

The effects of acculturative stressors to academic performance of international students at Université Laval

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Research Paper

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This work aims to assess the effects of acculturative stressors on the performance of international students at Université Laval. The purposive sampling technique was used to select twenty respondents, composed of eighteen international students and two lecturers. After analysing the interview, results have shown various acculturative stressors which affect the academic performance of international students such as language, which affects the performance of students who come from countries where French is not the medium language of instruction. It has also been noted that the pronunciation of Quebecers is difficult to understand for international students. Another acculturative stressor was the educational system which is said to be intensive and the type of student centered learning used makes students work more than expected. However, respondents did show appreciation for the availability and cooperative spirit of lecturers at Université

Laval. The socio-cultural acculturative stressor was not found to have much of an effect on the performance. Discrimination is not done openly and generally does not come from professors but rather from other students by forming groups wherein international students are excluded. The financial acculturative stressor does not have a significant effect on international students because most of them have scholarships or are coming from wealthy families. Finally, the respondents did mention other acculturative stressors which affect the performance of international students such as diet, time management and climate. Winter in Quebec was described as a very sensitive acculturative stressor to international students.

Key Words: Acculturation, acculturative stressors, academic performance and international students.

INTRODUCTION

In today's context of globalization, labour market is requiring graduates to know one or more foreign languages and to have strong intercultural skills. Universities and Colleges are focusing on internationalization and emphasizing exchange programs. Business Schools are therefore focusing their efforts on faculty and students' mobility using global research partnerships, improving their curriculum to reach their goals, and generally providing the opportunities for their faculty and studies to interconnect in a global setting.

Also, the number of students involved in global programs overseas has significantly increased in the last decades (Mbemba, 2014). Studying abroad has been described as an enriching experience for students leaving their home country (Yang et al., 2011). In this work, the variables such as the acculturative stressors and academic performance of international students at Université Laval were developed to explain the social and individual phenomena of the internationalization of Universities. The research has tried to push back the boundaries of the knowledge by providing compelling and logical justifications for altered views.

More than 3 million students study outside their home country, primarily at a Western university. A common belief among educators is that international students are sufficiently adjusted to higher education in their host country, both academically and socially. Furthermore, several groups of international students experience considerable amounts of stress while adapting to the culture of the host-institute. (Rienties et al., 2012). International students studying at a host university may experience a culture shock when the educational structure, behaviours and expectations of the host university are different from those of the students' culture (Rienties and Tempelaar, 2013).

International students are not only a valuable financial asset to universities in developed countries; they are individuals who also enrich these countries with their diverse heritage and perspectives, thus, serving to increase cultural awareness and appreciation (Bevis, 2002; Harrison, 2002). International students bring with them a wide range of knowledge and skills across many disciplines, thereby contributing to the intellectual capital of their host country and adding to the work force. Whilst it could be argued that their stay is mutually beneficial as they bring a range of assets to their host country and in return gain higher education, a number of factors impact an international students' acculturation; whereby acculturation is the process of change that takes place as a result of two or more cultures coming into contact (Berry, 2005). Moving to a foreign country to study brings many potential challenges, and international students may experience acculturative stress (that is, stress resulting from life changes in the acculturation process; (Berry, 2006) and adjustment problems (Smith and Khawaja, 2011).

Addressing and minimizing any disadvantage international students might have should therefore be of prime concern for all those involved in teaching and mentoring culturally diverse classes (Sulkowski and Deakin, 2009). Institutions should manage diversity not react to its consequence. (Hartwell et al., 2011). Thus, Université Laval does not require proficiency language testing and it offers flexibility in choosing a program. Université Laval receives a significant number of international students but there is not follow up or a special treatment to adjust in the new academic environment.

Acculturation can be understood as the continuous meeting of different cultural elements. This phenomenon has increased globally due to advancements in technology, economy and globalization. Springer Science and Business Media, 2013). The main objective of this research is to identify the acculturative stressors and its effects on the academic performance of international students at Université Laval. The increase in migration over the past century has prompted researchers to explore the processes that immigrants go through when settling in a foreign country, leading to the development

of acculturation models. Initially acculturation was conceptualized as a uni-dimensional model focusing on the migrant only, and theory stated that the migrant underwent a process of discarding their cultural heritage and adopting the host country's culture (Schwartz et al., 2010 in Smith and Khawaja, 2011).

While literature reviews have previously investigated the array of stressors that international students face (e.g., Andrade, 2006; Chen, 1999; Mori, 2000), the subsequent expansion of literature in this area in the past decade highlights the need for another review integrating this recent research. Furthermore, there is an ongoing need to refine dominant acculturation models in the general acculturation literature and apply them to international students, as the majority of the acculturation models have been related to immigrants and refugees.

A recently published review of the acculturation experiences of international students discusses (Smith and Khawaja, 2011) the theoretical background of acculturation specifically in relation to international students. Drawing upon leading acculturation models, the range of potential stressors that international students face when studying abroad, and their coping mechanisms will be considered. The impact of acculturative stress on international students and recent attempts to enhance the adjustment and acculturation of international students through various programs are also examined. The review outlined the lack of empirically tested interventions to aid the acculturation of international students. I did not intend to generate a new theory from scratch, instead I tried to work on improving the existing theory to make my contribution. This goes with the views of Golden-Biddle and Locke, (2013) as he states that when we write up our discussion of extent literature, we are doing much more than generating a summary of previous studies and theorizing a topic. We construct existing knowledge in a way that makes room for our research and invites the contribution our work can make. The goal of the study on the effects of acculturative stressors on the academic performance of international was to fill in the gap in the literature and to contribute to the existing body of knowledge.

Academic performance can be estimated by comparing the resources (inputs) to the outcomes (outputs) (De Witte and Kortelainen, 2013). Student performance is naturally considered a critical aspect for many educationists. Many papers have therefore looked at specific factors affecting student's academic performance to determine the impact on learner performance. Academic performances of both undergraduate and postgraduate students have been of considerable importance. As a result, universities and colleges should address this issue and focus on improving the performance of students, which in turn will have a positive impact on students and society (Alhajraf and Alasfour, 2014). Our study is limited to academic performance of international students of Université Laval.

As North America's first French language university, Université Laval draws strength from its history and vitality. A well-rounded university: more than 420 programs, renowned mobility and exchange programs, 5 profiles: sustainable development, entrepreneurial, international, distinction and research, Custom, continuing, and distance education programs, some 750 partnership agreements with some 525 universities in nearly 70 countries, A library of over 6 million documents, A vibrant and diverse community, nearly 48,000 students, nearly 6,600 international students, some 250 student associations (<https://www2.ulaval.ca/en/about-us.html>). Osikomaiya, (2014) states that acculturative stress creates significant challenges for international students regardless of race, language, and country of origin. These challenges have been well documented and include homesickness, (Poyrazli and Lopez, 2007), language barriers, difficulties in adjustment (Poyrazli and Grahame, 2007; Poyrazli and Lopez, 2007), difficulties adjusting due to cultural differences, (Constantine et al., 2005; Reynolds and Constantine, 2007), and perceived discrimination (Beoku-Betts, 2004; Karuppan and Barari, 2011; Lee and Rice, 2007). The effects of these challenges include risk for mental health issues, such as anxiety (Brown, 2008, Msengi, 2007), depression, maladjustment, and academic. Studies on acculturative stress have confirmed that the level of acculturation and length of time in the new country do not eliminate acculturative stress; for example, immigrants who speak with an accent experience stress regardless of their acculturation level or residence time in the new country (Caplan, 2007). In this paper the documentary and empirical data of the effects of acculturative stressors on academic performance were gathered as requested by the recent previous researchers to fill the gap and to contribute to current thinking.

This paper aims to examine the effects of acculturative stressors on the academic performance of international students of Université Laval. This study, therefore, addressed the following questions:

1. How does language acculturative stressor affect the performance of international students at Université Laval?
2. How does educational acculturative stressor affect the performance of international students at Université Laval?
3. How does Socio-cultural acculturative stressor affect the performance of international students at Université Laval?
4. How does discrimination acculturative stressor affect the performance of international students at Université Laval?
5. How does financial acculturative stressor affect the performance of international students at Université Laval?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Before commencing a review of the stressors impacting international students it is important to define and discuss the concept of acculturation. Acculturation is the process of adapting to a new social and cultural setting (Lieber et al., 2001). As outlined by Kagitçibasi, (2007), acculturative stress includes both psychological and sociocultural adaptation. The psychological aspect is the most common focus of research and deals with a person's sense of well-being and self-satisfaction, while sociocultural adaptation is related to levels of success in becoming integrated in the dominant society.

Abdulahad et al. (2014) state that acculturative stress has been defined as the 'reduction in mental health and wellbeing of ethnic minorities that occurs during the process of adaptation to a new culture' (Lueck and Wilson, 2010). Acculturative stress is impacted by the migratory grief and losses immigrants experience while interacting in a new system that has different values and beliefs, as well as demands for a shift in social roles and customs (Casado et al., 2010). It is also influenced by the social and environmental issues that are embedded in the new society, such as limited access by minority groups to real economic, social and political opportunities (Al-Krenawi and Graham, 2003; De Pass and Qureshi, 2002; Lund, 2006).

The acculturation is defined as "the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members" (Berry, 2005). In Berry, (2005) acculturation, changes are said to be co-occurring on an individual level (psychological acculturation) and on a group level (cultural acculturation) in both cultures. For example, acculturative change occurs in international students as well as in their host culture. Berry, (1997) also developed a taxonomy to describe acculturation attitudes of both host and migrant groups, identifying four acculturation attitudes (integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization), which subsequent acculturation models have commonly incorporated. (Smith and Khawaja, 2011). Wang and Hannes, (2014) state that we can change our own perspectives, learn from other cultures and return to a better self. It is neither giving up our own cultures (assimilation), nor separating ourselves from the other cultures (separation), but trying to incorporate the valuable parts of different cultures into our own value systems (integration). The concept of acculturative stress refers to a particular type of stress in which the stressors are identified as having their source in the process of acculturation (Nicholson et al., 2013).

While acculturation is a multidimensional psychological and cultural process of adjusting to a new culture, including adapting to new meanings and values (Berry et al., 2006; Cabassa, 2003; Sam and Berry, 2010; Landrine and Klonoff, 1996), acculturative stressors include obstacles in meeting the demands of the host

culture (Dawson and Williams, 2008; Miranda and Matheny, 2000). This is also a distinct form of acculturative stress, which is the subjective experience of these obstacles (Anderson, 1991; Miranda and Matheny, 2000).

Myers-Walls et al. (2011) state that adapting to new social and physical environments requires adjustment on the part of international students and their families. Although any students may have stress as they begin studying in a new institution and adapting to a new educational environment, moving to a new country at that time is even more stressful.

Acculturative stressors encountered by international students

Based on the acculturation models [dimensionality (unidimensional adaptation, a bidimensional combination of culture maintenance and adaptation, or a multidimensional fusion of two cultures) and domain specificity (trait or domain-specific models)] by (Arends-Toth and van de Vijver, 2006; Berry, 1997, 2006; Safdar et al., 2003; Ward et al., 2001), it is reasonable to expect that an international student may encounter a range of life changes as a result of being in a new culture. These changes have the potential to become stressors, or hassles as termed in Safdar et al. (2003) model, if they are appraised by an international student as being a difficulty. The following section reviews the frequently documented acculturative stressors within the international student literature. (Smith and Khawaja, 2011).

Language

Researchers have also identified individual differences among immigrants; for instance, Missingham et al. (2004) indicated that older individuals tend to keep their language when they move from one country to another and tend to socialize within their own community. This can be less stressful for them than interacting with people who hold different values and cultures.

Language usage has long been recognized as a reasonable proxy for acculturation and language consistently appears as a prominent aspect of acculturation measures and scales (Schwebel and Brezausek, 2009).

Smith and Khawaja, (2011) state that a major acculturation stressor that international students face is a language barrier. Chen, (1999) argues that second language anxiety is a stressor that interacts with other stressors in both academic and sociocultural domains. In the academic domain, language barriers can have an impact on assignment writing, understanding lectures, oral and written examinations, and the ability to ask

questions in class (Chen, 1999; Mori, 2000). Socially, language barriers can impede international students' attempts to make friends and interact with locals (Chen, 1999; Mori, 2000).

International students oftentimes needed to negotiate cultural and linguistic differences, and were likely to experience culture shock due to language problems. In addition to these issues, international students, especially those from non-Western countries, perceived that they were being discriminated against when they come in contact with the host community. These experiences resulted in developing coping skills in order for them to complete their studies (Osikomaiya, 2014).

The language socialization theory indicates that people who learn ideologies, linguistics, culture, history, and identity knowledge, use the language appropriately and engage in the new community such as in publications (objectivities and ideologies) and law schools (authority). Duff (in press) argued some misconceptions regarding the academic socialization which expertise is identified by the competency in socialization, and the biggest struggle that students face is academic writing.

Students' different prior school experiences, homes and commonalities expose feeling of strangeness, conflicts of identity and lack of confidence. Their position as an outsider or an insider, and the feeling of being capable or incapable, affect their socialization. Some instructors do not support students by providing appropriate feedback and scaffolding (Murshidi, 2014).

Educational system

There are a number of potential acculturative stressors that international students encounter in the educational environment. Academic stress is not unique to international students but rather experienced by all university students. However, academic stress is likely to be intensified for international students due to the added stressors of second language anxiety and adapting to a new educational environment (Smith and Khawaja, 2011).

International students may encounter a mismatch in expectations regarding the quality and efficiency of services provided by educational institutions. Sherry et al. (2004) highlighted that international students, in comparison to domestic students, had lower perceptions of services offered by their educational institutions, and these findings were affirmed by (Khawaja and Dempsey, 2008).

International students' unmet expectations of university's educational services have been found to be associated with poorer adaptation (Khawaja and Dempsey, 2008) and increased depression levels (Kennedy, 1999), as cited in, Ward et al., (2001). Therefore, unmet education expectations appear to be another possible source of acculturative stress.

Socio-cultural

Brisset et al. (2010) Social support is considered within the stress and coping framework and has been found to be an important predictor in psychological adaptation during cross-cultural transitions. In addition to the acculturative stressors experienced within the educational domain, often international students have to establish a new social network after leaving their friends and family back home. Emerging research suggests that personality variables of attachment style, trait-anxiety, and extroversion may have an impact on international students' ability to form friendships, and in-turn impact their sociocultural and psychological adaptation (Brisset et al., 2010; Wang and Mallinckrodt, 2006; Ying and Han, 2006 in Smith and Khawaja, 2011).

White and Rosado, 2014, states that an additional cultural value seemed to present challenges in the American university classroom (Yan and Berliner, 2009), which was identified as the "silent learner versus active learner" style preference. The result was that the students may appear to not want to participate and generally cannot voice their distress due to cultural aspects of the home culture (Yan and Berliner, 2009). The factor that had the greatest influence for all the students in a study of academic stressors in Chinese international students, was socio-cultural (Lui, 2001).

Discrimination

In Canada, immigrants often struggle to find jobs related to their education and professional qualification, even when they have adequate levels of training and experience in their country of origin. Systemic barriers associated with credential evaluation and licensing for trades and occupation are well recognized. This can lead to earning differentials between newcomers and mainstream Canadian-born citizens as well as the emergence of a stratified society (George, 2012).

Research that has explored challenges facing international students has shown that they are susceptible to discrimination based on cultural differences (Constantine et al., 2005; Karrupan and Barari, 2011; Lee and Rice, 2007; Poyrazli and Lopez, 2007). Discrimination has also been noted as another potential acculturative stressor. International students from Asia, Africa, India, Latin America, and the Middle East often report significant perceived discrimination compared to domestic students or European international students (Hanassab, 2006; Lee and Rice, 2007; Poyrazli and Lopez, 2007).

Lee and Rice, (2007) interviewed a sample of international students from 15 countries about international student perceptions of discrimination against the backdrop of neo-racism as a theoretical lens. Their findings tie in with the findings of other researchers,

pointing to real inadequacies within the larger American system, which negatively impacts international students. Karrupan and Barari, (2011) found similar sentiments when they conducted an investigation of international students. The authors concluded, "Perceived discrimination has a strong, negative impact on educational experience" (Osikomaiya, 2014).

Financial

In addition to educational and sociocultural stressors, international students may also experience a number of practical or lifestyle acculturative stressors. Studies have shown that financial problems are experienced by the majority of international students (Li & Kaye, 1998; Poyrazli and Grahame, 2007; Roberts et al., 1999), with contributing factors including work restrictions in the host country and substantially greater tuition fees (Chen, 1999; Mori, 2000). Further practical issues such as accommodation and transportation have also been highlighted in other qualitative studies (Bradley, 2000; Poyrazli and Grahame, 2007). However, Khawaja and Dempsey, (2008) found no significant differences in financial and accommodation satisfaction between international and domestic students (Smith and Khawaja, 2011). At Université Laval, the practice is not far from this, because the tuition fees of international students is very high compared to national students and it increases every year.

The role of the institution in preventing the acculturative stressors to international students

Regarding institutional response to international students, Trice, (2003) reported a rather positive picture of faculty perceptions of international students. She interviewed and collected data from four departments (Architecture, Public Health, Mechanical Engineering, and Materials Science and Engineering) at a research university to examine their experiences with international students. Although she was quick to admit that the international students in her study were treated as homogenous entities, her findings of faculty perceptions varied from one department to the next. However, faculty members showed interest and a commitment to the success of their international students and an awareness of the problems international students face. They made concerted efforts to mitigate any problems (Trice, 2003). According to Trice, the main issue faculty noted as a major problem for international students is communication with faculty and peers (Osikomaiya, 2014).

Effects of acculturative stressor on international students

Osikomaiya, (2014) states that the research examining

stressors faced by international students find that they are more likely to complain of stress due to alienation and discrimination in the host country than guilt over leaving their home countries (Msengi, 2007). According to Msengi, these stressors impact the mental health of international students and may also result in anxiety and depression. Several authors have also found anxiety and depression as predictors of acculturative stress. Grahame, Poyrazli, and Sumer (2008) as well as Khawajah and Stallman (2011) reported that anxiety and depression were major challenges that international students face in a host country. Research has shown that international students' psychological experiences range from anxiety and depression to homesickness, disorientation, alienation, and powerlessness. Grahame et al. (2008) conducted a cross-sectional, exploratory study in which depression and anxiety were measured among international students.

Ribeiro, (2012) states that in the process of cultural adaptation, individuals experience a number of psychological stressors (Kiang et al., 2010). Researchers have pointed out that some of these stressors emanate from language acquisition, loss of support networks, and family conflicts (Bacallao and Smokowski, 2007; Padilla and Borrero, 2006). The term "acculturative stress" has been coined to describe the experience of these stressors (Berry, 2006; Padilla and Borrego, 2006; Zea et al., 2003). Acculturative stress has been associated with increased family conflict, psychological distress, and cultural conflicts (Cuellar et al., 1995; Flores et al., 2004). Acculturative stressors have been associated with loss of personal identity and social support (Smart and Smart, 1995). In sum, acculturative stressors have been identified by researchers as predictors of loneliness, depression, homesickness, and poor mental health among international students. This literature review shows that acculturative stress on international students negatively impacts their level of academic achievements. International students reported that they had problems interacting with domestic students and the immediate community around the campus because of language barriers and cultural differences (Osikomaiya, 2014).

METHODOLOGY

Research design

According to Maxwell, (2013) in a qualitative study, research design should be a reflexive process operating through every stage of a project.

Sampling

Eighteen international students and two lecturers were selected, using convenience sampling. Participation on a

voluntary basis. Respondents agreed to partake after receiving the basic information. The twenty participants (Table 1), included eighteen international students studying at Université Laval and two lecturers. The students were from China, Morocco, Ivory Coast, Bulgaria, Rwanda, Burundi, Republic Democratic of Congo, Benin, Senegal, Haiti, Taiwan, Sweden, and France, German, Tunisia, Algeria, Jamaica, and Korea studying at different levels and two lecturers from Canada.

Six of them are at the doctoral level, other five are at the master's level, four are at the undergraduate and three others are in exchange program. They were enrolled in various programs across different departments. There are nine female students and nine male students, aged between 20 and 45 and a lecturer is aged between 35-50. To fully protect the privacy of the participants, respondent's numbers are used to refer to them in the results section.

The following studies were of particular interest: (Anderson, 1991, Arends-Toth and van de Vijver, 2006; Berry, 2005; Berry et al., 1987; Chen, 1999; De Witte, and Kortelainen, 2013; Padilla and Borrero, 2006, Pan and Wong, 2011). The researcher realized that there are many other acculturative stressors which are not identified in this literature that are raised by respondents.

The researcher gave the research instrument to the experts in the qualitative research to be validated and he tried to be as objective as possible. Therefore the sample was not representative to all international students studying at Université Laval. But as the respondents were from different continents, different countries with different cultures and backgrounds their responses were rich to be considered. When the paper was complete, it was given to four senior researchers and academicians from different institutions. All their inputs were integrated before it gets published.

Study scope

Based on the relevance of the study, it ought to be conducted to all international students of Université Laval but considering the time and means it requires, the researcher decides to limit the study from October 2014 to August 2015.

Data collection and analysis procedure

The interview guide included the researcher's name, an explanation of the research and its importance to the community as well as the researcher. The interview guide made it clear that participation was voluntary and answers would be anonymous. Interviewing respondents on events taking place in the past can prove difficult, not because respondents may lie but simply because we all

Table 1. General characteristics of respondents.

No. of Respondent	Nationality	Level	The time spent at U Laval	Gender	Age (In between)	Marital status
1	Ivory coast	Masters	5 years	Female	30-35	Single
2	China	PhD candidate	3 years	Female	25-30	Married
3	Morocco	Undergraduate	5 years	Male	20-25	Single
4	Bulgaria	Exchange Program	1 session	Male	20-25	Single
5	Rwanda	Masters	1 sessions	Male	25-30	Single
6	Burundi	Undergraduate	3 sessions	Female	20-25	Single
7	France	Undergraduate	2 years	Female	20-25	Single
8	Haiti	PhD students	3 years	Male	35-40	Married
9	Jamaica	PhD students	4 years	Female	30-35	Single
10	Suiden	Exchange program	1 session	Female	20-25	Single
11	Tunisia	Masters	2 years	Male	30-35	Married
12	Democratic Republic of Congo	PhD students	1 session	Male	40-45	Married
13	Korea	Undergraduate	2sessions	Female	20-25	Single
14	German	Exchange program	1 session	Female	20-25	Single
15	Algeria	PhD students	2 sessions	Male	30-40	Married
16	Benin	PhD students	3 years	Male	35-40	Married
17	Senegal	Masters	2 years	Male	25-30	Married
18	Taiwan	Masters	1 year	Female	20-25	Single
19	Canada	Lecturer	Above 5 years	Male	45- 50 and above	Conjoint de fait (Law spouse)
20	Canadian	Lecturer	Above 5 years	Female	35-40	Conjoint de fait (Law spouse)

view the past through a lens of the present. Hence this kind of retrospective study is likely to offer inaccurate information (Silverman, 2013).The interview was conducted with 20 potential respondents. The questions were asked either in French or English according to the choice of respondents.

The format of an interview was chosen to allow respondents the opportunity to express themselves more clearly and to expand on the topic. The data collected were classified, categorized and analyzed in accordance with the

objectives of the study.

The researcher make appointments with the respondents and all interviews were registered. After conducting all of the interviews, the data were gathered according to objectives, and comments were made on all sections.

Ethical considerations

Silverman, (2013) states that the general principles that most researchers would agree with

research ethics are: voluntary participation and the right to withdraw, protection of research participants, assessment of potential benefits and risks to participants, obtaining informed consent, not doing harm. To respond to these requirements, a cover letter that explains the ethical considerations of this study and appeals for voluntary participation was given to the respondents when their appointment was made. In addition, the researcher ensured the respondents that their anonymity would be

maintained. The respondents understood that their responses would be treated with confidentiality and could only be used for the purposes of this research. All respondents signed a consent form.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the interviews on acculturative stressors and their effects on the academic performance of international students conducted with 18 students from different countries and lecturers from continents and their names were not mentioned, but variables such as nationality, level, time spent at Université Laval, sex, age and marital status of respondents are presented on this (Table 1).

Language acculturative stressors

During the interviews, the researcher realized that the fact that French language proficiency testing is not made mandatory by Université Laval means that many students apply and later are affected by the acculturative stressor of language. This of course depends on the country of the origin. This is a particular problem for Asian students who come from an educational background where French was not used in instruction. This was stated by female student from China "French is very frustrating to me. When I read I use English, but I study in French. I cannot communicate well with my colleagues because of the language barriers, it makes me to feel aloneness and frustrated. I do not get enough information. The lecturers do not mind about the particularities of some international students, they do not tolerate any grammatical error, and in consequence, we do not get the same grades as students from Quebec. Sometimes students do escape to be with us in groups, by pretext that we do not present well and make them fail". While for a Rwandan female student when asked she replies that "If I knew, I wouldn't come at Université Laval, French itself is a problem to me because I did my studies in English but when it comes to French of Quebec, I feel, I could run away"

Language does not appear to be an acculturative stressor to the international students at the same level. For the student from, Ivory Coast, Morocco, France, Haiti, Benin, Senegal, and German they all say that French language does not affect their academic performance, because they have been studying in French since primary school. The student from Bulgaria explains, "Frankly, the French couldn't be a problem to me because it is my mother tongue, but in Quebec they have their pronunciation which is not of French standards. For the first time it was hard for me to get what they say because sometimes lecturers use words which you cannot get in dictionary, others laugh and I could not

know why they laugh. But with time we get used". Most of the respondents said that the language did not affect their performance because the written French is the same. From the perspective of the lecturer, female lecturer explains the language acculturative stressor and its effects on the academic performance of international student this way "For the international students to understand the accent of Quebecers, regional expression it is a problem. And for informal relations this can create incomprehension and sometimes conflicts. When French is not your primary language, it is difficult to adapt. For lecturers, we try our best to speak slowly and to give examples. It requires a lot of efforts. For the issue of affecting academic performance it is obvious. The lecturer cannot compromise ethics, you assess the students the same way. You cannot give privilege to some students because of one reason or another. I wish the university may be very selective when it is giving admissions and make sure that the recruited students are able to pursue their studies in French this can help students as well as lecturers". While the male lecturer responds in this way when he was asked this question "we know that the French is the problem for some international students but that cannot be handled by a lecturer, they must follow the French course before attending the courses in their regular program". In brief, the language is an acculturative stressor which affects the academic performance of international students, but at different levels.

Researchers argue that second language anxiety is a stressor that interacts with other stressors in both academic and sociocultural domains. In the academic domain, language barriers can have an impact on assignment writing, understanding lectures, oral and

written examinations, and the ability to ask questions in class (Chen, 1999; Mori, 2000). The students from countries which do not use French as medium language of communication face these parries at Université Laval. For this reason, it is important that the university set up language centres where international students coming from a different linguistic background can have the opportunity to improve.

Educational acculturative stressors

The majority of respondents confirmed that the education system is acculturative stressor which affects the academic performance of international students.

The student from France when she was asked about if education system is acculturative stressor she answered that "the French education system is more theoretical, that the lecturers talk too much while Canadian education system is more practical. The students work hard, no time to relax" while a student from Ivory Coast who was doing masters when asked replied "Frankly speaking the education system here is much advanced than in my

country. It is too much demanding. I realized that I had to learn how to study. Here, they give too much work in a very short period of time. The lecturers do not mind about other courses.

They give a lot of assignments with deadlines. I may say that this affected me negatively and positively. Negatively because, for the first session, I did not perform well. But positively, because I learnt to work hard and to respect deadlines". Most of respondents appreciated the availability of lecturers.

They said that here the students work a lot. To some of them, it was positive, to others it was said to be strange to them. While another male student from Morocco explained that "We used to see lecturers teach and students follow, read notes and do exams, but here it is somehow different.

The students make research and present all the time. But this is common to all students being nationals or international students they have the same stress. We cannot attribute this to the lecturers, though it is tough, but it is what we have come to look for, we are actually looking for difference. For its effects to academic performance, personally I managed to make it. I do not know whether I can generalize it." Other respondents said that they appreciate the educational system and that sometimes they perform better than the domestic students. Also, they appreciated working in groups. A student from Haiti who was doing PhD, when he was asked about education system, he said that "the problem is not the education system, rather, the problem is that the lecturers are not flexible to fresh international students, before they get integrated into the system"

From the lecturer's perspective, the female Canadian lecturer at Université Laval said "it depends on person and education system he/ she is coming from. I was once surprised when one of my African student brought a work on landscape and all in capital letters. I told the student that it is not acceptable for a university student to submit such work to a lecturer. It took like an hour to explain how to make it. To me the university has a lot of facilities in place to help international students but they are not aware. It is the weakness of the university in induction of the new international students, for the appreciation of the system, for humility purpose, I leave this to the beneficiaries".

In general, most respondents appreciated the system. Furthermore, the lecturers have to be more educators than instructors. They have to recognize the differences of their students and avoid having generalized bias toward some groups of international students. A male lecturer says that " yes, we know that education system in north America is different from other education systems but to cope with the system, the international students must join the groups of the students who are used with the system for mentorship or get information from the service in charge or orientation and integration of international students".

Socio- cultural acculturative stressors

The respondents said that the level of sociability depends on one person to another. The student from Ivory Coast explained that "socializing with people whom you come from different culture, different background and have different interests, depends on the personality of a person. For the first time, I was chocked because from my childhood, I was taught to salute people, I used to salute people and they do not respond *and I was shocked*. On the other hand, we have to accept cultural differences". For other respondents they said that they socialize with people from the same country as stated by a Chinese female who was doing PhD when she was asked "Myself I like to be alone, I do not mind about that. When I want to socialize with people I socialize with those from my country or those from Asia in general. I realized that approaching Quebeckers is not easy. I prefer to not disturb anybody. It can't affect my academic performance because there are so many Chinese here. For other respondents they say that in general, they don't have time to socialize because there is too much pressure to succeed so, they therefore do not put much emphasis on social issues. Most of respondents mentioned that here people are too individualist than social. From the lecturer's perspective, a female lecturer said "for the matter of social issues, it is individual, it is not generalized. There are some students who are extroverted and others who are introverted. I cannot say that it is on international students, it can happen even to domestic students. There are some students who are shy and others who are sharp. In general it is easier to those who belong to some social clubs". A student from Sweden who was doing an exchange program said that "Here, they are too much activities organized either in residences or in different associations of the students" These answers are justified by theories which state that as it is commonly recognized in literature, the adjustment of international students is a multi-dimensional field which often encompasses three major domains: academic adjustment, socio-cultural adjustment and personal psychological adjustment (Brisset et al., 2010; Zhang and Goodson, 2011).

Discrimination as acculturative stressor

On the issue of discrimination, respondents said that people respected each other, but that discrimination exists, it just isn't spoken. Student from Ivory Coast who was doing masters stated that "the discrimination is seen in groups. Sometimes we are rejected and they tend to form their own groups. Even the lecturers know how the Quebeckers answer and they have preconceived attitudes against us that we do not have the same capacity, this intellect supremacy is there. I saw a student telling a lecturer that is not happy of grade because he

wants to apply for a scholarship. This cannot work to international students, curiously, the next grade was higher. In brief, the Chinese are discriminated for political reasons. They do not give us a value". On this issue, the student from Algeria said it is not only at Université Laval that it is the generalized bias towards Islam though it is not said. He said that he has been victim of his Arabic name several times.

On the other hand, other respondents said that there is no discrimination. Bulgarian male student who was doing an exchange program explained it in this way, "Honestly, I have never been discriminated". Most of respondents said that there is no discrimination, they found the issue being difficulty into different groups of Quebecker students since those groups have been together in previous years. The lecturer explained, "I think, I am not the right person to answer this question. May be victims. What I saw in class is that the students claim to not working with international students, to me this is not discrimination rather it is differentiation of education systems". On this issue, a female student from Burundi who was doing an undergraduate program said that, once when a lecturer assigned her in a group of Quebeckers, they asked her to find another group without any other explanations. She qualified this as a racial discrimination.

In previous theories, it was shown that friendships with host nationals tend to increase life satisfaction, and decrease feelings of home sickness and loneliness of international students (Church, 1982). Through contact with local communities, international students gain new knowledge and understanding of the lifestyle, values and customs of the host society.

Financial acculturative stressor

The views of respondents differed on the issue of financial acculturative stressor. Bulgarian student said "I am in exchange program, I pay nothing. Yet I got to know from my colleagues that the tuition fees for international students are keeping increasing every year." While the student from Ivory Coast explained this issue on this way, "Most students who come here some are from rich families and others have scholarship. And to get a visa they ask you to show the financial support evidences. It can happen that in some circumstances, you do not get money. It happened once and I could not participate in class, I could not buy books and when you are hungry you sleep in class. When I had presentation, I could not stand as I passed two days without eating. I presented while sitting and I was penalised. This has affected my academic performance."

Most of respondents said that life is expensive in Quebec. And they say that the international students cannot get scholarships like Canadian students can. From the perspective of the lecturer, the female Canadian lecturer from Canada said that "this is one of

sensitive issues to talk about in this context. You cannot ask someone the financial situation, religion, marriage etc. I keep distance. It is private life" But in general, when you are hungry you cannot be psychologically stable, and you cannot think deeply and concentration is lowered, which means that poor performance is obvious.

Other acculturative stressors raised by respondents

The respondents raised other acculturative stressors which affect the academic performance of international students at Université Laval. One of them is climate. Most respondents said that it's horrible in the winter, they don't want to get out of bed in the morning and as it is getting dark early they get sleepy in class. They said that this is common for all students, but that the only difference is that nationals already know how to dress properly during the winter. Another issue raised was a Diet. The respondents did not speak the same language about this acculturative stressor. Some of them were saying that a large majority of foods here contain pork and that for religious reasons they do not eat pork.

Others said that Quebec is a city where everybody can find food for his/ her choice and most of the respondents they said that they like the Quebecers' food (poutine). Time management was also raised as an acculturative stressor. The respondents said that it was difficult to adapt to the rhythm of Quebeckers. However, this was somewhere a positive factor because they learned to manage their time.

From the lecturer's perspective, the Canadian lecturer said that they have a perception that Africans are always late. They try to understand diversity, but can still find it insulting.

The role of the institution in preventing acculturative stressors for international students

Concerning the role of the institution in preventing acculturative stressors to international students, most of respondents said that in general, the university does not have an integration program for new international students. On the issue of language the university recruits all students regardless of the previous language of education and does not provide any special help to them. Regarding the education system, all of the respondents appreciated the availability and flexibility of lecturers. On the issues of socio-cultural acculturative stressors the University has set up different activities to help students but it needs to follow-up to see whether the international students are informed and benefiting from such services. A recommendation to eliminate discrimination would be for the lecturers to create the groups. On the financial side, respondents noted that international student tuition fees are too high. Though the University gives exemption

Table 2. Confrontation of the factors identified in interviews and to the factors identified in the literature.

Acculturative stressors	The studies which identified these stressors
Language as acculturative stressor	Murshidi (2014); Araújo et al., 2008; Chen, 1999; Mori, 2000
Education acculturative stressor	Thi Tuyet (June), Tran. 2013; Brown, 2008; Smith and Khawaja,2011
Socio- cultural acculturative stressor	White and Rosado,2014; Wang and Hannes, 2014; Brisset et al., 2010; Zhang and Goodson, 2011; Trottier,2008
Discrimination acculturative stressor	Chung and Epstein, 2014, Church, 1982; Hanassab, 2006; Lee and Rice, 2007; Poyrazli and Lopez, 2007
Financial acculturative stressor	Li and Kaye, 1998; Poyrazli and Grahame, 2007; Roberts et al.,1999
Academic performance of international students	Alhajraf and Alasfour, 2014; Rienties et al., 2012; Giridharan,2012; Loong, 2012.

scholarships to international students pursuing doctoral programs, it should do the same for undergraduate and master's programs. Concerning diet, it is beyond the university, time management is very much individual, and for climate, the University has made underground ways (Tunnels) to help students in the winter. The respondents suggest that the university should heat the residences better to help students.

Effects of acculturative stressors on academic performance of international students

The acculturative stressors have effects such as stress, loneliness, anxiety, disappointment, fear, frustration and depression to the extent that some international students tend to go back home or commit suicide as stated by some respondents (Table 2).

The interviews showed that acculturative stressors do not affect performance at the same level, the effects depends on each individual. Language affects the performance of international students whom the medium language of instruction in their countries is not French. For others, they are able to adapt because while sometimes the Quebecer accent can be challenging, the written French is the same. While for education system it is intensive and demands significant student participation, they try to adapt

themselves and declared that they are looking for the difference. Discrimination is not obvious and it does not have direct effects to the performance. For socio- cultural stressors, it does not affect the performance because it leads students to focus more on their studies to perform well. The financial stressor was said to affect the academic performance because lack of food could affect concentration. But generally, it is not seen to many students. It was raised by students that diet, time management and climate affect the performance of international students.

Conclusions

The results of the study clearly show that the academic performance of international students at Université Laval is influenced by acculturative stressors such as language barrier, education system, socio-cultural, and discrimination and financial.

It was noted that the language is acculturative stressor which affects the academic performance due to the fact that Université Laval, recruits the international students without asking the language proficiency test proof. For those who come from French speaking countries, it is difficult to understand the Quebecers' pronunciation which is said not to be of French standards.

The education system at Université Laval, is

said to be intensive and stressful, which is different from almost of the respondents' educational background. For the issue of socio-cultural acculturative stressors, it was found that international students tend to join some cultural groups from their countries. In terms of discrimination, it is not overtly present except in some cases in group works.

Lack of financial means is not too much for international students because most of them have scholarships and others come from wealthy families (Finances are also part of the Canadian Visa requirements).

The study showed that in some cases, when international students do not have money it affects their academic performance. The respondents raised other acculturation factors which affect the academic performance of international students such as Diet, and the presence of pork in many foods.

They also raised the issue of time management, where it takes time for international students to adapt to the rhythm of Quebecers. Lastly, climate was raised as a significant acculturative stressor as winter was said to be very difficult for both national and international students. To conclude, the acculturative stressors discussed do not affect the academic performance at the same level; personality, individual factors and the general environment are important determinants. The valuable contribution of this research to the

existing body of knowledge is to show the effects of the acculturative stressors to the academic performance of international students at Université Laval that to best of our knowledge has never been treated by anyone else. The findings of this research show the necessity of having special programs and activities to help new international students integrate into the social and academic environment at Université Laval to help them to perform well.

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