Supporting International Doctoral Students in CES Programs

Grace Gibby, Bosede Balogun, Cornelius Anyanwu, Daniel Kimonyi

Liberty University

Abstract

Current research demonstrates that international students (IS) in Counselor Education and Supervision (CES) programs struggle culturally and academically. With little direct support provided by U.S.-based institutions and scarcity in research, there is a growing need to understand this process and enhance the cultural diversity of the counseling profession. Four IS examined the current research on this topic, described the challenges associated with studying at a U.S.-based institution, considered exacerbations to these challenges due to COVID-19, and provided recommendations that can be implemented in counseling educator programs. This conceptual article was formulated to express these concerns and meet the need for their voices to be heard. Significant deficiencies that are experienced include acculturative stress, which can lead to depressive symptoms and feelings of anxiety, failure to complete the program, social connectivity, and language barriers. Urgent action can ensure that IS remain in CES programs, incorporate their background for cultural diversity, and work towards the common goal of internationalizing the counseling profession.

Keywords: international student, counselor education and supervision, acculturation,

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The National data for education statistics reported a consistent increase in IS' enrollment in the United States Universities and Colleges. Current data shows that in the 2008/2009 academic year, 671,616 IS were enrolled compared to 1,095,299 IS in the 2018/19 academic year (Institute of International Education (IIE), 2021). The data shows a tremendous increase of 63% of IS' enrollment in the United States colleges and universities before the COVID-19 Pandemic (IIE, 2021). However, in the 2020/21 academic year, there was a sudden drop in the number of IS enrolled in American colleges and universities due to the COVID-19 pandemic (IIE, 2021).

The latest data reports that IS constituted 5.5% of U.S. enrollment in 2018/2019 and reduced to 4.6% in 2020/2021 (IIE, 2021). This decrease was primarily because of the COVID - 19 pandemic (IIE, 2021). However, the increased demographics before COVID-19 are evident in the Counselor Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Program (CACREP) accredited counseling program (Joshi et al., 2021). The report from CACREP (2019) shows that of 19,831,000 students enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities (Institute of International Education, 2021) in 2017/18 academic year, 2,120 students enrolled in CACREP accredited doctoral programs, and 3.16% were IS (Asempapa, 2019; CACREP, 2019).

With this reported growth, an increasing number of research studies have been paying attention to IS' needs at various academic levels and fields. This data draws the attention of researchers to the acculturation needs and challenges of IS in CACREP accredited doctoral programs (Behl et al., 2017; Lee, 2018; Woo et al., 2015). Among many researchers, Interiano & Lim (2018) reported challenges that international doctoral students experience while acculturating to the structures of America. Also, Behl et al. (2017) investigated the acculturative needs of IS in

CACREP programs. Minh et al. (2019) defined acculturation as the result of psychological and cultural changes due to moving to a new, foreign country or living in a new environment.

A consistent theme in many of these studies indicates the essence of academic, social, and cultural support for IS in counseling programs (Mittal &Wieling, 2006; Asempapa, 2019; Boafo-Arthur, 2014;). However, few studies are tailored towards their needs. Studying in a new multicultural environment requires the mindset to adjust and adapt to new values and ultimately decide if the new values should be accepted (Minh et al., 2019). Depending on how smoothly this transition transpires, individuals can develop acculturative stress, resulting in psychological distress from the interaction of interpersonal issues and external factors. Individuals can experience a positive acculturation process (Behl et al., 2017). This filtering process is often where acculturative conflict occurs (Minh et al., 2019). When IS struggle with acculturation, acculturative stress develops, and these students can increasingly struggle with social connectivity, psychological well-being, and language barriers (Behl et al., 2017). Finally, the literature confirms that increased challenges and enrollment of IS in the CES program are due to COVID-19 and Globalization.

Globalization and the COVID-19 pandemic have increased enrollment in CES programs. IS in the U.S. are faced with stressful experiences due in part to integrating into a different culture while seeking a doctoral degree in a second language. The stress is compounded by the isolation of online classes during COVID-19, uncertain financial stability and medical coverage, and homesickness, thus, increasing risk factors and reducing protective factors. IS may experience feelings of guilt and shame related to family expectations and the inability to be present for family events such as births, marriages, and deaths. There is little direct support provided to IS, and many are financially challenged due to interrupted funding sources from their

home countries, loss of jobs, disqualification from U.S. relief packages, as well as adapting to an individualistic society. This manuscript will provide recommendations for supporting IS in CES programs.

The recommendations to support international CES students are stated in the purpose of this article as (1) To address the gap in the literature concerning the challenges IS often face in the CES Program; (2) Recommend targeted mentoring as a tailored program to improve the CES students experience in the U.S. systems, especially during their field experiences (practicum and internship); (3) Propose a role induction program to better equip international doctoral students for professional responsibilities (4) Propose incorporation of culturally sensitive and multicultural counseling courses that create awareness and train emerging counselor educators to be culturally competent in alignment with the CACREP recommendation.

Challenges Facing International CES Students

Social Connectivity

Social connectivity is among the leading challenges university-level IS face, and these constraints were heightened with the outbreak of the COVID-19 (Stroebe et al., 2002; Tochkov et al., 2010). Due to acculturation issues, IS may have difficulty connecting with support systems that cushion the effects of social connectivity. The impact of isolation on an international student's mental and physical well-being can be overwhelming. Isolation or loneliness is prevalent among IS, especially at the university level, as this population faces difficulties integrating into their new country and university community. A university foreign student participant of a qualitative study admits that his special friend is his cell phone (Awosanya, 2018). As much as cell phones and video conferencing devices provide some relief to the student, it is unclear how enduring these feelings remain.

Comparable to isolation, homesickness is another element of social connectivity that plagues international university students. In a different study, homesickness is compared with other psychological distress such as depression (Verschuur et al., 2004). In addition, a considerable percentage of IS suffer from some form of homesickness due to detachment from their families and familiar environments (Bardelle and Lashley, 2015). In as much as homesickness is not a pathological issue that may require a critical medical response; however, it may result in other psychological problems such as adjustment disorders (Van Tilburg et al., 1996).

Psychological Well-Being

Studies indicate that a lack of acculturation can contribute to IS struggling with psychological problems such as confidence, self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and neuroticism (Hirai et al., 2015; Lertora et al., 2019). While an adjustment to university life applies to all students, research supports that for IS, the adjustment process is much more difficult (Hirai et al., 2015). Apart from the expected acculturation process, there is growing evidence that mental health concerns and needs of IS have risen in recent years (Rice et al., 2017). In a study conducted by Wang et al. (2012), 11% of IS identified as culture-shocked; additional studies have reported up to 45% of 130 IS experienced depressive symptoms, and 29% experienced anxiety (Han et al., 2013). IS tend also to experience the pressure of familial expectations to achieve well in their studies as the sacrifice in all aspects is immense. Financially the cost is high, homesickness is experienced, and these factors all contribute to depression (Hamamura et al., 2014). IS must learn about the host country's culture and find ways to remain authentic to themselves and successfully interact with the culture they are currently residing in. Additionally,

IS may not be comfortable seeking mental health treatment when experiencing these negative intimidation feelings and language barriers which are significant contributing factors.

Communication

Communication is the most prevalent among the overwhelming challenges IS experience in their host countries. Here, our focus will be on the students' foreign accents, which is a significant reason for miscommunication (Derwing & Munro, 2009). In addition, spoken English often imposes severe social and academic difficulties, exacerbating students' anxieties (Line et al., 2000; Zhang & Mi, 2010). In a study of nursing students from countries with English as a second language, Crawford (2013) highlighted the importance of recognizing IS' psychological and fundamental needs to assist them in adjusting to their host country. Hegarty (2014), argued that the reluctance to practice their English with the native speakers impedes their integration in the universities and disrupts the opportunities for both the American counterparts and the IS to improve their individual experiences. This is a missed opportunity for future professional alliances.

Another study indicates that teachers have identified some IS' behaviors that explain their low academic success. These include but are not limited to lack of engagement with instructors and their classmates, low-class participation during class discussions, and failure to seek clarifications when the need arises (Tompson & Tompson, 1996). Conversely, a body of literature argues that the low chances of IS to communicate freely with their American counterparts can be traced to difficulty with an accent, limited English proficiency, and culture shock (Kelly & Moogan, 2012; and Trice, 2004). Furthermore, Xue, F. (2010) added that the challenge of overcoming their foreign accents could further impede the students' socialization, giving rise to isolation and inadequate social integration. Therefore, Andrade (2009); Luo &

Jamieson-Drake (2013) suggest that domestic students must recognize the potential benefits of developing rapport with IS. Thus, rather than antagonize them because of their foreign accents, they should build social networks and exchange ideas and information.

COVID-19 Related Stressors

In addition, COVID-19 has exacerbated already existing challenges and acculturative stressors affecting international doctoral students in Counselor Education. In a survey examining issues experienced by IS, Lee (2013) identified four main stress domains for this population. These include language barriers (Yeh & Cheng, 2008; Fuertes et al., 2012), financial concerns (Hyun et al., 2007; Koyama, 2010), academic/career-related issues (Cho, 2009), and cultural adjustment issues (Ku et al., 2008; Wedding et al., 2009). Behl and colleagues (2017) established that these compounding stressors highly affect social, academic, and cultural performance among IS. Although there is little research on how the pandemic has affected this population, there is mounting evidence that it significantly impacted individuals in helping professions (Ornell et al., 2020; Sethi et al., 2020).

The pandemic forced a shift to a virtual working environment which required doctoral CES students to quickly adapt in multiple areas, including learning, practicum, internship, and supervision experiences (Jan & Jacqueline, 2020). The logistical challenges experienced in this transition and existing concerns of foreign language anxiety affected individuals in academic and clinical settings. Language anxiety has been shown to impact self-efficacy in teaching and counseling (Mittal & Wielding, 2006), and it is likely more challenging for students undertaking online teaching and supervision courses. Further, IS experiencing the challenges of limited exposure to cultural norms like interpersonal dynamics and communication styles (Mittal &

Wielding, 2006) were still required to engage in their professional duties in the face of these constraints.

Further, the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic also had a significant impact on international doctoral CES students. Prior to the onset of the pandemic, IS already experienced financial burdens that are linked to living abroad (Lee, 2013), paying out-of-state tuition (Hyun et al., 2007), and supporting themselves financially, all while maintaining their required full-time status. However, due to the limited funding sources from their home countries and no access to the government relief packages available to their domestic counterparts, IS were left with limited options to sustain themselves. We recommend the following based on all these highlighted challenges facing international CES students.

Recommendations

Targeted Mentoring

According to Herzig (2002), students' positive interactions in the Ph.D. program with their peers and faculty could create an environment conducive to personal and professional growth. Positive interactions include peer debriefing and mentorship by addressing challenges' dynamic nature and successful outcomes throughout the Ph.D. program (Lewinski et al., 2017). Current mentoring programs can be formal, informal, peer, structured, or unstructured (Leask, 2009). Formal mentoring is often provided by an advisor, dissertation committee member, supervisor, or instructor. And informal mentoring is provided by faculty or peers based on organic connections on shared interests (Hermann et al., 2014; Holm et al., 2015).

Peer mentoring is an informal relationship between senior and junior doctoral students and can be structured or unstructured (Lynch, 2008; Noonan et al., 2007). It promotes a sense of connectedness; the mentors would share ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, geography, and

national origin. Sharma and Jung (1985) encourage institutes to target promoting activities that will motivate and maintain a high degree of cultural interactions for IS to develop feelings of belongingness and feeling connected. Also, they may grow and strengthen their cultural identity through these positive interactions (Seyeneh, 2018). Ng (2006) recommends that institutions in the CACREP program provide formal and informal forums to help IS overcome the potential isolation they may face.

The current research points to formal and informal mentoring providing personal and professional support for IS and mentorship correlated with successful student outcomes (Brown et al., 1999; Clark et al., 2000; Holley & Caldwell. 2012). And positive results, especially in underrepresented populations like students of color, first-generation college, and IS (Brown et al., 1999; Holm et al., 2015). However, racial, and ethnic backgrounds are some of the limitations that influence IS' perceptions and expectations of mentoring (Asempapa, 2019). In a study assessing the patterns of acculturation, friendship formation, and the academic experiences of IS at a U.S. college, Leong (2015) found that IS generally encounter a disorientation because of exposure to new teaching, culture, and learning styles in U.S**.**

However, this disorientation increases (Asempapa, 2019) because international CES students have added stress when engaging in practicum and internship**s** in the American systems (Reid, 2012). IS in the CES must understand U.S. culture's traditions, values, and non-verbal norms (). They must also understand American history's role in the racial issues in contemporary social climate (Reid & Dixon, 2012). Counselor educators are faced with the challenge of better understanding these students' specialized training and unique supervision needs. Literature indicates that counselor educators' research regarding the understanding of students in counseling programs needs to focus more on American ethnic/racial minorities and have little studies

exploring the needs of IS (Reid & Dixon, 2012). For example, Mori (2000) reported that IS in the U.S. colleges a diverse and increasing population whose unique needs are disregarded. And this reality appears to be true in the CES program.

Proposed Strategies for Targeted Mentoring

Vernam and colleagues (2022) identified the needs of IS in CES programs and recommended cross-cultural mentorship to address their challenges. In addition, Evans and Cokley (2008) suggested the intentional utilization of mentorship for diverse students in higher Education. We further suggest an intentional and proactive "targeted mentoring program" that will significantly impact IS in the CES program. This will be a three-step strategy designed to train volunteer IS, match mentors and mentees, and implement targeted event programming for this population.

The Three-Step Strategy

This strategy will help overcome the challenges of social connectivity (Dao, 2007) and promote the successful advancement in the CES program (Briggs & Pehrsson, 2008).

Training Volunteer International Doctoral Students in the Program as Mentors. At this level, the faculty would make invitations through email for the international student in the CES program to volunteer to become mentors. Those international CES students who expressed an interest will complete an application form. In addition, all applicants will be invited to attend a week's training session covering expectations, responsibilities, and boundaries (for an effective outcome of the mentoring program.

Intentional Matching of Peer Mentors and Mentees. The goal is for IS already in the CES program to assist the incoming international CES students in navigating and preparing for their future roles as successful students. All new international CES students would be assigned

mentors based on similar cultural backgrounds to provide emotional and social support in the

academic year. For example, Chan and colleagues (2015) indicate that mentoring involves

transferring needed information, feedback, and encouragement to the protégé and providing

social and emotional support. Mentors get to communicate with their assigned mentees via email

before they arrive in the U.S.

Event Programming. The program manager at the CES department will develop social

events that will provide avenues for the senior and new students to meet one another. The first-

semester event will be an orientation program for the new students in the program. The second

event will be a dinner for the incoming IS and their mentees to commemorate cultural diversity

among the students. Mentors will continue to contact their mentees throughout the academic year

through their preferred communication avenue. The second-semester event will invite the IS for

dinner at a local restaurant and encourage social interaction in the program.

Infusion of Cultural Diversity

Cultural Diversity has recently been described as a fourth force in the mental health field

(Pedersen, 1991) and serves as a core competency from CACREP Standards (CACREP, 2016).

As the field of mental health is increasingly becoming internationalized, Counseling Programs,

and Counselor Educator Programs with IS enrolled, gain the cultural insights of those cultures

which extends to all graduate students in the program enhancing their multicultural competence

(Lee, 2013). Therefore, it is imperative that the voices of IS are heard.

Within counseling programs, it is not sufficient to teach multicultural competence but to

practice it (Lee, 2013). IS are taught to practice this competency within their clinical practice, but

they often struggle to feel culturally understood within their academic program. The American

Society tends to perceive the dominant cultural group as the model for other cultures to follow.

Therefore when minority cultures are unwilling to fit or compromise, such cultures are

considered to have a deficient identity (Lee, 2013). IS who are desirous of becoming counselor

educators use themselves as instruments in teaching multiculturalism, which models the ability

for coexistence between cultural differences in a respectful and mutually understood manner (Li

et al., 2020).

There are several recommendations to strengthen the social inclusion and cultural

diversity aspect. One major focus is the provision of training workshops and seminars that

facilitate discourse about the issues and needs related to educating and supervising IS (Ng,

2006). In addition, these forums can inform counselor educators and supervisors about cross-

cultural knowledge, values and skills that are beneficial when working with IS in the mental

health field (Ng, 2006).

IS will primarily focus on their academic needs while studying in the U.S. and tend to

ignore their social concerns; this can be addressed through a cultural advisor. A cultural advisor

can assist the international student with learning and understanding the mannerisms of the

American culture in the social spheres (Behl et al., 2017). Furthermore, IS have described that

their peers are unaware of the adjustment issues and cultural differences and, to some extent, are

uninterested (Behl et al., 2017).

The mental health field is increasing in popularity but is still uncommon in various

countries worldwide. An additional way that counselor educators can support IS is to

acknowledge and validate the students' decision to pursue a vocation in this field (Ng, 2006).

Often, family members in the students' home country are not familiar with this field and may not

be able to provide the encouragement that is needed to finish well (Ng, 2006). This may require

counselor educators and support faculty to understand their pre-existing opinions and aim to

become more sensitive to cultural perspectives. Given that cultural norms do not support a direct style of communication, counselor educators can utilize this information in their interpretation of silence from IS contrary to the normed thought of lack of participation (Lee, 2013).

Role Induction for International Doctoral CES students

In Anita et al. (2021) study on supporting junior CES faculty members, the researchers proposed the development of an eight-session long induction support group for doctoral candidates to help each other pursue tenured positions. The proposed group sessions were based on CACREP (2014) competencies and other areas related to professional development like pursuing tenure track, building a research agenda, and preparing for distant and on-campus interviews. Based on the existing literature which has identified the challenges experienced by international doctoral CES students, a similar model framework addressing the identified issues could prove quite beneficial to this population.

The induction group could address challenging topics for IS like navigating language barriers, self-efficacy concerns, external obligations from home countries, and understanding cultural norms. The group could also address professional and academic issues that would enable IS to be at par with their domestic counterparts. In a phenomenological study of 11 international counseling doctoral students, Li and Liu (2021) found that participants experienced disproportionate preparation in their teaching training. They also noted that cultural implications were likely intertwined with teaching readiness, and they proposed utilizing support systems to prepare international doctoral candidates better. Using the induction group model to address issues like preparing lessons for counselors in training or utilizing learner-centered teaching models could improve their teaching preparedness. Further, the participation of peers from

similar cultural or national backgrounds could serve as a morale booster for incoming international doctoral students and would likely generate enthusiasm from inductees.

Future Implications

IS in CES programs can receive more support with the acculturation process thus increasing their success as students, future counselor educators, and reducing the mental health concerns associated with poor acculturation. As IS journey through their CES programs with a sense of belonging to the host country and the university, they become model instruments for social inclusion and cultural diversity (Chan et al., 2018). The growth results are exponential as many IS are desirous of returning home and investing in the development of mental health services. Upon returning to their home country, they are ambassadors for the counseling profession. This results in the counseling profession being internationalized and improves counselors' professional image and journey globally (Behl et al., 2017).

The 2016 CACREP standards highlight Social Inclusion and Cultural Diversity (CACREP, 2015). Universities with robust support services for IS demonstrate their commitment to cultural diversity and adherence to the CACREP standards. In addition, given the importance of accreditation in CES programs, universities can benefit from providing IS with the opportunity to gain higher Education at well-accredited programs (Kung, 2017).

Conclusion

Internationalization and Globalization have increased access to higher Education for IS at U.S based institutions. Institutions must be more prepared to understand IS' needs and implement programs that will assist them. This paper sought to examine existing literature on the challenges of IS studying in CES programs in the U.S. and propose recommendations that will make it easier for higher education institutions to assist them. Challenges that included acculturative

stress, deterioration in mental health, communication barriers, and COVID-19 can be overcome

through recommendations inclusive of targeted mentorship strategies, consistent infusion of

cultural diversity throughout the entire CES program, and an intervention model that provides a

step-by-step outline. The improvement of cross-cultural awareness provides invaluable benefits

in the global expansion of the professional field of counseling, counseling education programs at

U.S-based universities, and assurances that cultural diversity competencies are adequately being

met.

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