

# Resilience experiences of non-native speakers of English in US education doctoral programs

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Article Info	Abstract
<p><b>Article History</b> Submitted: 30 November 2017 Revised: 4 December 2017 Published: 8 December 2017</p> <hr/> <p><b>Keywords</b> International students Non-native speakers of English Education Resilience</p>	<p>International students, specifically non-native speakers of English, constitute a growing population of the graduate programs in western-based universities like UK, US, and Australia. Despite their document challenges, these students also demonstrate resilience that when appropriately channeled, could promote their success in graduate school. The purpose of the study was to explore the experiences of non-native speakers of English in education doctoral programs in US. A qualitative research, specifically a phenomenological approach was used to explore the experiences of non-native speakers of English in US doctoral programs in education. Participants were six doctoral students on F1 visa or equivalent. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, transcribed, and coded. Themes that came out of the codes included knowledge, new experience, and support. Students used both past knowledge from their home countries to connect with new knowledge. They appreciated new experiences provided by professors and the support from both colleagues and mentors. Implications are discussed.</p>

## 1. Introduction

Resilience Experiences of Non-Native Speakers of English in US Education Doctoral Programs by the 2014/15 school year, United States (US) was host to 974,926 international students, an increase of 10% over the previous year, and a growth of 72% since the first International Education Week Briefing held in 2000 (Institute of International Education [IIE], 2016). According to the 2016 Open Doors report, fifty percent of all international students come from China, India and South Korea, countries that use other languages apart from English. More than 38,000 of all international students specialize in education and humanities (Hopkins, 2012; Open Doors, 2016). International students make up 8.2% of student population in American Psychological Association [APA]-accredited counseling psychology programs (Forrest, 2010) and about 1% in Council for Accreditation of Counseling & Related Educational Programs [CACREP]-accredited counseling programs (CACREP, 2014) in the US.

US is one of the many industrialized countries that benefit from the presence of international students. Beyond adding to student population, international students contribute over \$30 billion to the American economy yearly (National Association of Foreign Student Advisers [NAFSA], 2016). In other advanced countries like the United Kingdom, international students contribute £10.2 billion to the economy, the second largest global market after healthcare (Heffernan, 2014).

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In addition, Canada's international student population are reported to generate about \$445 million in government revenue (Global Affairs Canada, 2016). These figures indicate the immense financial contribution international students make to industrialized countries.

Besides the financial benefits, international students also provide global and social competencies for both faculty and local students; competencies beyond the scope of books and videos (Altbach, 2010; McDowell, Fang, Kosutic, & Griggs, 2012). An example of education-related field benefiting from the international flavor is counseling. Counseling and its related fields, more than many other professions, is concentrating on globalization of the counseling profession (Lorelle, Bryd, & Crockett, 2012; Moir-Bussy, 2012; Wang & Heppner, 2015) as is evidenced by the themes of many counseling-related conferences in the US (e.g., American Counseling Association [ACA] 2016, Association for Counselor Education and Supervision [ACES] 2015). Consequently, if the profession is being sensitive to international issues, it becomes imperative that international students within the graduate programs are provided with the necessary resources to ensure their success in school. This success will lead to effective transition as counselor educators whether in their home countries, for those who return, or in the States, for those who stay (Park-Saltzman, Wada, & Mogami, 2012; Shen & Herr, 2004).

An area of focus for counseling is mental health. It is believed that mental health problems are responsible for up to 14% of the global burden of disease (Astramovich & Pehrsson, 2009; Whiteford, 2014). Because of this, the National Board for Certified Counselors [NBCC], ACA and CACREP are working with countries outside the US to strengthen the counseling profession internationally through accreditation, leadership and direction (Stanard, 2013). Since the counseling profession is more developed in the US than in many countries (Stanard, 2013), it is natural that many international students would wish to pursue higher training in counseling in the United States.

Pursuing a higher training in education allows advanced countries to partner with international students to help address worldwide education problems like mental health and rehabilitation (Chen, Ong, & Brodwin, 2008). Unfortunately, success in school comes at a great psychological cost to many international students in various counseling and education-related programs (Kim, 2011; Koyama, 2009; Nilsson & Dodds, 2006). An understanding of their needs, and a model to provide an accommodation to address these needs would ensure their success at a much lesser psychological cost. Because of the need to understand international students to ensure their success in graduate school, this study undertook a phenomenological approach to explore the experiences of non-native speakers of English in various education related doctoral programs. Several studies have documented the challenges of non-native speakers of English in higher education (Delgado-Romero & Wu, 2010; Lowinger, He, Lin, & Chang, 2014; Maeda, 2008; Ng, 2012; Reid & Dixon, 2012). Even though we acknowledge and recognize these challenges, we also approached this study with a resilience lens to explore how their experiences, vis-à-vis their resilience, comes into play in navigating education in a second and sometimes third language.

### **1.1. Resilience and the Non-Native Speaker of English in a US PhD program in education**

Resilience is the ability of a person to bounce back from stressors either medically (Kralik, van Loon & Visentin, 2007) or psychologically (Hoge, Austin, & Pollack, 2007; Rutter, 1987). Resilience shines a ray of light in many deficit-focused models (Masten, 2001) in psychology. The positive psychology aspect of resilience encourages communities and researchers to look beyond a person's present circumstances and identify their inherent ability to bounce back and succeed (Bryan, 2005). Thus, despite the growing literature on international students' challenges in academia (e.g., Fotovatian & Miller, 2014; Lin, 2013; Smith & Khawaja, 2011), this ray of light propels us to look for their inherent ability to bounce back and gradually reach for success in a foreign land.

## 1.2. Challenges of International Students

### 1.2.1. Language

Language-related concerns are common problems for international students, and affect various functioning areas such as communication, relationships, cultural adjustment and/or academic domains. Communication issues seem to be problematic for international students, even before they leave from their own country to the US (Lowinger et al., 2014; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). Various researchers have identified language difficulties as a regular problem for international students (Knox et al., 2013; Ng & Smith, 2009). Additionally, language-related difficulties may vary from region to region. For example, Fritz, Chin, and DeMarinis' (2008) study compared Asian and European international students in general to US students. The authors found that Asian student had more language difficulties than European students, and European students had more language difficulties than the US students. Language-related concerns may also prevent international students from getting involved in social relationships. In Zhu and Degeneffe's (2011) study, international graduate students in rehabilitation counseling programs reported that their cultural and language abilities were barriers to social relationships in the US.

Because of language issues, international students may need more faculty and staff support than native English-speaking students especially because education-related fields use more language than a field like computer science. Furthermore, Poyrazli and Grahame (2007) mentioned that English proficiency seems to be an ongoing issue for international students, compounding their academic challenges. Non-native speakers of English could be encouraged to take part in activities that will engage their communication skills.

### 1.2.2. Academic Challenges

Non-native speakers of English commonly have difficulty comprehending what others are saying in real time as well as grabbing the right timing to speak up in discussion (Maeda, 2008; Delgado-Romero & Wu, 2010). Like most international students, students in education-related fields struggle with understanding lectures and class participation. However, literature indicates that one of the biggest concerns involve students in counseling-related clinical requirements (Liu, 2013; Ng, 2006; 2012). The reason for this concern is that clinical work (e.g., counseling practicum) requires a high level of English proficiency to understand the subtle nuances of cultural, historical, and contextual words based on comprehensive knowledge of U.S. culture and history (Park-Salzman et al. 2012).

Liu (2013) reported that East Asian international counseling students perceived clients' distrust or discrimination against them due to their cultural backgrounds. Ng and Smith (2009) also noted that international trainees struggled with clients' perceived bias that counselors with a different accent may be less professional, less trustful, and less attractive compared to other counselors with a standard accent. Additionally, Maeda (2008) reported that international students had difficulty communicating with clients in initial counseling sessions, and they struggled with providing counseling because of lack experience with culturally diverse clients and differences in diagnosis, intervention styles, and terminology. All these challenges can seem daunting for new students, especially those entering the US for the first time, and produce emotional and relational stressors.

### 1.2.3. Emotional and Relational Challenges

Maeda (2008) reported that a number of participants discussed experiencing feelings of homesickness, loneliness, and isolation (or feeling like an outcast). Superficial interpersonal relationships, feelings of not belonging in classes, and loss of privileges in the United States were reported to prompt their feelings of being isolated. International students face challenges in building strong relationship with faculty or local colleagues and developing new social support systems (Reid & Dixon, 2012) because for many, relationships with those seen to be in power is more subservient whereas their American counterparts have no such inhibitions. This may further widen the gap when it comes to seeking support for academic challenges from faculty.

International students experience relational difficulties due to different cultural expectations, a feeling of being judged and not understood, being discriminated against by a classmate, being left out of group projects, and negative presumptions of themselves (Maeda, 2008). Reid and Dixon (2012) suggested that the difference of value systems might play a huge role in hindering the development of relationships with U.S. born peers. For instance, international students from collectivist countries are likely to experience difficulties building relationship with the US. of individualistic value system, further widening the cultural gap.

#### 1.2.4. Cultural adjustment

Another one of the challenges international students encounter is cultural adjustment. Because international students come from different countries and cultural backgrounds, the differences between home country and the US may cause anxiety and fear of the unknown. Ng and Smith (2009) compared international and domestic counseling trainees regarding 14 problems areas related to counseling training and stay in the US. The authors found that international trainees reported higher mean scores than domestic trainees in 10 problem areas, including cultural adjustment problems  $F(1, 134) = 27.91, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.17$ . The results of the research further indicated that doctoral students (both international and domestic) reported higher means in cultural adjustment problem than master's students (both international and domestic)  $F(1, 134) = 6.13, p < .05, \eta^2 = .04$ .

In another study, Knox et al., (2013) analyzed the perceptions of international advisees in counseling psychology doctoral programs. The results of this analysis indicated that international students had more challenges than benefits in their study. Students typically reported various challenges including adjustment/acclimation and not being understood culturally by others.

Fritz, Chin and Demarinis (2008) compared US students and international students in general, and found no differences between two groups in the feeling of pressure from the school. However, researchers investigated the differences by dividing international student into their home countries and found that both Asians and Europeans perceived acculturation as harder than the US students' perception of it (Fritz et al., 2008).

#### 1.2.5. Financial and Legal Challenges

After international students come to the US from their home country, they need to adjust to the new country financially. Therefore, moving to a new country may cause some financial-related problems. Zhu and Degeneffe (2011) surveyed 21 international students in rehabilitation counseling education programs and reported that the participants' socioeconomic status changed on arrival to the US, and were thus engulfed in social and cultural difficulties. In another study, financial issues were reported as one of the reported challenges by international students in counseling psychology doctoral program (Knox et al., 2013).

Zhu and Degeneffe's (2011) survey on international students in rehabilitation counseling education programs showed that the socioeconomic statuses had decreased ( $n = 8, 38.1\%$ ) (Zhu & Degeneffe, 2011). Moreover, the researchers reported that the participants proffered various reasons for this occurrence. The inequities in the currency rates between home country and US limited work opportunities, the financial stressors and needs to sacrifice the quality of lives due to financial constraints. However, whereas Asian and European students reported more difficulties in being able to work in the US, American students on exchange programs had no such reports.

### 1.3. Research Questions

Many studies have been conducted on non-English speaking international students undertaking higher education in English-speaking countries. These studies have categorized the challenges they encounter. However, few have focused on non-native speakers of English in doctoral programs of education using a resilience lens. To fill this gap in the academic community, this investigation was conducted based on the following research questions:

- What are the lived experiences of non-native speakers of English in US education doctoral programs?
- What efforts do non-native speakers of English make to succeed their doctoral programs?

## 2. Method

The study used a qualitative research approach. Specifically, a phenomenological design was employed to identify participants' experiences (Creswell, 2013). This method was deemed appropriate because the researchers sought to explore the lived experiences of non-native speakers of English as they navigated the process of completed a doctoral program in education in a language that was different from one they spoke regularly and frequently.

### 2.1. Participants

The purposeful sampling method was used (Creswell, 2013) because participants needed to have had experiences in their position as non-native speakers of English in doctoral programs in education. The participants were individuals on student visa. The inclusion criteria for participation was individuals who had English as a second or third language and who had been in the US for five years or less. Approval from the university's institutional review board was sought. Thereafter, the coordinator of the doctoral program was contacted and he agreed to send an initial invitation to all non-native speakers of English. Six individuals contacted the lead author. Data was collected from a public university in southern US. Data collection took place over four weeks. Each of the participants was interviewed in a mutually-agreed upon place that ensured confidentiality. Participants were interviewed between 60-90 minutes. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Participants were six doctoral students in various education-related programs. Table 1 displays the demographic information of participants. To ensure confidentiality, participants were given a pseudonym and their countries divided by continental region. All participants reported that English was not their native language. All participants had been in the US between 1-5 years.

Table 1  
*Participant Demographics*

Name	Region	Program of Study	Year in the program	Place where Master's was pursued	Familial Relation	Number of children
Nona	East Asia	English as Second Language	1	East Asia	Married	1
Amber	Middle East	Educational Administration	2	US	Married	2, pregnant with 3 <sup>rd</sup>
Kimberly	Middle East	Science Education	2	Middle East	Married	0
Jack	East Asia	Counseling	2	East Asia	Married	2
Tim	Middle East	Counseling	2	US	Engaged	0
Essie	South America	English as Second Language	2	South America & UK	Single	0

### 2.2. Data Analysis

The lead author transcribed all interviews, as well as conducted an initial coding of transcripts. A team of three graduate students each coded the transcripts and extracted themes. These themes were compared among coders to ensure inter-coder agreement and trustworthiness. Further trustworthiness occurred when another researcher not on this study read one transcribed



interview and compared it to the themes identified. Comparison of the major codes established three major themes and six sub-themes (Figure 1).

### 2.3. Initial Coding

Coding was done using a combination of *descriptive* and *in vivo coding* methods (Saldaña, 2013). In descriptive coding, words or phrases were used to describe a sentence or paragraph. In *in vivo* coding, participants' own words were used to describe a sentence or paragraph. Decoding of passage was done by reflecting on it to decipher its core meaning. Thereafter, encoding was done by finding the appropriate code and labeling it (see table 2).

Table 2

#### Sample Coding and Labeling

Statement	Descriptive and <i>In Vivo</i> Coding
I wanted a new experience.	<i>New experience</i>
If I study in _____, I will study in the same program, same faculty, same system. But I can study while working.	<i>Argument for and against study abroad</i>
But I think if I study in the US, it will definitely be a new experience and I will have more opportunity for my new career.	<i>Future prospects</i>
So I decided to study.	<i>Convinced</i>
And US is counseling field the top in the world.	<i>Objective decision</i>

### 2.4. Codifying

This is the second part of the coding process occurred when coders isolated, grouped and regrouped codes to merge and explain meaning (Saldaña, 2013). Codes were then compared to identify similarities and differences. Three broad categories emerged from the data, with six sub-themes. The major themes consisted of "new experiences", "knowledge" and "support". These major themes run through most of the interviews.



Figure 1. Codes of the Experiences of Non-English Speakers in Doctoral Education Programs

### 3. Findings

Non-native speakers of English described their experiences as involving “support”, “knowledge”, and “new experience.” Support, knowledge, and new experience became the tripod for resilience in non-native speakers of English in education doctoral programs in US.

#### 3.1. Support

Participants addressed support in terms of social network they already have, a topic addressed at length in the literature on international students (Lin, 2012). Participants’ perception of support also included institutional support they received to help them succeed. They were very appreciative of the support they received from faculty, mentors and cohort members. Kimberly from the Middle East was eternally grateful to her professor.

The other thing that helped me a lot was the behavior of professors. They were totally different from what I expected. ... But emm, I remember that the first day in our class, we were like 2 people in one of my science classes. And my professor... just came to me and tap my shoulder and said “I know you are international; I know this is the first time you’re here and it’s your second language, so all the time, I will talk slowly so don’t worry about anything...” I really love her; she really helped me.

Jack proffered an opinion about the advantages of mentoring and cohort system in ensuring the academic success of non-native speakers of English.

Yeah, for my academic survival, I think cohort system and mentoring system in my program was very helpful for me. I think for the international students, the cohort system and the mentoring system should be good for them.

Tim’s experience reinforces the advantages of the cohort system as indicated by Jack. However, he admits that non-native speakers of English will benefit from this system only when they take advantage of it.

Plus there are support here, especially in the PhD program. ... But PhD, I don’t know other universities but my experience and perspective, I have cohort. Cohort has been always helpful. However, during the first semester, I didn’t get much help not because they didn’t offer, because we didn’t get used to each other in that moment. It was building relationship time. By the second semester, I felt very close to them. And there have been very helpful.

#### 3.2. Knowledge

Knowledge as a broad theme consisted of knowledge about self and knowledge about the culture. Non-native speakers of English applied knowledge when they sought advice from family and friends concerning the journey they wanted to embark on. They recognized their motivation alone was not enough to help them undertake such a decision. This theme also speaks to resilience in using their support system in making a decision in a culturally appropriate manner. They therefore obtained the self-awareness to seek for counsel. Tim from the Middle East says this about his experience:

...I began to be impressed by the faculty, by academicians, by professors; I wanted to be like them...I had passion for learning and compassion...I got some suggestions from students who graduated before me. I talked to my extended family...I talked to my professors who suggested me to do it in the United States.

The knowledge they acquired became applicable as they tried to navigate the academic world in a new environment. Jack from East Asia says this:

I was just thinking about how many percent I understood in class. I ask myself several times. At that time, about 15 or 20%... The good thing is most of faculty members provide very detailed syllabus. So when I miss something, I usually check what’s the next step.

Jack was not the only one who used knowledge in navigating the new environment. Tim's statement buttresses the idea that

...my English was not really enough to understand what was in the syllabus. I note every single detail and learn everything before the class...after the class, I was horribly tired because I had to pay attention to everything in English and this went on for almost three months...

Nona from East Asia determined that positive thinking beyond gaining the best scores was a necessary self-awareness she had gained in the new environment.

I think positive thinking...I come from \_\_\_\_ and we are constantly worried about good scores. But I change and I think maybe it's okay to change a little...If I worry about I always get As, this will drive me crazy...I am thinking this way so I think I am recognizing myself. Why I make mistake and what I can learn from my own mistakes, I think that helps a lot; it really helps me to adjust to here and to survive this program.

This knowledge created in them an awareness to know their limitations. The resilience is demonstrated in their inner strength which exhibited itself as motivation, passion, and positive self-talk. Participants also took advantage of available resources to ensure their success.

Knowledge about culture further came under the two categories - culture of the academic environment and culture of the program of study. Kimberly from the Middle East had this to say about the culture of the academic environment

The people here are more individualized, I think. In US, they prefer to work everything by themselves but in my culture, people start asking questions and working together. I don't say that the teamwork is strongest there than here. But the culture of interacting is much stronger than here.

Jack from East Asia admitted that a lack of awareness about both the US culture and the culture of the field of study were detrimental to his success.

Understanding US culture is very important for the study and for living here. And the diagnosis system is very different from my country... so I want to advise them to study the diagnosis system before coming here.

### 3.3. New Experiences

The experiences in the new environment were a juxtaposition of negative and positive. Two of the participants who were in counseling remember with trepidation their first several weeks in their program. Even though both students were non-native speakers of English, Jack entered the doctoral program straight from his country of origin, while Tim had had the opportunity of obtaining his master's degree from a US university. Jack had this to say:

In my first semester, I took practicum class. That class is so difficult for me because I need to meet real clients and there is no structure. We just discuss about counseling clients in class. So the difficult part of the practicum is I didn't know well about the US counseling system and the terminology used in counseling. So for the practicum, I went to the students' counseling center and received my own counseling service there. My initial plan of receiving counseling service was for only my practicum but the counseling service helped me with other emotional and academic success.

Tim had a different experience from Jack, albeit similar to the experiences of other non-native speakers of English who were enrolled in US PhD education programs. Thus, even though both participants struggled with adjustment, their stresses were different.

But in PhD first semester, it was different in that I had 4 classes, and I had to lead two different groups and I had to see clients in practicum. The PhD I didn't feel much inferior about the language and the system and I knew how professors treat you. Generally speaking, I knew what to do and what not to do. But it was busy; I had to catch up



everything. I didn't have time to read twice anything. I had to finish in time and I had no chance to review that. It was kinda confusing and another stress.

These experiences, similar to studies with other international students in counseling-related programs (Nayar-Bhalerao, 2013), in no way capture the gamut of the experiences of every international student in a counseling-related program in the US. However, they can serve as a guide towards a starting place in providing appropriate accommodation for international students, especially non-native speakers of English in education-related programs.

The negative experiences occurred when they encountered the differences in the US legal system from that of their home country and perceived lack of warmth in colleagues. Tim shared an experience at the US airport, a first point of call that could have made many lily-livered run back home.

I had a terrible experience in US airport... I took the maximum required cash from my country but I didn't expect some people to give me some cash at the airport as well. I already had the maximum cash of \$8000 when I left from my house, but some people gave me some money at the airport and I had to bring that money to US. But this made some issues for me. ... the officer at the airport examined how much money I had so my money is a little bit over the maximum like \$300 or \$500. It's not too big. Uhhmmm, I think he just want me to fear so he said "you should go to jail", just like that. I was so shocked. "So the worst scenario is I'm gonna take all your money". It's very big trouble... So that experience is so terrible. So I'm very nervous and very fearful over everything. And that examination took a lot of my time at the airport so I didn't have enough transference time.

In a similar vein, Kimberly was surprised at the lack of warmth from colleagues in the office. She, however, used the institutional support to help her navigate the new environment

I had a bad experience here; when I got the key to my office, I went there and there were two people there already. It was a very small office and when I said 'hello' they didn't respond to me. I was shocked that how is it possible that someone doesn't respond when you say hello? And when I said I have to share the room with them, they said "oh why? This room is very small and we don't need any other person other than us"... it really shocked me because I felt I could make some friends, go there so we can work together. They didn't even talk with me just that the room was small...And then I asked to have my room changed and they changed it for me. Of course the room was small but I didn't like their behavior as future teachers and professors.

Kimberly learned to use the experience for her benefit. Having obtained a new level of self-awareness, both of herself and of the environment, she would always find someone who was not necessarily from her country to share her burdens with. Her explanation sums up how negative experiences can be juxtaposed with positive ones "...I think I become a little bit more active compared to me in the past. I could actively find someone to talk with because I want to relieve my feelings because it is already too much, I can't hold all".

#### 4. Conclusion

Being non-native speakers of English in education doctoral program ourselves, we expected to discover several values that make this population resilient and strive for success in graduate school. It is possible that in looking for themes, we focused on areas that reflect their persistence and not those that exhibit failures. We also expected that this strive for success would stem from their past experiences either in their home countries or when they came to the US. The learned strengths were expected to be useful in their new environment and new roles as graduate students learning in a second or sometimes third language and competing with people who were natives. We finally expected that even when participants identified instances of low self-esteem, this would push them to succeed instead of giving up. We were also cognizant of the fact that participants may not be willing to share their frustrations. This was because many come from cultures where strangers are not trusted enough to share problems with. We therefore ask that consumers of this

work read with an awareness of the position of researchers, and make their own judgements based on narratives of participants.

#### **4.1. Implications for Educators, Prospective Students, and Researchers Teaching and Learning**

Since language is the predominant challenge for international students, professors in the classroom can speak slowly to help non-native speakers of English students follow classroom work. In this way, professors prove their belief in the social justice aspect of advocacy within the counseling profession (Delgado-Romero & Wu, 2010) beyond mere talk. Furthermore, professors need to have an awareness of this population and find ways of explaining American-based jokes, nuances, and TV shows should they come up in class discussions. The intentionality in addressing the needs of international students also models to local students appropriate behaviors to ensure the collective success of students in the classroom. These suggestions are in line with Trice's (2005) recommendation of an integrative approach to teaching.

Another suggestion for the instructors would be to include international students into classroom discussion by asking them about their culture, especially in terms of the mental health systems of their various countries. Since the counseling profession is going global, a conversation of this nature will provide a necessary foundation towards infusing western-based theoretical concepts of counseling and making it work in non-western environments (Hartung, 2005). Apart from helping international students feel involved and validated, it will provide inter-cultural perspectives as well as elicit dialog on interventions that could work with different populations, especially those who do not view mental health as a formal helping profession.

Prospective students are encouraged to step out of their comfort zone and find social settings that will urge them to speak English more frequently. In addition, non-native speakers of English need an awareness of teaching and learning styles in the US. Educators in US are generally open to addressing the needs of students; they however expect students to ask. International students need to know how to advocate for themselves by asking professors to sometimes slow down for them or explain expressions or jokes. Finally, international students are encouraged to find other international students not from their home countries to communicate with. Even though all are international, they may need English as a common language to communicate, thereby providing the opportunity to use the language more frequently than if they had been with people from their own countries and cultures.

#### **4.2. Research-Related Work**

International students can be assigned to professors undertaking research to help with basic research-related duties (e.g., taking care of references, looking for articles). Generally, many international students come from countries where research is not undertaken on a rigorous nature as done in US. Thus, to ease students into the research culture, professors have to be mentors and guide them gradually, a process they would generally not use for local students. This is because, if the criteria used for local students is the one used for international students, the process may be overwhelming, especially coupled with trying to understand the everyday context of American life.

#### **4.3. Clinical Experiential Work**

The clinical or practicum experience can be overwhelming for international students who may have had little supervision in their master's programs. In the aforementioned interview with Jack, he explains "...I took practicum class. That class is so difficult for me. Because I need to meet real clients...the difficult part is I didn't know well about the US counseling system and the terminology used in counseling". Thus, an accommodation for international students could be to help them acclimatize with the mental health system in US or even observe how counseling is undertaken in US before being made to see clients.

#### 4.4. Service Related Work

Service is another aspect of academe, and for many international students, this may be seen differently. Professors may assign mentors to international students who will work on service-related activities and explain the processes to them. Thus, by the second semester or even the second year in a doctoral program, the average international student would know what service is, as well as the expectation for service as a doctoral student and in future as a faculty member.

These collaborative efforts to ensure international students' success makes them future cultural ambassadors of goodwill (Chen et al., 2008), and their presence "promotes global citizenry and multicultural competency" (McDowell et al., 2012, p. 332). Further, students who choose to go back to their home countries become instrumental in social reforms and become catalysts for advancing the counseling profession (Chen et al., 2008).

#### 5. Limitation to the study

Even though the experiences of these participants reflect what many international students go through, because of the number of participants, we can only hope that this is a framework to help some other non-native English speaker. We do not claim that the results of this study will be generalizable both because of the non-random nature of sampling and the small sample size.

Furthermore, we sampled students from just one institution, therefore, future work could explore the experiences of students from multiple institutions to identify consistency or lack thereof of these experiences. Finally, the familial status of participants could have enhanced their resilience approach. Because questions did not explore that, we could not establish how participants used the presence of loved ones to survive the reported challenges.

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### How to cite this article:

Acquaye, H. E., Jo, H., & Gungor, A. (2017). Resilience experiences of non-native speakers of English in US education doctoral programs? *Journal of Pedagogical Research*, 1(1), 21-33.