

The Lived Experiences of Asian International Students in the U.S. Higher Education

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Abstract

Asian international students have long constituted the largest portion of the international student body in the United States (U.S.), a trend that persists despite the hurdles presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. These students play an essential role in stimulating the U.S. economy, facilitating cross-cultural exchange, and nurturing international collaboration and understanding. During the 2022-2023 academic year, Asian international students comprised 70.3% of the total international student population in the U.S. higher education.

The number of Asian international students in the U.S. higher education institutions is so considerable that their lived experiences within the U.S. higher education system deserves a thorough examination. Existing empirical research demonstrates that plenty of Asian international students are underserved, mainly facing culture shock, linguistic barriers, racial discrimination, and mental health issues. This systematic literature review aims to:

1. Investigate whether Asian international students face any challenges in the U.S. higher education;
2. Classify the challenges (if any) encountered by Asian international students in the U.S. higher education;
3. Offer valuable insights to key stakeholders in international education, empowering them to refine current administrative policies and teaching pedagogies to best support the well-being and success of Asian international students in the U.S. higher education.

Keywords: Asian international students, higher education, United States, cultural differences, linguistic barriers

1. Introduction

According to the 2023 U.S. News and World Report, the U.S. has remained a premier destination for international students seeking higher education. The U.S. institutions have been actively recruiting international students since 1948 till now. The 2023 Open Doors Report: Enrollment Trends, released by the Institute of International Education (IIE), documents a consistent rise in international student enrollment at the U.S. institutions from 1948 to 2023, with a few exceptions in the academic years 1971-1972, 2003-2004, 2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2019-2020, and 2020-2021.

Despite the dramatic disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, such as travel bans and intense political conflicts, the U.S. has maintained its status as a leading destination for international students. In the 2022-2023 academic year, 572,458 students from Asia enrolled in the U.S. higher education institutions, composing 70.3% of the total international undergraduate and graduate student population (IIE, 2023).

While Asian international students represent a large majority of the total international student population in the U.S. higher education, existing empirical research indicates that many of them are underserved, grappling primarily with culture shock, linguistic barriers, racial discrimination, and mental health challenges. A systematic review of existing literature emphasizes the critical need for culturally oriented training programs, culturally and linguistically responsive teaching (CLRT) methodologies, and tailored support services to effectively meet the particular needs of Asian international students.

2. Definitions of Key Terms

2.1 International Student

The Department of Homeland Security manages international students and issues I-20 documents to enable

international students to enter the U.S. for the sole purpose of study. The U.S. government uses the term “nonimmigrant” to refer to foreign nationals admitted into the country temporarily for a specific purpose. Once a nonimmigrant fulfills their purpose for coming to the U.S., they must either change their status or depart the country. International students in the U.S. are considered nonimmigrants because their sole purpose for being in the country is to complete a program of study at a Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP)-certified school. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security manages two different categories of students:

- F-1 nonimmigrant: An international student in the U.S. to pursue a full course of academic or professional study (including a language training program) at an SEVP-certified school. An F-2 nonimmigrant is a foreign national who is the spouse or child of an F-1 student.
- M-1 nonimmigrant: An international student in the U.S. to pursue a full course of study at an SEVP-certified vocational or other recognized nonacademic institution. An M-2 nonimmigrant is a foreign national who is the spouse or child of an M-1 student.

2.2 Higher Education

Education USA, affiliated with the U.S. The Department of State, defines the U.S. higher education as “Postsecondary education at colleges, universities, professional schools, technical institutes, etc.” Education USA articulates that 1. Nearly 4,000 accredited institutions make up the U.S. higher education; 2. The U.S. higher education institutions are not centrally organized or managed but are accredited nationally or regionally by independent accrediting bodies; 3. Various institution types offer higher-education degrees, including liberal arts institutions, private colleges and universities, state (public) colleges and universities, and community colleges; 4. Students in the U.S. higher education typically earn credits for their courses, which count towards completing a program regardless of the institution type.

3. Literature Review

This systematic literature review seeks to explore the lived experiences of Asian international students in the U.S. higher education, shedding light on both policymaking and pedagogy concerning international students. Scholarly papers were sourced from the SUNY library system utilizing the keywords “Asian international students + United States + higher education,” with filters set to full-text, peer-reviewed articles published in English between January 1, 2013, and December 31, 2023. Twenty-four scholarly articles were chosen following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. Studies not focusing on Asian international students, those not related to the U.S. higher education, and literature reviews were excluded. All papers selected in this review are derived from empirical research studies using qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method approaches.

While the keywords (“Asian international students + United States + higher education”) do not imply any negativity, an analysis of the selected scholarly papers uncovers that numerous Asian international students contend with challenges such as culture shock, linguistic barriers, racial discrimination, and mental health issues. These challenges persist within the scholarship despite the neutral nature of the keywords. The challenges faced by Asian international students are recurring and can be categorized into the following themes.

3.1 Recurring Themes Faced by Asian International Students

3.1.1 Culture Shock

It is widely recognized that significant cultural differences exist between Asia and the U.S. These disparities often pose barriers to mutual understanding between the East and the West, thereby impeding Asian international students in the U.S. higher education. Various scholars have undertaken empirical studies documenting the cultural challenges encountered by Asian international students in the U.S. higher education.

Li (2016) embarked on a qualitative research endeavor employing cultural hybridization as the theoretical framework to explore the academic learning experiences of East Asian international students within a U.S. higher education setting. Li recruited 15 participants and conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews to gather data. Li uncovered that East Asian international students often encountered passive interactions with both domestic students and professors, primarily influenced by the traditional teacher-centered culture prevalent in Asian societies. Strikingly, nearly all participants in this study had resided in the U.S. for three years on average at the time of their participation, suggesting culture shock and cultural differences persist over time.

In 2016, Kommers and Pham conducted a quantitative research project to examine the academic and social integration of Asian international students in comparison to non-Asian (Western) international students. Kommers and Pham utilized data from the Beginning Postsecondary Longitudinal Study of 2004-2006

(BPLS:04/06) and employed the Theory of Student Departure (Tinto, 1987) as the theoretical framework. They sampled 170 international students attending a U.S. higher education institution and conducted statistical regression analysis, demonstrating that Asian international students encountered greater challenges in both academic and social integration compared to their non-Asian counterparts because of the profound cultural differences between the East and the West. Kommers and Pham (2016) corroborated Li's (2016) findings regarding the culture shock challenges faced by Asian international students. While Li (2016) primarily examined academic cultural differences, Kommers and Pham (2016) broadened the scope to encompass both academic and social cultural disparities.

Thompson, Bagby, Sulak, Sheets, and Trepinski (2017) undertook a mixed-method investigation to explore the effectiveness of a culturally oriented training workshop in improving the comprehension of academic plagiarism and honesty among Asian international graduate students within the context of the U.S. higher education. The study outcomes indicated that 63% of workshop attendees reported an enhanced understanding of academic plagiarism and honesty, while 68% expressed improved comprehension of paraphrasing. Furthermore, the research highlighted disparities in interpreting academic integrity between Asian and the U.S. academic settings. Behaviors deemed acceptable in Asian institutions, such as quotation without citation, are identified as plagiarism in the U.S. higher education. Importantly, the study underscored how cultural distinctions can contribute to academic discrepancies, potentially ensnaring Asian international students in academic plagiarism and dishonesty.

Li (2016), Kommers and Pham (2016), and Thompson, Bagby, Sulak, Sheets, and Trepinski (2017) investigated the challenges faced by Asian international students through a cultural lens respectively using qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method methodology. Their investigations underscored how cultural differences impeded Asian international students academically and socially, leading to issues like plagiarism, reduced class participation, and strained relationships with professors and local peers. Despite employing different research methodologies and involving varying numbers of participants, these three studies arrived at a shared conclusion: Asian international students experienced culture shock that adversely affected their academic performance.

3.1.2 Linguistic Barriers

As non-native English speakers, Asian international students are mandated to take standardized English proficiency tests, such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), to certify their English language skills. The literature highlights that Asian international students continue to encounter English language barriers, particularly in academic writing, within the U.S. higher education institutions, despite demonstrating satisfactory English language proficiency through standardized testing.

Choi (2013) carried out a mixed-method research endeavor to investigate the attitudes of East Asian international music students toward the U.S. higher education. Ninety-two East Asian international music students from nine universities participated in the study. The findings unveiled that factors such as professor-student relationships, English proficiency, and emotional stability predominantly impacted the academic success of East Asian international music students. While professor-student relationships emerged as the primary influential factor in this research, English proficiency was noted as a secondary factor. This study reinforced previous findings regarding the challenges faced by Asian international students concerning English language barriers.

Tabasum Niroo and Williams (2022) conducted a study focusing on Asian international students enrolled at a medium-sized research university. Employing a phenomenological approach grounded in the social constructivist paradigm framework, they recruited seven participants to explore their experiences. Their investigation revealed that Asian international students encountered challenges, particularly in academic English proficiency (mainly in English listening comprehension and academic writing).

Choi (2013) focused solely on students majoring in music, potentially restricting the applicability of the conclusions to this specific group. Tabasum Niroo and Williams (2022) supplemented Choi's (2013) research by including participants from various majors. However, Tabasum Niroo and Williams involved only seven participants, limiting the generalizability of the findings regarding Asian international students' struggles with English linguistic barriers.

There is scant research exclusively dedicated to exploring the linguistic challenges faced by Asian international students, as these challenges frequently intersect with cultural, sociocultural, and psychological factors.

3.1.3 Combined Cultural & Linguistic Challenges

A language is an integral aspect of culture, just as culture is intertwined within language; they are so intricately

connected that one cannot disentangle them without diminishing the essence of either (Brown, 1994). Many researchers have attested to the convergence of cultural differences and linguistic obstacles. The intersection of cultural differences and linguistic barriers exacerbates the challenges faced by Asian international students.

Lin and Scherz (2014) conducted a qualitative phenomenological study to examine the cultural and linguistic challenges encountered by non-native English-speaking international graduate students in higher educational environments. Employing convenience sampling, they recruited five participants from three different Asian countries and gathered data through a 2-hour videotaped focus group interview conducted in English. The research outcomes indicated that although participants generally reported positive experiences at the university, they acknowledged encountering cultural and linguistic challenges within and outside American classrooms.

In contrast to Lin and Scherz (2014), who conducted qualitative research to explore the influence of culture and linguistics on Asian international students, Lowinger et al. (2016) implemented quantitative research to examine the factors influencing academic procrastination among Asian international students. They recruited 255 participants from six U.S. higher education institutions and gathered data via an online survey. Their findings revealed that 33% of the Asian international students surveyed underwent academic procrastination, primarily attributed to cross-cultural disparities and linguistic obstacles. The convergence of cultural differences and linguistic barriers significantly impacted Asian international students, prompting academic procrastination.

Chen and Bang (2020) conducted qualitative research to explore how East Asian international students prepared for their study in the U.S. and what challenges they faced after their arrival. Chen and Bang recruited 12 East Asian international students and collected data through semi-structured interviews. Their data analysis showed that most participating East Asian international students faced both cultural and linguistic challenges that hindered their academic study and socialization.

Moon, Zhang, Larke, and James (2020) undertook a qualitative project to explore the academic experiences of Chinese and South Korean international graduate students in the U.S. higher education. Employing in-depth, semi-structured interviews, the researchers engaged six participants. Their findings unveiled that both Chinese and South Korean students encountered hurdles stemming from the English language barrier, encompassing challenges in comprehension, speaking, academic writing, and participation in group work and discussions. The research findings also showed that the participants grappled with cultural and pedagogical intricacies, including disparities between teacher-centered and student-centered approaches and interaction patterns.

The research findings of Moon, Zhang, Larke, and James (2020) confirmed the research findings of Lin and Scherz (2014), Lowinger et al. (2016) and Chen and Bang (2020) that Asian international students battled with both cultural and linguistic challenges in the U.S. higher education. These researchers utilized either qualitative or quantitative methods, indicating the potential for enhanced findings through mixed-methods research.

3.1.4 Racial Discrimination

Regrettably, covert and overt racial discrimination against Asian international students remains prevalent on the U.S. higher education campuses. Studies have illustrated that during health pandemics, such as the COVID-19 outbreak, Asian international students were unfairly targeted and stereotyped, labeled as both a health risk (commonly referred to as “yellow peril”) and sources of financial gain (commonly referred to as “cash cow”) within the U.S. higher education. Incidents of racism and discrimination against Asian students on college campuses garnered widespread attention, exemplified by cases at Angelo State University (Trammell, 2020), and Castleton University (Juan, 2020).

Ritter (2016) undertook a qualitative research inquiry to probe the perceptions of race among East Asian international undergraduate and graduate students in a U.S. higher education institution. Recruiting 47 participants from various East Asian countries, Ritter conducted 60-90-minute semi-structured interviews. The findings exposed a prevailing belief among participants regarding the hierarchical social status, with White individuals perceived at the apex, followed by East Asian individuals, while African-Americans and Southeast Asian individuals were positioned at the bottom. Implicit racial hegemony and hierarchy were discernible within the research findings. Ritter’s research also revealed implicit racial discrimination by Asian international students against African-Americans and Southeast Asian individuals.

Kwon, Hernandez, and Moga (2017) conducted a qualitative ethnographic study exploring the racial identities of Asian international undergraduate students. The research illuminated limited interaction between international and domestic students due to established patterns of racial segregation among students and their organizations on campus. Findings also suggested that Asian Americans distanced themselves from Asian international students, driven by the privileges associated with normative Whiteness, thereby indicating the racial segregation of Asian

international students from both White and Asian American peers. Both Ritter (2016) and Kwon, Hernandez, and Moga (2017) demonstrated the prevalence of Whiteness supremacy and racial hegemony and hierarchy.

Liu, Miller, Pollard-Durodola, and Ping (2022) designed and carried out a qualitative study to examine how Asian international students experienced racism before and after COVID-19 and how they reacted to such racism. They worked with 11 Asian international students and collected data via a counter-narrative method. Their data analysis showed that all the participants frequently experienced racism due to their Asian identity. Furthermore, several participants experienced overt racism, such as verbal attack and unwarranted accusations.

Qiu, Fu, Yeom, and Hong (2023) also embarked on a collaborative autoethnographic research endeavor to examine the experiences of East Asian international doctoral students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using transnationalism and AsianCrit as theoretical frameworks, their counter-narratives revealed instances of institutional and systemic racism, micro-/macro-aggressions, and racial marginalization within a predominantly White department of a U.S. higher education institution.

In comparison to the findings of Ritter (2016) and Kwon, Hernandez, and Moga (2017), the studies conducted by Liu, Miller, Pollard-Durodola, and Ping (2022) and Qiu, Fu, Yeom, and Hong (2023) revealed explicit cases of racial discrimination encountered by Asian international students amid the COVID-19 pandemic. These four studies together suggest that implicit racial discrimination against Asian international students can escalate into overt racial discrimination in certain crisis circumstances such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

In contrast to Ritter (2016), Kwon, Hernandez, and Moga (2017), Liu, Miller, Pollard-Durodola, and Ping (2022), and Qiu, Fu, Yeom, and Hong (2023), Perry, Weatherford, and Lausch (2016) presented diverse perspectives on racial discrimination. Engaging 29 participants in a quantitative inquiry, Perry, Weatherford, and Lausch (2016) noted that 12 participants reported some degree of discrimination from Americans, six reported no instances of discrimination, while the remaining participants reported feelings of neutral discrimination. Although Perry, Weatherford, and Lausch (2016) did not specify the factors contributing to the disparate perceptions of racial discrimination, they shed light on the varying range of sentiments toward racial discrimination among the twenty-nine Asian international students included in the study.

3.1.5 Mental Health

Asian international students are often hesitant to seek mental health assistance due to the stigma associated with individuals with mental health issues being labeled as “psychopaths” within Asian culture. Although the mental health of Asian international students has historically received limited attention, a handful of scholars have recently begun to delve into this crucial area.

Li, Wong, and Toth (2013) conducted a mixed-methods survey and recruited 177 Asian international students from a large Midwestern public university in the U.S. Their findings revealed a general reluctance among Asian international students to seek mental health assistance, with a greater inclination towards seeking counseling for academic concerns, particularly in times of high academic stress.

Ma (2021) conducted quantitative research to investigate the relationship between acculturation stress and depression among first-year Chinese and Indian international graduate students enrolled at a U.S. higher education institution. The findings affirmed a positive correlation between acculturation stress and depression among first-year international graduate students from China and India at the target university, consistent with previous research on Chinese and Indian international students. Participants reported experiencing varying levels of acculturation stress, potentially leading to depressive symptoms. Additionally, the researchers noted that social support did not correlate significantly with crucial study variables, suggesting that although participants reported the availability of social support, they might not effectively utilize it. The study revealed that 27% of participants were identified as being at risk for clinical depression.

Stokes et al. (2021) conducted mixed-method research to examine the experiences of Asian Americans, European Americans, and Asian international students at a university counseling center. They uncovered that compared to Asian American and European American students, Asian international students had higher levels of depression. Specifically, both Asian American and Asian international students experienced significantly greater levels of racial discrimination, adjustment to university, homesickness, test/speech/academic performance, and irritability/anger/hostility than European American students.

Jin and Acharya (2022) also employed a mixed-method approach to investigate the mental health and adjustment of Asian International Students. Their findings revealed that Asian international students exhibited a reluctance to utilize professional mental health services, had a heightened rate of dropout, and lacked adequate access to psychological counseling. This study underscored the significance of culturally tailored interventions,

highlighting that Asian international students displayed a greater willingness to seek mental health support when presented with culturally sensitive messages reflecting their cultural norms and addressing their specific needs. Additionally, the researchers observed that while Asian international students often took advantage of culturally influenced strategies to navigate cultural and linguistic challenges, instructors and peers rarely understood or valued these strategies.

Zhou, Banawa, and Oh (2023) utilized Chi-square analyses to examine variations in mental health symptoms among Asian Pacific Islander students and Asian Pacific Islander international students across three academic semesters. Their findings revealed that Asian Pacific Islander international students experienced a notable uptick, reporting a 16% increase in severe depression and a 12% increase in severe anxiety attributed to discrimination or hostility related to COVID. Zhou, Banawa, and Oh (2023) not only discovered that Asian international students reported significant increases in severe depression and anxiety but also revealed that such mental health challenges were triggered by COVID-19-related discrimination or hostility.

Wong, and Toth (2013) found that Asian international students hesitated to seek mental health assistance or counseling due to cultural stigmatization without specifying the quantity or severity of mental health issues experienced by these students. Ma (2021) disclosed that 27% of the surveyed Chinese and Indian international students were at risk of clinical depression using quantitative research methods, complementing the research of Li, Wong, and Toth (2013). Both Stokes et al. (2021) and Jin and Acharya (2022) employed mixed-methods research approaches, further reinforcing the findings that Asian international students were reluctant to pursue mental health counseling and experienced higher levels of depression compared to their European and American counterparts. In contrast to previous studies, Zhou, Banawa, and Oh (2023) examined the mental health of Asian Pacific Islander international students amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Their research uncovered that these students experienced deteriorating mental health during the global health crisis era, underscoring the great importance of addressing mental health issues among both domestic and international Asian students, particularly during times of crisis.

3.1.6 Multifaceted & Multidimensional Challenges

Hailing from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, the challenges faced by Asian international students are multifaceted and multidimensional rather than linear and singular. Many researchers examined the lived experiences of Asian international students enrolled in the U.S. higher education, and their research uncovered that Asian international students confronted a myriad of complex challenges.

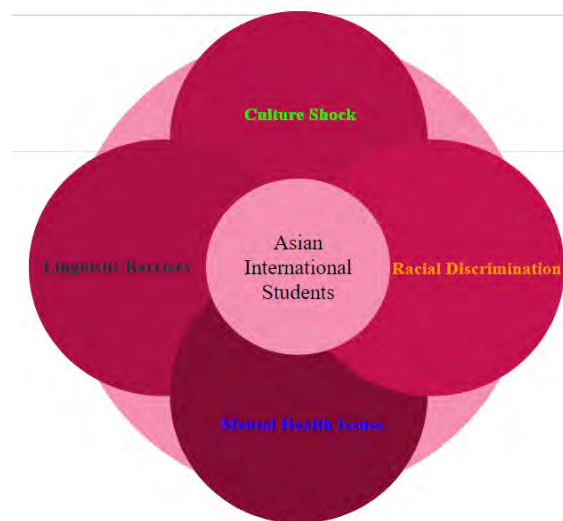


Figure 1. Multifaceted & Multidimensional Challenges Faced by Asian International Students

Perry, Weatherford and Lausch (2016) conducted a quantitative study to investigate the perceived experiences of Asian international students in a U.S. higher education institution. They engaged 29 Asian international students and collected data through a survey. Their research findings uncovered that most Asian international students were concerned with language barriers, healthcare issues and safety.

Lyken-Segosebe (2017) employed grounded theory methodology to investigate the challenges faced by East Asian international graduate students in adapting to academic life in the U.S. higher education. Through in-depth interviews, the study revealed that participants grappled with a myriad of academic, cultural, and social obstacles during their initial year of graduate studies. English language barriers, divergent teaching approaches and settings, and limited interaction with professors emerged as significant contributing factors.

Employing consensual qualitative research, Li, Wang, Liu, Xu, & Cui (2018) focused on East Asian international students at a large-sized public U.S. university. By recruiting 13 participants, they substantiated that international students encountered difficulties with English proficiency, interpersonal relationships, course readiness, time management, and negative learning experiences.

Xiong and Zhou (2018) undertook a qualitative inquiry to study the socio-cultural and psychological adaptation of East Asian graduate students within a Midwestern University in the U.S. They recruited eight participants and gathered data through interviews. Their investigation uncovered multidimensional challenges including acculturation hurdles, language barriers, social-cultural disparities, academic differences, inadequate institutional support, and financial strains. These factors exerted heavy stress on Asian international students, subsequently impairing their socio-cultural and psychological adjustment within the U.S. higher education landscape.

The diverse and complex challenges encountered by Asian international students can have negative repercussions on their academic performance, social interactions, and mental well-being. These challenges are frequently interconnected and interactive, potentially magnifying their impact on Asian international students.

3.1.7 Shared but still Different Challenges

The literature review demonstrates that Asian international students encounter shared challenges, including culture shock and linguistic barriers. Nonetheless, each Asian subgroup presents distinct challenges, highlighting the diversity within the Asian international student population.

Li (2016) conducted qualitative research utilizing cultural hybridization as the theoretical framework to delve into the academic learning experiences of East Asian international students in a U.S. higher education setting. Recruiting 15 participants, Li conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews to gather data, revealing that East Asian international students formed peer-led learning subgroups and relied on effective informational peer learning. The research underscored the diversity among the fifteen Asian participants from different cultural backgrounds. It elucidated how they formed subgroups based on culture to facilitate learning, revealing the richness and complexity within the Asian international student population.

Merola, Coelen, & Hofman (2019) employed a quantitative approach utilizing data from the International Student Barometer (N=5,242) to investigate the nexus between integration, nationality, and self-reported satisfaction among Chinese, Indian, and South Korean undergraduate international students studying in English-speaking countries: the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia. Their findings revealed significantly higher mean satisfaction among Indian students than Chinese and South Korean counterparts. Moreover, nationality emerged as a predictive factor for integration levels, with Indian students showcasing greater academic and social integration than their South Korean and Chinese peers. This study extended prior research by delineating variations in satisfaction and integration based on nationality while also highlighting shared challenges among Asian international students, such as difficulties in forming friendships with American peers, alongside cultural and social differences. This research project indicated that Asian international students were similar but not all the same.

Moon, Zhang, Larke, & James (2020) undertook qualitative research to scrutinize the academic experiences of Chinese and South Korean international graduate students in the U.S. They recruited six participants and conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews to collect data. Their findings unveiled shared challenges among Chinese and South Korean students, including difficulties stemming from the English language barrier and cultural and pedagogical nuances. Although both groups encountered similar obstacles, notable differences emerged: solely South Korean participants expressed initial struggles in communicating with instructors due to cultural differences, while only Chinese students lacked experience in participating in group work.

These three studies suggest that while Asian international students may share some common challenges, they possess their own unique needs and challenges.

4. Discussion: Critical Analysis on Existing Empirical Research

4.1 Research Methodology

All the qualitative research included in this literature review employed interviews as their primary data collection

method. While interviews are crucial for gathering data, it is essential to triangulate the data to ensure its reliability and validity. Relying solely on interviews for data collection may lead to skepticism regarding the conclusions drawn. Therefore, member check, multiple data collection method, and peer review should be utilized to validate the data and ensure its accuracy.

4.2 Research Site Selection

Most researchers in this literature review did not specify the location of their research. However, it is crucial to note that Asian international students may have completely different experiences in the U.S. higher education institutions depending on the geographical location of the institutions. For instance, states like California and New York, known for their cultural and linguistic diversity, may offer Asian international students more positive experiences. Therefore, stating the approximate research site is essential to provide stakeholders with more accurate insights into international education in the U.S.

4.3 Research Gap

Among the 24 selected scholarly papers, four discussed mental health. Three of these four projects employed mixed-methods research methodology and one utilized quantitative methodology. There was a lack of qualitative research specifically addressing the mental health of Asian international students. The dearth of mental health research on Asian international students using qualitative methodology presents a significant research gap that future researchers could explore.

5. Conclusion

This systematic literature review, comprising 24 peer-reviewed articles sourced from the SUNY library system, highlights the myriad challenges encountered by Asian international students, including cultural differences, culture shock, linguistic barriers, overt and covert racial discrimination, and mental health issues. Two critical implications emerge from this systematic review:

Firstly, the challenges faced by Asian international students are not linear and singular but rather multifaceted and multidimensional. Each student's experience is influenced by a complex interplay of factors, necessitating a nuanced understanding of their diverse needs and experiences.

Secondly, Asian international students encounter some common hurdles, but each ethnic group faces their own particular challenges. Variations exist among students from different Asian countries, emphasizing the importance of recognizing and addressing their unique needs. It is imperative to acknowledge that students from diverse cultural backgrounds cannot be treated uniformly.

Given the substantial presence of Asian international students in the U.S. higher education, it is crucial to prioritize addressing and mitigating their concerns and challenges. This endeavor is critical not only for the well-being and success of these students but also for the overall improvement of the U.S. higher education.

This systematic review underscores the scarcity of research solely dedicated to linguistic challenges. Nonetheless, the absence of such studies does not diminish the English linguistic challenges faced by Asian international students. Linguistic hurdles often intertwine with cultural challenges, and there is extensive research exploring the influence of both culture and linguistics on Asian international students. However, over a hundred studies categorized Asian international students with the broader international student population, thereby overlooking their distinct needs.

Asian international students play an extremely vital role in the U.S. higher education, and it is imperative to address and accommodate their specific needs. To better support Asian international students, the U.S. higher education institutions should consider implementing the following measures:

- a. Explore various cultural elements and needs of Asian international students to ensure optimal accommodation (Kim, 2016; Kommers & Pham, 2016; Thompson et al., 2017).
- b. Provide comprehensive orientation programs for all incoming international students (Thompson et al., 2017).
- c. Develop programs and services to strengthen students' identities from diverse cultural backgrounds (Li, 2016).
- d. Establish and implement a robust support system tailored to the unique needs of international students, particularly those with vastly different educational backgrounds (Choi, 2012; Tabasum Niroom & Williams, 2022).
- e. Enhance existing services, such as the writing center and International Student Services (ISS) office, and foster a more culturally sensitive faculty cohort (Li et al., 2018; Lyken-Segosebe, 2017; Moon et al., 2020).
- f. Create culturally and linguistically inclusive teaching and learning environments to provide optimal support for non-native English-speaking international students (Lin & Scherz, 2014).

g. Develop systematic outreach programs through counseling centers to engage Asian international students and increase their likelihood of attending therapy, providing training for physicians in multicultural issues to better understand and serve Asian international students (Ma, 2021; Stokes et al., 2021).

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Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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