address structural, cultural, and academic challenges through orientations and continued open discussions.
The importance of incorporating cultural issues in counseling and supervision traces back to Vander Kolk’s (1974) work. Vander Kolk identified the possible influences of supervisor-supervisee cultural differences on effective supervisory processes. Supporting this claim, Hird, Cavalier, Dulko, Felice, and Ho (2001) argued that cultural differences in supervision might induce conflicts that can interfere with effective communication and relationships; thus, addressing cultural issues is vital for effective supervision (Campbell, 2006). Understanding learners’ cultural contexts is one of the fundamental concepts in Vygotsky’s sociocultural learning theory (Turuk, 2008). The human mind is mediated and, therefore, the intermediary of tools or signs that carry specific cultural meanings influence humans’ actions. According to Vander Kolk, Vygotsky advocates, “The role of teachers should be to understand how human social and mental activity is organized through culturally constructed meanings” (pp. 245-246). Vygotsky’s theory helps counseling programs and counselor educators understand and consider learners’/supervisees’ sociocultural contexts for effective communication processes and to address the learners’/supervisees’ needs. Vygotsky claims that sociocultural forces (culture, social interactions/contacts in specific contexts, cultural tools/artifacts) all affect individuals’ communication, thoughts, actions, and behaviors (as cited in Wertsch, 1985). Since international students come from a different culture, they may vary from the rest of learners/supervisees and/or their supervisors/professors (Abramson, 2012; Jordan, 2010). Therefore, the implication of the sociocultural theory in supervisor-supervisee relationships, according to Constantine and Sue (2005), is that supervisors must recognize the presence of such cultural differences and should openly discuss influences of race and culture with their supervisees. This process
encourages international supervisees to express their cultural experiences, values, and norms as well the similarities and differences of their cultural background with the hosting culture to help international students articulate their supervisory relation experiences. Nilsson and Dodds (2006) supported this notion. They noted that supervisors must be responsible for facilitating cultural discussions that can positively influence supervisory relationships. Gardner (2002) also recommended that ignoring the diversity issues and cultural discussions in supervisory relationships could adversely affect the process and hamper supervisees’ personal and professional development.

Williams and Burden (1997) explained the role of sociocultural learning theory in education. They stated that sociocultural theory advocates that “education should be concerned not just with theories of instruction, but with learning to learn, developing skills and strategies to continue to learn, with making learning experiences meaningful and relevant to the learner/individual, with developing and growing as a whole person” (p. 247). Sociocultural theory explains that education can never be value-free; it is underpinned based on a set of beliefs and societal constructs of specific contexts in which individuals grew up. Coming from different societies, international students’ learning processes and knowledge acquisition have been impacted by explicit and implicit beliefs and societal constructs of their specific society (Abramson, 2012; Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003; Jordan, 2010). According to the sociocultural theoretical principle, teachers should understand the manifestation and existence of their students’ deep-rooted beliefs and cultural values during interpersonal interactions and teaching-learning processes, which can help students to address their learning needs.

Gutierrez (1982) stated that the U.S. education system has given clear attention and privilege to white students. According to Gutierrez, this trend is not only seen in counseling
programs, but also among students from minority groups who have received little attention in other education programs. Gutierrez pointed out some educators’ and supervisors’ claim equal treatment to all students; however, in reality, she found students from non-majority groups are treated differently. International students who are mistakenly generalized with U.S. racial and ethnic minorities lack opportunities to address their unique needs (Gaballah, 2014; Rasheed, 2015). Gutierrez strengthens the sociocultural theoretical explanation of understanding learners’/students’ cultural values and beliefs in the learning environment. She argues that students should be understood within their cultural contexts; particularly in counseling programs, the importance of integrating cultural contexts should be considered at all times. Although multiculturalism has been given due attention recently because of the rapid growth and enrollment of racial and/or ethnic groups, the needs of international students are still overlooked (Mittal & Wieling, 2006; Ng, 2006; Ng & Smith, 2009; Rasheed; Sangganjanavanich & Black, 2009). In this regard, the sociocultural explanation strengthens the importance of providing culturally appropriate learning environments.

According to Williams and Burden (1997), sociocultural theory appreciates that learning should construct meaning instead of mere acquisition and presentation of discrete skills and knowledge. In relation to this, the theory emphasizes the importance of incorporating what the learner brings to the learning situation as “an active meaning-maker and problem-solver” (p.248). Research shows that international students in counselor education and supervision programs have revealed their concerns and complained that their experiences are not valued and incorporated in the learning process (Gaballah, 2014; Rasheed, 2015; Seyeneh, 2017). In this regard, the sociocultural learning theory suggests that supervisors/professors and/or counselor education programs should utilize international students’ experiences and incorporate them into
the learning processes whenever appropriate. Supporting the sociocultural explanation, Moll (1992) noted the importance of acknowledging the influence of culture and language as well as understanding the culturally conditioned knowledge students bring to the table can help create effective teaching-learning processes. Moll studied concept formation and provision of effective education for linguistically and culturally diverse students:

One advantage [of a sociocultural approach] is that in studying human beings dynamically, within their social circumstances, in their full complexity, we gain a much more complete...a much more understanding of them. We also gain, particularly in the case of minority learners, a more positive view of their capabilities and how our pedagogy often constraints, and just as often distorts, what they do and what they are capable of doing. (p. 239)

Similarly, John-Steiner and Mahn (1996) stated that sociocultural theory gives high emphasis to the influence of culture and language on human development and the learning process. Language anxiety has been a common issue for most of the international students during their stay in the U.S. and other foreign universities (Yeh & Inose, 2003). Various study findings confirmed the language limitations and associated challenges of international students, particularly counselor educators/counselors-in-training in counselor education programs, struggle with language barriers during their professional development and clinical-based training (Gaballah, 2014; Lin & Yi, 1997; Nayar-Bhalerao, 2013; Özturgut & Murphy 2009; Rasheed, 2015; Yeh & Inose). The sociocultural learning theory demonstrates how CES programs can be responsive to the limited English language abilities of international students (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003; John-Steiner & Mahn; Özturgut & Murphy, 2009; Yeh & Inose).
Connection to Methodology

Consistent with Vygotsky’s (1978) theory, I acknowledge the importance and influence of cultural values in one’s personal and professional development. I support the view that individuals’ experiences are reflections of cultural practices and social interactions acquired through engagements in specific settings (Abramson, 2012). Therefore, similar to Vygotsky’s theoretical model, I understand that the experience of international students is predominantly shaped by their socio-cultural background and their engagements in specific settings. The theory guided me in formulating research methods (research and interview questions, data collection and interpretation procedures). Moreover, the model helped me conceptualize international students’ cultural differences and investigate the participants’ unique as well as diverse lived experiences based on their own words instead of imposing my assumptions, interpretations, and biases as well as generalizations. When international students come to CES programs, they may have many differences (Rasheed, 2015; Reid & Dixon, 2012). The way they interact with people, their communication and learning styles, and even their language (Hwang, 2014) might be different from domestic people in the host universities. Therefore, I explored and understood the participants’ lived experiences based on the sociocultural learning theory principles that provided opportunities for participants to articulate their lived experiences from their perspectives. Additionally, the theory helped me be cognizant about my biases as an international student in a CES program (insider views) and my role as a researcher (outsider role) as well as gain recognition of subjectivity that enhances safeguarding trustworthiness (Jackson, Drummond, & Camara, 2007). According to Jackson et al., recognition of subjectivity is important during the
research process to check researcher’s beliefs and values that could give opportunities to understand the experiences from the participants’ viewpoints.

Gaps in the Literature

Although ongoing research has documented some lived experiences of international students in CES programs, previous studies have left gaps in thoroughly exploring the overall lived experiences of international doctoral students/graduates; therefore, the literature lacks important recommendations about the ways in which counselor education programs and faculty members can facilitate supportive educational settings. Previous studies, for example Rasheed (2015), explored the lived experiences of international master’s and doctoral students only during their field based clinical supervision by using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Another study by Nayar-Bhalerao (2013) explored the lived experiences of international master’s and doctoral students only in CACREP-accredited counselor education programs. Similarly, Gaballah (2014) explored the training and supervisory experiences and challenges of international doctoral students in CACREP-accredited programs. By exploring the overall lived experiences of international doctoral students and graduates of either CACREP or non-CACREP-accredited programs, the current study intended to fill the gap in the literature, particularly about the need for incorporating inclusive multicultural counseling courses in CES programs. Additionally, by using a phenomenological interpretative approach and in-depth interviews, the current study provided opportunities for the students to voice their experiences and suggestions for CES programs.
Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed relevant literature and documented important details about international students in general and the lived experiences of international students in CES programs in particular. The contributions, benefits, and challenges of international students were addressed in detail. Additionally, related literature about the lived experiences of international students during clinical-based training was thoroughly discussed. The background developed from the literature review provided a broader foundation for examining my participants’ perspectives of their experiences in CES programs. The implications and importance of the theoretical framework are also outlined in this section. Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural learning theory acknowledged the importance of culture and understanding its influence in any learning environment. To address the unique needs of international students/supervisees, the theory encourages counselor education programs and/or counselor educators to provide culturally inclusive and appropriate learning environments. Viewing the research project from Vygotsky’s sociocultural perspective helped me frame the methodological design (interviews, data collection strategies, and data analysis).
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the current study’s methodological design. It gives details about the methodological framework, participants’ selection criteria, data collection, and data analysis procedures. The methodology was chosen to be consistent with the study’s theoretical framework that explored the participants’ perspectives about their lived experiences, challenges, adversities, contributions, and their support systems. The study addressed the following four research questions.

1. How do recent international graduates and ABD students describe their overall experiences in counselor education and supervision doctoral programs?
2. What challenges do international graduates and ABD students face in counselor education and supervision programs?
3. How do international graduates and ABD students describe support systems during their doctoral study in counselor education and supervision programs?
4. How do international graduates and ABD students think they contribute to the counselor education and supervision programs in the host universities?

Methodological Framework

I guided this study based on a phenomenological approach (Gadamer, 1989; Kafle, 2011) that focused on interpretative narration of the participants’ experiences in a meaningful way.
Various researchers define phenomenology in terms of its importance. For example, Kafle (2011) defines phenomenology as an umbrella term that encompasses “both a philosophical movement and a range of research approaches” (p.181). Finlay (2009) stated that phenomenology is the study of phenomena (their nature and meanings) that provides spaces for individuals’ lived experiences. van Manen (1997) described phenomenology as a “method/practice of observing, recording, and interpreting lived experiences through vivid and detailed description” (p.13). The practice of phenomenology seeks to uncover lived experiences constructed in a particular situation. van Manen added that phenomenological research is a “poetizing activity and informed process of meaning-making/interpretation” (p. 13). Through informed process, researchers immerse themselves in the phenomena and seek to explain them thematically. Additionally, they actively engage in a meaning making process and deeper understanding of the phenomena.

The purpose of the current study was to understand the lived experiences of international doctoral students and graduates of counselor education programs, a phenomenological approach was appropriate. This approach provided a rich texture for understanding and uncovering the participants’ lived experiences (Kafle, 2011). Most importantly, the phenomenological interpretative approach offered opportunities for the participants to describe their perspectives and personal experiences based on their own words and cultural values (Finlay, 2009). The focus of the phenomenology was on understanding, interpreting, and meaning making based on cultural, social, and historical contexts.
Research Design

Description of Participants and Site

Seven international doctoral students and graduates from six counselor education and supervision (CES) programs were recruited from four regions of the U.S. (West, Southwest, Southeast, and Midwest) for the current study. Three of the participants were doctoral candidates who were in their dissertation stage, whereas four of the participants were graduates of CES programs. The participants were from CACREP-accredited CES programs. The participants, except for one, identified as female. Three of the participants were from Africa (one from Uganda, two from Ethiopia); three were from Asia (India, South Korea, and Taiwan); and the other participant was from Europe.

Although I planned to recruit at least 10 participants for the current study, I decided seven participants would be enough because saturation and repetition of data were evident during the data collection processes (Mason, 2010). Mason argued that since qualitative study is concerned with meaning making, the number of participants is smaller when compared to a quantitative study. Although a considerable sample size is necessary for the presence of diverse experiences, too large a sample size at the same time becomes repetitive regarding new data. Therefore, according to Glaser and Straus (1967), the decision of sample size should follow the concept of saturation; “new data does not shed any further light on the issue under investigation” (p. 2).

Morse (2000) also noted factors that affect the decision of sample size: “the scope of the study, the nature of the topic, the quality of the study, and the study design” (p. 4). Morse recommended at least six participants for phenomenological study (as cited in Mason, 2010), whereas Creswell (1998) recommended five to 25 participants. Saturation was evident, so seven
participants provided enough detailed perspectives for the current phenomenological study (Mason, 2010).

**Participants Selection Procedures**

The participants’ selection procedures and substantial sample size are important considerations to yield thick description of the issue under study (Mason, 2010; Seidman, 2006). The participants were selected on a criterion-based strategy that considered only F-1 visa holder international doctoral students who had completed course requirements and were working on their dissertation (ABD) and/or only international faculty who had graduated from CES doctoral programs not earlier than Spring 2015. Purposive and/or convenience sampling was an appropriate strategy for selecting participants who fulfilled the inclusion criteria and who have had diverse experiences (Guetterman, 2015). Two of the participants were recruited based on the information I shared in the International Students and Faculty Interest Network (ISFIN) meeting in October 2017 during the Association for the Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) annual conference. The other three participants were selected based on an announcements/invitation letter (see Appendix A) I posted on the CES Network-Listserv (CESNET-L). Additionally, one of the participants was selected based on personal contact, and the other participant was selected based on snowball sampling (Guetterman, 2015).

After I received the participants’ responses about their willingness to participate in the study, I emailed an informed consent letter (see Appendix B) and a demographic form (see Appendix C) to those who fulfilled the inclusion criteria. After I received the signed consent form, I scheduled interviews for each participant based on his/her preference. To facilitate participation and to obtain the needed number of participants, I
announced a drawing to win one of three $50 gift cards. Upon completion of the interviews, three participants were randomly selected and received gift cards.

Data Collection

Data collection methods in qualitative design flow from the research questions (Corbin & Strauss, 1990); hence, the research problems shape the data collection methods helpful for exploring the participants’ lived experiences, their settings, and the situations to the extent possible (Creswell, 2013). I collected the data by using in-depth interviews based on Seidman’s (2006) three interview series: focused life history or background information, the details of the experience, and reflection on the meaning. Seidman noted, “At the root of in-depth interviewing, there is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meanings they make of that experience” (p. 3). In-depth interviews gathered descriptive data in the participants’ own words that helped me develop insight into how they interpret their lives and learning experiences (Cohen & Swerdlink, 2005; Weiss, 1994). As an interview is a reciprocal affair, it provided opportunities for the participants to ask for clarification and describe their experiences/perspectives in a detailed manner and offered me chances to follow-up and explore for more information (Cohen & Swerdlink; Seidman, 2006).

The interviews lasted from November 2017 to February 2018. Through the interview process, I combined Seidman’s (2006) three interview forms together. The beginning phase (background information) of the interview helped me build rapport and context, which enabled the participants to develop trust and encouraged them to share their lived experiences as openly as possible (Seidman). In this stage, I explored the participants’ personal and professional
backgrounds, their interest in joining the CES doctoral program in U.S. universities, and the participants’ first impressions about their CES programs.

In the second phase, I focused on exploring the participants’ lived experiences by using a semi-structured open-ended interview guide (see Appendix D). During this stage, the participants described their perspectives of their professional developmental needs and how the programs addressed their needs. Additionally, they shared their opinions about their advanced practicum experiences in the five domains of a CES doctoral program (teaching, counseling, supervision, leadership, and advocacy) and their challenges during their practicum hours. Furthermore, the participants reflected on their expectations from their programs, their experiences with supervisors and instructors, and their support systems in the CES programs. This interview phase was also essential to explore the participants’ overall adversities, cultural identities, and how their cultural backgrounds influenced their professional identity development. I also deeply explored the participants’ overall lived experiences regarding their adjustment processes; how the programs addressed their cultural needs; the participants’ possible contributions to their CES programs and host universities; the participants’ perspectives about their interpersonal interactions and self-care; and their views about the current U.S. politics.

By using follow-up questions, the final phase of the interviews focused on exploring the participants’ reflections on the meanings of their lived experiences (Seidman, 2006). The final interview questions addressed “the intellectual and emotional connections between the participants’ work and life” (p. 12). At this stage, the participants shared their perspectives about how they defined their personal and professional identities; summarized their overall experiences in five key words; and described their future career plans. Additionally, in the final stage, the
participants provided their recommendations for international students, CES programs and faculty, and international offices at host universities.

I prepared semi-structured open-ended interview guides (see Appendix D) that encompassed the four research questions (lived experiences, challenges, support systems as well as contributions). I conducted one of the interviews face-to-face; six of the interviews through Skype, and one of the interviews over the phone. To obtain full details, I recorded the interviews and took field notes after securing informed consent (see Appendix B). Field notes and self-reflection journals were important to document the participants’ recruitment and data collection processes; to be aware of my presuppositions, values or beliefs; and to collect in-depth data (Glesne, 2011; Ortlipp, 2009). I conducted the interviews in English. The time duration varied for each participant depending on his/her lived experiences. However, the average duration did not exceed 90 minutes. Except for one, I conducted follow-up interviews with six of the participants for clarity and additional information. The follow-up interviews were through email, phone, and/or Skype.

To ensure effective communication, I applied different techniques (e.g., listened more, talked less; asked follow-up questions without interrupting; and avoided leading questions) and made the questions clear and understandable (Seidman, 2006). By creating safe and enabling environments, I took care not to embarrass the participants and allowed them opportunities to express their opinions and perspectives as openly as possible. Hence, I interviewed each participant separately to ensure privacy. By using pseudonyms, I maintained confidentiality. Additionally, I scheduled the time of each interview according to the participants’ preferences.
Data Analysis

I employed NVivo software to analyze the data. First, I transcribed the interview recordings manually. LeCompte (2000) identified five steps of data analysis: tidying up, finding items, creating stable sets of items, creating patterns, and assembling structures. Gale, Heath, Cameron, Rashid, and Redwood (2013) also developed a framework of data analysis procedures that includes five data analysis steps: transcription, familiarization with the interview data, coding, developing a working analytical framework, and applying the analytical framework. For the current study, I employed open and selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) and integrated Gale et al.’s and LeCompte’s data analysis procedures when necessary. The following sections present the current study’s data analysis procedures in detail.

Coding

Qualitative design offers opportunities for researchers to analyze data during data collection (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). I started transcription and coding of the audio records right after the first interview. I transcribed the interviews word for word to understand the perspectives of each participant. This process provided opportunities for immersing myself in the data and developing insight as well as for conceptualizing the existing patterns and themes (Gale et al., 2013; Saldana, 2013; Seidman, 2006). Then I created files based on the type of data or data sources (e.g., interviews, field notes/reflective notes) that helped me easily access the required data (LeCompte, 2000). After arranging the data, I read and reread my reflective notes and transcripts. I also listened to audio recordings repeatedly to familiarize myself with the data and conceptualize existing similarities and differences. Becoming familiar with the data was a vital
process to capture the main concepts and themes (Saldana, 2013). Then I employed open and selective coding to guide the data analysis process.

**NVivo Software**

Although Saldana (2013) recommended coding small-scale qualitative data manually, I used NVivo software for analysis because of its efficient processing for large data. NVivo software facilitated data analysis through breaking down the data, creating coding patterns, and identifying relationships as well as making comparisons. The software also helped to organize data from different interview transcripts and to picture existing patterns (Hu, 2016).

**Open Coding**

Open coding is an interpretative process to break down data analytically (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The main purpose of open coding in the current study was to gain insight into the data. During this stage, I employed an inductive coding process. Without having pre-specified ideas, the codes emerged from the existing data (Creswell, 2013). I coded any available information that might be relevant from as many different perspectives as possible by using NVivo. For example, I focused on coding the elements of the data that referred to particular behaviors, incidents, structures, emotions, beliefs, values, experiences, body movements and facial expressions, perspectives, sound/voice tones, and/or explanations and viewpoints (Corbin & Strauss; Seidman, 2006).

In the process, I broke the data into themes and categories. Then I compared the data for similarities and differences and labeled the data conceptually. The process helped me identify existing patterns and further the specificity and precision of generating core concepts (Saldana,
The constant use of comparisons for similarities and differences helped me break through my subjectivity and biases (Kolb, 2012). In each step of open coding, I engaged in understanding the participants’ experiences by reading and re-reading the transcripts and cleaning up redundant information using NVivo’s parent nodes. Although cleaning up is challenging, Seidman (2006) recommends that researchers look for patterns to determine what is significant for interpretation and meaning making. Through open coding, I recognized important research themes that appeared frequently across the interviews and made significant judgements for cleaning up (Kolb; Seidman).

Selective Coding

Further to capture the participants’ thoughts, views, perceptions, and perspectives, I employed selective coding. Selective coding is the process of selecting the core categories, systematically relating them to the other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Kaluch, 2004). Selective coding using NVivo helped me group similar and major themes together to address the four research questions guiding the study (Gale et al., 2013).

Researcher Role

As an international doctoral student in a CACREP-accredited CES program, I have experienced distinctive concerns (language difficulty, differences in cultural values and norms and ways of communication, differences in learning styles, ways of interpersonal interactions and friendship, and misunderstandings) that have affected my personal and professional development. Therefore, I hold insider views and perspectives. I also hold assumptions and
biases about the lived experiences of international students in CES programs. For example, I assume that international students in doctoral CES programs are struggling with limited English language ability, particularly during their clinical fieldwork as counselors and supervisors with American clients and supervisees, respectively. I also hold an assumption that the current multicultural models in counselor education and supervision programs do not effectively address the diverse needs of international students; therefore, international students in the programs lack the necessary support as well as encouragement for their personal and professional growth. Thus, my assumptions and insider views as well as my judgments and my lived experiences surfaced during the data collection and interpretation processes.

However, as a researcher, I also had an outsider role, so I managed my biases and limited the impositions of my assumptions and insider views. Although avoiding all biases was challenging, I worked through them and kept myself as an outsider to minimize my personal judgments, views, and conclusions. I focused on the detailed descriptions of the participants’ lived experiences based on their own words and interpretations. I used multiple strategies that helped me focus on the interview data (e.g., listening to the interview records and reading the interview transcripts repeatedly, self-talk – processing the participants’ words in my mind, and using reflective journals as well as being self-aware during the data analysis). These processes helped ensure the trustworthiness of the research findings (Connelly, 2016; Cypress, 2017). Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey (2011) also stated that qualitative researchers assume different roles, particularly during the data collection process; “Qualitative researchers need to be open minded, curious and empathetic, flexible, and able to listen to people telling their own story” (p. 9). Therefore, I assumed roles that facilitated the data collection process. Additionally, as a growing counselor-educator, I abide with the American Counseling Association’s ethical principles of
unbiased interpretation (ACA, 2014), which helped me reduce my biases and self-impositions throughout the whole research process. Using reflective memos was also essential for checking my biases, thoughts, and impositions. Most importantly, participant check-ins and follow-up interviews as well as proofreading by qualitative research experts assisted me in minimizing my potentially biased interpretations. My dissertation chair and committee members were also the best resources for assisting me with my objectivity.

Ensuring Trustworthiness

Various researchers have described trustworthiness in different ways (Connelly, 2016; Cypress, 2017). For example, Yin (1994) describes trustworthiness as “criterion to judge the quality of a research design” (as cited in Cypress, 2017, p. 253). Trustworthiness refers to “quality, authenticity, and truthfulness of findings of qualitative research” (Cypress, 2017, p. 254). Guba (1981) has outlined four criteria that help maintain trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The current study met these criteria.

Credibility

Credibility in qualitative research deals with the accuracy and congruency of the findings in relation to the reality of the participants’ lived experiences (Cypress, 2017; Guba, 1981; Shenton, 2004). To ensure credibility and to minimize distortion of reality, I applied different strategies: triangulation (interviews, reflective journals, and follow-up interviews), intensive engagement with the data, self-reflection journals, member-checking, peer-debriefing, voluntary participation, fostering trust and honesty during data collection, and familiarity with the
participants’ cultural backgrounds before data collection (Connelly, 2016; Cypress, 2017; Shenton, 2004).

**Transferability**

Transferability refers to the extent to which findings are useful to people in other settings (Polit & Beck, 2014). I enhanced transferability by recruiting appropriate participants using purposive sampling. Participants who only fulfilled the inclusion criteria and who volunteered to participate in the interviews provided detailed information. Additionally, I continued the data collection until saturation, and during data analysis, I immersed myself in the data to make sense of it (Cypress, 2017).

**Dependability**

Dependability refers to the stability of the data over time and over the conditions of the study (Polit & Beck, 2014). To ensure dependability, I employed strategies such as thick descriptions of the data, peer-debriefing, reviewing field notes, theme reviews by qualitative research experts, and comparisons of my own thematic analysis with the experts (Cypress, 2017).

**Confirmability**

Confirmability refers to the neutrality of the findings or the degree to which findings are consistent and could be repeated (Polit & Beck, 2014). I maintained confirmability through keeping detailed notes of my decisions and data analysis, discussions with experts, member-checking (Connelly, 2016), and referring to my pilot study (Seyeneh, 2017). I also maintained reflective journals during the research process and audit trails through documentation of the
actual interviews and daily field notes (Cypress, 2017). Through reflective journals, I made myself aware of my biases, assumptions, beliefs, and presuppositions and actively engaged with the data (Kafle, 2011).

Ethical Considerations

I put the necessary effort into ensuring ethical principles and maintaining the participants’ rights and privacy. Flick (2009) contended, “Codes of ethics are formulated to regulate the relationship of researchers to the people and field they intended to study” (p. 38). In its Code of Ethics, the ACA (2014) has outlined important guidelines of ethical considerations in research. Throughout the research process, I considered some of the guidelines: confidentiality (participants and information), relationships and boundaries, and informed consent (about the nature and purpose of the research, benefits and potential risks, and possible limitations of confidentiality).

Additionally, participation in this study was solely voluntary. Before participation, I informed the participants about the nature and purpose of the study, possible risks and benefits, confidentiality, and their right to continue or withdraw from the research. During the interviews, I briefly explained the nature of the study before the actual data collection. Then I asked the participants for verbal consent to participate or to resign from participation. I also minimized risks of confidentiality and tried to guarantee the participants’ privacy by using pseudonyms. Additionally, I conducted interviews privately and kept interview records and transcriptions on a personal laptop with protected passwords. I also provided a trustworthy environment for each participant and built rapport (ACA, 2014; Flick, 2009). I managed possible misinterpretations,
misstatements, or inaccurate analysis through member checking and reflective memos (Flick, 2009).

Summary

In this chapter, I present the methodological design of the current study. Consistent with the sociocultural learning theory, a qualitative design was the appropriate approach to guide the study. I based my investigation and interpretation on interpretative phenomenology. I recruited participants using purposive sampling based on specific screening criteria. The primary data collection method was in-depth interviews. The data analysis followed step-by-step procedures and used NVivo software to analyze the data. By applying different strategies, I maintained trustworthiness and important ethical guidelines accordingly.
In this section, I present the participants’ background information and individual profiles based on how they defined their cultural, personal, and professional identities. I also present the participants’ previous work experiences and their future plans. Six of the participants self-identified as female, and the other participant identified as a male. The participants are from CACREP-accredited CES programs. The participants identified the regions of their study program in the U.S. as Midwest (two participants), West (two participants), Southeast (two participants), and Southwest (one participant). The participants’ age ranged from 30-44 and above.

Three of the participants were doctoral candidates who were working on their dissertation; four of the participants graduated from CES, two participants in Spring 2015, one participant in Spring 2016, and one participant in Spring 2017. Three of them are currently assistant professors in different regions of the U.S., whereas the other one is working as a student advisor in the Midwest region. In terms of their origin (country), three of the participants were from Asia (Taiwan, South Korea, and India), three of them from Africa (one from Uganda, two from Ethiopia), and one from Europe. The participants had work experiences prior they joined the CES programs. Four of the participants mentioned that they had previous work experiences whether in the U.S. or in their countries; whereas three of the participants worked in their home countries. Table 1. shows the participants’ background information.
Table 1
Participants’ Background Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Origin/Country</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>USA Region</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>CACREP-accredited</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abel</td>
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<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>West</td>
<td>Graduated</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josie</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>Southeast</td>
<td>ABD</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Min-Ji</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>Southeast</td>
<td>ABD</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nafula</td>
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<td>Uganda</td>
<td>44 and above</td>
<td>West</td>
<td>ABD</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selam</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>Graduated</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simone</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>44 and above</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>Graduated</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ting-Wei</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>Southwest</td>
<td>Graduated</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants’ Individual Profile

In the following section, I provide the participants’ detailed background descriptions with supporting direct quotations. The participants are identified by pseudonyms. Josie, Nafula, and Simone picked the pseudonyms by themselves; however, I have assigned the other pseudonyms based on how people are named in the participants’ countries.

Abel

Abel completed his Ph.D. in Spring 2015 from a CACREP-accredited CES program in the Western region of the U.S. Currently, he is an assistant professor at a master’s level mental
health counseling program in the Southeast region. Abel’s age range is 35-39. Abel has an undergraduate degree in psychology and a master’s in educational psychology. Before he joined the Ph.D. program, he was working as a lecturer at Addis Ababa University (AAU) for more than three years. “After completing my master’s degree, I was able to teach. So basically, I have a psychology background and teaching experience and then a Ph.D. in the U.S.” Abel joined the counselor education and supervision program because of his interest in helping people and to work with master’s level counseling students to help them become competent counselors.

The reason I wanted to do a Ph.D. is to train master’s students and I want to help graduate students … I think counseling has been my focus starting from my undergraduate and then in my graduate school I liked all my counseling classes in my undergraduate school. The whole idea is I wanna be a social help for others, and I wanna help other people and that is how counseling comes in my life.

Abel described his professional identity as a counselor educator, researcher, and supervisor. “As a counselor educator, I teach primary classes, and as a researcher, I conduct qualitative study, and as a supervisor, I supervise the clinical work of first year and second year master’s students. As a counselor, I see clients once a while at the clinic in the university.”

Abel established his cultural identity based on his personal values, skills, and societal norms. Abel mentioned that listening and helping others are important values and societal norms in his culture, so he described his cultural identity as a person who enjoys helping others and listening to others.

When I see a client, I am able to listen, and that listening skill is part of my cultural identity. In my culture, children are told not to talk to adults just to listen….and you see the impact of that identity in how I am more inclined to listen more than interrupt my client. Then when my clients finish, I will be ok to interrupt them and then it is just respectful when you act like that.

In the future, Abel’s priority is teaching in counseling programs, although he wants to be a qualitative researcher and an advocate for others to empower people.
Teaching is my priority… and that is my overall identity totally. And I also like research. My research in qualitative research is all about staying active and using the findings to support my teaching. In regard to advocacy, instead of me advocating for others may be empowering them to advocate on their own is the strategy that I use.

Josie

Josie is a doctoral candidate in a CACREP-accredited CES program at one of the universities in the Southeast region of the U.S. Josie came from India and she is in the age range of 35-39. Josie earned her undergraduate and master’s in psychology from India. After she came to the U.S., she did another master’s degree in school counseling, which was an intensive one-year program. Before joining the Ph.D. program in CES, Josie was working in a boarding school as a teacher. Josie has her NCC and State License in school counseling. Josie’s interest in teaching motivated her to join in CES program, which has helped her to grow as a counselor educator. In describing her first impression in the program, Josie explained that “my experience in the program is really interesting. There are both things maybe feel good and there are also things that do not feel good about experience.”

Josie described her cultural identity based on different concepts such as gender, religion, and origin of birth. Culturally, she identifies as an Indian, and she also identifies herself as a religious and spiritual woman who practices a mix of Hinduism and Buddhism. Josie is very interested in Native American culture, which she feels is much closer to her Indian culture and has incorporated some of the concepts/contents of the Hindu religion.

Culturally speaking, I enjoy my language, my food, and my clothes. I do have a couple of people Indian descent even though they were born and brought up here. So, we are able to talk about common experiences. One more thing I would say that it is very upfront that I am a woman. But in relation to my culture, it is very upfront that I am a woman, my culture is a male dominated culture so culturally there are so many things that I can or I can’t do.
However, in my journey in the U.S., I have discovered that there are things I can do so that is something a kind of adjusting to new roles.

Josie is taking care of herself and her personal wellness through eating good food, walking and physical exercise, going to counseling, visiting family occasionally during breaks. Josie also wanted to become connected with her culture through watching Indian movies and listening to songs.

Josie described her personal identity based on her international status and professional identity. She identifies as a feminist woman in a majority culture from a minority culture. Professionally, Josie identified herself as a counselor, supervisor, and as a counselor educator. Although she sees herself as a researcher, she is reluctant to fully conceptualize her professional identity as a researcher. “I identify myself sort of as researcher not I am still getting to there, still trying to get there, to be comfortable with that identity.” Additionally, Josie identifies herself as introverted, caring, compassion, and empathetic. Regarding her feminist identity, Josie describes that

Over the years, I struggle with the cultural limitations that were put on me as a woman. I think, I actually coming to the US, I have found my feminist identity so that I actually believe that man and woman are equal and there should not be any difference in because considering who they are questioning, what they say about professionals, differences in being paid differently because of their gender. So that is my feminist point of few that I have really have been empowered to my own experience in such of people in my life and my counselors over the years. I find this identity and I advocate for them.

Although Josie has a fear because of the current U.S. political system, she wants to work as a counselor educator in the U.S. and has a future plan to become involve in teaching, research, services, supervision, and counseling.
Min-Ji

Min-Ji is a doctoral candidate at a CACREP-accredited counselor education and supervision program in the Southeast region. Min-Ji earned her undergraduate degree in Micro-Biology in South Korea. She is in the age range of 30-34. Min-Ji came to the U.S. ten years ago to earn her Master’s in Rehabilitation Counseling. After her master’s, as a certified rehabilitation counselor, she worked with a wide range of clients with varied physical and mental disabilities, particularly with people who are hard of hearing. She practiced her clinical rehabilitation counseling in different settings, such as in vocational rehabilitation counseling centers and rehabilitation services in the Southeast region. Additionally, she worked with people with different symptoms of mental disorders such as symptoms of depression, anxiety, and PTSD. As a doctoral intern, she works with people who identified themselves as a LQBTQ+ in a community mental health setting in the same region.

Min-Ji enjoys listening to others and interacting with people, which motivated her to change her career from micro-biology to rehabilitation counseling and then to counselor education.

I always somehow naturally enjoyed listening to others, but my major was microbiology…so I was doing some research on like family version of cells using a particular subject. I know that I found myself this is not a profession which gonna to work with me because I wanted to have for more human interaction of doing some research interacting with others so I switched my major from microbiology to rehab counseling to work with people but still like do really enjoying with research but using human subjects rather than just cells.

Min-Ji described her cultural identity based on her international status and the influence of global perspectives. She mentioned that cultural identity is not a single concept, but it is a composite of various identities.
I think, being an international student that is a huge part in the way I define myself, who I am culturally. So, I would say, I am an international student because not having the particular residential status in the US. I will say I am a global citizen. I am also a South Korean citizen because that is where I was born and grew up and spent most of my time but at the same I have lived in three countries so far. So culturally, I am very multicultural but citizenship wise I am from everywhere. I think each person should have a global citizenship because it is not only about like physically where you are; what if something happens in one part of the world or probably internationally; we are interacting with the world nowadays with these advances of technology, we are so connected.

Min-Ji defined her personal identity as a very multidimensional concept in which many themes come into play. She identified her personal identity based on the context of her personal values and cultural background, which are also the basics of her professional identity development. Min-Ji mentioned human interaction and listening to others are her core personal values that guide her professional values. Professionally, she identifies as a researcher and counselor educator.

As a professional counselor you are working with people, you are not working with anything that does not have emotions so one of the things that I care about a human interaction. So, I care about my future students how they are doing. I can focus on meaningful and safe interaction, giving safe space to talk even about their personal life events because their personal life events affect the level of their performance in a professional setting.

As a researcher, she wants to integrate counseling and neurophysiology to describe and understand human behavior from different levels. She mentioned that cultural background is not the only element that influences human behavior, so she wants to integrate the components of neurophysiology into counseling curriculum. In the future, Min-Ji sees herself as a counselor educator working at the university level that are more focus on research and teaching. Also as a counselor educator, she wants to update her knowledge regularly to be well prepared to work with people in clinical settings and to better understand her clients’ experiences accordingly. She wants to work with people who are at risk and in psychological distress.
Nafula came from Uganda in Fall 2014 to attend her Ph.D. program at one of the CACREP-accredited CES programs in the West region of the U.S. She is currently a doctoral candidate in the program and planning to graduate in Spring 2018. Nafula has a Bachelor’s in Education and Master’s in Counseling both from Uganda. She had been teaching in secondary schools in Uganda before she had joined the Ph.D. program. She mentioned that students’ problems at schools motivated her to be a counselor educator.

I saw so many challenges that the children were facing that provoked me to get into counseling. Students had a lot of problems; families had problems, and so I thought that doing counseling would be the best thing for me… I just really thought that if I could get skills I would be able to help them. As a secondary school teacher, they would do to talk to me for help and did not know what to do.

Nafula acknowledged that the Ugandan school system is different in sense that there are no positions for school counselors to work with students who seek professional help. “In Uganda we have what we call senior teachers ...elderly teachers who are given that the job of counseling”. Nafula also mentioned that her interest in helping the community and the limited number of professional counselors in the community motivated her to join the program.

Nafula defined her cultural identity based on a collectivist vs. individualistic perspective. She stated that in a collectivist culture, people interact with each other and expect help from others.

I would say we are interactive with others and expect help from other people… we are not offended if someone walks on us…if they need help we will leave what we are doing and just go ahead to offer help and get back what we were doing. It is the norm.

Nafula described her personal and professional identity in many ways. She identifies herself as a counselor, educator, researcher, and as someone who is ready to provide social
support and advocate for social justice. She also described herself as someone who understands others and provides empathy. She wants to help people be reflective about their situation.

In addition to helping school children, Nafula wants to be an authentic leader in the future. To fill gaps in her home country, she wants to develop her leadership style and philosophy accordingly. “At this stage with a Ph.D. there are limited women in Africa where I am going to fit with that position, so that is one area where I have really grown.” Nafula mentioned that growing as a leader is a very exciting and rewarding part of her professional identity development. Nafula said that she is growing as an authentic leader who gives the power to the clients and work beside them rather than taking over the clients’ power. Nafula did not have any knowledge about leadership at all before she joined the CES program. Nafula also compared the leadership styles that are practiced here and back in Africa.

I am identifying with authentic leadership style that parallels with my Christian values … but remember before I came to this program, I did not think about leadership, no leadership styles; it was a totally new area that I was trying to develop as a self-identity…. Authentic leadership is giving the power to the client and working beside them rather than taking over …. I think that is one of the problems that we have in Africa as leaders when a leader is not influencing or working by the side of the people but rather is ahead of them and the people end up serving the leader instead of the leader serving the people.

Nafula plans to import counseling knowledge and skills to her country and to adapt it based on the cultural values and norms of her society. She plans to train school counselors, social workers, and community and religious leaders.

Selam

Selam earned her Ph.D. from a CACREP-accredited CES program at one of the Midwest universities in the U.S. in Spring 2016. She is in the age range of 35-39. She earned her
undergraduate degree in educational psychology and a Master’s in Counseling Psychology at AAU, Ethiopia. She worked as a lecturer at AAU for six years before she joined her Ph.D. program. Selam described that her cultural identity is very distinct from the U.S. majority cultural value. She defined her culture as a collectivist one in which the focus is on systemic wellness and the collective good instead of emphasizing individual wellness and experience.

In a collectivist cultures, we tend to focus more on collective good and systemic wellness. The individual is there but we do not give as much weight to how their experiencing life. The degree of emphasis on individual satisfaction, individual sense of achievement is really different.

Selam identified as evolving professional counselor educator. In the future, she plans to teach at the university level although currently she is working as an academic advisor in a public university in the Midwest region. “I think I have evolved [pause]… when I got finished with the Ph.D., it left me with the sense that I do not know much… I want to say that I think I became a lifelong learner.” Selam plans to teach at university level and become a researcher and counselor.

Simone

Simone, an assistant professor in a CES program, came from Europe and earned her Ph.D. from one of the Midwest CACREP-accredited CES programs in Spring 2017. She is in the age range of 44 and above. Simone had more than five years work experience in Europe and U.S. before beginning her Ph.D. Her course work in the master’s counseling program attracted her to join the counselor education program.

I have done my post master’s in school counseling…And I really enjoyed the experience… I just enjoyed the learning experience…I had here it was different…The way we discuss in the classroom, the way we dialogue is very constructivist in its nature and whole discussion and bringing out the ideas of each other. I just really enjoyed that so when I thought about my Ph.D. I want to go back and find a Ph.D. here rather than doing my Ph.D. in Europe.
Although Simone is a licensed professional school counselor, she bases her professional definition on her educational qualifications, work experiences, and in what she brings to the table. She describes that licensing should not be an ultimate confirmation of being a professional counselor.

Despite having difficulty to articulating her cultural background, Simone described her cultural identity based on her gender status and her origin. “I am female … it is difficult to express my cultural identity.” Simone’s future plan is teaching master’s level school counselors and advocating for children. “I would like to work with master’s students in order that I can adequately prepare them to be able to cope with the reality in the world they are going to face” Simone mentioned that since she has limited research experience, she might not be comfortable teaching at the doctoral level.

Research is something I like to do; do not get me wrong, but I am not passionate about it in the way that would be required for me to teach doctoral students. I feel it will be somewhat unethical of me to go for teaching doctoral students when my passion is not really that. I will never say never; I could teach doctoral students to the other classes not teach research.

Simone also wants to advocate for children and young people, particularly for children of color who are at risk in some aspects of their lives. She plans to connect those children to education. “I am a firm believer in the fact that every child should have equal and equitable access to education and that ensures their future.”

**Ting-Wei**

Ting-Wei came from Taiwan to the U.S. ten years ago to earn her master’s degree in counseling. She is in the age range of 30-34. Ting-Wei earned her Ph.D. from a CACREP-
accredited CES program at one of the universities in the Southwest region. Currently, she is an assistant professor at a public university in the Midwest.

Ting-Wei got her Bachelor’s in Early Childhood Education in Taiwan and was a kindergarten teacher. After one year of experience, she decided to change her career into counseling program to help her interact with people and children. Ting-Wei’s childhood dream and her interest to work with children as well as with people motivated her to study counseling in the U.S.

I think it has been always a dream to study abroad. I think a kind of like trace back. I have couple uncles who live in the States, so when I was a child once I told my mother that hey I want to go to the U.S. to study. I was may be 9 years old … then my mom actually said ‘seriously’ so she was like tell me ‘save money’…and I remembered my dream and continued just moving forward to accomplish my dream. When I was in college I was just starting looking for some programs in the U.S. and also I go to afterschool program so actually that time I was not sure what I was going to study until when I went to internship to kindergarten …that is when I decided to study counseling…and I found that counseling fits with me to work with children and people.

Ting-Wei described her cultural and professional identity based on her international status. Although she experienced culture shock in her master’s program, she mentioned that she might not need to change her thoughts and behavior totally to fit in the majority culture.

At the beginning, of course, my cultural identity was very Taiwanese as international. I experienced culture shock in the beginning and I wanted fitting in the culture. I kind of thinking about maybe I should change my thought, my behavior.

Regarding her professional identity, Ting-Wei identifies as an international faculty, a counselor educator, a supervisor, a counselor, and a play therapist. Ting-Wei wants to continue seeing clients and have her own private clinical setting even if she is currently a counselor educator at the university level. She mentioned that seeing clients gives her energy. Therefore, she plans to integrate her counseling clinical experience with teaching to build her teaching
philosophy using client cases. Ting-Wei also wants to continue conducting research that can help improve teaching and counseling processes.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented the participants’ background information in a detailed manner. The descriptions are based on the participants’ self-identified gender (sex), age ranges, origin/countries, status (ABD or graduated), and the U.S. regions in which their universities are located. Most importantly, the participants’ self-defined cultural, personal, and professional identities supported the details of their individual profiles. The participants came from a range of educational backgrounds and varied work experiences. Their educational backgrounds included, but were not limited to, educational psychology, child education, counseling psychology, microbiology, counseling, and rehabilitation counseling. The participants defined their cultural identity differently. Some of them defined their origin/country and gender to support their definition. Some of them also support their definition based on personal values, multicultural experiences, international status, global perspectives, and counseling skills. Regarding professional identity, almost all of them identified as counselor educators, but most of them added researcher professional identity. The participants wanted to teach at the university level in the future; some of the participants had plans to advocate for others/children and to promote social justice; while others aspired to do outreach to work with vulnerable populations in communities.
CHAPTER 5
FINDINGS

The primary purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of international students and/or graduates of CES programs in the U.S. By using four main research questions, this study specifically explored the overall lived experiences, challenges, support systems, and contributions of international students and graduates in CES programs. Through exploring these questions, the researcher identified various themes under each research question. Table 2 shows the summary of main themes and categories.

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Research Themes and Categories

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Overall Lived Experiences

The analysis of the participants’ interview transcriptions about the first research question (How do recent international graduates and students describe their overall experiences in their CES programs?) revealed six main themes: journey of empowerment, missed opportunities, acculturation and adjustment, personal wellness, limited social interactions, and the political impact. In this section, I present detailed descriptions of each theme based on how the participants described their overall lived experiences. Under the first research question, the study explored the participants’ perspectives about their lived experiences that included, but were not limited to, their developmental needs, expectations and impressions about the CES programs, adjustment processes, interpersonal/social interactions, self-care, personal wellness, adversities, learning curves, views about the current U.S. politics, and the participants’ perceptions of their personal and professional identity.

Journey of Empowerment

Through exploring the lived experiences of international counselor-educators-in-training and graduates from the CES programs, it was possible to identify journey of empowerment as one of the main themes of the participants’ overall lived experiences. Journey of empowerment in this study is broadly defined as a path of positive growth/personal-transition, self-exploration and awareness, knowledge acquisition, and counselor educator professional identity development. While the participants had some specific differences in the shape of their empowerment path, they shared similar outcomes. The participants’ described their journeys as
ones of empowerment through self-exploration, learning new materials, practicing counseling and supervision, engaging in research, leadership, and advocacy projects. Because of being empowered, the participants believed their experiences were educational, satisfying, motivating, and exciting. Additionally, they realized they were honored to be in a position to experience such empowerment.

When describing their journeys of empowerment, some participants focused on their professional development, while others referred to their personal growth and development of self-knowledge. Although some of the participants described their journeys of empowerment as their unique ways of personal-change, all of them focused on how the learning process in the CES programs enabled them to acquire knowledge and develop skills for personal change. The participants agreed that the learning environment in the CES programs positively impacted their emotional, personal, social, and professional identity development. They acknowledged that through the learning processes in the CES programs, they grow as counselor educators, researchers, counselors, supervisors, and leaders. The participants reported that they can bring back these professional and advocacy experiences to their home countries.

Ting-Wei reflected on her journey of empowerment connecting with the definition self-exploration and personal growth. As explained by Ting-Wei, through the learning process, she identified her strengths and areas of development, which she was not aware of them before her study in the CES program. Other participants connected their journeys of empowerment based on how they acquired new knowledge and information. The participants confirmed that many counseling professionals have contributed many ideas and knowledge to the profession, which the participants defined as very “educating and informing.” Selam reflects this view in the following quote: “There is immeasurable knowledge that I came across throughout the learning
process, which helped me think differently about my capabilities.” According to Selam, the written knowledge in the CES profession is very informational and helped her understand different patterns of people’s lives. Selam described that she was living in her own small bubble of culture, but since she joined the program, she has shaped her values and was able to prioritize things. She mentioned that the process can inform different ways of thinking, which can help the learners be open and less judgmental. Josie also supported that the learning process in the program was very educating and informing, which helped her to advance her counseling knowledge.

Most of the participants described their journeys of empowerment as a meaning making process in which the learning materials coming out from different perspectives in a sense that nobody’s idea is really wrong or right, but a very engaging constructive process that allows everyone to talk, to contribute, and to explore different aspects. The participants mentioned that the processes were very valuable learning experiences not only to develop professional counseling knowledge and skills but also to understand personal resources and to know about who they are, what they want to be, and what kind of qualities fit their personalities. In the following quote, Ting-Wei described her journey of empowerment in relation to one’s own professional identity development.

It is like valuable learning experience not only professionally but also personally. I understand more about who I am or what kind of counselor, what kind of supervisor what kind of counselor educator I want to be, what kind of qualities fit me, or what kind of qualities do not fit me so those are very rewarding experience and self-exploration.

Ting-Wei also linked her journey of empowerment to the development of her confidence level and personal growth. Compared to her first-year experience in the program, her confidence level increased dramatically that motivated her to advocate for and contribute back to others.
Selam also connected her journey of empowerment to self-exploration. She described how the learning process helped her to explore her areas of improvement and to recognize her wealth of cultural values as well as different perspectives, which she mentioned as a very empowering journey.

In so many levels, my inflected self-image has been pocked in different event from the fact that how much I am able to do, how much I am able to read. on one way, I found myself more weaker than I thought I was in terms of how I write, how I process information, how I read, how I meet my academic requirements; on another way, I was very empowered because I was able to see how rich of a culture and a value I have and amazing wealth of cultural power.

Simone described her journey of empowerment as a means of adding new knowledge on her personal edges and recognizing available resources. Simone’s loud voice, open gestures, and raised hands all can describe how she was excited in the learning process “it is really good experience. When opening a book or read an article thinking wawww [loud voice], I never thought about this information before that I already knew in this way so that is really good [pause] that was exciting for me.”

All participants reported that through the process they were growing as counselor educators, every day; they said they observed themselves growing as professional counselor educators, especially through teaching and research. For example, Abel linked the journey of empowerment to the enhancement of his academic knowledge through teaching and doing research. “I was teaching quite a variety of classes, and every time, I was given a new class, a new course, and there was a lot of preparation. There was a lot of reading that helped me to grow as a counselor educator…. The program keeps me growing as a motivated researcher.” Moreover, most of the participants described their journeys of empowerment as motivational experiences. They reflected on how they were excited growing as researchers. For instance,
Abel and Nafula communicated that they did their graduate certificate in qualitative research, which enabled them to do qualitative research in better ways from their previous research experience. They felt that they have had expertise in how to do their research. For example, Nafula mentioned that through the process of taking research courses, she was able to specifically articulate her dissertation area. Nafula said, “You know my dissertation topic was huge like an elephant, I was confused where can I start cutting the elephant, but the learning process enabled me the skill and expertise of doing a qualitative research and defining my dissertation topic.”

Josie reflected that the learning process in the CES has been very inspirational and a time of self-exploration and self-growth. She described that her journey of empowerment in the program has been a great experience to realize her own power and potential “when you think you can do something you actually are able to do it or pull it off that is actually really empowering. Just being able to find my own power, being able to realize I can or I can’t do it.”

Similarly, some of the participants connected their journeys of empowerment to the benefits they accrued from their programs and/or universities. They explained that they were empowered through getting graduate assistantships (opportunities to teach, to do research, and participate in leadership activities), scholarships, and joint research projects and conference presentations. Most of the participants also related their journeys of empowerment to their professional development that enabled them expertise in practicing counseling and supervision in clinical settings. The participants acknowledged that the learning process in the CES programs equipped them basic and advanced counseling, multicultural, and supervision skills that are essential to work with diverse populations in different settings.
Some of the participants also defined their journeys of empowerment as an honor and a privilege. The learning experience in the CES programs helped them recognize the rare opportunity of joining the CES Ph.D. program, which they mentioned is very honoring to have a Ph.D. in counselor education from a U.S. CES program. Ting-Wei also described her journey of empowerment as a unique personal experience. Ting-Wei’s deep breath, low voice, and pauses between her speeches revealed how she experienced her unique journey of empowerment. She explained:

I should say that is a unique experience for myself [low voice] no one tends to have this experience like me [pause], that is the unique journey for me. Like a lot of joys, tears, frustration, disappointments [deep breath], at the same time excitement, being proud of myself and improving in confidence.

Overall, the participants acknowledged their journeys of empowerment as enabling and motivating experiences. The participants had opportunities to explore their own strengths, limitations, and resources; investigating the sources of knowledge while developing leadership and teaching skills, engaging in research, practicing counseling and supervision, and embracing new knowledge. Additionally, the participants’ journeys of empowerment enabled them to recognize the importance of their own cultural values.

Missed Opportunities

The analysis of the participants’ lived experiences also revealed their missed opportunities during their study in the CES doctoral programs. Participants often were not aware of or exposed to beneficial opportunities due to limitations imposed by themselves or the lack of exposure to opportunities due to the programs’ structure and personnel (i.e. faculty and staff). The participants shared their perspectives about missed opportunities that would have
been helpful for expanding their counseling knowledge and developing better leadership, research, multicultural, and supervision skills. They also acknowledged that they missed opportunities that were important for their personal adjustment, acculturation, and socialization processes in the new learning environments and sociocultural settings. Overall, the participants regretted that they missed opportunities that were very essential for their personal growth and professional identity development as counselor educators. The theme, missed opportunities, consists of two categories programs and self-imposed limitations, as illustrated in the following sections.

**Program Limitations**

Programs’ limitations were defined as missed opportunities by the participants because of the counselor educators’ lack of understanding of international students’ differences or needs. Most of the participants agreed that the programs were not designed to give them the necessary experiences in some specific areas. They reported that the programs were designed in favor of domestic students and therefore international students lacked equal opportunities to address their professional developmental needs, particularly in research, counseling, supervision, and multicultural skills training. For example, Nafula reported that the programs and the faculty in her program did not make adjustment to address her unique needs. She explained, “well I think [pause] there is little that can be done [pause] with programs because programs are created generally to meet the needs of domestic students and it is hard for faculty to go out of their way to understand international students.” Selam reflected on how she felt “disconnected” from a program designed for others.

International students are in the disadvantageous position and there is a differential treatment. I did not feel connected during my dissertation experience, during my
practicum, and in classrooms. I felt like I was going through the motions. It was just like I was there in a path that was opened for other purposes or for other people instead of assisting myself to really achieve my learning goals. Maybe it is because of the programs’ nature…. I do not know. But one thing I can say for truth is that I did not feel I was heard or valued.

Min-Ji described that she did not have any independent teaching experience compared to her peers. Min-Ji reported that although she has been serving as a teaching assistant for many classes, she lacked opportunities to teach courses by herself. Min-Ji added that as a future counselor educator, she needed to practice teaching by herself and design course curricula/syllabi to develop appropriate skills. She expressed that serving as a teaching assistant is a very different experience from teaching courses on her own. Min-Ji’s deep breaths, pauses, and facial expressions all revealed her unhappy feelings when talking about her missed opportunities.

Selam also added that there was “a narrow door for international students to be supported in her program as compared to domestic students.” Her angry voice, frown facial expression, and hand movements all revealed how she was not treated like other students. Selam reflected, “I feel deceived. There was no collective effort to consider international students to the level domestic students are supported.”

Other participants described the programs’ limitations in terms of practicing counseling without having appropriate counseling skills training. Most of the participants agreed that they practiced counseling in their first year of schooling, which lacked appropriate training to work effectively with diverse clients. For example, Abel reported that his professional development was examined during the first semester of his first year. Abel was supposed to work with diverse clients as a counselor, which he mentioned is an “early counseling practice” for international students. Abel noted that the professors may assume that international students have the necessary skills to practice counseling when they enter to the program. Abel said that as an
international student, he needed more training before practicing, but the opportunities for additional training were very limited. He was confused how to do counseling in a different context with clients who have diverse counseling needs. Abel added,

The professors may think we know how to assess, how to do paper works based on our training program back home; as a master’s degree holder, they would think we had important skills to work with diverse clients.

Some of the participants pointed out that because supervision training is limited to only one class, they lacked necessary skills to provide supervision to master’s level counseling students in culturally accepted ways. For example, Selam felt unprepared and lacked trust regarding her expertise because of the minimal supervision training she received in the program. Similarly, other participants described their limited supervision skill development because of the lack of training. According to the participants’ descriptions, doctoral students in CES programs are required to take only one supervision course, which is not enough to prepare them to supervise master’s level counselors-in-training. They expressed that during their course work, they acquired knowledge about different supervision theories and models, but this was not enough to practice “live” supervision. The following quotation expresses how Min-Ji felt unprepared and lacked confidence to perform as an effective supervisor.

After taking one supervision course, I was suddenly responsible for up to four to five master’s level counselor interns…I was responsible for all of the students and all the counseling they are providing, but was I ready for everybody? I did not like to act as a supervisor. I felt like there might be something ethically missed, I would not prefer to work as a supervisor.

Selam described her missed opportunity based on the nature of her internship and supervisory relationship with her supervisor. Selam had not had enough opportunity to practice counseling because of the very structured nature of her internship and her supervisor’s reluctance to allow Selam to work with children. She explained, “There was not a lot of counseling practice.
…I did follow the structure of what I am supposed to do, but I did not feel that I was fully involved with the students because of the structured nature of the supervision.”

Most of the participants also linked their missed opportunities to the lack of research and leadership skills development. They reported that the CES programs are not well structured to provide rigorous research training. For example, Min-Ji reported, “my school is not really a research institution, so I think it can be universal across counseling programs too, research is not something that is rigorously done in the counseling curriculum.” Some of them mentioned that they stepped outside of their program and did some research projects with other professors to address their research interests because they had very limited opportunities for research and for publications in the CES programs. Simone also added that she did not have enough opportunity to practice research and leadership roles. Simone described that the CES programs are well designed for domestic students to develop their leadership skills. Simone said, “I would like to have done more research and leadership in terms of social justice… to go out there and to work with the community, but the opportunity is limited for international students.”

Like Simone, most of the participants were expecting to be involved in research and publication in the CES program, but the opportunities were very limited. The participants compared the CES programs with other programs regarding the opportunities for rigorous research for the doctoral students. According to the participants’ description, CES programs are less organized and at the same time less rigorous in offering research training for their doctoral students as compared to clinical psychology and social work programs. Unlike in CES, in these two programs, according to the participants’ descriptions, each professor has his/her own research lab and his/her doctoral level students have opportunities for regular research meetings;
by the time they start doing their dissertations, they already have the collected data to analyze and process, but this does not happen in the CES programs.

Some of the participants also described the missed opportunities in terms of the lack of appropriate multicultural skills training. They pointed out that the doctoral students in CES programs are expected to take only one or two multicultural courses, but according to them, taking this course did not prepare them to work with diverse populations in the U.S. Additionally, they mentioned that the type of multicultural training was not practical but was instead very theory based. The participants described that although they had knowledge about multicultural theories, they did not have appropriate training to apply the multicultural knowledge in the real world. Selam explained, “I do not think I found a curriculum to apply multicultural theoretical framework to either supervision or clinical work.”

In general, the participants described the programs’ limitations regarding different aspects based on their lived experiences and missed opportunities in the CES programs. Most of them linked the limitations with the lack of appropriate counseling and supervision skills training. Others linked the programs’ limitations to lack of rigorous research and leadership training opportunities for international students. At the same time, the participants also pointed out the lack of appropriate multicultural skills training to apply knowledge into real world when working with diverse populations.

**Self-Imposed Limitations**

Self-imposed limitations contribute to missed opportunities because of the participants’ lack of engagement in different learning contexts. For example, Simone described that her limited leadership skills development might not only be because of the programs’ limitations but
also might be because of her self-imposed priorities. She did not pursue networks with individuals who could have supported her research and leadership development. Simone did not reach out to appropriate organizations and networks so that her leadership skills were not as well developed as she had hoped.

For me leadership has been the most difficult [loud voice]. I missed that because I know that part of visa requires that to volunteer work we have to get permission and limited time. It is part of the reason why I haven’t explored that area. (Simone)

Similar to Simone, some of the participants described their international status and visa restrictions as the most personal limitations that resulted in many missed opportunities. As international students, the participants were required to take nine credits each semester in addition to the supervision or counseling clinical work. According to them, they did not have enough time to do volunteer work or to develop leadership and/or advocacy skills on campus. Additionally, their visa restricted them from working off-campus or working more than 20 hours, which was a serious personal limitation according to their description. Other participants mentioned that they needed extra time to develop those required counseling and supervision multicultural skills by implementing them in multiple facets of the community. Additionally, the participants contended that international students should step out of their comfort zone and connect themselves with professors or other students, but some of the participants were limited to do so because of shortage of time or other personal reasons. Most of the participants were expecting their professors to arrange some opportunities (leadership, internship, conference presentations); however, the participants identified these expectations as self-imposed limitations. The participants stated that they should be aware of the programs’ culture and take proactive measures to reach out to available resources either in the programs or on campuses. Selam explained, “I was expecting my advisor to ask me to do collaborative research for
conference presentations, but it was better if I would have asked him.” For Ting-Wei, the self-imposed limitation was because of her lack of confidence in her English to interact effectively as required so that she missed some opportunities. Ting-Wei explained,

> When I was in Taiwan I am not quiet I am pretty like I talk a lot, but when I am here I tend to be more quiet [pause]. At the beginning I was not confident in myself in terms of English, secondly I just questioned my overall confidence level [pause] I felt inferior to others, I missed opportunities of interacting with people.

Some participants also defined their self-imposed limitations in relation to the priority they had given to some aspects of professional development and skills training. For example, Nafula described that since she had teaching experience in her country, she did not put much emphasis on practicing teaching in the CES program during her Ph.D. program, so she missed the opportunity of developing teaching skills in the CES context that was different from her country’s teaching-learning environment. As described above, the participants shared their perspectives about their missed opportunities because of self-imposed reasons.

**Acculturation and Adjustment**

Through analysis of the participants’ perspectives about their lived experiences, it was also possible to identify their acculturation and adjustment processes. Acculturation and adjustment was described as the participants’ ways of integrating themselves into the learning culture of the CES programs and to the new U.S. sociocultural settings. The participants described that they were open and willing to adapt to the majority culture, to experience the new cultures, and to integrate into the new dominant culture. Some of the participants also pointed out that they challenged themselves to experience and learn new behaviors and skills in the processes of their acculturations and adjustments. Most of them said that they were open to interact with American cohorts, ask questions, go to conferences, prepare co-presentations, and
willing to share about their own cultural values through open communications. The acculturation and adjustment theme is categorized in four specific groups: awareness of cultural requirements, protective of own cultural values, stepping out of the comfort zone, and reflection and self-exploration. As illustrated below, the participants described their adjustment and acculturation perspectives based on their own lived experiences.

**Awareness of Cultural Requirements**

Awareness of cultural requirements describes the participants’ sensitivity to and consciousness about the programs’ or campuses’ requirements. Some participants pointed out that they were very observant, conscious, and aware of the cultural requirements whether in the school settings or in other contexts to fit into and to fulfill what was expected from them. For example, Simone reported that the CES program by itself requires international students to adjust to its learning culture and to follow its way of operating. She mentioned that she had been observant and aware of the departmental requirements. Selam also described that asking for help is a cultural phenomenon that is more linked with her cultural value; in her CES program, she was observant of how people responded to her requests and repeated questions. After a while, she was aware of her help-seeking behaviors. She explained, “I told myself to fully fit in and kind of not draw people towards my direction [pause]. My resolution was to really stop talking and to really stop asking too many questions again and again.” Other participants described that they were cognizant of the requirements, so they made plans ahead of time to adjust in the programs. All participants described their awareness as being observant, cognizant of the requirements, and adjusting accordingly.
Protective of Own Cultural Values

Being protective of own culture was described as the participants’ ways of adapting to the new culture while keeping and respecting their cultural values. All participants acknowledged the importance of integrating into and adjusting to the U.S. customs; however, at the same time, they emphasized the importance of honoring their cultural values. They pointed out that through the process of acculturation, they did not accept all of the things that were coming to them and they did not change most of their cultural values. Paralleling this, Nafula described how she was protective of her own cultural values, “I do not just swallow the thing that comes my way. I try to digest it and learn it with my own values and will consider what I found to be important in life.” Although the participants acknowledged the importance of openness and being transparent in the process of acculturation, according to some of the participants, it does not mean that they are accepting all of the cultural values of the majority culture and assimilating to it. Ting-Wei described her perspective how she was protective of her cultural values. She stated,

In the beginning, I want thinking maybe I should change my thought, my behavior, and faced a lot of culture shock. But now, I feel like I do not want to change my own cultural values I think that is who I am and it is my […] yes I want to understand your culture but I do not want to change my own cultural value I feel like you should understand my cultural value I do not want to change me because of you.

Josie also acknowledged the importance of protecting her own cultural values. She mentioned that she had been in a culture shock when she first came to the U.S. However, through the process of adjustment, she has met her sole life purpose of being independent. Josie described that although the U.S. culture has helped her to solve her need for independence, mental security, and economic security, throughout the process, she had been protective of her own values through self-reflection. Josie evaluates new cultural values to identify whether they
conflict with or integrate into her own cultural values. Simone also described how she was protective of her own values, personal identity, and race while integrating into the American culture.

I think I am integrated [pause] I think I am comfortable who I am as a persona and who I am in terms of my race, in terms of my identity, my nationality, and then I have accepted the American culture as much as I am willing to [pause] and I like it and I respect it and I think I am integrated. I appreciate and respect the American culture, and I also appreciate and respect who I am, and my identities are not lost within that.

While protective of their own culture and values, the participants shared some strategies to integrate and be part of the majority culture through observing, learning about, and figuring out which parts of the new culture they feel comfortable to adopt and which part is conflicting with their personal or cultural values.

Stepping Out of Comfort Zone

The concept stepping out of comfort zone describes the participants’ proactive measures to actively engage in situations that were new and challenging and to access available resources in the CES programs and/or other departments on campuses or in the local communities. In connection to this definition, Josie described how she stepped out of her comfort zone: “I have had to figure out something that I have never done before, and it is just I am not sure about it. A situation which I am not sure I can actually do it.”

Simone also stated that although stepping out of her comfort zone created many discomforts and vulnerability, she most often used this strategy to adjust to and integrate into the new profession. She stated, “There was uncomfortableness of being vulnerable in the new profession, but it was the way of adjusting and I was aware that it won’t be a constant feeling.” Abel also reported stepping out of his comfort zone and finding out new things as helpful
strategies in his acculturation process. He mentioned that he was able to explore available resources through exposing himself to new groups, creating open communication, and interacting actively whether in classrooms or somewhere on campus. Although he experienced many challenges through the process, Abel described that stepping out of his comfort zone helped him adapt easily to the new learning culture. Ting-Wei also mentioned that one of her most effective adjustment was to step out of her comfort zone and to learn how to speak out in a large group and advocate for herself so that people can hear her voice. She stated,

I want to step out of my comfort zone to advocate more [pause] to do presentations in large groups even if I was not comfortable to do so. That was another way to challenge myself. In the first time the first year, I went to a conference to present I was literally like shaking in front of the stage and strange [pause] if they are hundred people I still feel nervous but now I feel more confident in myself.

The participants tried to step out of their comfort zone to access available resources and to integrate into the new cultural and educational settings. They described that they used different strategies to step out of their comfort zones: talking more, interacting with new people, asking questions, going to conferences, doing presentations, and advocating for themselves.

**Reflection and Self-Exploration**

The concept of reflection and self-exploration was described as the participants’ adjustment through considering different perspectives, creating connections with their own opinions, and evaluating the usefulness of these perspectives in various contexts. Most of the participants mentioned they had engaged in mental/self-talk and writing of journals as strategies for self-exploration and reflection. For example, Abel stated that through mental talk and self-reflection, he was able to identify the differences between his own cultural values and the
majority culture, so that he could integrate and adjust accordingly in the new culture and educational settings. Abel stated,

My own culture and my own way of being was important when I was in Ethiopia and may not be helpful when I am here, and I think trying to differentiate what the culture requires here and trying to show the difference between the things. This who I am but this is what the school requires me and having that mental self-talk, reflection, and being in conversation in my own mind was really very helpful.

Nafula also engages in mental talk and reflection before making important decisions. She mentioned that she deeply thinks about many issues around her, evaluates the pros and cons, reflects on other individuals’ perspectives, and connects with her own point of view when appropriate. Nafula stated that although there might be some perspectives that contrast with her perspective and values, she explores the importance and reflects on it and considers the other side of the argument when necessary. Selam also described that most of her adjustment has been through reflection and self-exploration. Whenever she had time, she used to write journals and engage in self-talk about her day-to-day discomforts, surprise experiences, and negative feelings. She reported that engaging in such self-reflection helped her to identify her international status and to figure out supportive adjustment strategies to fit into the program. Josie also explained that her international status has been creating so many challenges everywhere, but she used to reflect on them and figure out how she can manage the distractions through self-exploration and reflection.

In this section, I presented what the international students’ and/or graduates’ acculturation and adjustment process looked like in the CES programs and U.S. culture. Although the participants passed through different hardships, the participants reported that they managed to acculturate and adjust to the majority culture by using various strategies such as by
being aware of cultural requirements, stepping out of their comfort zones, being protective of their own values, respecting the majority culture, and using reflection and self-exploration

Personal Wellness

Personal wellness is the participants’ term for the importance of self-care and active engagement in taking care of their mental and physical health. Paralleling this definition, Abel reported, “I think personal wellness is a very huge thing, especially for a professional counselor, we may get bored easily; we may use all our passion, our energy, and our motivation. If we are not focusing on our self-care, we might stop growing as effective counselor educator.”

Most of the participants reported they had advanced personal wellness and self-care experiences throughout their learning processes in the CES programs. They discussed that maintaining their personal wellness helped them navigate barriers and grow as good counselors. Through the process, the participants used different personal wellness and self-care strategies that were mostly related to their personal values. For example, Ting-Wei said she maintained her wellness through going to personal counseling and practicing meditation. She explained, “Meditation helped me to empty my overwhelmed thoughts and to focus on here and now.” She mentioned that during meditation, she can focus only on her own breathing without bothering herself by the overwhelmed thoughts of what to do tomorrow and what assignments are out there. She reported that meditation helped her stay focused on and be productive in her work, readings, and writings.

Nafula also reported the importance of maintaining her personal wellness not only in the CES program but also throughout her previous college training. She described that maintaining personal wellness should be a priority for everyone to keep growing in their profession and to
keep their mental and physical health. Nafula stated that if she could not take good care of herself, she could not get enough energy to learn and even to interact with her loved ones (her children and her husband). Prayers and going to church, meditation, interacting with people, and reading renewed her tiredness and restored her energy. Nafula also focused on building healthy relationships with people and friends, but not a superficial relationship. Nafula described that she was not willing to build relationships with people who do not have good will toward her. To avoid stress, she wanted to reduce interactions with people who were against her values.

Abel also reported that he maintained his personal wellness by traveling, visiting new places and friends, exploring new cultures, getting enough sleep, cooking, meditating, and going to church and praying. Additionally, being involved in volunteering activities and staying connected with family either virtually or in person restored his motivation to grow as an effective counselor educator. Although Josie has been struggling to maintain her mental and physical health, she tried to stay connected to her cultural values through watching Indian movies and listening to Indian music and connecting with her family. She also used to walk, cook, eat good food, and talk with her friends and her mentor. “I am always stressed out, so I tried to eat, I tried to make sure that I walk or do something physical.”

However, two of the participants mentioned that they had poor self-care and personal wellness experiences, mostly because of their limited time. They agreed about the importance of maintaining personal wellness, although their limited time prevented them from doing so. Simone mentioned that she used to go to gym on a regular basis before she joined the CES Ph.D. program, but she was not able to keep up her exercising schedule; “even in the weekends, I found myself buried in books” because of so many assignments and readings. Selam also mentioned that she did not have time to maintain her personal wellness. She connected personal
wellness with her collectivist cultural values and described how this also impacted her self-care. During the interview, particularly when describing her personal wellness and social interaction experiences, Selam had very intense feelings, struggled to speak, and took long and deep breaths. She mentioned that as a doctoral student, she could be depressed easily when her needs were not met on regular basis, but on top of that it was very tough to maintain her mental wellness although it was considered as a priority.

**Limited Social Interactions**

Limited social interaction was described as the participants’ lack of interpersonal interactions with their friends, families, peers, cohorts, and/or other individuals during their study in the doctoral programs. The participants acknowledged the importance of having advanced interpersonal interactions, particularly with American cohorts. Most of them mentioned that since the CES programs valued a very interactive learning culture, international students should take active roles to interact with American cohorts, so they can easily integrate into the learning environment and can also be able to explore available resources and access information. However, except for two, the participants reported limited social and interpersonal interactions during their learning process in the programs. Most of the participants explained the reason as a shortage of time because of intense requirements and workloads in the CES doctoral programs. Selam described her limited social interaction and isolated experience, “We, Ph.D. students, are like nuns and monks.” She also reported that she disconnected herself from social media and even talking over the phone with family members and friends. She stated,

I call it I quit social interaction. I mean some of my personal relations suffered. For example, like my brother, I kept saying like do not talk to me for the next three weeks and
then he was like ‘what if I die in the middle [pause]’ and then I finally decided I continue
to decline invitation [pause]…and I completely disconnected from social media.

Some of the participants also mentioned that they were the only international students in
the program, so they were not able to find people to interact with accordingly. For example, Josie
mentioned as the only international student in her program, she felt left out. Josie’s repeated
pauses, deep and intense breaths, and slow and lower voices all revealed her feelings of isolation,
even surfacing during the interview.

My experience in the program is a very isolating experience. If you are the only
international student anywhere or the only of anything it is always isolating. I had a few
not even few I had one friend who graduated last year, who was a person of color like me,
but she was not an international student [pause]. During the whole process, I feel left out,
isolated, and I also feel the entire thing is hypothetical.

Simone also described her interpersonal interactions as superficial and said they only
took place in the classrooms. She stated, “Most of the interactions takes place in the classroom
only. I must be honest, outside of class [pause] my social interaction was really very limited.
When we go conference, we share room and the cost, but not a real friendship, but very
superficial.” Although Abel and Nafula reported advanced social interactions and interpersonal
relationships during their learning process, most of the participants confirmed described limited
social and interpersonal experiences.

**Political Impact**

Political impact in this study describes the influence and effect of the current U.S.
political system on the international students’ overall experiences. Most of the participants
mentioned that the U.S. politics are “coming to the international students’ front doors,” which
might affect their professional and personal growth either directly or indirectly. For example,
Ting-Wei reported that “the U.S. is not safe anymore for internationals.” As counselor educators, the participants are expected to and interested in advocating for social justice, equity, and equality; however, some of the participants pointed out that because of their international status, they had fears about doing so. They had fears about their student status and/or deportation that made them develop outsider feelings. The ongoing everyday new immigration information and many policy changes left the international students with overwhelming thoughts and fears of the unknown. Josie described that the current politics is “shutting her out.” During the interview, Josie struggled to put her anger, fear, anxiety, and experiences into words. She reflected,

The political system is shutting me out [pause]. It is shutting me out [sad voice] and [feeling of helplessness] I am [pause] I am concerned, I am angry, I am not sure what I can do about it. It is a very interesting position to be in because as international students we have so many intricate so if we look on advocacy efforts there is only limited opportunity you can do safely without the consequence of being arrested or deported. I do not think even I can actually put words for this experience. It is a very nonverbal kind of fear, anxiety, whatever you might call it.

Ting-Wei reflected her fears and intense feelings about the impact of the current politics on her professional development and personal wellness. She said that the primary reason for her to come to the U.S. was her need to experience diversity to help her to grow as an effective professional. She supported her view that “Taiwan is not a diverse country, 90% Taiwanese and only 10% other groups;” so she decided to come to the U.S., a very diverse country to experience what the world looks like, since according to Ting-Wei, the U.S. is like a world in one country. However, Ting-Wei mentioned that the U.S. has changed dramatically and is not safe for international students anymore, but a lot of fear and not like she knew it 10 years ago when she first came to this country. She described her feelings of disappointment about everyday “hate crimes and micro-aggressions.” The following quote summarizes Ting-Wei’s fears, disappointment, and how the current political situation affects her personal wellness.
I feel people are not accepting in the States and that really [pause] really surprised me and left me feeling scared because in the past I experienced some micro-aggression, but now it seems people just feel maybe it is okay to be aggressive toward you. Physically you see the news every day when someone gets shot or killed whatever it is scary, and it is very, very disappointing.

Selam added a different perspective on the current U.S. political situation. She reported that the political situation is the reflection of what is going on underneath, which is not a dramatic change that only happened recently. She described, “Even before the current administration from the get-go, I felt well accepted and embraced as long as I did not give a response I might stay permanently and as long as I am a guest…I think people in the U.S. are tired of immigrants.”

Although Min-Ji did not experience any practical negative personal influence because of the current political situation, she has developed a fear of the unknown. Min-Ji is concerned about what her future job as a counselor educator will look like and to which region in the U.S. she will be going. She reported that as a minority, she may feel uncomfortable processing her different point of view in various situations in the future. “The current political situation causes me to think a lot [pause] since I am in a liberal state I am okay currently, but in the future, what if it is not liberal [pause], what I would do? Because it is a practical situation.”

Simone reported that the current political situation is impacting her psychologically and mentally, but it is not because the politics directly affect her personal life. Although she did not necessarily experience any direct personal impact currently, she has been worried and painfully aware of the day-to-day immigration policy changes and laws. As international counseling faculty, she has been worried about others, particularly about undocumented students/individuals and how it could impact her profession. Simone described that shortly after the government change, there have been so many changes even to green card holders from certain countries. So
even if she is not directly impacted as someone from a European country, she is painfully aware of the negative impacts on other people. She reflected, “Thankfully my country has a good relationship with the current government, but people like me are negatively impacted, which makes me worry and painfully aware of what is going on.” Having an international status, according to Simone, she is not involved in politics such as voting directly impacting any political situations; however, she wants to listen what is going on in others’ lives. “I wanted to get a sense of so many immigration changes and laws about people and watch list countries, which makes me psychologically worried.”

Some of the participants reflected on their perspectives and lived experiences about the current political situation. Most of them are disappointed, scared, and confused about the situation. Others are concerned about their future and have developed fears of the unknown. Some of them are also concerned about what is going on in others’ lives.

**Overview of the Participants’ Overall Lived Experiences**

In this section, I present the main themes that emerged from the participants’ lived experiences: journey of empowerment, missed opportunities, acculturation and adjustment, personal wellness, limited social interaction, and political impact. Most of the participants shared similar lived experiences. For example, most of the participants described their journeys of empowerment as empowering, educating, informing, satisfying, and opportunities for self-growth and professional identity development. Most of the participants also agreed about the programs’ limitations to address international students’ needs and reported some self-imposed limitations. Additionally, the participants integrated and acculturated to the CES learning culture and the U.S. new sociocultural environments by using different strategies. The participants also
agreed about the importance of maintaining personal wellness and social interaction. Except for two, the participants maintained their personal wellness (physical and mental health) by using different strategies. Although all, except for two, agreed about the importance of having advanced human interactions, the participants experienced limited social interactions during their doctoral studies in the CES programs. Some of the participants also shared their concerns and feelings about the impact of the current politics on their personal and professional development. Figure 1 shows the themes through from analysis of the participants’ interview transcripts about their overall lived experiences.

Figure 1. Themes of the participants’ overall lived experiences.
Participants’ Challenges

The participants in the current study addressed various needs as they worked through the program to develop their professional identity. At the same time, they encountered various barriers and challenges while growing as counselor educators. Including lack of cultural understanding, six major themes emerged through analysis of the participants’ interviews of the second main research question “What challenges do international graduates and ABD students face in CES programs.” The themes are identified as lack of cultural understanding, disconnected teaching-learning styles, language barriers, intensity of course loads, financial hardships, and cultural differences complicated professional development. The following sections present the themes in detail.

Lack of Cultural Understanding

The participants shared that they had been struggling with the lack of cultural understanding in the CES programs. Lack of cultural understanding describes the participants’ unsupported lived experiences and different challenges in the CES because of less culturally-oriented programs and less responsive professors/supervisors for international students who come to the programs with unique and diverse learning needs as well as different cultural backgrounds. The participants agreed on the importance of understanding international students’ cultural backgrounds, particularly in the CES programs to address their unique needs and to benefit from their diverse lived experiences. However, most of the participants reported that they have had many struggles to find professors and/or supervisors who were willing or open to learn about international students’ culture, to understand their perspectives, and to support them
accordingly. In relation to this challenge Josie reflected, “The idea of making some even trying someone even understand or empathize with the complicated process of being an international student is exhausting. I really cannot explain all the intricate of what it is all the challenges of to be an international student.” Based on the participants’ shared and similar experiences, this theme is categorized into four specific groups/patterns: lack of understanding and nurturing relationships, unheard voices and overlooked unique needs, invisible and unspoken expectations, and fighting hard for validation. The following section illustrates each theme and category in detail.

Lack of Understanding and Nurturing Relationships

Most of participants struggled with a lack of understanding and unsupported professional relationships with their professors and supervisors in the CES programs. Josie reported, “I experienced so many ups, downs, and struggles in relationships with my professors and supervisors because of lack of understanding of my needs as international student.” The participants also mentioned that some of their professors and supervisors were not paying attention to the international students’ struggles, unique needs, and cultural backgrounds. The participants contended that the professors and supervisors were either too busy or did not have interest, for instance, “they were too ignorant” (Josie) to assess and understand the needs of international students. Therefore, most of the participants acknowledged that they had struggled with misunderstandings and felt unsupported during their study in the CES programs. For example, Selam stated that she had a hard time fitting into the existing structure that lacked understanding of her needs by her professors, advisor, and supervisor. Selam stated,
It was hard [weak voice and deep breathes]. The most visible experiences were with my advisors, my professors, and my supervisors, for a reason, I felt like they were not really paying attention where my struggles were, where I was developmentally. I felt like they were guiding me as a child to just fit with the structure that is available. My advisor did not have that space to understand me and kind of making the plan tailor made for my situation or that it did not integrate my challenges, my weakness, and my responsibilities. Sometimes [long pause] I felt that they had barriers…in a sense assumptions about international students. I felt that I was treated as child and I was told to do and not to do lists that did not align with my needs. I felt very frustrated [pause].

Ting-Wei’s experiences also supported Selam’s perspectives. Ting-Wei reported that most of the professors did not identify the unique needs of international students and they did not even know how to help or to mentor. Most of the time, the professors made generalizations about international students instead of seeking clear understanding of the international students’ most salient unique needs in the program. Ting-Wei added, “I feel like especially in the U.S. people do not care about other people and do not want to learn about other’s culture. I think, as counselor educators, it is really important for professors to facilitate cultural understanding.”

Min-Ji described that although she had great expectations from the CES program, she felt that her expectations were not met and she did not obtain enough faculty support and cultural understanding. She noted that the faculty should provide safe and supportive environments so students could be open to share their life experiences. According to Min-Ji, this kind of support could help the students be effective in their performances and enhance their knowledge in the counseling field. However, Min-Ji reported that the professors were not available to reach out to international students to discuss the students’ concerns or challenges. Although Min-Ji is in the final stage of her program, she has not had an opportunity to sit down with any of the faculty members to talk about her challenges in terms of supervision, internship, and/or teaching. Min-Ji reflected, “I do not think, I had the opportunity to sit down with any of the faculty. That was the missing part throughout the curriculum.” Josie added, “I do not think the professors were tried to
understand what my needs were. I think they have a general idea of what a person of color might need in their program where majority of students were Caucasian.”

Some of the participants reported that their professors have generalized ideas about international students. For example, Nafula reflected on her struggles about the lack of understanding in the CES program because of the professors’ prior assumptions and beliefs about international students. According to Nafula, the professors already have certain profiles and made their minds up, so they were not open to give international students spaces to be listened to and understood. Nafula reflected, “They follow their assumptions so that the importance of open mindedness, listening, and asking questions are missed in the program.”

Some participants agreed on their programs unresponsiveness to considering their needs and the impact of their international status on their learning processes. For example, according to Josie and Simone, international status by itself can be a limitation for the students’ internship and leadership participation when required by the programs. However, the programs did not make additional adjustments such as creating networks and connections for international students, offering extra opportunities/hours for mentorship, and supporting international students tapping into their strengths. Selam also added that some of her professors and her advisor were not open to understanding her learning needs, instead they were simply making generalizations. She reflected, “Some professors even do not know how to help international students. When I came, my advisor was like ‘here is your plan, here is what you are going to do.’ At the beginning, it helped, but she should understand my needs first.” When experiencing such struggles of fitting into the existing structure, Selam felt unheard, unseen, and unvalued. Then she decided to follow through on the requirements to fit into the existing structure that was not considering her learning needs.
Some participants reported about the impact of people’s perceptions toward them and lack of understanding about their personal qualities. For example, Josie struggled with people’s perceptions toward her in contrast to how she perceived herself. She mentioned that most of the time, people perceive her differently from how she feels and understands herself as a person. “I’m [surprised] where they got that thing, they think like that I am, but I am not like that at all, but for some reason make feel I am. It is the same thing that they are pushing me to develop a self-fulfilling prophecy.”

Most of the participants described that they lack nurturing professional relationships with their supervisors, dissertation chairs, and professors. Some of the participants reported that they were supported academically but lacked emotional and social support. Other participants mentioned that they lacked academic and emotional support. For example, although Ting-Wei was academically supported by her advisor and dissertation chair, she felt unhappy about the lack of nurturing relationship with her chair. Ting-Wei reflected that her dissertation chair had an international background, so she was able to understand and support Ting-Wei’s needs as an international student. However, Ting-Wei continued to feel scared and unsupported because of the chair’s very direct and reserved nature. Ting-Wei’s broken speech during the interview revealed how she was scared and vulnerable in an unsupported relationship. Min-Ji also complained about how the professors’ lack of understanding complicated her learning process. She stated that the professors were not aware of the international students’ cultural backgrounds and learning styles. Min-Ji described that the professors should be aware of every students’ learning needs and should adjust their teaching styles. Min-Ji stated:

The students in a classroom might have some kind of different cultural backgrounds, the professors might need some more like classified their way of instructions. For example, many people especially from this American culture like to teach throughout their entire
body of language and their facial expressions. I think, to help students from a different culture to be effective counselors, the professors need to be responsive to cultural expectations and differences, but I do not think that the curriculum practically teaches them to be like that.

Except for one, all participants came from a collectivist cultural background, which values respect, interdependence, and group wellness. Some of the participants reported that their professors and supervisors did not consider their cultural values throughout the learning processes. In relation to this, Ting-Wei reported that as someone from a collectivist culture, she tended to be humble and to respect her professors, which created a challenge throughout her learning process in the CES program. Although she needed to ask questions, she felt bad asking too many questions. “I do not need they think like I am needy or something but at the same time I do need more information about what I can learn better. It was very important that if they understood my cultural background.” Ting-Wei also added that some of the professors might have stereotypes about international students being quiet in classrooms, which she considered as “micro-aggression.” She noted that it would be better if the professors could consider some supportive strategies, encourage, and involve international students in discussions and change their learning styles instead of making generalizations and expecting them to speak up always. She said, “I think the faculty need to be more creative in terms of their teaching pedagogy how to involve international students in discussions.” In the following quotation, Josie also reflected on how she struggled with the lack of people’s openness to and ignorance about understanding her cultural background.

When you come into the culture, you are the only person to fit, so there is almost a feeling that it is your responsibility to readjust to the majority culture and so I know more about the majority culture. There are so many things that I know about them than they know mine. I know more about references that are historical and literature base. It is verse reverse, so I feel like a lot of times, people are uncomfortable what they can or cannot say in front of me. And I am just like ooo ‘if you want to learn, you must ask me and understand
Although Abel reflected on how the professors’ assumptions/generalizations could impact international students’ professional development, he did not say anything about struggling with a lack of understanding and support during his study in the CES program. Instead he reflected on how he was supported by his professors and supervisor, who often opened their doors for him. Based on the above descriptions, it was evident that most of the participants had been challenged by lack of responsive and multicultural oriented learning environments as well as unsupported relationships with some of their professors, advisors, and supervisors.

Unheard Voices and Overlooked Unique Needs

The interviews revealed that most of the participants felt their voices were unheard and some of their needs were overlooked. This category describes the participants’ unmet and/or overlooked unique needs and how they felt about their unheard voices. Most of the participants confirmed that because of their international status, they had had various unique needs (e.g. the need for extra time, mentorship, cultural understanding, networks, supported relationships, programs’ adjustment, etc.), but most of them reported that some of their needs were not met accordingly. Simone clearly stated how she felt about her overlooked unique needs as an international student in the CES doctoral program, “I am very disappointed that my unique needs were not considered.” For example, when Josie was asked how the program and the professors supported her to meet the unique needs, she responded with a loud and fake laugh, “They did not …they did not. I do not think my needs are met in any way.” Josie also described how her unique needs were overlooked, particularly by one of the professors in her program. “She has a different
kind of personality … very forceful … she had her favorite students. I have never seen that kind of counselor educator.” Selam also complained about how her difference was overlooked and considered as a deficit rather than as a unique need. “The true cultural acceptance would be to allow me flexibility, to understand my unique needs, but was considered as undesirable … as a deficit.” Selam reflected on her frustration and her unheard voice:

Every time you encounter people or systems that do not make room for you that is very frustrating. You know, you do not feel heard, embraced, when you do not feel that your style of being existing is not given a chance or when you feel like that you are regularly pressed to think to act, to live, to behave in a certain way that is very frustrating. You feel like you are not heard, you are not understood [weak voice and helplessness]. I felt like that was my experience too.

Some of the participants pointed out they had unique needs or limitations because of their international status (the limitations of working only 20 hours per week, the limitations of not working off campus, and minimum nine credit requirement per semester). However according to the participants’ description, these needs were overlooked by their programs and faculty. The programs did not design important strategies to consider the participants’ needs. In this case, Min-Ji felt disappointed and frustrated about her unheard voices and unmet needs as an international student in the CES program. She stated, “I do not know how they addressed my uniqueness [loud laugh]. I am disappointed and frustrated.”

The above descriptions from some of participants all revealed their unheard voices and overlooked needs in the CES programs. Although Abel did not clearly state his unheard voices and overlooked needs, he participants reported some of their unmet/overlooked needs and unheard voices.
Invisible and Unspoken Expectations

Some participants also reported their challenges about invisible and unspoken expectations and cultural codes in the CES programs. This term describes the professors’ and supervisors’ expectations that were not clearly stated in words and direct communication with the international students in classrooms and/or in other social events. For example, Josie stated that because of her different background, she was targeted to be a spokesperson about the experiences of people of color in different contexts. She struggled with the implied messages of “tell us something” that was not clearly stated in direct questions or statements. Josie stated,

I feel like lot of times [pause] there are a lot of people who expect me to be a spokesperson [pause] I do not feel like a spokesperson but when there is five person sitting in the classroom and all of them identify as Caucasian and you are the only person having a different kind of experience and that is when you do become a spokesperson. Actually, I mean there is no giving that so I think the time there is unspoken, unheard expectations of like ‘you bring something new to our discussion because you are a person of color.’ But the tricky thing is what if I do not want to be a spokesperson for people of color.

In relation to this, Selam also reflected on her struggles of the unspoken classroom cultural and social codes. “In the first year, I was like challenged in classroom discussions, I was like honest but then [pause] saw that there are cultural taboos which we do not explore in public and I decided [ok] I need to be careful.” Selam discussed her first-year struggles of unspoken classroom social codes. In her first year, talking about sexuality using terms “lesbian and gay” was very new for her, and she was open and honest to speak out about her lack of interest in working with “those people” as a professional when the professor asked “if you are given a choice, which kind of client would you refuse to counsel or which kind of client do you find it hard to counsel?” Because of her cultural background and previous experiences in the society she came from, she found it hard to work with “those clients” and stated her choice clearly in the
classroom that included “lesbian and gay” students. But after a time, she realized that the professor and her peers distanced her because of her clear discrimination against clients with different sexual orientations. Selam regretted speaking her mind and wished she had a better understanding of the unspoken cultural and social codes of the classroom discussions. Min-Ji also added, “It is almost feels that there is a secret [pause] handshake, which I do not know. You know, I always feel I am missing something. Always feel I am on the outside.” Nafula also reflected on her challenging experiences of invisible classroom codes. “There were unspoken expectations that were set for me, which I did not clearly understand but considered them as assumptions and stereotypes.” The other participants did not clearly state their challenges about invisible expectations and unspoken social codes.

**Fighting Hard for Validation**

Fighting hard for validation describes the lack of recognition, validation, and acceptance of the participants’ experiences because of others’ purposeful ignorance and/or unintentional actions. Supporting this definition, Simone reported, “It took long time and I cried enough to recognize what I bring to the table, and it took time to recognize my strength.” This quotation from Simone shows how she was challenged by the lack of recognition of her strengths and lived experiences. Simone was also very disappointed that people in the CES programs did not realize, appreciate, and utilize her strengths and lived experiences, although her lived experiences might have been important to the program. She mentioned how she fought hard for validation, but most of the time there was an argument about the importance of license rather than her lived experiences and strengths. Simone added that the license issue stemmed from negating her previous experiences. She described,
I had come from a place where my experience was counted more than licensure. Well I came here with my experience, but that only counted in as much as my license proved I had gone through this educational experience and just proof that I were trustworthy because I should have the license in order to maintain all of those things couple together and ‘ok we can trust you to work with children.’

For Simone, it was hard to find people who could appreciate her strengths and lived experiences. She described this experience as an attack on herself-esteem and self-confidence “My self-confidence was beaten down [showing me her hand beat something down].” Simone reflected that she was a strong person and it took long time to shake her self-esteem and self-confidence, but there was a very strong attack on her self-esteem that had shaken her self-confidence. “It was such a very strong attack of my self-esteem. There is already enough going just being here financially it is difficult, socially I am isolated [anger and loud voice], and then my self-esteem is being shaken because people are not recognizing us for who we are.”

Including Simone, most of the participants reflected on how they were struggling with lack of recognition of the lived experiences and strengths they brought to the table. Josie described, “It gets me so frustrated that people are so ignorant and so not interested in trying to figure out what an international student life is worth.” Selam also described that as an international student, she has different perspectives and lived experiences, but her perspectives were not considered and valued in classroom discussions. She supported her argument that when people consider some student’s opinions, the professors and peers built on those students’ opinions. But Selam mentioned that she did not find such opportunities in most cases. She described, “After fighting [pause] lot, I found myself they did not consider my lived experiences [pause]. I am not visible as my peers […] I was pathing through others lines/unfit paths.”

In this section, I presented the participants’ challenges related to the lack of cultural understanding and unresponsive learning environments. Although one of the participants did not
clearly state his struggles in this category, the participants reflected they had been challenged by the lack of understanding and nurturing relationships. Most of them also described their unheard voices and unmet needs. Similarly, the participants expressed their struggles with unspoken and invisible cultural and social codes, whether in the classrooms or throughout the programs. Additionally, some of the participants felt frustrated and disappointed because of lack of validation and acceptance.

Disconnected Teaching-Learning Styles

Disconnected teaching-learning styles is one of the biggest challenges the participants experienced during their study in the CES doctoral programs. This term describes the participants’ struggles to address their diverse learning needs because of the teaching-learning disorientation/disconnection between their previous experiences and the CES programs’ teaching methodologies. The participants confirmed that they had challenges in the CES learning environments because of teaching-learning styles that were very different from their previous learning experiences. Some of the participants reflected on the very structured nature of the curriculum, which did not have the freedom and flexibility to consider their learning developmental stages. For example, Nafula described that she was disconnected from the learning process. Although Nafula came from Uganda, the teaching-learning process in her country is basically dominated by the British educational system, which is very different from the American educational system. Nafula stated,

The British education system is teacher-centered. First, teachers do a lot of work for students and it is also summative evaluation. You have the chance to fight on exams in the final month and so on. Here all the work is divided across the semester. In a British system you have only 40 marks for mid-tests and 60 for final exam so here from the start you must be keen in getting your marks you can’t say that I will do well in the remaining exam. In
the British system … when you get a 90% you are so good, here when you get 90 you will get “B” but in the British system 60% is the pass mark and so it is just a lot to review and adjust to. There is a work to be done from start to end; otherwise you will be in trouble.

Ting-Wei supported Nafula’s assertions. She mentioned that the teaching-learning process in Taiwan is a very teacher-oriented in that the teacher gives teaching materials and assignments, which is unlike the teaching methodology in the CES doctoral program where students are required to be self-motivated and self-directed. She said, “In the CES program, you have to seek out or maybe schedule meetings with your professors, to see if there are any research opportunities, if there is any research team.” She mentioned that she struggled to fit into such a learning culture in the CES, particularly in her first year.

Abel added, “It is not easy to come to a new culture to learn a different language at the same time … to adjust to the different teaching learning style.” When Abel first came to the CES program, his expectation about the teaching methodology was slightly different. In Ethiopia, the learning process is a teacher-driven methodology in which the teacher knows everything, so the professor is the main source of knowledge. Based on this previous experience, Abel was expecting a similar teaching approach and was expecting the professor to be the main source of knowledge, and therefore, he was ready to receive knowledge. But according to Abel, the professors in the CES only create an environment for students to learn about their experiences, the subjects, and the theories. Abel reflected,

With my previous experience, a professor telling the students what to do, how to do, what to study, how to study, what to approach, how much to explore, [pause] so the student-centered methodology is very different from my experience [long breath] there were many requirements to work with peers from a very diverse background, which was a struggle.

Min-Ji compared her previous lecture-based teaching-learning method experience to the very interactive nature of the CES program’s teaching method that did not consider her personal
and cultural backgrounds. She complained about how this teaching method challenged her professional development in the clinical and educational settings. “The U.S. teaching method is very interactive. You are raising so many questions, you are interacting with your professors, your colleagues, and your classmates, but where I grew up, the classes were very lecture-based [fake laugh].” Min-Ji complained not only about the interactive nature of the learning methods that overlooked the international students’ previous experiences and cultural background but also the nonverbal teaching styles that someone from a different culture might not totally understand. Min-Ji expressed that the professors might not have even understood the international students’ struggles and might not have considered the cultural ways of teaching. Min-Ji noted that the professors should create ways for international students to be interactive in the classrooms.

Min-Ji also discussed her perspectives of how the interactive teaching methodology negatively impact the students’ critical thinking and generation of different ideas, which is a disconnected learning style according Min-Ji’s experience in the CES program. She pointed out that the lecture-based method encourages students to think individually and to generate ideas or opinions in a particular time by themselves, but not in a group setting. However, according to Min-Ji, the CES teaching-learning processes are very interactive and communicational and allow students to think together in class, which she described as “let us think about this and now you get together, and you bring some.” But, Min-Ji complained that she needed opportunities to think individually and to bring and contribute opinions. Min-Ji reflected that such a learning process not only impacts the international students’ classroom participation but also their critical thinking could be negatively affected.

On the other hand, some participants complained about the very structured nature of the program’s curricula with accepted principles that did not give them flexibility and freedom
throughout their learning process. For instance, Selam pointed out that the CES curricula overlooked her unique needs and learning stages. She also reported that she came to the U.S. on purpose to learn counseling skills and knowledge in a deeper manner and to import those skills to her home country; however, her expectations were not addressed. Selam explained, “I thought, I will have more freedom to study the topics of my interest. The curriculum was very structured, kind of geared toward finding academic positions at the university in the U.S. Then I was struggling to understand how and why some of the topics emphasized or connected with counseling.” When Selam came from Ethiopia, she planned to examine counseling knowledge on an international basis. However, according to Selam, the U.S. counseling programs have been guided by pre-accepted principles and past-experiences for more than 100 years of practice from previous counselors, practitioners, and educators. She was passionate about deeply examining and understanding the principles that can be applicable to different cultures and/or universal principles. She tried to unpack and dismantle the core elements of the counseling profession and to figure out the specific ones that could match her goals and her country’s counseling principles. However, the structured nature of the CES curriculum did not give her freedom to do so. She was supposed to meet her program’s requirements, so according to her, because of the structure of the program, there was no time left to explore topics of her interest.

While Selam complained about the structured nature of her program’s doctoral curriculum, Simone complained about the lack of control and structure about specific teaching methods in her CES doctoral program. “I just explained it in terms of losing control that is all of myself [pause] I did not know [pause] where I were going [pause] [broken speech] like only trusting the process.” Simone discussed that before she joined the CES program, she was in control of her educational experiences and had contingency plans, but the situation in the CES
did not allow her to practice and to control on her plans. Simone’s repeated words and phrases, broken speech, and repeated pauses as well as her deep breaths during the interview all revealed her vulnerability because of the lack of structure in the CES teaching-learning system.

The participants pointed out their perspectives about the mismatched and disconnected teaching-learning methods in the CES programs that overlooked their learning needs and cultural backgrounds. Some of the participants complained about the very interactive nature of the teaching methods; others reflected on the very structured nature of the CES curricula. Additionally, some of the participants reported their vulnerability and loss of control during the teaching-learning processes.

**Language Barriers**

In this finding, the term language barrier is defined as the participants’ challenges because of their limited English and having different accents. Some participants linked their language challenges to their struggles in classroom participation and in academic reading; others related it to academic writing; and some of them described it based on their struggles of having different accents. In this section, I present the details of language barriers based on the participants’ perspectives.

Paralleling the above definition, Min-Ji described the challenge of her limited language in relation to the lack of her classroom participation, particularly in the first semester of her first year in the program. Min-Ji stated her difficulty of speaking in a different language as a “language barrier.” She reflected that she was good at information processing and critical thinking but was very challenged to speak her mind. The following clearly states Min-Ji’s language struggle, “When I had many questions in mind, I was spending so much time; one time
forming a sentence, the other time raising a question that I have in mind. While I am having it, one of my classmates will ask the question like du.du.du.du [speaking fast].”

Selam described the language barrier in relation to her difficulty in academic reading. Selam stated that on top of having many reading materials, she was a very slow reader to cover the reading requirements on time. “Until I came here, I was not aware of my slow reading. I tested myself and was able to read only ten pages per hour in average with a text book.” Selam also mentioned that in her previous learning experience, the purpose of her reading was mastering the content and fully understanding the heart of the reading assignments by reading the material repeatedly. But in the CES program, according to Selam, the students were expected to scan the material and to quickly sense the content and move to the next, but she described that she did not have the ability to quickly scan the resources because of her limited English. Ting-Wei supported Selam’s perspective of language barrier in reading. Ting-Wei had been challenged in her reading and academic writing “because I read very slowly, I definitely schedule longer time to do assignments or whatever and I think it was more challenging in my dissertation phase. I have to find a schedule just couple hours to write and do nothing.”

Additionally, other participants described their challenges of speaking in English in different learning contexts. Ting-Wei stated, “Even though I know definitely what I am talking about, but still I am not domestic. It is not my first language so that creates a barrier for me.” Ting-Wei still feels nervous about speaking in front of large group, particularly in conference presentations. Since English is not her first language, she understands she cannot fully express herself through it. Therefore, she is worried about the conference attendees’ patience when listening to her presentations. “I need the safe environment because I know presentations create vulnerability and the attendees are here to learn, to pay for the conference, so then me as a
presenter that makes me nervous, even though I know that knowledge and the presentation content, but I still feel nervous about that.” Some of the participants also mentioned that sometimes their professors struggled to understand their speeches because of their different accents. In relation to this, Min-Ji described, “When I open my mouth to speak, they will hear my different accent; then they tend to change their position toward me even if I said something very similar to domestic students. They could not understand me.”

Some of the participants also complained about their professors’ reactions toward their limited language. They mentioned that some of the professors and/or supervisors lacked understanding of the impact of the participants’ language limitations and barriers. For instance, Nafula complained, “The mentality the teachers have, for example, if they think I do not know English, they try to correct me. Every time, they are going to mock me and find more mistakes.”

Although Simone did not experience challenges because of a language barrier, she witnessed the language difficulties of her international peers in the CES program. “My colleagues would talk about having to read something and then they will reread it again and translate it to their own language and then reread. I think it is very hard process when English is a barrier, but it was not a barrier for me.” However, Simone had difficulties in academic writing that were directly related to the APA requirements in the CES program. Abel also did not provide a clear detail about the language barrier, but he mentioned that “it was not easy to learn with a different language.”

Although Simone did not experience a language barrier in her learning process and Abel did not clearly state his language barriers, the participants described their difficulties of learning with a different language in the CES programs. Most of them reported about their difficulties in academic writing and reading, some of them identified the challenges of speaking a different
accent, and some of the participants complained about how professors reacted to such challenges and how people perceived their language barrier as deficits.

**Intensity of Course Loads**

Intensity of course loads describes the participants’ challenges because of many course and clinical hour requirements during their preparation as counselor educators in the CES programs. The participants complained about their difficulties in managing the required materials on time because of the intensity of reading materials, writing/reflections, and practicum/clinical and supervision hours. In relation to this definition, Selam stated, “The Ph.D. program required me to be like a nun. I experienced it like a monk. There is no other life, there is nothing else. I just have to, otherwise I do not feel I am successful, because the requirements are so intense and there are a lot of expectations.” Selam described her challenges of covering so many required readings, which did not recognize her developmental and academic needs. Because of the intensity of reading materials, she struggled to figure out the helpful information from the pile of the literature that required many extra hours to cover. She described “It was very frustrating covering the readings on time and picking the best from the pile of the literature.”

Like Selam, Ting-Wei reflected on her challenging experience of managing intense workloads and requirements in the CES program. “There was too much work seven days a week. I do not think having like weekend. I think it was terrible, I did not have any balance in terms of my school and personal life.” Ting-Wei’s deep breaths and slow speech during the interview revealed how she was tired of the intensity of the requirements. Ting-Wei also described how the intensity of course loads affected her personal wellness. “In the doctoral program, I got this, this,
and this, so my schedule was full like meetings, class, supervision, teaching whatever. I did not have enough sleep, which was not good for my wellness.”

Although Nafula was impressed by the way the CES program was set up, she complained about how intensity of courses had challenged her. Nafula stated that the CES is a very rich program in knowledge, but at the same time, it is very intense and overwhelming. She also described that the CES doctoral program should be at least a five-year program that can give flexibility for students, particularly for international ones to find the heart of the profession. “I need to deeply immerse in the heart of the readings, but I am always moving from something to another thing because the program is just intense.” To fulfill the required courses and clinical hours, she took four courses (more than 12 hours) in a semester in addition to other requirements, such as co-teaching and practicum. Nafula stated, “I was put down in so many things…. I was very overwhelmed.”

Simone and Josie described that their status as an international student was one of the reasons for the intensity level of course loads. Simone described, “Our visa requires us to do nine credits in each semester in addition to other GA hours. There was a lot of work, I can’t remember even a weekend break without burying myself in a book and pushing myself doing my assignments.” Although Simone was socially isolated, according to her, it was not her biggest worry because she had too much to work on when she was alone. Simone also commented that international students do not have the “luxury” of having weekend or holiday breaks as domestic students. Josie also pointed out that although the program is very intense, it might not be that challenging for domestic students. She stated that international students must take at least nine credits each semester in addition to other clinical hours, GA hours, and co-teaching, which could make international students struggle with the intense nature of the program. During the
interview, Josie was struggling even to share her experiences. She described that her program and/or professors did understand her struggles and did do some adjustments accordingly.

The participants complained about the intensity level of course requirements and clinical hours in the CES programs. Some of them described how they were challenged to figure out the core concepts of reading assignments from a pile of too much literature. Others complained about the nine-credit requirement for international students and the lack of understanding of their professors and/or programs to make adjustments. Some of the participants also reported their struggles of not having weekend breaks and enough sleep to catch up on assignments, which affected their wellness according to their descriptions. Others also complained about how the intensity of course requirements negatively affected their adjustment in the programs, particularly during their first year. Overall the participants described their experiences with the intensity level as very overwhelming and stressful learning processes.

Financial Hardships

In this study, the term financial hardship describes the participants’ struggles of lacking enough money to support themselves. Most of the participants described that their financial challenges were directly associated with their visa status because as international students, their visas have many restrictions; for example, they were not allowed to work off campus and were not allowed to work more than 20 hours per week even in on-campus jobs. Some of the participants connected their financial hardships with the current budget cuts in different state universities, which have affected the CES programs and their financial situation directly. The following section gives a detailed description of the participants’ financial hardships.
Simone mentioned that her financial status changed dramatically when she joined the CES program, so that was a very difficult experience to handle her financial needs. She was working full time and was paid a good salary according to her. However, her visa status did not allow her to work full time after she joined the CES program. Josie also complained about how her international status contributed to her financial hardships. Josie mentioned that the financial challenge not only affected her personal life but also her professional growth. She also complained that the faculty did not understand her financial challenges. She stated, “When I apply for a grant to help my research agenda, many national level grants ask if I am a permanent resident or permanent citizen that is one criteria to apply for those grants, but I am not.”

Nafula described how she was worried and anxious about the budget cuts that directly affected her financial situation in the program. Nafula was a graduate assistant (GA) in her program, but because of the budget cut she was forced to leave that position, which made her very confused about how to manage life without having a GA position. She mentioned that if she did not have a GA position on campus, she was supposed to pay out-of-state tuition, which was too much money. Nafula planned to graduate in Fall 2017, but she mentioned that because of the budget cuts, she was not able to cover her expenses to travel to Africa to collect her dissertation data, so she deferred her graduation to Spring 2018. Nafula also described that her visa status restricted her from working off campus for additional money, which could have helped her cover university fees and household expenses for her two kids and her husband. She mentioned that when she applied to the program, she was totally dependent on the GA finances and her university in Africa did not sponsor her. However, because of the budget cuts and the small amount of money from the GA position, she was struggling financially. Although Josie
wanted to visit her family during breaks, she was not able to do so because of the financial challenge. She stated, “Travel has been the hardest, so the finance is impacting all other things.”

The participants’ descriptions revealed their financial hardships during their study in the doctoral program. The participants complained about how their financial situations added other stressors and how this made their adjustment difficult. Most of them mentioned that they were not able to manage the university fees and to travel during breaks to visit families, which negatively influenced their personal wellness.

**Cultural Differences Complicated Professional Development**

The participants described how their cultural differences complicated their professional development as counselor educators and how it also affected their adjustment and acculturation processes. This term describes the participants’ challenges of their professional development as counselor educators because of their different cultural backgrounds. The participants described that they have been conditioned to different cultural values and norms. They mentioned that their cultural backgrounds had greatly influenced their behaviors, values, attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs, which complicated their professional development and adjustment to different cultural and educational settings. Except for one, the participants came from a collectivist culture that emphasized systemic and group wellness. For example, Selam mentioned that her cultural background focuses on the “interdependence and enhanced interpersonal interactions.” Having such a cultural background, according to her, it was very challenging to adjust in the program that operates from the individualistic perspectives and focuses on individual wellness rather than groups’ interdependence. Selam stated, “In the collectivist culture, we value the ‘we mentality’ and focus on personal relationships as well as teamwork.”
Similar to Selam, Min-Ji reflected on how her collectivist cultural background impacted her interactions in the CES program, which is mostly oriented by the individualistic values. Min-Ji reported that her cultural differences regularly influenced her communication in classroom discussions and in different events throughout her learning process in the program. Min-Ji mentioned that in her culture, people are very respectful of others during communication. Min-Ji reported, “While people are talking in groups, it is very disrespectful if someone interrupts others’ talk.” Additionally, Min-Ji mentioned her struggles of balancing and adjusting between her collectivist cultural background of “we mentality” and the very individualistic “me mentality” during her stay in the CES program. Having such a cultural background, she tended to be respectful of her professors and to respect hierarchy in the program. But she was shocked when the domestic students confronted their professors and talked as equally as their professors. Most importantly, Min-Ji complained about the lack of understanding from her professors. Without having a clear understanding of her cultural background, her professors might recommend her to come to their office, but at the same time, they might already have someone inside their offices, so it was hard for Min-Ji to knock on her professors’ doors. Min-Ji mentioned, “It is a disrespectful behavior to disturb my professor while having someone with him.” She described that she might wait even for 30 minutes around her professor’s office without knocking on the door. By the time her professor came out, he/she could find her around and might say “you could have knocked on my door, the time was set for you.” She mentioned that this was a lack of understanding. Min-Ji also described how the lack of trust of her professors restricted her from sharing her cultural differences. She described that only one professor allowed her a safe space and regular interpersonal interactions, so she was able to develop that trust.
Some of the participants also reported that their cultural differences complicated their practical training and internships. For instance, Ting-Wei stated, “When I work with clients who are Caucasian/are not Asian cultural background that is the part I can see conflicting with my profession.” During her internship, Ting-Wei was working with children and parents; she needed extra help during that time. As a play therapist, she had a role of educating parents about the importance of play therapy to help their children. However, she described that she was forced to modify her intervention to make sure that the model was culturally sensitive with those families.

Similarly, Abel mentioned that his cultural differences surfaced not only in the counseling settings but also in every communication and interpersonal interaction. As a counselor-educator-in-training, Abel was expected to work with diverse populations. Abel stated, “When I was in class I was expected to work with people from different backgrounds, from different regions, from different cultures, so I think that was very challenging.” Josie also reflected on how she has been conditioned to the ins and outs of her society. As Josie stated, this experience created a culture shock when she first came to the U.S. and complicated her professional development.

Most of the participants reported that their cultural background about how they viewed learning complicated their professional development. For example, Selam shared her perspective, “The way I understood learning was I do not achieve a sense of satisfaction or readiness until I really feel that I have mastered the material that I am told to read.” Selam mentioned that she experienced a “complete opposite about learning in the U.S. learning culture.” Because of this, she was very frustrated and had a hard time feeling confident going to class and sitting in exams: “I feel like I do not know.” Nafula also mentioned that an individual should be self-reliant for everything to adapt in the U.S culture. “If I do not know something, for
example, if I have a computer problem, getting someone for help is hard.” Nafula described that seeking for help and providing help for others are normal behaviors in her culture, but these cultural values conflicted with her professional development in the CES program that operates from a different perspective from her cultural background. Min-Ji also added how the cultural differences created communication barriers and misunderstandings in different learning contexts. She stated, “In a group of people in the U.S the way they communicate is different. They keep continue talking in the group whoever in that group is … the conversation keeps going. In comparison to the way of communication in some East Asian cultures, we take our turns. I feel disrespectful.” Min-Ji reported her communication barriers in different learning settings, which complicated her professional development as a counselor educator.

Because of their cultural differences, some of the participants also had struggles with knowing their personal boundaries and being assertive in some contexts. For example, Ting-Wei struggled to know boundaries and when to say “no.” As she described, she used to say “yes” for every request from people, particularly from those who were in a higher hierarchy. Ting-Wei added,

The biggest challenge was I think knowing the boundary how [pause] I used to say yes to everything. However, at the end, I felt burned out. Sometimes it is okay to say no in certain challenges like putting boundaries … it is okay to say no. It is not the end of the world if I say no [pause]. I think it is my cultural thing. I feel like when authorities ask me to do something, I am supposed to say, yes but I think the culture here is it is okay to say no.

On the other hand, some of the participants explained that the different cultural background complicated their learning processes and professional relationships in clinical settings. In relation to this, Abel mentioned that in his culture listening is more valued than talking. Having such cultural perspective, he had been challenged to actively interact and to easily connect to the learning culture in the CES program. Abel stated, “My cultural differences
played a role in counseling, in supervision, and in my interactions with other people. People may expect me to behave the way they behave, and I need to adjust to those things. Adding those skills was a challenge.” Min-Ji stated that she experienced discrimination from one of her clients because of her differences. Min-Ji said, “I had bad experiences. My former client told me that ‘because you are not from this country, you are not a Caucasian, I do not want to work with you.’ I heard that in our first meeting without knowing about my counseling skills. We ended our counselor-client relationship.”

Ting-Wei and Abel experienced similar struggles because of their cultural differences. Both were challenged to advocate for themselves. Although Ting-Wei felt that there might be some inequity, she did not advocate for herself and was afraid to confront people because of her cultural values associated with hierarchal respect. “In my observation, most of the domestic students are not afraid to confront when they are beyond some inequity; [pause] they are not afraid to advocate for themselves, but not me.” Ting-Wei described that her cultural values complicated her professional development and she struggled to find a way to bring her voice up for herself. “No one knows your needs if you are not speaking out. I thought that teachers are supposed to know about their students’ needs, but nothing throughout the program. Unlike me, everybody will talk about their experiences and their accomplishments in a classroom.” Like Ting-Wei, Abel also reported his struggles for self-advocacy and talking about his accomplishments, which are important skills for people who are in CES programs. In Abel’s culture, individuals are not supposed to talk about their accomplishments and/or their experiences. Therefore, he had been struggling with talking about his experiences even if the professors expected him to do so. According to Abel, such a cultural background complicated his professional development.
Except Simone, the participants came from a collectivist cultural background; therefore, according to their descriptions, they had difficulties adjusting to the CES programs learning processes, which were basically oriented to the individualistic cultural values and norms. Some of them complained about the professors’ lack of understanding to make some classroom adjustments to address the international students’ learning needs. Other participants described how their cultural backgrounds influenced their learning styles. Although self-advocacy and sharing one’s accomplishments are very important skills for someone to grow as an effective counselor, some of the participants reported their struggles of self-advocacy and experience sharing. Most of the participants also acknowledged some communication barriers because of their cultural differences.

**Overview of the Participants’ Challenges**

In this section, I presented the detail descriptions of the themes identified under the main research question: “What challenges do international doctoral students and graduates face in CES programs?” The analysis revealed six main themes: lack of cultural understanding, disconnected teaching-learning styles, language barriers, intensity of course loads, financial hardships, and cultural differences complicated the participants’ professional development. Most of participants shared similar perspectives and experiences when describing their challenges during their study in the CES programs. Most of the participants were challenged because of the professors’ and supervisors’ lack of understanding when addressing their unique learning needs. Some of the participants acknowledged their struggles for validation and acceptance. The participants complained about the intensity level of courses in the CES program and how their international status added stressors to those challenging situations. Most of the participants also described the
language barriers and how they impacted their professional development. The participants also complained about the disconnected nature of the teaching-learning processes in the CES programs as compared to their previous experiences. They also described the professional and personal struggles caused by their cultural differences. Some of the participants also reported their difficulties adapting to the unspoken and invisible cultural and social codes in the classroom settings and/or throughout the programs. Most of them also reflected on their financial hardships and how their international status and visa restrictions worsened their financial situations. On top of these challenges, the participants complained about the lack of understanding and/or unwillingness of their professors and/or supervisors to make some adjustments that considered the international students’ learning needs. Figure 2 presents the summary of the main themes about the challenges of international students in the CES programs.

Figure 2. The participants’ challenges in the CES programs.
Support Systems and Protective Factors

Even though the participants reported challenging situations and struggles during their studies in the CES programs, they were able to manage those challenges and achieve their educational goals. The participants mentioned that the presence of the support systems was the main protective factor that helped them navigate through many barriers and challenging situations. The analysis of the research question: “How do international students and graduates describe support systems during their doctoral study in counselor education and supervision programs,” revealed three main themes: cohorts as social and emotional support; family, friends, and international clubs; and faculty and advisors. In this section, I present detailed findings based on how the participants described their support systems and protective factors.

Cohorts as Emotional and Social Support

The participants reported the importance of cohorts in their CES programs. This term describes the participants’ social, emotional, and academic support from their classmates/peers, particularly from the domestic students in the CES programs. The participants agreed that the cohorts supported them in different aspects of their lives. For example, Abel mentioned that he had a very strong connection with his cohorts, so the cohorts were able to share resources, exchange important information, and play games and to do assignments together. Ting-Wei also described her perspective about the importance of the cohorts. She described that without her cohort no one could understand the challenging process of being a doctoral student in the CES program. She appreciated the emotional and social support of her cohort. She explained, “I think without the cohort how exhausting it would be.” Ting-Wei reported that the diverse nature of her
cohort was another significant importance to create strong bonds and to know each other easily. Ting-Wei’s cohort was a mix of three international students and domestic students, which helped her to interact easily and to share her experiences. Nafula supported Abel’s and Ting-Wei’s perspectives in describing how the cohort was the greatest support system in her CES program. She mentioned that her classmates have been important support systems “to check in and air the anxieties and dirty frustrations together.” Nafula mentioned that in the beginning of every class, her cohort members always checked with each other about their progress and what they were experiencing in their learning processes. Min-Ji also described the importance of her cohort by comparing the support she received from the faculty. “I will say we have supported each other more regularly and frequently. If I compared it with some of the supports from the faculty, I have one hundred percent from my cohort.”

Min-Ji reported that she has had very close contact with her cohort and that they care for each other – “one peer experiencing together [deep breath].” According to her description, she has received very strong and regular support. Min-Ji stated, “My cohort is the most social support in terms of giving me extra time to listen my complaints, encouraging me by sharing resources … that was crucial, presenting together. We were bonding each other. Professional bond, social bond, even to the extent of helping each other with personal things.” Josie also appreciated the emotional and social support that she has been receiving from her cohort. “Mostly as a cohort, we talked a lot, so that was very helpful…. This year for me has been particularly difficult like I feel even more isolated because I am not taking any classes with my cohorts in my program.” Simone also noted the importance of the cohorts as a social and emotional support. She mentioned that her cohort was helpful for giving presentations together and sharing rooms as well as costs during conferences. She added, “I appreciated my colleagues
and my classmates in sort of being friendly, supporting my social aspects, allowing me to be myself in the classroom, and accepting my humor. I think that was helpful developmentally to grow as a counselor educator.”

As reported above, the participants shared the importance of their cohorts as support systems and protective factors. Some of the participants mentioned that the cohorts shared their anxieties and frustrations; others reported how the cohorts were important in offering extra time to listen to complaints and to encourage the international students in their progress. The participants also stated how the strong social bond with the cohorts helped their emotional and personal wellness.

**Family, Friends, and International Clubs**

The participants agreed about the importance of their families and friends as emotional and social support systems. For example, Nafula said that her family has been the most important support system to “air her dirty frustration.” She added that “my spouse [deep breath and low voice] helped me a lot. You know there is someone at home who is always ready to listen and to share the challenges without judging.” Nafula also acknowledged that people in her church supported her in many ways. Nafula reported that the greatest social and emotional support was from her kids during the learning process. “I think, I could not handle it without my kids.” She also added how her husband has been supportive in all the challenging situations.

Min-Ji also acknowledged how her husband has been helping her emotionally throughout her learning process. “My loved ones are supportive to me … especially my husband; he is very understanding, caring, and supporting me throughout this Ph.D. process.” Ting-Wei also reported the importance of international clubs and friends as emotional and social support. She mentioned
that she had many opportunities for meeting international students in the clubs, which helped her share experiences, challenges, and support. Ting-Wei also added that friends from her country were her emotional support outside the school. Other participants also shared their perspectives about the significant social support they received from their families and friends. Abel and Selam mentioned that they had regular contact with their families either virtually or in person, which helped them to maintain their personal wellness.

Faculty and Advisors

Although the participants reported less emotional and social support from their faculties and advisors as compared to their cohorts, all of them agreed about the significant academic, social, and emotional support they received from their advisors, professors, and supervisors. For example, Simone reported that her advisor was the most important support system, particularly during her first and second years in the program. She also mentioned that “the program had been a great support system; it offered me a GA position as well. I was a fulltime instructor in the program.” Abel also described that his professors and supervisor were great support systems to help him succeed in his studies. “My professors and supervisors were following open-door policies in which, I could stop by their office to communicate my needs…. My supervisor identified my needs many times, and she empowered me to be autonomous.” Similar to Abel, Nafula acknowledged how her supervisor has been empowering her. “My supervisor let me fight with challenges that have given me empowerment.” Nafula also described that her professors and supervisor were very supportive during the whole learning process in the CES program, particularly in her first two years. She mentioned that she is able to share her challenges and received help to conceptualize her dissertation content and develop self-reflection skills.
Min-Ji also appreciated how her dissertation chair is supportive throughout the challenging process of writing the dissertation. Min-Ji reflected that her chair has a very humanistic perspective and is a very understanding person. According to her, he gives her time, not only to discuss about her dissertation but also to process what is going on in her personal life, which helps her emotional and personal wellness. She mentioned that writing a dissertation is a very isolating process that takes emotional energy and makes people feel lonely. Min-Ji mentioned that she lacks support from other professors. She stated, “I think that this humanity is missing from other human interactions in my program, but my chair is very [pause] he is very great [pause] in checking where I am and how I am doing.”

Selam pointed out the huge importance of the support she received from some of her professors and the department chair. Selam reflected that the department chair was a very supportive person who took time to understand others and to validate their experiences. She described that although it took long time for her professors to be willing to give her extra time to accommodate her needs, their support made a huge difference in her learning process. “When professors are caring enough, if they are flexible to meet you where you are instead of demanding you to meet them where they are, it can be very helpful.”

Ting-Wei also reflected that she received support from the faculty in terms of scholarships. Ting-Wei mentioned that the faculty tried to understand the financial challenges of international students in the program, so they were very supportive through offering scholarship funds. Ting-Wei expressed that the faculty gives priority to international students when there are available scholarships. “In my university if you get a $1,000 scholarship totally, you are able to pay in state tuition. So, I think, they were very understanding of that and they usually put us in priority for scholarships. I think that helped a lot. That was how they addressed our needs.”
Simone also added how her dissertation chair was very supportive not only in academics but also emotionally. Simone mentioned that her chair was also very encouraging and supportive in searching for available resources on campus. He connected her with people who helped her to find the first GA position. Simone also acknowledged other faculty members’ support. She stated, “I think the most support had come from my professors. People bend over backwards to help me, which helped me balance my work from GA and studies.” Simone described that the support she obtained from her chair and professors helped her deal with some of her personal issues and many other challenges. Simone described how the professors’ emotional and social support helped her to grow as a counselor educator.

I was a person who liked to be in high control of myself, but when I was in the CES program, I was very vulnerable and that was the hardest part of my adjustment. This was a mixture of experiencing learning, classes, and changes I was going through. But I was supported by these people who already went through the program. There was someone to talk to me when I was feeling uncomfortable, someone to just comfort me when I was feeling low and my thoughts came back to normal… And also, during that period, it was fostering to have people saying “you do not need to drop everything from your previous field.” So that helped me to find myself as a counselor educator.

Some participants described the faculty’s social and academic support as judgment-free relationships and stereotype-free support and decision making. In relation to this, Abel mentioned that his supervisor was an understanding person. “I was not feeling that she was judging me, and I was feeling that she was very understanding, caring, and accepting.” Throughout the process, Abel had a good relationship and, therefore, he felt empowered and accepted. Abel also mentioned that the faculty and the professors were very helpful, and they had the open-door policy, which is walk in and talk to them any time. Additionally, they were willing to answer students’ questions anytime. According to Abel, the professors were able to meet students privately if the students needed support and to discuss their personal concerns. Such
personal relationships with the professors, as Abel mentioned, made him comfortable not only sharing about his struggles but also identifying his goals for the future. Selam also acknowledged her department chair’s openness to make “stereotype-free decisions” through understanding her perspectives. “Our department chair was also very supportive, instead of making generalized opinions [pause], I saw him taking the time to slowly explain what the work setting expectations are.”

Abel also added that his advisor trusted his potential and provided him spaces that were in line with his interests. Abel reflected that his advisor identified his needs, struggles, and paved the way to solve these concerns within himself. She cultivated in him a sense of trust about his potential and ability to solve concerns by himself. Abel appreciated that these were excellent approaches, not only to solve his challenges as a doctoral student but also to interact with his current students.

Some participants also acknowledged how the faculty support helped them to develop their resume through offering teaching and co-teaching opportunities. Simone reflected that since the faculty were willing to co-teach with her, she was able to develop rich teaching experiences. Simone mentioned that the feedback she received from the professors with whom she co-taught was very encouraging and constructive. The program also provided her a full-time instructor position, so she could grow as an effective counselor educator. Other participants also recognized the support they received from their professors, dissertation chairs, and the faculty in their CES programs. Josie reflected, “I feel like [pause] we have a lot of support and opportunities from our professors, supervisors, and program in the training that we get as a counselor educator.”
Ting-Wei also reflected on the special support she received from the international faculty in her CES program. She particularly appreciated one of the international faculty members who regularly checked on the international students’ progress in the program. She stated, “One of them was very generous, she regularly sends emails for all of us and scheduled office hours for international students. I really appreciate her support… she was willing to open her doors and help us to adjust some unique needs because of her background and her previous experiences.”

Overview of the Participants’ Support Systems

In this section, I presented the participants’ perspectives about their support systems and protective factors. The participants acknowledged the emotional, social, and academic support they received from their peers/cohorts, dissertation chairs, professors, supervisors, and/or the programs. Additionally, the participants reflected on the emotional support they received from their families and friends. Most of them confirmed that these supports were their protective factors to break through many barriers and to grow as effective counselor educators. Figure 3 presents the summary of themes of the participants’ support systems and protective factors.
Participants’ Contributions

The participants’ contributions to the CES programs emerged during the analysis of the main research question: “How do international counselor educators-in-training and graduates of CES doctoral programs think they contribute to the CES programs in the host universities.” The term contribution is described as the participants’ personal experiences and diverse cultural backgrounds they brought to the CES programs, which were helpful for fostering multicultural teaching and learning environments in the programs. Four main themes emerged under this research idea: diversity as the beauty of counseling; advocacy and social justice; internationalization of counseling; and coping styles. The following sections describe these themes in detail.

Diversity as the Beauty of Counseling

The participants in this study reported that they contributed to CES programs and to the counseling profession in different ways: The participants agreed that they were bringing diverse experiences and cultural perspectives to the programs that could enhance diversity in the counseling profession. Most of the participants described that diversity is the beauty of counseling. They mentioned that their lived experiences contributed to a variety of teaching styles and counseling strategies in this profession. In relation to this, Min-Ji stated that since she has experienced diverse cultural backgrounds, she can easily understand other people’s perspectives, which can help her to modify her ways of teaching, counseling, and/or research in the CES program. She also mentioned that the rich variety of her cultural background can help her become a more effective researcher and future counselor educator. She added, “As having a
diverse perspective, I am also sensitive to give attention for people with various needs.” Ting-Wei described how her lived experiences and cultural perspectives contributed to the program to integrate culture-oriented environments and different teaching, counseling, and supervision styles based on individuals’ needs. Ting-Wei added, “I think one of my contributions is that I am culturally sensitive, and I am open to feedback. I am passionate about those diverse issues and I am willing to modify my teaching materials.” Similar to Ting-Wei, Josie also described her openness to differences. Josie has a rich cultural experience and can understand how individuals differ because of their cultural orientations. Josie also reflected that such a kind of understanding can lead her to be more sensitive, more compassionate, and more empathetic to different opinions and disagreements, which enhances diversity in her CES program.

Most of the participants noted the importance of integrating different teaching methods that consider all students’ learning needs, so they acknowledged that their diverse cultural backgrounds and lived experiences fostered multicultural-oriented learning environments. For example, Ting-Wei reflected that she brings different viewpoints for teaching and intervention strategies to address the needs of diverse groups. She stated that “there is not only one way of intervention/counseling strategies.” Ting-Wei also added that as a primary information source, she can bring and discuss her own cultural values and experiences with professors and peers, which foster diversity in the CES program. She stated, “There is a generalization about all cultural values. There is a generalized knowledge in the textbooks about different cultures. But my contribution can be to make peers and professors aware of different Asian culture. I also let them know that there are different perspectives of how to help people.”

Some of the participants described that their diverse experiences can foster awareness and enhance understanding of differences in the CES programs. For instance, Min-Ji pointed out that
her various perspectives can make differences in the CES program that widen the professors’ and students’ understanding. Min-Ji acknowledged that the change is bi-directional; through sharing her experiences, she can also widen her perspectives to know more about the American culture. Other participants also reflected on how they enhanced different perspectives and ways of thinking in the CES programs. Although Selam was disappointed because the program did not fully consider her diversity, she acknowledged that her diverse experiences could be a great contribution to spread awareness. She stated, “Honestly, I feel like my contributions would be more meaningful and counted if my presence was considered.” She noted that her presence in the program could help the professors and the peers to step out of their comfort zones and to consider different perspectives during their teaching and/or other professional relationships. Selam also reflected on how her contribution can make a big difference in the program by enhancing cultural understanding and awareness of others’ perspectives. She mentioned that the counseling profession has been mostly shaped by the majority in the U.S./Western culture. Hence, many professionals lack broader understanding of different cultural perspectives. In relation to this, Selam stated that “some of the principles that they really value are not essentially universal. Our different perspectives open our colleagues and our professors to varied experiences. They will be willing to pay attention to the international students’ needs instead of making assumptions and they could respect individual differences.”

Most of the participants described that in the CES programs, people might learn about diversity in written formats from books and articles. However, international students can contribute to the teaching by sharing their lived experiences as primary information sources. For example, Min-Ji stated, “They might learn in written format, but it is different from my lived
experience. I can share and discuss my experiences with my faculty, cohort, and they have the opportunity to integrate it.”

Except for one, the participants reported that some of their collectivist cultural values could be an addition to the counseling profession. For example, Selam and Nafula explained that collectivist cultural values such as enhanced interpersonal interactions and teamwork can enhance professional relationships in the CES programs. According to them, enhanced interpersonal interaction is the basic aspect of counseling. Selam described that her cultural background focuses on the “group and systemic wellness” and interdependency. She described that counselors should accept the “middle ground” that considers the groups’ interests instead of focusing only on the individual. The following clearly illustrates Selam’s stance about her contribution of the collectivist perspective to the CES program.

I believe [pause] that accepting that the middle ground could benefit our clients. Working with our clients and students from the point of individual wellness is important only when it integrates healthy collective cultural practices. For instance, when my students say that ‘I want to study accounting’, I ask them ‘what does your father and mother think about your choices?’ I recognize the input of the family members and friends in their lives and I value it as an important aspect of counseling. Because we belong to families, to groups, and to societal contexts, I think culturally I believe that the individual is not existing alone [pause]. The individual should be interdependent, and I support that value. I also encourage them to talk with their family and friends. It is a form of respecting their collective contribution.

Some participants considered the experiences they bring to the program as one of their achievements. In relation to this, Simone stated, “Every class that I have taught, I have spoken about my experiences in the field and my international experience. The students appreciated me for connecting my life experiences to their learning.” Josie also noted how her contribution as an international student in the program were unique. Josie said, “I have the perspective of my society. When I talk about those perspectives, people appreciate that point of view. There are
some examples of my culture that are applicable in the program. I feel that I am contributing that to provide a broader perspective of involving different cultures.”

Overall, the findings revealed the participants’ contributions to the CES program regarding different viewpoints that could enhance diversity, cultural understanding, and awareness of differences. The participants pointed out that their experiences and unique cultural backgrounds could bring broader perspectives that can help the programs to foster culturally responsive teaching methodologies and varied counseling strategies. Some of the participants also reported that their contribution can spread awareness to the professors and colleagues to think outside of the box, to pay attention to differences, and to act out of their comfort zones.

**Advocacy and Social Justice**

Some of the participants described their viewpoints of how they can be advocates for the counseling profession, for minorities, and for people who lack equal access of education as well as for some specific groups (e.g. children, people at risk of substance abuse, and international students). This term describes the participants’ contributions regarding social support, leadership activities, and empowerment training. Connecting to this definition, Abel described the importance of client-initiated advocacy strategy to empower clients to advocate for themselves and to seek support when necessary. “Instead of me advocating for others, it is better to empower them to advocate on their own.” Abel said that most often he uses a “self-advocacy” strategy of empowering clients by connecting them to support groups that can help the clients advocate for themselves. Abel stated, “This strategy is working well. You see people struggling with different mental illnesses, but not willing to seek professional help. If they are empowered they can go for counseling or social support.”
Ting-Wei described her advocacy perspective from a different angle. She described the importance of modifying teaching methods and learning materials for international students based on their needs. “The counseling material I am teaching is not applicable for international students, particularly to import counseling knowledge and to practice it in their countries.” Ting-Wei also added, “Most of the time, I talked to my colleagues/international how can we modify the material. That is how I advocate for international students because I do not see any benefits for them to learn these materials.” She also noted that advocating for minorities is an important value in the counseling profession, so she believes in making differences for minorities for better services. “I was able to share my experience and bring up my varied supervision skills with minority students. They appreciated that because they were able to share their concerns. I think, they did not feel safe to show their concerns to someone else.” Simone also reflected how she advocate for children who lack equal access for education.

Nafula shared Ting-Wei’s idea of advocating for minorities. Nafula noted that as a multicultural competent counselor, she can provide safe space and empathetic understanding for minorities and can advocate for them to bring their voices. She said,

When I see something which is not fair, I need to speak up for the people who may not be in position to speak up for them. They may not even know that something is unfair or may be dangerous for them. I think it is my obligation in such circumstances to advocate for them and so they can be empowered to stand against what they do not want.

Some of the participants also reported their advocacy efforts for the counseling profession. For example, Abel and Ting-Wei mentioned that through their advocacy work, they can promote counseling not only in the U.S. but also in their home countries. They stated that there is a strong stigma attached to the counseling and mental health in different cultures. Ting-
Wei described, “In terms of my country, most people has the stigma toward counseling, they are not open to counseling. That is what I want to change.” Abel added:

I am trying to advocate for clinical mental health profession. Many people do not really consider counseling as important because of the stigma attached to it. I see people seeking medical help, but when it comes to counseling and mental health they are hesitant. I am fighting such stigmas toward service seeking for clinical mental health.

The above descriptions revealed the participants’ contributions through advocating for clients, international students, and minority groups, and for the counseling profession at large.

**Internationalization of the Counseling Profession**

Many of the participants acknowledged that they contribute to the counseling profession through importing counseling knowledge and skills to their home countries and worldwide. For example, Min-Ji expressed that she promotes the counseling profession to international students, so they can apply to the program. Additionally, she mentioned that she can help the CES program consider the needs of international students so many international students can join the program, which helps to advance counseling worldwide. Nafula also added that after she finishes her Ph.D. program, she has a plan to train school counselors, teachers, church and community leaders and social workers for better services in her home country, which enhances internationalization of the counseling profession. According to the participants’ description, they are important bridges to transfer counseling knowledge and skills internationally. Selam mentioned that she plans to implement some Western counseling principles that are relevant in her country, which in turn according to her, promotes professional counseling worldwide.
Coping Styles

Coping styles are defined as the participants’ strengths and personal qualities that helped them adjust to their CES programs and in their new sociocultural settings. Most of the participants mentioned that although they passed through various challenges and struggles, they were able to manage the difficulties and achieve their learning goals. They noted that they were goal-directed, attentive, resilient, self-motivated, persistent, tenacious, and open to experiencing new things. Some of the participants described that they can share these qualities with people in the CES programs. The participants also had the ability to reframe challenges and stressors into opportunities for their learning and growth. Some participants mentioned that international students have unique qualities, strength, cultural sensitivity that help them in managing unique stressors. In the following, Ting-Wei described how she has been resilient in the face of many adversities.

I still survive. I concur all challenges and barriers. I got my degree and got a job. I think that is the big resilience. We international students come here with different reasons. We concur all those numerous challenges to reach our goals. We do not give up very easily. We find our way to go around those challenges, to identify what kind of solutions and always we find some solutions to challenge our self and to make sure we reach our goals... So that is the resilience part I can contribute to peers.

Overview of the Participants’ Contributions

The study’s findings revealed the participants’ different contributions to their CES programs. Most of the participants described their diverse cultural perspectives and lived experiences that can be helpful for diversifying the counseling profession. Some participants also explained their advocacy strategies for clients, for students, and for the counseling profession. Similarly, some of the participants expressed their contributions in terms of the internationalizing
the counseling profession and sharing their coping styles with peers in the CES programs. Most of the participants reported their coping styles as having a sense of determination and self-discipline, persistence and tenacity, optimistic attitudes, open mindedness, and perseverance, hard work and a sense of focus. Figure 4 presents the summary of themes of the participants’ contributions to their CES programs.

Figure 4. The participants’ contributions.

Summary of the Findings

By exploring the four main research questions, this study revealed the participants’ overall lived experiences, challenges, support systems, and contribution to their CES programs. Six main themes emerged while exploring the participants’ experiences as international students in the CES programs: journey of empowerment, missed opportunities, acculturation and
adjustment, personal wellness, limited social interactions, and political impact. The participants described their professional identity development as their journeys of empowerment. However, most of the participants also regretted the missed opportunities in their programs because of the programs’ limitations when addressing the international students’ needs and their self-imposed limitations. The participants agreed about the importance of maintaining their personal wellness as counselor educators. Most of them used various self-care strategies to maintain their physical and mental wellness. Except for two, the participants had limited social interactions, although they all agreed on the importance of advanced social and interpersonal interactions for their mental health. Some of the participants also shared their concerns and fears about the current U.S. political system, which has impacted their personal wellness and professional development in many ways.

Similarly, six main themes were identified during analysis of the participants’ challenges in the CES programs: lack of cultural understanding, disconnected teaching-learning styles, language barriers, intensity of course loads, financial hardships, and cultural differences complicated their professional developments. The participants complained about the lack of cultural understanding for considering their unique learning needs in the CES programs. The participants also acknowledged how they felt disconnected from the teaching-learning processes because of different teaching methodologies from their previous learning experiences. Some of the participants pointed out the challenges associated with interactive learning methods. Others complained about the structured nature of the CES curricula, and some complained about their vulnerability and loss of control in a learning environment that focused only on “trusting the process.” Some of them also acknowledged the challenges in terms of their limited language and having different accents. Other participants complained about their professors’ reactions toward
their language struggles. The participants pointed out their struggles of managing intense course requirements and their visa restrictions. Moreover, most of them had financial hardships, which created additional stressors. The participants also shared how their different cultural backgrounds complicated their professional development as counselor-educators.

The analysis of the participants’ support systems also revealed three main themes: cohorts; families, friends, and international clubs; and professors and advisors. Even though the participants struggled with many challenges, the support systems were their protective factors to navigate through the barriers. According to their descriptions, they received the greatest supports from their cohorts as compared to their professors and advisors. The participants also acknowledged the support they received from their families, loved ones, and friends.

Finally, four themes emerged from analysis of the participants’ contributions to the CES programs emerged: diversity as the beauty of counseling; advocacy and social justice; internationalization of the counseling profession; and coping styles. The participants reported that their diverse cultural backgrounds can make differences and enhance understanding of the broader perspectives in the counseling profession. They also expressed their contributions in terms of advocacy for minorities, international students, children, and the counseling profession. Most of the participants noted their contributions in terms of importing counseling knowledge and skills to their home countries, which can help the internationalization of the profession worldwide. Some of the participants also discussed their contributions from different angles, some participants described their strengths and personal qualities, which can be contributions to the CES program.
CHAPTER 6
DISCUSSION OF MAJOR FINDINGS

This study explored the overall lived experiences of international students in CES doctoral programs in four U.S. regions. Through qualitative interviews, the interpretative phenomenological study explored four main research questions. The participants shared rich descriptions of their perspectives and opinions about their overall lived experiences, challenges, support systems, and contributions to the CES programs. In this chapter, I provide a highlight of the major study’s findings in relation to existing literature and the current study’s conceptual framework. I also present conclusions and implications, limitations of the current study, suggestions for future research, and researcher’s reflection.

Importance of a Vygotskian Conceptual Framework

Using Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural learning theory to guide the current study was important for two main reasons: for the study’s methodological design and for the implications. Vygotsky asserts that sociocultural forces (culture, social interactions/contacts in specific contexts, cultural tools/artifacts) all affect individuals’ learning, communication, thoughts, and actions and behaviors (Wertsch, 1985). Vygotsky views culture and language as fundamental tools that greatly influence individuals’ learning processes. Consistent with Vygotsky, I acknowledge the importance and influence of cultural values in one’s personal and professional development. Using the sociocultural learning model was helpful for understanding the findings
and interpreting the participants’ lived experiences based on their perspectives. Most of the themes in the current study are connected to the participants’ cultural backgrounds. The Vygotskian framework helped me understand the influence of the participants’ cultural perspectives on their lived experiences, uncover, and frame the meanings of the themes based on the participants’ unique lived experiences. Although the participants were from three different continents and had diverse cultural backgrounds, the sociocultural learning theory helped me develop culturally appropriate approaches; the way I asked questions and interpreted the themes were guided by the conceptual framework.

The second importance of the Vygotskian conceptual framework is the implications for CES programs and counselor educators. Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural learning theory focuses on the importance of understanding and considering learners’ sociocultural backgrounds. According to the sociocultural theory perspective, the role of educators should be to understand how human social and mental activity are organized through culturally constructed meaning. The sociocultural learning theory helps professors, supervisors, and/or counseling programs understand and consider learners’/supervisees’ sociocultural contexts for effective communication processes and to address the learners’/supervisees’ needs. Since the participants came from different cultures, they varied from the rest of the learners/supervisees and/or their supervisors/professors (Abramson, 2012; Jordan, 2010).

As described in Chapter 5, many of the participants’ challenges were associated with the lack of cultural understanding and less responsiveness to their cultural perspectives and unique needs. Therefore, the implication of the sociocultural theory, according to Constantine and Sue (2005), is that the CES programs and counselor educators should recognize the presence of cultural differences and should openly discuss influences of culture with their students and
supervisees. This process encourages international students to express their cultural experiences, values, and norms as well as the similarities and differences of their cultural backgrounds with the host culture that can help international students articulate and make meaning of their learning experiences and adjust to the program (Constantine & Sue). Vygotsky’s learning theory also reinforces that counselor educators should integrate culturally appropriate learning strategies and counseling interventions based on the diverse needs of their students and/or clients.

In the sociocultural learning theory, language is also a central aspect of the learning process (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). This explanation also emphasizes that counselor educators should be sensitive and responsive to the language struggles of international students in CES programs and to consider appropriate strategies: for example, connecting international students to mentors and/or creating English conversation opportunities in CES programs. Most of the participants in the current study also complained about the lack of validation of their lived experiences and diverse cultural backgrounds. In relation to this, Vygotsky’s (1978) theory recognizes the importance of incorporating students’ lived experiences into the learning-teaching material, which has an implication for counselor educators to consider, validate, and integrate the diverse experiences of international students. Incorporating international students’ previous experiences can help them to build knowledge for the new material in connection to their prior knowledge.

Participants’ Overall Lived Experiences in CES Programs

In terms of the first research question that explored the overall lived experiences of international students (e.g., unique learning needs, adjustment processes, expectations, and interpersonal interactions) in the CES program, most of the findings are in line with previous
As reported in Chapter 5, most of the participants described their journeys of empowerment as meaning making and personal change processes in which the learning materials from different perspectives empowered them through engaging in constructive learning. The participants acknowledged that the learning process helped their self-growth and exploration, acquisition of new knowledge, and counselor educator professional identity development. Most importantly, the participants were empowered through teaching and co-teaching, supervising master’s students, and providing counseling for diverse clients. The participants also had opportunities for professional development through engaging themselves in different leadership activities, conference presentations, research, and advocacy and social justice project.

The participants in the current study stepped out of their comfort zones as a strategy to adjust to the CES learning culture and the new sociocultural settings. Previous findings (e.g., Rasheed, 2015; Gaballah, 2014) reported stepping out of the comfort zone as a challenge for international students but not as adjustment strategy. The participants in the current study reached out to available resources (social, financial, and emotional), which helped their adjustment process. Some of the participants mentioned that since their CES programs were limited to research opportunities, they reached out to other programs (e.g. clinical psychology, social work) and addressed their research needs accordingly.

Additionally, being protective of one’s own culture was an acculturation strategy for the participants in the current study. Although the participants respected the American culture, they did not integrate all of the cultural values. They were able to evaluate the importance of the new culture and its consistency with their personal values and/or religious values. Being protective of their own cultural values helped the participants manage culture shock. However, findings from
previous studies did not frame the importance of being protective of own cultural values (Rasheed, 2015).

The majority of the participants in the current study reported that the CES programs were limited in accommodating the students’ differences and addressing their unique needs. As described in Chapter 5, the participants felt they lacked equal attention and consideration by their professors and the CES programs. Most often, the participants were in a disadvantaged position and received differential treatment, particularly in some specific areas (e.g., counseling, supervision, multicultural acknowledgement, leadership skills development, and research activities). Some of the participants mentioned that they did not feel connected to the learning process because of the programs’ focus on domestic students and overlooked the international students’ limitations, previous experiences, and specific learning needs. Discriminatory behaviors were also evident in their statements about some of the professors and supervisors; however, the participants did not define this experience as discrimination against international students, which is not consistent with most of the literature. (e.g., Gaballah, 2014; Rasheed, 2015) findings about the perception of racial/ethnic discrimination of international students. The participants in the current study recognized the levels of different treatment; however, they did not identify such biased behaviors and unfair treatments as discrimination. From my lived experience in a collectivist culture, I may speculate that discrimination may be a more social construct in Westernized culture than in a collectivist culture, so the participants’ cultural backgrounds may have had an impact on their definitions and terminology about their treatment in the CES programs. Furthermore, previous researchers who used the term discrimination to describe behavior toward international students may have conceived the term vs their research participants.
Most of the participants in the current study acknowledged the direct and indirect impacts of the current U.S. politics on their personal and professional development. They said they have developed fears, anxieties, and feelings of being an outsider, which have impacted their personal wellness and professional growth. The current politics have hindered some of the international students’ active engagement in advocacy, leadership, and social justice activities. It has also created psychological instability and fear of the unknown. Except for some hardships in processing their visas to enter the U.S., previous research findings did not report the impact of the U.S. politics on international students’ professional development and personal wellness. After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks (Choudaha & Chang, 2012), the U.S. developed strict immigration laws that have adversely affected international students’ visa processing requirements. However, according to the current study’s findings, the participants felt that the U.S. politics are coming to “the international students’ front-doors,” which impacted their day-to-day normal functioning. The current findings may support that international students might be comfortable with the previous U.S. politics or the U.S. politics may not have directly impacted the lives of international students during the past administrations. However, the impact of the current politics, according to the participants’ description, is very intense, frequent, and stressful and is negatively affecting their day-to-day personal activities and professional development (e.g. advocacy efforts and social justice services).

Participants’ Challenges in the Counselor Education and Supervision Programs

Although the participants acknowledged their journeys of empowerment as self-growth and counselor educator professional identity development, at the same time, they reported that growing as counselor educators had been stressful and challenging processes. The participants
agreed that they faced unique challenges related to a lack of cultural understanding, disconnected teaching-learning styles, and intensity of the course load. Most of the participants also reported other challenges such as language barriers, financial hardships, and cultural differences that complicated their professional development.

Most of the participants in the current study felt they lacked recognition, acceptance, and validation of their lived cultural experiences. The participants struggled to find people who would acknowledge the participants’ strengths and consider their perspectives in the learning environments. According to the current study’s conceptual framework, considering the participants’ lived experiences and perspectives it is important for the participants to build new knowledge based on their existing experiences and to diversify the CES programs for enhanced cultural understanding (Vygotsky, 1978). However, the participants complained that most people in the CES programs were either purposefully ignorant in recognizing their perspectives or were unaware of the importance of different perspectives for the CES programs. As described in Chapter 5, diversifying CES programs is seldom a reality because the programs failed to consider the different viewpoints that are at hand. Most of the participants reported how the lack of recognition of their cultural perspectives, potential contributions, and lived experiences negatively impacted their self-confidence and self-esteem, paralleling Banjog and Olson (2016), who reported that international students struggled with lack of recognition and social acceptance when they encountered new learning and sociocultural environments at hosting universities.

The current study revealed struggles with disconnected teaching-learning styles in the CES programs. Because of their cultural backgrounds and previous learning styles, most of the participants did not benefit from the more interactive teaching methods in their CES programs, particularly during their first year. Similarly, Ladd and Ruby (1990) stated that instructors most
often employ learning strategies based on their own comfort, making international students the primary victims of such kinds of learning environments. Accordingly, the participants in the current study felt their learning needs had been overlooked throughout the curricula.

The majority of the participants in the current study indicated that advanced practicum hours are required too early in their learning process (first semester of their first year). Previous studies documented the challenges of international students during advanced practicum but did not clearly examine the influence of timing in practicing clinical hours. The participants in the current study reported that practicing clinical hours (counseling and supervision) in their first year is very challenging for several reasons. The participants were in a transition stage, and adjusting to the new sociocultural environment was demanding. The participants’ perspectives about counseling might also have been different from the U.S. population and working with clients was challenging for most of the participants, particularly during their first semester of their first year. Additionally, when they joined the CES programs, the participants lacked appropriate counseling, supervision, and multicultural skills training to work with diverse clients in the U.S.

Although the sociocultural learning theory acknowledges the importance of understanding the influence of language in students’ learning and adjustment process (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003; Özturgut & Murphy, 2009), some of the participants in the current study reported that their professors did not recognize their language struggles. The participants complained about their professors’ lack of understanding of language barriers and the professors’ reactions toward the participants’ language struggles.

The participants’ cultural background was one of the most significant challenges that complicated their professional development in the CES programs. Levy-Warren (Date) defined
cultural identity as a sense of feeling connected to a group based on religion, national origin, class, ethnicity, activity, sexual orientation, or geography (as cited in Castro-Abad, 1995). Individuals may develop and strengthen their cultural identity through interactions, groupings, specific activities, and practices and by developing feelings of belongingness to particular groups.

Except for one, all of the participants described that their behaviors, beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions were influenced by collectivist cultural values that focus on group and systemic wellness and the “we mentality.” The participants’ cultural differences impacted their communication, interpersonal interactions, and their professional relationships with their professors, classmates, supervisors, clients, and supervisees in different settings. Participants in the current study were from a collectivistic culture, which operates with group-oriented and collective responsibility, which supports Gaballah’s (2014) work. The international students in both studies faced difficulties shifting from a family and group-oriented, interdependent, and communal culture into a very different individualistic culture that expected them to be independent, to express themselves freely, and to be assertive. The participants’ different cultural values surfaced in various academic and personal settings (e.g., teaching/learning environments, clinical settings, and other social interactions). Because of their cultural differences, the majority of the participants in the current study had difficulty adjusting to the CES learning environments that were mainly based on individualistic cultural values and norms. Most of them had difficulty advocating for themselves, and some complained about the professors’ and supervisors’ lack of understanding about their differences in making classrooms and clinical settings culturally responsive environments.
Support Systems and Protective Factors

The participants in the current study acknowledged the greatest importance of their cohorts'/peers'/classmates’ support for their academic, social, emotional, and personal development in the CES programs. The participants also stated how the strong social bond with their cohorts helped their academic and personal adjustment processes in the programs. Most of the participants reported that their cohorts shared their anxieties and frustrations; some of the participants confirmed how the cohorts were important for offering them extra time to listen to complaints and to encourage the international students in their progress. In contrast to the current study, Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, and Van Horn (2002) reported that international students had fewer social support systems either on campus or off campus at American universities.

Although the participants reported less emotional and social support from their programs, advisors, professors, and supervisors as compared to their cohorts, all of them acknowledged the significant academic, social, and emotional support they received from their advisors/dissertation chairs, professors, supervisors, and/or programs. The participants also described the financial support they received from the programs, which enhanced their adjustment in the new sociocultural settings. Additionally, the participants reflected on the emotional support they received from their families and friends. The participants reported that that the supports they received from their cohorts, programs, professors, advisors, and supervisors were their protective factors to break through many barriers and to grow as effective counselor educators.
Participants’ Contributions

The participants in the current study pointed out their contributions to the CES, but the participants reported their contributions in different ways. All of them acknowledged the importance of their diverse cultural perspectives and lived experiences to the CES programs to enhance diversity, cultural understanding, and awareness of differences. The participants pointed out that the integration of their broader perspectives to the programs could advance culturally responsive teaching methodologies and varied intervention strategies for diverse groups. Some of the participants also reported that their contributions can spread awareness to their professors and colleagues to think outside of the box, to pay attention to differences, and to step out of their comfort zones. The current study and existing research (Ng & Smith, 2009) confirm that international students’ diverse cultural backgrounds are important additions to counseling programs. People in the programs can learn and grow through interactions with international students; particularly domestic students who do not have direct international exposure can learn and widen their multicultural knowledge and understanding. Some of the participants in the current study also described their contributions in terms of internationalization of counseling and growth of the profession by importing counseling knowledge and skills to their home countries. International students are the driving forces of the internationalization of the counseling profession, which parallels Ng and Noonan’s (2012) findings.

The participants reported their contributions regarding advocating for the counseling profession, clients, children, international students, minorities, and vulnerable individuals. The participants discussed that they advocate for international students through pushing to adapt CES curricula to address unique learning needs of international students. Other participants also
pointed out that they focused on self-advocacy efforts and empowered vulnerable individuals through networking and group counseling. The participants reported that there is a strong stigma attached to counseling, particularly in their countries; therefore, they described their advocacy efforts to promote the counseling profession in different ways (e.g., using media and empowering people to seek professional help).

Conclusions and Implications

Conclusions

The overall goal of the study was to highlight the lived experiences of international students in CES programs that serve as a basis of understanding the participant’s professional developmental needs, benefits, and contributions as well as their challenges and educational barriers. This study can help counselor education programs foster culturally responsive and inclusive academic support systems that may empower international students to develop appropriate knowledge and skills, which could have broader positive impact on their countries when they go back home to continue their counseling, leadership, and advocacy experiences.

Counselor education programs are expected to be culturally diverse, and counselor educators are also expected to be culturally sensitive and responsive to every person. However, according to the current findings, the truth is far from the expectation. Although there were great opportunities for diversifying CES programs through incorporating firsthand lived experiences and diverse cultural backgrounds, it was unfortunate that the programs were not inclusive, which conflicts with the mission of the CES. Most of the participants stated that diversifying counseling profession is seldom a reality.
Primarily, CES programs’ curricula about diversity and multiculturalism focus on race/ethnicity in the U.S, which overlooks international students’ lived experiences. Moreover, counselor educators often depend on a written generalized knowledge about culture and are susceptible to assumptions as well as generalizations. For example, because of the influence of culture and previous learning experiences, international students may not be participating in classroom discussions as compared to domestic students; professors may assume that international students lack knowledge about the content under discussion. Therefore, advancing diversity through incorporating specific cultural knowledge is very important in the CES program to reduce biased decisions and generalized assumptions. Since international students are coming from different countries and continents, they bring diverse lived experiences about their specific cultures. There is a lot to learn from international students’ personal qualities, adjustment strategies, advocacy efforts, coping styles, and diverse backgrounds. However, the findings show there is a lack of cultural exchange events in counselor education programs, which limits intercultural learning, diversity, and sharing of cultural values.

Social justice and advocacy are the building blocks of the counseling profession. However, based on the findings, the counselor educators did not consider appropriate social justice actions and advocacy efforts for inclusive learning environments. The participants reported that their unique needs were not well addressed, and they felt that they were not embraced or understood and their voices were unheard. The findings in the current study revealed the participants’ lack validation and acceptance; the participants described that they were treated as a child and were expected to work only on “do” and “not to do” lists and to fit into the existing learning system that overlooked their needs and limitations as international students. Because of the structured nature of the CES programs’ curricula, some of the
participants mentioned that they lacked freedom and flexibility to learn appropriate counseling knowledge and skills relevant to import into their countries.

**Implications**

Although the participants in the current study acknowledged their journeys of empowerment as self-growth and professional identity development; at the same time, they reported that growing as counselor educators had been stressful and challenging processes. The participants agreed that they faced challenges that were related to lack of cultural understanding, disconnected teaching-learning styles, and intensity of course loads. Most of the participants reported other challenges such as language barriers, financial hardships, and cultural differences complicated their professional development. The current study supported previous research findings about international students’ difficulties while studying in foreign universities (Faleel, Tam, Lee, Har, & Foo, 2012; Zhao, Jindal-Snape, Topping, & Todman; 2008), which in turn affected their psychological wellness, academic performance, and student-advisor/supervisor relationships. (Adrian-Taylor, Noels, & Tischler, 2007). Based on the findings, the implications of the current study are summarized into three areas. Based on the findings, the following implications are forwarded to CES programs, counselor educators, and international students believing that the recommendations could be important to foster culturally-oriented learning environments and varied teaching-learning styles that consider international students’ sociocultural backgrounds and previous learning experiences.
Implications for Counselor Education Programs

Being far from their social comfort zones, various obstacles challenged the participants. As described in Chapter 5, the CES programs are designed in favor of domestic students and overlook the learning and professional developmental needs of international students. In such conditions, the implications of this study focus on the importance of recognizing international students’ cultural backgrounds and unique needs. Programs should consider and incorporate culturally-oriented learning environments that inclusively address all students’ learning needs. It is also important to validate and integrate the lived experiences and cultural values of international students as primary information sources to diversify the programs and widen perspectives in the programs.

The participants acknowledged that their challenges were very serious during the first semester of their first year. In relation to this, it is very important if the programs arrange special orientation activities for international students and connect them with mentors and cohorts who can enhance their adjustment and acculturation processes. It is also important to network international students with available resources (social, academic, and/or financial) on campus and/or off campus. Adapting to the U.S. educational culture is an essential aspect for international students’ all-round academic and social development. Faculty and professors should encourage international students to interact with American students and join social organizations and clubs as well as student associations, in addition to encouraging mentor-mentee relationships. Creating formal and/or informal groups in CES programs is important to enhance international students’ learning processes, cultural adjustments, and English conversations skills.
The participants acknowledged that international students do not have a history or identity in the U.S. and do not have enough information about their rights and limitations; there is no organized group that advocates for their rights and, therefore, the voices of international students are unheard all over the country. Therefore, the participants highlighted the importance of creating committees in CES programs that advocate for and bring attention to international students’ issues. It is also important to increase the number of international faculty who can understand the complications of international students. Some of the participants also recommended the programs should help international students understand the importance and process of professional licensure. The participants also suggested the importance of organizing cultural exchange events in the CES programs to enhance culture sharing and understanding.

The participants reported on the intensity level of the course requirements and the amount of reading in the CES programs. They recommended the importance of selecting essential materials and focusing on quality rather than quantity. They also recommended that programs consider appropriate counseling, multicultural, and supervision skills training before international students are involved in practical work. Some of the participants also recommended the importance of flexible curriculum design in selecting appropriate courses that consider international students’ learning needs.

The current study’s findings identified the need for more supervision and multicultural counseling courses in CES doctoral programs and the need for intensive training on counseling, supervision, and multicultural skills before practicing clinical hours. Understanding the knowledge gaps of international students in their first semester of their first year is important. The participants recommended the importance of accommodating those gaps by arranging counseling and supervision clinical practices later in the program. The participants also
recommended the need for practical application of multicultural knowledge in different facets of communities with diverse populations.

As noted in Chapter 5, most of the participants faced financial hardships in meeting their basic needs, so it is vital that programs arrange scholarships and graduate assistantships for international students. International offices in the hosting universities have significant responsibilities when working with international students. For example, the participants’ acknowledged that stepping out of their comfort zones was an important strategy for their acculturation and adjustment processes. International offices should create important avenues for international students to connect with communities and network them with available resources.

Implication for Counselor Educators

The participants in the current study also felt unsupported, misunderstood, unheard, disappointed, and frustrated. Some of the participants also complained that because of lack of clear understanding about international students’ salient needs and challenges, most of the professors did not even know how to help or mentor those students. As indicated in Chapter 5, the voices of international students in the CES programs are unheard and their learning needs were not incorporated in the counseling training curricula. In this case, there is a need for special short-term training for counselor educators how to teach and supervise international students in CES programs. Additionally, professors should be more creative in their teaching pedagogy and consider how to involve international students in the classroom discussions. The participants in the current study recommended that professors should create environments where international students know that faculty are going to support them; faculty are going to advocate for them; and faculty are doing something in terms of policies or atmospheres in the learning environment. It
is also important to advocate for international students regarding school policies and procedures in terms of considering the students’ needs.

Counselor educators need to be mindful about the existence of micro-aggressions and try to make unbiased decisions/stereotype-free decisions and be open to consider the challenges and struggles of international students. It is important to create open communication and connect international students to available resources for their language struggles before making biased decisions because of their language limitations. The participants recommended the importance of need assessments to identify international students’ professional developmental needs, barriers, and limitations, which support incorporating appropriate strategies into the learning process. Instead of operating based on prior beliefs, professors need to be responsive, listen to and ask questions, be open minded, and be willing to listen to international students’ experiences and challenges so international students can feel listened to and understood.

The participants in the current study had struggles understanding unspoken cultural/social classroom codes. In this regard, supervisors and professors need to make clear classroom instructions and communicate the expectations in words instead of guiding classroom discussions by invisible expectations. It is also important to understand the cultural dynamics of international students that affect supervisory and counseling relationships. It is also important to check not only on their academic progress but also on the students’ personal wellness and safety.

In the current study, most of the participants reported the limited research and publication opportunities, which ignores the importance of empowering international students through collaborative research and joint projects, conference co-presentations, and creating professional networks. Mentoring and career advising are also essential aspects for international students to
develop skills of finding jobs, writing CVs, developing teaching philosophies, and doing job
interviews from the American perspective.

**Implications for International Students**

As illustrated below, most of the participants put emphasis on the international students
being responsible for achieving their educational goals.

The intensity of workloads and other hardships could lead students to feel less motivated
and tired, which might affect the students’ personal health. The participants recommended the
importance of maintaining self-care and personal wellness not only studying in the CES
programs but also in their everyday lives. Rather than only striving for academic success,
international students should balance their lives by maintaining appropriate self-care and social
interactions. Building interpersonal interactions with Americans was particularly important for
these international students to adjust easily and to advance their language and conversational
English. Through making interpersonal connections, international students can learn about and
adapt to the new culture. The participants also recommended the importance of integrating into
and respecting the American culture while recognizing their own cultural values through
bidirectional learning and cultural exchange.

The participants also recommended that international students should venture out of their
comfort zones and reach out to available resources and opportunities. It is necessary to take
proactive measures in their learning processes in the programs and network themselves to
different people and organizations like the National Institute for Health for research funds. They
need to use the available opportunities such as going to workshops, attending conferences,
watching online streamed sessions, webinars, and connecting themselves with counseling
organizations. The participants also suggested the importance of international students’ active involvement in advocacy efforts for themselves, for other international students, for minorities, and for health issues. International students should also advocate for more international employees and faculty in their programs and different organizations (such as ACA, ACES, and NCC) who can understand the needs of international students. International students must also further their advocacy efforts to policy makers through sending emails, meetings, and talking to government representatives so they can understand and consider international students’ personal and academic needs during their policy making processes.

The participants also recommended the importance of differentiating relevant and culturally appropriate learning materials. International students need to consider how the learning practices in the CES programs connect with their cultural values and might be imported to their home countries. They should be aware of not imposing all of the westernized counseling principles and values on a different culture. They should question the existing knowledge and be responsible for translating and adapting the counseling values and principles based on their sociocultural contexts and societal norms. Most importantly, international students need to appreciate and acknowledge the indigenous helping ways in their culture and examine how the helping ways can be integrated into the counseling profession.

It is also important for international students to be aware of cultural, academic, and/or other requirements in the new academic and sociocultural settings. Instead of self-advising, they need to ask questions, read important information, and do research to help them easily adjust to the programs. International students should also be open to help the programs, professors, supervisors, and/or peers understand the international students’ needs, cultural backgrounds, and perspectives. If they do not speak up, no one knows international students’ unique needs, so they
should not be ashamed of asking for scholarships and finances. They should not be afraid of speaking about their differences, cultural values, and diverse cultural backgrounds. Taking courage is also important in naming things; for example, some participant mentioned that international students should have the courage to say, “I have an accent; is this accent a barrier for you to understand me?”

Although international students experience different challenges, they should learn through reframing the challenges into opportunities by being open to new experiences and new sociocultural settings and engaging in research, leadership, and advocacy activities. International students also need to trust their potential and their strengths. The participants also recommended international students to do not only operate from a collectivist mind set and do not expect their teachers or others will advocate for international students. They need to be aware that in the individualistic culture, students can survive if they are strategic and strong, and they should be also sure that they are in a different culture which operates on the principle of “the fittest can survive.” International students should also learn how to negotiate to achieve their goals. In general, international students need to be aware of the cultural requirements and should make informed choices.

Limitations of the Study

Except for one, the participants in the current study identified as female; therefore, the lack of gender balance might impact the diverse nature of the data. Additionally, the participants were from CACREP-accredited doctoral programs, which might also impact the current study’s findings because of the accreditation requirements. Most important another limitation of the current study is that except for one, the participants came from a collectivist cultural
backgrounds, which might also have had an impact on the current findings. Although the participants came from different countries, only three continents (Africa, Asia, and Europe) were considered in the current study. Additionally, three of the participants in this study were from the same region (Africa). Three other participants were from Asia; two of the participants were from the same country, and two of the participants also were from the same university/program. Their common cultural backgrounds and learning experiences may have influenced the current findings. Lastly, my status as an international student from a collectivist cultural background might have imposed a researcher bias, which might also have been a limitation for the current study.

**Future Research Recommendations**

The participants in the current study complained about their difficulties in managing all of the required materials on time because of the intensity of the reading, writing/reflections, and practicum/clinical and supervision hours. CACREP-accreditation might impact the intensity of course requirements in the CES programs, so it may be important if future research considers how CACREP accreditation impacts the lived experiences of international students in CES programs.

There is a lack of research about the perspectives of counseling programs, counselor educators, host universities’ international offices, and domestic students regarding international students in CES programs. Future research may further the perspectives by investigating viewpoints from counselor educators, supervisors, and/or domestic students’ experiences and perspectives about working with international students.
Future research may also include more participants from doctoral and master's level CES programs. Considering a mixed method design (Creswell, 2013) may be important for further studies to address the needs of a larger sample size. Quantitative methods in a mixed design might be important to explore relationships between variables such as relationships between international students’ coping styles and their adjustment process, relationships between language and academic adjustment, or the difference between domestic students’ and international students’ coping styles. Longitudinal studies may also be important for future research to explore what key elements and components (e.g., teaching-learning styles, counseling contents, ways of life, time management skills, or coping styles) the international students will take back to their home countries to facilitate internationalization of the counseling professions. Considering longitudinal studies may also help investigate what major influences the participants bring to their development as counselor educators.

Perhaps it may also be important for future studies to incorporate participants from different countries and geographical regions that may not be from a collectivist culture and investigate how cultural dynamics influence international students’ learning and adjustment processes. Additionally, the male participant in the current study reported fewer adversities and had fewer complaints about his professors and supervisors as compared to the female participants, which may have impacted the current findings. Therefore, future research may investigate how gender impacts the lived experiences of international students in CES programs. Lastly, some of the participants in the current study reflected on their concerns and feelings about the impact of the current politics on their personal and professional development. Most of them were disappointed, scared, and confused about the situation. Future studies may further
examine how the U.S. politics impact international students’ active engagement in counseling program activities: advocacy and social justice efforts; and professional identity development.

Researcher’s Reflection

I grew up in Ethiopia in an extended Christian family in which respect to hierarchy and group wellness were some of the greatest values that guided the family’s dynamics. The family’s standards have shaped not only my personal values but also my professional ethics. Growing up, my Christian parents taught me to be truthful, trustful, and generous, which positively affected my world view and life philosophy. Starting at an early age, I have developed values: loving and accepting others, sharing resources, respecting people and their views, and serving others. Regardless of individual differences (e.g., race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status), I acknowledge and serve people equally without bias. These values have informed not only my own behaviors and day-to-day activities but also have guided my professional identity development as a counselor-educator.

My Christian values and following Jesus Christ have led me to work toward a just world in which no people suffer from unfair treatment, injustice, and discrimination. I value service provision and peacebuilding. I strive for providing volunteer, leadership, and advocacy services for people, particularly for those who are underserved and lack equal opportunities. Most importantly, I worship God, seek truth, and care for God’s creations. I try to spread the words of God in different contexts when appropriate. Through spreading the words of God, I aspire to provide a deep sense of purpose and meaning in individuals’ lives that can offer them hope and healing in the faces of adversities.
Additionally, the Ethiopian collectivist cultural values and societal norms (e.g., respect for hierarchy and elders, focus on group and systemic wellness, interdependence, and cooperation) are reflected in families and communities depending on how specific ethnic groups identify with the societal values. I am from the Amhara ethnic group in the northwestern part of Ethiopia where societal norms are most often considered as families’ and communities’ governing rules. For example, the Ethiopian society, particularly the northern part, is a patriarchal culture and well known for male domination. Starting from birth, there is a stereotype of gender roles. Most often people applaud three times when the baby is a girl, whereas if it is a boy, they applaud seven times. Husbands may not welcome their wives if the babies are girls. Males and females assume different roles starting from their early age. Although females are expected to perform some aspects of males’ roles outside the home (e.g., on the farm), males are not required to perform household roles (e.g., cooking and taking care of children). Females are not encouraged to speak in the public; rather they are expected to be quiet, which is considered a great personal quality for a woman. Females in Ethiopia, particularly in rural areas do not have equal power for decision-making and lack equal opportunity for education as compared to males.

Growing up with such religious and cultural values, my way of personal interactions, learning styles, belief systems, and way of communication has been influenced greatly. Having such a background, I was very interested in providing culturally-oriented environments, research methodology, and theoretical framework that could provide opportunities to the participants to describe their perspectives in their own words. Thus, the interpretative phenomenological design and the sociocultural learning theoretical framework are consistent to my view and were vital approaches for exploring the current study participants’ viewpoints deeply. Additionally, my religious and personal values were very important aspects, particularly during the interview and
interpretation processes. My values guided me in providing empathy, safe environments, and unbiased treatment for my interviewees and helped me remain ethical and unbiased during the interpretation processes. My religious and personal moral values prevented me from biased interpretations of the findings and helped me not to impose my assumptions and generalizations on the participants’ lived experiences.

As an international student in the CES program at Northern Illinois University (NIU), I have had many friends who came from different countries and regions of the world. We used to discuss our challenges, opportunities, and learning experiences and support each other. Most often, there were friends who shared their challenges with me about the new learning and sociocultural environments (e.g., language barriers, disconnected learning methodologies, interpersonal interactions, adjustment issues, cultural differences). However, while I was working as a counselor-educator-in training in the Community Counseling and Training Center (CCTC) at NIU, international students rarely visited the Center. That reality was what inspired me to advocate for international students. Many questions crossed my mind “even though international students are facing so many adversities, why do they not seek professional counseling services? Is it because they do not have enough information about the available services or is it because of their cultural perspectives and personal preferences?”

Because of such curiosity, I explored the academic and sociocultural experiences of international students at NIU when I was taking a qualitative research course. The findings of this project helped me in articulating the academic and sociocultural challenges of international students at NIU and motivated me to focus my study on the students in CES programs. As a pilot study for my dissertation, I explored the overall lived experiences of three international doctoral
students and graduates of two Midwest CES programs. This pilot study was important for refining my research methodology and theoretical framework.

Conducting my dissertation about international students in CES programs was both an encouraging and a challenging process. I have been in many challenging positions starting from the first phase of my study, particularly during the data collection and interpretation processes. As an international doctoral candidate in a CACREP-accredited CES program, I identified with the participants. As a female, I shared many life experiences with six of the current participants. As someone from a collectivist culture, I shared similar views, adjustment struggles, and communication challenges with six of my interviewees. As an African, I identified with three of the participants. Most importantly, as an Ethiopian, I shared many similar backgrounds and learning experiences with two of the participants. These overlapping identities surfaced not only during the data collection process but also during the interpretation. Most often, I experienced “counter transference” and immersed myself with the participants’ experiences during the whole process, particularly with the Ethiopians. I was greatly tested. However, my different experience in the CES program was one of the greatest protective factors to stay ethical in my study. My program, department chair, and professors identified and accommodated my learning needs throughout my learning processes. For example, I came from a different educational background, so that I did not have appropriate counseling and supervision skills during my first year in the CES program. My program and professors were aware of my deficiencies and therefore arranged my practicum/clinical internship hours later in the program. Additionally, the department chair and the College of Education were responsive to my financial challenges and were able to support me with additional scholarships for more than three consecutive semesters. I also had tremendous emotional, academic, and social support from my advisor/dissertation chair,
supervisors, and professors throughout the course of my study. My differential treatment in the CES program helped me remain unbiased, particularly during the data interpretation process. I kept regular journals and reflections about my differential treatment whenever I experienced some feelings of countertransference. Being aware of my immersion and reflecting on it had been an important strategy not only during data collection but also throughout the interpretation process.

On the other hand, as an international student with a different language and cultural background, I have struggled with many barriers during my study in the CES program, particularly my different accent and culture were two of the biggest challenges of my adjustment and professional identity development. Although I do not have problems comprehending reading content, writing academic papers, and critical thinking, my different accent has created difficulties, particularly with people who are not willing to communicate with others from a different background. My accent was a barrier for me, but at the same time, an opportunity for many people to intentionally ignore my questions and requests. I have been struggling with repeated “say it again” phrases from people who are not patient with differences. As a result, it has been a challenging experience listening to the participants’ perspectives about their adversities and barriers. During interviews, most of the participants’ angry and loud voices, feelings of helplessness and sad voices, expressive body positions, deep and long breaths, regular hand movements and finger taps, and frowning facial expressions all challenged my professional ethics and values. Engaging in internal dialogues, my participants have followed me everywhere. I have been listening to their excitement, frustrations, complaints, fears, and anxieties while I am in class, in the office, or at home.
However, as a researcher, I also had an outsider role, so I effectively worked and managed my biases and limited the impositions of my assumptions and insider views. Although avoiding all biases was challenging, I worked through them and kept myself as an outsider to minimize my personal judgments, views, and conclusions and focused on the detailed descriptions of the participants’ lived experiences based on their own words and interpretations. I used multiple strategies that helped me focus on the interview data (e.g., listening to the interview records and reading the interview transcripts repeatedly, self-talk – processing the participants’ words in my mind, and using reflective journals as well as being self-aware during the data analysis). These processes helped in ensuring the trustworthiness of the research findings (Connelly, 2016; Cypress, 2017). As a growing counselor educator, I also abide by ACA’s (2014) ethical considerations of unbiased interpretations of research findings.

At the same time, exploring the participants’ lived experiences was also very encouraging and a learning opportunity. First, the study was a great opportunity to reveal the international students’ silent and unheard voices. No matter how CES programs and faculty will react to this study’s implications, the current study serves as an avenue for the international students at least to showcase their voices and to communicate with future readers of this work. They shared their lived experiences: journeys of empowerment, self-growth and personal changes, and professional identity development experiences. They reflected on the impact of their cultural differences, adversities, contributions, and coping styles. They complained about the intentional and unintentional counselor educators’ “ignorance” of international students’ unique learning needs and limitations. They acknowledged the lack of cultural understanding in CES programs and their fights for validation and acceptance. They shared their fears and frustrations about the
impact of the current U.S. politics on some minority groups and international students, particularly from “the watch list countries.”

Second, conducting this study has given me power and privilege. All of my participants had diverse educational and cultural backgrounds. Through the whole process, I have learned many qualities from my participants, particularly some advocacy strategies and leadership skills. As a qualitative researcher, this was a great learning process for me to reflect on my strengths and areas of development. More importantly, conducting this study has given me the power and satisfaction of addressing my advocacy needs for people who are underserved and whose voices are silent and unheard.

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the main findings of the current study in relation to the sociocultural learning theory perspectives and previous studies. The findings of the current study provided an understanding of the participants’ overall lived experiences, challenges, support systems/protective factors, and contributions. A lack of cultural understanding, the intense nature of CES programs, and the minimum per semester credit limits for international students were some of the most mentioned findings that made the international students’ professional development stressful and intense. Through their journeys of empowerment, the participants addressed some specific professional needs; however, the process of addressing those needs was not a smooth path. They faced different barriers and challenges throughout their studies in their programs. Lack of cultural understanding, licensure issues that stemmed from negating their previous experiences and lack of validation, cultural differences, financial issues, and disconnected teaching-learning methodologies were some of the significant barriers. Although
their professional identity development processes were challenging, the presence of various support systems (professors, classmates, families, and other community members) and the participants’ enhanced self-care helped them to navigate the barriers.

The participants acknowledged their learning processes in the CES programs as journeys of empowerment that enabled their personal change and growth, self-exploration, knowledge advancement, and professional identity development. The participants also contributed to their programs in different ways: advancement of culture and diversity, advocacy, and social justice, serving as important bridges for the transfer of counseling knowledge and skills worldwide, and contributing to important coping styles.

In this chapter, I also presented the study’s limitations, recommendations for future research, conclusions, and implications for CES programs, counselor educators, and international students. A call for cultural understanding and implementation of inclusive learning environments is one of the most important implications for the CES programs and counselor educators.
REFERENCES


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APPENDIX A

INVITATION LETTER
Dear international doctoral students and graduates of counselor education and supervision programs in the U.S.

I am Mastewal Seyeneh, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Counseling, Adult, and Higher Education at Northern Illinois University specializing in Counselor Education and Supervision. Currently, I am working on my dissertation “Exploring the Lived Experiences of International Doctoral Students and/or Graduates of Counselor Education and Supervision (CES) Programs in the U.S.” To achieve the purpose of this study, I will collect data from international doctoral students and/or doctoral graduates of counselor education and supervision programs. Therefore, through this letter, I would like to invite you to take part in an interview which could take between 60 to 90 minutes. The main inclusion criteria for participation include: being international doctoral student (F-1) in CES program and working on your dissertation [All but dissertation] (ABD) or graduated from a doctoral CES program not earlier than Spring 2015. Your training program can be either CACREP-accredited or non-CACREP-accredited.

If you would like to participate in this study, please respond to this request. Based on your response, I will send out a short questionnaire to assess your demographic background. Based on your background information, I will select participants purposively considering your country of origin, gender, training program (CACREP-accredited or non-CACREP-accredited), your status (ABD or graduated) and the U.S. region of your training program. I will consider to include participants from each group in order to select varied range of participants who can provide diverse lived experiences for the topic under study. I will determine the number of participants at least to be proportional from each group. Then, I will send you a written consent form if you are one of the participants who is selected purposively. After you return the signed written consent form, I will schedule interview date and time based on your preference. Interviews can be over Skype or face-to-face based on your accessibility, traveling distance and expenses for me. After securing your consent, I will audio-tape the interview to have the full details of it and will keep the interview in personal computers that are password protected. Please be sure that no one will know who you are except me. I will include your responses, experiences, perspectives, remarks, recommendations, and thoughts in my research report; however, your identity will be confidential and anonymous. Participation in this study is completely voluntarily based so you have the right to withdraw from participation even after you signed the consent form or you started the actual interview.

Please respond to this invitation at mastewal.meken@yahoo.co.uk. Upon participation in the study, you will be included in a drawing to win a $50 Amazon gift card. Your email will be included into a pool; however, your email address will not be associated with your interviews (study responses) to maintain anonymity.

For further information, please contact my dissertation chair Dr. Teresa A. Fisher at TAFisher@niu.edu

Sincerely

Mastewal Seyeneh
Ph.D. Candidate
Counselor Education and Supervision Program
Northern Illinois University
APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT
Informed Consent

Doctoral Dissertation Study: Mastewal Seyeneh
Exploring the Lived Experiences of International Doctoral Candidates/Graduates of Counselor Education and Supervision Programs in the United States of America

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of international doctoral candidates in and/or graduates of counselor education and supervision programs in U.S. universities. Currently, various counseling preparation programs in the U.S. are accepting a growing number of minority groups including international students. However, the unique professional developmental needs and concerns of international students are not appropriately addressed. International students face various distinctive challenges in the new academic environment that might not be addressed by the current American Counseling Association. Therefore, understanding international students' lived experiences in counselor education programs is an important step to create multicultural-oriented support programs to empower them to fit into the new learning environment. This can also serve as a basis to motivate international students grow as effective counselor educators who could have broader positive impacts on the development of professional counseling programs in their native countries. Additionally, this study can have a broader impact on people across the borders. International students who grow as effective counselor educator can implement their counseling and leadership experiences and skills to serve those who need counseling, leadership, and social support services in their countries, which in turn has an impact on the advancement of counseling worldwide.

What will be done: You will participate in an interview, which will take 60-90 minutes to complete. The interview will be conducted at your selected location. Additionally, there may be follow-up questions either through email or phone. The interview will focus on your overall lived experiences in counselor education and supervision programs (perspectives on challenges, support systems, clinical-based experiences, and acculturation process) and your recommendations about effective support strategies that could enhance success of international doctoral students in counselor education and supervision programs. The interview will collect non-identifying demographic information such as gender, age, accreditation status of training program, country of origin, and years in the program. Based on your willingness, I may also collect artifacts, which may support or challenge the research findings.

Benefits of Participating in this Study: You will be contributing to knowledge about the unique needs of international students that may help to incorporate and facilitate inclusive as well as multicultural oriented learning environments. This in turn can empower international students in counselor education programs to transfer their counseling knowledge and skills to their home countries, which can serve for the advancement of counseling worldwide. In addition, you will be entered in a drawing for one $50 Amazon gift card for the willingness of your participation. Your participation in the interview process is greatly appreciated as it will provide in-depth and detailed information about your unique experiences and perspectives of the topic under study. There is no right or wrong answer. All comments, thoughts, recommendations, and
perspectives are welcomed. I would like to have many points of view and would encourage open conversation so feel free to express your opinions, experiences, and perspectives honestly and openly.

**Risks or discomforts:** I anticipate minimal risks and/or discomforts by participating in this study. Since you will be talking about your lived experiences, some negative feelings may surface. In this case, I will encourage you to seek counseling or additional support. I will assist you in finding appropriate referrals near your preferred location.

**Confidentiality:** Your responses will be kept confidential. Please be sure that no one will know who you are except me. I will include your responses, experiences, perspectives, remarks, recommendations, and thoughts in my research report; however, your identity will be confidential and anonymous. Your name and identity will not be identified in any report, presentation and/or publication. Based on your consent, the interview will be tape recorded to make sure that I will have the accurate and detailed information; the recorded data will be destroyed after the research has been finalized.

**Decision to withdraw at any time:** Although your participation in this interview is very essential, participation is voluntary; you are free to withdraw your participation from this study at any time. If you feel uncomfortable with a question or questions, you can withdraw from the study without negative consequences. If you decide to withdraw at any time before you have finished the interview, your interview will be deleted during the analysis of the findings.

**How the findings will be used:** The results of the study will be used for scholarly purposes only, including the primary investigator’s Doctoral dissertation. The results from the study will be presented in educational settings and possibly at professional conferences. Finally, the results may be published in professional journals in the field of counseling or other related fields. In any case, your personal identity is confidential and anonymous.

**Contact information:** If you have concerns or questions about this study, please contact the primary researcher – Mastewal Seyeneh at mseyenehl@niu.edu or her dissertation chair at Northern Illinois University – Dr. Teresa A. Fisher at TAFisher@niu.edu, or the office of Research Compliance at Northern Illinois University at (815) 753-8588. By signing below, you acknowledge that you have read this information and agree to participate in this research; with the knowledge that you are free to withdraw your participation at any time without penalty.

To give your written consent, please read the following statement and sign below.
By signing this form, I agree to participate in the research project titled "Exploring the Lived Experiences of International Doctoral Candidates/Graduates of Counselor Education and Supervision Programs in the United States of America" being conducted by Mastewal Seyeneh, a graduate student at Northern Illinois University. I have been informed that the purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of international doctoral students and graduates of counselor education and supervision programs in the U.S. that can help to incorporate multicultural oriented learning environments. I understand that if I agree to participate in this study I will be asked to participate in an interview, which may take 60 to 90 minutes. I am aware that participation in this interview is voluntary and may be withdrawn any time without penalty. I am also informed that participation in this study may have potential risks (emotional disturbance and feeling of discomforts) and benefits (contributing knowledge to existing literature and possibility of drawing a $50 Amazon gift card). I understand that I have right to contact the principal researcher and chair of this project Dr. Teresa A. Fisher at TAFisher@niu.edu or the office of Research Compliance at Northern Illinois University at (815) 753-8588 for further information. I understand that all information collected for this study will be kept confidential. I understand that my consent to participate in this project does not constitute a waiver of any legal rights or compensations I might have as a result of my participation, and I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent form.

Participant’s Name ________________________________

Signature _______________________________________

Date ___________________________________________
Consent to Audio Recording and Transcription

Doctoral Dissertation Study: Mastewal Seyeneh

Exploring the Lived Experiences of International Doctoral Candidates/Graduates of Counselor Education and Supervision Programs, the United States of America

To capture the full details of your experience, I will audio-record and transcribe your interview. Neither your name nor any other identifying information will be associated with the audio recording or with the transcript. Only the researcher (I) will be able to listen to the recordings. I will transcribe your interview and will erase once the transcriptions are checked for accuracy. Transcripts of your interview may be reproduced in whole or in part for use in presentations or written products that result from this study. Neither your name nor any other identifying information (such as your voice, name, or picture) will be used in presentations or in written products resulting from the study. I will also keep the transcriptions and recordings confidential using password secured personal laptops. To give your written consent please read the following statement and sign below.

By signing this form, I am allowing the researcher to audio tape my interview as part of this research. I also understand that this consent for recording is effective until the following date: 6/10/2021, three years after the completion of the study. On or before that date, the recordings and transcriptions will be destroyed. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent form.

Participant's Name: ________________________________

Participant's Signature: ________________________________

Date: __________

Northern Illinois University

November 9, 2017

Approved by NU IRB

Void one year from above date
APPENDIX C

BACKGROUND QUESTIONNAIRE
I politely request you to fill out your demographic information. Please complete the background information below.

1. **Gender**
   - Male ______
   - Female_______
   - Other_______

2. **Region where you came from**________________________

3. **Age**
   - 25 – 29______
   - 30-34_______
   - 35-39_______
   - 40-44 ______
   - 44 or above _____

4. **Training Program**
   - CACREP-accredited ______________
   - Non-CACREP-accredited __________

5. **U.S.A. Region (the location of your training program in the U.S.A.)**
   - West ______
   - Midwest ______
   - Northeast_______
   - Southwest_______
   - Southeast________

6. **Educational Status**
   - All but dissertation/ABD/_______
   - Graduated________ Year of Graduation__________

7. **Preferred Pseudonym** ________________________________
APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW GUIDE
The following questions are semi-structured open-ended questions that will guide the interview during data collection. I may also ask follow-up questions whenever necessary (e.g., during the interviews or after the interviews through email or phone calls based on the participants’ preference). The interview guide is developed based on Seidman’s (2006) three data collection procedures (focused life history/background information, the details of the experience, and reflection on the meaning).

**Focused Life History/ Background Information**

1. Could you please tell me about yourself/ your professional background?
2. What interested you about pursuing a counselor education and supervision doctoral degree in a U.S university?
3. Tell me your first impression about the program.
4. Tell me what your overall experience in the program looks like.

**Details of the Experience**

5. Describe your professional developmental/personal needs as an international student in a counselor education and supervision program?
   5.1. Describe how the program addresses these needs.
6. Tell me your overall advanced practicum experience as a counselor educator-in-training
   6.1. How would you describe your experience in the five domain training areas of a doctoral counselor-educator?
   A. Teaching
   B. Counseling
   C. Supervision
   D. Leadership
   E. Research
   6.2. As an international counselor educator-in-training, what was challenging and supportive during practicing in these five roles?
7. Describe your expectations from the program to grow as a counselor educator.
8. Tell me about your experiences with your supervisor(s) and/or instructor(s).
9. Describe the support systems in the counselor education and supervision program?
10. According to your perspective, how can you describe challenges in the program?
11. How would you describe your cultural identity?
   11.1. How does your cultural background influence your professional development as a counselor educator?
   11.2. How do you think your cultural background has conflicted with your professional development training?
   11.3. How does your program address your cultural needs?
12. As an international student, how do you acculturate and adjust in the program?
   12.1. Tell me how you are adjusting in the new cultural setting?
   12.2. Tell me what it is look like your acculturation process in the counseling program.
13. How would you describe your achievements and accomplishments in the program?
14. What can be possible contributions you bring to the counselor education and supervision program and your host university, if any?
15. How is the current U.S. political climate affecting you as an international student?
16. How is your interpersonal/social interaction experiences look like in the program?
17. How can you describe your self-care and personal wellness?

**Reflection on the Meaning**

18. Based on what you have said about your experience as an international counselor educator (in-training),
   18.1. How do you define yourself/your personal and professional identity?
   18.2. Could you please summarize your overall experiences in the program in five words?
   18.3. What are your plans for your future career?
19. Given what you have said about your experience as an international counselor-educator-in-training,
   19.1. What would be your recommendations for counselor education programs?
   19.2. What would you like to recommend to the program regarding cultural considerations of international counselor educators-in-training?
   19.3. What would you like to recommend to international students who would like to pursue their degree in your counselor education and supervision programs?
20. Is there anything else that would help me to better understand your experiences?