

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

**SOCIO DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES, SOCIAL SUPPORT AND
ACCULTURATIVE STRESS AMONG INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN
GHANAIAN UNIVERSITIES**



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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

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**A thesis in the Department of Counselling Psychology, Faculty of
Applied Behavioural Sciences in Education, submitted to the
School of Graduate studies in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the award of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Counselling Psychology)
in the University of Education, Winneba**

SEPTEMBER, 2025

DECLARATION

Student's Declaration

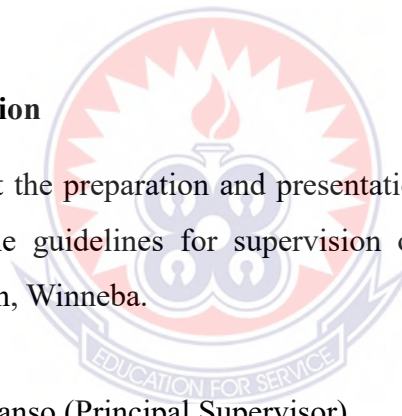
I, FRANCIS MARFO, declare that this thesis, with the exception of quotations and references contained in published works which have all been identified and duly acknowledged, is entirely my own original work, and it has not been submitted, either in part or whole, for another degree elsewhere.

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Date:

Supervisors' Declaration

We hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of this work was supervised in accordance with the guidelines for supervision of thesis as laid down by the University of Education, Winneba.



Prof. Stephen Antwi-Danso (Principal Supervisor)

Signature:.....

Date:.....

Prof. Theresa Antwi (Co-Supervisor)

Signature:.....

Date:.....

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my dear wife, Millicent Adobea Marfo and
my children Piesie, Adepa, Oheneba, and Obrempong



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This thesis would not have been possible without the kind support, endless encouragement, patience, mentorship and quick responses of my principal supervisor, Professor Stephen Antwi-Danso of the Department of Counselling Psychology, University of Education, Winneba. You kept me going through the toughest times. I say thank you and God richly bless you. I am also grateful to my co-supervisor, Prof. Theresah Antwi of the same department, for her efforts in giving me guidance and encouragement, constructivism criticisms and suggestions to shape this work. God richly bless you!

Special mention is made of Prof Ato Essuman, the founding Dean of Faculty of Education and Entrepreneurship of the Methodist University, Prof. Hannah Acquaye who encouraged me, lifted me, and prayed for me. I am grateful to Prof. Daniel Bruce whose encouragement lifted me and inspired me. A big ‘_thanks’ to Dr. Nyuiemedi Agordzo Edoh-Torgah, the HoD of the Department of Counselling Psychology; you made me believe that I could truly be successful and to never give me. I wish to acknowledge the support of Dr. E. E. Bonsi, Prof. Amos, Dr. E. Instiful and all the staff of the Department of Counselling Psychology, University of Education, Winneba. I couldn’t have done this without my classmates – the first cohort of the taught doctoral class – 2021 PhD Cohort in Counselling Psychology.

My utmost gratitude goes to my family and relatives, and especially appreciative of my wife, Mrs. Millicent A. Marfo for her prayers, moral, material, and financial support, sacrifices and the greater endurance she exhibited for the completion of this work. Finally, but most importantly, I thank God for helping me throughout this journey.

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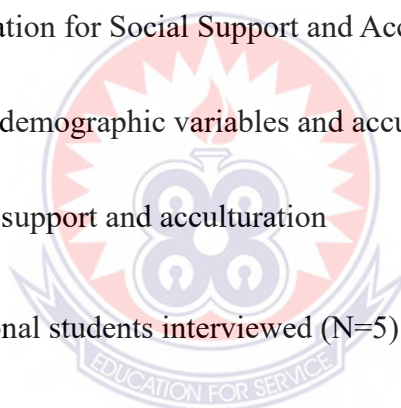
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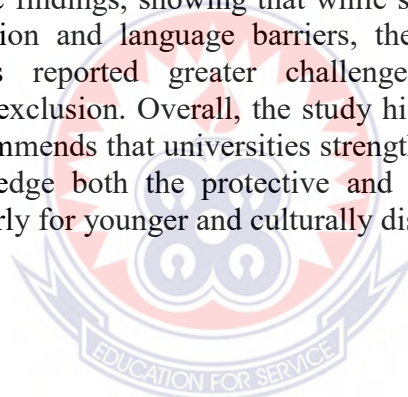
ABBREVIATIONS

ASSIS	Acculturative Stress Scale for International students
ISSS	Index of Sojourner Social Support
MUG	Methodist University Ghana
PUG	Pentecost University Ghana
IIE	Institute of International Education
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Approach
GAS	General Adaptation to Stress Model
NAB	National Accreditation Board



ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between socio-demographic variables, social support, and acculturative stress among international students in Ghanaian universities, focusing on Methodist University Ghana (MUG) and Pentecost University Ghana (PUG). Using a pragmatic philosophical orientation, the study adopted an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design. The quantitative phase involved 148 participants selected through stratified random sampling, using the Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students (ASSIS) and the Index of Sojourner Social Support (ISSS). The qualitative phase applied Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore lived experiences behind the statistical results. Quantitative findings showed that personal safety ($M = 30.16$, $SD = 8.15$) and homesickness ($M = 20.76$, $SD = 5.55$) were the most significant stressors, while injustice had the least impact ($M = 3.56$, $SD = 1.24$). Regression analysis revealed that age and country of origin significantly predicted acculturative stress, while gender did not. Unexpectedly, social support was positively correlated with acculturative stress ($\beta = .528$, $p < .001$), suggesting that high support may sometimes intensify stress due to unmet expectations or overreliance on social ties. Qualitative results reinforced these findings, showing that while social networks helped students cope with discrimination and language barriers, they could also heighten stress. Francophone students reported greater challenges linked to communication difficulties and social exclusion. Overall, the study highlights the complex nature of acculturation and recommends that universities strengthen culturally sensitive support systems that acknowledge both the protective and burdensome aspects of social relationships, particularly for younger and culturally distant international students



CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

With the recent growth of globalization and human mobility, pursuing higher education abroad has become increasingly common in the contemporary world (Hofhuis et al., 2019; Yang, 2018). Existing literature consistently highlights the challenges faced by international students during their education abroad, as they must adjust to a new learning environment. For example, literature suggests that international students may experience psychological problems due to several factors. (Chorong, et al, 2019; Gyasi-Gyamerah, 2017; Muhammad A. & Rafia, Rafique, 2019). These factors include language lack of support from family systems and difficulties related to culture shock and social adjustment. Project Atlas defines international students as individuals who pursue all or part of their higher education experience in a country other than their home country for formal education purposes, and they are not permanent residents in the host country. International students can also be described as "non-immigrant" visitors who come to a country temporarily to take classes or take virtual courses. International students are students who are not residents of their current country of study and who received their prior education in another country (International Student Mobility, 2018).

In the 2018-2019 academic year, the United States hosted over one million international students, an all-time high that represented 5.5% of the total student population in the country's higher education system (Institute of International Education, 2019). According to a study conducted by Education Australia and the Centre for International Economics, the global demand for international higher

education is expected to grow substantially, with demand projected to reach 7.2 million by 2025.

However, while most international students adapt well to the host culture and academic demands, many experience acculturative stress, racism, and reduced access to their usual support systems (Thomas & Sumathi, 2016; Qi, Wang, Pincus & Wu, 2018; Nasirudeen & Josephine, 2019). As a result, the changes and differences experienced by international students may impact their mental health, leading to depression, anxiety, and other psychological problems, as reported by Sullivan and Kashubeck-West (2015), Liu et al. (2016), and Gebregergis (2018).

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2014) defines mental health as a state of well-being in which individuals **understand** their potential, can cope with everyday life pressures, work productively and fruitfully, and contribute to society. Acculturative stress is a common phenomenon experienced by international students when they encounter difficulties adjusting to their host country's cultural and social environment (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). International students studying in Ghanaian higher education institutions also face various challenges related to language barriers, cultural differences, and social isolation, among others.

Acculturative stress among international students. Sociodemographic variables are a set of characteristics of individuals that are used to describe and understand the social and economic status of a population (Abdullahi, 2020). In the context of this study, sociodemographic variables may include age, gender, nationality, educational level, family background, country of origin, and other factors that may influence an international student's experience in Ghanaian higher education. For instance, age as a sociodemographic variable has been identified as an important sociodemographic variable that may influence acculturative stress among international students in Ghana

(Lampitey & Yoo, 2020). The authors found that younger students reported higher levels of acculturative stress, which may be due to factors such as greater academic pressure or difficulties adjusting to a new cultural environment. Gender is another sociodemographic variable that may have an impact on acculturative stress among international students in Ghana. Asante et al. (2020) found that female students reported higher levels of acculturative stress, which may be due to factors such as gender-related expectations and cultural differences in gender roles. Also, the nationality of international students may be an important sociodemographic variable that influences acculturative stress. Takyi-Amoako et al. (2020) found that students from certain African countries reported higher levels of acculturative stress compared to students from other nations, which may be due to differences in cultural values and social norms. Educational level is another sociodemographic variable that may influence acculturative stress among international students in Ghana. Asante et al. (2020) found that students with lower family income and educational levels experienced higher levels of acculturative stress, which may be due to factors such as financial constraints and a lack of preparation for the academic demands of higher education.

Family background, including factors such as family support and socioeconomic status, may also influence acculturative stress among international students in Ghana. Ye and Ng (2020) found that students who perceived higher levels of social support from their families reported lower levels of acculturative stress, while Lampitey and Yoo (2020) found that students from single-parent households reported higher levels of acculturative stress.

All in all, sociodemographic variables can provide valuable insight into the experiences of international students in Ghanaian higher education and help identify

factors that may influence their acculturative stress. Universities and policymakers need to consider these variables when developing strategies to support the well-being of international students and facilitate their adjustment to a new cultural environment. Another important variable that affects acculturative stress is social support. Social support has been identified as a crucial factor in reducing acculturative stress among international students. Social support can be classified into three types: emotional, informational, and instrumental support (Kim et al., 2017). Emotional support involves providing comfort and empathy, while informational support involves providing information and guidance. Instrumental support involves providing practical assistance, such as help with daily tasks or financial support. Studies have found that social support can significantly reduce acculturative stress among international students (Chen et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2017). The source of social support matters. International students who receive social support from their family, friends, and the host community experience lower levels of acculturative stress compared to those who do not receive social support (Chen et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2017). Social support from the host community is particularly important for international students, as it helps them to feel integrated into the new cultural and social environment.

Acculturative stress can hurt the academic performance of international students. International students who experience high levels of acculturative stress may have difficulty concentrating, participating in class, and completing assignments (Kim et al., 2017). Additionally, acculturative stress can lead to emotional distress, such as depression and anxiety, which can further impact academic performance (Wang et al., 2018). It can also have negative effects on the physical and mental health of international students. Studies have found that international students who experience

high levels of acculturative stress are more likely to engage in unhealthy behaviours, such as smoking and excessive alcohol consumption (Wang et al., 2018). Additionally, acculturative stress can lead to mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety (Kim et al., 2017).

Several interventions have been proposed over the years to reduce acculturative stress among international students. These interventions include counselling, mentoring, social support programs, and language training (Chen et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2017). Counselling and mentoring programs can provide emotional support and guidance to international students, while social support programs can connect international students with their peers and the host community. Language training programs can help international students improve their language skills, which can improve their ability to communicate and integrate into the new environment. In addition, studies have shown that cultural orientation programs can be effective in reducing acculturative stress among international students (Kim et al., 2017). These programs provide information on the cultural and social norms of the host country, as well as tips on how to adapt to the new environment. As history shows, journeying to higher education in a different country has become common (Institute of International Education [IIE], 2021; “International Students,” 2020; Wehrly, 1986). The international student population at colleges and universities in Ghana is rapidly growing and diversifying. While bringing national, cultural, and ethnic diversity to university campuses, international students also offer diverse socioeconomic, political, and academic value to Ghanaian university campuses. Ghana’s tertiary institutions embark upon several activities to attract international students to study at these institutions either for a short period or for a long period.

Private universities such as Methodist University (MUG) also have regular and visiting international students. It is important to point out that almost all the international student population in MUG are from the African continent (<http://www.wiuc.edu.gh>) and are pursuing courses that lead to the award of a certificates, degrees, or post-graduate degrees. The lack of empirical literature and understanding of how international students adapt to life in a new sociocultural environment in Ghana. Understanding how international students acculturate can shed light on their overall well-being and mental health. The challenges of adapting to a new cultural context, language barriers, and academic differences can impact their emotional and psychological state

Research findings can inform the development of effective policies and support services for international students. Universities and institutions can use this knowledge to create programs that address the specific needs of this population, enhancing their overall experience.

Ghana is a culturally diverse country with a rich history and a variety of ethnic groups. Researching the acculturation of international students in Ghana provides an opportunity to explore how students from different cultural backgrounds navigate and adapt to the unique cultural context of the country. Findings from the research can inform the development of policies and strategies for internationalization within Ghanaian educational institutions. This includes creating a supportive environment for international students and fostering cultural diversity within the academic community.

In conclusion, international students studying in Ghanaian universities face various challenges related to acculturative stress. Socio-demographic variables such as age, gender, nationality, and marital status have been found to influence the level of acculturative stress experienced by international students. Social support, particularly

from family, friends, and the host community, has been identified as a crucial factor in reducing acculturative stress. Thus, interventions such as counselling, mentoring, social support programs, language training, and cultural orientation programs can be effective in reducing acculturative stress among international students.

1.2 Problem Statement

Globalization and the development of modern education systems make foreign students very important in higher education. Although the presence of international students in the host country is mutually beneficial, there are numerous factors impacting their acculturation process and they may experience acculturative stress. The phenomenon of acculturative stress experienced by international students has been the focus of much research in recent years. As the number of international students continues to rise in many countries, it has become increasingly important to understand the experiences and stressors of these students to better support their adjustment and well-being.

In Ghana, a West African country that has seen a significant increase in its international student population, many students struggle with issues such as social isolation, language barriers, and cultural differences while studying abroad. These difficulties can result in acculturative stress and have a significant impact on the academic, social, and personal lives of international students (Lee, 2014; Misra & Castillo, 2004).

Existing literature consistently highlights the challenges faced by international students, when adapting to a new academic and sociocultural environment. (Gyasi-Gyamrah, 2017, Leong & Chou, 2002; Hofhuis et al., 2019; Yang, 2018; Sullivan & Kashubeck-West, 2015; Liu et al., 2016, McKinlay,). In the African context, particularly in Ghana, there is a notable surge in the migration of students to more

developed countries for higher education despite limited resources in their home countries (Thomas & Sumathi, 2016; Ali, Yoenanto, & Nurdibyanandaru, 2020).

The argument here is that acculturative stress among international students in Ghanaian universities is significant for several reasons. The first has to do with its impact on their well-being. Acculturative stress can have detrimental effects on the mental health and well-being of international students. As stated by Gebregergi, 2018; Wang et., 2018 psychological problems such as depression, anxiety, and reduced quality of life are common outcomes of acculturative stress. Therefore addressing this issue is crucial to safeguarding the mental health of international students, promoting their overall well-being, and ensuring they have a positive educational experience.

The second has to do with academic performance. To Kim et al., 2017, acculturative stress can impede international students' academic performance, affecting their ability to concentrate, participate in class, and complete assignments effectively (Kim et al., 2017). This does not only hampers individual students' educational attainment but also impacts the reputation and competitiveness of Ghanaian universities on the global stage. There is also the issue of social integration and cultural exchange effects. International students contribute to cultural diversity and cross-cultural exchange in Ghanaian universities. Acculturative stress may hinder their ability to fully engage with the host community and participate in cultural activities, limiting opportunities for meaningful social integration and intercultural dialogue. However, research on the sociodemographic variables and social support influencing acculturative stress among international students in Ghanaian universities seems limited (Lamptey & Yoo, 2020; Asante et al., 2020). This is a need for comprehensive investigation to fill this literature gap.

Moreover, a methodological gap persists in the measurement and understanding of acculturative stress within this population. The current methodologies predominantly rely on qualitative interviews to assess acculturative stress levels (Ika, Nugraba Arif 2022, Jierru Bai, 2016, Mubeen, Kroner, 2015). While these methods provide valuable insights into students' subjective experiences, they often lack the depth and precision needed to capture the nuanced complexities of acculturative stress. Self-reported measures may be susceptible to response biases, cultural differences in expressing distress, and may not adequately capture the dynamic nature of stressors and coping mechanisms over time. Thus, the nature of the problem is characterized by an insufficient understanding of how unique cultural and contextual factors in Ghana contribute to the acculturative stress experienced by international students.

This oversight limits the generalizability and applicability of findings and hinders the development of tailored interventions to support diverse international students in Ghana. This study employed a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews that offered a holistic perspective into lived experiences, allowing for a nuanced exploration of both the quantitative associations and qualitative insights into the lived experiences of these international students in Ghana. By bridging these methodological gaps, this study sought to explore sociodemographic variables, social support and acculturative stress among international students in Ghanaian universities and develop effective interventions to support their well-being and academic success in Ghana.

Contextually, majority of the existing literature has focused on experiences of Asian, China, Latin American and Europe about the acculturative experiences of international students enrolled at these universities (Ali, Yoenanto, &

Nurdibyanandaru, 2020, Li et al., 2017, Ye & Ng, 2020, Chorong, Tanya, Mark & Simona, 2019; Muhammad A. & Rafia, Rafique, 2019; Carolyn , Fang, Handit & Rao, 2020; Pinciano, Chiachih & Linglin, 2022) . It appears there is not much research originating from Africa that focuses on acculturative stress with regards with sociodemographic variables, social support and acculturative stress. Yet, some limited research has been conducted on the experiences of international students in African contexts, particularly in Ghana (Gyasi-Gyamerah, 2017).

By focusing on this overlooked population, the study aims to fill this contextual gap, offering insights that are not only relevant to Ghana but can also contribute to the global discourse on supporting diverse international student populations in higher education settings.

It recognizes the importance of these factors in shaping the experiences of international students, ensuring that interventions and policies are tailored to the specific needs of this category of the population within the Ghanaian universities. Anecdotal evidence also seem to suggest that these international students are exploited due to their lack of understanding of local currency trading practices. This is a pressing concern within the realm of global education and this compounds the acculturative stress of these international student in Ghana.

Again, research has shown that social support has been identified as an important factor in reducing acculturative stress among international students in various contexts (Ye & Ng, 2020). However, the role of social support in the Ghanaian context is not well understood, and further research is needed to explore the factors that influence the availability and effectiveness of social support for international students in Ghana.

Furthermore, the significance of the study lies in its potential to enhance the overall well-being and academic success of international students. Through a thorough understanding of the factors contributing to acculturative stress, the research aims to pave the way for interventions that create a more inclusive and supportive educational environment. This, in turn, can positively impact mental health, academic performance, and the overall educational experience of international students. Beyond its implications for Ghana, the study contributes to the broader global discourse on international education. The insights garnered from this research can inform practices and interventions applicable in various international higher education contexts. The study, therefore, has the potential to make a lasting impact on how institutions globally approach the support and integration of their international student populations.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

This thesis was underpinned by three theoretical frameworks namely Greenfield's Theory, the Stress and Coping Theory, and the Social Identity theory.

1.4.1 Greenfield's Theory of Cultural Change (Greenfield, 2009)

The theory of cultural change, which was created by Susan C. Greenfield, maintains that culture has a big impact on how people grow and behave. It highlights the reciprocal nature of the relationship that exists between people and their cultural contexts, implying that over time, both the individual and the environment have an impact on and are impacted by one another (Greenfield, 2009). Asserting that cultural values, beliefs, and practices change in response to shifting social, economic, and environmental factors, this theory highlights the dynamic nature of culture (Greenfield, 2004). According to Greenfield (2016), a fundamental tenet of her

framework is that cultural influences have a lifelong impact on identity formation, social behaviours, emotional expressions, and cognitive processes.

In addition, Greenfield's theory emphasises people's ability to adapt and remain resilient in the face of cultural change. Although it acknowledges the impact of culture on behaviour, it places a strong emphasis on the agency of the individual in navigating cultural shifts and implementing coping mechanisms (Greenfield, 2018). Aside from that, the theory highlights how crucial it is to consider the significant variations in cultural practices and values across societies and contexts when studying human behaviour (Greenfield, 2013).

The benefits and drawbacks of the theory are the subject of many discussions. Among its many advantages is that the theory offers a thorough framework for comprehending the mutually reinforcing link between human development and culture. The idea that culture shapes people and that people in turn influence and shape culture is fundamental to the theory (Greenfield, 2009). The dynamic character of cultural change is emphasised by this bidirectional viewpoint, which also emphasises how cultural practices and values change over time in response to social, economic, and environmental factors (Greenfield, 2004). Moreover, the theory emphasises how culture has a profound effect on a range of human behaviours, emotions, thought processes, and identity development over the course of a lifetime (Greenfield, 2016).

Recognising cultural diversity and the significance of taking variance across societies and contexts into account are two more important aspects of Greenfield's theory (Greenfield, 2013). In multicultural and international contexts, this acknowledgement increases the theory's applicability. Furthermore, the theory highlights how adaptable

and resilient people can be when navigating cultural transitions, emphasising the importance of agency in overcoming such obstacles (Greenfield, 2018).

To put it briefly, Greenfield's theory of cultural change provides a strong, multidisciplinary framework for comprehending how culture affects human development. Its ability to explain cultural phenomena in a variety of contexts is strengthened and kept relevant by its bidirectional perspective, recognition of cultural diversity, and emphasis on adaptation and resilience.

However, despite providing insightful information about the connection between culture and human development, this theory is not without flaws. Firstly, the theory's bidirectional perspective may oversimplify the complexity of cultural interactions. While it acknowledges that individuals influence culture, it may not adequately account for power dynamics and structural forces that shape cultural norms and values (Greenfield, 2009). This limitation could lead to an underestimation of the systemic barriers individuals face in challenging cultural practices.

Furthermore, the theory's emphasis on cultural development may undervalue the role of cultural continuity and stability. While cultural evolution is clearly an important component of human development, the theory's emphasis on change may ignore the ways in which people use tradition and legacy to sustain their cultural identity (Greenfield, 2016). This mistake could result in an insufficient grasp of how culture shapes people's lives.

Also, the theory may lack specificity in its explanations of how cultural values and practices influence specific aspects of human behaviour. While it provides a broad framework for understanding cultural dynamics, it may not offer detailed insights into the mechanisms through which culture impacts cognition, emotion, and behaviour

(Greenfield, 2018). This limitation could hinder the theory's applicability in practical contexts where precise explanations are needed.

This theory is related to this study because acculturative stress arises when individuals face difficulties in adjusting to a new culture. Greenfield's theory helps explain this stress as part of the broader cultural shift student's experience. Those who come from more traditional, collectivist backgrounds may find it stressful to adjust to the modern aspects of Ghanaian culture (or its unique blend of traditional and modern elements). Conversely, students who come from more modernized, individualistic societies might face stress in dealing with aspects of Ghanaian culture that are more collectivistic, such as community-based social norms.

Greenfield's Theory of Cultural Change provides a lens through which to understanding how sociodemographic variables and social support impact international students' acculturative stress. Their experiences of stress depend on the cultural distance between their home cultures and Ghana, as well as the social networks they build to help them navigate the cultural transition

In summary, while Greenfield's Theory of Cultural Change offers valuable insights into the relationship between culture and human development, it is not without its weaknesses. Addressing these limitations could enhance the theory's utility and applicability in understanding cultural phenomena across diverse contexts.

1.4.2 The Stress and Coping Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984)

Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman developed the *Stress and Coping Theory*, a comprehensive framework for studying how people perceive and respond to stressors in their life. At its foundation, the theory holds that stress results from the transactional interaction between people and their surroundings. Stressors are viewed

as dangerous or demanding to one's well-being, prompting people to use coping mechanisms to manage or lessen the perceived stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

According to the idea, people use primary appraisal to determine the importance of a stressor in relation to their goals, values, and well-being. This assessment procedure entails determining whether the stressor is unimportant, benign-positive, or stressful. Following primary evaluation, participants conduct secondary appraisal to measure their coping resources and stress-management strategies. This includes determining whether they have the resources and ability to effectively deal with the stressor (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

The theory identifies two main types of coping strategies: problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. Problem-focused coping involves efforts to directly address the stressor or alter the stressful situation, while emotion-focused coping involves efforts to regulate one's emotional response to the stressor. These coping strategies are influenced by cognitive appraisal, which refers to the cognitive processes through which individuals evaluate the meaning and significance of a stressor, as well as the perceived availability of coping resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

The theory's strengths include its broad framework and practical use in understanding and managing stress. First, the theory provides a sophisticated explanation of stress as a dynamic process driven by people's perceptions and interactions with their surroundings. By emphasizing the transactional aspect of stress, the theory acknowledges that stressors are not intrinsically stressful, but rather become so through individuals' perceptions of them (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This viewpoint provides for a more comprehensive approach to stress management since it

recognises the subjective character of stress and the significance of individual differences in coping.

Also, the theory's delineation of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping techniques offers practical advice for people looking to handle stress effectively. Problem-focused coping techniques encourage people to take action to address the root causes of stress, whereas emotion-focused coping strategies assist people regulate their emotional reactions to stressors (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). By identifying different coping methods, the theory provides individuals with a variety of options for dealing with stresses, allowing for a more personalised approach to stress management.

Furthermore, the Stress and Coping Theory's emphasis on cognitive evaluation which emphasises the role of people's interpretations of stressors in determining their stress reactions. This recognition emphasises the importance of cognitive elements such as perceived control and coping efficacy in shaping people's ability to deal with stress effectively (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). By addressing cognitive evaluations, the theory provides insights into the cognitive processes that underpin stress responses, allowing for the creation of therapies that promote adaptive coping methods.

While the Stress and Coping Theory provides useful insights into the dynamics of stress perception and management, it also has some flaws that should be considered. One noteworthy weakness is the theory's restricted focus on individual-level issues, which may overlook the more general social and environmental drivers of stress. By focusing on the cognitive evaluation process within individuals, the theory may underestimate the role of external factors such as socioeconomic status,

cultural norms, and institutional disparities in determining stress experiences. (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Moreover, the theory's dichotomous distinction between problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies may oversimplify the complexity of coping processes. In reality, individuals often employ a combination of coping strategies that may vary in effectiveness depending on the nature of the stressor and available resources. This oversimplification could limit the theory's utility in guiding interventions aimed at promoting adaptive coping strategies tailored to individual needs (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Furthermore, the Stress and Coping Theory may be criticised for its essentially static view of stress and coping. While the theory recognises stress as a dynamic process, it may not fully represent the iterative nature of stress assessment and management across time. Stressors and coping methods can change in response to changing circumstances, but the theory's emphasis on distinct appraisal stages and coping categories may not account for these dynamic processes (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Furthermore, the theory's reliance on self-report measures to assess cognitive evaluation and coping methods may lead to biases and limits in empirical study. Self-report measures are based on people's subjective judgements and may not always adequately reflect their cognitive processes or coping behaviours. The use of self-report data may limit the validity and generalizability of study findings based on the theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

In as much as the Stress and Coping Theory gives useful insights into individual-level stress perception and management processes, it does have limits that must be acknowledged. Addressing these flaws may improve the theory's application

and relevance in understanding the intricacies of stress and coping in various circumstances.

Transactional explanations of stress emphasize the cognitive phenomenological processes that enable individuals to attribute meaning to their environment, emphasizing the relational, dynamic nature of the transaction in which stress may arise (Lazarus, 1966; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Inherent within the transactional approach is the bidirectional nature of the transactions between an individual and their environment; therefore, it is neither the individual nor the environment alone that produces stress but a complex transaction between the two (Folkman, 1984; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984)

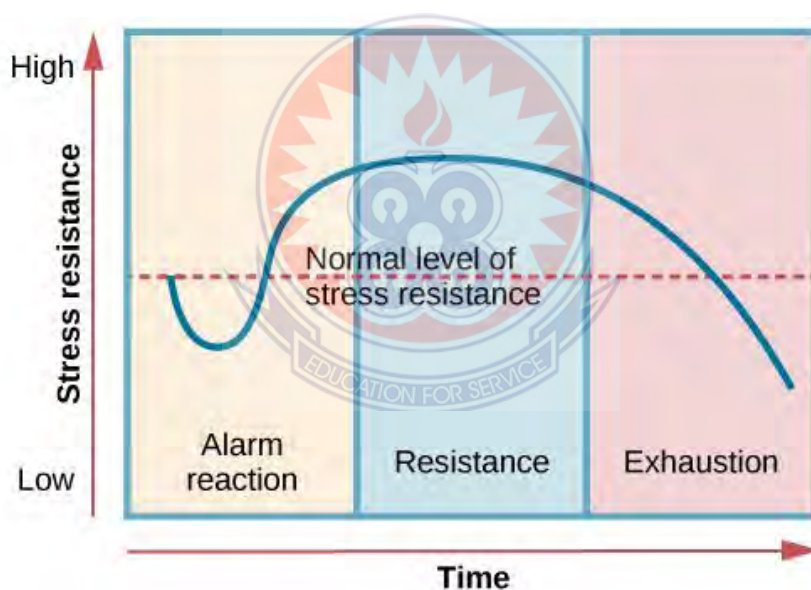


Figure 1 General Adaptation to Stress (GAS) Model (AltanticOER Pressbooks Network)

The response model of stress incorporates coping within the model itself. The idea of adaptation or coping is inherent to the GAS model at both the alarm and resistance stages. When confronted with a negative stimulus, the alarm response initiates the sympathetic nervous system to combat or avoid the stressor (i.e., increased heart rate, temperature, adrenaline, and glucose levels). The resistance response then initiates physiological systems with a fight or flight reaction to the

stressor, returning the system to homeostasis, reducing harm, or more generally accommodating the stressor, which can lead to adaptive diseases such as sleep deprivation, mental illness, hypertension, or heart disease. Thus, along with the early conceptualization of stress as a physiological response, early research on coping was also born

This theory is relevant in the current study because, when international students encounter acculturative stressors such as language barriers, cultural differences, academic pressure, social isolation, and discrimination, they undergo a cognitive appraisal process. This appraisal involves evaluating the significance of the stressors and assessing their ability to cope with them. Based on this appraisal, students employ various coping strategies to manage acculturative stress

Thus, Lazarus and Folkman distinguished between problem-focused coping, which involves addressing the stressor directly, and emotion-focused coping, which focuses on managing emotional responses to the stressor. International students may use problem-focused coping strategies such as seeking language assistance, attending cultural orientation programs, seeking academic support, and actively engaging in social activities to navigate the challenges of acculturation

1.4.3 Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Social Identity Theory, developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner, is a psychological framework that explores how individuals' self-concept and behaviour are influenced by their membership in social groups. At its core, the theory posits that people categorize themselves and others into social groups based on shared characteristics, such as ethnicity, nationality, religion, or organizational affiliation. These group memberships form part of individuals' social identity, which

encompasses the aspects of their self-concept derived from their group memberships (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Central to the theory is the concept of in-group favoritisms and out-group derogation, which suggests that individuals tend to favor members of their own group (in-group) while discriminating against members of other groups (out-groups). This bias arises from the psychological need for positive self-esteem and social identity enhancement, wherein individuals derive a sense of worth and belonging from their group memberships (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Social Identity Theory also proposes that group memberships contribute to the formation of social categorizations and stereotypes, which are generalized beliefs about the characteristics of members of specific social groups. These stereotypes serve as cognitive shortcuts that help individuals navigate their social environment but can also lead to prejudice and discrimination when applied uncritically (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Furthermore, the theory emphasizes the dynamic nature of social identity, suggesting that it can be influenced by situational factors, intergroup relations, and social context. Individuals may shift their social identities depending on the salience of different group memberships in a given context, leading to changes in their behaviour and intergroup attitudes (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Social Identity Theory offers several strengths that contribute to its significance in understanding intergroup relations and identity processes. One of its key strengths is its emphasis on the role of social categorization in shaping individuals' perceptions and behaviours. By highlighting how people categorize themselves and others into social groups based on shared characteristics, the theory

provides a fundamental insight into the cognitive processes underlying intergroup dynamics (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Moreover, the theory's explanation of in-group favouritism and out-group derogation helps elucidate the mechanisms through which group memberships influence individuals' attitudes and behaviours towards others. This insight into the psychological motivations underlying intergroup bias enhances our understanding of phenomena such as prejudice, discrimination, and social identity enhancement (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Additionally, Social Identity Theory's recognition of the dynamic nature of social identity allows provides a perfect understanding of identity formation and intergroup relations. By acknowledging that individuals' social identities can be influenced by situational factors and social context, the theory provides a flexible framework that can account for variability in intergroup attitudes and behaviours across different contexts (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Furthermore, the theory's emphasis on the role of social context and intergroup relations in shaping social identity highlights the importance of broader social structures and dynamics in understanding intergroup phenomena. This systemic perspective underscores the interconnectedness of individuals' identities and societal structures, offering insights into the complexities of social inequality, collective action, and social change (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Despite its strengths, Social Identity Theory also has certain weaknesses that warrant consideration. One limitation is its tendency to oversimplify the complexities of intergroup relations by focusing primarily on cognitive processes at the individual level. While the theory provides valuable insights into how people categorize themselves and others into social groups, it may not fully account for the role of

structural factors such as power dynamics, institutional discrimination, and historical contexts in shaping intergroup dynamics (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Additionally, Social Identity Theory's emphasis on in-group favoritism and out-group derogation may perpetuate intergroup conflict and reinforce social divisions. By highlighting the psychological mechanisms underlying intergroup bias, the theory may inadvertently downplay the potential for intergroup cooperation, empathy, and reconciliation (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Furthermore, the theory's reliance on self-reported measures of social identity and intergroup attitudes may introduce biases and limitations in empirical research. Self-report measures rely on individuals' subjective perceptions and may not capture the full complexity of their social identities or intergroup relations. This reliance on self-report data may limit the validity and generalizability of research findings based on the theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). When international students arrive in a foreign country, they may find themselves as part of an "out-group" relative to the local population. According to Social Identity Theory, being part of an out-group can lead to feelings of social exclusion, prejudice, or discrimination, which in turn contributes to acculturative stress. In Ghana, for instance, international students may struggle with a sense of otherness due to differences in language, cultural practices, creating a divide between themselves (the out-group) and the host country's nationals (the in-group).

This theory relates to this study because understanding the interplay between social identity theory and acculturative stress can inform interventions and support services for international students. By recognizing the role of social identity in shaping their experiences and coping strategies, educational institutions can develop programs that foster intercultural dialogue, promote social integration, and provide

tailored support to facilitate the adjustment of international students to the new cultural environment. In the nutshell, this theory offers valuable insights into the psychological processes underlying acculturative stress among international students, highlighting the significance of group membership, social comparison, ingroup support, and intergroup dynamics in shaping their experiences of cultural adaptation and adjustment. Based on these, the use of the theory in the current study is justified.

1.4.4 Inter-relationships of the theories

The relationships between Social Identity Theory, Stress and Coping Theory, and Greenfield's Theory of Cultural Change are intricate and multifaceted, offering complementary perspectives on various aspects of human behaviour and social dynamics.

Social Identity Theory provides insights into how individuals perceive themselves and others within the context of social groups, emphasizing the role of group memberships in shaping identity and intergroup relations. In contrast, Stress and Coping Theory delves into the cognitive and behavioural processes individuals employ to manage stressors, focusing on the transactional nature of stress appraisal and coping strategies. While Social Identity Theory primarily examines intergroup dynamics and identity formation, Stress and Coping Theory focuses on individual-level responses to stressors, highlighting the importance of cognitive appraisal and coping mechanisms in mitigating stress. However, both theories intersect in their consideration of the influence of social context on individual behaviour, with Social Identity Theory emphasizing the role of group memberships and intergroup relations, and Stress and Coping Theory underscoring the impact of situational factors on stress perception and coping responses.

In contrast, Greenfield's Theory of Cultural Change offers a broader perspective on the interaction between culture and human development, exploring how cultural values and practices shape individuals' cognition, emotion, and behaviour over time. While Social Identity Theory and Stress and Coping Theory focus primarily on psychological processes at the individual and intergroup levels, Greenfield's theory extends the analysis to encompass societal-level changes in cultural norms and values.

Despite their distinct foci, these theories intersect in their consideration of the role of social context in shaping human behaviour and identity. Social Identity Theory provides insights into how group memberships influence individuals' perceptions and behaviours, while Stress and Coping Theory elucidates the cognitive and behavioural mechanisms individuals employ to manage stress in social contexts. Greenfield's Theory of Cultural Change offers a broader framework for understanding how cultural dynamics shape individual and collective identity processes, highlighting the interplay between cultural change and human development.

The decision to incorporate Social Identity Theory, Stress and Coping Theory, and Greenfield's Theory of Cultural Change into the theoretical framework of this study was guided by their alignment with the research questions and objectives, as well as their capacity to offer nuanced insights into the phenomena under investigation.

Social Identity Theory was chosen for its relevance to understanding the dynamics of identity formation and intergroup relations among international students in Ghanaian higher education. By examining how students' group memberships influence their perceptions and behaviours within the academic context, this theory

provides a valuable framework for exploring the role of social identity in shaping acculturative stress and social integration experiences.

Stress and Coping Theory was deemed essential for its applicability to investigating the cognitive appraisal processes and coping strategies employed by international students to manage the challenges of adaptation and cultural adjustment. Given the study's focus on acculturative stress among students in a multicultural environment, this theory offers a comprehensive framework for analyzing the psychological mechanisms underlying stress perception and its impact on students' well-being and academic performance.

Greenfield's Theory of Cultural Change was included in the theoretical framework to provide a broader perspective on how cultural dynamics shape individuals' cognition, behaviour, and identity over time. By considering the influence of cultural values, norms, and practices on students' adaptation experiences, this theory enriches the theoretical framework by highlighting the interplay between cultural change and acculturative stress among international students in Ghanaian higher education.

In summary, the selection of these theories was driven by their relevance to the research context and their potential to offer comprehensive insights into the psychological processes underlying acculturative stress and adaptation among international students. By integrating these theories into the theoretical framework, the study aims to provide a holistic understanding of the factors influencing students' experiences and well-being in the context of cross-cultural education.

1.5 Conceptual Framework

Acculturative stress, stemming from the challenges of adapting to a new cultural environment, is a pervasive phenomenon experienced by international students worldwide. With the globalization of higher education, an increasing number of students are crossing borders to pursue academic opportunities in diverse cultural contexts. In the context of Ghanaian higher education, international students face unique acculturative stressors, influenced by the country's cultural, social, and educational dynamics. Understanding the factors contributing to acculturative stress and its impact on students' well-being, academic success, and social integration is essential for developing effective support strategies and interventions tailored to the needs of this population.

The conceptual framework of this study draws upon three theoretical foundations, Social Identity Theory, Stress and Coping Theory, and Greenfield's Theory of Cultural Change to elucidate the complexities of acculturative stress among international students in Ghana. These theories provide a framework for understanding how sociodemographic factors, cultural and environmental context, social support, and individual coping mechanisms interact to shape the acculturation experience.

In this introduction section, I provided an overview of each theoretical foundation, highlighting their relevance to the study and their contributions to understanding acculturative stress. Subsequently, I illustrated the relationships between these theoretical constructs and discuss their implications for the acculturation experience of international students in Ghanaian higher education. Through this conceptual framework, I aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing acculturative stress and inform the

development of targeted interventions to support the well-being and success of international students in Ghana.

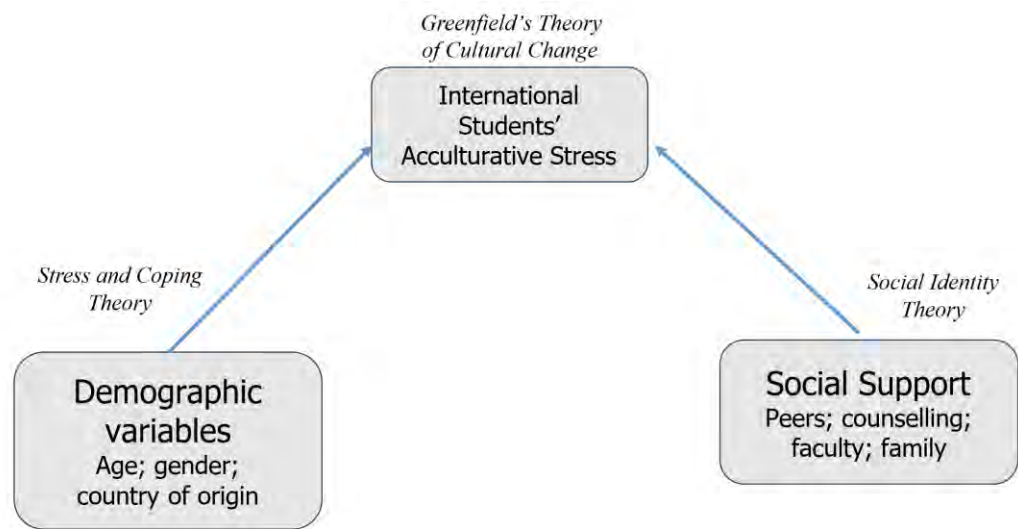


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework of Study Variables

1.5.1 Sociodemographic Factors

The conceptual framework of the study intricately explored the intersection of sociodemographic variables such as age, gender and country of origin, with acculturative stress among international students in Ghana, underpinned by a theoretical amalgamation of Greenfield's theory of cultural change, Lazarus and Folkman's stress and coping theory, and social identity theory. This approach aimed to dissect how each factor uniquely influenced the adaptation and stress experiences of these students, providing a nuanced understanding that could inform tailored support and interventions.

Age was considered from the perspective of life experience and resilience, hypothesising that older students might have navigated acculturative stress with more coping strategies at their disposal than their younger counterparts. Gender was explored in relation to societal and cultural expectations that impact stress perception and access to social support, invoking social identity theory to analyse how gendered

experiences shaped adaptation processes. The country of origin was examined through the lens of cultural distance, with an assumption that students from backgrounds more similar to Ghana might have experienced less acculturative stress, a notion supported by Greenfield's cultural change framework. Educational level addressed the varied demands and expectations between undergraduate and postgraduate studies, positing that these differences significantly influenced students' stress levels and coping mechanisms.

By synthesising these sociodemographic variables with the selected theoretical perspectives, the study aimed to uncover the complex dynamics of acculturative stress among international students in Ghana. This comprehensive analysis sought not only to identify the specific needs and challenges of these students but also to contribute to the development of more effective policies and practices that enhance their academic and personal well-being. Through this approach, the study underscored the importance of a multifaceted understanding of acculturative stress, which was crucial for crafting supportive environments that fostered the success and integration of international students in Ghanaian higher education.

1.5.2 Cultural and Environmental Contexts

In examining the cultural and environmental context impacting international students in Ghana, this study delved into the nuances of cultural differences, the educational environment, and social and cultural norms within the country, all through the lens of Greenfield's theory of cultural change and adaptation. Greenfield's framework (Greenfield, 2000) served as a cornerstone for understanding how cultural and environmental contexts influence cognitive and social development, particularly emphasising the transition from more traditional, community-oriented values towards more individualistic, Western paradigms. Theoretically, students from more

collectivistic or traditional societies may experience increased acculturative stress when adjusting to Ghana's educational and social milieu, which is a blend of traditional values and growing Western influences. This theoretical perspective was instrumental in helping to analyse the cultural differences faced by international students.

The educational environment in Ghana, characterised by a mix of lecture-based learning and participatory approaches, often represents a shift for students accustomed to other pedagogical styles. This shift necessitates an adaptation process that can be stressful, especially for those from educational systems that favour either more rigid, lecture-based learning or more interactive, student-centred learning environments. The stress of adapting to this new educational environment is compounded by the social and cultural norms prevalent in Ghana, which may differ significantly from what exists in the students' home countries. Social norms around communication, interpersonal relationships, and academic engagement in Ghana can pose additional layers of challenge for international students, necessitating a nuanced understanding of these norms to successfully navigate social and academic life (Boafo-Arthur, 2014).

Understanding these elements, cultural differences, educational environment, and social and cultural norms, in the context of Greenfield's theory highlights the complex interplay between individual adaptability and the collective cultural landscape of Ghana. It underscores the importance of providing international students with the tools and support necessary to navigate these differences, thereby reducing acculturative stress and fostering a more inclusive and supportive educational environment. This approach not only benefits the students but also enriches

educational institutions and the broader community by promoting cross-cultural understanding and integration.

1.5.3 Acculturative Stress

In exploring the concept of acculturative stress among international students in Ghana, this study closely examined the challenges such as language barriers, cultural differences in teaching styles, and social integration, as well as the students' perceptions of stress through the lens of stress and coping theory. Acculturative stress refers to the psychological impact of adapting to a new cultural environment, and for international students in Ghana, this stress is multifaceted, shaped by both tangible obstacles and subjective experiences.

Language barriers stand as a primary challenge for many international students, even though English is widely spoken in Ghana. The nuances of local dialects and the use of idiomatic expressions in both academic and social settings can make communication difficult, thereby heightening the sense of alienation and stress (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Furthermore, the educational system in Ghana, with its mix of traditional lecture-based methods and participatory approaches, can starkly contrast with the teaching styles international students are accustomed to. This divergence can lead to difficulties in academic adaptation, significantly contributing to the students' acculturative stress.

International students' stress levels are further exacerbated by their lack of social integration. Developing deep connections with people in the host nation is essential to reducing feelings of isolation and loneliness. But these relationships can be hampered by cultural differences and a lack of awareness of social norms, which heightens feelings of alienation and stress (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001).

Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) Stress and Coping Theory provides an insightful framework for comprehending how overseas students view and handle these stressors. This theory holds that stress perception is a subjective process in which different people may interpret the same stressor in different ways, resulting in differences in how stress is felt and managed. According to this theory, how foreign students perceive acculturative stress depends on how they perceive the difficulties they will face and how confident they are that they can overcome those difficulties. Both the degree of stress experienced and the general wellbeing of the students are significantly influenced by coping strategies, whether they are problem-focused (addressing the source of stress directly) or emotion-focused (managing the emotional response to stress).

By integrating the challenges of acculturative stress with the perceptions and coping mechanisms outlined in the Stress and Coping Theory, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the acculturative experience of international students in Ghana. This understanding is crucial for developing targeted interventions aimed at reducing acculturative stress and promoting a positive educational and social experience for international students.

1.5.4 Social Support

In the context of acculturative stress among international students in Ghana, the role of social support emerges as a critical factor influencing their adjustment and well-being. Social support can be categorised into four main types: emotional, informational, appraisal, and instrumental, each serving a unique function in aiding students to navigate the complexities of acculturation.

Emotional support refers to expressions of empathy, care, and concern that provide reassurance and reduce feelings of isolation. Informational support involves

the provision of advice, information, and guidance that can help students understand and navigate the new cultural and academic environment. Appraisal support offers feedback and affirmation that can help students evaluate their circumstances and make decisions. Instrumental support, on the other hand, includes practical aid and services that directly address the needs of students, such as financial assistance or help with academic tasks.

The sources of these supports are diverse, encompassing family, peers, academic institutions, and the local community. Family support, although sometimes distant, remains a foundational emotional and financial backbone for many international students. Peers, including fellow international students and local students, often provide a sense of camaraderie and shared experience, offering both emotional and informational support. Academic institutions play a pivotal role through formal support services like counseling, orientation programmes, and academic advising, providing crucial appraisal and informational support that aids in academic and cultural adjustment. The local community, including religious organizations and cultural groups, can offer a sense of belonging and instrumental support, assisting students in integrating more fully into their new environment.

The synergistic effect of these various forms of support is substantial, significantly impacting the students' ability to cope with acculturative stress. Emotional and informational support can alleviate feelings of loneliness and confusion, appraisal support can enhance self-esteem and decision-making, and instrumental support can ease the practical challenges of living and studying in a new country. Thus, the availability and effectiveness of these support systems are essential for mitigating the effects of acculturative stress, promoting successful adjustment, and enhancing the overall well-being of international students in Ghana.

By examining the types and sources of social support within the Ghanaian context, this study aims to uncover how these elements interact to influence the acculturative experience of international students. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for informing the development of targeted interventions and support structures that address the unique needs of this population, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and supportive educational environment.

1.5.5 Potential Outcomes

The outcomes of acculturative stress among international students in Ghana vary, however, I focused on three key domains, psychological well-being, academic success, and social integration. These outcomes are interconnected and have significant implications for the overall adjustment and success of international students in their academic and social endeavours.

Psychological well-being encompasses various aspects of mental health, including feelings of happiness, life satisfaction, and emotional stability. Acculturative stress can have a profound impact on psychological well-being, leading to symptoms of depression, anxiety, and psychological distress (Sullivan & Kashubeck-West, 2015). By examining the relationship between acculturative stress and psychological well-being, the study seeks to understand how the stress experienced by international students influences their overall mental health and emotional resilience.

Academic success is another crucial outcome that is closely linked to acculturative stress. High levels of stress can impede students' ability to concentrate, engage in class discussions, and perform well on academic tasks (Kim et al., 2017). Acculturative stress may also lead to feelings of self-doubt and inadequacy, further undermining students' confidence and motivation to succeed academically. By exploring the impact of acculturative stress on academic success, the study aims to

identify factors that contribute to or mitigate the negative effects of stress on students' academic performance.

Social integration refers to the process through which international students become involved and engaged in the social and cultural life of the host country. Acculturative stress can hinder social integration by creating barriers to forming meaningful relationships and participating in social activities (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). Conversely, social support and positive social interactions can facilitate integration and enhance students' sense of belonging and connectedness to their new environment. By examining the relationship between acculturative stress and social integration, the study aims to elucidate the mechanisms through which stress influences students' ability to adapt socially and culturally in Ghana.

Overall, the study seeks to provide insights into the outcomes of acculturative stress among international students in Ghana, shedding light on the complex interplay between stress, psychological well-being, academic success, and social integration. By understanding these outcomes, the study aims to inform the development of interventions and support strategies that promote the holistic well-being and success of international students in Ghanaian higher education.

1.5.6 Illustration of Relationships

1. Sociodemographic factors will be related to the level of acculturative stress experienced by international students and their ability to access and utilize social support.
2. The cultural and environmental context in Ghana affect both the nature of acculturative stress experienced and the types of social support available to help navigate the acculturative stress.
3. Social support relates to acculturative stress either negatively or positively.

4. The theoretical foundations underpinning the study highlight the importance of identity, stress perception and coping, and cultural change in understanding the acculturation experience of international students.

The relationships outlined above demonstrate the intricate interplay between various factors influencing the acculturation experience of international students in Ghana. Sociodemographic factors, such as age, gender, nationality, and educational level, may shape the level of acculturative stress experienced by students and their access to social support networks. For example, younger students or those from certain cultural backgrounds may encounter unique challenges that contribute to higher levels of acculturative stress (Lamprey & Yoo, 2020; Takyi-Amoako et al., 2020). Similarly, students with lower socioeconomic status or limited English proficiency may face barriers to accessing formal support services offered by academic institutions or community organisations.

Moreover, the cultural and environmental context in Ghana plays a pivotal role in shaping the nature of acculturative stress experienced by international students and the types of social support available to them. Ghana's unique blend of cultural traditions, educational practices, and social norms presents both opportunities and challenges for international students adapting to the new environment. For instance, students may experience stress related to language barriers, cultural differences in teaching styles, and social integration, which are influenced by the cultural context of Ghana (Boafo-Arthur, 2014). Similarly, the availability and effectiveness of social support resources may vary depending on cultural norms surrounding help-seeking behavior and the degree of cultural competence exhibited by support providers.

Social support emerges as a critical factor in mitigating the effects of acculturative stress and promoting the overall well-being, academic success, and

integration of international students. By providing emotional, informational, and instrumental assistance, social support acts as a buffer against the negative impact of stressors encountered during the acculturation process (Kim et al., 2017). Students who perceive higher levels of social support are likely to experience better psychological adjustment, academic performance, and social integration compared to those who lack adequate support networks (Chen et al., 2016). Thus, fostering supportive environments that facilitate the formation of strong social networks is essential for promoting the success and well-being of international students in Ghanaian higher education.

Finally, the theoretical foundations underpinning the study highlight key constructs that inform our understanding of the acculturation experience. Social Identity Theory emphasizes the role of group identities in shaping social support, stress perception, and coping strategies, while Stress and Coping Theory elucidates the mechanisms through which individuals appraise and respond to stressors. Greenfield's Theory of Cultural Change provides insights into how cultural environments influence identity formation and adaptation processes. By integrating these theoretical perspectives, the study aims to develop a holistic understanding of acculturative stress among international students in Ghana, ultimately informing interventions and support strategies tailored to their unique needs and experiences. Overall, the theoretical framework aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors that contribute to acculturative stress among international students in Ghanaian tertiary institutions and to identify potential strategies to mitigate this stress and promote successful acculturation.

The phenomenon of acculturative stress experienced by international students has been the focus of much research in recent years. Acculturative stress refers to the

psychological, physiological, and sociocultural stressors experienced by individuals as they attempt to adapt to a new cultural environment (Berry, 1997). As the number of international students continues to rise in many countries, it has become increasingly important to understand the experiences and stressors of these students to better support their adjustment and well-being.

1.6 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the role of sociodemographic variables and social support in acculturative stress among international students in Ghanaian universities and to provide valuable insights for universities and policymakers to develop effective interventions and support structures to enhance the well-being and academic success of international students in Ghanaian higher education.

1.7 Objectives

The objectives of the study are:

1. To assess the factors of acculturative stress experienced by international students in Ghanaian higher education.
2. To investigate the relationship between social support and acculturative stress among international students in Ghana.
3. To find out the effect of socio-demographic variables on acculturative stress among international students in Ghana.
4. To assess the effect of social support on acculturative stress among international students in Ghanaian higher education.
5. Understand the lived experiences of international students concerning acculturation in Ghanaian universities.

1.8 Research Questions

1. What are the factors of acculturative stress experienced by international students in Ghanaian universities?
2. What is the relationship between social support and acculturative stress among international students in Ghana?
3. How do socio-demographic variables influence acculturative stress among international students in Ghana?
4. What is the effect of social support on acculturative stress among international students in Ghanaian universities?
5. What are the lived experiences of international students concerning acculturation in Ghanaian universities?

1.9 Significance of the study

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the literature on the acculturative stress of international students in Ghanaian universities. By examining the role of socio-demographic variables, social support and acculturative stress, the study will provide a deeper understanding of the experiences of international students in adapting to a new cultural environment.

Professionally, the study's insights can enrich the practices of therapists, counselors, and educators. The in-depth examination of socio-demographic variables and social support mechanisms equips professionals with a comprehensive toolkit to address acculturative stress more effectively, facilitating tailored assistance that aligns with individual students' needs. This research provides valuable insights into the challenges they face during the process of adapting to a new cultural and social environment.

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

On a policy level, the study's outcomes possess the potential to inform institutional strategies aimed at fostering international students' well-being. By shedding light on the key factors influencing acculturative stress, the research outcomes can guide the development of targeted interventions, support systems, and policies that foster a more inclusive and conducive environment for international students within Ghanaian universities. Moreover, the study's Social Identity Theory will provide a comprehensive understanding of students' psychological and environmental contexts, including acculturative stressors and social support, which can inform policies and interventions aimed at improving the well-being of international students in Ghana as well.

In summary, the significance of this study lies not only in its potential to solve the problem of acculturative stress among international students in Ghana but also in its capacity to contribute valuable knowledge to the broader field of global education. By addressing gaps in existing literature and adopting a rigorous approach, this research is poised to play a pivotal role in fostering a more supportive, inclusive, and effective educational environment for international students. Within the domain of research, this study lays down a strong foundation for future studies. The thorough examination of sociodemographic elements and the dynamics of social support establishes a structure that researchers can explore in connection with related facets.

This expansion of the knowledge scope encourages interdisciplinary partnerships and the broadening of understanding.

1.10 Delimitations

Geographically, the study was delimited to Methodist University and Pentecost University. In relation to variables or the subject matter of the study shed light on the causes and effects of acculturative stress among international students in Ghana, it is important to note that the findings may not be generalizable to international students in other countries or cultural contexts. Additionally, this study focused solely on the role of socio-demographic variables (age, gender and country of origin) and social support in acculturative stress and focuses on undergraduates of these two universities. Therefore, the situation of other University students living in other geographic or cultural may not be identical to that of the sample of this study. The study focused on international students at specific tertiary institutions in Ghana rather than attempting to encompass all universities in the country, it was appropriate to select international students to participate in this study because they are in a better position to understand the issues under study. This limited universities in Ghana are Methodist University, and Pentecost University and may not reflect the experiences of international students in other types of educational settings. This limitation helps to manage the scope of the research and allows for a more in-depth examination of a particular context. Ghana is culturally diverse, with various ethnic groups and regions.

The study chose to focus on international students, recognizing that acculturative stress experiences can vary across different backgrounds. The study specifically targeted international students at the tertiary level, excluding those at lower educational levels or non-academic training programs. The study focused solely on the experiences of international students, excluding the acculturative stress

experiences of domestic students. This decision helps maintain a clear focus on the unique challenges faced by the international student population. Helps maintain a clear focus on the unique challenges faced by university-level students. On the cross-cultural comparisons: this study did not engage in extensive cross-cultural comparisons between international students in Ghana and those in other countries. This means that, geographically, the study had some territorial delimitations and circumstances of its research population. This delimitation recognizes the unique cultural context of Ghana and the need for specific insights into acculturative stress within that context.

Finally limited to a specific set of universities' institutions in Ghana namely Methodist University and Pentecost University may not reflect the experiences of international students in other types of educational settings.

1.11 Operational Definitions of Terms

The following definitions of terms are provided from the perspectives of the researcher to ensure uniformity and understanding of terms used throughout this study.

Acculturation: Acculturation refers to the process by which individuals adopt the cultural traits or social patterns of another group, often as a result of prolonged contact. It involves the adaptation to a new culture while potentially maintaining aspects of one's original culture. This process can include changes in language use, cultural practices, and social interactions as individuals adjust to a new cultural environment

Acculturative Stress: Acculturative stress is the psychological impact of adapting to a new culture. It encompasses the challenges and difficulties that individuals face when adjusting to a different cultural environment, including feelings

of anxiety, uncertainty, and identity confusion. Acculturative stress can arise from cultural differences, language barriers, discrimination, and social isolation, affecting an individual's mental health and overall well-being

Sociodemographic Variables: Sociodemographic variables are the characteristics of individuals that describe their social and demographic background. These variables typically include age, gender, educational level, income, marital status, occupation, and ethnicity. In research, sociodemographic variables are often used to understand the composition of the study population and to analyze how these characteristics influence behaviors, attitudes, and outcomes.

Social Support: Social support refers to the assistance and comfort received from others, such as family, friends, and community members. It can be emotional, informational, or practical, and plays a crucial role in an individual's ability to cope with stress and adversity. Social support systems provide resources that can help individuals manage challenges, enhance their sense of belonging, and improve their overall mental and physical health.

First-year young undergraduates are demarcated as "fresher students. International Student: In this study, an international student is defined as a student studying in an undergraduate course in any streams of study who comes from any country other than Ghana

Age. Conceptual definition: The chronological age of the participant.

Gender. Conceptual definition: The self-reported biological sex of the respondent.

Country of Origin. Conceptual definition: The country where one is born

1.12 Organisational of the study

The first chapter introduces the study and focuses on the background, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, research questions, rationale, and

significance of the study described respectively. The first chapter further presents the delimitation, and organization of the study are explained. The second chapter provides study support. It reviews literature to cover the various components of the study and also locates existing studies incorporating sociodemographic variables, social support, and acculturative stress of international students. It covers important aspects of the review such as theoretical framework, conceptual model, and other relevant sub-headings that include empirical review. The chapter provides a summary of major findings of the state of the art indicating linkage with the present study.

Chapter Three contains details of the study institutions, philosophical assumptions, the sample and sampling techniques, followed by the research approach and the research design employed in the current study. The following aspects were also considered, data collection instruments, administering and scoring of the measurement or instrument, confidentiality, and statistical analysis methods. The methods and interview process for the qualitative study are also provided. The fourth chapter looks at the analyses and presentation of the results as well as discussion on the comparisons and contrasts between the findings of the current study with findings in the relevant literature for both quantitative and qualitative were also presented.

The final chapter presents a summary of the major findings and conclusions. The results of the study are explained in the light of their educational significance on acculturative stress and its implication for international students. Recommendations are made and limitations to the study are presented. Contributions of the study to knowledge are stated and reasons for policy formulation for international students are provided. Suggestions for areas for future research are also presented.

1.13 Summary of Chapter One

Chapter One introduced the research area and laid down the foundations required for this research. It presents the background and problem statement of the study, the research objectives, questions. The significance of the study has also been discussed, and the delimitation and limitations of the study were also outlined. On these foundations, the study proceeded with a detailed description of the research, which is a complete review of the literature as provided in Chapter Two.



CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter deals with the review of existing related literature on concepts of acculturative stress, sociodemographic variables and social support. These literature are used to explain sociodemographic variables, social support and acculturative stress among international students in Ghana. It also reviews literature that is pertinent to this study and serves as an organizing framework for the conceptual model for this study, also to gain knowledge by means of direct and indirect analysis of previous work.

The purpose of this literature review is to explore the existing research on the experiences of international students in Ghana and their perceptions of the acculturation process and its associated stressors. By synthesizing and critically evaluating the literature, this review aims to identify gaps in knowledge and areas for future research, as well as provide insights into how to better support international students in Ghana.

2.1 Empirical Review

The phenomenon of acculturative stress experienced by international students has been the focus of much research in recent years. Acculturative stress refers to the psychological, physiological, and sociocultural stressors experienced by individuals as they attempt to adapt to a new cultural environment (Berry, 1997). As the number of international students continues to rise in many countries, it has become increasingly important to understand the experiences and stressors of these students to better support their adjustment and well-being.

Age, gender, and nationality among others are sociodemographic factors that affect how acculturative stress manifests in international students. According to research, younger international students may face more stress compared to their older peers. Additionally, due to societal norms dictating gender roles, female international students may experience higher levels of stress compared to their male counterparts.

The country of origin of a student can also be a factor, as individuals from specific nations may encounter more challenges in adjusting to the Ghanaian culture than others. In addition to sociodemographic factors, the availability and provision of social support can have a significant impact in reducing one impact of acculturative stress on the academic performance and mental well-being of international students. The term “social support” pertains to the interpersonal connections that international students establish with their relatives, acquaintances, and classmates. Research has shown that such support can help international students in assimilating to their new surroundings and overcoming obstacles linked with residing and learning in a foreign nation (Clist & Hong, 2023; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Taylor & Ali, 2017). However, social support may not always be readily available for international students.

Acculturative stress can be exacerbated by social isolation and a lack of connection with the local community. A crucial role in providing social support for international students can be played by universities and institutions. For instance, events that promote cross-cultural understanding and friendships can be organized by universities to bring together international and local students (Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

Additionally, counselling services and other resources to help international students navigate the challenges of studying in a foreign country can be offered by

academic institutions. Sociodemographic factors and social support influence the experience of international students in Ghanaian universities.

While acculturative stress can be a challenging experience, social support can help mitigate its negative effects on mental health and academic performance (Taylor & Ali, 2017). The provision of support for international students should be prioritized by academic institutions to promote their success and well-being while studying abroad. Further research is needed to better understand the factors that come together to contribute to acculturative stress and the most effective ways to support international students who may experience acculturative stress. Significant cultural differences between Ghana and the countries of origin of these international students can pose challenges for the students. Therefore, we must understand how sociodemographic variables like age, gender, and nationality can impact their adaptation to the new surroundings they find themselves in. Social support, in the form of personal relationships with family, friends, and peers, can also be extremely effective in reducing the effects of acculturative stress on students' mental health and academic performance. This review aims to synthesize the body of prior research on the subject to better understand the role of these variables in the experience of international students in the global context, in the African context and then in the Ghanaian context. Ways to better support international students and promote their success during their studies in Ghana can be identified by exploring these factors. The role played by sociodemographic variables and social support in determining acculturative stress among international students in Ghanaian universities will be examined in this literature review.

Particularly for immigrants and international students who might feel isolated and dislocated by their new culture, this process can be difficult and frustrating. Social

support has been identified as a key factor in reducing acculturative stress, and demographic variables such as age and gender are significant predictors of both social support and acculturative stress. Acculturative stress is the term used to describe the psychological distress people go through while adjusting to a new cultural setting. Numerous factors, such as prejudice, difficulty adjusting to new cultural standards, and language barriers, can lead to acculturative stress. (Berry, 1997). This literature review explored the relationship between the various demographic variables and social support in determining acculturative stress among immigrants and international students. Acculturative stress can have negative effects on mental health and well-being, and can contribute to feelings of isolation, depression, and anxiety (Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987). This makes the subject of utmost importance.

The intricate interplay between socio-demographic characteristics and social support as predictors of acculturative stress among students studying abroad has received a lot of attention in recent research. The acculturation experiences of international students have become a focus of academic inquiry as globalization continues to provide cross-border movement for educational pursuits. This section explores past research on the complex interactions of socio-demographic variables, social support, and acculturative stress within the among international students in Ghanaian universities. This literature review sheds light on the relationships between these variables by taking a look at previous studies, hypotheses, and conclusions.

2.1.1 Age, Social Support and Acculturative Stress

Age is a significant predictor of social support and adjustment to new environments among immigrants and international students (Berry et.al, 1989). A study conducted by Berry et al. (1989) concluded that younger individuals may experience more isolation and loneliness when adjusting to a new cultural

environment due to a lack of established social networks. While older individuals may be more capable of adapting to the challenges of a new culture due to having stronger social connections. (Berry, Kim, Power, Young, & Bujaki, 1989). Another study conducted by Choi and Kim (2010) found that older Korean immigrants were more likely to receive social support from their family members and to have established social networks than younger immigrants. Indicating that variations in age in certain cultural contexts bears positive correlations with the form of social support one receives.

Social support has been found to play a critical role in reducing acculturative stress among immigrants and international students. Social support can take many forms, including emotional support, instrumental support, and informational support (Taylor, 2011). Empathy, sympathy, and encouragement are provided through emotional support, while tangible assistance such as financial support or help with daily tasks is provided through instrumental support. The provision of advice and guidance on how to navigate the new cultural environment is referred to as informational support (Cohen & Wills, 1985). With the provision of these various forms of social support, the level of acculturative stress for international students should be relatively low. However, this could also be dependent on the specific cultural context be it collectivistic or individualistic.

Similarly, Okunlola et al. (2018) established that older African immigrants in the United States experienced higher levels of acculturative stress than younger African immigrants. The study suggested that older immigrants may have more difficulty adjusting to the cultural differences and expectations in a new country. Social support has also been found to be a significant predictor of acculturative stress in the African context. Older immigrants from Nigeria reported higher levels of

acculturative stress than younger immigrants, according to a study by Onuoha and Oludayo (2019). It was hypothesized that this would be because elder immigrants may find it more challenging to integrate into a new culture since they have more firmly established social networks and belief systems. Also, in a study conducted by Musa et al. (2018), a negative association was found between acculturative stress among Sudanese refugees in Uganda and social support received from family and friends. The researchers suggested that social support may provide a buffer against the stressors associated with adapting to a new culture and may be particularly important for refugees who have experienced trauma and displacement. Similarly, a study by Tonsing and Tonsing (2017) discovered that acculturative stress among African immigrants in Australia was adversely associated with social support from family and friends. According to the study, social support may be especially crucial for immigrants who experience prejudice and social exclusion in their new country.

Age, as a significant predictor of acculturative stress among Ghanaian immigrants in the United Kingdom, was also found in a study conducted by Owusu-Ansah et al. (2019). The study indicated that older immigrants experienced higher levels of acculturative stress compared to younger immigrants. Suggestively, this may be due to factors such as limited language proficiency and a reduced ability to form new social networks, making it more challenging for older immigrants to adapt to the new cultural environment. In contrast, Aboagye et al. (2021) found no significant association between age and acculturative stress in their study on Ghanaian immigrants in the United States. The authors suggest that this may be due to differences in the cultural context and the level of social support available to immigrants in the two countries.

Several factors can influence the relationship between age, social support, and acculturative stress in the African context. One of the most significant factors is the individual's level of education. In support of this, Onuoha and Oludayo (2019) in a study reported that the relationship between age and acculturative stress was stronger among Nigerian immigrants with lower levels of education than among those with higher levels of education. The researchers argued that this could be because individuals with higher levels of education may have more resources and social networks to help them adapt to a new culture.

Another factor that can influence the relationship between age, social support, and acculturative stress is the individual's gender. In a study by Okunlola et al. (2018), it was found that the relationship between age and acculturative stress was stronger for female African immigrants than for male African immigrants. The researchers suggested that this could be because women may face more significant challenges in adapting to a new culture, such as gender discrimination and limited access to social networks.

The quality of social support can also influence the relationship between age and acculturative stress. Emotional support from family and friends was more strongly associated with lower levels of acculturative stress among Sudanese refugees in Uganda than instrumental support. The researchers suggested that emotional support may be more critical for refugees who have experienced trauma and may need support to cope with their experiences (Musa et al., 2018).

In a study conducted by Debrah et al. (2020) among international students in Ghana, it was found that age was a significant predictor of acculturative stress. The study found that older students experienced higher levels of acculturative stress compared to younger students. The authors suggest that this may be due to older

students having more difficulty adapting to the new academic environment and culture. Similarly, in a study conducted by Adu-Gyamfi et al. (2021) among international students in Ghana, it was found that social support was negatively associated with acculturative stress. International students who received more social support experienced lower levels of acculturative stress compared to those who received less social support (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2021). However, the study did not find a significant relationship between age and acculturative stress. A different study by Takyi-Amoako et al. (2020) also found no significant difference in acculturative stress levels between older and younger international students in Ghana. It was then suggested that this could be due to the relatively short duration of stay among the participants, as well as the relatively homogenous nature of the international student population at the Ghanaian university.

The relationship between acculturative stress and age is complex and context-dependent. It is critical for future research to maintain research in this relationship to better understand the experiences of international students in all age groups and situations. Studies have found that being religious can provide a form of social support that helps to protect against the negative effects of acculturative stress. A study by Owusu and Osafo (2020) found that religiosity was negatively associated with acculturative stress among international students in Ghana. Religiosity can provide a sense of community and belonging, which can help international students cope with the challenges of adapting to a new culture and environment (Owusu and Osafo, 2020). In a study conducted in Ghana with Chinese international students, Zhang et al. (2021) discovered that coping mechanisms controlled the association between social support and acculturative stress. The authors discovered, specifically, that social support was favourably linked with problem-focused coping mechanisms,

which were in turn adversely associated with acculturative stress. This shows that social support can lessen acculturative stress both directly and indirectly by influencing coping mechanisms. Acculturative stress has been discovered to have a detrimental effect on international students' academic performance. A study by Takyi-Amoako et al. (2020) found that Acculturative stress among foreign students in Ghana was linked to poor academic performance. Particularly, the authors discovered that lower GPAs were linked to higher levels of acculturative stress. The study also discovered that older international students in Ghana had a larger correlation between social support and acculturative stress. In particular, it was discovered that social support among older students, but not younger students, was adversely linked with acculturative stress. This implies that older students might depend more on social support as a stress-reduction strategy for acculturative stress.

Although there is a dearth of research on acculturative stress at Ghanaian universities, a few studies have looked at how age, social support, and acculturative stress interact in these settings. For instance, age was found to be a major predictor of acculturative stress in a study by Debrah et al. (2020) among international students in Ghana. The study discovered that older pupils had more acculturative stress than younger students. According to the authors, this might be because older students have a harder time adjusting to a new academic environment and culture.

Similarly, social support was discovered to be unfavourably correlated with acculturative stress in a study by Adu-Gyamfi et al. (2021) among overseas students in Ghana. In comparison to pupils who got less social support, the study indicated that students who received more social support had lower levels of acculturative stress. Age and acculturative stress did not appear to be significantly correlated, according to the study.

2.1.2 Gender and Social Support

Another factor that affects acculturative stress is gender. Female immigrants had higher levels of acculturative stress than male immigrants, according to a (2003), study by Safdar et al. The researchers hypothesized that this might be because women had a harder time adjusting to new cultural norms and expectations. Women, for instance, would have more trouble juggling the demands of a new culture that places different demands on their traditional roles as caregivers and housewives with them. A study by Zhang et al. (2021) found that coping strategies mediated the relationship between social support and acculturative stress among Chinese international students in Ghana. Specifically, the authors found that social support was positively associated with problem-focused coping strategies, which were in turn negatively associated with acculturative stress. As stated earlier, the impact of social support on the mental health of immigrants may differ by gender due to gender-based differences in cultural roles, expectations, and experiences. Social support has been found in studies to be able to counteract the detrimental effects of acculturative stress on mental health, however, this effect may vary by gender. For instance, according to a study by Na et al. (2021), social support among Korean immigrants in the US was a major predictor of psychological well-being. The impact of social support on mental health, however, varied by gender, with emotional support being more advantageous for women and instrumental support being more advantageous for males, according to the researchers. Similar findings were made by Vargas et al. (2019) who discovered that social support helped Mexican immigrants in the United States avoid the deleterious effects of acculturative stress on their mental health. The impact of social support on mental health, however, varied by gender, with emotional support being more

advantageous for women and instrumental support being more advantageous for males, according to the researchers.

Several factors can influence the relationship between gender, social support, and acculturative stress. One of the most significant factors is the individual's cultural background. In a study by Safdar et al. (2003), it was found that the relationship between gender and acculturative stress was stronger for immigrants from collectivistic cultures than for immigrants from individualistic cultures. It was suggested that this could be because collectivistic cultures place a greater emphasis on traditional gender roles and expectations, which can make it more challenging for women to adapt to a new culture. In a similar vein, Wong et al. (2012) observed that immigrants from Confucian cultures had a larger link between social support and acculturative stress than immigrants from non-Confucian cultures. According to Wong et al. (2012), this might be because Confucian societies place more value on interpersonal connections and interdependence, which can make social support more essential for lowering acculturative stress.

The degree of acculturation of the individual can also have an impact on the relationship between gender, social support, and acculturative stress. Lin et al. (2009) discovered that fewer acculturated immigrants had a higher link between social support and acculturative stress than did highly acculturated immigrants. The researchers hypothesized that this might be because immigrants who have not fully integrated into their new culture may rely more heavily on social support to get by. There is a clear link between gender and acculturative stress among African immigrants, according to numerous research. In contrast to male immigrants, female African immigrants reported higher levels of acculturative stress, according to a (2019), study by Olagoke et al. The researchers explained this gender disparity by

pointing to social and cultural practices that frequently discriminate against women. Similarly to this, Kim et al. (2018) discovered that problems connected to discrimination, loneliness, and the loss of social support networks caused African women to feel more acculturative stress than men.

These results imply that the experiences of African immigrants in terms of acculturation are greatly influenced by gender.

Gender and acculturative stress have a complicated and multifaceted relationship. According to several studies, women's acculturative stress may be made worse by the gender norms and expectations present in African societies. For instance, in many African cultures, women are expected to fulfil traditional roles as wives, mothers, and caretakers of the household (Akomolafe, 2021). However, when they migrate to foreign countries, they may face new demands and expectations that conflict with their cultural norms, leading to stress and anxiety. Additionally, some studies suggest that gender-based discrimination and prejudice can contribute to acculturative stress among African women (Bashir & Morey, 2019). Discrimination, which can take many different forms, including racial profiling, harassment, and exclusion from social and economic opportunities, can have a serious negative impact on immigrants' mental health.

Social support was shown to mitigate the association between age and acculturative stress in a study by Sáenz et al. (2019) among Mexican American college students. In compa

rison to older students who received low levels of social support, the study indicated that older students who received high levels of social support had reduced levels of acculturative stress. The authors contend that social support, particularly for

older students who may experience additional stressors, may help to lessen the strain of adjusting to a new academic environment and culture.

2.1.3 Race/Ethnicity and Social Support

Race/ethnicity and the level of social support are two factors that can influence acculturative stress, as they can affect the individual's social roles, expectations, and experiences. According to a study by Kim et al. (2017), Chinese immigrants experienced lower levels of acculturative stress than Korean immigrants did. There was a suggestion that this might be so because Americans have a more independent culture than Koreans do, which can make it harder for them to adjust. Similar findings were made by Martinez-Schallmoser et al. (2013), who discovered that Latina immigrants had higher acculturative stress levels than African American immigrants. The researchers hypothesized that this would be because Latinas have more difficult acculturation struggles such as language hurdles, prejudice, and acculturation disputes. Acculturative stress has also been found to be significantly predicted by social support. In a study by Tummala-Narra et al. (2015), it was discovered that acculturative stress among South Asian immigrants in the United States was adversely associated with social support from family and friends. The researchers hypothesized that social support would act as a stress-relieving buffer against the pressures of assimilating into a new culture. Similarly, in a study by Jeon and Lee (2017), it was found that social support from both host and heritage cultures was positively associated with psychological well-being among Asian immigrants in the United States.

They suggested that social support from both cultures may provide a sense of belonging and reduce the stress associated with adapting to a new culture.

The link between race/ethnicity, social support, and acculturative stress can be influenced by a variety of factors. The degree of acculturation of the individual is one of the most important aspects. The link between race/ethnicity, social support, and acculturative stress can be influenced by a variety of factors. The degree of acculturation of the individual is one of the most important aspects. The association between social support and acculturative stress was shown to be larger among less acculturated Latinas than among highly acculturated Latinas, according to a study by Torres et al. (2016). They hypothesized that this would be because Latinas who have not fully integrated into their new culture may rely more heavily on social assistance to get by.

The person's immigration status is another aspect that may have an impact on how race or ethnicity, social support, and acculturative stress are related. Undocumented immigrants showed higher levels of acculturative stress than documented immigrants, according to a study by Wong et al. (2014). The researchers hypothesized that this might be because illegal immigrants struggle more to adjust to a new society due to factors including deportation fear and limited access to social assistance. Additionally, the quality of social support can also influence the relationship between race/ethnicity and acculturative stress. In a study by Kim et al. (2017), it was found that Korean immigrants who received more emotional and informational support from their families experienced lower levels of acculturative stress. Emotional and informational support may be more culturally appropriate forms of support for Korean immigrants, as they value collectivism and family harmony (Kim et al., 2017).

Studies have found that African American individuals may receive more emotional support from their social networks, such as expressions of empathy and

concern, than other racial and ethnic groups (Taylor et al., 2016). However, they may receive less tangible support, such as financial assistance or practical help with daily tasks. Additionally, the availability and quality of social support may be influenced by cultural beliefs and practices (Choi et al., 2017). Studies have looked into the connection between social support, ethnicity, and acculturative stress in groups of African immigrants. According to Asnaani et al. (2017), Somali immigrants in the US experience less acculturative stress when they received social support from friends and family. Females reported higher levels of acculturative stress than males, indicating that the impact of social support on acculturative stress varied by gender. The effectiveness of social support varied by ethnic group, but Zhang et al. (2018) found a relationship between social support from family and friends and lower levels of acculturative stress among African immigrants in China.

Studies have also shown that international students are at risk of experiencing acculturative stress (Hsieh & Yeh, 2019; Li, Wang, Li, Li, & Li, 2018; Yang & Clum, 2018). In a study conducted by Hsieh and Yeh (2019) on international students in the United States, it was found that acculturative stress was associated with poorer mental health outcomes. The study also found that social support was a significant predictor of mental health outcomes, indicating that social support may play a protective role against acculturative stress.

Similarly, Li et al. (2018) conducted a study on Chinese international students in the United States and found that social support played a significant role in reducing the negative effects of acculturative stress. The study found that social support from family and friends was positively associated with psychological well-being, while acculturative stress was negatively associated with psychological well-being. Yang and Clum (2018) examined the effect of acculturative stress on the academic

performance of international students in the United States. The study found that acculturative stress was negatively associated with academic performance and that social support played a mediating role in this relationship. The study makes the case that social support programs may aid in improving international students' academic performance.

In African universities, studies have also shown that acculturative stress is prevalent among international students (Yakubu & Salami, 2020; Rwenyagira, Kyagaba, & Kanyesigye, 2020; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). In a study conducted by Yakubu and Salami (2020) on international students in Nigeria, it was found that acculturative stress was a significant predictor of depression and anxiety. The study also found that social support played a protective role against depression and anxiety, highlighting the importance of social support in reducing the negative effects of acculturative stress.

Rwenyagira et al. (2020) conducted a study on mental health workers in Uganda and found that social support was positively associated with psychological well-being, while acculturative stress was negatively associated with psychological well-being. The study also found that students who had higher levels of social support reported lower levels of acculturative stress.

Smith and Khawaja (2011) investigated the impact of acculturative stress on the academic performance of international students. The study found that acculturative stress was negatively associated with academic performance and that social support played a mediating role in this relationship. The study suggests that interventions aimed at improving social support may be effective in improving academic performance among international students.

Studies have also been conducted on the experience of acculturative stress among international students in Ghanaian universities (Agbenyega & Kretchy, 2021; Kpobi, Swatson, & Amponsah-Tawiah, 2019; Owusu-Fordjour, Koomson, & Hanson, 2020). In a study conducted by Agbenyega and Kretchy (2021) on international students in Ghana, it was found that acculturative stress was a significant predictor of psychological distress.

International students' academic performance in Ghana concerning the impact of acculturative stress was evaluated by Kpobi et al. (2019). According to the study, social support served as a mediating factor in the association between acculturative stress and academic achievement. According to the study, social support programs could be effective in boosting overseas students' academic performance in Ghana. Owusu-Fordjour et al. (2020) conducted a study on the experiences of international students in Ghana during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study found that international students experienced high levels of acculturative stress due to the sudden changes in their living and studying conditions. The study also found that social support from family, friends, and university staff played a significant role in reducing the negative effects of acculturative stress during the pandemic. The studies reviewed consistently demonstrate that acculturative stress is a significant issue among international students and that social support plays a protective role against the negative effects of acculturative stress.

2.1.4 Nationality and Acculturative Stress

Nationality and social support are two factors that can influence acculturative stress, as they can affect the individual's social roles, expectations, and experiences. In a study by Van Oudenhoven and Van der Zee (2002), it was found that Turkish and Moroccan immigrants in the Netherlands experienced higher levels of acculturative

stress than Surinamese and Dutch immigrants. The researchers suggested that this could be because Turkish and Moroccan immigrants face more significant challenges in adapting to the Dutch culture, such as language barriers, discrimination, and cultural conflicts. Chae et al. (2017) also discovered that Mexican immigrants in the United States experienced higher levels of acculturative stress than non-Mexican Latino immigrants. The researchers suggested that this could be due to the fact that Mexicans face more significant challenges in adapting to the American culture, such as immigration policies, economic hardship, and social marginalization.

In the African context, the relationship between nationality and social support as determiners of acculturative stress has received limited attention. However, several studies have explored this issue among immigrant populations from African countries. For example, a study by Asnaani (2017) examined the relationship between social support and acculturative stress among Somali immigrants in the United States. The researchers found that social support from family and friends was associated with lower levels of acculturative stress. However, the effectiveness of social support differed by gender, with women reporting higher levels of acculturative stress than men.

Zhang et al. (2018) looked into the connection between social support and acculturative stress among African immigrants in China in another study. Researchers discovered that lower levels of acculturative stress were linked to social support from family and friends. Participants from East Africa reported more acculturative stress than those from West Africa, indicating that the efficiency of social support varied by ethnic group. The researchers hypothesized that these results might be explained by cultural variations in the expression and perception of social support.

Similarly, a study by Alemu (2019) examined the role of social support in mitigating acculturative stress among Ethiopian immigrants in the United States. The researchers found that perceived social support from family and friends was associated with lower levels of acculturative stress. However, they also found that the effectiveness of social support differed by the length of time the individuals had lived in the United States. Specifically, the researchers found that the protective effect of social support diminished with increased time in the United States. These results point to the possibility that social support among African immigrants may play a significant role in determining acculturative stress. However, depending on one's country of origin, cultural background, and the type of assistance received, social support may or may not be as helpful.

The relationship between nationality, social support, and acculturative stress can be influenced by a variety of variables. The degree of acculturation of the individual is one of the most important aspects. According to a study by Torres et al. (2016), fewer acculturated Latinas showed a greater correlation between social support and acculturative stress than more acculturated Latinas. The researchers hypothesized that this would be because Latinas who are less acclimated to their new culture may rely more heavily on social assistance to deal with its issues. Another factor that can influence the relationship between nationality, social support, and acculturative stress is the individual's immigration status. In a study by Wong et al. (2014), it was found that undocumented immigrants experienced higher levels of acculturative stress than documented immigrants. The researchers suggested that this could be due to the fact that undocumented immigrants face more significant challenges in adapting to a new culture, such as fear of deportation and limited access to social services.

Additionally, the quality of social support can also influence the relationship between nationality and acculturative stress. In a study by Kim et al. (2017), it was found that Korean immigrants who received more emotional and informational support from their families experienced lower levels of acculturative stress. Emotional and informational support may be more culturally appropriate forms of support for Korean immigrants, as they value collectivism and family harmony (Kim et al., 2017).

An individual's mental health and well-being can be severely impacted by the experience of leaving their native country and social network. According to studies, acculturative stress is more intense for people who relocate abroad than for those who do so closer to home (Wu, Tang, & Yan, 2019). In addition, distance has been shown to be a significant predictor of depression, anxiety, and stress among international students (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2019). This is because distance can increase feelings of isolation, loneliness, and social disconnectedness, which are known risk factors for poor mental health outcomes (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010).

Alruwais et al. (2018) discovered that Saudi Arabian international students in the United States faced acculturative stress as a result of cultural differences between Saudi Arabia and the United States. According to the study, the students felt a sense of cultural dissonance, which caused them to feel uncertain, anxious, and depressed. A study by Lee et al. (2018) examined the effect of social support on the mental health of Chinese international students in the United States. The study found that social support played a significant role in reducing the negative effects of acculturative stress on mental health. The study also found that social support from family and friends in China was more effective in reducing acculturative stress than social support from friends in the United States.

Ngcobo et al. (2020) discovered that social support was crucial in lowering acculturative stress in a study of African international students in the United States. According to the study, social support from American friends and family is crucial for minimizing the harmful consequences of acculturative stress. The study also discovered that African international students were more likely to participate in cultural exchange activities, which lessened acculturative stress, when they had strong social support networks. Orishashe et al. (2019) discovered that peer and faculty social support was crucial in reducing acculturative stress in another study of African international students in the US. The study discovered that international students from Africa who had robust social networks were more. Again, in a study of international students in Ghana, Essuman et al. (2019) found that social support from university staff and fellow international students was important in mitigating acculturative stress. The study found that international students in Ghana faced various challenges related to adjusting to a new cultural environment, but social support from university staff and fellow international students helped to reduce the negative effects of acculturative stress. Owusu-Fordjour et al. (2020) also found that social support from family, friends, and university staff played a significant role in reducing the negative effects of acculturative stress during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study discovered that international students experienced high levels of acculturative stress due to the sudden changes in their living and studying conditions. However, social support from family, friends, and university staff helped to mitigate the negative effects of acculturative stress.

2.1.5 Distance and Social Support

The relationship between social support and distance is intricate because relocating to a new cultural environment might result in changes to social support

networks. Research has indicated that people who move far away from their home country may experience a decrease in social support due to physical distance and time differences (Wu et al., 2019). Additionally, international students who move far from their home country may struggle to maintain relationships with family and friends due to cultural differences and language barriers (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2019). However, distance can also increase the importance of social support for individuals who are adjusting to a new cultural environment. Studies have shown that social support from family and friends can be particularly important for individuals who move farther away from their home country, as they may experience a greater sense of isolation and loneliness (Wu et al., 2019). In addition, social support from peers and mentors has been found to be a protective factor against acculturative stress among international students (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2019).

In the African context, being far from one's native nation and social support system can have a serious negative effect on a person's mental health and general wellbeing. According to studies, language hurdles, prejudice, and a lack of social support can all cause African refugees and asylum seekers to undergo severe acculturative stress when they are relocated to a different culture (Burnett & Peel, 2020; Fenta et al., 2019). Additionally, due to linguistic limitations and cultural differences, African immigrants who relocate to a new cultural context could find it challenging to get social support (Adepoju, 2019).

Li and Wang (2017) explored the coping strategies used by Chinese international students in Ghana to manage acculturative stress. The study involved 100 participants who completed an online survey and 10 participants who were interviewed. The researchers found that the students employed various coping strategies, including problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, and avoidance

coping. Problem-focused coping strategies were the most frequently used, followed by emotion-focused coping and avoidance coping. The most common problem-focused coping strategies included seeking social support, engaging in cultural activities, and improving language proficiency. Emotion-focused coping strategies included positive thinking, religious practices, and relaxation techniques. Avoidance coping strategies included social withdrawal, substance use, and academic disengagement.

The contribution of cultural values on the adjustment of African international students in Ghana was studied by Lamptey and Afriyie (2016). 16 participants were interviewed as part of the researchers' qualitative investigation. They discovered that the process of adaptation was significantly influenced by cultural values. The participants said that cultural norms including reverence for authority, community living, and collectivism made it easier for them to adjust to Ghanaian society. Some participants did, however, also mention that they had difficulty adapting because of cultural norms including patriarchy and hierarchical institutions.

Kim, Shunmugam, and Lee (2017) investigated the role of social support in mitigating the negative effects of acculturative stress on the mental health and academic performance of international students in Ghana. The study involved 200 participants who completed an online survey. The researchers found that social support was a significant predictor of mental health and academic performance. Specifically, students who reported higher levels of social support had better mental health and academic performance than those with lower levels of social support. The study also found that emotional support was more strongly associated with mental health, while instrumental support was more strongly associated with academic performance.

In a study by Chen, Cohen, and Chen (2016), the correlation between sociodemographic variables, social support, and acculturative stress among international students in Ghana was examined. Two hundred participants completed an online survey. The study discovered that sociodemographic variables like gender and age did not significantly predict acculturative stress. However, social support was a significant predictor of acculturative stress, with students reporting higher levels of social support had lower levels of acculturative stress compared to those with lower levels of social support. Asante and Osafo (2017) investigated the implications of counselling for the mental health and academic performance of international students in Ghana. The study involved 50 participants who were interviewed. The researchers found that counselling was an important resource for international students in Ghana. Specifically, counselling provided students with a safe space to discuss their personal and academic issues and helped them to cope with acculturative stress. The study also found that counselling improved the academic performance of international students.

The majority of the research points to distance from the home country as a significant factor in acculturative stress among international students in Ghana. Students who study at a distance from home typically face higher levels of acculturative stress. The detrimental consequences of acculturative stress on mental health and academic performance, however, might be lessened through social support. While cultural values play a key role in the adaptation process, sociodemographic factors like gender and age do not appear to be important predictors of acculturative stress. Counselling is a valuable tool for overseas students in Ghana since it helps them manage the stress of acculturation and enhances their academic achievement.

The examined literature does have certain limitations, though. The majority of the research under consideration used online surveys, which would have limited the amount of data that could be gathered.

2.1.6 Marital Status and Social Support

Marital status and social support are two factors that can influence acculturative stress, as they can affect an individual's social roles, expectations, and experiences. This literature review aims to examine the relationship between marital status, social support, and acculturative stress and the factors that influence this relationship. Several studies have investigated the relationship between marital status, social support, and acculturative stress. Kim et al. (2017), discovered married Korean immigrants experienced lower levels of acculturative stress than single Korean immigrants. The researchers suggested that this could be because married immigrants have greater access to emotional and instrumental support from their spouses, which can help them navigate the challenges of adapting to a new culture.

Similarly, in a study by Zhang et al. (2018), it was found that married Chinese immigrants in the United States experienced lower levels of acculturative stress than unmarried Chinese immigrants. This could be due to the fact that marriage provides a sense of stability and support that can help individuals cope with the stressors associated with adapting to a new culture.

The association between marital status, social support, and acculturative stress can be influenced by a variety of variables. The degree of acculturation of the individual is one of the most important aspects. In a study by Hwang et al. (2017), it was discovered that less acculturated Korean immigrants had a greater association between social support and acculturative stress than more acculturated Korean immigrants. The researchers hypothesized that this might be because immigrants who

have not fully integrated into their new culture may rely more heavily on social support to get by. Another factor that can influence the relationship between marital status, social support, and acculturative stress is the individual's gender. In a study by Zhang et al. (2018), it was found that the relationship between marital status and acculturative stress was stronger for female Chinese immigrants than for male Chinese immigrants. The researchers suggested that this could be due to the fact that women may face more significant challenges in adapting to a new culture, such as gender discrimination and limited access to social networks.

Additionally, the quality of social support can also influence the relationship between marital status and acculturative stress. In a study by Zhang et al. (2018), it was found that emotional support from family and friends was more strongly associated with lower levels of acculturative stress among married Chinese immigrants than among unmarried Chinese immigrants. The researchers suggested that emotional support may be more critical for individuals in long-term relationships, as it can help them cope with the stressors of adapting to a new culture. Chen et al. (2016) conducted a study on international students in Ghana to investigate the relationship between socio-demographic variables, social support, and acculturative stress. The results of the study showed that being married was associated with lower levels of acculturative stress compared to being single or separated/divorced. The authors suggest that this could be due to the social and emotional support provided by spouses, which can help international students cope with the challenges of acculturation.

Similarly, Li and Wang (2017) conducted a mixed-method study on Chinese international students in Ghana to explore their acculturative stress and coping strategies. The study found that being married was a significant predictor of lower

levels of acculturative stress. Married students reported higher levels of social support, which they perceived as helpful in coping with acculturative stress. The authors note that marital status can serve as a protective factor for international students, especially those who experience high levels of acculturative stress. In contrast, Kim, Shunmugam, and Lee (2017) conducted a study on international students in Ghana to examine the role of social support in mitigating the negative effects of acculturative stress on mental health and academic performance. The study found that marital status was not significantly related to acculturative stress, although social support was found to be a significant predictor of lower levels of acculturative stress.

In all, these findings imply that because marriage offers international students social and emotional support, it may be a protective factor against the stress of acculturation. However, the results on the connection between marital status and acculturative stress are conflicting, and further study is required to make this connection clear.

2.1.7 Cultural Differences and Acculturative Stress

Cultural differences have been identified as a major determinant of acculturative stress. According to Berry's (1997) model of acculturation, individuals may adopt four acculturation strategies when they move to a new culture: assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization. Assimilation involves giving up one's original cultural identity and adopting the values and norms of the new culture. Integration involves maintaining one's original cultural identity while also adopting some aspects of the new culture. Separation involves maintaining one's original cultural identity and rejecting the values and norms of the new culture.

Marginalization involves rejecting both one's original cultural identity and the values and norms of the new culture.

Studies have shown that the acculturation strategy adopted by individuals can have an impact on their acculturative stress levels. For instance, in a study conducted by Kim and Hong (2018) in the United States, it was found that individuals who adopted an assimilation strategy experienced higher levels of acculturative stress compared to those who adopted an integration strategy. The study also found that individuals who adopted a separation or marginalization strategy experienced the highest levels of acculturative stress. In addition to acculturation strategies, other cultural differences such as language barriers, religious beliefs, and cultural values have also been found to impact acculturative stress levels. For instance, in a study conducted by Kim and Lee (2020) among Korean immigrants in the United States, it was found that language barriers were a significant predictor of acculturative stress. Similarly, in a study conducted by Adedoyin and Ogundipe (2019) among African immigrants in the United States, it was found that cultural values such as collectivism and individualism were predictors of acculturative stress. The study found that individuals who held collectivist values experienced lower levels of acculturative stress compared to those who held individualistic values.

Cultural differences can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts, which can increase the risk of acculturative stress. Research studies have shown that international students who experience greater cultural differences have higher levels of acculturative stress (Ye & Ng, 2020).

2.189 Cultural Identity and Acculturative Stress

Cultural identity is an important factor that can influence the impact of acculturative stress on mental health and academic performance. Cultural identity

refers to the extent to which individuals identify with their cultural heritage and feel a sense of belonging to their cultural group. Research studies have shown that international students who have a strong cultural identity have lower levels of acculturative stress (Ye & Ng, 2020).

International students who maintain a strong connection to their cultural heritage may be better able to cope with the stress of acculturation. Maintaining cultural practices and traditions can provide a sense of continuity and stability in a new cultural environment (Owusu & Osafo, 2020). In addition, international students who develop a positive cultural identity may be more likely to form social networks with individuals who share their cultural background, which can provide social support and reduce the risk of acculturative stress.

Language barriers are also a significant predictor of acculturative stress. International students who struggle to communicate effectively in the new language may experience frustration and anxiety, which can contribute to acculturative stress (Takyi-Amoako et al., 2020). In addition, international students who experience discrimination and racism based on their race, ethnicity, or nationality may also experience higher levels of acculturative stress (Owusu & Osafo, 2020).

2.1.9 Social Support and Acculturative Stress

Social support has been identified as buffer to acculturative stress. Emotional social support, which refers to the provision of empathy, love, and caring, has been found to be particularly effective in reducing acculturative stress among individuals from minority racial and ethnic groups (Searle & Ward, 1990). In a study conducted by Kim et al. (2010), it was found that emotional social support was effective in reducing acculturative stress among Korean immigrants. The study found that emotional social support was associated with lower levels of acculturative stress and

better mental health outcomes. The results of the study suggest that emotional social support can be an effective means of reducing acculturative stress among immigrants.

Similarly, a study conducted by Nguyen et al. (2011) found that emotional social support was associated with lower levels of depressive symptoms and anxiety among Vietnamese immigrants. The study found that emotional social support was a better predictor of mental health outcomes than instrumental social support, which refers to the provision of tangible assistance. Informational social support, which refers to the provision of advice, guidance, and information, has been found to be particularly effective in reducing acculturative stress among individuals from minority racial and ethnic groups (Kim & Asakawa, 2009).

In a study conducted by Kim and Asakawa (2009), it was found that informational social support was effective in reducing acculturative stress among Korean immigrants. The study found that informational social support was associated with lower levels of acculturative stress and better mental health outcomes. The results of the study suggest that informational social support can be an effective means of reducing acculturative stress among immigrants. Similarly, a study conducted by Hwang and Goto (2008) found that informational social support was associated with better mental health outcomes among Asian American immigrants. The study found that informational social support was a better predictor of mental health outcomes than emotional social support, which refers to the provision of empathy, love, and caring.

Esteem social support, which refers to the provision of praise, positive feedback, and recognition, has been found to be particularly effective in reducing acculturative stress among individuals from minority racial and ethnic groups (Kim & Asakawa, 2009). In a study conducted by Kim and Asakawa (2009), it was found that esteem social

support was effective in reducing acculturative stress among Korean immigrants. The study found that esteem social support was associated with higher levels of self-esteem, which in turn was associated with lower levels of acculturative stress. The results of the study suggest that esteem social support can be an effective means of reducing acculturative stress among immigrants.

Similarly, a study conducted by Li and Kim (2004) found that esteem social support was associated with better mental health outcomes among Asian American college students. The study found that esteem social support was a better predictor of mental health outcomes than emotional social support, which refers to the provision of empathy, love, and caring.

Social network support has been found to be particularly effective in reducing acculturative stress among individuals from minority racial and ethnic groups (Kim & Asakawa, 2010). Social network support refers to the provision of support from one's social network, including family members, friends, and other acquaintances. Similarly, a study conducted by Schwartz et al. (2010) found that social network support was associated with better mental health outcomes among Latino immigrants. The study found that social network support was a better predictor of mental health outcomes than other types of social support, including emotional and instrumental support. Tangible social support, which refers to the provision of practical assistance such as financial or material support, has been identified as an effective source of support for individuals experiencing acculturative stress. Research has shown that tangible social support can reduce financial stressors and promote better mental health outcomes for immigrants.

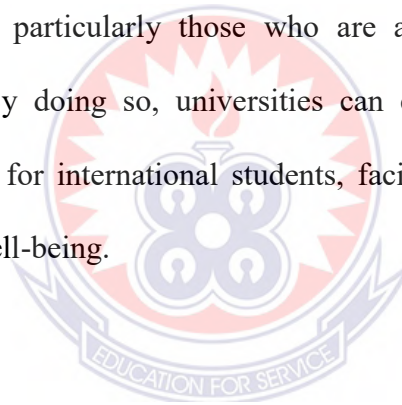
Studies have consistently shown that individuals from minority racial and ethnic groups experience higher levels of acculturative stress than individuals from

majority racial and ethnic groups. For example, individuals from minority racial and ethnic groups are more likely to feel isolated and discriminated against, which can be significant sources of stress. Research has also shown that interventions promoting tangible social support among individuals from minority racial and ethnic groups can be effective in reducing acculturative stress and promoting better mental health outcomes. Therefore, it is crucial to consider and implement such interventions when addressing the mental health needs of immigrant populations.

In summary, tangible social support plays a vital role in reducing acculturative stress for individuals from minority racial and ethnic groups. Therefore, interventions that promote tangible social support can be an effective means of reducing acculturative stress and promoting better mental health outcomes among immigrant populations. Research has shown that sociodemographic variables and social support interact in complex ways to determine acculturative stress among international students. For example, a study conducted by Ibrahim and colleagues (2019) found that social support moderated the relationship between age and acculturative stress among international students in Malaysia. Specifically, the study found that younger international students who received higher levels of social support experienced lower levels of acculturative stress than their peers who received less social support. Additionally, a study conducted by Liao et al. (2019) found that social support moderated the relationship between gender and acculturative stress among international students in China. The study found that female international students who received higher levels of social support experienced lower levels of acculturative stress than their male peers who received less social support.

2.2 Summary of Literature Review

In conclusion, this literature review has shown that sociodemographic variables and social support are significant determinants of acculturative stress among international students in Ghanaian universities. Younger students, female students, and students from non-Western countries are more likely to experience acculturative stress. However, social support from family, friends, and peers can help mitigate the effects of acculturative stress. Moreover, social support can moderate the relationship between sociodemographic variables and acculturative stress, highlighting the importance of social support for international students. These findings suggest that universities should implement policies and programs to provide social support for international students, particularly those who are at higher risk of experiencing acculturative stress. By doing so, universities can create a more welcoming and inclusive environment for international students, facilitating their academic success and promoting their well-being.



CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction to the Chapter

According to Creswell (2003), research methodology refers to the methods adopted in carrying out research. This chapter presents the methodology used for the study, the justification for choice, and the design strategies supporting this study. It covered areas such as the philosophical basis for the research, the research approach, the research design, population, sample, and sampling procedure as well as the instruments that were used, the data collection procedure, and how data was analyzed. It presents the ethical issues considered in the study. The reliability and validity of the instruments were also discussed.

3.1 Research Setting

The study was conducted in two private universities, namely the Methodist University (MUG), and Pentecost University of Ghana (PUG). The main justification for the choice of the institution for this study was based on these reasons: Firstly, these universities attract a diverse student body from various cultural backgrounds. This diversity creates a welcoming and inclusive environment for international students, providing opportunities for cross-cultural interaction, and support networks, and providing a rich and diverse sample for research purposes. This diversity allows for a more comprehensive understanding of acculturative stress experiences among international students. Both institutions represent a significant proportion of the growing private higher education sector in Ghana, which plays a vital role in complementing public universities in addressing the increasing demand for tertiary education. Finally, the selection of Methodist University and Pentecost University was purposeful, as both are faith-based institutions with distinct institutional cultures. This

provided an opportunity to explore how institutional ethos and policies might shape students' experiences and outcomes, thus enriching the findings of the study. Their inclusion therefore provides useful insights into the experiences of students in private universities,

The private university system in Ghana is young but growing rapidly. From zero private universities and just three public universities in 1993, when the Ghanaian state held a monopoly on university education, there are now more than 20 public universities and about 81 private universities (National Accreditation Board (NAB), 2018, UNESCO report 2022).

Also, the selected settings meant that the researcher could easily manage the size of the setting within the duration of the study; it made it convenient for the researcher to access the participants to collect data their proximity and ease of access. Considering the above reasons, it was prudent for the study to be conducted in a setting where international students were accessible.

The Methodist University Ghana is a faith-based private university in Ghana. It is located in Accra in the Greater Accra Region. The Methodist Church decided at its 37th Annual Conference held in Sunyani (1998) to establish a Methodist University College. After due preparations and processes, the Methodist University Ghana (MUG) was granted accreditation by the National Accreditation Board (NAB) in August 2000. Its application for affiliation to the University of Ghana was approved in October 2002. MUG started academic work in October 2000. The first batch of students reported for lectures in November 2000 and the second batch in October 2001. It has three campuses. The Dansoman campus is the main campus of the university, while Tema Campus: Satellite campus on the premises of the Tema Methodist Day Secondary School. The Wenchi situated at Wenchi the Ahafo region. It

offers, B.Sc. General Agriculture, Diploma in General Nursing, and Certificate programs in Agribusiness, Agro-processing, and Horticulture are run from this campus. The university received its Presidential Charter in March 2022. The University has four faculties. namely :Faculty of Business Administration, Faculty of Science, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Faculty of Education and Entrepreneurship.

The Pentecost University is a private university located at Sowutuom in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. It was founded by The Church of Pentecost (COP) and evolved from The Pentecost Bible College which initially trained only Lay Leaders and full-time Ministers for the COP. On May 22, 2003, J. A. Kufuor, the former President of Ghana, inaugurated PUC at the Sowutuom campus. The first PUC Council was inducted on May 6, 2004. PUC was accredited by the National Accreditation Board (NAB), Ghana in November 2004 and awarded its Presidential Charter on May 28, 2020, by Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, the President of the Republic of Ghana. Prior to receiving a Presidential Charter, the university was affiliated to the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, University of Cape Coast. Currently, the university has four Faculties namely, Faculty of Engineering, Science and Computing (FESAC), Faculty of Business Administration (FBA), Faculty of Theology and Mission (FTM) and Faculty of Health and Allied Sciences (FHAS). It also has to its credit the Pentecost University Graduate School (PUGS) and the College of Foundation and Professional Studies (COFOPS). Pentecost University has international students, most of whom are African international students from the West African sub-region. Private universities often attract a diverse international student population. Researching acculturative stress in this setting allows for the exploration of a variety of cultural backgrounds, potentially

providing a more comprehensive understanding of cross-cultural adaptation challenges. Private universities have different resource allocation strategies and support services for international students. Research in this context can assess the effectiveness of existing support systems and inform improvements tailored to the specific needs of international students at private institutions.

3.2 Philosophical Underpinnings

A fundamental assumption about reality, knowledge, or how the world functions is referred to as a philosophical assumption (Alele, 2023). These assumptions underpin a researcher's study strategy and impact method selection, data collecting, analysis, and interpretation. They are frequently firmly ingrained in a researcher's perspective and impact how things are perceived and investigated. Philosophical assumptions are important because they serve as the philosophical underpinning for a research study, influencing the researcher's judgments and viewpoints throughout the research process. Ontological ideas about what exists, epistemological beliefs about how knowledge is obtained, axiological attitudes about values and ethics, and methodological beliefs about how research should be performed are all examples of assumptions. Philosophical assumptions may be overtly acknowledged by researchers, or they may function with implicit assumptions that affect their study method. When the researcher has settled on the type of reality, the ensuing level is how to know and understand that reality. The branch of study that deals with different methods of knowing is called epistemology (Sing, 2019). Epistemological assumptions are concerned with knowledge that can be created, acquired, and transferred (Scotland, 2012). The study's epistemological and ontological orientations about the pursuit of the virtues of reality and truth were based largely on the pragmatism paradigm that values the assumptions of both

positivist and constructivist. Consequently, knowledge is examined using the best tool that is the basis of the research endeavor, with consequences for the design, implementation, and interpretation of the research. As a result, knowing these ontological assumptions is critical in developing a solid methodology for research.

3.3 Pragmatism as a Philosophical Assumption

As a philosophical presupposition in research methodology, pragmatism has both epistemological and ontological components. Pragmatism, which has its roots in the writings of philosophers such as William James and John Dewey, provides a unique lens through which researchers may examine the nature of reality, knowledge, and the research process itself. Hence to ascertain the full range.

Pragmatism holds that the worth and validity of information should be determined by its practical implications and utility (James, 1907). According to Dewey (1938), pragmatism maintains that reality is dynamic and context-dependent, developing in response to human experiences and acts. This is in contrast to the positivist idea of an objective, external reality that exists apart from human experience. Pragmatism as a philosophical assumption in research methodology is characterized by several key tenets:

1. **Instrumentalism:** According to Denzin and Lincoln (2018), pragmatism accepts the instrumentalist viewpoint that research methodologies are instruments selected for their usefulness in addressing specific research questions or issues. The practicality and utility of research methodologies are prioritized over strict adherence to a specific philosophical tradition in this instrumentalist viewpoint.
2. **Problem-Centered Approach:** Pragmatists value research that is problem-centred (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The nature of the research topic itself, rather than a fixed adherence to a single philosophical paradigm, drives the choice of research

methodology. This strategy enables researchers to be attentive to the specific needs of each research investigation.

3. Empirical Inquiry and Effects: Empirical inquiry and the evaluation of the effects of various acts and decisions are central to pragmatism (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). It acknowledges that knowledge is not static, but rather changes as a result of actual experiences and their effects.

3.3.1 Implications of Pragmatism in Research

The philosophical assumption of pragmatism has several implications for research process: which are discussed below

1. Methodological Flexibility: Pragmatists support methodological flexibility and pluralism (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Rather than being restricted to a particular strategy, researchers are encouraged to modify and mix research methodologies to best suit the study subject at hand.
2. Context Sensitivity: Pragmatism recognizes the significance of context in influencing research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Researchers who accept this premise recognize that the usefulness of a specific approach may be dependent on the unique qualities of the study situation.
3. Pragmatic Inquiry (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003): Pragmatic inquiry focuses on the practical consequences and real-world implementations of study results. This viewpoint is consistent with the belief that research should not only contribute to theoretical knowledge but should also serve practical goals and address real-world challenges.

Ultimately, as a philosophical presupposition in research technique, pragmatism challenges the tight constraints of established philosophical paradigms. It encourages academics to prioritize pragmatism, flexibility, and problem-solving in

their study. This assumption is consistent with the pragmatic concept that research should be a dynamic, flexible, and context-sensitive process motivated by the pursuit of useful information and meaningful outcomes. After considering the research questions and objectives of this study, a pragmatist approach was adopted as the most appropriate philosophical assumption for the study. This approach allows for the use of both quantitative and qualitative research methods to explore the research questions and objectives. The assessment of theories or beliefs based on the success of their practical implementation is emphasized by pragmatism. Within the framework of this study, the objective of comprehending and alleviating acculturative stress among international students in Ghanaian universities is aligned with a pragmatist approach. The use of a pragmatist approach enabled the researcher to take into account practical considerations such as the availability of resources, time constraints, and ethical considerations. This approach allows the researcher to adopt a problem-focused and action-oriented approach to research, which was useful in exploring the complex nature of acculturative stress, social support, and sociodemographic variables among international students in Ghanaian universities.

The Quantitative data provided an overview of the extent and nature of acculturative stress, social support, and sociodemographic variables among international students, while qualitative data provided insights into the subjective experiences and perspectives of the international students themselves. The use of a mixed methods approach helped the researcher to triangulate the data and validate the findings, thereby enhancing the reliability and validity of the study. This approach allows the researcher to explore the research questions from different angles and perspectives, providing a more robust understanding of the research phenomena.

3.4 Research Approach

Following the philosophical position rooted in this study, it demanded that the study adopt an approach that allows for what works for the study. The study employed a mixed methods approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2009), which involves the triangulation of both numeric and non-numeric data (Kelle and Erzberger, 2004; Flick, 2004; Flick, 2009). Mixed methods research resides in the middle of this continuum because it incorporates elements of both qualitative and quantitative approaches (Creswell, 2009). Here the investigator collects and analyses data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches and methods in a single study or program of inquiry” (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007b, p. 4).

It is important to keep in mind the clear disadvantages of mixed methods. However, this approach also provides significant advantages to the study. Specifically, it allows the issues to be examined holistically within the natural environment, offering a fully contextualized perspective. This, in turn, promotes a deeper understanding of stakeholders’ views on the type of intervention needed to address the acculturative stress of international students (Castro, Kellison, Boyd & Kopak, 2010).

The mixed-methods sequential explanatory design consists of two distinct phases: quantitative followed by qualitative (Creswell et al. 2003). In this design, the researcher first collected and analysed the quantitative (numeric) data. The qualitative (text) data were collected and analysed second in the sequence to help explain or elaborate on the quantitative results obtained in the first phase. The second, qualitative, phase builds on the first, quantitative, phase, and the two phases are connected in the intermediate stage of the study. The rationale for this approach was that the quantitative data and their subsequent analysis provided a general

understanding of the research problem. The qualitative data and their analysis refined and explained those statistical results by exploring participants' views in more depth (Creswell 2003; Rossman and Wilson 1985; Tashakkori and Teddlie 1998;). This enabled the researcher not only to integrate the data but also to engage in multi-dimensional analysis of the phenomena investigated (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2015).

The mixed methods approach was considered to be effective for addressing this study's objectives and research questions. It was appropriate for the researcher to handle phenomena of multiple realities based on different value systems. The adoption of mixed methods made it possible to obtain in-depth information to describe, interpret, and make informed judgments concerning the topic under investigation. This design is useful especially when unexpected results arise from a quantitative study (Morse 1991), by falling on the data provided in the qualitative phase of the study, the researcher could be able to get more insights into the subject matter and thereby be able to manage or balance out the shortcomings of using the quantitative method alone. Further the approach was appropriate because it is common knowledge that no single source of knowledge engages subjects in research to validate the knowledge obtained (Creswell, 2003, Mertens, 2012). The blending of both forms (objective and subjective views) carries the strengths of quantitative and qualitative, and it offers broader options to explore social realities.

3.5 Research Design

This study employed explanatory sequential mixed methods design, as outlined by Creswell and Plano (2007). The explanatory sequential design involves collecting and analyzing quantitative data first, followed by qualitative data in two consecutive phases within a single study. This approach provided a comprehensive understanding and corroboration of the research findings, combining the breadth of

quantitative data with the depth of qualitative insights (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007) to explain why certain results occurred. Initially, quantitative data was gathered and analyzed, followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data to interpret the findings more comprehensively. This methodology facilitated multiple perspectives on the data regarding the phenomenon under study. By adding the qualitative data, it provided richer context and a more nuanced understanding of the quantitative results.

3.5.1 Qualitative phase

Qualitative research is a type of research that explores and provides deeper insights into real-world problems (Moser & Korstjens, 2017). Instead of collecting numerical data points or intervening or introducing treatments just like in quantitative research, qualitative research helps generate hypotheses as well as further investigate and understand quantitative data. Qualitative research gathers participants' experiences, perceptions, and behavior. It answers the how and why instead of how many or how much. Qualitative research allows researchers to explore complex phenomena in-depth, providing a rich understanding of participants' experiences, perspectives, and behaviors. It helps uncover nuances and details that quantitative measures may not capture fully. Qualitative data often provides a rich source of information for deriving practical implications and recommendations. It helps bridge the gap between research findings and their real-world applications, making the research more actionable.

To analyze the qualitative data, the Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (IPA) was employed. IPA is a research method designed to explore and understand the everyday lived experiences of people (Smith et al., 2009). The adoption of this

technique provided insights into the reality of the lived experiences of international students as they went through the process of acculturation and its attendant stressors.

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data. Thematic analysis is a method of identifying patterns, themes, and categories within the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It involved identifying recurring patterns within the data and grouping them into themes, which were then used to interpret the data and draw conclusions about the research questions.

3.6 Population

The study population comprised all international undergraduate students at Methodist University and Pentecost University. According to Asiamah, Mensah, and Oteng-Abayie (2017), populations in research are categorized into three types: general, targeted, and accessible. The general population refers to the entire group about which information is sought. The targeted population includes all members of a real or hypothetical group to which a researcher intends to generalize the study's findings. The accessible population, however, represents the portion of the targeted population that can realistically be included in the sample. For this study, the targeted population was all international undergraduate students registered at Methodist University and Pentecost University during the 2023/2024 academic year. Specifically, Methodist University had 155 international students and Pentecost University had 85, giving a total of 240 international undergraduate students. (*See Table 1 below*).

Table 1: Population of International Students

Name of University	Number of International Students		
	Total Number	Male	Female
Methodist University	155	91	64
Pentecost University	85	53	32
Total Number	240	144	96

Source: Field Data, 2024

3.7 Sample size

A sample is a subset of the population being studied. In statistics, a sample refers to the observation drawn from a population (Crossman, 2013). According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2000), having the right sample size is crucial in finding a statistically significant result. The larger the sample size, the more reliable the results. According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970), for a population of 240, a sample of 148 should be considered appropriate. Therefore, the study projected a sample size of 148 out of a population of 240 students, from the two universities, thus Methodist and Pentecost University of Ghana. A sample of 148 students, however, responded to the survey arriving at a response rate of 99.4% for this study.

3.8 Sampling Technique

The study employed a stratified random sampling technique to ensure comprehensive representation across different strata within the population. Stratified random sampling involves dividing the population into distinct subgroups, or strata, and then randomly selecting samples from each stratum (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). Given the total population of 260 students from Methodist and Pentecost Universities in Ghana, the process began by identifying relevant strata based on university affiliation, gender, and level of education to ensure adequate representation.

The sample size was then proportionally allocated to each stratum, ensuring that the sample maintained the population ratio. For example, Methodist University had 155 students and Pentecost University had 85 students, the sample sizes adjusted accordingly. Within each stratum, students were randomly selected using a random number generator to ensure that every student had an equal chance of being included, thereby minimizing selection bias and enhancing the generalizability of the findings.

This stratified approach not only enhanced the representativeness of the sample but also reduced potential sampling bias and increased the precision of the estimates of population parameters. By dividing the population into strata and performing random selection within each, the technique ensured that all key subgroups such as ABC within the population were adequately represented. Consequently, this method provided a more accurate reflection of the entire population's diversity and characteristics, ensuring that the study's findings could be generalized with a high degree of confidence.

3.9 Target Population and Sample

Sampling involves selecting units of analysis (e.g., people, groups, artifacts, settings) in a manner that maximizes the researcher's ability to answer research questions outlined in a study (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). The target population in this study was the first-year undergraduate international students, who have been admitted to the university program and taking classes during the first semester. Recruiting participants occurred through the database of the available students in these universities' programs. A total of 240 students in the database met these criteria (Field Data 2024). For the first quantitative phase of the study, simple random was used to select the participants. A simple random sample is one in the accessible population that has an equal chance of being included in the sample, and the

probability of a unit being selected is not affected by the selection of other units from the accessible population, simple random sampling helps eliminate selection bias, (i.e., the selections are made independently of one another). Simple random sampling enhances the rigor of statistical analyses. It allows for the application of inferential statistics to make valid and reliable inferences about the population based on the characteristics of the sample. It allows for the application of inferential statistics to make valid and reliable inferences about the population based on the characteristics of the sample.

Although simple random sampling was used in the quantitative phase to allow for generalization of results to the population with a calculable margin of error (Dillman, 2000), the qualitative phase required a different sampling strategy. For that phase, purposive sampling was adopted. Purposive sampling involves deliberately selecting individuals who are best positioned to shed light on the phenomenon under study (McMillan & Schumacher, 1994; Miles & Huberman, 1994). It is especially useful when looking to explore ‘information-rich’ cases—people who can provide depth, insight, and contextual understanding beyond what can be captured through numeric data. More recent sources confirm that purposive sampling is preferred when depth over breadth is required, when time or resources are limited, or when specific subgroups in the population are of interest. These are the specific criteria used in selecting the participants.

Representation by Institution: Two participants were selected from each of the two universities in the study (Methodist University and Pentecost University), to ensure that qualitative insights reflect institutional variation.

- i. **Student Status:** Within each university, one student was a “beginning” student (freshly matriculated) and one was a “matriculated” student (further along in

the programme). This ensures perspectives from both ends of the student experience.

- ii. Information Richness: Participants needed to be able to provide detailed, in-depth responses that clearly address the research questions—students who have lived experiences relevant to acculturative stress and who were articulate about those experiences. The selection emphasizes those most likely to offer substantive insights. This aligns with what is described in recent qualitative methodology literature: selecting participants who are ‘information-rich’ and have direct, relevant experience.
- iii. Voluntariness and Transparency: In the survey’s informed consent form, it was clearly communicated to all participants that four individuals would be selected for the follow-up voluntary individual interviews. Thus, those selected also met the criterion of willingness and ethical clarity.

3.10 Instrumentation

Two instruments were used in this study: the Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students (ASSIS) and the Index of Sojourner Social Support (ISSS) (Ong & Ward, 2005).

Acculturative Stress: The Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students (ASSIS), developed by Sandhu and Asrabadi (1994), was employed to measure the challenges faced by international students. This instrument captures personal, social, and environmental difficulties that students encounter when adapting to a new country. These challenges are often described as cultural shock or the acculturative stress experience. The ASSIS was selected for this study because it is the only instrument specifically designed to measure acculturative stress among international students. The Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students (Sandhu &

Asrabadi, 1994) consists of 36 items on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 = –Strongly Disagree,” 2 = –Disagree,” 3 = –Not Sure,” 4 = –Agree,” to 5 = –Strongly Agree,” and was designed to assess the acculturative stress levels of international students. Sample items included, –People from some other ethnic groups show hatred toward me through their actions”; –I feel uncomfortable to adjust to new cultural values”; and –I feel nervous to communicate in English.” The identified major contributing factors included perceived discrimination (8 items), homesickness (4 items), perceived hatred/rejection (5 items), fear (4 items), guilt (2 items), stress due to change (3 items), and non-specific concerns (10 items). The total scores ranged from 36 to 180, with higher scores representing higher levels of acculturative stress. The 36-item scale has high internal consistency, as measured by Cronbach’s alpha, which ranged from .92 to .94.

Social support was assessed with a modified version of the Index of Sojourner Social Support (ISSS) (Ong & Ward, 2005). The ISSS is an 18-item measure. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Higher scores indicate greater perceived availability of support. The scale yields two subscales: socio-emotional support and instrumental support. In validation studies the scale has shown excellent internal consistency (overall $\alpha \approx .95$; subscale alphas reported near .94–.96). Scores range from 18 to 90. For this study the ISSS was adapted slightly to fit the student context and to ask respondents about support available to them while studying abroad. Sample demographic questions covered age, gender, country of origin. (Ong & Ward, 2005; Tanner et al., 2014; Rhodes et al., 2014) The ISSS has shown high internal consistency in multiple samples. Ong & Ward (2005) reported very strong reliability. Later validation and applied studies report overall Cronbach’s α near .95 and subscale

alphas approximately .94 to .96. Several validation studies have also supported its factor structure and cross-cultural applicability

3.10.1 Quantitative Data Collection

For the quantitative phase of this study, a structured survey method was employed to gather data on acculturative stress, social support, and sociodemographic variables among international students. The primary data collection instrument was a questionnaire that incorporated validated scales and demographic questions.

Before administering the questionnaire, I obtained introductory letter from the department of counseling psychology at UEW to these universities. This is to ensure the study met all ethical standards, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. The International students at Methodist University and Pentecost University were identified as the primary target population. Announcements were made in relevant lectures with the help of research assistants and at international student meetings to reach a larger pool of students. Each student was provided with a consent form explaining the purpose of the study, the types of questions on the Acculturative Stress Scale, and assurances of confidentiality. Participants were informed that their responses would be used solely for academic purposes and that they could withdraw at any time without penalty. The Acculturative Stress Scale questionnaire was distributed in paper formats. To maximize participation, paper copies of the questionnaire were made available at various university locations, including the International Students Office and the campus library. Students could fill out the paper survey on-site or take it home and return it within the next day. The Paper questionnaires were collected and stored in a locked filing cabinet to ensure confidentiality. Identifiable information, such as names or student IDs, was excluded from the questionnaire to maintain anonymity. Furthermore data was reviewed to

verify completeness and consistency, with any incomplete or invalid responses removed before analysis.

To capture sociodemographic variables, the questionnaire included items assessing the respondents' age, sex, nationality, and other relevant demographic information. A total number of one hundred and fifty-four ($n=154$) respondents were recruited to take part in the study. The data gathered from the participants were analyzed using various statistical methods to identify potential predictive relationships and patterns.

3.10.2 Qualitative Data Collection

For the qualitative phase, the study employed the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach to explore the lived experiences of international students in Ghana. The primary data collection instrument for this phase was an in-depth interview guide designed to elicit rich, detailed narratives about the students' adaptation processes and the stressors they encountered.

The semi-structured interview guide was developed to allow for flexibility in exploring participants' unique experiences while ensuring consistency across interviews. The guide included open-ended questions covering key themes such as cultural adjustment, language barriers, social support, feelings of isolation and discrimination, and overall adaptation experiences. Sample questions included: "Can you describe your initial experience upon arriving in Ghana?" and "What forms of social support have you found most helpful?"

Four participants for the qualitative phase were selected from the pool of respondents who participated in the quantitative phase and expressed willingness to participate further. Interviews were conducted face-to-face in a private setting to ensure confidentiality and comfort. Each interview lasted between 60 to 90 minutes,

allowing participants to share their stories in depth. The interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

The combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods provided a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing acculturative stress and the adaptation processes of international students in Ghana. The integration of these methods ensured a thorough exploration of the research questions, allowing for both breadth and depth in the analysis.

3.12 Validity and Reliability of the Instruments

Validity refers to the extent to which an instrument measures what it is intended to measure, and this study ensured the validity of both quantitative and qualitative instruments through various established methods. The Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students (ASSIS), developed by Sandhu and Asrabadi (1998), demonstrated strong content validity as its items were derived from comprehensive literature reviews and expert consultations, ensuring they covered all dimensions of acculturative stress. Its construct validity was confirmed through factor analysis in previous studies, aligning well with theoretical concepts of acculturation and stress. Similarly, the Index of Sojourner Social Support (ISSS) by Ong and Ward (2005) was adapted to assess social support among international students, with items designed based on established theories. Its construct validity was also validated through factor analysis, confirming its multidimensional nature. Several studies have examined the validity and reliability of the Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students (ASSIS). For example, a study conducted in Indonesia with 100 international students tested the psychometric properties of the ASSIS using confirmatory and exploratory factor analyses. The results showed that the scale met reliability standards, with Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values ranging from 0.50 to 0.63 and Composite

Reliability (CR) values between 0.73 and 0.91, thereby confirming both content and construct validity. Similarly, a study of 422 first-year international medical students in Egypt used the ASSIS to measure acculturative stress and explored its associations with related constructs such as language proficiency and accommodation comfort. Findings revealed that the mean ASSIS total score was significantly higher than normative means, while subscales like homesickness and perceived discrimination behaved as expected, further supporting its construct validity and internal reliability. More recently, a 2025 study among international students in China employed the ASSIS to investigate relationships between acculturative stress, loneliness, smartphone addiction, and second-language emotions. This study confirmed the scale's robust reliability and found that the seven-factor dimensional structure held firm in their sample.

The sociodemographic questions in the study possessed face validity, being clear and relevant as reviewed by experts. The qualitative interview guide, crafted from a thorough literature review on acculturation, ensured comprehensive content validity, with experts in qualitative research and acculturation reviewing the guide for relevance and appropriateness.

3.12.1 Reliability

Reliability refers to the consistency and stability of an instrument over time, and the instruments used in this study demonstrated high reliability. The ASSIS showed high internal consistency with reliability coefficients ranging from .86 to .95 (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1998), indicating that its items consistently measured acculturative stress. Its test-retest reliability ensured stable results over different administrations. The ISSS exhibited high internal consistency with reliability estimates between .94 and .96 (Ong & Ward, 2005), and its test-retest reliability

further validated its stability. In qualitative research, reliability was ensured through a standardized interview guide, providing consistency in questions posed to all participants.

3.13 Positionality

Positionality refers to the researcher's background, experiences, beliefs, and biases, and how these factors may influence the research process and outcomes (Holmes, 2020). In this study, my positionality is shaped by various personal and professional experiences, which I recognize could impact the research design, data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

With a background in working at the Office of Student Affairs and engaging closely with international students, I have a heightened awareness of the challenges and opportunities faced by students as they navigate new cultural environments. This personal connection drives my interest in exploring acculturative stress and the social support mechanisms available to international students in Ghana. My experiences allow me to empathize with participants and gain a deeper understanding of their journeys. However, I remained vigilant about potential biases, such as assuming the universality of certain challenges or the effectiveness of specific support systems (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

As an educator and researcher in the field of international education, I possess a solid theoretical foundation and methodological expertise essential for conducting this study. My familiarity with the literature on acculturation, social support, and the experiences of international students informs the research questions, design, and analytical framework. I was committed to ensuring that my professional knowledge does not overshadow the voices and perspectives of the participants. Accurately

representing their experiences without filtering them through my preconceived notions is paramount.

Being an insider researcher, my cultural background and identity can also influence my interactions with participants and the interpretation of data. Sharing cultural similarities with some participants may lead to the risk of over-identification or assuming shared understandings. Conversely, cultural differences with other participants might result in misinterpretations or a failure to capture important nuances in their experiences (Smith, 1999). To minimize these biases, I employed several strategies throughout the research process. Firstly, I continuously reflected on my positionality and its impact on the research. By regularly assessing my own beliefs and assumptions, I aimed to maintain a balanced perspective (Finlay, 2002).

Furthermore I actively sought feedback from colleagues and my supervisors to gain insights into potential blind spots in my approach. This collaborative dialogue helped ensure that my analysis was informed by diverse viewpoints, and focused on establishing strong, trusting relationships with participants to create a comfortable environment for open communication. This included ensuring confidentiality and fostering a respectful and non-judgmental atmosphere

Again, I remained mindful of the power dynamics in the researcher-participant relationship and aimed to minimize any influences that might lead participants to provide socially desirable answers or withhold information (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). I focused on establishing strong, trusting relationships with participants to create a comfortable environment for open communication. Through these strategies, I strove to mitigate biases associated with my insider position and ensured that the research captured the authentic experiences of international students as they navigated the complexities of acculturation

3.14 Methods for Verification of Trustworthiness and Authenticity

The quality of this study is determined by the trustworthiness criteria. These criteria included elements such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These criteria were used because they fit in judging the quality of a study located in an interpretive qualitative framework (Guba, 1992; Kusi, 2011).

3.14.1 Credibility

The credibility criterion requires a qualitative study to be believable to critical readers and to be approved by the persons who provided the information gathered during the study. Lincoln & Guba (1985), recommend several techniques that inquirers may use to enhance the credibility of their research: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, progressive subjectivity checks, and member checking.

Credibility, deals with the question, “How congruent are the findings with reality?” The credibility of the study was ensured through triangulation. The researcher used semi-structured interviews, in gathering data for the qualitative aspect of the study. This helped the researcher to offset the limitations associated with using only one instrument and was able to determine the accuracy of the information gathered (Bush, 2002; Kusi, 2011).

In ensuring the credibility of the work, the researcher frequently had a debriefing session with his supervisors. This was done to ensure that the vision of the researcher widened as others brought to bear their experiences and perceptions. In establishing the credibility of data, I used triangulation of sources. This is the means of gathering data from different sources. In this study, I gathered data from different people at different points in time and in different settings. Thus, I did not gather the data from the participants in just one setting. The different participants were met at

different times and in different places. This ensured that the information given by participants was the actual information they wanted to give and was not influenced by the views of the other participants. This helped establish the credibility of the data collected.

This collaborative session was used by the researcher to discuss alternative approaches, the empirical review, and the methodology used in the study. The supervisors drew the researcher's attention to flaws in the proposed course of action. Peer scrutiny of the research work was also encouraged. The researcher allowed some of his course mates to read through and offer their constructive criticisms.

Prolonged engagement means being present on the site where the study is being done long enough to build trust with participants, experience the breath of variation, and overcome distortions due to the presence of the researcher on the site (Childers, 2012). This involves spending adequate time observing various aspects of the setting, speaking with a range of people, and developing relationships and rapport with members of the culture. The development of rapport and trust facilitates understanding and co-construction of meaning between the researcher and members of a setting. (Cosgrove, 2020).

In this study, several distinct questions were asked regarding topics related to sociodemographic variables, acculturative stress, social support, availability of opportunities homesickness, and hate. The researcher spent at least one hour per participant observing while asking questions.

3.14.2 Member Checking

Traditionally, member checking is defined as sharing either a summary of the findings or sharing the whole findings with the research participants (Koro-Ljungberg, 2010). Halfway through the study period, the researcher held a meeting with those

who had participated in the interviews, enabling them to correct the interpretation and challenge what they perceived to be a wrong interpretation. This offered the researcher the opportunity to capture the information from the perspectives of the participants and correct any erroneous impressions.

3.14.3 Transferability

Transferability is the generalization of the study findings to other situations and contexts (DeVault, 2018). Generalization is, however, limited in qualitative research due to the small nature of the sample size. This criterion also refers to the applicability of findings in one context (where the research is done) to other contexts or settings (where the interpretations might be transferred). Whether findings can be transferred or not is an empirical question, which cannot be answered by the inquirer alone. The target context must be compared to the research context to identify similarities. The more similar, the more likely it is that the findings will be transferable. Thus, the knowledge that was obtained in one context will be relevant in another, and investigators who carry out research in another context will be able to utilize certain concepts that were initially developed. It is comparable to generalizability. Persons reading the qualitative inquiry reports have to make this decision, Lincoln & Guba (1985).

This transferability analysis is facilitated by clear descriptions of the time and context in which working hypotheses are developed by the qualitative inquirer. It must be noted that the description of the phenomena under study and as much of the context in which the study took place as possible is the most powerful technique for facilitating transferability decisions. However, the transfer must be made by audiences to the report, not by the author. In this study, the researcher provided a rich account of descriptive data, such as the context in which the research was carried out, its setting,

sample size, sample strategy, demographics, socioeconomic characteristics, interview procedure, topics, and excerpts from the interview guide.

3.14.4 Dependability

This is the third standard for judging qualitative studies and refers to the stability or consistency of the inquiry processes used over time. In checking the dependability of this study, the researcher made sure he was not careless or did not make mistakes in conceptualizing the study, collecting the data, interpreting the findings, and reporting the results. The researcher also made sure that the logic used for selecting participants and events to observe, and interview were included in the study, Lincoln & Guba (1985). This is because the more consistent the researcher is in his research process, the more dependable are the results.

A major technique for assessing dependability is the dependability audit in which an independent auditor reviews the activities of the researcher (as recorded in an audit trail in field notes, archives, and reports) to see how well the techniques for meeting the credibility and transferability standards have been followed. If the researcher does not maintain any kind of audit trail, the dependability cannot be assessed and the dependability and trustworthiness of the study are diminished. In this study, the two supervisors examined the analytical process, the records, and minutes of meetings for accuracy and assessed whether all analytical techniques of phenomenology theory methodology had been used accordingly.

3.14.5 Confirmability

The concept of confirmability is the qualitative researcher's comparable concern to objectivity. It refers to the quality of the results produced by an inquiry in terms of how well they are supported by informants (members) who are involved in the study and by events that are independent of the inquirer. Reference to literature

and findings by other authors that confirm the inquirer's interpretations can strengthen the confirmability of the study in addition to information and interpretations by people other than the inquirer from within the inquiry site itself.

To fulfill the purpose of this criterion, the researcher ensured that the findings of this study were the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher. To reduce the effect of researcher bias, triangulation was employed. This was done because the key criterion for confirmability is the extent to which the researcher admits his predispositions and controls his bias (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This was done to confirm the accuracy of the findings and to ensure the findings were supported by the data collected. All interpretations and conclusions were examined to determine whether they were supported by the data itself.

3.15 Independent variables

In this study, the independent variables are those factors presumed to influence or predict the level of acculturative stress experienced by international students in Ghana. These variables are critical for understanding the different dimensions of students' adaptation processes.

1. **Gender:** This variable categorizes students based on their biological sex (male or female). Research indicates that sex can influence the experiences and coping mechanisms related to acculturative stress, with some studies suggesting that females may experience higher levels of stress in adapting to new environments compared to males (Schmitt, Spears, & Branscombe, 2003).
2. **Age:** This variable captures the chronological age of the international students. Age is a significant factor as it can affect acculturative stress; different age groups

may exhibit varying levels of adaptability and resilience (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001).

3. **Country of Origin:** This variable identifies the home country of the international students. The cultural distance between the student's home country and Ghana can significantly influence acculturative stress, with larger cultural differences potentially leading to higher stress levels (Ward & Kennedy, 1994).
4. **Social Support:** This variable captures the extent to which international students perceive they have support from friends, family, and their host community. Social support is a crucial factor in mitigating acculturative stress and is measured using the modified Index of Sojourner Social Support (ISSS) (Ong & Ward, 2005). The ISSS assesses both emotional and instrumental support received by students, which can help buffer the negative effects of acculturation challenges

3.16 Dependent Variables

In this study, the dependent variables are the outcome that is expected to be influenced by the independent variables such as sex, age, academic level, source of funding, and country of origin. The primary dependent variable in this research is Acculturative Stress.

1. Acculturative Stress: This refers to the psychological impact of adapting to a new cultural environment. Acculturative stress includes feelings of anxiety, depression, and difficulty in adjusting to the cultural norms of the host country (Ghana). The level of acculturative stress experienced by students is measured using the Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students (ASSIS), which assesses various stressors including homesickness, perceived discrimination, and academic pressures (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994).

3.17 Ethical Issues Considered in the Study

The issue of ethics is an important consideration in research that involves human subjects. It refers to the appropriate behaviour of research relative to the norms of society (Best & Kahn, 2012). The researcher took cognizance of the ethical guidelines to protect the participants and the researcher. Ethical issues that were catered for in this study include the right to privacy, voluntary participation, no harm to participants, anonymity and confidentiality, deception, and scientific misconduct.

Additionally, to gather data from sampled individuals, the researcher first submitted a copy of the instrument to the registrar, Human Resource Division, and international student office. This was done to confirm and ensure that the research participants and the university community are protected. As part of conducting every study, there are rules and guidelines to be followed. In this study, informed consent was sought from all participants. It ensured that participants had a clear understanding of the purpose of the study, the interviewer conducting it, how the data would be used, and what participants would mean to them. They were encouraged to feel free and air their views as objectively as possible and they had the liberty to choose whether to participate or not. They also had the option to withdraw their consent at any time and without any form of adverse consequence. They were assured that the information they provided would be used solely for research purposes and nothing else. The data received was collected by obtaining the requisite consent required at each level of the data collection process. Participants were debriefed on the purpose of the study and were made to understand that they were allowed to drop out of the study as and when they wanted.

In the qualitative study, the conversations were recorded with the permission of the participants. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured by keeping the audio

files safe and the names of the participants were not allowed in the transcripts. Confidentiality was observed as part of the ethical consideration. Participants were assured that the information provided was just for research and under no circumstance would it be used against them. Additionally, their names and identities would not be revealed, instead pseudonyms were used. Students who felt the need to have a feedback session after the data collection and the in-depth interview sessions were encouraged to do so with the help of the counsellors at the counselling centre who provided them with the needed counselling.

3.18 Data Analytic Procedure

The data collected from this study were analyzed using inferential statistics and thematic analysis. The numeric data was organized using simple frequency tables, correlation and regression analyses, and many other relevant statistical tests, while the qualitative data were categorized and analyzed based on themes from the research questions and other emergent themes (see Table 2).

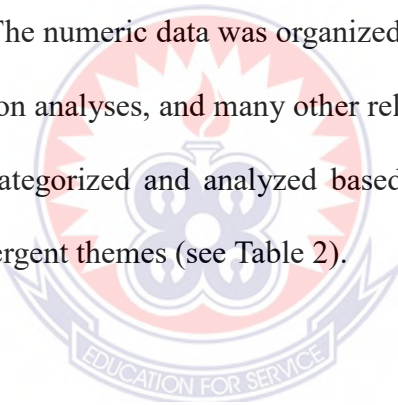


Table 2: Data Analytic Procedural Table

Objective	Analysis	What to Report
1. factors of acculturative stress of international students	Descriptive statistics	Frequencies and percentages
2. Relationship between social support and acculturative stress	Pearson's Product Moment Correlation	r-value; p-value, indicate the strength and direction of the relationship
3. Effect of socio-demographic variables on acculturative stress	Regression	p-value; R^2 value; R^2 change; <i>b</i> -and-beta-weights indicating each variable's contribution to the model
4. Effect of social support on acculturative stress	Regression	p-value; R^2 value; R^2 change; <i>b</i> -and-beta-weights indicating each variable's contribution to the model
5. Lived experiences of international students	Thematic analysis	Major themes; sub themes; narratives of participants to support themes

To analyse the qualitative data, the Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (IPA) was employed. IPA is a research method designed to explore and understand the everyday lived experiences of people (Smith et al., 2009). The adoption of this technique provided insights into the reality of the lived experiences of international students as they went through the process of acculturation and its attendant stressors.

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data. Thematic analysis is a method of identifying patterns, themes, and categories within the data (Braun and

Clarke, 2006). Specifically, inductive thematic analysis was employed to identify and interpret patterns and themes within the qualitative data (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012) It involved identifying recurring patterns within the data and grouping them into themes, which were then used to interpret the data and draw conclusions about the research questions. This process involved reading through the textual data, coding for significant themes, and interpreting the structure and content of these themes to gain insights into the lived experiences of international students.

Table 3: Profile of international students interviewed (N=4)

	Male	FEMALE	country of origin	
Methodist University	1	1	Nigeria	2
Methodist University	1		Tanzania	1
Pentecost University	1	1	Cote d'Ivoire	2
Total	3	2		5

Participant has been studying at the 2 universities.

Population for qualitative

The sample for the qualitative part of the study was drawn from the same international student population as was done for the quantitative aspect of the study. A total of four (5) participants, 3 males and 2 females, were interviewed. Two (2) of the in-depth interviews, out of the total, were conducted among international students at Pentecost University. The rest of the in-depth interviews were all conducted in Methodist University. Table 10 shows the profile of participants indicating their gender and continent of origin.

Participants had been studying at the 2 universities and at the first year of the degree programme. They ranged in age from between 21 years to 30 years. Two (2)

were pursuing a degree programme General Nursing, one in Information technology and other two pursuing degree in psychology and accounting respectively.

Procedure.

The participants for this aspect of the study were done through purposive sampling with the help of a Teaching Assistant (RA). These participants were purposively chosen based on their unique perspectives and experiences that were critical to understanding the phenomenon. Secondly given the study's scope and the aim to integrate qualitative data with quantitative results, this number was sufficient to reach thematic saturation and address the research questions effectively. According to Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006), data saturation can often be achieved with as few as 4 - 6 participants in homogeneous groups. Purposeful sampling was used, as outlined by Patton (2002), to ensure the inclusion of individuals with the most relevant experiences to address the research questions. Furthermore, Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) highlight that smaller qualitative samples are appropriate in mixed-methods research, as the qualitative data serves to contextualize and expand on quantitative results. This approach ensured methodological rigor while remaining feasible within the study's resource constraints.

Prospective participants who were at International student Office, student services and hostels were approached, informed of the study, the purpose, and any potential involves, and asked if they would be interested in participating. Participants who agreed to participate in the study, scheduled time and day suitable for them. The first name and telephone number of the participant was taken. Participants were called by the TA a day before the agreed interview date and time to ensure that they will be present. This procedure was however successful with only 5 participants. A purposive technique was then employed by requesting that these 5 participants tell their friends

about the study and ask if they would like to participate. Those who agreed to participate through this means were directed to the venue of the interview. It was through this purposive technique that the rest of the interviews were conducted successfully. All the interviews were conducted one-on-one and were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The shortest interview lasted for 60 minutes while the longest interview lasted an hour and 90 minutes. Before each interview, participants were provided with consent forms to read thoroughly. They were encouraged to ask any questions for clarification before signing two copies, keeping one for themselves and returning the other before the interview commenced. Participants were reassured that their information would remain confidential, the interview would be anonymous, and they had the right to withdraw from the study at any point, even after the interview had started. As a small token of appreciation, each participant was given a pen, a bottle of soft drink, and snacks.

The data collection process was guided by the phenomenological approach, focusing on participants' lived experiences as international students in Ghana. Using a semi-structured in-depth interview guide, strong rapport was built at the beginning of the interview, fostering deep engagement and allowing participants to freely and openly share their experiences. The ethical assurances provided through the consent process contributed to this openness. Responses were thoroughly probed to gain deeper insights into how participants navigated stressful intercultural situations both academically and within the broader Ghanaian socio-cultural context. The data collection process was guided by the phenomenological approach, focusing on participants' lived experiences as international students in Ghana. Using a semi-structured in-depth interview guide, strong rapport was built at the beginning of the

interview, fostering deep engagement and allowing participants to freely and openly share their experiences.

3.18 Summary of Chapter Three

This chapter presented the research methods used in detail. It examined the research approach, design, study institution, population, sample and sampling procedure, and instrumentation of the study. It was established that the study had adopted a sequential explanatory mixed methods design; therefore, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. The statistical analyses used to test the propositions of the study were elaborated, and the thematic analysis for the qualitative data was also presented.



CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS, AND DISCUSSIONS

4.0 Introduction

The chapter also provides analysis of the data, the results of the analysed data, the findings from the analysis, and discussion in the form of comparing and contrasting to literature reviewed.

4.1 Limitations of the Study

One limitation was the complex nature of conducting mixed studies as well as the difficulty with resolving discrepancies that arise in the interpretation of findings from the two different methods (quantitative and qualitative). The sample of this study was limited to undergraduate of international students of Methodist University and Pentecost University. While the sample size of 148 students is statistically appropriate, it represents only a subset of international students in Ghanaian universities. Consequently, the findings may not fully capture the experiences of international students in other institutions. The results were limited in terms of generalizability to international students outside the study institution. While they reflected the experiences of the population studied, this restriction reduced the validity of applying the conclusions to the broader population of international students.

Another limitation, it was assumed that the selected students from the institution have sufficient knowledge and understanding of acculturative stress to answer the items in the instruments accurately and truthfully. Thus, the study depends on self-reported data which runs the risk of being biased and selective recall on the part of the respondents and participants.

Furthermore, this study was that integrating quantitative and qualitative data was likely to produce different results since the methodology employed (mixed

methods) for the study was based on different theoretical and philosophical assumptions and it poses challenges in aligning and interpreting data across different methodological paradigms. In dealing with this, the researcher used the findings from the different methods to complement each other. In addition, the findings of this study may not be anticipated for the future since issues related to acculturative stress of international students keep changing with time. The qualitative phase involved a relatively small number of participants, which may not fully represent the diversity of experiences among international students.

4.2 Analysis and presentation demographic Data

The analysis of the data was analysed based on the research objectives. However, prior to that, descriptive statistics were undertaken to understand the participants and respondents of the study. Demographic variables analyzed included gender, age, country of origin, source of funding and marital status.

4.2.1 Gender of Respondents

Majority of the respondents were male ($n = 91$; 59%).

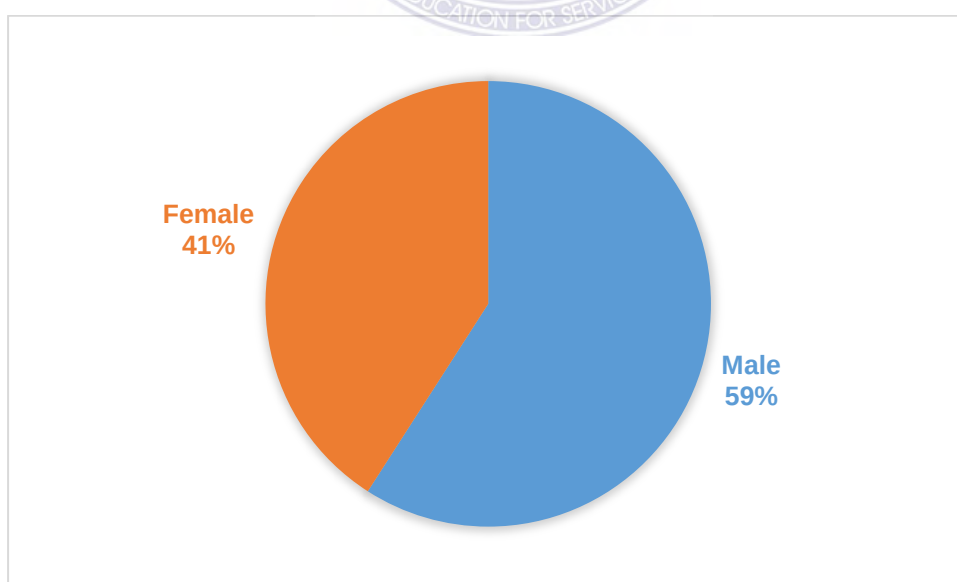


Figure 3: Gender of respondents

4.2.2 Age of Respondents

On average, respondents were 21 years ($M = 21.66$; $SD = 2.17$). The youngest person was 18 years old and the oldest was 30 years old.

4.2.3 Country of Origin and Length of Stay in Ghana

Respondents were from diverse African countries – some from the north, central, west, east, and southern.



Figure 4. Filled map of country of origin

Majority of the respondents came from Nigeria ($n = 68$), followed by Sierra Leone ($n = 19$). A surprising number came from French-speaking countries – Côte d'Ivoire ($n = 13$); Equatorial Guinea ($n = 10$); and Gabon ($n = 7$).

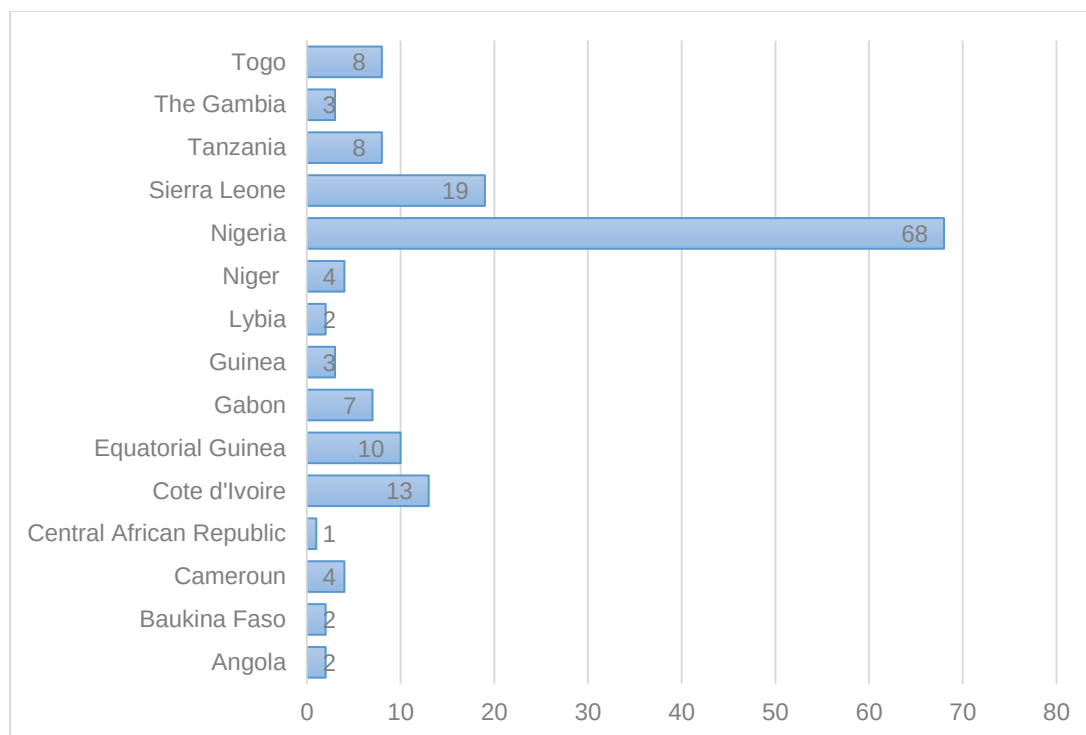


Figure 5. Clustered Bar Chart of country of origin

Concerning length of stay in Ghana, majority ($n = 130$; 84.4%) had been in Ghana less than one year. About 10 (6.5%) had been in Ghana for a year. Eight of them had been in Ghana for two years. One person had been in Ghana for three years and five people had been in Ghana for four years.

4.2.4 Marital Status and Social Support of respondents

Majority of the respondents were single ($n = 134$) and only one person was divorced.

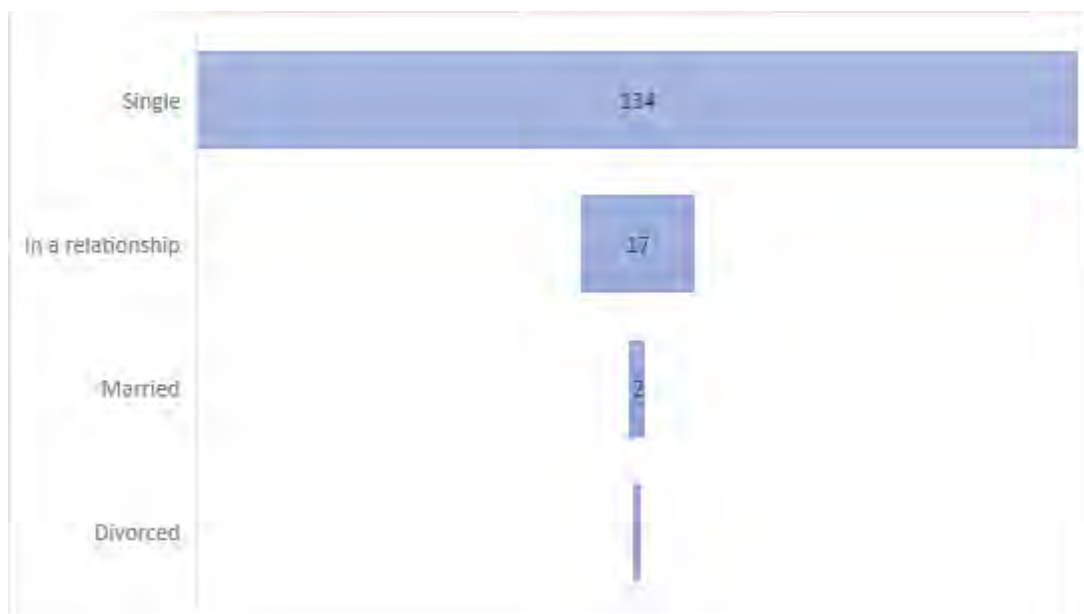


Figure 6. Funnel Bar Chart of marital status

When respondents were asked if they had relatives with them in Ghana, majority ($n = 134$; 87%) indicated they were in Ghana by themselves. About 13% on the other hand, had relatives with them in Ghana.

4.2.5 Source of Funding for School

Responses concerning sources of funding spanned several sources. These ranged from family funds, through scholarships to graduate assistantships (see table 2)

Table 4: Source of Funding

Funding Source	Frequency	Percent
Assistantship	10	6.5
Scholarship	20	13.0
Family Funds	109	70.8
Others	13	8.4
Missing	2	1.3
Total	154	100.00%

4.3 Analysis of Research questions

Each of the objectives was analysed using inferential statistics. Prior to these analyses, reliability calculation was undertaken for each of the instruments to ensure that they were good enough to be used in this sample. Two main instruments were adopted – the acculturative stress scale (ASSIS) and the social support scale.

Internal consistency was measured via SPSS, with the Cronbach's alpha as the index of internal consistency (Cohen, 1969, 1988; 1994). Cronbach's alpha was the index used to measure reliability, and Cohen's (1988) index was used as a measure of classification (i.e., acceptable; strong; very strong). A score of less than 0.60 is considered _not reliable'; scores between .60 and .79 are considered adequate; and scores at and above .80 are considered excellent.

Table 5: Reliability Indices of Instruments



Instrument	Reliability Index
Acculturation Stress Scale for International Students (ASSIS)	.969
Sojourner Social Support	.897

The reliability indices of both instruments were excellent.

4.3.1 Analyzing Research question one – Factors of acculturative stress

To understand the factors within acculturative stress, the descriptive statistics was used. Acculturative Stress was clustered under five factors. These factors were (1) Fear for personal safety; (2) Discrimination; (3) Homesickness; (4) Future insecurity; and (5) Injustice. These clusters were obtained based on the instrument developers' recommendations (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1998).

Table 6. Means and Standard Deviations of Acculturative Stress

Factor	Mean	SD	N
Personal Safety	30.1634	8.14786	153
Discrimination	13.4156	3.99461	154
Homesickness	20.7597	5.55078	154
Future Security	13.8516	3.96459	128
Injustice	3.5584	1.23663	154

The factor with the highest mean was personal safety. This factor represented respondents' fear for themselves because of the new country as well as the foreignness of the food and the culture. The next highest was the feeling of homesickness – missing family, friends, and the familiarity of their home country. The lowest mean was the feeling of injustice – where respondents felt they were denied what they deserved.

4.3.2 Analysing Research question 2 – Relationship between Social Support and Acculturative Stress

Pearson's Product Moment Correlation was used to analyze this objective. The variables for this analysis included social support as well as all the factors within acculturative stress. Correlations range from -1 to +1. The closer a correlational coefficient is to 1, the stronger it is. The negative and positive symbols indicate whether there is a positive relationship or a negative / inverse relationship.

Table 7. Off Diagonal Correlation for Social Support and Acculturation

Variable	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Personal Safety	153	30.16	8.15	1					
2 Discrimination	154	13.42	3.99	.658**	1				
3 Homesickness	154	20.76	5.55	.738**	.649**	1			
4 Fut. Insecure	128	13.86	3.96	.668**	.587**	.713**	1		
5 Injustice	154	3.56	1.24	.484**	.487**	.495**	.476**	1	
6 Social Support	149	59.09	13.06	.328**	.341**	.474**	.484**	.165*	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

All the variables were statistically significantly correlated with each other. Personal safety was correlated perfectly by itself. The presence of discrimination increased personal safety by 65.6%. The presence of homesickness increased personal safety by 73.8% and discrimination by 64.9%. Future insecurity increased personal safety by 66.8%, discrimination by 58.7%, and homesickness by 71.3%. Injustice increased personal safety by 48.8%, discrimination by 48.7%, homesickness by 49.5%, insecurity about the future by 47.6%. The presence of social support, increased personal safety by 32.8%, discrimination by 34.1%, homesickness by 47.4%, insecurity about the future by 48.4%, and feeling they are being denied what is their due (injustice) by 16.5%.

4.3.3 Analysing Research question 3 – Effect of Socio-demographic variables on Acculturative Stress

Socio-demographic variables could statistically significantly predict acculturative stress, $F(3, 121) = 6.23$; $R^2 = .134$; $p < .001$; Durbin Watson = .862.

Table 8 Regression of Socio demographic variables and acculturation

Variable	Unstandardized		Standardized	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>
	Coefficients		Coefficients		
	B	SE	Beta(β)		
Age	-3.89	1.14	-.29	-3.41	<.001
Gender	1.29	4.65	.024	.277	.782
Country of origin	1.39	.49	.243	2.85	.005

a. Dependent Variable: Acculturative Stress

The variable that contributed the most to Acculturative Stress was country of origin ($\beta = .243$; $p = .005$) followed by age ($\beta = -.29$; $p < .001$).

4.3.4 Analysing Research question 4 – Effect of Social Support on Acculturative Stress

Social support could statistically significantly predict acculturative stress, $F(1, 119) = 45.92$; $R^2 = .278$; $p < .001$; Durbin Watson = .690.

Table 9: Regression of social support and acculturation

Variable	Unstandardized		Standardized	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>
	Coefficients		Coefficients		
	B	SE	Beta(β)		
Social support	1.07	.158	.528	6.78	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Acculturative Stress

These results show that social support is a significant predictor of acculturative stress, with a positive relationship between the two. While social support typically acts as a buffer to stress, this positive association could indicate that in

certain contexts, higher levels of social support might come with emotional or cultural expectations, leading to increased stress. Additionally, the strength of the relationship is moderate to strong ($\beta = .528$), and the statistical significance is high ($p < .001$), indicating confidence in the findings. It may be valuable to explore the **types** of social support being provided and the specific context of the population to better understand this unexpected positive relationship.

Table 10. Profile of international students interviewed (N=5)

	Male	FEMALE	country of origin	
Methodist University	1	1	Nigeria	2
Methodist University	1		Tanzania	1
Pentecost University	1	1	Cote d'Ivoire	2
Total	2	2		5

Participant has been studying at the 2 universities.

4.3.5 Analysis of Research question 5 lived experiences of international students

4.3.5.1 Qualitative Results

This qualitative research undertakes an exploration of the experiences of international students in two Ghanaian universities, with a specific focus on understanding the nuances of their adaptation process, the obstacles encountered, and the resultant transformations. This study employed the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach to explore the lived experiences of international students in Ghana. The Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach was developed to examine how persons make sense of their personal and social world and the meanings they make of encountering such phenomena. (Smith,1996).

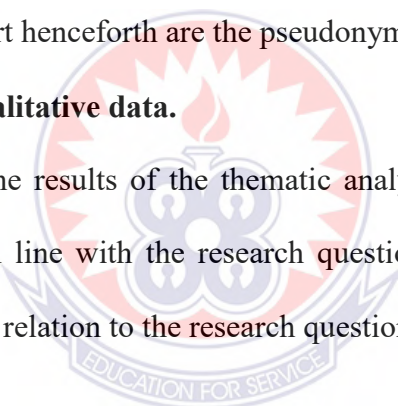
Utilizing a series of transcripts derived from interviews, the study aims to provide insights into the multifaceted dimensions of acculturative stress, encompassing themes such as cultural adaptation, language barriers, support systems, and perceptions of identity. This was guided by this research question:

5. What are the lived experiences among international students in Ghanaian universities on acculturative stress?

In the ensuing pages, findings that emerged from the study are analyzed and presented in line with the research questions. The total number of respondents for this phase was (5). Consistent with ethical protocol about anonymity and confidentiality, as well as to empower respondents, they were asked to provide a pseudonym for themselves. All names used in this report henceforth are the pseudonyms they chose for themselves.

4.3.5.2 Analysis of Qualitative data.

This section presents the results of the thematic analysis of the data collected. The results are presented in line with the research questions. Table 3 shows emerging themes from the data in relation to the research questions.



Emerging Themes from the Qualitative data

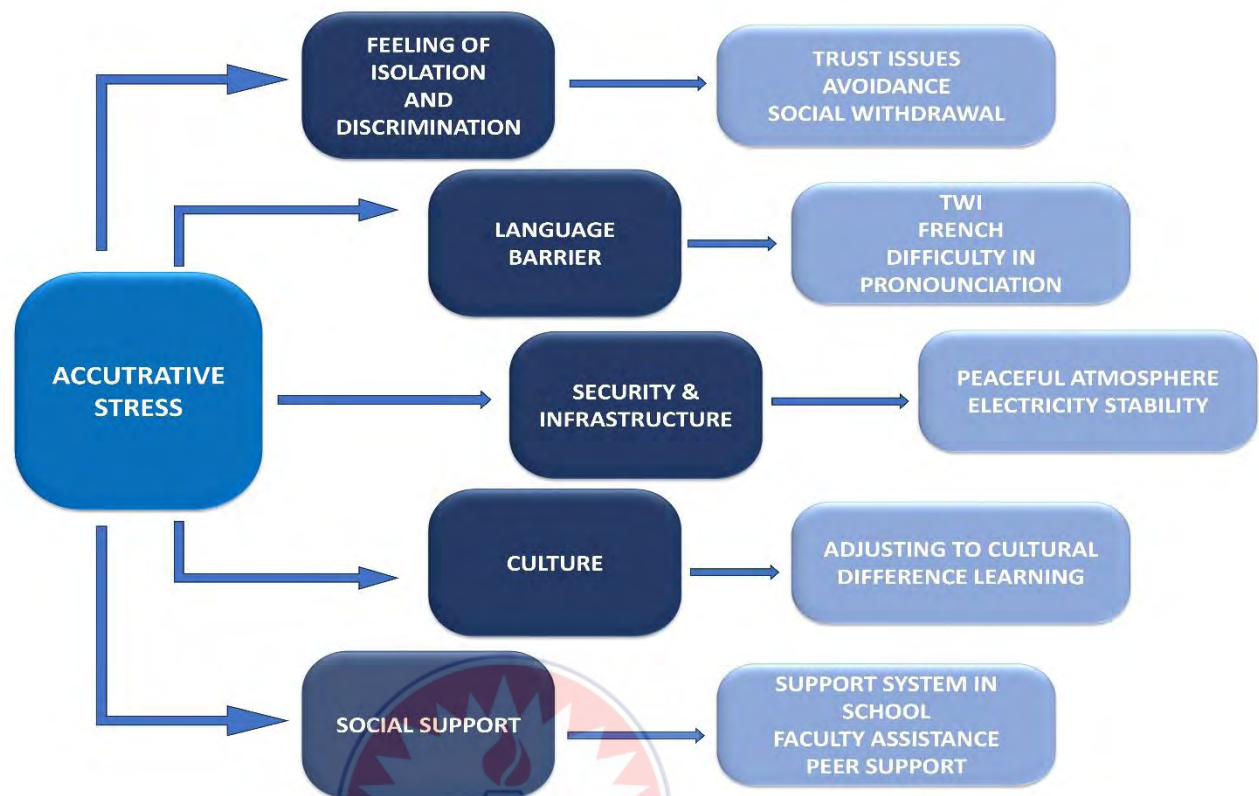


Figure 7. Thematic map and sub themes

Transcription.

The in-depth interviews were audio recorded and transcribed word-for-word to accurately preserve participants' original responses. Interview questions, labeled as "I," were typed in separate paragraphs from the participants' responses, labelled as "R." Transcripts were named according to the participant's gender, continent of origin, and the order of their interview. For instance, the first male participant from Nigeria was labelled "N1," while the first female participant from cote d'Ivoire was labelled "C1," and so forth. To maintain confidentiality and anonymity, these identifiers were used for all transcript excerpts illustrating findings. The same labels were applied to distinguish quotes from different transcriptions

Analyses

In analyzing the data, the researcher followed Smith et al.'s (2009) IPA guide for analyzing larger samples, as it suited the total of four in-depth interviews conducted. Consequently, I did not adhere to the typical idiographic rigor that involves detailed analysis of individual transcripts. Instead, I used a group-level approach, as outlined by Smith et al. (2009). Each transcript was read and re-read to assess key emergent themes for the entire group, allowing for what Smith and Osborn (2003) describe as an iterative process with close interaction between reader and text. In the second step, I established linkages between quotes that highlighted group-level themes and further connected them to recurrent themes. Finally, themes were verified, summarized, and analytical connections were made among them (Smith et al., 2009) to ensure a coherent, analytical write-up. The analysis yielded five main themes and twelve sub-themes. These themes and sub-themes were visually represented on a thematic map, where ovals indicated the main themes, sharp-edged rectangles represented sub-themes, and round-edged rectangles represented sub-sub themes.

Adapting to New Environment, Acculturative stress experience and Culture

The aim was to provide a comprehensive view of the difficulties faced by these students on how international student are treated, and the strategies they use to overcome them. The transition to a new environment is often characterized by a mixture of excitement and apprehension. Some of the respondent expressed difficulties in adjusting to new ways of living, communicating, and engaging with others, the feeling of disorientation was due to the unfamiliar environment, customs, and social norms.

The finding reflects this sentiment, as one international student describes the gradual smoothing out of their experience in Ghana. Despite the initial challenges, there is a

profound sense of peace that permeates their journey, emphasizing the resilience inherent in the process of adaptation. However, the process was not without its complexities, as highlighted by the acknowledgment of the language barrier and the need to navigate unfamiliar cultural activities. This resonates with the broader theme of cultural immersion and the efforts made by international student to integrate into their new surroundings. These experiences are shared as follows:

"My experience here in Ghana has been gradually smoothing out, especially compared to my initial weeks. It's a profound feeling to finally sense this peace around me, even as I continue to navigate and comprehend the nuances of life in Ghana." (N 4)

*"Seeing the fact that it's a completely new environment, so we try to fit into the culture and setting of the place and. It's not quite easy. You feel overwhelming at times. Because. There's of course there's the language barrier here, and other unfamiliar cultural activities which make life difficult. Activities we are *not used to*." – C 3*

This reflected the difficulty international students often faced when transitioning from a familiar cultural context to an entirely different one. The term overwhelming indicated the emotional toll that such a drastic change can have, especially in the early stages of adaptation, despite their significant financial contributions to both Ghanaian society and the university through the tuition fees they pay.

Challenges of Language Barrier

Language serves as a fundamental bridge for communication, yet it can also pose significant obstacles for international students adjusting to a new environment especially the use of the local language (Twi and Fante), the process of language acquisition, and the social dynamics involved when making language mistakes

The findings highlight the struggle for effective communication, with some international students expressing difficulty in fully engaging with others due to the language barrier. Similarly, some of the respondents shared their experience of language acquisition emphasizing the opportunities and challenges inherent in learning a new language. Despite the laughter and teasing that may accompany

language mistakes, there is a recognition of the advantages gained through linguistic diversity.

"When I first arrived, I struggled to communicate effectively due to the language barrier. Conversations often left me feeling lost, unable to fully engage with others or express myself. At times you go to the market whilst speaking English with them and some don't even understand what you are saying, some even cheat in terms of the prices and goods because they will be using the local language(twi) It's a constant challenge that I'm working to overcome." (T 5)

"Yes, because you are learning the language so you have to think before speaking because people will laugh, but I didn't see it as a bad thing. I see opportunities in teasing & when people laugh at me anytime I speak in English. I have a problem with pronouncing "r" in a word because I remembers one time a friend laughed at me for pronouncing 'bread' as 'blead' and I said 'And so I pronounced it as blead because I am learning the language but when it comes to French, you can't speak it fluently like I do'. So, I have that advantage." (N 4)

This sentiment reflected the sense of alienation that international students experienced when language inhibits their ability to form social connections or fully participate in academic settings.

"I struggle to communicate with locals because of the language differences. Even though most people speak English, the local dialects are often used, and I feel excluded in social situations."(N 1)

In academic contexts, the language barrier affected performance, as students find it harder to grasp complex concepts or express their thoughts effectively. African international students, especially from French speaking countries, accents and, in some cases, the nuances of English spoken in Ghana. For instance those whose first language is not English, everyday conversations became overwhelming. *Student 4* recounted their experience of mispronouncing the word "*bread*" as "*blead*", leading to teasing by a friend. However, the student used this experience to highlight their strength in another language.

The Feeling of Isolation and Discrimination

Feelings of isolation and discrimination can cast shadows on the international student experience, challenging notions of belonging and acceptance. International student

sheds light on the perception of exclusion, with one international student expressing a sense of alienation based on nationality. Additionally, this student reflected on experiences of discrimination, particularly related to skin color, highlighting the complexities of identity and belonging in a diverse society. Despite these challenges, there is a resilience evident in the international journey, as they navigate and adapt to their new reality.

"At times, I feel that they don't like us Ivoirians and that they like to cheat us."."
(C5)

"Sometimes I felt that, because of my color, I experienced discrimination. Over time, I started getting used to it. Even without their support, I managed to adapt."." (Nt 4)

Another source of acculturative stress for a number of international students was the wrong perception that they Ghanaians don't like the Nigerians and Ivoirians, conveys a sense of disconnection from the local community. These feelings raised when students perceived that their nationality influences how they been are treated by peers or locals. This perception of being "othered" lead to feelings of alienation, making it challenging for students to establish a sense of belonging in their new environment. The quotes above (N2 &N4) depict the experiences of the students

Cultural Adjustment and Learning

The process of cultural adjustment is a dynamic journey of exploration and adaptation. The findings reflect the ongoing learning curve faced by International student in Ghana, as they encounter unfamiliar customs and traditions. Despite the initial challenges, there is a recognition of the richness inherent in cultural diversity, prompting a journey of understanding and appreciation. The acknowledgment of novelty underscores the resilience and openness required to embrace new experiences and integrate into the fabric of Ghanaian society.

"As I continue to adapt to life in Ghana, I'm constantly encountering new customs and traditions that are unfamiliar to me. It makes me feel differently,

it's uncomfortable to me but it's a learning process, one that requires patience and an open mind as I strive to understand and appreciate the rich cultural tapestry of this country." (N 4)

"So, some of those things you see, they are new to us." (N 4)

The sentiment captures the essence of cultural adjustment as a dynamic process filled with discovery. International students navigated a variety of cultural practices, which range from local celebrations and rituals to everyday social interactions. These students often find that direct engagement with local culture, through participation in events, community gatherings, and interactions with locals, fosters a deeper understanding of the cultural nuances that define Ghanaian society. As articulated by *International Student 5*, the process can evoke feelings of discomfort: *"It makes me feel differently, makes me uncomfortable."* Such feelings were common among international students, particularly in their initial stages of adaptation. This discomfort stem from differences in social etiquette, communication styles, or daily practices that contrast sharply with what students are used to.

Appreciation of Security and Infrastructure

The sense of security and stability plays a pivotal role in shaping the migrant experience. The findings illustrate the newfound appreciation for the security measures and infrastructure in Ghana, contrasting with the uncertainties faced in their country of origin. One of these students came from country where instability and insecurity are prevalent, making the contrast with Ghana's environment stark and noteworthy. The assurance of safety enables international students to explore their surroundings freely, contributing to a sense of peace and well-being. Additionally, the reliability of utilities like electricity enhances the overall quality of life, fostering a sense of gratitude for the comforts afforded in their new home. One respondent expressed his relief and appreciation for the safety they felt in Ghana

"One thing I've come to appreciate about Ghana is the sense of security it provides. Unlike back home, I feel safe to explore the streets at any hour, knowing that I can trust in the security measures in place. Additionally, the reliability of utilities like electricity adds to the overall quality of life here." (C 2)

Some of the international student from Nigeria reported that Ghana is a free country to move around, they have the freedom to explore the environment without fear and this enhances students' sense of peace and encourages a more open engagement with their surroundings. Their ability to participate in everyday activities without concerns about safety contributes significantly to their emotional and psychological well-being

"Well, first of all, I think Ghana has a more peaceful atmosphere. Also, the electricity supply here is more stable compared to Nigeria, and since ECG is constant, it makes life better in Ghana" (C 3)

Support and Solidarity Among international students

Life as an international student was predominantly a challenging experience. Social support serves as a crucial buffer against the stressors associated with adjusting to a new cultural and academic environment. One of the significant challenges for international students is the feeling of being an outsider in a foreign culture. Social support, particularly from fellow students or members of the local community, fosters a sense of belonging. When students feel included and accepted, they are more likely to have positive experiences

"When I first arrived, I struggled with some cultural differences. Making friends was very challenging for me. I remember being told that the Ga people were celebrating their festival with many amazing activities, but I needed someone to explain the social norms and local customs to me. Having someone to share and explain these experiences would have made my transition much easier." (N 1)

This highlights common difficulties faced by many international students, such as adjusting to local customs, making friends, and understanding social norms in a new environment.

This student specifically mentioned difficulties with understanding the Ga people's festival and other aspects of local life. These festivals, which are central to local

culture, were unfamiliar to the student, making it difficult for them to engage fully or appreciate the significance of these events.

"Studying here is quite different from what I was used to because some of my lectures at times used the local language when teaching which makes the understanding very difficult. I felt lost at those moment." (N 1).

The following quotes illustrate the significant impact local friendships can have in providing support and easing the transition for international students.

"I had trouble figuring out how to get around the city and manage daily tasks because I speak French and thankfully, my friends showed me where to shop, how to use public transport, and even helped me with settling into my accommodation." (N 2)

"Being able to talk with other international students who are going through the same challenges has been comforting. We share our experiences, and it reminds me that I'm not alone in this journey." (C 3)

The findings encapsulate the essence of camaraderie and support among international student, as one individual finds solace in the companionship of roommates. Despite language barriers, these bonds transcend communication obstacles, offering invaluable assistance in navigating daily tasks and fostering a sense of belonging. The mutual support extends beyond practical matters, as evidenced by efforts to aid in academic endeavors and alleviate the anxieties of public speaking. These instances underscore the importance of solidarity in easing the transition to a new environment.

"Fortunately, I've found solace in the camaraderie of my roommates. Despite the language barrier, they've been incredibly supportive, helping me navigate everyday tasks and offering a sense of belonging in this new environment." (N 2)

"Yes, we learn together. They really help me a lot in my studies because, in a case where I don't understand a course, they try their best to help me understand and for instance during presentations, due to my language they just cover me up due to my shy nature do I am not intimidated by speaking, but the fear that grips me to stand in front of people and talk. " (N 2)

Without a network of friends or peers, international students may feel isolated and lonely, leading to emotional distress. Social support provides essential emotional backing, helping individuals cope with feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and

homesickness. Having friends or mentors who offer understanding, encouragement, and a listening ear help significantly reduce feelings of isolation and enhance emotional resilience. This emotional support helps international students feel more connected and valued, mitigating the psychological impact of acculturative stress. These responses were provided by the participants.

"I don't feel like I have a strong support system here. It's hard to reach out to people when I'm struggling, and sometimes I feel like I'm handling everything on my own. For example, when you need help with accommodation issues, it is very difficult to get support, even though I know the university is trying its best. I have not seen an international student office where you can easily go when facing challenges. The only office I know is the Student Support Unit, but since every student in the university uses it to lodge complaints or other issues, it becomes difficult for them to attend to us quickly." (C 5).

"It's hard to find the resources I need, whether it's academic help. As a French speaking student, from francophone country student, we need to pay for extra fees on the English classes which I think it expensive based on the fees we are paying as international student. The university's support system doesn't always seem tailored to international students, and I often feel lost." (International student 3)

"Living in Ghana as an international student is expensive. Between tuition, accommodation, and daily expenses, I'm constantly worried about money. It adds to my stress when I'm already trying to adjust." (C 3)

"I sometimes rely on my professors for support. They are often understanding of the challenges I face as an international student and provide guidance on both academic and personal issues..." (N 1)

"I often turn to my friends, especially those who understand my experiences as international students. They can relate to what I'm going through, and we support each other in navigating the challenges." (N1)

Studying in Ghana has altered the way some students perceive the country, shifting their initial views from the above respondents. The Ghanaian culture presented the greatest challenge for them, but it became a valuable experience in a society where education and forward-thinking ideas are balanced. This cultural challenge was the

4.3.6 Summary of the qualitative findings

Qualitative component of this study reflects the complex experiences of all international students in Ghana, emphasizing the significant challenges they face related to language barriers, cultural differences, and feelings of isolation. One student recounted being cheated in the marketplace due to a lack of understanding of Twi, while another found value in the teasing they received for language mistakes, such as mispronouncing "bread" as "blead." These language difficulties impacted both their social interactions and academic performance, particularly for African students from French-speaking countries who struggled with English nuances and accents.

Additionally, there is a perception among some students that Ghanaians hold negative views toward Nigerians and Ivorians, intensifying their sense of disconnection from the local community and making it harder to establish a sense of belonging. Despite these challenges, many students demonstrated resilience, adapting to their new reality and engaging with local culture through community events and social interactions. This engagement fosters a deeper understanding of Ghanaian society, helping students navigate their discomfort and integrate more fully into their environment.

The reliability of infrastructure, such as electricity, has also contributed to an improved quality of life, leading to greater gratitude for the comforts of their new home. However, some students expressed concerns about the lack of strong support systems and accessible resources, especially those facing language barriers and financial burdens, which can lead to emotional distress.

Despite these hurdles, students viewed their experiences as valuable learning opportunities that reshaped their perceptions of Ghana. The findings underscore the

importance of solidarity and mutual support among international students in navigating their challenges and successfully adapting to their new surroundings.

4.4 Discussion of Results

This study examined the role sociodemographic variables, social support and acculturative stress experienced by international students at two universities in Ghana. The study aimed to investigate the relationship between social support and acculturative stress among international students in Ghana. More also the study sought to find out the effect of socio-demographic variables on acculturative stress among international students in Ghana. In line with this objective, six research questions were examined. Results from the qualitative result threw light on the quantitative results since participants shared lived experiences as international students in Ghanaian universities. The section, therefore, provides an in-depth discussion of the key findings from this study.

The socio-demographic profile for respondents focused on the study area, international students, age, gender, country of origin. The study was conducted at the Methodist University Ghana and Pentecost University Ghana Greater Accra Region of Ghana. One hundred and fifty four (154) respondents participated in the study. The participants were undergraduate.

Research question 1 factors of Acculturative Stress

The analysis of acculturative stress revealed that respondents experienced varying levels of stress across five main factors: personal safety, discrimination, homesickness, future insecurity, and injustice. Among these, personal safety had the highest mean score, indicating that concerns related to personal security were the most prominent source of stress for international students.

This is in line with Berry's (1997) Acculturation Theory, which identifies safety concerns as a crucial component of the acculturation process. Fear of violence, crime, or discomfort in navigating an unfamiliar environment can heighten psychological distress. Empirical studies are consistent with this; for instance, Poyrazli and Lopez (2007) noted that safety concerns heavily impact stress levels among international students, while Bhugra (2004) highlighted similar trends among immigrant and refugee groups.

Thus, results of the study revealed that there exists a significant level of acculturative stress among international students. The overall results indicated that the highest mean score of factors revealed the average level of acculturative stress, the findings showed a significant level of stress among international students.

It both addressed the research question and contributed to the existing body of literature (Ada & Suk, 2004; Asmawati, 2012; Azizah, 2014; Berry & Kostornik, 1993; Hilletal, 1994; Nasir Nasirudeen, 2014; Azizah, 2014; Willam & Berry, 1991; Smart & Smart, 1995; Mishra, 1996).

In addition, all five subscales of sociocultural adaptation resulted in a significant negative relationship with acculturative stress, although the correlation was weak. This may suggest that greater competency with interpersonal communication, academic/work performance, personal interests and community involvement, ecological adaptation, and language proficiency can each reduce levels of acculturative stress among international students. Addressing these concerns is critical for easing acculturative stress. Programs that improve physical security and provide culturally sensitive orientations can be effective strategies to mitigate these fears. As suggested by Wang and Mallinckrodt (2006), the factor of acculturative stress is important in analysing sociocultural adjustment difficulties. Again, the result of this

study adds to the results of existing literature by demonstrating that whenever an individual moves from one culture to other a stress was imposed to that person

. This aligns with the understanding that international student relocating to a new country, especially those with unfamiliar cultural practices and environments, often feel vulnerable due to factors such as unfamiliarity with the local area, potential language barriers, food, environment, policies, cultural values, and differences in local customs. Personal safety is crucial for these students living in a foreign country. Some of the participant may not be familiar with the local environment making them more vulnerable in situations. Staying informed about safety measures, emergency contacts, and local customs can help students avoid potential risks. The high score suggests that addressing issues related to personal safety should be a priority in easing acculturative stress for international students.

The second highest source of stress was homesickness which is consistent with the emotional challenges faced by some participant adapting to a new environment. With respondents expressing significant emotional strain from being separated from family, friends, and familiar surroundings. This aligns with research by Mesidor and Sly (2016), who found that homesickness is a major challenge among international students. Stroebe et al. (2015) also underscored the impact of homesickness on mental health, suggesting that building social support networks can alleviate these feelings. These insights imply that fostering community connections and offering support groups could help individuals cope better with homesickness.

In the qualitative interviews, some reported a sense of disorientation upon arrival, which aligns with the classic “culture shock” experienced by many who move to new countries.

Missing the familiarity of family, friends, and the home country is a common experience among international students, contributing significantly to their overall stress levels. This highlights the need for social and emotional support mechanisms to help students adjust to life in a foreign country. Homesickness emerged as another prominent stressor, with respondents expressing significant emotional strain from being separated from family, friends, and familiar surroundings. This aligns with research by Mesidor and Sly (2016), who found that homesickness is a major challenge among international students. Stroebe et al. (2015) also underscored the impact of homesickness on mental health, suggesting that building social support networks can alleviate these feelings. These insights imply that fostering community connections and offering support groups could help individuals cope better with homesickness. The moderate mean score for *discrimination* indicates that experiencing or perceiving unequal treatment is a relevant stressor. Social Identity Theory by Tajfel and Turner (1979) explains that discrimination negatively affects one's self-esteem and contributes to acculturative stress, as individuals often derive a sense of identity from their social group affiliations. Lee and Rice (2007) documented that discrimination against international students can lead to feelings of alienation, complicating their social and academic integration. Schmitt et al. (2014) also found that discrimination is linked to higher stress levels and adverse health outcomes. Addressing this requires implementing policies that promote cultural inclusivity and sensitivity to reduce experiences of discrimination and foster a more welcoming environment.

On the other hand, *Future insecurity* also emerged as a relevant factor contributing to acculturative stress. According to Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) Stress and Coping Theory, the uncertainty about one's future—be it academic, professional, or

financial—can induce significant stress when perceived resources to cope seem insufficient. Constantine et al. (2005) emphasized that future-related stress is common among migrants, often fueled by concerns about employment prospects and long-term stability. Ward et al. (2001) also highlighted that planning for future security can mitigate these feelings of anxiety. This suggests that institutions should offer support services, such as career counseling and mentoring, to help alleviate stress related to future uncertainty.

Alternatively, injustice ($M = 3.56$, $SD = 1.24$) had the lowest mean score, suggesting that feelings of being treated unfairly or denied what one deserves were less prevalent compared to other stress factors. Although not as prominent, injustice still plays a role in acculturative stress and may stem from cultural misunderstandings, unequal treatment, or perceived discrimination. This could be due to effective institutional support systems or cultural factors that reduce perceptions of unfairness. Nonetheless, it is still essential to ensure that fair and transparent systems are in place to further minimize potential stressors. Moradi and Hasan (2004) found that perceived injustice is a stressor in cases of systematic disadvantage, though in your findings, it seems to have had a relatively minor impact.

Generally, the findings underscore the importance of addressing safety and emotional support needs while also acknowledging discrimination, future insecurity, and fairness concerns.

Research question 2: Relationship between Social Support and Acculturative Stress

The correlation analysis revealed statistically significant relationships between social support and all five factors of acculturative stress. The presence of discrimination increased personal safety by 65.6%. The presence of homesickness increased

personal safety by 73.8% and discrimination by 64.9%. Future insecurity increased personal safety by 66.8%, discrimination by 58.7%, and homesickness by 71.3%. Injustice increased personal safety by 48.8%, discrimination by 48.7%, homesickness, by 49.5%, and insecurity about the future by 47.6%. The presence of social support, increased personal safety by 32.8%, discrimination by 34.1%, homesickness by 47.4%, insecurity about the future by 48.4%, and feeling they are being denied what is their due (injustice) by 16.5%. The positive correlation between social support and acculturative stress across factors like personal safety and homesickness presents a nuanced understanding and was surprising. This finding is not consistent with those of previous studies which observed an increase in adjustment Wang and Mallinckrodt (2006), Ward and Kennedy (1994), and Yang et al. (2006) and decrease in acculturation stress levels with greater time in the host country (Msengi 2003). Again studies by Rui and Wang (2015) and Van Gorp et al. (2017) showed that social support is a positive coping mechanism for dealing with stress and adjusting psychologically by enhancing functioning and acts as a buffer against adverse outcomes. The study is similar to another study by, also found that social support from one's Mehrdad, Falavarjani, Christine, Yeh & Symen, Brouwers, 2019,

home culture, through home acculturation orientation, is associated with increased levels of stress and depression. Similar results have been found regarding college stress and social support (Solberg & Villarreal, 1997). When acculturative stress was low, those who perceived high social support reported more symptoms than their peers with lower levels of social support. Interestingly while social support is generally expected to buffer stress, the qualitative accounts point out that reliance on social networks sometimes creates added pressures. For example, one participants stated that may feel emotionally dependent on these networks or may experience

disappointment when the support does not meet expectations. One respondent, while appreciating their roommates' support, indicated that navigating local challenges such as language and market interactions, still felt isolating. Thus, while social support is a critical resource, its protective effects may be limited if students do not feel fully integrated or if that support is insufficient in overcoming certain cultural barriers.

Research question 3: Effect of Socio-Demographic Variables on Acculturative Stress.

Regression analysis identified country of origin and age as significant predictors of acculturative stress. Country of origin emerged as the most significant positive predictor of acculturative stress, emphasizing the role of cultural distance and differences in shaping stress experiences. The concept of cultural distance, proposed by Berry (1997), posits that the greater the differences between an individual's home and host cultures, the more difficult it is to acculturate successfully, leading to higher levels of stress. Research by Ward and Geeraert (2016) supports this, demonstrating that individuals from culturally distant regions often struggle more with language barriers, social norms, and discrimination. As students leave from their home country to the one in which they will be studying, they have to adopt to and integrate into the traditions and culture of their host nation. When transitioning from their home country to their host country, international college students face various perceived threats and challenges. Among them are the lack of knowledge of the host culture, difficulty in adapting to the host country customs and lifestyle, and maladjustment to the physical environment. Majority of the challenges faced by international students relate to expressive and written language. Because of their poor language proficiency, few respondents said, they had to spend more time studying the host local language. This finding is consistent with previous literature, as Abha et al. (2021) indicated that

country of origin, an attribute of life stress, contributes to the overall acculturative stress of international students, who also experience the added challenge of adjusting to college life in a foreign country with unfamiliar cultural and social nuances..

Participants from countries with greater cultural and linguistic differences from Ghana, such as French-speaking nations, faced heightened challenges, exacerbated by language barriers and cultural unfamiliarity. The current study agreed with those from previous study conducted, which indicated that international students who decide to study in another country are particularly vulnerable to acculturative stress (Baba & Hososda, 2014; Hamamura & Laird, 2014; Han et al., 2017; Hirai et al., 2015; Misra) In terms of discrimination, some respondents reported experiencing stress as they felt marginalized due to their nationality or skin color. This, results indicate that some degree of discrimination was perceived by the participants. This was in line with prior research which has shown that international students constantly report encounters with discrimination (Jung et al., 2007; Lee & Rice, 2007). Students who perceive discrimination may feel less motivated to interact with others from the host nation, which can lead into isolation/alienation and loneliness (Constantine et al., 2005; Klomegah, 2006). Lamentably, being rejected or having perceptions of rejection by social groups can induce high anxiety and have negative repercussions on psychological health and wellness (Young, 2017). All things considered, experiencing discrimination or rejection can have a harmful effect on the overall well-being of international students. This underscores how socio-political contexts and cultural distance can intensify feelings of alienation.

In terms of demographic data, students who were in the younger age group expressed higher levels of acculturation stress in the present study. Age was found to be a

significant negative predictor of acculturative stress), indicating that younger individuals experience higher levels of acculturative stress compared to older individuals. This result is consistent with developmental theories and empirical studies suggesting that younger individuals, particularly those in emerging adulthood, face more significant challenges when adapting to new cultural environments.

Extant research has offered inconsistent results regarding the association between acculturative stress and age. While some researchers have indicated that older international students experience more difficulties in adjusting (Poyrazli et al., 2001), other studies have not demonstrated any significant relationship between age and overall stress level (Yeh & Inose, 2003; Poyrazli et al., 2004). The contrary results in the present study, however, were in keeping with the findings by Msengi (2003) wherein younger international students exhibited higher levels of acculturative stress. As posited by Beiter et al. (2015) highlighted that younger adults may lack established coping mechanisms and social support networks, making them more vulnerable to acculturative stress. These findings suggest that age-related developmental factors influence how individuals experience and manage the stress of acculturation. This is corroborated by qualitative insights where the younger participant's students confirmed that often away from home for the first time, expressed greater difficulties adjusting to a new country and establishing independence. Older students, by contrast, exhibited more resilience, perhaps due to prior experience living abroad or better-developed coping mechanisms. These insights suggest that interventions targeting younger international students may be particularly beneficial in helping them develop effective coping strategies. These findings suggest that factors such as maturity, prior life experiences, and coping strategies may mediate the relationship between age and

acculturative stress, highlighting the need for further investigation into individual differences within age groups

The findings underscore the importance of considering socio-demographic factors in developing interventions to alleviate acculturative stress. The significant impact of age suggests that younger individuals may require targeted support, such as mentorship programs, counseling, and resources to develop effective coping strategies. Programs could focus on building resilience and providing peer networks that can assist young adults in navigating cultural transitions. The influence of country of origin highlights the need for culturally sensitive approaches to support acculturation. Institutions and organizations should recognize the unique challenges faced by individuals from culturally distant regions and offer tailored services that address language barriers, cultural misunderstandings, and social integration

Research question 4: Effect of Social Support on Acculturative Stress

The positive correlation between social support and acculturative stress ($\beta = .528, p < .001$) aligns with the qualitative data, where students described both the benefits and limitations of their social networks. This statement highlights a nuanced relationship between social support and acculturative stress, which is particularly relevant for international students. The positive correlation ($\beta = .528, p < .001$) shows that as social support increases, acculturative stress also tends to rise. This seems counterintuitive at first because social support is generally expected to reduce stress.

While social support is generally understood to mitigate stress, the positive relationship observed in this study suggests that the dynamic between social support and stress is more complex than expected. According to data several different studies have shown the importance of social support from local friends for international students to reduce homesickness Hendrickson, (2011). Friendships with local

residents are important to develop cultural knowledge and competencies needed in adaptation, while social support from family and fellow countrymen will help students to maintain cultural identities and practices, and reduce homesickness and disorientation Wang, et al.,(2017),proposed that social support can act as a buffer against stress by providing emotional comfort, practical help, and a sense of belonging. This current study's findings do not agree with the previous study. Additionally, similar results have also shown by several studies, which concluded that social support for international students does not have a direct effect on negative events experienced by students, such as racism and psychological distress symptoms (Bae, 2020, Chen & Mallinckrodt, 2002, Peng, 2019, Robertson et al., 2000) issues such as accents and communication challenges can be a major source of stress. International students from non-English speaking countries often face extra hurdles when trying to integrate socially or academically, and these language barriers can cause misunderstandings or even criticism from peers and lecturers. Moreover, in Ghana, language differences and unfamiliar cultural practices can contribute to feelings of isolation, making it more difficult for international students to bridge the gap with local students. It may be explained that many students benefit from their social networks, which help alleviate homesickness and feelings of isolation. For international students, especially in a new cultural environment, making connections can provide a sense of belonging and stability. However, it could be attributed to the assumption that these networks fail to meet students' emotional or practical needs, the stress intensify. Relying on social support that sometimes falls short adds another layer of stress, particularly when expectations aren't met or when students feel like their efforts to connect aren't reciprocated. Additionally, students who actively sought out social connections may have done so because of higher levels of stress, suggesting

a bidirectional relationship where stress drives the need for social support, and the lack of adequate support, in turn, amplifies stress. Frequent interactions with individuals from the dominant culture plays a large role in international student adjustment. International students with increased interactions with native English speakers, not only acquired more vocabulary and fluency, but appeared to have helped foreign students develop friendships and social support systems that improved their adaptation to the new cultural environment (Martinsen et al., 2010; Surdam & Collins; 1984; Zimmermann, 1995). Another possible explanation for the positive association between social support and acculturative stress is that high levels of social support may come with additional emotional or cultural expectations that could increase stress. According to Ryan and Deci (2000), social support can exert pressure if there are implicit expectations for reciprocity or adherence to cultural norms, which may be challenging for individuals already navigating a new cultural environment. For example, support from family or cultural groups might entail expectations to maintain cultural traditions, fulfill obligations, or succeed in a new context, which could add to the stress of acculturation.

Another explanation could be related to the quality and type of social support. Schwartz and Knoll (2007) emphasized that social support is not always beneficial; for instance, excessive or intrusive support can undermine a person's sense of autonomy and competence. In certain cases, well-intended support may become overbearing, leading to increased feelings of dependency and stress. Furthermore, the cultural background of the individuals in this study could influence how social support is perceived. In collectivist cultures, for example, the expectations attached to support from family or community networks may be more burdensome, potentially contributing to increased stress.

Adjusting to life in Ghana while navigating the language barriers and cultural differences may reflect some of the challenges highlighted here. While social connections can be incredibly helpful, they may also create new pressures when they don't provide the support you need, or when communication difficulties lead to misunderstandings. It is important to consider the context and nature of this support. Interventions aimed at reducing acculturative stress should focus not only on increasing the availability of social support but also on enhancing the quality of support. Training and awareness programs could help support providers understand how to offer assistance in a way that empowers individuals rather than adds to their stress. Additionally, promoting balanced and culturally sensitive forms of support that respect an individual's autonomy could be crucial in minimizing stress. Understanding this dynamic helps in managing expectations around social networks. While seeking support is important, it's also crucial to recognize that these relationships can sometimes be a source of both relief and stress. Thus, this is a need to be taken into account for formulating interventions or policies for universities that utilize social support in minimizing the acculturation stress of foreign students.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the summary of the findings of the study. The chapter also presents the contributions and implications of the findings of the study to knowledge, research, clinical practice and policy decision. Finally, some recommendations for future research and conclusions are provided.

5.1 Summary of the study

The preliminary analysis of the demographic characteristics of respondents and participants provides valuable insights into the profile of individuals participating in the study. This summary chapter highlights key findings from the demographic data collected, shedding light on the diversity within the participant group and its potential implications for the study outcomes. This study can be understood from the perspectives of stress and coping theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner 1979) and Greenfield theory of culture change (Greenfield, 2009). Lazarus et al. (1978; 1984) believe that one's view of a situation determines whether an event is experienced as stressful or not, making stress the consequence of appraisal and not the antecedent of stress. According to this theory, the way an international student appraises an event plays a fundamental role in determining, not only the magnitude of the stress response, but also the kind of coping strategies that these international students may employ in efforts to deal with the stress.

The research design for this study was the sequential explanatory mixed method. The approach was mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative). The response rate for the questionnaire was 99.4% i.e. a total of 148 participants out of 240.

rate for the questionnaire administered. Participants were stratified randomly selected. This stratified approach not only enhanced the representativeness of the sample but also reduced potential sampling bias and increased the precision of the estimates of population parameters. A total 5 in-depth interviews were conducted.

The gender distribution within the participant group reveals a slight preponderance of males, comprising 59.1% of the sample, while females constitute 40.9%. This gender distribution is noteworthy, as it may influence research outcomes, particularly those with gender-related dimensions.

Approximately a quarter of the participants (24.7%) reported engaging in educational experiences in Ghana beyond their university education. This suggests a diverse array of educational backgrounds within the sample, potentially influencing their perspectives and contributions to the

The majority of participants (70.8%) relied predominantly on familial financial support to facilitate their educational pursuits. A smaller proportion availed themselves of assistantships (6.5%) and scholarships (13.0%), while 8.4% indicated alternative sources of financial backing. This heterogeneity in funding sources underscores the central role of familial support in underpinning the educational aspirations of the study population.

An overwhelming majority of participants (87.0%) reported not having relatives in Ghana, indicating weak familial connections to the country. Regarding marital status, the majority identified as single (87.0%), while smaller proportions were in a relationship (11.0%), married (1.3%), or divorced (0.6%). Marital status is a personal aspect that can influence various aspects of life, potentially impacting the research outcomes.

Participants in the study hailed from a range of countries, with Nigeria being the most frequently represented (44.2%). Other countries included Gabon, Cote d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, Togo, Cameroon, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Niger, The Gambia, Libya, Equatorial Guinea, Angola, Tanzania, and the Central African Republic. The diverse nationalities within the sample underscore the multicultural nature of the research cohort, potentially influencing the research in various ways. The study was conducted based on the guidance of the following six research questions:

1. What are the factors of acculturative stress experienced by international students in Ghanaian higher education?
2. What is the relationship between social support and acculturative stress among international students in Ghana?
3. How do socio-demographic variables influence acculturative stress among international students in Ghana?
4. What is the effect of social support on acculturative stress among international students in Ghanaian higher education?
5. What are the lived experiences of international students concerning acculturation in Ghanaian universities?

5.2 Summary of findings

The data analysis for this study revealed the following findings

1. The first objective aimed to determine the level of acculturative stress among participants, using descriptive statistics to analyze five key factors: personal safety, discrimination, homesickness, future insecurity, and injustice. The results indicated that personal safety had the highest mean score suggesting that concerns about physical safety, unfamiliar cultural practices, and the environment were major stressors. Homesickness was the second-highest stress

factor reflecting emotional difficulties related to separation from familiar surroundings and loved ones. The lowest mean score was for injustice indicating that perceptions of being unfairly treated were relatively less impactful. These findings highlight the multifaceted nature of acculturative stress. Personal safety was the most pressing concern, suggesting that addressing safety issues should be prioritized for international students.

2. The study revealed significant correlations that, personal safety was strongly correlated with homesickness and future insecurity. Social support was moderately correlated with homesickness, and future insecurity but weakly correlated with injustice. Interestingly, the positive correlations suggest that higher social support was associated with higher acculturative stress, contrary to the expectation that support mitigates stress. This may be due to the emotional or cultural expectations attached to social networks, which could sometimes increase stress levels. Qualitative insights revealed that reliance on social networks sometimes heightened stress due to unmet expectations and emotional dependence.
3. Additionally, the fourth objective assessed how socio-demographic factors, including age, gender, and country of origin, impact acculturative stress through regression analysis. The model was statistically significant, explaining 13.4% of the variance in acculturative stress. *Age* was a significant negative predictor indicating that younger participants experienced higher stress. Country of origin was a significant positive predictor highlighting that individual from culturally distant regions faced greater stress. Gender was not a significant predictor suggesting that stress levels did not differ meaningfully between men and women. These results underscore the influence of age and

cultural background on acculturative stress, while gender did not play a significant role. Experiences of discrimination were reported, which exacerbated feelings of isolation and stress. the younger often feel greater peer pressure to fit in, leading to stress and uncertainty as they navigate new social dynamics

4. Also it was observed that positive correlation exist between social support and acculturative stress. While social support typically acts as a buffer to stress, this positive association indicated that in certain contexts, higher levels of social support might come with emotional or cultural expectations, leading to increased stress. Limited language proficiency led to misunderstandings and isolation for students from francophone countries. They experienced negative attitudes which heightened acculturative stress, making social support even more critical. This aligns with the qualitative data, where students described both the benefits and limitations of their social networks Moreover, universities should consider how to enhance social support systems to better address the unique challenges faced by international students. Overall, the study emphasizes the complexity of acculturative stress and the need for comprehensive support mechanisms to facilitate smoother transitions for international students in unfamiliar cultural environments.

5.3 Counselling Implications

The findings of this study underscore the complex and multifaceted nature of acculturative stress experienced by international students in unfamiliar cultural environments. These results highlight critical areas of concern, including personal safety, homesickness, and the nuanced role of social support, which have significant implications for counseling practices.

1. The findings of this study emphasize the multifaceted nature of acculturative stress, with personal safety being the most pressing concern among international students. Counseling interventions must prioritize addressing physical safety concerns and helping students adapt to unfamiliar cultural environments.
2. Emotional challenges, such as homesickness, were identified as significant stressors. Counseling strategies like support group that provides a safe space to share experiences of homesickness and adjustment struggles to reduce feelings of isolation and separation from loved ones
3. The complex relationship between social support and acculturative stress indicates that counselors must help students manage expectations within their social networks and develop coping mechanisms for emotional dependency and unmet expectations.
4. Experiences of discrimination and language barriers, particularly among francophone students, highlight the critical role of counselors in addressing these issues by promoting language support programs and creating safe spaces for discussing discrimination.
5. The positive correlation between social support and stress suggests a need to redefine and enhance social support systems to better align with the cultural and emotional needs of international students, minimizing stress stemming from social expectations.

5.4 Recommendations for Future Research

1. Future studies should investigate the different kinds of social support (e.g., emotional, informational, or practical) to determine which are most effective in reducing stress and in what contexts. Understanding the impact of each type will guide better-targeted interventions.
2. 2, Given the significance of age in this study, research should further explore how different developmental stages influence acculturative stress. Also, examining potential subtle differences between genders could uncover more specific stress-related dynamics that need addressing.
3. 3.Future research should involve participants from various cultural and national backgrounds to understand how acculturative stress differs across groups. This broader sampling will allow for findings that are more applicable to a wide range of cultural contexts.
4. Conduct longitudinal studies to track the acculturation process and changes in stress levels over time among international students in Ghana. This would provide valuable insights into the long-term effects of demographic factors and social support on students' well-being.
5. Compare the experiences of international students in Ghana with those in other host countries to identify cross-cultural differences and similarities in acculturative stress and coping mechanisms. This comparative approach would enhance our understanding of the broader context of international student experiences

5.4.1 Recommendations for Counselling Psychology

Develop counseling interventions that cater specifically to the needs of different age groups. For example, younger adults may require more support in developing coping strategies for homesickness and adjusting to new cultural environments.

Counselors should be trained to understand that while social support often helps, it can sometimes add stress, especially when there are cultural or emotional expectations involved. They should work with clients to balance these pressures and find healthy support systems.

Counseling psychologists should undergo training to become more culturally competent, ensuring they understand the diverse cultural backgrounds of their clients. This training will help them provide more effective and respectful care.

Counseling should focus on helping individuals manage major sources of stress, such as homesickness and safety concerns. Techniques like mindfulness, emotional regulation, and creating a sense of safety can be beneficial.

Organize group therapy sessions for individuals experiencing acculturative stress. These sessions can create a sense of community, allowing participants to share experiences and learn coping strategies from each other, reducing feelings of isolation.

5.4.2 Recommendations for Policy Makers

1. Policy makers should implement programs that help newcomers integrate smoothly into their new environments. These could include workshops or orientation sessions that cover safety, cultural practices, and local resources.

2. Launch initiatives to educate the public about cultural diversity and reduce discrimination. This can include campaigns in schools, workplaces, and communities that promote inclusivity and respect for all cultures.
3. Governments should ensure that mental health services are available and easily accessible to individuals experiencing acculturative stress. This includes partnering with organizations to provide culturally sensitive mental health support.
4. Fund community initiatives that offer support networks for newcomers, such as cultural exchange programs, mentorship schemes, and social events. These programs should be designed to help people feel welcomed and provide emotional and practical assistance.
5. Policy makers should base their decisions on research findings and continuously monitor the impact of their policies. Collecting feedback from affected communities can help refine and improve programs to ensure they meet the needs of those experiencing acculturative stress

5.4.3 Contribution to Knowledge

1. This study contributes to the understanding of acculturative stress among international students in Ghana, particularly by exploring the influence of demographic factors such as age, gender, country of origin and social support.
2. By examining age differences in acculturative stress, the study adds nuance to the existing literature, showing that while there may be slight variations in stress levels between ages, This challenges previous assumptions and underscores the need for age sensitive approaches in counseling.
3. The study highlights the significant role of social support networks and familial connections in mitigating acculturative stress among international students. It

underscores the importance of fostering strong support systems within the student community and emphasizes the need for targeted interventions for students lacking familial connections.

4. The study contributes to the understanding of cultural adaptation and coping mechanisms among international students in Ghana. It highlights the role of age and previous experiences in shaping coping strategies and emphasizes the importance of peer mentoring and support programs in facilitating adaptation.
5. The study uncovers the complex dynamics of social support, showing that while higher levels of social support are generally beneficial, they may also be associated with increased stress. This challenges conventional wisdom and underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of social support dynamics in counseling interventions.
6. Again, the study offers practical implications for counseling interventions aimed at supporting international students in Ghana. By identifying key demographic factors and psychological correlations, it provides guidance for developing targeted and effective counseling programs that address the unique needs of this population
7. App Name: I.S.A.G (International student Association of Ghana). Finally, through extensive research on the experiences of international students, I identified several challenges they face, including language barriers, cultural adjustment, and accessing campus resources. To address these issues, I developed an innovative app designed to support international students throughout their academic journey. My app, ISAG, is designed to help international students navigate their new environment. It offers student profile management, cultural tips, and a centralized hub for campus resources. By

targeting international students, the app aims to enhance their academic and social integration. ISAG (International Student Association Ghana) Web Application: Bridging Cultures and Empowering Students

Introduction

The ISAG Web Application is a powerful platform designed to enhance the experience of international students in Ghana. Whether they are new arrivals or have been studying in Ghana for a while, this application provides essential tools and resources to support their academic journey and cultural integration.

Key Features

1. Student Profiles and Management

Create and Manage Profiles: International students can easily create their profiles, providing essential information such as their background, field of study, and interests.

Search and Connect: Students can search for and connect with fellow international students, fostering a sense of community and networking.

2. WhatsApp Group Integration

Seamless Communication: Upon successful account creation and login, students gain access to an exclusive WhatsApp group. This group serves as a hub for announcements, discussions, and social interactions. **Instant Updates:** Important updates, event invitations, and cultural exchange opportunities are shared within the group.

3. Problem-Solving and Support

Ask Questions: Students can ask questions related to academics, daily life, or any challenges they face. Other members can provide answers or share their experiences.

Peer Support: ISAG members can offer advice, share resources, and provide emotional support to fellow students.

4. Cultural Integration

Events and Workshops: The application promotes cultural awareness by listing events, workshops, and activities related to Ghanaian culture. Students can participate and learn more about local traditions.

Language Exchange: Students interested in learning local languages can connect with native speakers for language exchange sessions.

Benefits

Community Building: ISAG fosters a sense of belonging among international students, reducing feelings of isolation.

Resource Sharing: Students can share tips, study materials, and survival guides.

Cultural Enrichment: By participating in cultural events, students gain a deeper understanding of Ghanaian traditions.

Problem-Solving Network: ISAG becomes a valuable resource for solving academic and personal challenges.

Conclusion

The ISAG Web Application is more than just a tool—it's a bridge connecting students from diverse backgrounds. As they navigate their academic journey in Ghana, they can rely on this platform for support, friendship, and cultural enrichment.

5.5 Suggestions for Future Research

1. Conduct longitudinal studies to track the acculturation process and changes in stress levels over time among international students in Ghana. This would provide valuable insights into the long-term effects of demographic factors and social support on students' well-being.
2. Compare the experiences of international students in Ghana with those in other host countries to identify cross-cultural differences and similarities in acculturative stress and coping mechanisms. This comparative approach

would enhance our understanding of the broader context of international student experiences.

3. Design and implement intervention studies to evaluate the effectiveness of counseling programs and support services in reducing acculturative stress and promoting well-being among international students in Ghana. This would provide evidence-based strategies for improving support systems
4. Explore the influence of cultural factors, such as cultural values, norms, and beliefs, on acculturative stress and adaptation among international students in Ghana. Understanding how cultural factors intersect with demographic characteristics and social support can inform culturally sensitive counseling interventions.
5. Include minority groups within the international student population, such as refugees and asylum seekers, in future research. Investigating their unique experiences and support needs would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse student population in Ghana.
6. Evaluate the role of institutional support, including academic advising, counseling services, and cultural integration programs, in mitigating acculturative stress among international students. Assessing the effectiveness of these support mechanisms can inform policy and practice at educational institutions.
7. Investigate resilience factors that buffer against acculturative stress among international students in Ghana. This could include factors such as social connectedness, self-efficacy, and cultural identity, which may enhance students' ability to adapt to their new environment.

8. Explore the use of technology-based interventions, such as online counseling platforms and mobile applications, to provide accessible support for international students. Assessing the feasibility and effectiveness of these interventions would address barriers to accessing traditional counseling services.



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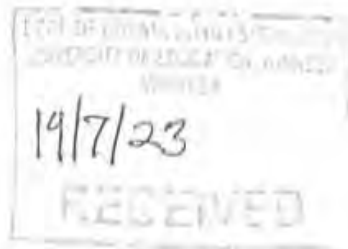
APPENDICES

Appendix	Description
Appendix 1	Request for Introductory Letter
Appendix 2	Letter of Introduction from Department
Appendix 3	Informed consent
Appendix 5	Qualitative Interview Guide



APPENDIX A

REQUEST FOR INTRODUCTORY LETTER



Marfo Francis
Methodist University Ghana
P. O. Box DC940
Accra- Dansoman
0243056205
fmurfo@mucg.edu.gh
18th July, 2023

The Head of Department
Department of Counselling Psychology
Faculty of Educational Studies
University of Education, Winneba

Dear Sir,

APPLICATION FOR INTRODUCTORY LETTER FOR DATA COLLECTION STUDENT #: (202114604)

I wish to apply for an introductory letter to start data collection. My Principal Supervisor is Prof. Antwi Danso and my Second Supervisor is Dr. Theresa Antwi. My supervisors have approved and agreed that I write to request permission to start data collection. I have chosen three sites for the data collection. Namely: Methodist University Ghana, Pentecost University Accra and University of Ghana (Legon).

The purpose of my study is to examine socio-demographic variables and social support as determinant of acculturative stress among international students in Ghanaian universities. Data will be collected from international students in the universities.

I have been trained in Ethics in Human Subjects Research and my informed consent is a reflection of this training. It is expected that data will be collected from July, 2023 to August, 2023.

Please find attached the research instrument for data collection
Thank you.

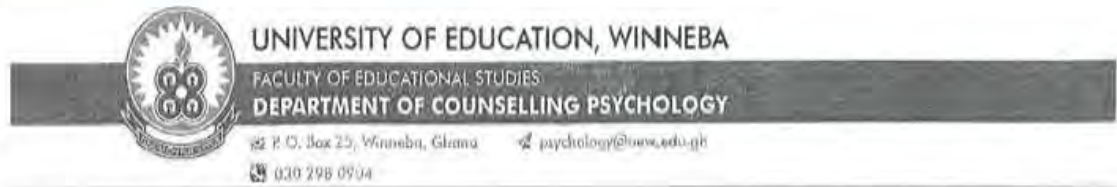
Yours sincerely,

Mr. Marfo Francis
(202114604)

cc: Prof. Antwi Danso
Dr. Theresa Antwi

APPENDIX B

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION FROM DEPARTMENT



20th February, 2023

The Vice Chancellor
Methodist University
Accra

Dear Sir,

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

I write to introduce to you, **FRANCIS MARFO**, a student in the Department of Counselling Psychology, of the University of Education, Winneba.

He is pursuing a Master of Philosophy Degree Programme in Counselling Psychology and as part of the programme, he is undertaking a research titled: **SOCIO DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES, SOCIAL SUPPORT AND ACCULTURATIVE STRESS AMONG INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN TWO GHANAIAN UNIVERSITIES**

He needs to administer questionnaire to enable him gather information for his data analysis and he has chosen to do so in your institution.

I would be grateful if he is permitted and assisted to carry out this exercise, which is solely for academic purposes, in your outfit.

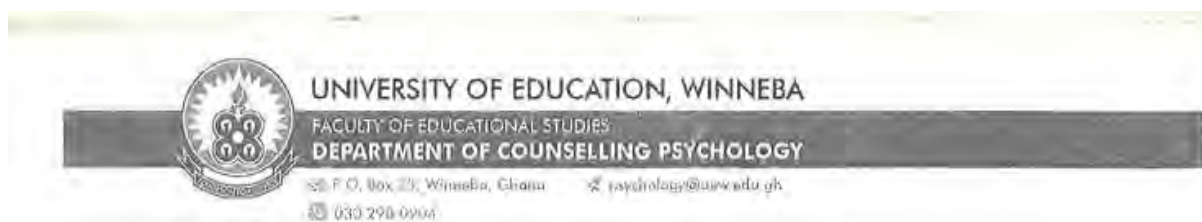
Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read "Nyimmedi Agordzo Edoh-Torgah".

Nyimmedi Agordzo Edoh-Torgah, PhD
Ag. Head of Department

APPENDIX C



20th February, 2023

The Vice Chancellor
Pentecost University
Accra

Dear Sir,

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

I write to introduce to you, **FRANCIS MARFO**, a student in the Department of Counselling Psychology, of the University of Education, Winneba.

He is pursuing a Master of Philosophy Degree Programme in Counselling Psychology and as part of the programme, he is undertaking a research titled: **SOCIO DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES, SOCIAL SUPPORT AND ACCULTURATIVE STRESS AMONG INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN TWO GHANAIAN UNIVERSITIES**

He needs to administer questionnaire to enable him gather information for his data analysis and he has chosen to do so in your institution.

I would be grateful if he is permitted and assisted to carry out this exercise, which is solely for academic purposes, in your outfit.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Nyumiemedi Agordzo Edoh-Torgah', is written over a faint circular watermark of the University of Education, Winneba logo.

Nyumiemedi Agordzo Edoh-Torgah, PhD

Ag. Head of Department

APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT AND RESEARCH PACKAGE IN ENGLISH

University of Education, Winneba
Faculty of Educational Studies
Department of Counselling Psychology

Socio Demographic Variables, Social Support and Acculturative Stress Among International Students In Two Ghanaian Universities

Informed Consent

Principal Investigator: Francis Marfo
Faculty Supervisors: Prof. Stephen Antwi-Danso, Ph.D
Dr. Theresa Antwi

You are being invited to participate in a research study. The study is *voluntary* so you can choose to take part or not.

Purpose of the study: The purpose of this study is to find out socio demographic variables, social support and acculturative stress among international students in Ghanaian universities.

What you will be asked to do in the study: When you take part in this study, we will ask you to complete a demographic questionnaire and two other questionnaires. You will not be given any money to take part in this study.

Study contacts for questions about the study or to report a problem: If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has impacted you negatively in any way, talk to: Madam Victoria or tell leader about it ok?

Head of Informal Settlement

Participant Name

(Signed Consent)

(Signed Assent)

Date: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX E

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Appendix A: International Students Acculturative Experiences Questionnaire (ISAEQ)

International Students'

Thank you for helping us to learn more about international students' psychological well-being by completing this questionnaire. In this questionnaire, you will have three sections. Section I will ask you some background information, but please be assured that the answers you give will be kept confidential. Section II measures acculturative stress. Section III measures perceived social support.

Section IV: Measures depression symptoms.

Section I: Background Characteristics Questionnaire

Instructions: In this questionnaire, you will have two sections. Section I is about your personal information. Please circle one appropriate answer.

1	What is your gender?	Male	Female
2	What is your age?	_____ years old	
3	You have been in the Ghana _____.	Less than one year One year Two years Three years Four years Five years More	
4	Do you have other education experiences in the Ghana before the university you are in now?	Yes No	
5	What is your country of origin?		
8	What is your level now?	Freshman Continues student	
10	What's yours feeling when using English?	Not comfortable Comfortable Very comfortable	
11	In the Ghana. how often do you speak English at home or with friends from home country?	Rarely or none of the time Some or a little of the time Occasionally or a moderate amount of time All of the time	
12	What is your current source of funding for your studies?	Graduate teaching/Research assistantship Scholarship Family funds Other	
13	Do you have relatives or family	Yes	

	with you in the Ghana?	No
14	Now you are _____. (Please check one)	Single In a relationship Married Divorced Widowed

Section II: Acculturative Stress Questionnaire (ASSIS)

Instructions: We are interested in how you feel about the following statements. Please read each statement carefully. Circle a number 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5 which indicates how much the statement applied to you *over the past 3 months*. There is no “right” or “wrong” answer. Please respond to what you think or how you feel at this point in time.

The rating scale is as follows:

- 1 = Strong Disagree
- 2 = Somewhat Disagree
- 3 = Neutral
- 4 = Somewhat Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

Question 1 – 8 is about your perception toward discrimination		1 Strongly disagree	2 Somewhat disagree	3 Neutral	4 Somewhat agree	5 Strongly agree
1	I feel that my people are discriminated against					
2	I am treated differently because of my race					
3	I am treated differently because of my colour					
4	Many opportunities are denied to me					
5	I am treated differently in social situations					
6	Others are biased toward me					
7	I feel low because of my cultural background					
8	I feel that my status in this society is low to my cultural background					
9	I don't feel a sense of belonging here					
10	I feel that I receive unequal treatment					
11	I am denied what I deserve					
12	I feel angry that my people					

	are considered inferior here					
13	I feel some people don't associate with me because of my ethnicity					
Question 9 – 12 is about homesickness						
14	Homesickness bothers me					
15	I feel sad living in unfamiliar surroundings					
16	I miss the people and country of my origin					
17	I feel sad leaving my relatives behind					
Question 13 – 17 is about your perception toward Hate/Rejection						
18	People show hatred toward me nonverbally					
19	People show hatred toward me verbally					
20	People show hatred me through actions					
21	Others are sarcastic toward my cultural values					
22	Others don't appreciate my cultural values					
Question 18 – 21 is about Fear						
23	I fear for my personal safety because of my different cultural background					
24	I feel insecure here					
25	I frequently relocate for fear of others					
26	I generally keep a low profile due to fear					
Question 22 – 24 is about Culture Shock/Stress Due to Change						
27	I feel uncomfortable to adjust to new foods					
28	Multiple pressures are placed on me after migration					
29	I feel uncomfortable to adjust to new cultural values					
Question 25 – 26 is about your perception toward guilt						
30	I feel guilty to leave my family and friends behind					
31	I feel guilty that I am living a different lifestyle here					
Question 27 – 36 is about some other significant factors						
32	I feel nervous to communicate in English					
33	I feel intimidated to participate in social activities					

34	It hurts when people don't understand my cultural values					
35	I feel sad to consider my people's problems					
36	I worry about my future for not being able to decide whether to stay here or to go back					

Section III: Perceived Social Support Questionnaire

Instructions: We are interested in how you feel about the following statements. Please read each statement carefully. Circle a number 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, or 7 which indicates how much the statement applied to you *over the past 3 months*. There is no "right" or "wrong" answer. Please respond to what you think or how you feel at this point in time.

The rating scale is as follows:

- 1 = Very Strong Disagree
- 2 = Strongly Disagree
- 3 = Mildly Disagree
- 4 = Neutral
- 5 = Mildly Agree
- 6 = Strongly Agree
- 7 = Very Strongly Agree

Question 1 – 4 is about your perception toward support from family		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
		Very strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	Mildly disagree	Neutral	Mildly agree	Strongly agree	Very strongly agree
1	My family really tries to help me							
2	I can get the emotional help and support I need from my family							
3	I can talk about my problems with my family							
4	My family is willing to help me make decisions							
Question 5 – 8 is about your perception toward support from friends								
5	I have friends with whom I can share my joys and sorrows							
6	I can talk about my problems with my friends							
7	My friends really try to help me							

8	I can count on my friends when things go wrong							
Question 9 – 12 is about your perception toward support from university services								
9	The international students center on campus is available when I need it							
10	I can talk about my problems with members in international students organization							
11	I trust university would offer me help when I need it							

Endorsed by:

(sign)

Prof. Stephen Antwi- Danso

Research Supervisor

April 24, 2023



Statistics

		Gender	How long have you been in Ghana?	Do you have other education experiences in Ghana before the university you are in now?	What is your country of origin?	What is your current source of funding?	Do you have relatives or family with you in Ghana?	What is your marital status
N	Valid	154	154	154	154	153	154	154
	Missing	0	0	0	0	1	0	0

Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	91	59.1	59.1	59.1
	Female	63	40.9	40.9	100.0
	Total	154	100.0	100.0	

How long have you been in Ghana?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Less than one year	130	84.4	84.4	84.4
	One year	10	6.5	6.5	90.9
	Two years	8	5.2	5.2	96.1
	Three years	1	.6	.6	96.8
	Four years	5	3.2	3.2	100.0
	Total	154	100.0	100.0	

Do you have other education experiences in Ghana before the university you are in now?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	116	75.3	75.3	75.3

Yes	38	24.7	24.7	100.0
Total	154	100.0	100.0	

What is your country of origin?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	.00	1	.6	.6	.6
	Nigeria	67	43.5	43.5	44.2
	Gabon	7	4.5	4.5	48.7
	Cote d'Ivoire	13	8.4	8.4	57.1
	Sierra Leone	19	12.3	12.3	69.5
	Equatorial Guinea	10	6.5	6.5	76.0
	Central African Republic	5	3.2	3.2	79.2
	8.00	3	1.9	1.9	81.2
	9.00	2	1.3	1.3	82.5
	10.00	4	2.6	2.6	85.1
	11.00	3	1.9	1.9	87.0
	12.00	2	1.3	1.3	88.3
	13.00	8	5.2	5.2	93.5
	14.00	2	1.3	1.3	94.8
	15.00	8	5.2	5.2	100.0
	Total	154	100.0	100.0	

What is your current source of funding?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	.00	1	.6	.7	.7
	Graduate / Teaching / Research Assistantship	10	6.5	6.5	7.2
	Scholarship	20	13.0	13.1	20.3
	Family Funds	109	70.8	71.2	91.5
	Other	13	8.4	8.5	100.0
	Total	153	99.4	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.6		
Total		154	100.0		

Do you have relatives or family with you in the Ghana?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	134	87.0	87.0	87.0
	Yes	20	13.0	13.0	100.0
	Total	154	100.0	100.0	

Scale: Reliability of ASSIS**Case Processing Summary**

		N	%
Cases	Valid	125	81.2
	Excluded ^a	29	18.8
	Total	154	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.969	34

Item Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
I feel that I am discriminated against	3.4400	1.25980	125
I am treated differently because I am not Ghanaian	3.5360	1.13978	125
I am treated differently because of my colour	3.4720	1.08936	125
Many opportunities are denied to me	3.5360	1.12554	125
Others are biased toward me	3.4720	1.16103	125
I feel low because of my cultural background	3.6800	1.15423	125

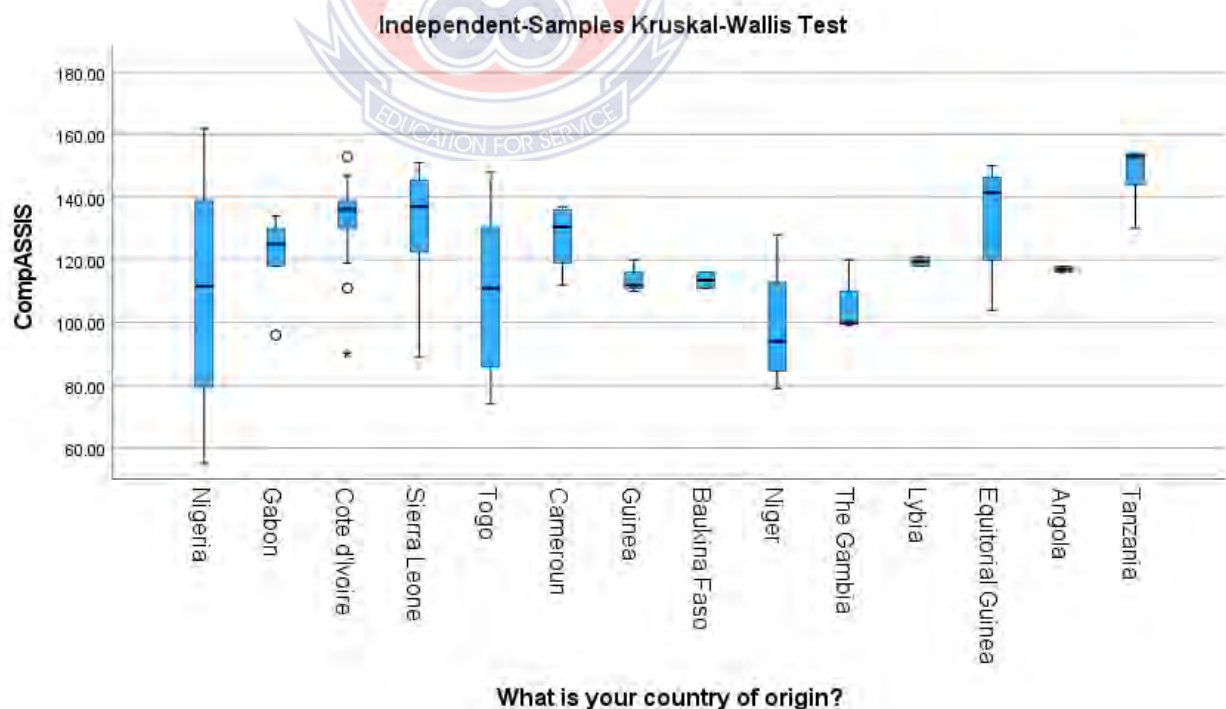
I don't feel a sense of belonging here	3.4880	1.06722	125
I feel that I receive unequal treatment	3.5840	.96038	125
I am denied what I deserve	3.7840	1.08942	125
I feel angry that my people are considered inferior here	3.5920	1.15770	125
Homesickness bothers me	3.5600	1.12451	125
I feel sad living in unfamiliar surroundings	3.6080	1.02309	125
I miss the people and country of my origin	3.5360	1.10383	125
I feel anxious leaving my relatives behind	3.6480	1.06450	125
People show hatred toward me nonverbally	3.5280	1.05170	125
People show hatred toward me verbally	3.6320	1.13972	125
People show hatred me through actions	3.5920	1.07835	125
Others are sarcastic toward my cultural values	3.4000	1.06256	125
Others don't appreciate my cultural values	3.4160	1.11575	125
I fear for my personal safety because of my different cultural background	3.4080	1.04801	125
I feel insecure here	3.5680	1.06511	125
I frequently relocate for fear of others	3.7040	1.04745	125
I generally keep a low profile due to fear	3.4000	1.05494	125
I feel uncomfortable to adjust to new foods	3.4640	.97999	125
Multiple pressures are placed on me after migration	3.4800	1.08954	125
I feel uncomfortable to adjust to new cultural values	3.6000	1.03175	125
I feel guilty to leave my family and friends behind	3.5360	1.02031	125
I feel guilty that I am living a different lifestyle here	3.4880	1.10436	125

I feel nervous to communicate in English	3.6880	1.01930	125
I feel intimidated to participate in social activities	3.5600	1.01123	125
It hurts when people don't understand my cultural values	3.2720	1.22063	125
I feel sad to consider my people's problems	3.4640	1.11835	125
I worry about my future for not being able to decide whether to stay here or to go back	3.5360	1.08170	125
ASSIS34	3.5520	1.13205	125

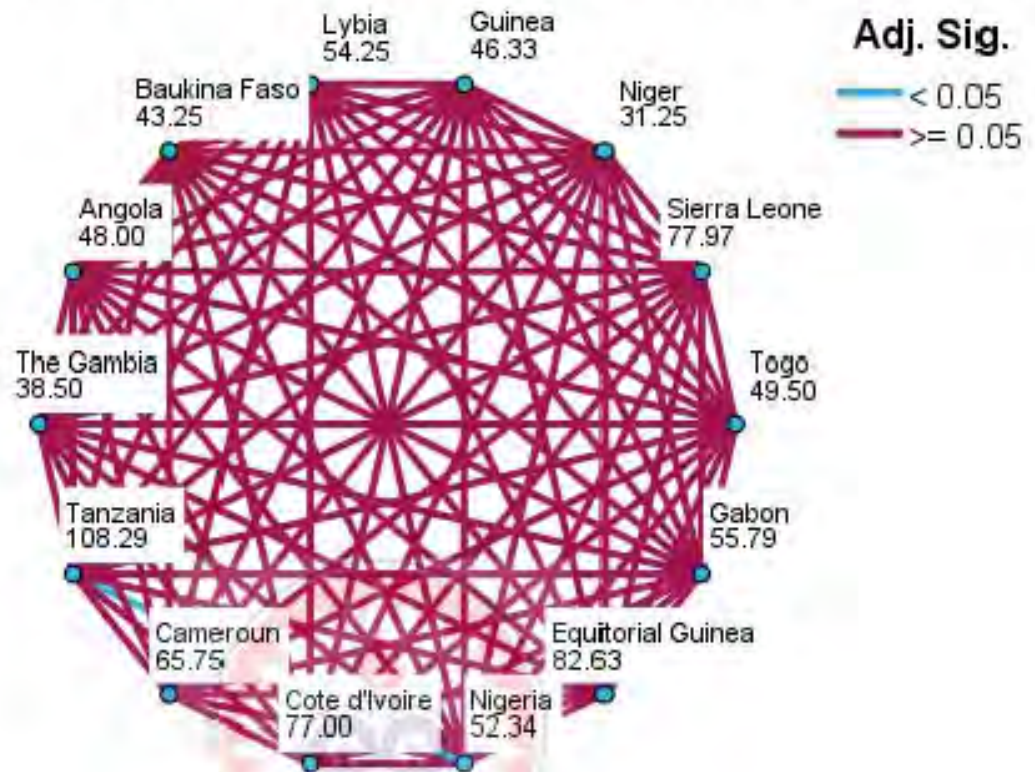
Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test Summary

Total N	125
Test Statistic	29.701 ^a
Degree Of Freedom	13
Asymptotic Sig.(2-sided test)	.005

a. The test statistic is adjusted for ties.



Pairwise Comparisons of What is your country of origin?



Each node shows the sample average rank of What is your country of origin?.