

5-9-2021

Metasynthesis Regarding the Sociocultural Adaptation of International University

Astrid Vanessa Sarmiento Quiñones
Universidad de Concepción, astrid.sarmiento@outlook.com

Claudio Enrique Bustos
Universidad de Concepción, clbustos@gmail.com

María Victoria Pérez
Universidad de Concepción, marperez@udec.cl

Diana Lucía Peralta
Universidad de Concepción, peraltadianalucia@gmail.com

Natalia Zañartu
Universidad de Concepción, nzanartu@gmail.com

See next page for additional authors

Follow this and additional works at: <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr>



Part of the [Social Psychology Commons](#)

Recommended APA Citation

Quiñones, A. S., Bustos, C. E., Pérez, M. V., Peralta, D. L., Zañartu, N., & Vergara del Solar, J. I. (2021). Metasynthesis Regarding the Sociocultural Adaptation of International University. *The Qualitative Report*, 26(5), 1567-1600. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2021.4623>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the The Qualitative Report at NSUWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Qualitative Report by an authorized administrator of NSUWorks. For more information, please contact nsuworks@nova.edu.



Metasynthesis Regarding the Sociocultural Adaptation of International University

Abstract

This study centers on the sociocultural adaptation experience of international students in academic life and daily life. Responses to the guiding question of what differences and similarities are discernible in the sociocultural adaptation processes that international university students experience in the university versus outside university in the receiving society. It presents a metasynthesis of 12 empirical studies that apply qualitative methodologies to the study of international university students' sociocultural adaptation, which were published in scientific journals indexed in Ebscohost, WOS and Scopus from January 2012 to March 2019. The metasynthesis results indicate that sociocultural adaptation involves: (1) situations of shock that arise in the two environments of academic and daily life with specific challenges proper to each one, and (2) the deployment of varying intrapersonal and social resources in each context. Academic and daily life can be considered as necessarily linked to sociocultural adaptation given the compensatory function observed in relational dynamics of students as they move between the two settings. The emphasis of the research on presenting sociocultural adaptation as a primarily negative process, the theoretical implications of separating academic life from daily life, and the relevance of exploring the role of social networks in students' daily life are discussed.

Keywords

international students, metasynthesis, review, sociocultural adaptation, university

Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

Acknowledgements

Funding: This work was funded by the National Agency for Research and Development, ANID/ Scholarship National Doctoral Grant [21160306]. Funding: This work was partially funded by the National Agency for Research and Development, ANID/FONDECYT 1201681, Teaching/Learning Methodologies of Research Practices in Psychology in Latin America and Spain. Acknowledgement: English translation by Elizabeth Ann Medina.

Authors

Astrid Vanessa Sarmiento Quiñones, Claudio Enrique Bustos, María Victoria Pérez, Diana Lucía Peralta, Natalia Zañartu, and Jorge Iván Vergara del Solar

Metasynthesis Regarding the Sociocultural Adaptation of International University

Astrid Vanessa Sarmiento Quiñones, Claudio Enrique Bustos, María Victoria Pérez, Diana Lucía Peralta, Natalia Zañartu and Jorge Iván Vergara del Solar
Universidad de Concepción, Chile

This study centers on the sociocultural adaptation experience of international students in academic life and daily life. Responses to the guiding question of what differences and similarities are discernible in the sociocultural adaptation processes that international university students experience in the university versus outside university in the receiving society. It presents a metasynthesis of 12 empirical studies that apply qualitative methodologies to the study of international university students' sociocultural adaptation, which were published in scientific journals indexed in Ebscohost, WOS and Scopus from January 2012 to March 2019. The metasynthesis results indicate that sociocultural adaptation involves: (1) situations of shock that arise in the two environments of academic and daily life with specific challenges proper to each one, and (2) the deployment of varying intrapersonal and social resources in each context. Academic and daily life can be considered as necessarily linked to sociocultural adaptation given the compensatory function observed in relational dynamics of students as they move between the two settings. The emphasis of the research on presenting sociocultural adaptation as a primarily negative process, the theoretical implications of separating academic life from daily life, and the relevance of exploring the role of social networks in students' daily life are discussed.

Keywords: international students, metasynthesis, review, sociocultural adaptation, university

Introduction

Institutions of higher education have reinforced the international dimension of their academic programs and in so doing contribute to the enhanced interconnections between different societies (Knight, 2004). This phenomenon is driven by university students' academic mobility, as more and more of them decide to pursue undergraduate or postgraduate studies in foreign universities (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Thus, based on this premise, student mobility lies at the heart of the internationalization of education and poses an imperative for higher education institutions to search for ways to respond appropriately to the resulting new challenges (Marginson & van der Wende, 2007).

While universities do take into consideration the internationalization of the academic environment, they fail to take advantage of the opportunities internationalization offers for evaluating the benefits of student diversity in multicultural interaction (De Vita & Case, 2003). In general, international students are conceived of as ambassadors between countries, as constituents of para-diplomacy (Beine et al., 2014). Their role in their host societies is associated with the cultural diversification of the classroom (Knight, 2008), the transmission

of common and specialized knowledge between countries (Vainio-Mattila, 2009), and the impact of the scientific and technological development of nations (Beine et al., 2014).

The experiences of coexistence between international students and their receiving societies have been studied from the perspective of sociocultural adaptation, since international students are considered as a temporal migration (Ward et al., 2001; Ward & Kennedy, 1999). Since university migrants are at the same time students, the analysis of this process should not merely be confined to daily life but should also extend to academic life (Jindal-Snape & Ingram, 2013). This is also why the sociocultural adaptation of this type of migrant is multidimensional and characterized by demands that are cultural (e.g., perceived cultural distance), social (e.g., against discrimination), economic, and academic (Teichler, 2010; van der Wende, 2007).

In the following section, we will present the evidence found in systematic reviews of the sociocultural adaptation of international university students. The systematic reviews have been considered in the analysis of the research findings on the theme in question, identifying their analytical focus and the methodologies applied. During the analysis, it became evident that a synthesis of the research results was lacking that underscored the students' perspectives and the contrasts they experienced in academic and daily life.

State-of-the-Art Investigations on International University Students and Their Sociocultural Adaptive Process

The empirical study of international students' sociocultural adaptation has been systematized through systematic reviews that focus on three domains. These are (1) theoretical frameworks, (2) predictor variables of the sociocultural adaptive process, and (3) empirical results. The following is a presentation of the contributions made in accordance with these foci.

According to our review of theoretical frameworks, reviews have been carried out in a narrative as well as a systematic mode. From the perspective of narrative, specific explicative theories, or models on the cultural adaptation of the migrant population have been synthesized (Furham, 2012; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Zhou et al., 2008). Systematic reviews have analyzed the frequency of use of such theories in 64 quantitative studies in the U.S. (Zhang & Goodson, 2011), and in 62 studies conducted in various countries (Sarmiento et al., 2019). This last review also narratively synthesized and established the frequency of use of other theoretical frameworks that do not directly address sociocultural adaptation but that are used in empirical studies. According to its results, the most widely used theoretical perspectives on sociocultural adaptation are the ABC Framework and the Acculturation Model.

According to the ABC Framework and the Acculturation Model, upon their insertion in a new environment, migrants cope with their adaptive process by using certain strategies. The ABC Framework affirms that these strategies can be affective, stress-coping, behavioral, one of cultural and cognitive learning, or a strategy of identity transformation (Zhou et al., 2008). The Acculturation Model defines four strategies of interaction with the new culture (1) assimilation, (2) separation, (3) marginalization, and (4) integration. The assimilation strategy assumes a certain degree of proximity to the host culture and a distancing from the culture of origin, while the separation strategy implies reinforcement of the culture of origin and distancing from the receiving culture. When there is an absence of interest in either of the two cultures, the strategy of marginalization is selected, creating a new and distinct space. If there is interest in both the integration strategy may be chosen, maintaining the student's own cultural identity while interacting with the receiving culture at the same time (Sam & Berry, 2006; Sarmiento et al., 2019).

With respect to the predictive variables of international students' adaptation, the Zhang and Goodson review (2011) found the variables that best explain adaptation are (1) fluency in

the host country's language, (2) the quality of social interaction with nationals, (3) length of stay in the country, (4) academic self-efficacy, and (5) orientation toward the goal of learning. Brunsting, Zachry, and Takeuchi (2018) continued along the same analytical line, with 30 quantitative papers published between 2009 and 2018 in the United States. Thirteen of the studies analyzed sociocultural adaptation referring to social integration, university membership, and interaction with teachers and co-national peers. Although the two reviews indicate the university as being a pertinent context, they do not address in-depth what would characterize the migrant's adaptive experience inside and outside this setting.

Regarding the analysis of the empirical results concerning international student adaptation, Smith and Khawaja (2011) performed a large-scale review of 94 empirical articles. This analysis included quantitative studies (81) and qualitative studies (13), describing what the most important stressors are for international students when they venture into unfamiliar environments. The most common stressors were (1) the language, (2) academic stressors, (3) sociocultural stressors, (4) practical stressors, and (5) perceived discrimination. This study is characterized by the rigorous description of the themes found in the literature, based on the acculturation model. The review centers on the interpretation of the results set forth by the authors of the primary references.

In the university context, language, or mastery of the host society's language, is a fundamental milestone for the international student, as it is decisive for their academic performance and their ability to relate to the locals and establish friendships. International students also encounter numerous academic stressors in the university setting, which influences their adaptation. Although these stressors are not unique to international students, they may be intensified by the need to master a second language and the demands of adapting to a new educational context. A further aspect to consider is the misalignment between their expectations and the daily realities of university life *vis-à-vis* academic achievement, the quality or efficiency of the services provided by the host educational institutions, and the host country's teaching style (Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

International students must create a new social network in the receiving country. Aside from personality characteristics that can affect their ability to form friendships, international students may experience sociocultural stressors involving cultural norms, language barriers, and the nature of friendly relationships. Practical stressors have to do with lifestyle-related necessities in general, such as having to find housing and secure the needed financial resources. Perceived discrimination includes feelings of inferiority, possible verbal insults, difficulties in finding employment, and being a target of physical aggression outside the bounds of the university (Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

Rationale and Research Question

The purpose of this metasyntesis is to delve deeper into the experiences of international students who have undergone processes of sociocultural adaptation in the university while pursuing their studies, and outside the university context, in the receiving societies. Past reviews have developed comprehensive syntheses of the literature on student sociocultural adaptation but from a theoretical perspective focusing on the themes or variables reported by primary studies. On the other hand, works such as that of Smith and Khawaja (2011) are a simultaneous revision of quantitative and qualitative research but without placing emphasis on the phenomenological position or interpretation of the results. Our study adopted a phenomenological perspective and attempted to reinterpret the results, creating a synthesis of the various experiences of the participants recorded by the studies. Doing so implied recategorizing certain results under common categories that in some cases may not have been considered in the prior studies.

This metasynthesis, in effect, is particularly concerned with the sociocultural adaptation experience of the international student inside and outside the university. Jindal-Snape and Ingram (2013) point out that not only does the international student's sociocultural adaptation involve their academic life or participation in the university context; adaptation also unfolds in their daily life. The university constitutes a public social space of professionalization and knowledge specialization, while daily life is personal and private. While each of these environments is autonomous and has specific characteristics, the two should not be considered as totally separate and isolating for the individual (Elias, 1998). Smith and Khawaja (2011) report on the most representative challenges that confront international students; but their work does not reflect the particularities of the adaptive sociocultural experiences of students in the university and outside it.

On the other hand, systematic reviews have attached great significance to the use of quantitative methodologies in empirical studies of sociocultural adaptation, to the detriment of qualitative studies. In the referenced work by Smith and Khawaja (2011), works are considered that have applied different methodologies, acknowledging the predominance of the quantitative approach, notwithstanding the important contributions of qualitative studies. In effect, there are no reviews that call particular attention to the progression in these studies gained through a qualitative approach, using the exhaustive and critical analysis of results as a springboard. This is a salient issue in view of the criticisms of empirical studies with respect to the undervaluing of *in situ* exploratory or descriptive investigation (Chirkov, 2009). Consequently, the question that has oriented our work is: What differences and similarities can be observed in the international university students' sociocultural adaptation processes in academic versus daily life?

The idea of the metasynthesis arose within the framework of the doctoral thesis in psychology entitled, "*El proceso de adaptación sociocultural de estudiantes internacionales de postgrado en el gran Concepción Chile*" ("The process of sociocultural adaptation of international graduate students in the city of Concepción, Chile"), on the initiative of the lead researcher and author of this article. Dr. Sarmiento has had a deep interest in studying the diversity found in educational contexts and has authored publications on the sociocultural adaptation of international students and educational inclusion in primary and middle school. This interest has been complemented by the research team members' other fields of expertise, such as systematic review methodology (Dr. Claudio Bustos and Dr. María Victoria Pérez) and cultural studies and qualitative investigation (Dr. Jorge Iván Vergara del Solar, Dra. Natalia Zañartu, and Diana Peralta, M.Sc.).

Method

Methodical Approach

The methodical approach of this study is qualitative. It consists of explaining the phenomenon of interest in the course of extracting and comprehending the multi-discourses that the participants formulate around said phenomenon, beyond analyzing the relationship between quantifiable variables (Flick, 2007). The qualitative method is the most appropriate one for this study since it renders accessible the social actors' interpretations of their social and personal worlds (Flores, 2009), focusing on the subjects' personal significations (Schutz, 1974). Sociocultural adaptation is a personal and social process, and the experiences that are constitutive of said process can be traced to reconstruct the worlds – academic and daily life – in which it emerges.

Research Design

Metasynthesis is the type of literature review selected to carry out the study. It is a qualitative method that produces scientific evidence based on an interpretative integration of qualitative study findings (Carrillo et al., 2008). Metasynthesis emphasizes the relevance of the primary references selected (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007), including studies having different designs: ethnographic, phenomenological, grounded theory, and others (Barroso & Powell-Cope, 2000).

There are various designs of metasynthesis as proposed by different authors, each one having a specific interest. They are as follows: (1) metaethnography, (2) meta-study, and (3) qualitative metasynthesis. The metaethnography considers ethnographic studies for analysis, the meta-study is oriented toward constructing theory based on the interpretation of findings (Carrillo et al., 2008), and the qualitative metasynthesis compares and integrates findings from primary studies with a different qualitative methodology (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007).

The qualitative metasynthesis proposed by Sandelowski and Barroso (2007) was selected for the following work. It would enable reinterpreting the experiences of international students reported in the section on the results for different qualitative comparative studies on students' academic and daily life. The metaethnography design was not selected, as it restricts the selection of studies to a single design type (i.e., ethnographic); neither was the meta-study chosen because it is geared more to the generation of theory, which was not the aim of this study.

The research question was structured once the method had been selected, which would then enable delimiting key aspects of the selection and interpretation of primary references (Carrillo et al., 2008). The guiding question of the meta-synthesis was structured based on the PICOT Methodology, frequently used in metasynthesis elaborated in the field of health (Carreño & Chaparro, 2015). The acronym is an acrostic of the following words: P - population or subject of interest, I - intervention, C - comparison, O - outcomes, and T - time of the study. The criteria applied in this study were: P - population of international university students, I - the sociocultural adaptation phenomenon, C - no comparator, O - reinterpretation of the findings on sociocultural adaptation in academic and daily life, and T - 2012 to 2019.

Recent studies underline the importance of extending the development of systematic reviews from the area of health to those of social science and education, above all because of the particularities in these two areas that significantly set them apart from other domains of knowledge. One such particularity is the heterogeneity of the research methods applied in the field of health, over and above the intervention studies (e.g., required to incorporate scientific literature of various kinds, theoretical as well as empirical). With respect to the empirical literature, studies should be considered that apply different methodologies, including observational investigation, case studies, etc., frequently used in these disciplines (Bustos et al., 2018). The metasynthesis is a systematic review with an exclusive focus on qualitative studies; thus, its use is relevant for performing qualitative reviews of the corpus of works in the social sciences and education published in international scientific journals.

Identification and Selection of Eligible References

To identify the eligible references in which qualitative methodologies have been applied to research on the sociocultural adaptation of international university students, a search was performed in three bibliographic search databases. Specifically, the Ebscohost (Environment Complete, APA PsycArticles, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, E-Journals, CINAHL Complete, SPORTDiscus with Full Text, Academic Search Ultimate, Business Source Ultimate, Fuente Académica Plus, Communication Source), Web of Science,

and Scopus databases were utilized as search databases that meet the high quality standards of the journals included within their scope and that accept similarly defined search criteria. It should be noted that these databases have already been used in other metasynthesis (Kingsbury & Chatfield, 2019).

The search was performed from January 2012 to March 2019. It was decided that this eight-year time lapse would make it possible to capture the most recent literature on empirical studies of the sociocultural adaptation process of international students. The search targeted empirical articles published by scientific journals as such writings are subjected to rigorous, high quality reviews (Carrillo et al., 2008). Consequently, abstracts of congresses, dissertations and theses were excluded, given the absence of assurances that they would have passed through a stringent review process (Kingsbury & Chatfield, 2019).

To identify the eligible references, definitions were formulated of descriptors and combinations of search equations based on the Boolean operators AND, OR, and NOT. The following criteria were employed: (sociocultural adaptation AND international students; sociocultural AND adaptation AND international AND students; university AND sojourner AND culture; university AND acculturation AND international student OR sojourner). The search terms were used following the review of antecedent literature. In 2019, we published a systematic review of 62 scientific articles on sociocultural adaptation of international students. Keywords were selected through that review (see Sarmiento et al., 2019).

The term “international students” was opted for rather than “study abroad.” In particular, because although the latter does refer to studying outside one’s country of origin, it does not explicitly include the action of completing an academic degree in an institute of higher learning in a foreign country but merely refers to general international experience such as working, doing volunteer work and internships (The Forum on Education Abroad, 2011). In this specific case, the focus of interest were the experiences of students who completed undergraduate or postgraduate studies in another country, rather than, for example, having participated in an exchange program.

Regarding the selection of references, five inclusion and exclusion criteria were established. The inclusion criteria were: (1) studies of international undergraduate or graduate university students, (2) empirical publications based on qualitative methodologies, (3) must be related to experiences of sociocultural adaptation in academic life (university) and daily life (society in general), (4) articles must be written in English or Spanish, the languages that the researchers are fluent in, and (5) must report ethical considerations. The explanation of each of the exclusion criteria follows.

Studies were excluded that (1) were not associated with the subject population, (2) were based on quantitative methodologies or mixed methodologies (part quantitative, part qualitative) and had purely theoretical support, (3) made no reference to the university or to daily life, (4) were not written in English or Spanish, and (5) did not report ethical considerations. This last aspect is transversal to the entire research, guaranteeing the voluntary participation of the participant subjects; thus, articles not meeting this criterion were excluded. Additionally, duplicated references were eliminated.

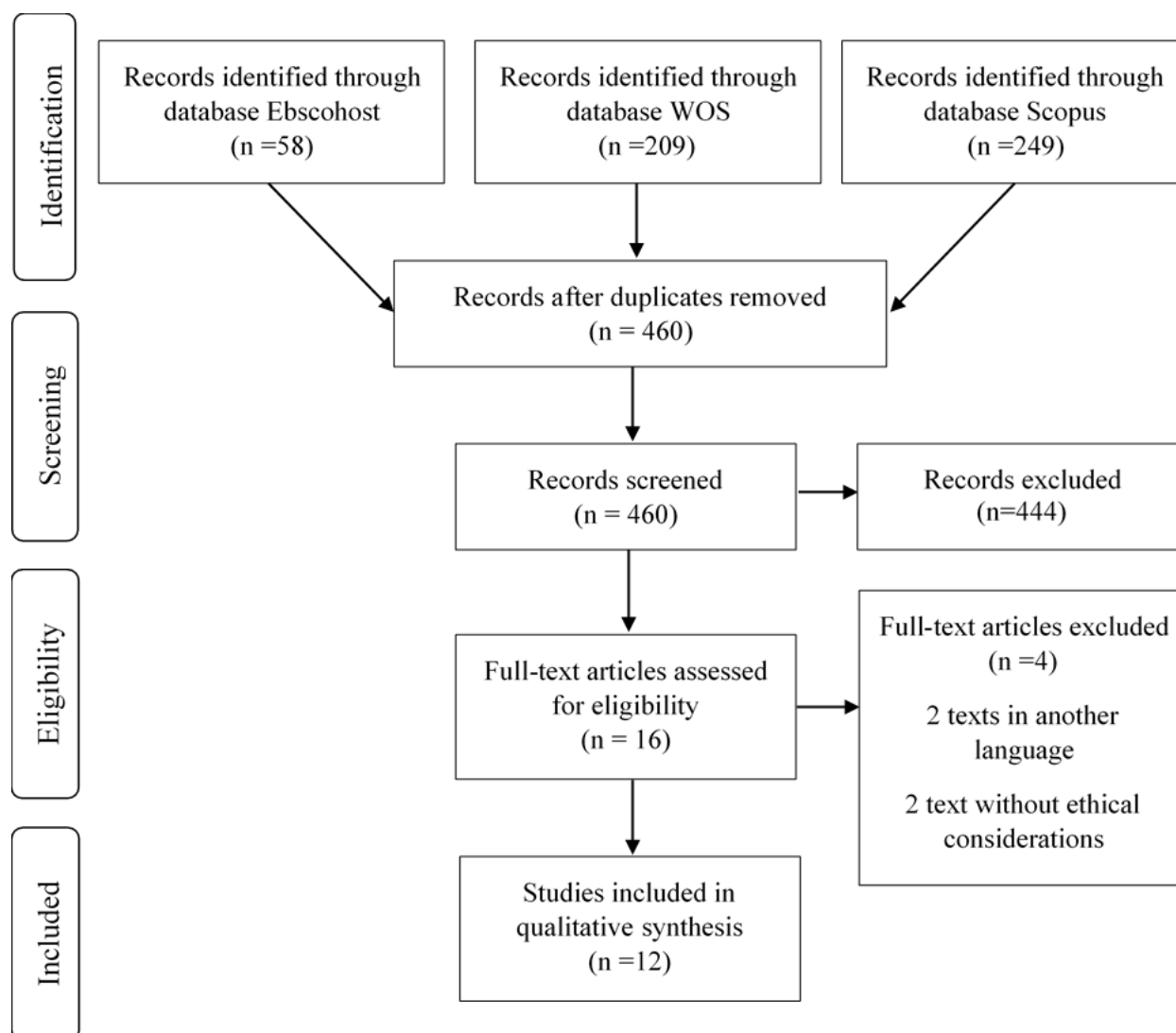
Article selection was done by two researchers (A.S. and C.B.), each of whom carried out the following: (1) reading of titles and abstracts, (2) selection of studies that met the specified inclusion and exclusion criteria, using information on the title, abstract and full text, and (3) reading the full text. Differences of opinion were resolved through holding meetings for consensus building until reaching a final decision. Differences around article selections were reviewed by the team, discussing the pertinence of their selection based on the previously defined inclusion and exclusion criteria. If there was no consensus, the article was not included.

There were 516 eligible references identified in the Ebscohost, WOS and Scopus databases. In accordance with the inclusion and exclusion criteria, twelve empirical articles

were selected, see Figure 1. All the articles selected for review had been published in English. With respect to the populations considered in them, eight of the twelve studies included graduate students (three studies mentioned the doctoral level, three mentioned masters and two studies did not specify the postgraduate level). Six of the twelve articles included undergraduate students and one article included exchange students. It should be noted that some of the studies simultaneously considered undergraduates, postgraduates (doctorates and masters) and exchange students (see Appendix A).

Figure 1

Flow Diagram of Reference Identification and Selection Process



As for the students' continent of origin, some studies mentioned different continents because their sample populations included students from various places of origin. Out of the total of twelve articles, eleven indicated Asia as the continent of origin, two indicated Africa, two named Europe, one North America and one Central America. With respect to destination continents, or where the students were to migrate to pursue their studies, of the twelve articles, six mentioned Asia, four Europe and two North America. The studies' breakdown by research design employed indicated that, of the twelve studies, seven used the phenomenological design, three the ethnographic design, two employed case studies and one was non-specific. A study could include various designs simultaneously (see Appendix A).

Data Extraction

Two processes were carried out for extracting data from the selected articles. These are (1) an Excel template was created to characterize specific information in each article and (2) the reading and characterization of each article by three researchers participating in this study. Each of the processes is explained below.

The Excel template was structured based on the guide, *Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Studies* (COREQ). These criteria flag the data that should be contained in any qualitative research (Tong et al., 2007). In this case, a section was included on the theoretical framework, objectives, research question, methodology, ethical aspects, results, limitations, future lines of research, and validity criteria for evaluating the articles' content. This made it possible to access a holistic, integrated vision of each article.

The metasynthesis focused on reinterpreting the results of the selected articles. Firstly, the themes and subthemes reported by the authors of the primary references were identified. Secondly, in addition to identifying the themes and subthemes, each one was identified based on the meanings ascribed by the primary reference authors. Thirdly, various *in vivo* extracts were selected (i.e., interview excerpts or other representative data of the primary authors' themes and subthemes). Regarding the *in vivo* extracts, it was determined whether they referred to the students' academic or daily life. Identifying the themes and subthemes of the primary authors and their corresponding *in vivo* codes was pertinent for this study because it provided insights into how the authors interpreted the participants' experiences (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007).

The reading of and data extraction from the twelve articles was carried out by the lead author (A.S). To triangulate the results, six articles were also analyzed by D.P., and another six articles by N.Z. It was decided that the researchers should carry out this process individually, to later contrast the analyses with the extracted data and thus ensure the rigor and reliability of this study.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the information was centered in the section on the results. Special consideration was given to the subsection of *in vivo* extracts or excerpts from the interviews, since they directly reflected the participants' experiences. Thus the *in vivo* extracts constitute our data unit but without omitting the authors' interpretations. The decision to do so was based on the cumulative experience of prior studies, which proposed the consideration of the codes as a means for reinterpreting the results in a metasynthesis (Juan-Martínez et al., 2018).

Three of the researchers (A.S., N.Z., and D.P.) then proceeded to generate the new thematization based on the *in vivo* extracts. This process was based on the method of constant comparison, organizing the information through open, axial, and selective codification (Flores, 2009). The open codification consisted of reading the material of interest and establishing the meaningful themes for grouping the information under. Academic life and daily life were considered as *a priori* categories of analysis, and themes and sub-themes proper to each one were generated and assigned names descriptive of their content according to the analyzed material.

For example, the following is an *in vivo* extract in one of the selected primary references: "I am 28 years old, have no wife or girlfriend, and I am not given the chance to interact with the American society. I love the research but hate the long hours." This extract is part of the sub-theme entitled, "Socializing in non-academic settings," which is taken from the theme designated by the primary authors as "Interactions within Academic and Non-academic Settings" (see Campbell, 2015). Since this was a reference to an experience outside the

university, it was included under our study category of “daily life.” Based on the *in vivo* codes and the prior knowledge of the themes and sub-themes of each article, we proceeded to generate the new thematization of the study data.

Axial codification involved carrying out a more abstract analysis, refining the information that would contribute significantly to the defined themes. And finally, selective codification consisted of condensing the number of themes to explain the phenomenon of interest to proceed to the stage of writing down the results. New themes and sub-themes were structured using the program NVivo 12 Pro.

Three researchers (A.S., N.Z., and D.P.) carried out the thematization separately and upon integrating the analyses found they had created similar themes and sub-themes for both academic and daily life. The themes and sub-themes were then further condensed, and there was consensus that they covered the study’s proposed objective. The results of the analysis were subsequently put in writing based on the themes and sub-themes created under the two categories of academic life and daily life. A conceptual description of each one was formulated, supported by the *in vivo* codes.

Rigor and Accuracy

To ensure the study’s methodological precision and reliability, the four criteria of good qualitative research proposed by Guba and Lincoln (2002) were met: (1) credibility, (2) transferability, (3) confirmability, and (4) reliability. Below is an explanation of how each criterion was met during the study.

The criterion of credibility is oriented toward guaranteeing a study’s internal validity, such that the information generated will be valid for the scientific community (Flores, 2009). The criterion met by triangulating the team members’ different perspectives (Okuda & Gómez-Restrepo, 2005). Two researchers worked on the identification and selection of eligible references for developing the metasynthesis, while three researchers performed information extraction and analysis on each article. The diversity of perspectives of the research team thus ensured the rigorous review of the primary articles.

The transferability criterion refers to the study’s external validity, meaning the results will be applicable in other contexts and to similar social actors. Transferability does not underscore a generalization of results; rather, it attends to the diversity of the phenomenon of interest. In this respect, in the metasynthesis the results of qualitative studies performed on different continents were analyzed and reinterpreted, which enabled contrasting and incorporating findings from different research contexts (Varela & Vives, 2016).

The criterion of confirmability is oriented toward the search for objectivity in the course of the research (Flores, 2009). Although the individual researcher’s subjectivity is present in the performance of a qualitative study, the team sought to respond analytically to the two categories of academic and daily life, based on the exhaustive review of the selected articles and the analytical process. This was further ensured by triangulating the team’s different perspectives and through sustained comparisons while carrying out the analytical process.

Finally, the criterion of reliability refers to the dependability of the investigation, or that the results can be repeated in similar contexts with the same social actors. Reliability can be ensured through an audit or information verification (Flores, 2009). Following the conclusion of the metasynthesis, it was reviewed by experts with extensive professional experience in qualitative research (J.V.S.) and systematic reviews (C.B. and M.P.), thus safeguarding the treatment of the data. The researchers read the metasynthesis and returned feedback and pertinent corrections for its improvement.

Ethical Aspects

The following study did not require submitting a request for approval to an ethics committee and a review by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The study focus was on the analysis of scientific articles using a qualitative methodology. One condition that allows exemption from an IRB review is that a study concentrate on the analysis of existing data and the participants' identities are undisclosed (Taraban, 2016). Therefore, one of the criteria of inclusion and exclusion applied to article selection was the reporting of ethical considerations. In other words, protection of the rights and well-being of the participants through ensuring anonymity and the confidentiality of the information.

Organization and Presentation of Results

To organize and present the study results, a section was created for reporting on the daily life of the international student and another section on their academic life. Each section contains descriptions of the pertinent themes and sub-themes derived from the application of the constant comparison method, developed in the stage of data analysis. Extracts or *in vivo* codes provide support for the analysis, indicating with a number the article from which each code has been extracted. The numbers correspond to the articles characterized in Appendix A.

Results

Metasynthesis of the References

As mentioned before, the question that has oriented our work is related to the differences and similarities which can be observed in the international university students' sociocultural adaptation processes, in academic versus daily life. In accordance with this distinction, we have established two sections: (1) the international university student's daily life and (2) the international university student's academic life. The themes and sub-themes under each section are presented below.

Daily Life of the International University Student

The international university student's daily life reflects the student's experiences outside the university context. The emergent analysis includes four themes: (1) situations that trigger shock, (2) challenging situations, (3) strategies for coping with sociocultural adaptation, and (4) functionality of social networks (see Appendix B). Since this study is a reinterpretation of findings, the results are presented indicating the number of the article analyzed between parenthesis (*italics*), according to the characterization of the twelve articles presented in Appendix A.

Situations That Trigger Shock. Situations that trigger shock refers to events that provoke disorientation or disconcertment in the international student, because such situations are not part of the lifeways in their country of origin. Said situations generally involve cultural differences and the quality of social interaction, including the treatment received by students from the host society, summarized. These are: (1) discrimination, (2) stereotyping, and (3) perception of an unsafe context.

The sub-theme of "discrimination" refers to experiences of international students that they feel reflect unequal treatment from the host country due to cultural differences. Arab students in the Philippines stated: "[...] I just used Putonghua with the salesperson [...]. To my surprise, no sooner had I finished my words than she turned away" (10). Discrimination can be

symbolic, for example being ignored because of weak command of the host nationals' language. However, it can also be triggered by perceptions of phenotype. International students are discriminated against because of their skin color, resulting in verbal and physical confrontations: "[...] a car driver called me as Nigro. Then I stopped him, and we had big fight [...]" (7). International students are no strangers to experiences of discrimination in daily life, for example in relation to accessing public services, using public transport, and shopping at the supermarket.

The sub-theme of "stereotypes" is conceptualized as experiences of international students who become aware of their image as migrants held by the receiving society. One stereotype is the belief that foreign students are financially well-off since they can afford a university education: "Your family must be very rich because you can come to this country to study" (11). This suggests that in the eyes of the nationals, people probably live in precarious conditions in the international student's country of origin, in contrast to the high standard and cost of living in the receiving society. Thus, the migrant would be able to stay in their country if he/she came from a high-income socioeconomic group.

The "perception of an unsafe context" refers to the image that the international student has of the receiving society as far as how much they can trust that their physical integrity and material safety will be protected. Japanese and Korean women living in Thailand affirm they find themselves the object of unwanted attention, provoking fears of being unable to independently manage their relationship with the environment: "As a Korean woman, I got a lot of unwanted attention [...] Korean women do not walk around off campus [...] shopping together and come back together" (9). Their adaptive behavior in such cases is to take recourse to groups formed as a protection mechanism in front of a social context perceived as hostile outside the limits of the university: "[...] if I walk alone [...] I grab my bag in front of me so nobody can steal it [...]" (9). In the sociocultural process, the place where one lives is fundamental for forming a positive perception of the receiving society. The phenomenon of robbery and the possible impact of being a victim of assault in a foreign country acquire importance.

Challenging Situations. Challenging situations are events that impact on international students, though not necessarily due to treatment received from the host society. Rather they involve the student's perception of how capable they are of facing different situations that are an intrinsic part of life in the receiving country. Among these challenges are: (1) coping with autonomy and (2) securing housing.

"Coping with autonomy" refers to the challenge of learning to live alone in a different country without the help of one's parents or of significant referents. This is important because these are students who have lived with their families and have never ventured out of their comfort zone: "[...] my parents pay, but here I need to work" (12). Thus, they have little experience in assuming responsibility for covering their own expenses and working to support themselves. Arab students in the Philippines face the challenge of managing on their own without the supervision of parents or of male siblings: "[...] So suddenly, I found myself alone moving without my father or brothers" (7). Achieving autonomy in a foreign country involves learning to generate one's own financial resources and covering all of one's daily expenses. It also means being independent and taking charge of preserving one's physical integrity.

"Securing housing" is conceptualized as the challenge meant by looking for housing in another country, a challenge inherent to the condition of being a foreign student. For example: "The rent is very high and also they ask, 'Are you a student?' They do not like students [...]" (12). Securing a living space in another country is a challenge that the students must deal with in daily life. Finding a rental is one of the first steps of insertion that guarantees quality of life

– it is a basic need whose satisfaction can be blocked owing to certain characteristics of the migrant, who in this case is a student or is not a salaried worker.

Coping Strategies for Sociocultural Adaptation. Coping strategies for sociocultural adaptation is conceptualized as the individual's personal resources of response for managing or dealing with the internal and environmental demands that arise upon inserting oneself in a foreign society. In other words, they are strategies that enable one to face the new social environment. One of these strategies is the search for information.

The “search for information” makes it evident that the international student's intention is to gather information in advance on the country and the lifeways of its society that he/she will be migrating to. International students search for information on digital platforms to learn about the experiences of other migrants and find advice on how to deal appropriately with everyday life: “[...] I used a lot of blogs [...] People shared their UK experience [...] That helps a lot” (12). This strategy is resorted to for personal contextualization in a foreign country, which will enable the international student to anticipate contingencies and know how to act should an emergency arise.

Functionality of Social Networks. This refers to the international student's perception of social interaction with different social actors in the receiving society. Also, how these interactions can be of service during his or her stay in the country. In the context of daily life, “familial support” is especially important.

“Familial support” refers to the international student's perception of the support offered by the relatives who have migrated together with them, support that may be emotional in nature: “[...] my parents can only give spiritual support” (1). However, said support may also be utilitarian, for example, by freeing the student from having to take care of different domestic activities: “[...] A husband makes it easier because of paying some rent and then some support as well, but when it comes to children it is quite difficult studying and taking care of children” (12). While the family is not necessarily part of the academic sphere, it provides emotional and practical support, helps to optimize financial resources and, in general, by taking on household tasks and childcare, benefits students by allowing them to concentrate on their academic endeavors.

The International University Student's Academic Life

Academic life encompasses the experiences of international students in the university context. Five issues emerged from the study analysis: (1) situations that trigger shock, (2) challenging situations, (3) strategies for coping with sociocultural adaptation, (4) functionality of social resources, and (5) needs in the receiving academic environment (see Appendix C). The results are presented in the section below. The numbers between parenthesis (*italics*), correspond to the 12 articles characterized in Appendix A.

Situations That Produce Shock. This refers to events that the international student perceives as strange, causing them confusion or disconcertment as such situations never arise in normal life in their native country, in this specific case in academic life. International students may experience shock or disorientation in their academic life for the following reasons: (1) weak command of the host society language, (2) discrimination, (3) stereotyping, (4) non-acknowledgement of cultural differences, and (5) lack of integration in the university context.

“Weak command of the host society language” is reflective of the shock produced in the international student if they are not fluent in the native language of the receiving society,

which affects their social engagement. They have implicit feelings of inferiority that bring about fear or insecurity due to the inability to communicate fluidly in the language of the receiving context: “I felt inferior because we don’t have the same accent and I was afraid my English wouldn’t be as good [...]” (8). They may also be fatigued because they have to speak various languages in their academic, in daily life, in addition to their native tongue: “[...] I have to switch to English at school, Thai in the canteen and then I get home and I can relax and go back to Japanese. It’s confusing and tiring” (9). Naturally, fluency in the receiving country’s native language facilitates social interaction and universities can admit other languages (e.g., English) as part of their internationalization. Transitioning between different languages as a function of participation in certain contexts causes conflict because it provokes feelings of lack of competence, confusion, and exhaustion.

International students also perceive “discrimination” in the university environment. This sub-theme is conceptualized as experiences in which they receive clearly unequal treatment in the university context because of their nationality. They may be triggered by strangers who treat students as undesirable migrants in the country: “I was just walking around within the university campus, a Korean woman came to us and asked, “Where are you from?” We said, “China,” and then she shouted, “Go home” (11). Teachers may also make denigrating comments, for instance introducing them to their peers as migrants lacking in character and good manners: “There is a professor [...] he wanted me to explain to everyone why most Chinese people living in Korea are of such low character, and then explained to us how the Chinese and Chinese-Korean people he had met had been rude” (11). International students perceive as discrimination the negative verbalizations and comments directed at them because of their nationality. In the case of teachers, they make comments that, though subtle, place the student in a position of inferiority in the teacher-student power relationship.

International students are also the target of “stereotyping,” experiences in which the receiving society’s oversimplified assumptions are projected at them in the academic context. One example is of students from Central Asia in South Korea who were presumed to be vegetarians by the administrators of the student cafeteria: “[...] as soon as we came to Korea we began to be considered as just vegetarians [...]” (4). University personnel retain stereotypes because they are uninformed of the cultural differences between the students’ countries of origin and the receiving society, and this is an irritant for foreign students when they are treated differently when they wish to avail themselves of services and products on campus.

Stereotyping is not far removed from the perception of “non-acknowledgement of cultural differences.” This sub-theme refers to situations indicative of a lack of recognition in the university of cultural diversity, when practices are imposed that run counter to the international student’s culture. Arab nationals in the Philippines felt bad about being obliged to participate in activities that hindered the proper practice of religious fasting: “[...] it is too difficult [...] dance as a Muslim and being fasting at the same time. It becomes much more difficult when the teacher ask you to dance with a girl!” (7). International students have a perception that the university promotes academic activities without consideration for cultural differences. Emphasis is given to the weightiness of pedagogical practices that are disconnected from the presence of heterogeneity in the classroom.

For international students it is also bound up with feelings of “lack of integration in the university context.” The sub-theme points to the difficulties of international students *vis-à-vis* feeling part of the academic community; for example, because the information on campus activities is only available in the receiving country’s native language: “[...] because sometimes there is useful information, and we cannot get it [...] I feel that I am not part of the community” (4). The feeling of being not quite integrated is due to the fact that, while international students are accepted by foreign universities, no mechanisms are in place that facilitate smooth

communication with them. The university is expected to be democratic with the migrants and provide information that is accessible to all.

Challenging Situations. Challenging situations refers to events that exert an impact on international students, though not necessarily because of the treatment received from the receiving society. It involves the perception of their personal capacity to face different situations inherent to academic life in the host universities. Included as such are: (1) conventions in scientific writing, (2) master a second language, (3) meet the expectations of third parties, (4) forge relationships of trust, and (5) collectivism vs. individualism.

“Conventions in scientific writing” refers to the style and format rules that must be followed in submissions of written scientific works. This is a challenge because more rigorousness is required in scientific writing: “[...] I was told I did not reference the authors properly in my work” (12). International students must develop skill in backing up their arguments, so that these will be considered valid by their teachers: “I had to back up all of my arguments [...] so that I can make [them] valid [...]” (12). Learning how to write scientific papers is a challenge that is an intrinsic part of higher education. It requires knowledge of and the ability to apply the rules and conventions demanded by the faculty and the wider scientific community. It is therefore part of the formative process, beyond the curricular content that strictly pertains to the discipline taught in the degree program.

Once again, having to “master a second language” is a challenge each time the international student carries out an academic activity. They have difficulty understanding study texts due to their limited understanding of the receiving country’s language: “[...] I was overwhelmed by English; all the textbooks imported from Western countries were very thick, and I had to preview all reading materials. Otherwise, I shall not understand what the professors said in class” (10). Lack of mastery of the local language has important repercussions, beyond the limits it imposes on social interaction with the nationals. Most importantly, it has a direct impact on academic performance, and therefore improving language competency would facilitate academic integration: “[...] If I can’t understand the language, academic knowledge makes no sense” (11).

Some international students are keen “to meet the expectations of third parties.” This sub-theme is conceptualized as the need to perform or comport oneself according to norms of behavior expected of the students, whether by teachers or peers. For example, their academic performance must be superior to that of their native peers: “We never thought that we have to do better than Korean students [...]” (4). Students from China attending university in England mention that communities providing support to international students encouraged them to change their religious beliefs:

“I was aware some of them are missionaries and their job is to spread God’s love to more people. But for myself, I have accepted your favour, but I cannot live up to your expectations. [...] I was faced with the dilemma and was confused [...] and it even affected my studies and daily life.” (3).

It is a challenge to have to demonstrate a higher level of academic achievement than the nationals and to assimilate the cultural practices in the educational system. These are additional demands that can impact on the students’ well-being.

It can likewise be a challenge for international students to “forge relationships of trust” with their peers. This refers to the fact that the nationals do not always believe that the foreigners have good intentions, that they are honest or respectful individuals, and this affects the construction of friendly, authentic relationships. For example: “[...] some of them need long time to trust you at the beginning because of their perception about the Arab students in

general” (7). Building close relationships between migrants and nationals can require more time, as the barriers of prejudice are removed.

International students face the dilemma of “collectivism vs. individualism,” given that collectivism is characteristic of some societies of origin while the host society follows the ethos of individualism (or vice versa). The result is that the students’ sense of belonging and degree of group integration are affected. In the case of Malaysians and Indonesians studying in Jordan, in their countries of origin the advisors accompany learners in the education process; however, in the host country the students alone are responsible for their academic process: “In Indonesia [...] advisor takes major responsibility for the student’s academic program; [...] however, in Jordanian universities [...] the student is solely responsible for her or his academic program” (6). Chinese students in Hong Kong are not obliged to attend a fixed class schedule, which poses a challenge for them to be able to create a close circle of friends: “At Mainland China universities, there is a lot of emphasis on collectivism. [...] at Hong Kong universities, students are independent from each other” (10). The challenge in this case is that students are unable to count on the accompaniment of teachers and the support of their peers in another country and must carry out study activities completely on their own.

Strategies of Coping with the Sociocultural Adaptation. Strategies for coping with sociocultural adaptation conceptualizes the individual student’s personal resources of response for managing or dealing with the internal and environmental demands that accompany their insertion in a foreign society. Six primary strategies can be mentioned: (1) orientation toward academic achievement, (2) assigning a low priority to daily life, (3) academic achievement as the mechanism for gaining recognition, (4) assimilation, (5) separation, and (6) integration. The sub-themes are presented below.

“Orientation toward academic achievement” refers to the utilization of academic achievement to attain dominance in the university setting and status in the receiving society. For example: “I need much time to [get used to] the Jordanian system [putting] more pressure [on me] to [be] successful in my study” (6). Adapting to the university system is seen as synonymous with academic success and demands a deeper commitment to one’s studies and self-regulation to successfully meet the institution’s academic demands.

One way of achieving this is by “assigning a low priority to daily life.” This strategy consists of prioritizing academic life above daily life, which includes the suspension or indefinite postponement of daily life activities to begin a process of self-enclosure and outstanding performance in one’s studies: “[...] I just stopped going out at all” (8). As they devote most of their time to academics, students may consider their personal development in their daily lives as precarious, as they do not have opportunities for establishing meaningful relationships, finding a partner, or making friends.

Another coping strategy adopted by international students in their sociocultural adaptive process is “academic achievement as the mechanism for gaining recognition” in the university environment. This strategy refers to the use of academic achievement to gain recognition and value in the eyes of the nationals: “[...] my advisor and professors are very important to me. I realized that they hold my future; therefore, I try to study hard to prove to my instructors I am a good student” (6). International students have a conception of their teachers and advisors as very important persons in their lives because they hold their future in their hands. International students focus on their studies to demonstrate to their teachers that they are good students. In this regard, the support they receive is not perceived as a gratuitous right; rather, it will be granted if dedication and enthusiasm are demonstrated from the start of one’s studies, which will then create willingness in their teachers to work with them.

International students also resort to “assimilation.” Assimilation is defined as a closer approach to the host culture and not toward the migrant’s own culture. This approach implies

acting in ways that fit in with the established norms of the receiving country. French students in the United States pointed out that the only way to be accepted depended on using the same dress codes: “Students here are conformist, like sheep [...] We went to a party last month and we had to follow everybody and wear the same shirt. It was the only way for us to be accepted” (2). A dress code differentiates a certain group from society in general and promotes a sense of belonging to the group. However, in the university context it is perceived as imposing a social order, to the extent that it undermines individual identity and turns those who participate into “sheep.”

To maintain one’s preference for one’s own culture and to distance oneself from the receiving culture constitutes the strategy of “separation.” Arab students in a university setting in the Philippines showed a marked interest in practicing their faith, as it was a mechanism useful for tolerating negative moments and, besides, allowed them to project “the true image of Islam”: “Islam is the religion of mercy, [...] I wish I can reflect the right picture about the Islam” (7). These students wished to exhort their co-nationals to remain observant of their religion and demonstrate to the locals that certain practices, such as the use of the *hijab*, were a meaningful symbol for their part of the world and not a mental derangement. This had to do, in other words, with a desire to communicate and render one’s own culture visible to transform the negative image created primarily by the communications media.

When the individual is favorably inclined toward both cultures, they opt for the strategy of “integration,” maintaining their original cultural identity even as they interact with the receiving culture. In the abovementioned case the religion practiced in the students’ country of origin did not impede them from being open to a different culture, as they did not define their own culture solely in terms of religious faith: “[...] I feel there are many things in it worth learning [...] religion is only a small part of culture” (3). In contrast to others who adopt the strategy of assimilation, these students do not feel obliged to consort exclusively with co-nationals. Thus, integration is the strategy that makes cultural learning possible without detriment to one’s own values and cultural identity.

Functionality of Social Resources. The theme of functionality of social resources is conceptualized as the degree to which international students perceive organizations in the university context as working efficiently and effectively to promote a more integrated university environment. The social resources referred to in this theme are: (1) the organizations that serve integration, (2) the role of the University Office of International Affairs, (3) the teachers’ role, (4) the role of the host national network, (5) the role of the co-national network, and (6) the role of the international network.

International students have a positive perception of “the organizations that serve integration” into activities and groups in the university environment. In other words, international students value the actions of organizations whose objective is to make them feel welcomed and integrated into the academic community. Chinese students residing in England mentioned: “When international students like us travel [...] to understand the [local] culture [...] there are not many opportunities. But it [the LVG] has provided an excellent platform for us” (3). Despite their profound wish to understand the new culture and build relationships with the locals, they hadn’t had many opportunities to create meaningful networks. In this context, the Christian organization LVG, which offered outreach services for acculturating foreign students, made a positive contribution toward meeting those needs.

“The role of the University Office of International Affairs” is understood as referring to the function of the Internationalization Office of welcoming and providing orientation services to international students. In the opinion of Japanese and Korean students, the performance of this role is deficient because the functionaries speak no other language apart from the local one: “[...] staff in the international relations department cannot speak English

or Korean [...]” (9). This office in Thailand offered no response to the main barrier to intercultural contact: language. The staff was not enabled in English as a second language, neither did they speak Korean, and this hindered access to important information. In the United Kingdom mention is made of the limited information available on finding employment and how to comply with migratory procedures, information that could actually be accessed through the Internationalization Office’s digital platform: “I think they should be more explicit and say, especially to international students, that, ‘If you get a visa it is hard to get a job’ [...], because it is there specifically for the international students” (12).

The sub-theme designated as the “teachers’ role” is understood as the function in welcoming international students to their classrooms. The students perceive as positive the teachers’ willingness to create a climate of trust that encourages the expression of their ideas and opinions: “[...] They helped me adapt to [...] teaching methods and helped me talk up in class” (1). In the same way that it is a shock for them to encounter teachers who are not sensitive to cultural differences, the students consider it significant when teachers are empathic toward cultural differences: “[...] he understood my cultural and social difficulties” (1). They also give value to instrumental support, such as when they are offered physical assistance in case of an illness: “[...] I was sick, so my teacher helped me to go to a walking center [...]” (12).

The “role of the host national network” is conceptualized as the function of social bonding between international students and the host nationals or their local peers. The valuation of this functionality by the international students is neither positive nor negative, but instead, limited. Social interaction between these groups occurs for purely academic reasons: “[...] Most interaction with them [is] around academic purposes and does not go as far as to invite each other to social events” [...]” (6).

International students perceive “the role of their co-national network” as having to do with the social bonds created among migrant peers of the same nationality. The value assigned by the students to this network is marked by ambivalence. On one hand, they perceive the network as positive – less effort is required when one interacts with persons who share the same culture, as there is no need to deal with cultural barriers: “You share the common culture, so you feel more relaxed” (5). However, such ties are also perceived as adverse in the sense that they affect the sociocultural adaptation process – if one stays within one’s comfort zone, there will be no openness to cultural learning: “We are getting closer to each other, [...] but [...] we stay in our comfort zone [...]” (8).

“The role of the international network” is conceptualized as the function of the social bonds between international students and fellow migrants of other nationalities. Such bonds are generally perceived as having positive value because they are conducive to cultural learnings: “It’s just so nice to get to know new things and to have different views on things” (5). Another perception of value relates to the availability of emotional support in situations of difficulty or conflict: “[...] we kind of support each other, like, ‘You can do it! [...]’ (5). Interaction with students of other nationalities is associated with knowledge of a diversity of thought and perspectives concerning the world, an identity as migrants experiencing nostalgia, and the emotional support that the network provides in difficult times to shore up feelings of security and self-confidence.

Needs in the Receiving Academic Environment. Needs in the receiving academic environment is conceptualized as the expression of the international students’ perception of an absence of actions on the part of the universities that could favor their sociocultural adaptation. It includes the following: (1) student assistance, (2) increased social interaction with nationals, (3) cultural instruction in the classroom, and (4) bi-directional adaptation. The sub-themes are presented below.

“Student assistance” refers to the international students’ need for initial assistance from the universities with tackling the demands of relocation to a foreign country. The expression of this need emerges from uncertainties around milestones inherent to the educational context, together with the lack of devices that facilitate the socio-academic integration of international students: “[...] we feel lost, we need support. [...] We don’t know what we have to do and what’s gonna happen [...]” (2).

“Increased social interaction with nationals” is understood as the international students’ expression of a need for more social interaction with host nationals. In the case of Chinese students in England who took part in the Christian student integration program, they emphasized that it was the only venue for socialization outside of the classroom: “[...] so far we only know what Christians are like. As for other ordinary people, business people, for example, what the life of ordinary people is like, we have no idea” (3). They need to be able to learn about the receiving country, its lifeways and culture, through interaction with heterogeneous groups, and for this learning to extend to daily life settings.

Another sub-theme is “cultural instruction in the classroom.” This is conceptualized as a perceived need for spaces of cultural learning and not just for discipline-oriented study. In the opinion of Asian students in South Korea, social interaction would be important for cultural instruction to take place in the classroom, as this would enable learning the national language, above and beyond the use of books or Internet: “I would really appreciate it if Korean friends try to talk to me in Korean so that I could enhance my speaking skills” (4). The classroom is turned into an apt space for promoting cultural learning, calling on the host nationals’ support for gaining proficiency in the language and thus eliminate cultural barriers that impact on integration.

A final perceived need involves “bi-directional adaptation.” Bi-directional adaptation refers to international students’ need for host national students to try to understand them. It would imply a cultural learning on the part of the receiving society for better interactions with the migrants: “We feel that American students have to make efforts to understand us. We also nod our heads for two hours, pretending that we understand what Americans tell us” (2). In this case, both international students and host nationals would have to experience an adaptation process, and hopefully the nationals would likewise try to understand the migrants, given the latter’s affirmation that the burden of adaptation falls on them, the international students.

Discussion

This metasynthesis was prepared to interpret the results of prior qualitative research on the sociocultural adaptation process of international university students. The main research findings indicate the following with respect to sociocultural adaptation: (1) it implies specific challenges in academic and daily life, as well as situations of shock that crosscut both social settings, and (2) it mobilizes different intrapersonal and social resources in academic and daily life. The following section presents our findings in the light of current knowledge, and describes the theoretical and practical implications that derive from said findings.

Sociocultural Adaptation and the Identification of Problematic Situations

An initial finding was that the international student’s sociocultural adaptation is approached empirically, based on the description of the problematic events that arise during the student’s stay in a society other than their own. The reinterpretation of the findings identified the experiencing of challenges that exert less impact, and situations of shock, or a high degree of disorientation in academic and daily life. Said shock involves the perception of discrimination and stereotyping, transversal to both social settings.

The identification of negative or problematic events associated with the sociocultural adaptation of international students has been widely addressed in other research studies (Brunsting et al., 2018; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Zhang & Goodson, 2011). As well, systematic reviews are available that emphasize the linguistic barrier, the sociocultural stressors associated with cultural norms, and social interaction with the locals (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Recent studies highlight how migrant integration into the academic community is limited by the language barrier (Yu & Wright, 2016) and difficulties in social interaction with the native population (Gao, 2016; Wang & Hannes, 2014).

While the problematic events that arise in the sociocultural adaptation process have been identified, no review exists presenting their relative weight in students' academic and daily life, and the associated differences. In this regard, we identified situations that challenge international students, while others cause shock or significant negative impact. In daily life, it is a challenge to search for information on housing and to experience emancipation or living independently, far from parents and siblings. The perception of lack of safety in their surroundings, putting their physical integrity at risk, and provokes shock. The challenges in the university milieu include a lack of mastery of a second language that is necessary to develop study activities, which leads to shock when the student feels unsupported by the locals and lack of integration in the university. Finally, shock is generated transversally in university and daily life by perceptions of discrimination and stereotyping.

Differentiating between the university environment and the ambit of daily life has important implications at the theoretical level. This is so especially because some theoretical models, such as the U curve, emphasize the completion of specific stages before the attainment of full adaptation (Oberg, 1960). This conception overlooks the international student's participation in concrete social environments and refers to experiences in specific environments more than to a unitary adaptation process. Of the twelve studies selected, four presented *in vivo* extracts associated with participation in the university and in daily life (See Alazzi & Al-Jarrah, 2016; Campbell, 2015; Coles & Swami, 2012; Yu & Zhang, 2016), although their stated objectives did not stipulate a search for said specificity. We therefore consider that establishing a distinction between academic and daily life, as proposed by Jindal-Snape and Ingram (2013), contributes to a more holistic understanding of the international student's process of sociocultural adaptation.

Sociocultural Adaptation and Strategies of Response to the Environment

A second finding consisted of the role of individual agency and of the receiving society in students' sociocultural adaptation, especially in the university milieu. Emphasis has been given to the individual's response to the demands of the receiving environment in different theoretical models, including the acculturation model (Berry, 1997), which is among those most often applied in studies of international students' sociocultural adaptation (Sarmiento et al., 2019; Zhang & Goodson, 2011). In effect, prior studies have underscored the recurrent use of strategies of integration, assimilation, separation, and, to a lesser extent, of marginalization (Wang & Hannes, 2014). We identified the use of acculturation strategies in the university setting. Assimilation and integration would enable students to have a sense of belonging to the academic community and motivate them to seek interaction with the locals while remaining separate would be motivated by the desire to preserve their native culture and vindicate the home country's negative image. Other forms of agency consist of academic immersion, to excel in their studies.

Of the twelve studies selected, only two stated in their objectives the analysis of the strategies involved in sociocultural adaptation, which were reported in the section on outcomes (see Alazzi & Al-Jarrah, 2016; Choi & Kim, 2014), although we did identify *in vivo* extracts

that referred to coping with the new social milieu in other studies. There were few investigations whose *in vivo* extracts contained ways of responding to the demands of daily life (see Campbell, 2015; Gbadamosi, 2018). The above offer guidelines for future research that could consider the exploration of acculturation strategies within and outside the university, thus accounting for individual agency in specific contexts of participation.

With respect to the receiving country, or the country where the international student has relocated, its contribution to sociocultural adaptation is fundamental, especially in terms of the support provided by social ties. The explicative model of interpersonal relationships of friendship has determined the utility for international students of three social networks: with nationals, with co-nationals, and with the international network (Bochner et al., 1977). We found more information on these networks in the university settings; however, just two studies provided data on available daily life networks, and these gave no data on the role of the family (see Campbell, 2015; Gbadamosi, 2018).

Specifying the three social networks of friendship has been useful to explain migrants' social interactions from the perspective of the specific benefits they received from each network in the receiving country. The network they established with co-nationals reaffirmed the values of their culture of origin. The network with host nationals facilitated the attainment of academic and professional goals. The members of this group are the students' peers and teachers, among others. Finally, the international network included other foreigners who made more of a recreational contribution because they shared the same condition of being migrants (Ward et al., 2001).

In Bochner et al. (1977) the meaning or significance that underpins a close relationship or a friendship is not clarified, other than as an exchange of resources. According to Schutz (1974), social interactions include various levels of intimacy or anonymity therefore implying different degrees of significance. Face-to-face interactions, whether with friends or strangers, are subject to spatial and temporal immediacy, which influences how they will be characterized. Thus, not all social interactions constituted close or intimate relationships or served utilitarian purposes. We considered it relevant to extend the use of said model for assigning value to the role of significant social interactions, although they may not all be of a close nature. The social dimension of the students' daily life environment is highly significant, because should their interactions be problematic or limited in the university, it will motivate them to seek more social contact in daily life. Conversely, high academic achievement implies difficulties of socialization in more informal settings (Gao, 2016; Wang & Hannes, 2014). This compensatory dynamic in social bonding within different ambits of participation can be further explored.

Conclusion

Two conclusions emerge from this metasynthesis. First, we wish to critique the great emphasis placed on the problematical situations that international students encounter in academic life and in daily life, while much less attention has been placed on the deployment of personal strategies and social resources that are available outside the university environment. Because of this underlying premise, sociocultural adaptation studies present it as a primarily negative and highly complex process, with precedence given to the concept of a hostile and challenging receiving context, relegating the migrant's agency and the availability of various support networks to a lower order of importance.

Secondly, the sphere of daily life appears to be a propitious space for establishing social contact with the locals, should this be problematic in the university context. The foregoing does not mean that social interactions are more important in one setting or in the other; rather, that a compensatory dynamic exists between the two contexts. Therefore, the simultaneous

engagement with academic life and daily life grants specificity to the adaptive sociocultural experience. The two statements above regarding daily and academic life are theoretical in nature; they may be considered as conceptual insights that adaptation to different university environments should be thought of as dynamic processes, wherein a very important role is played by the actors' agency. The link between daily life and academic life needs to be analyzed in greater depth, understanding integration as a global phenomenon instead of envisioning it through biased perspectives trained on an isolated dimension and excluding the others.

The compensatory function that academic life and daily life can alternately take on in the process of sociocultural adaptation was an unexpected finding, especially since the studies do not assume any possible distinction between the students' experiences at university and outside it. Sociocultural adaptation is approached as a process that unfolds at the country level without discriminating between the different scenarios in which students are inserted, the social networks they build and the challenges inherent to each of the contexts. Therefore, it is recommended that studies be undertaken to analyze the role of academic life and daily life in the students' sociocultural adaptation process.

It should be pointed out that the above-referenced conclusions have emerged in light of the criterion of transferability or external validity of the stud. The conclusions stated in this article make no claim of universal applicability to the experience of all international students. Rather they demonstrate the diversity of the findings reported in the qualitative studies that are possible to systematize in new analytical categories. It is possible to observe that there are common experiences found the academic life and daily life of international students even when they pursue their studies on different continents. However, that said, the aforementioned experiences exert striking and unique subjective impacts on each international student.

Contribution

This study's primary contribution is that of synthesizing the empirical results of qualitative investigations on the sociocultural adaptation of international university students. Specific factors of the adaptive experience inside and outside the academic setting are identified to offer a state-of-the-art vision. Finally, a re-categorization of the findings was performed that helps to confirm the highly negative look trained by the research on the sociocultural adaptation process (Pan, 2011). Far from being hostile, the receiving environment can become a resource for the migrant (Safdar et al., 2003). Thus, above and beyond rendering visible the problematic situations, the deployment is identified of diverse personal strategies and social resources, especially in the university environment.

Limitations

It is important to recognize the review's potential limitations that are associated with the applied criteria of inclusion and exclusion. The search for articles that might respond to the research question covered qualitative studies conducted in various sociocultural contexts, thus a situational and contextual vision was not considered. Another limitation was the inclusion of studies on different samples –undergraduate and graduate students. Age is a variable associated with sociocultural adaptation (Zhang & Goodson, 2011); thus, the undergraduate and postgraduate levels are associated with different milestones in accordance with the requirements of a tertiary or quaternary education. Another limitation was the use of just three academic databases (Ebscohost, WOS, and Scopus). These databases were selected because of the high quality of the studies in their search result; however, other significant studies may have been excluded because they were not indexed in them.

While we are confident that our systematic process has been rigorous, some pertinent findings may have been left out due to the limited number of *in vivo* extracts available in the studies. Lastly, the decision to focus on a qualitative synthesis, instead of on a review integrating quantitative findings, imposed limits on the presentation of our results. Future works can integrate qualitative and quantitative findings to obtain more generalizable information.

Implications for Research and Practice

From a theoretical perspective and on the basis of the *in vivo* extracts analyzed, it is our opinion that the approach to international students' experiences of sociocultural adaptation should be informed by a simultaneous consideration of individual agency and the receiving society's role as a social resource. Likewise, it is fundamental to analyze the receiving environment's role in concrete settings of participation, specifically the university and daily life. The application of the model and acculturation strategies of Berry (1997) to individual agency would be feasible. On the other hand, given the observed emphasis on problematic events in the studies selected, the adaptive process seems to require reinterpretation in more positive, less pathological terms, from which learnings could arise that would be favorable for the stay in the receiving country (Pan, 2011). In approaching the role of the receiving society, since the students participate in highly internationalized contexts, the model of friendly relations (Bochner et al., 1977) is relevant, specifically focusing on the importance of national, co-national, and international networks.

The present study is centered on the experiences of international students considered as migrants. Future lines of research are open to the possibility of conducting systematic reviews that will include the experiences of other social actors, among them national students, teachers, and administrators. A suggestion has been made regarding the relevance of a reciprocal or bidirectional approach, that would focus on the migrant-other and the national-other as adapting to each other in a mutual process (Volet & Jones, 2012). Another suggestion is to analyze the possible compensatory dynamic between academic life and daily life in the international student's sociocultural adaptation. Furthermore, the studies analyzed have been conducted in Europe, Asia, and North America; studies from the Latin American continent are lacking. Another possible line of research would be to focus on the roles of internationalization offices, internationalized education policies, and administrative practices in responding to a globalized academic environment because, in effect, sociocultural adaptation is bound up with the work teachers do with their international students and the support provided to the latter by university administrations.

From the perspective of praxis, institutional actions should be reinforced that are oriented toward fostering cultural heterogeneity and offering support to newcomers. Internationalization Offices with their virtual platforms can serve to gather relevant information on the university and postgraduate admissions processing, facilitate relations with host nationals through formal and informal events, promote the development of linguistic and academic writing skills, as well as generate referral networks for access to psychological counseling services.

References

- Abunab, H. Y., Dator, W. L. T., Salvador, J. T., & Lacanaria, M. G. C. (2017). Solitude, religious and cultural uniqueness in a foreign environment: Adjustments as an Arab student. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 56(5), 1701–1718. doi: [10.1007/s10943-017-0425-x](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-017-0425-x)
- Alazzi, K., & Al-Jarrah, A. (2016). Southeast Asian international students adjusting to Jordanian universities: Views from the field. *Journal of College Student Development*, 57(6), 730–741. doi: [10.1353/csd.2016.0071](https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2016.0071)
- Altbach, P. G., & Knight, J. (2007). The internationalization of higher education: Motivations and realities. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 11(3–4), 290–305. doi: [10.1177/1028315307303542](https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315307303542)
- Barroso, J., & Powell-Cope, G. M. (2000). Metasynthesis of qualitative research on living with HIV infection. *Qualitative Health Research*, 10(3), 340–353. doi: [10.1177/104973200129118480](https://doi.org/10.1177/104973200129118480)
- Beine, M., Noël, R., & Ragot, L. (2014). Determinants of the international mobility of students. *Economics of Education Review*, 41, 40–54. doi: [10.1016/j.econedurev.2014.03.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2014.03.003)
- Berry, J. W. (1997). Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation. *Applied Psychology*, 46(1), 5–68. doi: [10.1111/j.1464-0597.1997.tb01087.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.1997.tb01087.x)
- Bochner, S., McLeod, B. M., & Lin, A. (1977). Friendship patterns of overseas students: A functional model. *International Journal of Psychology*, 12(4), 277–294. doi: [10.1080/00207597708247396](https://doi.org/10.1080/00207597708247396)
- Brunsting, N. C., Zachry, C., & Takeuchi, R. (2018). Predictors of undergraduate international student psychosocial adjustment to US universities: A systematic review from 2009–2018. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 66, 22–33. doi: [10.1016/j.ijintrel.2018.06.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2018.06.002)
- Bustos, C., Morales, M. G., Salcedo, P., & Díaz, A. (2018). Buhos: A web-based systematic literature review management software. *SoftwareX*, 7, 360–372. doi: [10.1016/j.softx.2018.10.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.softx.2018.10.004)
- Campbell, T. A. (2015). A phenomenological study on international doctoral students' acculturation experiences at a U.S. University. *Journal of International Students*, 5(3), 285–299. <http://jistudents.org>
- Carreño, S. P., & Chaparro, L. (2015). Metasíntesis: Discusión de un abordaje metodológico. *Ciencia y Enfermería*, 21(3), 123–131. doi: [10.4067/S0717-95532015000300011](https://doi.org/10.4067/S0717-95532015000300011)
- Carrillo, G. M., Gómez, O. J., & Vargas, E. (2008). Metodologías en metasíntesis. *Ciencia y Enfermería*, 14(2), 13–19. doi: [10.4067/S0717-95532008000200003](https://doi.org/10.4067/S0717-95532008000200003)
- Chirkov, V. (2009). Critical psychology of acculturation: What do we study and how do we study it, when we investigate acculturation? *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 33(2), 94–105. doi: [10.1016/j.ijintrel.2008.12.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2008.12.004)
- Choi, J., & Kim, Y. (2014). Central Asian students' adjustment experiences at a “globalized” Korean university. *International Education Studies*, 7(8), 94–103. doi: [10.5539/ies.v7n8p94](https://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v7n8p94)
- Coles, R., & Swami, V. (2012). The sociocultural adjustment trajectory of international university students and the role of university structures: a qualitative investigation. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 11(1), 87–100. doi: [10.1177/1475240911435867](https://doi.org/10.1177/1475240911435867)
- De Vita, G., & Case, P. (2003). Rethinking the internationalisation agenda in UK higher education. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 27(4), 383–398. doi: [10.1080/0309877032000128082](https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877032000128082)
- Elias, N. (1998). *La civilización de los padres y otros ensayos*. Editorial Norma.

- Flick, U. (2007). *Introducción a la investigación cualitativa* (2nd ed.). Ediciones Morata, S. L.
- Flores, R. (2009). *Observando observadores: Una introducción a las técnicas cualitativas de investigación social*. Ediciones UC.
- Furham, A. (2012). Culture shock. *Journal of Psychology and Education*, 7(1), 9–22. <http://content.ebscohost.com/ContentServer.asp?T=P&P=AN&K=79758800&S=R&D=eue&EbscoContent=dGJyMNLe80SeprM4zdnyOLCmr0%2Bep7VSRqi4TbOWxWXS&ContentCustomer=dGJyMOzprlCxqbZRuePfgex43zx>
- Gao, X. (2016). Mainland Chinese undergraduates' academic socialisation in Hong Kong. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 41(3), 364–378. [doi:10.1080/0309877X.2015.1117596](https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2015.1117596)
- Gbadamosi, A. (2018). The anatomy of international students' acculturation in UK universities. *Industry and Higher Education*, 32(2), 129–138. [doi:10.1177/0950422218760335](https://doi.org/10.1177/0950422218760335)
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2002). Paradigmas en competencia en la investigación cualitativa. In C. Denman & J. A. Haro (Eds.), *Por los rincones: antología de métodos cualitativos en la investigación social* (pp. 113–145). Colegio Sonora.
- Jindal-Snape, D., & Ingram, R. (2013). Perspectives in applied academic practice understanding and supporting triple transitions of international doctoral students: ELT and SuReCom Models. *Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice*, 1(1), 17–24. [doi:10.14297/jpaap.v1i1.39](https://doi.org/10.14297/jpaap.v1i1.39)
- Juan-Martínez, B., Castillo-Arcos, L. del C., & Cortaza-Ramírez, L. (2018). “Una sociedad desmantelada”: Metasíntesis del fenómeno de violencia en poblaciones indígenas. *Rev Gaúcha Enferm*, 39(e20170080). [doi:10.1590/1983-1447.2018.2017-0080](https://doi.org/10.1590/1983-1447.2018.2017-0080)
- Knight, J. (2004). Internationalization remodeled: Definition, approaches, and rationales. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 8(1), 5–31. [doi:10.1177/1028315303260832](https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315303260832)
- Knight, J. (2008). An internationalization model: Meaning, rationales, approaches, and strategies. In P. G. Altbach (Ed.), *Higher education in turmoil: The changing world of internationalization* (pp. 19–38). Sense Publishers.
- Kingsbury, D., & Chatfield, S. (2019). A qualitative metasynthesis of published research exploring the pregnancy and resettlement experience among refugee women. *The Qualitative Report*, 24(2), 18. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2019.3750>
- Kwon, Y. (2013). The sociocultural adjustment of Chinese graduate students at Korean universities: A qualitative study. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 37(5), 536–549. [doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2013.06.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2013.06.004)
- The Forum on Education Abroad. (2011). *Education abroad glossary*. The Forum on Education Abroad. <https://forumea.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Forum-2011-Glossary-v2.pdf>
- Li, D. (2012). Out of the ivory tower: The impact of wider social contact on the values, religious beliefs and identities of Chinese postgraduate students in the UK. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 15(2), 241–258. [doi:10.1080/13613324.2011.585339](https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2011.585339)
- Marginson, S., & van der Wende, M. (2007). Globalisation and higher education. *OECD Education Working Papers*, 8, 1–85. <https://doi.org/10.1787/173831738240>
- Matusitz, J. (2015). The acculturative experience of French students in a southwestern university apartment complex in the United States. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 25(3), 261–274. [doi:10.1080/10911359.2015.1005517](https://doi.org/10.1080/10911359.2015.1005517)
- Oberg, K. (1960). Cultural shock: Adjustment to new cultural environments. *Practical Anthropology*, 7(4), 177–182. [doi:10.1177/009182966000700405](https://doi.org/10.1177/009182966000700405)
- Okuda, M., & Gómez-Restrepo, C. (2005). Metodología de investigación y lectura crítica de estudios. *Revista Colombiana de Psiquiatría*, 34(1), 118–124. <https://www.redalyc.org/pdf/806/80635209.pdf>

- Pan, J.-Y. (2011). A resilience-based and meaning-oriented model of acculturation: A sample of mainland Chinese postgraduate students in Hong Kong. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35(5), 592–603. doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2011.02.009
- Rhein, D. (2018). Sociocultural adjustment and coping strategies of Korean and Japanese students in a Thai international college. *International Journal of Asia-Pacific Studies*, 14(1), 57–78. doi:10.21315/ijaps2018.14.1.3
- Safdar, S., Lay, C., & Struthers, W. (2003). The process of acculturation and basic goals: Testing a multidimensional individual difference acculturation model with Iranian immigrants in Canada. *Applied Psychology*, 52(4), 555–579. doi:10.1111/1464-0597.00151
- Sam, D. L., & Berry, J. W. (2006). *The Cambridge handbook of acculturation psychology*. Cambridge University Press.
- Sandelowski, M., & Barroso, J. (2007). *Handbook for synthesizing qualitative research*. Springer Publishing Company, Inc.
- Sarmiento, A. V., Pérez, M. V., Bustos, C., Hidalgo, J. P., & del Solar, J. I. V. (2019). Inclusion profile of theoretical frameworks on the study of sociocultural adaptation of international university students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 70. doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2019.02.004
- Schartner, A. (2014). ‘You cannot talk with all of the strangers in a pub’: A longitudinal case study of international postgraduate students’ social ties at a British university. *Higher Education*, 69(2), 225–241. doi:10.1007/s10734-014-9771-8
- Schutz, A. (1974). *Estudios sobre teoría social*. Amorrortu Editores.
- Smith, R. A., & Khawaja, N. G. (2011). A review of the acculturation experiences of international students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35, 699–713. doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2011.08.004
- Taraban, B. (2016). Institutional review board review of clinical research. *The Southwest Respiratory and Critical Care Chronicles*, 4(15), 89-93. doi:10.12746/swrccc 2016.0415.210
- Teichler, U. (2010). Internationalising higher education: Debates and changes in Europe. In D. Mattheou (Ed.), *Changing educational landscapes* (pp. 263–284). Springer Science & Business Media.
- Tong, A., Sainbury, P., & Craig, J. (2007). Consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative research (COREQ): A 32-item checklist for interviews and focus groups. *International Journal for Quality in Health Care*, 19(6), 349–357. doi:10.1093/intqhc/mzm042
- Vainio-Mattila, A. (2009). Internationalizing curriculum: A new kind of education. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 118, 95–103. doi:10.1002/tl
- van der Wende, M. (2007). Internationalization of higher education in the OECD countries: Challenges and opportunities for the coming decade. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 11(3/4), 274–289. doi:10.1177/1028315307303543
- Varela, M., & Vives, T. (2016). Autenticidad y calidad en la investigación educativa cualitativa: Multivocalidad. *Investigación en Educación Médica*, 5(19), 191-198. doi:10.1016/j.riem.2016.04.006
- Volet, S., & Jones, C. (2012). Cultural transitions in higher education: Individual adaptation, transformation and engagement. *Advances in Motivation and Achievement*, 17, 241–284. https://doi.org/10.1108/S0749-7423(2012)0000017012
- Wang, Q., & Hannes, K. (2014). Academic and socio-cultural adjustment among Asian international students in the Flemish community of Belgium: A photovoice project. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 39(1), 66–81. doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2013.09.013
- Ward, C., Bochner, S., & Furnham, A. (2001). *The psychology of culture shock* (2nd ed.).

Routledge.

- Ward, C., & Kennedy, A. (1999). The measurement of sociocultural adaptation. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 23(4), 659–677. [doi:10.1016/S0147-1767\(99\)00014-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0147-1767(99)00014-0)
- Yu, B., & Wright, E. (2016). Socio-cultural adaptation, academic adaptation and satisfaction of international higher degree research students in Australia. *Tertiary Education and Management*, 22(1), 49–64. [doi:10.1080/13583883.2015.1127405](https://doi.org/10.1080/13583883.2015.1127405)
- Yu, B., & Zhang, K. (2016). ‘It’s more foreign than a foreign country’: Adaptation and experience of Mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong. *Tertiary Education and Management*, 22(4), 300–315. [doi:10.1080/13583883.2016.1226944](https://doi.org/10.1080/13583883.2016.1226944)
- Zhang, J., & Goodson, P. (2011). Predictors of international students’ psychosocial adjustment to life in the United States: A systematic review. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35(2), 139–162. [doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2010.11.011](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2010.11.011)
- Zhou, Y., Jindal-Snape, D., Topping, K., & Todman, J. (2008). Theoretical models of culture shock and adaptation in international students in higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 33(1), 63–75. [doi:10.1080/03075070701794833](https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070701794833)

Appendix A

Table 1
Selected Articles Information

N	Article	Population	Origin and destiny	Design	Topics and subtopics
1	A Phenomenological Study on International Doctoral Students' Acculturation Experiences at a U.S. University (Campbell, 2015)	(10) Doctorate	India, Indonesia, Ghana; China, Iran, Arabia <i>To</i> USA	Phenomenology	1. Reasons for Studying in the U.S. 2. Interactions within Academic and Non-academic Settings. 2.1 Interactions with instructors. 2.2 Interactions with classmates 2.3 Interactions with supervising professors. 2.4 Socializing in non-academic settings. 3. The Role of Family Relationships.
2	The Acculturative Experience of French Students in a Southwestern University Apartment Complex in the United States (Matusitz, 2015)	(8) Undergraduate and exchange students	France <i>To</i> USA	Narrative, ethnographic	1. The Theme of Culture Shock. 2. The Theme of Acculturative Stress. 3. The Theme of Linguistic Limitations. 4. The Theme of Culture Adjustment.
3	Out of the ivory tower: the impact of wider social contact on the values, religious beliefs and identities of Chinese postgraduate students in the UK (Li, 2012)	(11) Master (3) members LVG.	China <i>To</i> England	Phenomenology and ethnographic	1. Support needs perceived by the Chinese students and the LVG. 2. Students' perception of the support provided. 3. Impact of wider social support on the students' values, religious beliefs and identities. 3.1. The believers 3.2 The doubter 3.3 The conflicts between the believers and the doubter. 3.4 The empathizers 3.5 The commentators 4. The group dynamics – individual vs group identities
4	Central Asian Students' Adjustment Experiences at a "Globalized" Korean University (Choi & Kim, 2014)	(43) Undergraduate (2) administration staff	Central Asia <i>To</i> South Korea	Ethnographic	1. The University and its Internationalization Policy 2. Central Asian Students' Adjustment Experience 2.1 Adjustment to a New Dietary Environment 2.2 Language use on Campus

					2.3 Adjusting to the Academic Environment
5	‘You cannot talk with all of the strangers in a pub’: a longitudinal case study of international postgraduate students’ social ties at a British university (Schartner, 2014)	(20) Doctorate	Romania, Turkey, Malaysia, Italy, Germany, Lithuania, Indonesia, Finland, Mexico, USA, Slovakia, China, Latvia <i>To</i> England	Case study Longitudinal- Exploratory	1. Ties with host nationals 2. Ties with co-nationals 3. International ties
6	Southeast Asian International Students Adjusting to Jordanian Universities: Views From the Field (Alazzi & Al-Jarrah, 2016)	(20) Undergraduate	Malaysia and Indonesia <i>To</i> Jordan	Phenomenology	1. Personal Concerns 2. Academic Concerns 2.1 Advising 2.2 Academic conflict 2.3 Language proficiency, 2.4 Expectation for academic achievement. 3. Sociocultural Concerns 4. Problem-Solving Strategies
7	‘‘Solitude, Religious and Cultural Uniqueness in a Foreign Environment: Adjustments as an Arab Student’’ (Abunab et al., 2017)	(17) Undergraduate with specialization	Arabia <i>To</i> Philippines	Phenomenology	1. Education beyond borders: hybrid vision and empowerment 1.1 Art of practicability and science of destiny 1.2 Challenges of journey 1.3 Culture shock 1.4 Arabian perspective of the Philippines 2. Stigma in the Arab world 2.1 Discrimination 2.2 Arabo: stereotyping and misconceptions 2.3 School bullying 3 Islam: the way of life 3.1 Coping mechanism 3.2 Religious setbacks 3.3 Tenacity of faith 3.4 Finding oneself 4. The future of Arab students 4.1 Arabo to Arab: undoing stereotypes 4.2 Looking forward
8	The sociocultural adjustment trajectory of international university students and the role of university structures: A qualitative investigation (Coles & Swami, 2012)	(58) Undergraduate	China, Malaysia, India <i>To</i> United Kingdom	Exploratory- Longitudinal (scope of the study)	1. Co-cultural groupings 2. Two adjustment patterns 3. Student accommodation 4. Lectures, seminars, and labs 5. University societies

9	Sociocultural adjustment and coping strategies of Korean and Japanese students in a Thai International collage (Rhein, 2018)	(30) Postgraduate (does not specify)	Japan, Korea <i>To</i> Thailand	Case Study Exploratory	1. Language issues 2. Academics 3. Social Issues 4. Friendship
10	'It's more foreign than a foreign country': adaptation and experience of Mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong (Yu & Zhang, 2016)	(54) Undergraduate and postgraduate (does not specify)	Mainland <i>To</i> Hong Kong	Exploratory-Phenomenology	1. Linguistic adaptation 2. Social interactions 3. Clashes of opposing political ideologies 4. Discrimination
11	The sociocultural adjustment of Chinese graduate students at Korean universities: A qualitative study (Kwon, 2013)	(9) Masters and PhD	China <i>To</i> Seoul-Korea	Phenomenology	1. Perceived cultural distance 2. Language competency 3. The level of interaction with host nationals 4. Biased stereotypes
12	The anatomy of international students' acculturation in UK universities (Gbadamosi, 2018)	(38) Master	Tanzania; Zambia; South Africa; India; Saudi Arabia; Afghanistan; Pakistan; Ivory Coast; Sierra Leone; China; Nigeria; Japan; Bangladesh; Namibia <i>To</i> United Kingdom	Phenomenology	1. Culture shock. 2. Personal challenges 3. Integration 4. Institutional support and mentorship 5. Resources and equipment 6. Government policy 7. Value of British education

Appendix B

Table 2
Daily Life of the International University Student

Themes	Subthemes	<i>In vivo code and article</i>
Situations that trigger shock	Discrimination	- [...] I just used Putonghua with the salesperson [...]. To my surprise, no sooner had I finished my words than she turned away (10). - Mainland Chinese's perceived discrimination has been exaggerated by social media (10). - [...] a car driver called me as "Nigro." Then I stopped him, and we had big fight [...] (7). - [...] I feel different treatment from the Americans...I look different, I dress different (1).
	Stereotyping	- [...] "Your family must be very rich because you can come to this country to study." [...] I met some Koreans who thought Chinese people do not take a shower every day [...] (11)
	Perception of an unsafe context	-As a Korean woman, I got a lot of unwanted attention [...] Korean women do not walk around off campus [...] shopping together and come back together (9) - [...] if I walk alone [...] I grab my bag in front of me so nobody can steal it [...] (9) -My Hijab [...] I feel I'm protected, and I never experienced any harassment (7).
Challenging situations	Coping with autonomy	- [...] my parents pay, but here I need to work (12). - [...] So suddenly, I found myself alone moving without my father or brothers (7). - [...] it took me some time to get used to the transport system [...] (12).
	Securing housing	- The rent is very high and also, they ask, 'Are you a student?' They do not like students [...] (12).
Strategies for coping with sociocultural adaptation	Search for information	- [...] I used a lot of blogs [...] People shared their UK experience [...] That helps a lot (12).
Functionality of social networks	Familial support	- [...] my parents can only give spiritual support (1). - [...] A husband makes it easier because of paying some rent and then some support as well, but when it comes to children it is quite difficult studying and taking care of children (12).

Appendix C

Table 3
The International University Student's Academic Life

Themes	Subthemes	In vivo codes
Situations that trigger shock	Weak command of the host society language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - [...] here it was the exact opposite, instructors expect you to contribute to class discussions, and I had a very hard time (1) - I felt inferior because we don't have the same accent and I was afraid my English wouldn't be as good [...] (8). - [...] I have to switch to English at school, Thai in the canteen and then I get home and I can relax and go back to Japanese. It's confusing and tiring (9). - [...] lack of Cantonese proficiency makes communication less convenient (10). - [...] If I can't understand the language, academic knowledge makes no sense (11). - [...] I find it difficult to understand them, and they also find it difficult to understand me (12)
	Discrimination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - [...] I were just walking around within the university campus. A Korean woman came to us and asked, "Where are you from?" We said "China," and then she shouted "Go home." (11). - There is a professor [...] he wanted me to explain to everyone why most Chinese people living in Korea are of such low character and then explained to us how the Chinese and Chinese-Korean people he had met had been rude (11). - We are all human; international and UK students [...] We all have equal rights, so I think that is an injustice, and that has to be dealt with (12). - [...] his questions to me at the beginning of each class to put me in an embarrassing situation in the philosophy class, which really I do not like (7).
	Stereotyping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - [...] as soon as we came to Korea, we began to be considered as 'just vegetarians' (4) - [...] most of them think that anyone come from KSA is a very rich man [...] they don't know my financial problems (7).
	Non-acknowledgement of cultural differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - [...] I will help you to accept God.' I found it extremely embarrassing, so later I decided to avoid [going to such gatherings] (3). - [...] it is too difficult [...] dance as a Muslim and being fasting at the same time. It becomes much more difficult when the teacher ask you to dance with a girl!' (7).
	Lack of integration in the university context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - [...] when the language of the class is suddenly changed to Korean [...] We feel that we are excluded even from learning and studying (4). - [...] because sometimes there is useful information, and we cannot get it. [...] I feel that I am not part of the community" (4). - [...] I have tried going to clubs, but I stopped [...] Why do they ask us to join and then speak in a language we can't understand? (9). - When they use idiomatic expressions in Cantonese, I cannot understand them, which impedes my integration (10). - [...] I still have many difficulties in doing research. Because I am a foreigner, maybe the professors think that I don't have a good command of Korean (11).
	Conventions in scientific writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - [...] I was told I did not reference the authors properly in my work (12). - [...] I had to back up all of my arguments [...] so that I can make [them] valid [...] (12).
Challenging situations	Master a second language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - [...] I was overwhelmed by English; all the textbooks imported from western countries were very thick, and I had to preview all reading materials. Otherwise, I shall not understand what the professors said in class (10). - [...] I can communicate with Korean people fluently about the daily life, [...] I cannot communicate easily in academic areas (11). - [...] If I can't understand the language, academic knowledge makes no sense (11).
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I was aware some of them are missionaries and their job is to spread God's love to more people [...]. But for myself, I have accepted your favour but I cannot live up to

	Meet the expectations of third parties	your expectations. [...] I was faced with <i>the dilemma and was confused [...] and it even affected my studies and daily life</i> ” (3). -We never thought that we have to do better than Korean students and others, but we just think learning is important. [...] (4). - [...] Chinese always care about their face very much, so [...] they generally don’t want others to know that they don’t know. It’s the same for me (11).
	Forge relationships of trust	- [...] some of them need long time to trust you at the beginning because of their perception about the Arab students in general (7).
	Collectivism vs. individualism	- American students do not interact with their professors as much as French students do in France [...] (2). - [...] In Indonesia [...] advisor takes major responsibility for the student’s academic program; [...] however, in Jordanian universities [...] the student is solely responsible for her or his academic program (6). -At Mainland China universities, there is a lot of emphasis on collectivism. [...] By contrast, at Hong Kong universities, students are independent from each other [...] (10).
Strategies for coping with sociocultural adaptation	Orientation toward academic achievement	- I need much time to [get used to] the Jordanian system [putting] more pressure [on me] to [be] successful in my study (6).
	Assigning a low priority to daily life	- [...] I have very little social life. I am 28 years old, have no wife or girlfriend, and I am not given the chance to interact with the American society (1). - [...] I just stopped going out at all (8).
	Academic achievement as the mechanism for gaining recognition	- [...] You should show good dedication in the beginning, [...] They will see your enthusiasm and be willing to work with you (1). - [...] my advisor and professors are very important to me. I realized that they hold my future; therefore, I try to study hard to prove to my instructors I am a good student (6).
	Assimilation	-Students here are conformist, like sheep [...] We went to a party last month and we had to follow everybody and wear the same shirt. It was the only way for us to be accepted (2). - [...] if you were the only one who were stubborn and did not want to participate, you would feel isolated [...] If I had come on my own, it [the issue of religion] might not have had the strong impact on me [...] (3).
	Separation	- Islam is the religion of mercy, [...] I wish I can reflect the right picture about the Islam (7)
	Integration	- [...] I have been studying the Bible after joining their Bible Studies [...] I feel there are many things in it worth learning [...] religion is only a small part of culture (3). - I can meet Italians in Italy, why should I meet new Italians here? (5). - [...] I definitely feel more involved this year. It’s making the effort’ (8). - [...] menus are in Thai and even the taxi drivers really only understand Thai. So, I’m learning Thai now so I can survive (9).
Functionality of social resources	Organizations that serve integration	- When international students like us travel [...] to understand the [local] culture [...] there are not many opportunities. But it [the LVG] has provided an excellent platform for us (3).
	The role of the University Office of International Affairs	- [...] staff in the international relations department cannot speak English or Korean [...] (9). - [...] I think they should be more explicit and say, especially to international students, that, ‘If you get a visa, it is hard to get a job’ [...], because it is there specifically for the international students [...] (12).
	The teachers’ role	- [...] he understood my cultural and social difficulties (1). - [...] They helped me adapt to [...] teaching methods and helped me talk up in class (1).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Was taken advantage of! [...] your work is not always appreciated [...] my professor was not professional (1). - Professors here are kind; they are curious in that they try to know students by asking them questions, by assuring them that they will be fine [...] (2). - [...] I was sick, so my teacher helped me to go to a walking center [...] (12). 	
The role of the host national network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I want to meet more British people (5). - [...] Most interaction with them [is] around academic purposes and does not go as far as to invite each other to social events [...] (6). 	
The role of the co-national network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - You share the common culture, so you feel more relaxed (5). - [...] I can speak my language (5). - It's very complicated emotion [...] I also expect to make friends with British or other countries people [...] (5). - We are getting closer to each other [...] but [...] we stay in our comfort zone [...] (8). 	
The role of the international network.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It's just so nice to get to know new things and to have different views on things (5). - [...] never thought about that there is like young people like me [...] (5) - [...] I guess when we meet most of them are also homesick (5). - [...] we kind of support each other, like "You can do it!" [...] (5). 	
Needs in the receiving academic environment	Student assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - [...] we feel lost, we need support. [...] We don't know what we have to do and what's gonna happen [...] (2). - This new culture drives us crazy [...] we don't have enough ties with American students so we can't get help from them (2). - [...] I need someone who can guide me. I am afraid to ask professors for research tasks because we can't communicate fluently with each other (11). - [...] I feel that they should ask, Are you familiar with the system? [...] so that they can understand the gap or the lack I have, and how to help (12).
	Increased social interaction with nationals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We thought we might be able to have more social interaction with the Westerners, [...] but in fact the hall where we live is rather isolated from the outside. [...] (3). - I want to meet more British people (5). - I would like to know more things about British culture, like eat at someone's house with her British mum [...] (5). - [...] so far, we only know what Christians are like. As for other ordinary people, businesspeople, for example, what the life of ordinary people is like, we have no idea (3).
	Cultural instruction in the classroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I would really appreciate it if Korean friends try to talk to me in Korean so that I could enhance my speaking skills (4).
	Bi-directional adaptation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We feel that American students have to make efforts to understand us. We also nod our heads for two hours, pretending that we understand what Americans tell us (2).

Author Note

Astrid Vanessa Sarmiento Quiñones is a psychologist from Universidad Antonio Nariño, Cali, Colombia, and holds a doctorate degree in psychology from Universidad de Concepción. She is professor at Departamento de Educación, Universidad Autónoma de Chile. Please direct correspondence to astrid.sarmiento@outlook.com.

Claudio Bustos Navarrete is a psychologist and holds a master's in psychology, master's in applied statistics, and a doctorate degree in psychology from Universidad de Concepción. He is professor at Departamento de Psicología, Universidad de Concepción, Chile. Please direct correspondence to clbustos@gmail.com.

María Victoria Pérez is a psychologist by Universidad de Chile and obtained her doctorate degree in Psychology by Universidad de Oviedo, España. She is titular professor at Departamento de Psicología, Universidad de Concepción. Please direct correspondence to marperez@udec.cl.

Diana Lucía Peralta has a degree in primary education by Universidad del Atlántico de Barranquilla, and a master's in education from the Universidad Simón Bolívar de Barranquilla. Currently, she is pursuing a master's degree in educational management and leadership, Universidad de Concepción. Please direct correspondence to peraltadianalucia@gmail.com.

Natalia Zañartu Canihuante is a psychologist from the Universidad de la Frontera and obtained her doctorate degree in psychology from Universidad de Concepción. She is a postdoctoral fellow at Universidad de Concepción, Chile. Please direct correspondence to nzanartu@gmail.com.

Jorge Iván Vergara del Solar is an anthropologist by Universidad Austral de Chile. He has a master in sociology by Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile and a doctoral degree in sociology by Freie Universität Berlin, Germany. He is titular professor at Departamento de Antropología, Universidad de Concepción. Please direct correspondence to jorgeivergara@udec.cl.

Acknowledgements: This work was funded by the National Agency for Research and Development, ANID/ Scholarship National Doctoral Grant [21160306]. This work was also partially funded by the National Agency for Research and Development, ANID/FONDECYT 1201681, Teaching/Learning Methodologies of Research Practices in Psychology in Latin America and Spain. The authors wish to thank Elizabeth Ann Medina for her work on the English translation of this report.

Copyright 2021: Astrid Vanessa Sarmiento Quiñones, Claudio Enrique Bustos, María Victoria Pérez, Diana Lucía Peralta, Natalia Zañartu, Jorge Iván Vergara del Solar, and Nova Southeastern University.

Article Citation

Sarmiento Quiñones, A. V. S., Bustos, C. E., Pérez, M. V., Peralta, D. L., Zañartu, N., del Solar, J. I. V. (2021). Metasynthesis regarding the sociocultural adaptation of international university students. *The Qualitative Report*, 26(5), 1567-1600. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2021.4623>
