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International Doctoral Student Experiences in Educational Administration Programs in the United States: A Phenomenological Study

Ping Robert

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Ping Robert

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Advisor: Dr. Lolita Tabron

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Keywords: International doctoral students, culturally responsive pedagogy, cultural competence, international education, Educational Administration Programs

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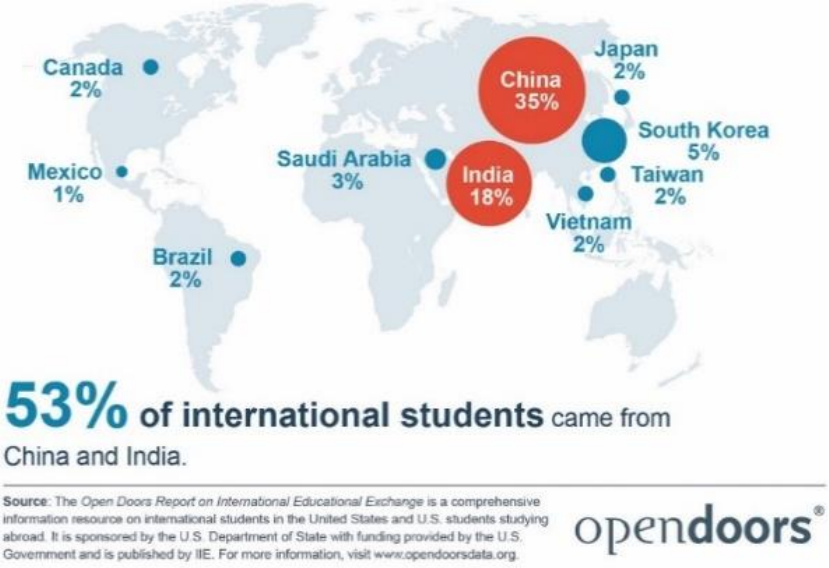
Chapter One: Introduction

International student populations in U.S. colleges and universities continue to grow every year. As visible in Figure 1, the top five countries of origin for U.S. international students are China (including Hong Kong), India, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, and Canada. Over half of the international students in the U.S. are from China and India (IEE, 2019). There are several reasons international students choose the U.S. as their study destination.

Figure 1

Top 10 Places of Origin for International Students



Source: Institute of International Education (IEE, 2019).

Studies showed that Chinese international students' motivations for studying in the U.S. included pursuing quality education, a second chance for academics and careers,

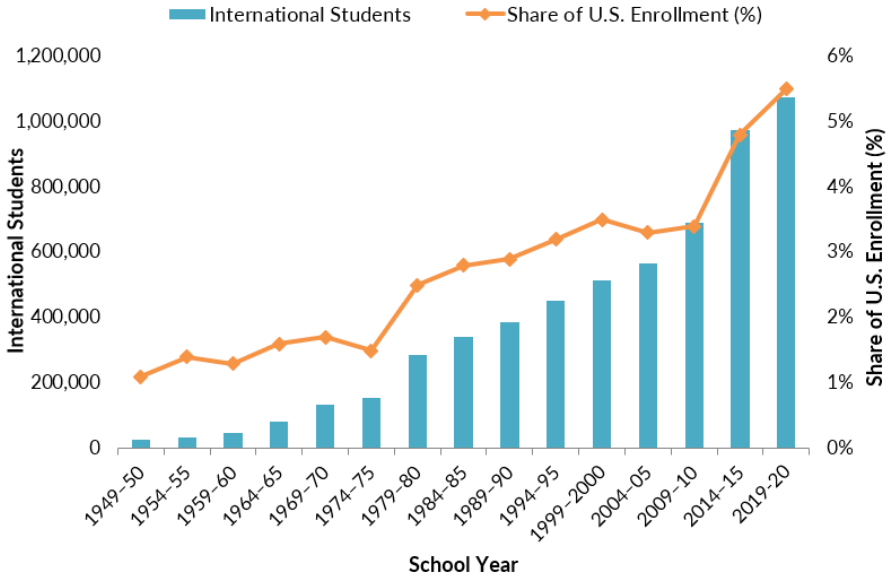
cultural capital, prestige, fairness in the U.S. educational system, and social pressure (Ma, 2019; Yan & Berliner, 2011). Indian international student decisions included a pathway to immigration, quality education, scarce opportunities to get into desired institutions, career advancement, and collective choices from family and educational agents (Wadhwa, 2016).

International Student Destinations, Majors, and Contributions to the United States

International students' choices of location to study are also important. When international students arrive in the United States, most choose to study in California (14.9%), New York (11.8%), or Texas (7.2%)—states with larger populations, more cultural diversity, and vibrant immigrant communities (Institute of International Education, n.d.; Israel & Batalova, 2021). International students are also more likely to choose these states for the prestige of schools, their wide-ranging job markets, and in some cases (e.g., Texas), a low cost of living (HSBC, n.d.). Once they choose their destination, most international students study science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines because the Optional Practical Training (OPT) program is an essential pathway to immigration to the U.S. (Zong & Batalova, 2018). This program allows most international students to work in the U.S. for up to 12 months during or after their studies. Once they graduate, they can apply for an added 24-month extension to continue work in the U.S. marketplace (Basiri, 2021). However, these motivations are not one-sided.

Figure 2

Annual International Student Numbers and Share of U.S. Enrollment



Source: Israel & Batalova (2021).

International students bring significant financial benefits to the U.S., and many institutions include international student recruitment and enrollment as part of their financial strategy (Israel & Batalova, 2021). As seen in Figure 2, international students contribute an estimated 14% of total tuition revenues at four-year institutions annually, despite making up just 6% of total enrollment (Megan & Brown, 2020). In 2019 alone, international students brought $44 billion to higher education in the U.S. (IEE, 2019).

Acculturation, Challenges, and Discrimination

International students also bring cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity to their institutions. However, international graduate students need help with arriving at U.S. campuses. Regardless of the field of study, language barriers, financial challenges, cultural differences, racism, classroom instruction norms, prejudice toward religious identities, homesickness, and lack of social support are common acculturation challenges

(Alharbi & Smith, 2018; Constantine et al., 2004, 2005; Gebhard, 2012; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Teshome & Osei-Kofi, 2012).

Acculturation challenges vary among international students depending on their origin, racial identity, and political and religious affiliation (Boafo-Arthur, 2013; Lee, 2010; Lee & Rice, 2007; Reynolds & Constantine, 2007; Wadsworth et al., 2008). International students from Africa, Southeast Asia, and Middle Eastern countries meet more acculturation challenges due to their actual or perceived identities than students from Canada and European countries (Lee, 2007). For example, Black African international students meet more racialized experiences than their peers who can access certain forms of power and resources because of their proximity to whiteness (i.e., light skin complexion) (Boafo-Arthur, 2013). Similarly, international graduate students from North African countries and other Muslim countries endure more religious prejudice than international students from non-Muslim and non-Arabic speaking countries (Lee, 2010; Johnson, 2008). Moreover, students from Middle Eastern countries felt that the U.S. needed to provide a welcoming environment post-9/11 in the U.S. higher education system. Many schools are still learning to break myths and stereotypes about students from abroad stemming from U.S. immigration policy and political climates (Choudaha, 2017; Heng, 2018).

Ph.D. vs. Ed.D.

According to American University (2023), Doctor of Education (Ed.D) and Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degrees (Ph.D.) are highly valuable for aspiring educational leaders. Both degrees require substantial commitment, with doctoral-level programs typically taking three years or longer to complete. Although there are shared elements in

the coursework and potential career paths between Ed.D. and Ph.D. programs, understanding their differences can assist prospective students in choosing the most suitable option. Furthermore, the curriculum of each degree program is designed to equip students with skills and knowledge relevant to distinct professional trajectories. Ph.D. programs generally offer a more comprehensive range of options and specializations than Ed.D. programs. An Ed.D. primarily prepares graduates for leadership and strategic roles within the education sector, such as superintendents, deans, provosts, and school district officials.

On the other hand, a Ph.D. is more tailored toward preparing graduates for instructional and research positions in education and higher education, such as professors and researchers. In addition, except for the United States, United Kingdom, Singapore, Australia, India, Canada, South Africa, and Ireland, other countries do not provide Ed. D degrees (Wikipedia, 2023). Interestingly, these are also the countries with historical British influence where fewer international students come from in the United States.

Inclusive Excellence in Higher Education

With the rapid growth of international student populations in U.S. institutions and a desire to keep them, many colleges and universities are adopting goals of inclusive excellence. Knight (2003) describes inclusive excellence as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions, or delivery of postsecondary education” (p. 2). Knight and de Wit (1995) suggest the purpose of inclusive excellence is to “understand, appreciate and articulate the reality of interdependence among nations (environmental, economic, cultural, and social) and therefore prepare [those involved] to function in an international and inter-cultural

context" (p. 13). In the competitive space of U.S. higher education, providing suitable education and services to students has become paramount. University leaders must be prepared to understand the global trends and the internationalization of higher education (Rumbley et al., 2012). Rendón (2012) noted that engaging students using holistic pedagogies is also a form of social justice and liberation.

Problem Statement, Purpose Statement, and Research Question

While there is a substantial body of research establishing the need for inclusive practice in higher education (Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Opertti et al., 2014) and how higher education programs might create inclusive practices in higher education (Brown & Jones, 2011; Haigh, 2002; Ryan, 2000), related research is lacking in how to support international students in Educational Administration (EA) programs (Choudaha & Chang, 2012). Many U.S. Educational Administration (EA) graduate programs focus on training and preparing domestic educators for careers in preschool/kindergarten to twelfth grade (P–12 or K–12) or educational leadership and policy. For example, the mission of the leading EA organization and connector, the University Council for Educational Administration (2021), is to constructively impact local, state, and national educational policies. In recent years, more international students have been in EA programs in the U.S. However, different needs for doctoral degrees and studies for domestic and international students may differ. Most existing literature focuses on international students coming to the U.S. to pursue STEM careers (IEE, 2019); however, 1.6% of international students who wish to pursue careers as educational leaders also merit further study (IEE, 2019). International students in the EA programs may be the minorities or the minorities in higher education, and limited funding or resources would go to this area of

research. This phenomenological study aims to understand the experience of international doctoral students in the EA programs in the United States. My research is guided by the following question: What is the essence of international postgraduate student experiences in EA programs in the United States?

Definitions of Key Terminology

Education Administration (EA) programs: According to the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA), "Education administration refers to leadership, instructional development, performance evaluation, and fiscal management in education. Principals and other administrators must be responsible for a teacher and support staff workforce" (Writers, 2021). U.S. educational administration (EA) programs have many names, such as Educational Leadership & Policy Studies and Supervision or Education Policy. For consistency, I call them EA programs in the present study.

International graduate students: Students enrolled in Master, Doctor of Education, or Doctor of Philosophy graduate programs, while holding non-U.S. passports and an F1 or J1 visa are considered international doctoral students in this study. In addition, my study design includes recently graduated international students (within five years) and excludes students who completed their undergraduate studies in the United States. They might have American citizenship or permanent residency.

Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions

Limitations

There are two significant limitations that readers should consider as they interpret the results of this study. First, due to the limited literature on international students in EA programs, my conceptual framework evolved from studies on international students

outside of the EA programs. Second, the Covid-19 pandemic instigated many temporary changes to higher education. Many classes went remote or hybrid; some programs have temporarily adjusted coursework requirements and student, personnel recruitment, and research settings in their assignments. For these reasons, the student experiences captured in the present study may differ vastly from the pre-Covid period. The present study's time horizon was 2022—a period still affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. For example, I could imagine vastly different experiences between students who have completed graduate work in remote or hybrid learning from students and those who entered their in-person graduate programs before Covid-19.

In addition, EA program policies had been in flux from 2016 to the time of writing (late 2022), so international students' academic experiences might change with them. Due to these two factors, student experiences and perceptions might be impacted in essential ways. Thus, the findings of this study reflected a specific historical moment and student body. EA program faculty and administrators should carefully consider if findings differed from the research conducted before or after the Covid-19 period.

Delimitations

I decided to focus this study's scope in three critical ways. First, I used a qualitative inquiry approach to understand better international graduate students' experiences in the context of EA graduate studies. In line with this approach, I did not design it to have a universal application to or speak to non-EA programs. However, the rich details I provided in my findings could support learning transfer to different contexts.

Second, I centered the voices of international students' points of view exclusively. I neither interviewed domestic students nor administrator or faculty perspectives. While it was vital to incorporate faculty's responses, I only focused on understanding the core of the experiences of international doctoral students in the EA programs. Moreover, I primarily focused on academic support for students and the support that EA programs and their faculty could do to support this student body. I excluded the social, mental health, or financial aspects of their experience, although they appeared in the interviews.

Assumptions

This study was founded on the premise that the participants provided honest responses and that the responses and evaluations gathered from specific programs indicated the views held by some international students in EA programs in the United States. The participants in this study were representative of the general population of international students in U.S. EA programs.

Researcher Positionality

Born in the U.S. and raised in Taiwan, my family culture has always differed slightly from other Taiwanese families. My highly educated parents work in higher education and have a blend of Eastern and American parenting styles. As a Christian family in Taiwan, we represent only 5% of the population. In my past education, I went to a junior college which was not a high school. Therefore, my schooling experience was different from other students. Later, I worked in India and married an Indian husband. Consequently, I knew my multicultural experience differed from a typical Taiwanese person educated in Taiwan.

However, being an international student with dual citizenship has not been the hardest thing I had to go through. Although I knew I was Taiwanese and ethnically Chinese, I did not think I was "an Asian" in the United States. I stood on the land where I was born, and it did not feel like home. Finding jobs, resources, and community support was a big struggle. Throughout the first three years of my doctoral program, I worked three to five positions on and off campus every quarter to pay my tuition in the first three years of my postgraduate studies. Due to my dual citizenship, my faculty told me I had to go out to find jobs instead of working as a graduate assistant in my program. As new immigrants, it was exceedingly difficult and stressful for my husband and me. Fortunately, I could find work-study jobs on campus and other off-campus positions. Hence, I understand the financial struggles of many international students.

After starting my studies at the EA program, I realized I grew up in a privileged family. Once I learned about social justice in education, I only realized my privilege level, such as socioeconomic upbringing, race, being in a developed country, and having international experiences. Coming to the U.S. vastly changed my perspectives on race, access, and educational equity. I became more critical of global issues in education, such as support for underrepresented student bodies and international students. I felt the tension between international students and domestic ones in class when we did not understand each other nor share common ground with domestic students.

I was a participant-researcher since I have similar lived experiences, and I brought my voice into the reflective journal. I conducted this study from my unique position as an international student with the privilege of being a U.S. citizen. My lens was shaped in conducting this study because I assumed that most international students had challenges

in their graduate studies. However, I did not want to only criticize the systems without contributing anything. I decided to turn the stressors into opportunities for change and success. I wanted to tell stories about international students in EA programs through in-depth interviews and qualitative approaches. I passionately believe that data change minds, but levels change hearts. Within educational leadership, change also starts with students. As international students, we must voice our needs and encourage our programs to support us better. Through my multicultural lens and lived experiences, my goal was to explore and provide some solutions to the educational administration field to consider from a perspective of leadership and systemic change about minoritized groups.

Significance of the Study

This study contributes novel approaches to ways EA programs can better support international students in program design and structures. Understanding international students' lived experiences and stories can enlighten program administrators and faculty members in EA programs to improve empathy and enhance recruitment and retention efforts. In addition, this study helped the EA programs and faculty understand the academic experience of international doctoral students. As EA programs prepare future educational leaders in K-12, higher education, and research, the awareness and knowledge built from this study would help the field cultivate better leaders that may create more inclusive policies in education administration in the U.S. and worldwide. The recommendations at the end of this study will also be a tool for programs to assess policy, curriculum design, administrative strategies, and educational practices.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I offered the necessary background on international students at U.S institutions of higher education. As discussed, most international students from Asia study STEM disciplines on the East or West Coast. International students come to the U.S. with different aspirations for their postsecondary education and career prospects. As the number of international student increase, they bring both financial benefits and diversity to U.S. colleges and universities. However, international students face immense challenges, including linguistic barriers, social-emotional needs, acculturation challenges, and racial discrimination. These stressors can create or worsen mental-health issues and adjustment problems. At the same time as international students struggle, the higher education sector is leaning toward inclusive excellence to support and serve students of diverse backgrounds and identities. This study addresses an existing gap in the literature and provides a deeper understanding of the academic experiences of international doctoral students in EA graduate programs in the U.S. In chapter two, I review existing literature on supporting international graduate students in EA programs and offer my conceptual framework. Sections in chapter two include international graduate students' experiences, inclusive excellence in higher education, and recommendations and support for international doctoral students in the Educational Administration programs in the U.S.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In Chapter 1, I offered background and context for the experiences of international graduate students in the United States. I highlighted my purpose to uncover ways to prepare international graduate students for educational leadership through U.S. educational administration (EA) programs. Implications of the present study included improved leadership preparation of international students in EA programs across the United States.

In this literature review, I looked for research on how international graduate students prepare for educational leadership through U.S. educational administration (EA) programs. A critical interrogation of this question in exploring existing literature led to three significant bodies of work: 1) international graduate student's academic experiences, including "international students as an underrepresented group"; and "politics and perceptions in higher education in the U.S."; 2) inclusive excellence in higher education classrooms: "limited literature on educational administration graduate programs," "designing inclusive curriculum for higher education," and "reframing pedagogies in higher education"; and 3) recommendations and support for international graduate students: "linguistic support"; "teaching, learning, and research"; "faculty-student mentoring relationships"; and "internship and career." I began this review by explaining my search and filtering processes. Next, I offered a conceptual framework that

guided my study. Finally, I highlighted the experiences of international graduate students and considerations for EA program design and practice.

Literature Review Methodology

Inclusion, Exclusion, and Bounding Criteria

To locate the most current research in my study area, I delimited my review to research published from January 2011 to December 2021. However, some canon theories and key frameworks were older than 2011, so I included their studies in my review. Studies in the present thought included peer-reviewed academic journal articles, websites of education administration programs and professional organizations (i.e., University Council of Educational Administration and American Educational Research Association), scholarly books, and public scholarship reporting trends on international students.

Scope of Review

This literature review aimed to investigate the foundations and existing theories, studies, and findings on international graduate students in the EA fields. I began the literature review with the following questions: 1) What research exists about international students in EA programs? 2) What can be done to support international students better in EA programs? 3) What are best practices related to international students' academic experiences? 4) What research exists related to inclusive excellence and culturally responsive pedagogies in support of international students in higher education?

To conduct my search, I used the search tools, online databases, and subscription services available through the University of Denver Libraries, including ERIC, EBSCO, and Google Scholar. In consultation with my advisors and research librarians from DU Research Center, I developed a list of search terms specific to EA programs and

international graduate students. Key search terms included educational administration program, international graduate students, and support for international students.

Since I focused on the inclusive academic experience for international students, I expanded the search terms to find a wide range of literature related to the topic. I reviewed over 100 scholarly journal articles, reports, and statistics from various agencies: and over 30 non-academic texts, including news articles, educational blogs, and commentaries. From those 100 studies, I synthesized and discussed 40 relevant studies that made up my conceptual framework.

International Graduate Student Academic Experiences

In this section, I discuss politics and beliefs in higher education in the United States and the studies related to international graduate students. I first explore the political climates and the overview of international students in the U.S. Sequentially; I discuss factors that challenge international students in various aspects.

International Students as A Minoritized Group

As the introduction mentions, most U.S. international undergraduate and graduate students are from Asia—specifically China. Thus, I offer a closer focus on Asian and Chinese populations about challenges on higher education campuses in the United States. For example, Zhang (2016) used adult transition theory (Goodman et al., 2006) to examine ten Chinese doctoral students in a Midwestern university through the lens of coping strategies and adult development in transition. Zhang (2016) found four factors ("4S"): situation, self, support, and design. Findings revealed that while studying in the U.S. is favorable, international students encountered challenges in English and managing personal and social life due to the Eastern and Western cultural differences. Specifically,

Chinese students tended to keep problems to themselves, as they felt it was a sign of weakness to share challenges with others. To encourage international students to talk about their experience with mentors and peer mentors, Zhang (2016) concluded that support networks (including cohorts, classes, student organizations, or local families) both on and off campus create more inclusive environments for international and domestic students.

Politics and Perceptions in Higher Education in the United States

Race, countries of origin, and students' language proficiency also impact how communities view international students in their host countries. For example, many Muslim students from Middle Eastern and North African countries face different challenges when they come to the United States. According to Tummala-Narra and Claudius (2013), Muslim international students comprise 13% of the U.S. global student population. However, 2010 saw a precipitous drop to 5.5% during 2018–2019 related to former President Trump's travel ban (Anderson, 2020). Whereas Chinese students faced cultural challenges around mental health and disclosure, Muslim students lacked respect for their religious practices, such as daily prayers, separate spaces for male and female students, avoiding physical contact with the opposite gender, and a non-alcoholic lifestyle. Muslim students also faced more harassment and discrimination than other racial student groups in the United States. (2013).

Moreover, due to their head coverings, Muslim women disproportionately experienced discrimination. Furthermore, they found that international students from the Middle East held diverse views of the new cultural environment and needed protective factors to adjust to the U.S. Many participants expressed hope while also experiencing a

lack of cultural and religious understanding. In turn, this led to difficulties in forming friendships and mental stress. In addition, stressors carried over to familial relationships, with family members experiencing mental stress, especially without strong social networks.

Charles-Toussaint and Crowson (2010) conducted a quantitative study of ways political views affected domestic student perceptions of international and immigrant students on campus. This research showed how student political views and social constructs affect their perception of newcomers to the campus (Charles-Toussaint & Crowson, 2010). Findings included a significant and positive relationship between right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) and social dominance orientation (SDO) and their perception of a realistic threat, perception of symbolic threat, and prejudice against international students, especially against Mexican and Arab students.

Students from African countries are also a unique racial group. George Mwangi, Changamire, and Mosselson (2019) identified four areas that African international graduate students faced challenges: (1) problematic assumptions made by U.S. peers and faculty; (2) adjustment challenges within campus systems; (3) disingenuous campus internationalization and diversity rhetoric; and (4) conflicting worldviews and practices. Participants felt the disconnection in cultural expectations and priorities while the campus pursued internationalization. George Mwangi et al. (2019) suggest that colleges should prioritize supporting marginalized African international students, particularly as it relates to anti-racism, in pursuit of internationalization. Sustainable cultural competence and sensitivity training for staff and administrators may also improve student quality of life. Retaining faculty and staff from diverse racial backgrounds should also be part of any

campus internationalization plan. U.S. colleges have some inclusive strategies and policies when discussing international students' challenges.

Other than race and country of origin, Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGovern (2015) found that English proficiency was critical to adjustment. Moreover, having family or a robust social network with friends/neighbors in the United States helped participants adjust. Like the Chinese international students mentioned above, mental health counseling is uncommon in Saudi Arabia, except in cases of severe mental illness. Therefore, it was likely that Saudi students should have reached out to find help or resources when needed. Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGovern (2015) recommend increasing awareness on college campuses about mental health services and help-seeking practices, in addition to English language support, local connections, informal mentorship, and cultural preparation.

Inclusive Excellence in Higher Education Classrooms

While technology has continued to make the world feel smaller and more diverse, educators are critical actors in incorporating inclusion, compassion, and social justice into the learning environment. Despite their background, Sengupta et al. (2019) stated that an inclusive classroom benefits every learner. In this literature review section, I cover three subsections: inclusive curriculum for EA programs, culturally responsive practice, and curriculum design and inclusive practice for international graduate students. I discuss intersections between inclusive higher education and international graduate students from these three angles.

Limited Literature on Educational Administration Graduate Programs

As I went through an extensive search of EA program-related literature, there are studies on concepts and practices (Hitt et al., 2012; Fiore, 2013; Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2021); doctoral student progression (Ford & Vaughn, 2011; Murakami-Ramalho et al., 2013), social justice in EA programs (Furman, 2012; Oplatka, 2014), school leaders or principals (Fuller et al., 2011; Myung et al., 2011; Orr & Orphanos, 2011;) and its relationship with P/K–12 school systems (Epstein et al., 2011; LaFrance & Beck, 2014; Sorensen, 2019). However, inclusive practices remain undiscussed in the literature regarding EA programs and international students. This lack of literature represents a critical gap in research in the field.

Similarly, many studies explore ways to support different minoritized student groups in EA programs (Anderson, 1997). However, only a few explore the nationality dimension in international students. For example, there are studies on integrating lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and questioning (LGBTIQ) identities into principal preparation (O'Malley & Capper, 2015), feminist viewpoints (Dentith et al., 2014), racial justice (Gooden & Dantley, 2012), special education (Pazey & Cole, 2013), and English Language Learners (Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011). However, the intersection between inclusive practices in EA programs and international students is limited. It is essential to explore this topic while domestic and international educators and scholars learn about inclusivity and diversity to positively affect future generations, educational policy, and practices. However, in my multiple attempts from 2017 to 2021, little literature covered international graduate students in the EA programs.

Designing Inclusive Curriculum for Higher Education

Since 2005, many colleges and universities have approached diversity through inclusive excellence. The term comes from the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), which challenged postsecondary institutions to engage inclusivity with excellence. An inclusive excellence framework promotes diversity in curricula and engages educators to encourage equity and challenge assumptions and the status quo.

As one example, Danowitz and Tuitt (2011) described their journey in approaching diversity in the graduate program in education at the University of Denver. First, they refined the mission of the graduate program to include multiculturalism and diversity. They revised the curricula, course names, and learning outcomes so that students might better understand education and the intersection of power, inequality, race, ethnicity, class, and gender. Doctoral students were encouraged to use critical theory to analyze their own identities. They worked to create more inclusive-content offerings and competency-building for students to embrace education for social and political change. The program started using the principle of "engaged pedagogy" (hooks, 1994/2014), which is a "reflexive, experiential and critical approach aligned with womanist, feminist and critical values and pedagogies" (Danowitz & Tuitt, 2011, p. 49). In their article, students expressed some of the challenges and resistance they faced in their program. After the engaged pedagogy implementation, the doctoral students in their study later began to engage themselves through different lenses and view their academic pursuits to sustain personal and professional work with underrepresented communities.

According to Danowitz and Tuitt (2011), when re-envisioning a program for inclusive excellence, educators should consider the reference theories and research related to inclusivity, expect resistance from scholarship, and implement engaged pedagogies.

Tuitt (2016) called for critical and inclusive pedagogies to create affirming and socially just environments, various interactive teaching practices, and diverse and interdisciplinary content and perspectives with equity-oriented minds. Furthermore, Tuitt (2016) asked two crucial questions to educators applying inclusive pedagogies: "How might we rethink our pedagogy in increasingly diverse learning environments?" and "How can we create learning environments that respect and care for the souls of our students?" (p. 210). These guiding questions help educators design their teaching and learning practices for diverse students. The theoretical models of teaching, such as humanizing pedagogy, critical and inclusive pedagogy, engaging pedagogy, and performative pedagogy, are available for scholars to study and apply in their contexts to leverage with the diverse student body (Davis, 2016).

Besides moving into academic programs, educators must consider whether racially minoritized communities can access educational resources. In addition, programs might audit curriculum, assignments, assessments, and student successes/failures to investigate the reward structures that influence the academic spaces of minoritized communities. Decolonization is needed to support all students. However, even in the inclusive excellence literature, international students are given scant attention. More research must explore the intersections between international students and minoritized study bodies.

Reframing Pedagogies in Higher Education

When reframing pedagogies in higher education, Adamo et al. (2019) asserted that asset-based theories and frameworks should be structured to support minoritized groups. In their article, they provided a brief literature review on 1) theoretical foundations of culturally responsive pedagogy and curriculum; 2) decolonizing and humanizing instructional methods as a means to understand and integrate cultural knowledge; and 3) policy and practice recommendations in the development of culturally responsive equity-focused curriculum.

First, culturally responsive pedagogy includes three criteria: an ability to develop students academically, a willingness to nurture and support cultural competence, and the development of a sociopolitical or critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 483). Second, it requires reciprocity (Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 2005). By using students' "funds of knowledge" (Kiyama & Rios-Aguilar, 2017, p. 1), all are invited to the learning space and contribute to the classroom. Humanizing classroom space also requires reducing elitist values and the practice of epistemological equity, asking students to share their "multiple forms of knowledge, identities, locations, and ways of knowing" (Osei-Kofi et al., 2004) among faculty and students.

Third, an intuitive understanding of the faculty's pedagogical approach, curricula, and self-created opportunities assists the classroom in becoming counter-spaces of resistance with culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2017). Adamo et al. (2019) recommended including student voices in the course content and assessments and administering them as a learning community for internal improvement. The article offers excellent applications for supporting international students since they come from quite

diverse backgrounds and funds of knowledge. EA faculty and administrators can consider creating inclusive curricula in their programs.

Recommendations and Support for International Graduate Students

Due to the previous discussions of inclusive higher education, culturally responsive leadership and pedagogies, campus cultures and minoritized students, and international graduate students' academic experiences, I cover support and resources in this last section of my literature review. It is helpful to look at some examples of how to serve international students better and potential considerations when hosting them in the EA programs.

Linguistic Support

Most international students require language support for academic success and improved campus engagement and inclusion. However, supporting international students with language skills can be a big task. According to Macgregor and Folinazzo (2018), professors and international students attributed linguistic challenges to varied factors. For example, while professors find English skills as the challenges facing international students, international students perceive the issue lies in course pacing and content delivery. With this information, faculty might offer improved accommodations for international students and be more prepared for the diverse student population through professional development on cultural awareness and competence.

In addition, internationalizing content and engaging diverse perspectives are vital to culturally responsive pedagogies when facing diverse learners in the same classroom. Additionally, institutions can consider changing strategies to help the development of the

organization's culture. Setting up a committee to plan programs, curriculum, and employment opportunities for international students will help students settle in easier.

Teaching, Learning, and Research

Supporting international students includes teaching, learning, and research. Many international students face challenges in higher education due to cultural and linguistic differences (Tas, 2013; Jennings, 2017). However, turning the learning context into a positive and inclusive environment helps all educators in EA programs bring out inclusive practices in their workplace. Lin and Scherz (2014) suggested that faculty scaffold student learning and increase linguistic awareness within the classroom, especially when international students have linguistic challenges—internationalizing teaching and learning with the culture-as-instructional-asset mindset and understanding students' cultural backgrounds and expectations. For academic strategies, providing clear directions and expectations, scaffolding course rigor through pedagogical methods, and involving relevant research and field experiences with international students will improve their graduate studies.

Achieving inclusive excellence in classrooms with both domestic and international students requires consideration of multiple issues that would fit into various contexts. Numerous studies on inclusive and multicultural higher education and the pedagogy models give faculty and policymakers a new lens as colleges host more and more international students. For example, Rendón (2012) discussed the *sentipensante* pedagogy, which emphasizes harmony, a complementary relationship between scholarships, teaching, and learning. In the book, *Sentipensante (Sensing/Thinking) Pedagogy: Educating for Wholeness, Social Justice, and Liberation*, Rendón (2012)

argued that contemplative practice enhances transformative and multicultural education. Facilitators of the course would invite learners and educators to feel and think in the academic spaces with contemplative practices for more profound learning experiences. This model also promotes social justice, reinforcing minoritized groups to share their intellectual ideas and cultural truths.

In Click's (2018) qualitative study among three research universities in the United States, they found that international graduate students need research support throughout the entire research process, for example, selecting a topic, choosing the correct database for resources, and incorporating the information into writing. Also, participants in the study did not value information literacy instruction or understand the research support available on campus. Therefore, the author suggested that library outreach or promoting campus resources in the orientation specifically for international students will help support student research. Video tutorials in different languages will help students with limited language proficiency understand the existing services and resources for academic work. Faculty and staff can support international students by introducing workshops and seminars about library and research support to ensure that students know how to receive approval for their coursework.

In researching inclusive higher education and international students, it is crucial to consider examples from a global perspective to locate best practices in the field. Studying in Denmark, Blasco (2014) indicated that higher education scholars must consider whether culturally inclusive pedagogy accommodates international students or disarms their differences. Blasco (2014) also argued that knowledge is formed from experiences and reflection. Therefore, conceptualizing the contextual experience helps students be

aware of the knowledge they do and do not have. For example, preparation for class is the first step of their learning cycle, which emerges with reading the syllabus and material pre-reading. Classes and supervision are the next step in the learning cycle. Participants recognized the differences in classes and the faculty-student culture that differed from their backgrounds. Assessment is the last step of the learning cycle, which involves exams and feedback. Blasco (2014) stated that international students need time to make sense of what they go through. Universities need tools to support students in identifying tacit knowledge in the learning cycle. Institutions can use this approach in many ways. For example, in hosting support groups, students greet and meet groups in class discussions or adding sessions. In these ways, international students can turn their experience into knowledge on campus.

Faculty-Student Mentoring Relationships

The higher education field widely holds that mentoring supports positive outcomes among graduate students. Preston et al. (2014) used narrative inquiry to examine peer mentorship among doctoral students. Using transformational learning theory to analyze informal and formal reflections, Preston et al. (2014) offer evidence that peer mentorship is helpful for both domestic and international graduate students. Through mentorship, human and social capital is maximized, and students are supported professionally and personally. Preston et al. (2014) encouraged institutions to integrate peer mentorship (in their study, it was led by students from the same cohort) to help students navigate a new educational system, discuss experiences and coping strategies when facing challenges, and support student retention. Peer mentorship is a good practice

that graduate programs should consider and implement to build the bridge between gaps between students.

Advising and mentoring graduate students can be challenging, and the literature review suggests a need for more cross-cultural knowledge and tools available about international students for faculty and staff. In addition, Zhang (2015) found that international students needed help with faculty advising, unfamiliarity with U.S. higher education, and difficulties in managing academic credits. Findings revealed a need for proper and systematic advising training. Therefore, as programs recruit international students, adequate training on everyday issues, regulations, and limitations for faculty and staff will help create an informed and inclusive campus culture for all students.

Indeed, Bista (2015) found that international students' academic advisors need higher cultural competence, awareness of the limitations of employment for international students, and cross-office collaboration and services to support international students. Internationalization in higher educational institutions is still inconsistent, individualistic, and anchored in Western epistemologies that starkly differ from the Eastern cultures from which most international students come (Maznevski et al., 2002; Theobald, 2008). Subsequently, there is a steady increase in research on how best to support international students with inclusive practices (Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Opertti et al., 2014).

In addition, infusing cultural empathy and intercultural competence into mentoring and advising helps programs support students holistically. Rice et al. (2009) investigated the mentoring and advising relationship and found that international students generally had favorable and positive relationships. However, doctoral students' ratings were lower than the master's on all three measures analyzed in the study. Problems

emerging in advising included poor advising, interpersonal relationship issues, mismatch of research interests, and lack of financial support. Rice et al. (2009) recommended cross-cultural empathy, interpersonal relationship-building, strong advising, individualizing student needs, and financial support to address these issues.

Lastly, Cummings-Mansfield et al. (2010) are among the few sources on students in educational leadership programs, including attention to international students. The authors explored the experiences of female doctoral students in educational leadership programs with various demographic characteristics, including age, race, country of origin, native language, marital status, sexual orientation, caretaking status, and whether they were first-generation college students. Findings revealed five issue areas: constraints within the organizational culture, personal and familial sacrifice, struggles with identity, questioning self, and experiences with mentoring. Conditions within the corporate culture involved opportunities and concerns in securing stable funding—personal and familial sacrifice concerned family obligations and caretaking stressors. Moreover, struggles with identity are often manifested in student isolation and distress.

Interestingly, two participants were international students. These students identified political and financial challenges as the most critical. In addition, cultivating a supportive relationship between faculty/mentors and international students is helpful.

Glass et al. (2015) found that participants had a good relationship with the faculty and developed their ways of knowing. When international students have significant social ties with others, they have a stronger sense of connection. Furthermore, faculty with higher intercultural competence and inclusive classroom practice substantially and positively influence students' perceptions and career trajectories. Interestingly but not

surprisingly, the low financial-resource subgroup expressed more concentrated and harmful comments. However, researchers did not further investigate the study's financial impact. This study gives evidence of the positive impact of the faculty who whither intercultural competence and inclusive practice with international students.

Internship and Career

International students in EA programs seek a practicum or internship during graduate work based on program recommendations or to improve their practice (Pounder, 2011). Such work experience provides hands-on learning opportunities in the American context. In addition, it supports learning around unstated workplace norms and expectations (Thessin & Clayton, 2013). However, U.S. research on international students' practicum or internship experiences in social sciences is scant.

In the Australian context, Felton and Harrison (2017) provided a needs analysis for inclusive practicums across the social and behavioral sciences for international students, finding that many practicum supervisors needed more understanding of the needs of international students and limited skills in culturally responsive supervision. The authors suggest increasing staff capacity to provide an inclusive environment to international students (Felton & Harrison, 2017). Likewise, universities and industries should develop supportive partnerships to build awareness and skills for culturally responsive supervision. In addition, the authors found a strong deficit mindset toward international students in the workplace. To support international student success, industry and educators must increase their ability to facilitate inclusive practicums.

Figure 3

Conceptual Framework and Relation to This Study

In the conceptual framework, I presented two concepts that helped me make sense of the empirical findings from the existing literature I reviewed. The framework included international graduate students' academic experiences, inclusive excellence in higher education, and recommendations from related studies. I summarized, analyzed, and synthesized these three buckets' current literature. Furthermore, I discussed the gaps in my literature review and how I would move forward in my study. This conceptual framework visual (Figure 3) represented the intersections of my research in exploring international graduate students in EA programs in the US. The frameworks helped inform my study of international doctoral students.

Chapter Summary

A particular gap in the research existed around how EA graduate programs design leadership training and experiences that support both domestic and international students,

indicating a need for further study. This chapter examined the literature on international graduate students' academic experiences and inclusive higher education: 1) international graduate student's academic experiences, including "international students as an underrepresented group"; and "politics and perceptions in higher education in the United States"; 2) inclusive excellence in higher education classrooms: "limited literature on educational administration graduate programs," "designing inclusive curriculum for higher education," and "reframing pedagogies in higher education"; and 3) recommendations and support for international graduate students: "linguistic support"; "teaching, learning, and research"; "faculty-student mentoring relationships"; and "internship and career." In addition, I explored ways scholars presented findings from various groups of international students, including countries of origin, race, religious background, length of stay in the U.S., and gender.

Very few studies broadly focused on international graduate students in education colleges or EA programs. There were few findings on preparing global educational leaders on the graduate or academic level within the EA programs. While many studies covered recommendations and considerations supporting inclusive excellence in higher education, studies focused explicitly on inclusive excellence in EA programs for educational leaders in an international context were scant.

Lastly, I discussed academic, advising, and career issues in the third section of my review. Again, the gap emerged between existing scholarship focusing on creating an inclusive learning environment in the EA programs for international students and on college campuses in the U.S. Given earlier studies using both qualitative and quantitative methods; I aimed to study the experiences among international doctoral students in the

EA programs to generate practical recommendations and guidelines for EA programs to consider when recruiting international students. The next chapter will discuss my methodology, participants, and how qualitative methods will help me understand this study.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter aims to introduce the research methodology for this qualitative, phenomenological study exploring the essence(s) of international graduate students' shared experiences of leadership preparation in Educational Administration (EA) programs in public and private higher education institutions in the United States. This approach allowed me to explore the "underlying structure of the meaning ascribed to this experience" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 27). I reintroduce the reader to the central research question in the following sections. Then I discuss my research plan, including the methodology, phenomenological approach and procedures, data collection and analysis, ethical concerns, trustworthiness strategies, and research positionality.

Research Question

In this study, I focused on one central research question: What is the essence of international doctoral students' experiences in EA programs in the United States? By answering this research question, I aim to offer recommendations relevant to faculty in EA programs that can improve the preparation of international doctoral students as global educational leaders.

Chosen Methodology

With the need for more literature on the experience of international graduate students in EA programs, I chose a qualitative approach to the present study. According to Creswell (2013) and Maxwell (2013), qualitative research offers a story or a picture

with details. It also provides vignettes of lived experience, offering insight into ways individuals construct their worlds (Merriam, 2016). Furthermore, Merriam and Tisdell (2015) argued that through the consistency of a qualitative approach, the answers provided by participants offer the perspectives of a phenomenon—not the views of the researchers. Through the inquiry process, qualitative study reveals knowledge learned from lived experiences (Rossman & Rallis, 2016) and is one of the most critical resources for uncovering knowledge (Hancock & Algozzine, 2012; Yin, 2014). In addition, qualitative research elevates the voices of participant stakeholders and empowers them to share their stories while intentionally minimizing the researcher's power (Creswell, 2013). In this way, qualitative researchers design studies using collaborative or reciprocal approaches such that participants become co-creators (Lawless, 2000; Lassiter, 2005).

A Phenomenological Approach to Inquiry

There were many ways to approach inquiry through qualitative methods, and I chose to use phenomenology as my approach to the problem of this study. Researchers who conducted phenomenological studies seek to deeply understand the lived experiences of a group of people by grasping the essence of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). The phenomenon of interest in this study is the international student academic experience in graduate EA programs in the United States. One of the most common qualitative approaches in education, phenomenology, allowed me to deeply understand the essence of the lived experiences of international students (Creswell, 2007; Dall'Alba, 2009). My study used hermeneutic phenomenology to describe and interpret the data from only interviews (Laverty, 2003).

Strengths of Phenomenology

According to Creswell (2013), phenomenological studies present an in-depth understanding of people's experiences, including *what* was experienced and *how* it was experienced. It focuses on the philosophy that individuals and groups engage and process experiences in context (Creswell, 2013). In addition, the phenomenological approach keeps specific philosophical perspectives, including searching for wisdom with the intentionality of consciousness, without presuppositions, and with a dismissal of the subject-object dichotomy (Creswell, 2013; Stewart & Mickunas, 1990) Also, Smith (2012) noted that hermeneutic phenomenology aims at producing detailed textual descriptions of the phenomena through which readers can collectively connect. Likewise, phenomenology brings out experiences authentically without being detached from participants' lives (Valle et al., 1989). For these reasons, hermeneutic phenomenology offers a practical design to study international students in graduate EA programs.

Challenges of Phenomenology

Like other qualitative approaches, findings from phenomenological research were difficult to generalize, and researchers could only access data through single or multiple interviews (Creswell, 2013). When conducting single-method research, phenomenological studies depended on researchers' interview questions and awareness of subjectivities (Creswell, 2013). In addition, it was impossible to capture the complete experience of participants, and discovery was limited by the consciousness and awareness of what participants felt and said (Giorgi, 1997). Furthermore, what participants perceived they did versus what they did might differ and not represent the complete stories in their contexts (Giorgi, 1997; Husserl, 1977).

Sampling and Recruitment

I first sent my research proposal for the Institutional Research Board (IRB) review, which was approved after three weeks. Later, I drew my purposeful sample from a population of international doctoral students enrolled in EA programs at public and private higher education institutions in the United States. These schools were members of our leading professional organization, the University Council of Educational Administration (UCEA). I emailed the programs with my invitation and information by July 2022. After a month, I had only recruited one participant. Following a discussion with my advisor, I emailed program directors/chairs with individualized emails. Hence, I received some participants via email or my online survey by September 2022. After interested volunteers filled out the online survey to determine eligibility, I contacted the potential participants to explain the study in detail. I sought six to eight participants from different EA programs but later recruited nine people to avoid participant dropouts.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Participants must be international students who came to the United States for their graduate studies and lived somewhere outside of the United States regardless of visa or immigration status. Eligible participants are enrolled in a Ph.D. degree-granting EA doctoral program or may have recently graduated (after 2017). Many studies only focus on international students with a non-US passport or F or J visa; however, my study focused on academic experiences. Therefore, participants did not need foreign status in the United States. In addition, I did not wish to exclude the experience of some international students due to their permanent residency or U.S. passport. Furthermore, visa status did not affect the perceptions of students. Therefore, I included international

doctoral students in EA programs regardless of immigration status, so long as they arrived after completing undergraduate studies. Online survey and interview protocols are included in the appendices.

In-Depth Semi-Structured Interviews

According to Smith and Osborn (2007), well-crafted interview questions bring a more profound understanding to qualitative research and minimize preconceptions. I conducted three interviews to address my research question**:** What is the essence of international doctoral student experiences in EA programs in the U.S.? As per Englander and Robinson (2009), the interview is a process of participant-to-participant relation which would be meaningful for my study. As a phenomenological study, my interview questions aligned with the conceptual frameworks to deeply understand international students' academic experiences in higher education and their recommendations for EA programs as educational leaders. Due to Covid-19 and distance reasons, all interviews were conducted using Zoom videoconferencing software available through the University of Denver.

Eligible participants received a copy of my interview protocol before deciding to be part of the study. Before the first interview, the participants and I reviewed again, and they signed the consent form if they consented to join my study. Interview questions were divided into three sections: academic, social, financial, mental health, inclusive higher education, career, and research areas aligned with my research question (see Appendices B, C, and D).

Before my official interviews, I conducted pilot interviews with three non-EA program international students within my college of education in the summer of 2022.

After several editions of the questions based on their feedback and clarification, my interview questions were tested and finalized (See Appendices A, B, C, and D).

At the beginning of the first interview, I introduced myself so the participants could know me better and create rapport. Since I was also a fellow student, I encouraged them to speak honestly and from their own experiences. I assured them that I would not judge them from their interviews and that my role was to learn from them.

Interviews were semi-structured and lasted about 50–60 minutes on Zoom. I interviewed each participant three times. I recruited student participants and provided the interview consent form and questions (see Appendix E) before the interview. All recordings were recorded and transcribed using the Zoom transcription feature. Participants were aware that they could withdraw from the study at any point. After discussions, participants were invited to remove or add to their responses.

Ideally, I conducted the interviews about one week apart from each other. However, some participants were only available during specific periods. Therefore, I worked on three interviews close to one another. I tried to cover different areas discussed in international student life from the literature review. The first interview centered on academics and social transitions, and I probed how participants would feel included and excluded in their program. The second interview was on finances and mental health to illustrate a bigger picture of how international students experience. Lastly, the third interview was on inclusive higher education and wrap-up questions as my confirmation from the previous two interviews, and I gathered participant recommendations regarding their EA programs. I scheduled the next meeting with participants at the end of the first and second interviews. Between each interview, I noted my thoughts and follow-up

questions for next time if necessary. During the interview, I intentionally asked them if they had questions or other ideas about my protocol. They could also contact me after the interviews if they thought of stories to share. All interviews were recorded by Zoom and transcribed by Rev.Com. I completed all 27 interviews between August and November 2022.

Participant Profiles

I gathered all the demographic data via the online survey and created a list of code names, participant names, and regions. The survey provided an overview of my participants; therefore, I laid out their demographics and wrote the institution and participant profiles.

Before the vignettes of each participant in Chapter 4, I provided a table with some general demographics in Table 1 with their pseudonyms, regions in the United States, institution pseudonyms, genders, nationality, start year in their doctoral programs, and the year of studies as of in the year 2022 when this study was conducted. I intended to draw a background story for each participant and provide more details of who they were and their positions in this study.

Table 1

Participants

Pseudonym	U.S. region	Institution	Gender	Nationality	Start year	Years*	Career goals
Hannah	East	Empire	Female	China	2020	3	Colleges or agency administrator
Jenny	Mountain	Silver	Female	Malawi	2018	5	Higher education faculty
JiangHong	Mountain	Beehive	Female	China	2019	4	Higher education administrator
Juan	Mountain	North	Male	Philippines	2021	2	Managerial-level positions in schools or teaching positions in higher education
Meek	Mountain	Beehive	Female	Netherlands	2021	2	K12 school systems or policy consultant
Micky	Central	Sooner	Male	Nigeria	2021	2	Higher education faculty, educational organizations, or flexible
Parker	Central	Ozark	Female	South Korea	2022	1	Higher education faculty
Rose	Central	Sooner	Female	South Korea	2019	3	Higher education faculty
Soft Power	East	Empire	Male	Nepal	2020	3	Higher education faculty

N Note. *Years: Year in the doctoral program.

Institution Profiles

In Table 2, I aimed to clarify the degrees offered by the programs and their objectives for students. After meeting the participants, I provided institution profiles of which EA programs the nine participants enrolled in. There were six schools, including Sooner, Ozark, Empire, Silver, Beehive, and North in the East, Mountain, and Central regions. A pseudonym was coded for each school to protect the privacy of participants. I could not cite the websites of the program descriptions since that would break the confidentiality of my study agreement. I also paraphrased the reports to avoid tracking back to the existing programs. One thing to note was that most EA programs wrote their descriptions vaguely and did not mention that their designs were for local leaders. I will discuss this further in Chapter Four.

Table 2

Educational Administration Programs

Region	School	Program	Degrees	Target career
Central	Sooner	Educational leadership and policy studies	MS, School Administration; Ed.S., Educational Administration; Ed.D., School Administration; Ph.D., Educational Administration; Graduate Certificate in Building Level Leadership; Graduate Certificate in District Level Leadership; Graduate Certificate in Workforce and Adult Education	Scholar-practitioners in educational institutions

Central	Ozark	Educational leadership & policy analysis	Ph.D. in Educational Administration, Ed.D. in Educational Leadership, PhD. in Educational Policy Studies, EdSp with certification in Executive Superintendency, M.Ed. and Ph.D. in Higher Education, MEd or EdSp with certification in PK-12 Educational Leadership and Administration with Elementary and Secondary Principal Certification, and EdSp with a certificate in PK–12 Educational Leadership and Administration with Superintendent Certification	Educational leaders, policymakers, and scholars in higher education, PK–12 schools, and policy settings
East	Empire	Educational policy & leadership	Educational policy and leadership MS; Higher Education MS; International Education Management and Leadership MA; Educational Policy and Leadership (EPL) Ph.D.; Certificates in Community College Leadership CGS; International Education Management CGS; School Building, District, and District Business Leadership AGC	K–12 schools, higher education institutions, government agencies, non-profit organizations, and businesses; high-level teaching, research, or leadership in the field of educational policy and leadership
Mountain	Silver	Educational leadership & policy studies	Certificate in Educational Leadership & Policy Studies (State Principal Licensure); Master of Arts in Educational Leadership & Policy Studies; Ph.D. in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies and Ed.D. in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies	Executive leadership, higher education, research organizations, and policy centers

Mountain	Beehive	Educational leadership & policy	M.Ed. K-12 Teacher Instructional Leadership; M.Ed. K-12 School Leadership and M.Ed. Student Affairs Emphasis; K-12 Ed.D. Program; K-12 Ed.D. w/ Administrative Licensure; Ed.D. in Higher Education Administration; Ph.D. degree and Joint MPA/Ph.D.	High-level administrators, university professors, researchers, or research and policy analysts in educational agencies for K–12 or Higher Education
Mountain	North	Educational leadership	Educational Leadership Master of Arts (M.A.); Educational Leadership Specialist in Education (Ed.S.) and Educational Leadership Doctor of Education (Ed.D.)	P–12 district leadership; Applied Research; Advocacy and Teaching in higher education

Central: **Sooner University**

Second-year Micky and third-year Rose went to Sooner University, a public research-one (R1) university in the Central region. The Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, Ph.D. is under the School of Educational Foundations, Leadership and Aviation and the College of Education and Human Sciences. Their programs are MS, School Administration; Ed.S., Educational Administration; Ed.D., School Administration; Ph.D., Educational Administration; Graduate Certificate in Building Level Leadership; Graduate Certificate in District Level Leadership; Graduate Certificate in Workforce and Adult Education. The Ph.D. program in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, precisely the option in Educational Administration, aims to enhance educational institutions using leadership, research, and theory development. The program

is intended to produce scholar-practitioners with the skills to analyze and address academic problems in diverse environments. The program aims to equip graduates to effect positive change in educational institutions. The Ph.D. program requires the completion of 72 credit hours beyond the master's degree, including 15 hours of dissertation. The required core curriculum includes School Leadership, Culture, and Ethics; School Improvement/Reform; Organizational Theory in Education; Research Traditions in Educational Leadership; Qualitative Research; Analysis of Variance; The Politics of Education; and special topics in Education Law and School Finance Policy. The development and improvement of courses are guided by the Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) standards, which are acknowledged by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP).

Central: **Ozark University**

The first-year student, Park, went to Ozark University, a public research-one university in the Central region. The Department of Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis (ELPA) is under the College of Education & Human Development. The department's mission is to generate knowledge and equip leaders with critical thinking skills to reform educational issues, policies, and practices in various settings such as higher education, PK–12 schools, and policy settings. The mission is furthered by providing education and training to leaders and educators in these fields. The Ozark EA program's goal is achieved by producing research that can benefit educational leaders, policymakers, and scholars.

Additionally, the institution promotes diversity, social justice, and cultural and global competence. The program fosters collaboration with local, state, national, and international leaders and policymakers. The institution offers various degree programs such as a Ph.D. in Educational Administration, Ed.D. in Educational Leadership, Ph.D. in Educational Policy Studies, EdSp with certification in Executive Superintendency, M.Ed. and Ph.D. in Higher Education, MEd or EdSp with certification in PK-12 Educational Leadership and Administration with Elementary and Secondary Principal Certification, and EdSp with a certificate in PK-12 Educational Leadership and Administration with Superintendent Certification. Doctoral students are required to complete 60 credit hours.

East: Empire University

Soft Power and Hannah were both doing their third year at Empire University, a public research-one university in the East region. The Department of Educational Policy & Leadership is under the School of Education. It provides the following degrees, master's in educational policy and leadership MS; Higher Education MS; International Education Management and Leadership MA; Educational Policy and Leadership (EPL) Ph.D.; Certificates in Community College Leadership CGS; International Education Management CGS; School Building, District, and District Business Leadership AGC. According to the participant, their international students outnumbered their domestic students in the doctoral program. From their website, the program is to acquire advanced research skills in education that align with your career objectives in academia, educational administration, or policy analysis. The Ph.D. program in educational policy and leadership spans 69 credits, including a dissertation, and can be pursued full-time or part-time. Credits earned from a related master's degree may be transferable. The

program offers easy access to nearby cities, such as Empire City, enabling students to participate in research projects in various settings, including K–12 schools, higher education institutions, government agencies, non-profit organizations, and businesses within and beyond the Capital Region. The areas of concentration provided at the ELP Ph.D. program include Educational Policy; Global and Comparative Educational Policy; Higher Education; School Leadership. The student learning objectives for their Ph.D. students are that upon completion of the program, graduates are equipped to assume high-level teaching, research, or leadership positions in educational policy and leadership. Graduates can draw upon and critically evaluate information from the relevant knowledge and skill base.

Mountain: **Silver University**

The fifth-year student, Jenny, was at Silver University, a private research-one university in the Mountain region. Educational Leadership & Policy Studies (ELPS) is under the College of Education, and it aims to empower students to create a better future. The ELPS program provides students with the tools to overcome challenges at every level of the educational system, whether for an aspiring principal, district leader, or policymaker. ELPS provides degrees, including a Certificate in Educational Leadership & Policy Studies (State Principal Licensure), Master of Arts in Educational Leadership & Policy Studies, Ph.D. in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, and Ed.D. in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. The focus of the Ph.D. program is for students to acquire advanced research skills and in-depth knowledge of educational leadership and policy. The Ph.D. program will equip students for careers in executive

leadership, higher education, research organizations, and policy centers. ELPS holds a cohort system composed of Ed.D. and Ph.D. students for the first two years. The learning outcomes are a self-aware, critically conscious scholar, researcher committed to social justice, and transformative leader. The institution runs on a quarter system; the Ph.D. requires 90-quarter credit hours and a traditional dissertation.

Mountain: **Beehive University**

JiangHong (fourth year) and Meek (second year) studied in the Mountain region at Beehive University, a public research-one university. The Department of Educational Leadership & Policy is in the College of Education. It provides master's degrees, including M.Ed. K–12 Teacher Instructional Leadership; M.Ed. K–12 School Leadership and M.Ed. Student Affairs Emphasis. For their doctoral programs, there are concentrations such as K–12 Ed.D. Program; K–12 Ed.D. with Administrative Licensure; Ed.D. in Higher Education Administration; Ph.D. degree and Joint MPA/Ph.D. Program. Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) students are expected to develop expertise in theory and research related to educational leadership and policy. The program caters to individuals seeking careers as high-level administrators, university professors, researchers, or research and policy analysts in educational agencies. Students may opt to specialize in either K–12 or Higher Education. Coursework will cover educational leadership, organizations, educational policy, or critical studies in education. In addition, students will be required to enroll in courses that focus on qualitative and quantitative research methods to support a two-semester research apprenticeship under the guidance of a faculty member. The final dissertation will be based on independent research on a topic

of the student's choosing. The program follows a semester system; completing 68 credits requires Ph.D. students to fulfill their coursework requirements.

Mountain: **North University**

Lastly, the second-year student, Juan, went to North University, a public state university in the Mountain region. The Educational Leadership program is within the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences. According to their webpage, the program provides degrees of Master of Arts, Educational Specialist, and Educational Doctorate degrees designed to expand the skills and knowledge of educational leaders at all levels - from P-12, to lead 21st-century organizations to impact student achievement successfully and positively. Educational Leadership Master of Arts (M.A.); Educational Leadership Specialist in Education (Ed.D.); and Educational Leadership Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) and The Educational Leadership Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) program prepares educators to assume various roles: P–12 district leadership; Applied Research Advocacy; Teaching in higher education; Critical reading, analysis of data, and original research are emphasized in addition to content courses in individualized areas of concentration. The principal licensure, administrator licensure, and research concentrations allow students to design their program to fit their career goals and interests best. This program is delivered entirely online. Coursework includes synchronous online sessions with a focus on the application of theory and research to practice. The required credits are 64 hours, including a dissertation for master's students without an education degree.

In this section, I explained the rationale for in-depth semi-structured interviews as data sources for the present phenomenological study. Thick and detailed descriptions will

be presented in my writing to ensure this study's trustworthiness and validity. The data collection process began with the online eligibility survey described above, wherein participants consented to contact me for in-depth interviews.

Data Analysis

In a qualitative study, data analysis is a reiterative process (Creswell, 2007). In this section, I discussed my plans and procedures for data analysis. Through the interviews as my sole method, I cross-checked and triangulated data to ensure the quality and validity of the study with thick descriptions, member checking, and expert review.

Hermeneutic Phenomenology Analysis

Zoom Interviews

I downloaded the videos and audio and ran them by Rev.com for transcripts after the interviews. I reviewed all the transcripts to correct text errors. Following proofreading, I sent the transcripts to my participants for member-checking, and some of them responded with some clarifications. Later, I used NVivo to code interview transcripts by categories and themes using a process of inductive coding. I also followed up with my participants with the primary findings; some agreed.

I analyzed all interview transcripts per hermeneutic phenomenology methodology (Creswell, 2007). I went over the transcripts for rough ideas during my first skim. The second time, I started coding the transcripts according to the topics and trends into categories. I also used my notes as supporting ideas for interpretation when finding the shared experience of international doctoral students in the EA programs. Later, I lumped and split the codes into five categories out of 27 transcripts, a total of 236 primary codes and subcodes under 23 initial categories, such as academics, advising, feelings, etc.

Two final themes are listed in Table 3; I listed the codes, categories, and themes in my data analysis. In the last column, I add some example quotes from the transcripts. Three themes emerged. Theme 1 suggests that "faculty intercultural understanding plays a vital role in international student cultural adaptation and success," including instruction, advising, and research. Theme 2 indicated that "cultural differences in epistemologies and expectations added challenges and confusion," which was supported by three categories, academics, curriculum, and careers. Lastly, the essence was "Cultural differences and American epistemology caused misalignment between international students and faculty expectations." Each theme was divided into different subsections, followed by participant quotes. In addition, I also interpreted the meanings from the stories participants shared (Laverty, 2003).

Table 3

Deductive Codes and Examples

Codes	Categories	Themes	Quote examples
Course load Context differences ESL challenges Discussions Accommodations Assignments Discussions Field trips on-site	Instruction	Faculty intercultural understanding plays a vital role in international students' cultural adaptation and success.	"I just want to accommodate international students' background in assignments would be important because they would understand. Hey, this person is not performing as well as this one because this one works in this [local school] system."
Advisor Close Relationship Directions decisions Faculty Busy	Advising		"Even though I talk to my academic advisor a lot, they usually just give you some advice."

Codes	Categories	Themes	Quote examples
FS different Relationships Faculty understands Eng Challenges Mentoring Faculty Race/Culture			
Helpful Learned Much Publications R Interests R Opportunities Research challenges	Research		"Yeah, in my third or fourth years, I wanna join many projects with faculty members."
Faculty impatient with international students	Academics	Cultural differences in epistemologies and expectations added challenges and confusion.	"But in China, usually [Ph.D. students] have a close connection with professor[s]; usually, you will definitely join one or even more than one professor's project."
Different contexts Cultural differences Experience working at the school or not Different systems & contexts The program focus is different from mine	Curriculum		"So, I could sometimes say if international students are struggling. It is because of a different page. You give me an assignment on something that has to do with education in K to 12, maybe in fifth grade at a particular school; I can know generally what that is, but I haven't experienced it in person."
Career challenges Lack of network & opportunities Feeling unprepared	Careers		"especially to international students. I think they should make some kind of space that I can work as a main instructor, as a teaching assistant."

Codes	Categories	Themes	Quote examples
Program lack of career resources Lack of teaching experience Networking Career goals			
F trainings Orientation for int. students Recommendations Program recommendations Resources Instruction Recommendations	Alignment	Essential theme: Cultural differences in epistemologies and expectations added challenges and confusion.	"I had complained to some faculty that the program lacks a global perspective because everything was just <Mountain State> specific, and it was sometimes difficult to engage in classroom conversations on things that I didn't know."

Trustworthiness

I employed several strategies to ensure trustworthiness. First, I chose purposeful sampling for targeted participants bounded within EA programs in The U.S. context. It was an entirely voluntary participation. International students from EA programs in the United States could participate in my study of their free will. Second, I used member checks during and after the interviews. I summarized their ideas during the interview and ensured I understood the participants' experiences. They could reiterate if I did not understand correctly. After the interviews, I circled back to participants with themes and asked them to confirm the correctness. Most participants did not respond to my invitation nor send me a disagreement on the themes. Third, I used adequate engagement and spent extended time collecting data from my participants until data saturation. In this case, I conducted three in-depth interviews with each participant for the data for this study, and I used my researcher's notes to maintain the study's rigor (Houghton et al., 2013).

Finally, throughout my study, I met with my dissertation advisors to discuss and review the logistics and the process of this study for their expert review to ensure the quality and the angles of my research were aligned. Due to my experience as an international doctoral student in the EA program, I assumed international students encounter more challenges than successes. To stay aware of my subjectivities, I kept a researcher's journal and recorded my thoughts about my experiences in my program. In that way, I had my perspectives cross-checked while I collected data. Also, recording my thoughts and notes helped organize my voice with the participants. As an insider and outsider, I used multiple interviews with multiple participants to examine my blind spots. I ensured that emerging topics and themes were based on consistent data from the interviews and document analysis. In the later stage of my data analysis, I invited participants to check the accuracy of my findings in a summary form. In this way, they kept me accountable from my lens and assumptions. Furthermore, I also expected that the participants would voice their thoughts and suggestions for their programs. I assumed that all responses were truthful and honest.

Ethical Considerations

I submitted my procedures, consent, confidentiality, and data management plans to the Institutional Research Board (IRB) at the University of Denver (DU) for ethical considerations. Under IRB policy, my study was exempted from reviews for adult participants and non-human experiments. I minimized the risks for my participants by sending separate emails to ensure they would not receive other participant information and that their data would not be accidentally shared. In addition, I explained my study thoroughly and sent them a copy of the details before the interview. Therefore,

participants knew what they needed to do for my research. I also ensured that they understood that they could withdraw from the study at any point without penalty. Upon departmental approval of my proposal, I submitted the required documents to the DU IRB for review.

For consent, all nine interviewees signed their forms before the interview. I verbally read the consent details to them to ensure that they understand. They could also ask me questions after hearing the consent details and withdraw at any point. No parental or guardian consent was required since they were over 18. Participants digitally signed and stored in a cloud with a password. I named the files with pseudonyms to decrease Consent forms and the risk of leaking information to third parties.

In terms of confidentiality, all data were saved on encrypted devices and online platforms. I coded all identifiable information with pseudonyms. I also used pseudonyms for institutions and programs. This study only used demographic responses for the participant demographic overview.

Finally, my data management plan entails that participants' real names and pseudonyms were stored in a separate folder online and on my computer. Data will be destroyed five years after I graduate from the University of Denver. I backed up the digital data on a cloud account requiring two-way email or mobile phone authentication to avoid data damage, loss, hacking, or leaks.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the methodology of my study. I used a qualitative approach to inquiry, specifically hermeneutic phenomenology. First, I discussed my recruitment plan, research setting, and sampling strategies. I also provided the alignment

matrixes for my survey questions and interview protocol. Later, I explained how each research question was answered by a particular data collection method, including an online survey, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and the researcher's journal. Later, I presented my plan for data analysis and how I organized and analyzed my data, including coding the data into themes after participants' member checks. The codes and categories were compared with the literature and the conceptual framework to generate findings. As stated, I built trustworthiness through member checks, methodology triangulation, reflective journaling, and expert reviews. I also included the ethical considerations and my positionality in this chapter. Chapter 4 presents my findings on international doctoral students in the EA programs.

Chapter Four: Results

In this chapter, I present the results of my study. I chose hermeneutic phenomenology, which allowed me to interpret and make sense of participant ideas to distill a common essence of shared experience from my nine participants across the United States. The research question guiding the findings was “What is the essence of international doctoral students' experiences in EA programs in the United States?” Whereas most international students who come to the United States study and seek careers in STEM fields, this study aims to capture the core features of international student experiences in EA doctoral programs in the United States as they seek to develop expertise and careers as primary or secondary school administrators or researchers. I extracted significant examples from 27 interviews and more than 100 statements to formulate the meanings into two themes. In Table 4, I selected examples of participant statements and formulated meanings to provide a snapshot of my data analysis process. The presentation of findings begins by describing individual participant experiences in their doctoral EA programs to capture what and how they experienced the phenomena individually. All participants spoke English as a second language, and I considered their English as part of their identities. Despite the imperfect English grammar or usage, I kept most original speech in participant quotes. Keeping the authenticity of my data would ensure the presence of participants.

Table 4 *Selected Examples of Participant Statements and Formulated Meanings*

Selected Examples of Participant Statements and Formulated Meanings

Themes	Formulated meaning	Examples
Faculty intercultural understanding plays a vital role in international students' cultural adaptation and success.	Pedagogies and course Content were a whole new world	“they understand your language proficiency level is not so high. And then we'll slow down their speed. Furthermore, when you answer some questions, they'll give you enough time to organize the language.”
	Cultural differences in advising approaches and expectations	Let me know when you need help. They're busy and [when] we send the email. They need some time to respond to your email.
	Immersive research opportunities enhance the student experience.	I told them, please, sir, ma, I'm ready for any work you're doing. Please involve me. Let me be involved. Just let me know.
Cultural differences in epistemologies and expectations added challenges and confusion.	Advising and Research Guidance Styles	I will say superficial nice. It’s not like you can feel if a person cares[s] about you; you will feel that. You will understand based on that person's action or behavior."
	Career Readiness Differed for International Students	So, being a faculty, what does my CV have to look like when I’m applying for a job, do I have those things that I have that I need to ask? They can have career services, but I don't think they would understand what I mean because they generally do things.

After I discussed each participant's experiences, I shared two themes that emerged from my analysis of twenty-seven transcripts. The first theme suggests that faculty intercultural understanding plays a vital role in international student cultural adaptation and success. The second theme indicates that cultural differences in epistemologies and expectations added challenges and confusion. From these two themes, I sought to get to the core of their experience, the universal essence, which was that process of

Westernization was a crucial feature in international student experiences in EA doctoral programs in the United States. In addition, leadership development was also rooted in Americanization.

Participant Educational Administration Journeys

I arranged participants by year of studies to show their experience progression: Parker was a first-year student; Juan, Meek, and Micky were second-year students; Hannah, Rose, and Soft Power were third-years; JiangHong was a fourth-year student; Jenny was in her fifth-year.

Parker*:* Year 1

Parker was in the program for about three months when I interviewed him. Parker's Master's Degree in Educational Administration and Policy focused on student assessments. He worked in an elementary school for four years in South Korea and became interested in student assessment before coming to the U.S. in 2022. Parker was the only first-year Ph.D. student in this study. He had many academic challenges, including adjusting to the U.S. graduate school system, learning everything in English, and being an international student in his program at Ozark University in the Central Region. Parker applied to ten schools in 2021, but only Ozark offered a full scholarship for his G.A. position. He went into Ozark's doctoral program to learn more about student evaluation and statistics in quantitative research. Equally influential in his decision to enroll in Ozark University was that his advisor was also Korean, and he felt their cultural similarities would model future success and goals for him. The program ran with a cohort system that required students to take the same core courses for two years.

His experience was fresh and unique as a South Korean newcomer to the United States. Parker prepared notes before our interviews and occasionally checked the questions and responses from the notes. Furthermore, he organized his thoughts and feelings well. I could sense that he was nervous during the first two interviews. Parker was aware of his English and the challenges in his studies. He was strategic when facing issues. He was proactive in searching for support.

I loved listening to his stories of meeting other international students and how they connected off-campus. We also talked about the drinking culture in Korea and how he coped with stress. It was unique that there were three international students out of five in his cohort, and they connected well. He worked in the elementary school for four years and had a master's in educational administration and policy. He went to his program based on the available funding among the schools he applied to. He was serious about his assignments, work, and research. He met his advisors regularly.

During the interviews, I could tell that his English, vocabulary, and confidence had improved. He wanted to be a professor using quantitative methods to conduct his research. His interest was in assessing teacher quality and student performance. He was eager to expand his network and wanted to collaborate with people in research opportunities. He was frank and wanted to work harder after meeting the advisors. One of his advisors was also Korean, and Parker took him as a role model. He said, "If my professor can do it, I think I can, too."

His program had three international students out of five doctoral students in the same cohort, making Parker among the majority within his cohort. Parker came with a purpose and wanted to learn as much as possible. He was determined to do more research

once he learned the foundation. When discussing a future career, he told me that being a university professor and researching school systems in higher education would be ideal.

As Parker reflected on his experiences in the doctoral EA program, themes of stress and coping strategies were apparent in our conversations. For Parker, translating concepts to and from English at the rapid pace of faculty and students whose first language is language express their ideas is academically challenging. However, he could understand most faculty who enunciated their speech. Despite not having language accommodations, Parker was resilient and showed tremendous growth in this area. He said during our first interview after three months into the first semester, “Last week, I asked a question the whole class. That's my first time.” Although this example seems small, it shows how exceptional international students are because they are expected to engage and excel comparably to domestic students despite not beginning on an equal playing field regarding language, classroom cultural norms, and engaging in content where faculty presume prior foundational knowledge in U.S. educational systems. Structured advising with his advisor and peer mentors supported Parker’s success. He appreciated the time with his advisor, who assigned him readings and annotated bibliographies. A senior Korean student also supported him academically and life-wise. The international students in the program hung out after class and took time to celebrate as they completed milestones, all of which contributed to Parker having a positive program experience.

Meek: Year 2

Meek came from the Netherlands and was the only White international student in this study. She used to work in elementary schools and taught for a year in an

international middle school in Japan. Meek thought about going to the United States to study for a career in education. Unlike other participants, she did not pursue her career in higher education but wanted to be a practitioner-researcher in the school systems or related organizations. She wanted to learn more about policymaking and instructional design in the K–12 systems. Meek chose to pursue her doctorate at Mountain Region because her partner was already located in the region, the program offered a graduate assistantship, and the program did not require Graduate Record Examinations scores (GRE).

She worked in Japan for a year, teaching at a middle school. She also came to the United States for her non-American partner, who financially supported her. They both were on student visas (F1), which led to some uncertainty. She was content with her studies. She had different perspectives from other Asian participants. Meek knew herself, her needs, and the situation and had already thought through many things.

Meek was the only European and White participant in my study. She looked serious, but later I realized it was her calmness. Meek was very kind and a thorough thinker. She usually took a small quantity of time before she answered my questions. Her expressions and delivery were precise and clear. Her race and background made her more privileged in the United States. She had much experience teaching in elementary school and received a master's in the science of teaching.

Meek also recognized cultural differences and actively chose the support she needed, including mental health therapy. Being Dutch, she considered her English could have been better and felt frustrated in her job interview. Meek was hesitant to approach

things that were discouraged by others. She wanted to focus on K–12 school systems as a consultant or for policy making. She did not aim to work in higher education; this goal differed from other participants.

When Meek joined the program, she thought it would be a smooth transition because of her familiarity with Western culture, and her Master's Degree was in teaching science. At the beginning of her studies, she intentionally sought mental health therapy on campus to prepare herself for homesickness and other issues that might occur. As Meek continued to have therapy sessions, she found them helpful for her transitions in life. However, she still felt overwhelmed when joining the EA program like other international students. The content and topics discussed in class were new to her, and she was surprised that she could not build on the knowledge gained from her Master's Degree. Meek questioned her presence in the program and how she could succeed academically. She said, "I felt a little bit of imposter syndrome. I wasn't supposed to be in here." Because Meek identified as White and had experience with Western cultures, her faculty and peers assumed she could navigate the program like domestic students. By looking at her, many forgot that she was not from the U.S. and found her questions about life and studies surprising, which intensified and slowed her academic adjustment in the EA program.

Like Parker, writing assignments were challenging for her initially since she had never written an article in English. However, she also appreciated the faculty and her cohort who supported her with specific resources, such as giving her a book on the course

content, clarifying her questions, or engaging in international student communities where she could exchange experiences.

In Meek's example, she talked about applying what she learned in a different context, and it was practical: "I feel like the knowledge that we learn is applicable. It's not only theoretical. So, either a case study or you need to think about your organization and how you would apply the stuff." In sum, when international doctoral student learning goals, program visions, and faculty support aligned in pedagogy, advising, and career readiness, their experiences were more transformational.

In general, she had a good experience in her program. She was a G.A. and worked with faculty members closely on research projects. Her finances were less challenging due to her supportive partner. She would like to stay in the United States to work. However, she was still deciding where she would be after graduating. Immigration status was the primary factor for her uncertain future.

Juan: Year 2

Juan holds a Bachelor's Degree in General Education and two Master's in Physics and Special Education from the Philippines. Later, he received his third master's in international studies and is pursuing a Ph.D. in social development in the Philippines; however, he put the program on pause (which he would finish after his current Ed.D.). Juan attended Mountain Region in 2015 as an exchange scholar program on a J-1 visa and taught math in a high school. After getting offered a job in the same area as a math special education teacher and his school sponsored him with an H1B employment visa, he dropped his math tutoring center and consulting business and restarted his life in the United States. In 2020, Juan was a charter school coordinator for special education while

pursuing his education specialist program (Ed.S.) in Special Education Administration and Educational Leadership. He then pursued his Ed.D. in Educational Leadership at North University.

Juan was the only international student in his EA program. He was sincere and honest about his journey. Juan was also aware of the privilege of working in the school system without visa issues. I was amazed at how driven he was since he had a full-time job while pursuing his doctoral degree and the quality of his assignments. He was also the only participant on the Ed.D. track due to his desire to work as an administrator in the district. Also, his school did not offer a Ph.D. option in educational administration. He was doing his second year at Mountain North University and married to an American citizen wife. He came from the Philippines and has been in the U.S. since 2017. At first, he worked in the local district as a Special Education teacher on an exchange scholar visa (J1), then on a work visa (H1B). He had two master's degrees and another Ph.D. program on pause.

He firmly believed he wanted to keep trying to find the right job. He aimed to find managerial-level positions in schools or teaching classes in higher education. Since he was working in the school district, he discovered his Ed.D. coursework helpful. However, his job search experience was challenging because he needed more connections in local school districts. He also liked having studies on the side, which would give him accountability to learn more. Since it was only his second year in the program, I encouraged him that things would get better, and I would help connect him with some resources. Despite the struggles and frustration of not getting the desired jobs, he shared heartfelt stories.

He chose to study at North University because the school only offered a fully online EA program and only for Ed. D degree, and it was in the same region. Juan went through a J-1 visa, then an H1B employment visa, and now a Permanent Residency through his American wife. He did not have to find employers that sponsored him. Juan's visa status was a difference maker in career employment options while pursuing his Ed.D. because it allowed him to work part-time as a graduate assistant, full-time in local schools, and continue the practitioner route (an opportunity not available for most international students). Juan's visa status is a key reason he was the only participant in the Ed.D. route.

Juan's faculty supported and cared for student work experiences and challenges. Students could learn from faculty modeling how to engage their colleagues. As Juan reported:

> And then they have a structure to do that. It's interesting how we should run professional development through our graduate school classes, if that makes sense. We have specific activities that model how to conduct professional development, primarily helping them understand us; it's highly engaging.

Participants felt included when they could relate to class pedagogy and the course content. However, the road to a dream job was still long. Despite many setbacks in Juan's job search as an international scholar and practitioner, he kept trying: "I've not stopped learning and learning and learning. I know that one day I'll meet the right people who can lead me to where I really wanna be." There needed to be more career resources for international students. He wondered if the job market did pick him due to the need for more local practice and experience. He had few networks within the local districts as a

Filipino school leader, and his program could only help a little. Overall, he enjoyed the program and classes. He was happy that the faculty always checked with students before class. Students in the cohort shared experiences within their school districts. Since he was fully off-campus, he did not need services or events from his program or on campus.

Micky: Year 2

Micky came from a family of educators in Nigeria. Before coming to the United States, he had two Master's Degrees in Accounting and Human Resource management. His schooling was in English. Therefore, he was proficient in studying English. He attended Sooner University in the Central Region in 2018 for his Master's in International Relations. After earning his Master's, he applied to several schools in Canada and the United States but chose to stay on the same campus for his doctoral studies. Juan's program offered him a G.A. position with funding. He hoped to shape the lives of young people through education, and he said, "So that's been part of me to impact other lives, to shape to shape future of younger ones." His doctoral studies started smoothly at the same school, and his fellow international students supported him tremendously. He noted: "We are like a family. The professors, they do everything to make sure that you are successful."

In the second interview, he was driving, so we did not engage in the video. He was outspoken and flexible when facing changes in his program. He spoke about the stories, and he was full of gratitude for his program and faculty. They gave him full support in many ways, and he was surprised those people he met became his family. He had a strong faith in his life and was willing to support his friends financially.

Like many other participants, he worked as a Graduate Assistant. Listening to his ideas about race and how others react to him was interesting. He accepted the facts about himself but did not care much when people treated him differently. In addition, he had a very positive experience. The work experience helped him to focus on what was more important. To my surprise, his faculty also supported him financially. He wanted to make an impact on young adults and continue his career in education like his extended family. He was very proud to introduce his state in Nigeria, which produced the highest number of professors in Nigeria. He was also confident that he could enter the marketplace anytime opportunities came because of his diverse working experiences and skills acquired before and after the doctoral program.

After his first year, his wife and three teenage sons joined him. As much as family support was vital, the financial stress and holding several roles were stressful. He was grateful for his colleagues, faculty, and people around him. He kept mentioning the help he received in the interviews. As a Black male, he did not encounter much racism, except some people chuckled at his Nigerian accent. He said, “I mean, see, it might have happened. I didn't take notes, but I don't care. I don't have an inferiority complex.” Some faculty invited international students to their homes for Christmas, and he felt welcomed to Sooner. He had a smooth transition joining the doctoral program. He found a food pantry and some charitable items for his home through campus resources. He admitted that readings and assignments cause him stress. However, he coped with the pressure well with hobbies and talking to friends and family.

He enjoyed the research opportunities in his program and worked on presenting and publishing his articles. He proactively asked the faculty for guidance when he

enrolled in the program. When he encountered financial or administrative problems, the faculty and program staff were quick to help him. The examples included professors paying for part of his tuition or calling him on his birthday. He was confident that his experience in diverse industries would help him find more options in education.

Hannah: Year 3

Hannah was from China. When we first met online, she seemed reserved and nervous. When we spoke in Mandarin, her face relaxed. She prepared her answers beforehand, so she only needed to think a little before responding. She struggled a bit in delivering her ideas in English. She had a bachelor's degree in computer science and a master's in electronic engineering in China. She taught Electronic Engineering at a vocational college for 15 years before moving to the United States. Later, she and her family moved to the East Coast for her husband's job. After her master's, she taught for about three years in high schools on an L2 visa (see Appendix) and got her Green Card soon after. Soon, she earned another master's degree in teaching Chinese as Second Language in 2017–2019.

Furthermore, she interned at the Department of Education in the K–12 Office of Bilingual Education. In 2022, she started the position of Educational Specialist in the same office. She wanted more profound knowledge, research, and work experience in higher education. She also appreciated the U.S. merits and thought learning about educational improvements would help her observe and change different systems. When choosing her school and program, the location of her family was already decided. Therefore, she searched for schools nearby the city and was admitted to East Empire.

She was self-funded for her doctoral studies. She did not choose the Ed.D. degree because she wanted to focus on broader educational issues outside of the local context in educational administration. She aimed to work in higher education or governmental agencies for language education sectors.

Hannah has a computer science bachelor's degree and a master's degree in electronic engineering from China. Before coming to the United States with her husband and teenage daughter, she taught computer science and electronic commerce at a vocational college for 15 years. Hannah got another Master's Degree in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language at East Region University and taught in high schools for two and a half years. Unlike other participants, she came to the United States on her L2 visa, which allowed her to work and study simultaneously without much restriction. During our interviews in 2022, Hannah worked part-time in her state's bilingual education department and was in her third year in the doctoral program. She wanted a systems-level understanding of educational leadership to contribute more to China and the U.S. education systems. Therefore, Hannah went into the doctoral program to bring systemic improvement in K–12 educational administration as a researcher either in higher education or government agencies in the educational field. She chose her program based on the location her family was in.

Hannah started her EA program in 2021, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, and all classes were virtual. She was the only self-funded participant and did not work as a Graduate Assistant. Hannah had an internship for 20 hours per week off-campus, and the stipend covered her tuition. Due to her work and being a mother, she

was constantly tired and stressed. The course load and online modality were new to her and caused much stress in the first year. She had never taken classes online or Blackboard, her school's online learning management system. An additional challenge was that Hannah's classes heavily focused on local educational contexts within the state, and she needed to understand some educational jargon when she started her doctoral studies. Like many students, her academic performance was affected by Covid; she said, "I especially dislike asynchronous courses. That's usually much work moved to the Blackboard online platform to leave your post or read others' posts and give feedback. I feel a huge work reading and writing work." Having online classes added complicated cultural adaptation.

In 2022, Hannah was excited to return to in-person classes and became more engaged in discussions. The technology and interpersonal communication styles made her feel the faculty was more willing to talk and led more conversations with a natural flow than online. Her program operated on a non-cohort system, but she went out with her classmates for lunch and coffee. Some faculty in her program knew how to interact with international students; according to her, they had more international experience. She reported:

> They have much international teaching experience or do research programs in different locations, areas, and worldwide. So that kind of professor, just as I mentioned, is more open and inclusive. They understand your language proficiency level is not so high in the classroom.

She perceived faculty with more cross-cultural understanding and international experience in studies or work as the “friendly” faculty who were open and gave her more time to think before talking, or they would rephrase to confirm what she wanted to say.

When she compared her interaction with her advisors back in China and the East Region, she thought students had a closer relationship with Chinese faculty and worked alongside the faculty's projects with a top-down approach. In contrast, American students needed to be more proactive when approaching their faculty for guidance with a partnership style. The advising styles were different for her. The support from advising and research was helpful for her. She joined a research project and presented at a conference. She recommended that her school and program create a handbook for students to know the administrative workflows on campus. According to her experience during Covid, tech-savvy faculty were ideal for virtual classes because students would be more engaged, and the course could benefit.

Rose: Year 3

Rose was from South Korea. When I met her, she prepared her responses and was very sincere about our conversation. When I asked her about her age, Rose insisted on saying “mid-thirties,” and I stopped counting after 30. She was the only participant who gave me an age range instead of an exact number.

She worked as a middle school English teacher before coming to the United States. She chose Central Sooner University because they offered her total funding. She admitted that she did not have many challenges after starting her program but thought a lot throughout her studies. She was compassionate while she was talking about her roommates and her cat. She made many friends with other international friends by

nurturing and hosting them. She was now satisfied with the program but wanted to go elsewhere for her career. After the interviews, I met her at the UCEA conference in 2022 and thought she worked very hard on her research, job search, and future career. Her schoolmates I met at the conference complimented her on being supportive and resourceful.

She wanted to learn and contribute more to educational equity; therefore, she applied to study Educational Technology in 2017. Later she decided to transfer to the EA program, which better suits her career goals as a university faculty.

Rose received two admissions but chose Sooner University in the Central Region for a full scholarship as a G.A. Rose came to the United States. as a single student without a family in 2019. She started her doctoral studies in Educational Technology but transferred to Educational Leadership & Policy Studies after discussing with her advisor in 2019. She was a fourth-year student actively engaged with research and supporting other international students in the program.

In her opinion, her faculty were welcoming and friendly but needed more experience with international students. She mentioned that she rarely spoke in class during her first to third semester because the course content was new. She spent time observing and learning until she could contribute to the discussions. Rose proactively worked on her research projects with faculty and on her own. At our interview, she was the Primary Investigator of a project on Korean heritage schools. Only three international students were in the program, and after the pandemic, they needed to be more cautious about gathering. She admitted that she became busier due to the distance learning during Covid and her work as a teaching assistant. There could be more global content in her

classes or outside her state. It was challenging when she did not work in the school district but had to discuss related topics in class.

As she approached her dissertation work solely on research, she felt more homesick without her usual circles in social life. She also pondered where to be and what job she should apply for during her last year in the program. Rose wanted to be a professor in college and continue her research. Another consideration about her future location was not having her family in the United States. As a senior student in the program, Micky looked up to her and thanked her for her support. She recommended, “It'll be nice if we have one specific course that helps international students and local students find different jobs.” As a third-year student, she was preparing herself for the workforce and would appreciate more career resources from her program.

Soft Power: Year 3

I first met Soft Power at the NAFSA conference (NAFSA: Association of International Educators). We both volunteered for the front desk, and he was beside me. He was very attentive and helpful in answering the attendees' questions. We started talking, and I learned he was from Nepal. I asked him what he studied, and he immediately gave me a business card, and we realized we were in a similar program. I told him I was looking for international students in the EA programs; if he would be interested, I could follow up after the IRB approval. He agreed and said he was happy to help. He was passionate about helping people and very strategic in networking. He was engaged when I saw him talking to some people at the conference. He was my first interviewee. He was very articulate in conveying his ideas and experience.

Soft Power had strong determination and a clear plan for his doctoral studies. He had two sons and his wife, who came with him to the US. He mentioned that the school district was one of the factors in choosing his location for the program. He also chose East Empire University based on the site where he did the master's program, the existing network, and funding from the program. He also decided to do doctoral studies because of the social prestige and the fulfillment of being a doctor. He studied a few different degrees, and I was impressed. He was aware of his mental health and career paths. He told me that he actively joined many events and was involved in many organizations and research projects on and off campus. His career goal was to be a professor in higher education.

Soft Power studied at the Empire University in the East Region as a third-year Nepali student since 2020. He recruited international students in Nepal for ten years. Later, he received his Master's Degree in International Relations in the East Region, and after working for a year, he applied for a doctoral program in the area. He also considered his children's school district and scholarships when choosing the programs. He came to the United States with his wife and two young sons. He concentrated on International Education when he joined Educational Policy and Leadership.

At the beginning of his doctoral studies, he had to adjust culturally. Many faculty needed to know the differences between international and domestic students in his program. Based on his observation, he felt excluded as an international student when the faculty had limited patience in waiting for students to finish their sentences. He gave an example: "So I still need to finish the question and professor think, 'Oh, I understood

your question. Here is my answer'—even before I finished my question." He cherished the time that the faculty gave to the students after class, although the course content remained locally focused. He hoped there would be more international examples and faculty from diverse backgrounds in the class. He was socially active and involved with student organizations and volunteer work for academic conferences. He knew many student resources on campus and attended Nepali social gatherings. Having a mental health counselor background, he could cope with stress better by doing hobbies.

He was more concerned about his future career. He wished there were more resources for international scholars from the program. He said, "We need to include the teaching assistant also because, after graduation, the Ph.D. students go to different professions." He recommended that EA programs have more teaching options when students want to enter academia or teaching positions. In addition, he hoped that his program would initiate more events or opportunities for faculty and students to learn from each other.

JiangHong: Year 4

JiangHong was from Northeast China. She had a bachelor's degree in teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language. After teaching for a year in Thailand, she moved to a state on the West Coast for her master's in the United States. She was a college student administrator during her Optional Practical Training (OPT). She later continued her doctoral studies in the same school. She and her Turkish partner met and moved to the Mountain area afterward. She mentioned that most of her friends were international students, and she was a global citizen.

She worked on her dissertation and was in her fourth year in 2022. Initially, she started in the Ed.D. track, but after two years, she transferred to the Ph.D. program. The transition between Ed.D. and Ph.D. was challenging and complicated. There was no consensus between offices and her program; she had to loop all personnel in the same email as self-help. In addition, her advisor left the program, and she had to find another dissertation advisor. Despite the frustration, she continued uplifting herself and her fellow students. She worked on several research projects but wanted to be something other than a researcher in the future.

JiangHong admitted that she was inspired by a Pakistani faculty and wanted to be like her. After her OPT, she wanted to study more and make her father proud as a Ph.D. degree holder; she applied to schools in Mountain State to be closer to her partner and got accepted by Beehive University, where she worked. She also received a GA position as the funding source.

She mentioned that her mental health had not been excellent, and there were many stressors from her studies, Covid, and the long-distance with her partner. She married before her fourth year and hoped to stay in the United States longer. She wanted to work as a higher-education administrator after graduation but was still deciding if she was ready for the marketplace. She did not want to focus her career on research but more on international student services or global offices. Before joining Beehive University in the Mountain Region, she worked as an administrator in the Global Office at a university. She applied for her doctoral program in the Beehive area because her Turkish fiancé worked there. She loved working with international students. She said, “I consider myself a global citizen. Many of my friends are international.” She wanted to push herself to

improve and make her family proud with a doctoral degree. In addition, she hoped to make changes to help students and internationalization in higher education.

In her Ed.D. cohort, JiangHong was the only international student. Also, she could only work as a G.A. on campus with her visa status, unlike other students who worked full-time in the school districts. During the pandemic, she enjoyed her classes more because there were fewer academic requirements. She felt the faculty were very busy and needed more time for students. Since she was the only senior international student, many faculty recommended other international students to ask her for support. She was upset to see the lack of support and treating her as a "guinea pig" in her program because she had to go through many first times with the staff and faculty as an international student. Most faculty needed to gain experience teaching or supporting international students like her. Therefore, they had to learn things with JiangHong along the way.

After sharing her challenging stories in her program, she recommended some insight for her program to consider. As the only international student in her program for a year before other international students joined her program, JiangHong wished there were more international students. Having a handbook with helpful information would help her transition on campus. Her program provided some career resources for domestic students, but she needed to figure out how her program could help her.

Jenny: Year 5

Born and raised in Malawi, Jenny's English was nearly native. I was surprised that she still did not consider her language a strength among international students. She was very conscious about her identity as a Black woman. During our interviews, she

relocated to the East Coast with her husband rather than staying in the Mountain West Region. She was not working at that time to focus on her dissertation.

After getting her master's in Secondary Education in the U.S., she interned at World Vision in Washington, DC, and taught at a high school for her Optional Practical Training (OPT). Later, she considered the career options of higher education and applied to a few schools for her doctoral studies. Mountain Silver University stood out for one year of Graduate Assistantship and the opportunity to talk to current international students before she accepted the offer.

Jenny was doing her last year of doctoral studies during our interviews in 2022. From the interviews, I could see Jenny being a flexible person. She did not want to regret accepting a job she would not enjoy. Jenny was determined and clear about her interests. She shared many solid examples, and we connected in our conversations. Jenny was open to sharing her experiences and hoped to encourage others. Her research focuses on developing countries. Her career goals were to teach and research in higher education and contribute more to the K–12 systems in her home country.

Jenny was in her fifth year of the doctoral program at Mountain Region. She spoke English as a second language but was educated in English in Malawi. Jenny identified herself as Black. She completed her Master's in Secondary Education in Tennessee in 2015 and worked as a high school teacher before joining the program at Silver University. She wanted to work in higher education as a researcher in educational leadership and transfer those leadership skills to improve Malawi's primary and secondary school systems. She applied for a few programs, all offering her funding.

However, Silver University stood out because the faculty let her talk to a current international student in the program. Her EA program secured her funding for a year through a graduate assistantship. Her husband also went with her to Mountain State from Malawi.

When Jenny first started in her program in 2018, she felt overwhelmed because she had been educated in a British system before, and her EA program focused more on K–12 systems with which she had little experience. She said, “I felt like an undergrad. I had to relearn everything.” Jenny found that all the students came from different backgrounds and had work experiences in the EA program, and their knowledge differed vastly. In her first two years, she attended classes on the weekend. Students would go to their classes all day, which was too stressful for her. Also, using the online platform, Canvas was new to her. She was used to submitting hard-copy assignments. After the first year, it was easier for her. She was able to make more progress. During the COVID-19 pandemic, all classes went virtual, and it was challenging for her to adjust to digital learning. She had a good relationship with her advisor, and they were in regular contact.

For some international students, grouping was stressful because they experienced racialization and the apparent difference in background and knowledge. In retrospect, she sometimes wished that her faculty would understand more about being international students. Some faculty would let students choose their workgroups. However, her cohort would have students of color together and White students together. She mentioned that it would be helpful when faculty assigned groups for students to avoid segregation.

Similarly, she experienced the hierarchy from a developing country among domestic and international student groups. Some people would ask ignorant questions such as, “You guys have pizza in Malawi?” As a result, she withdrew herself from those groups and only connected with a few friends from campus.

In addition, Jenny planned with her advisor, and the scheduled regular check-ins were meaningful for commitments. Still, she laughed that she could fall short of them sometimes. Jennu recalled:

> She [advisor] would check on me if I don't submit something. If I commit to something for this day, she will ask, ‘what happened? You said you're going to do this date.’ So, because I had decided to send reminders, kind of invites of which I regretted doing that to myself because now I had to commit to that <laugh>.

Students may need support clarifying their strategies to achieve their goals. Jenny continued:

It would help you support your students if you knew why or where they're coming from, why they're [domestic students] doing what they're doing, and where they want to go after the program. Moreover, one of the challenges that I've personally faced is that expectation that because I'm a Ph.D. student, I know what I'm doing.

She was active in search of resources and extra funding. For instance, she would find grants from other universities and apply. After three years of her G.A. position, she moved on to a full-time job with her Curriculum Practical Training (CPT) in the K–12 system, but she had no time for her dissertation. In 2022, she had to resign and focus on dissertation work. When I asked her for recommendations, she hoped there were more

intentional resources and funding for international students. If faculty and domestic students could be more aware of the international contexts, it would help all students thrive. Career-wise, she wished there were more options to teach graduate-level courses and more pathways for international scholars.

Theme 1: Faculty Intercultural Understanding Intercultural understanding plays a Vital Role in International Student Cultural Adaptation and Success

The difficulties of adapting to a new culture differ for international students based on factors such as their country of origin, racial background, and political and religious associations (Boafo-Arthur, 2013; Lee, 2010; Lee & Rice, 2007; Reynolds & Constantine, 2007; Wadsworth et al., 2008). When EA faculty supports international students in a culturally responsive way, participants feel included and cared for during their doctoral studies. This theme emerged from three categories: pedagogies and course content, advising approaches, and research opportunities.

Pedagogies and Course Content Were a Whole New World

The first category for theme one captured participants' experiences with course content and faculty instructional practices. Faculty's intercultural understanding shaped how international students learn and interact in class and the program. When I asked participants about their experiences with classroom instruction, I wanted to understand how they felt included or excluded. Most participants considered the instructors critical to facilitating class activities, course content, and assessment styles. Inclusive pedagogical practice is also directly connected to their positive or negative experiences. For instance, Jenny reflected on the inclusive pedagogy means intentional support, such as providing assignment extensions due to the faculty's awareness of some international students'

unique needs for extra time to understand the local context, which may be distinct from the needs of domestic students. When faculty understood the differences, she would feel supported: "I just want to accommodate international students' background in assignments would be important because they would understand. Hey, this person is not performing as well as this one because this one works in this [local school] system."

Inclusive pedagogy also means valuing cultural and epistemological differences. For example, how international students approach concepts such as race theory, leadership styles, or organizational leadership might differ from domestic students when I probed JiangHong about her favorite courses and teaching styles due to the faculty member's understanding of students' cultural backgrounds. She mentioned that her faculty would value and embrace her unique international perspective in the class. The faculty tried to discover the reasons behind students' epistemology by showing them an object from the Native American culture in the class for the students to discuss how they make sense of it. She pointed out how different it was for JiangHong, and other students would perceive the same object:

> So, I like the design of her class. They put some American decoration thing [in the class]. As a Chinese, I have never seen that before on the table and let people touch it and make people feel like, why do you think it is that thing? How did you learn? That is the thing for me.

In this quote, JiangHong expressed her appreciation of her faculty, noting her and other students' cultural differences and making the discussion a co-construction of knowledge.

Moreover, the attitude of the faculty and how they react in conversations would be crucial in the classroom. When faculty presented themselves with little patience when

students talked, students felt the tone and the expectations. Hannah added, “There's not so good feeling that some professor might not give you enough time, enough chance to talk about your ideas and deepen your [opinions].” Additionally, Soft Power had a similar experience in which the faculty would cut him off when he tried to frame questions, "I have not finished the question, and the professor thinks that, oh, I understood your question. Okay, here is my answer, even before I finished my question." These two quotes showed that students felt rushed and disrespected when faculty did not communicate patiently.

Moreover, Soft Power asserted that faculty who understood the cultural and linguistic challenges and differences with international students would be more supportive, “they understand your language proficiency level is not so high. And then we'll slow down their speed. Furthermore, when you answer some questions, they'll give you enough time to organize the language.” These examples indicate that students perceived faculty as inclusive when they provided intentional support and were willing to adapt to new ideas and instructions.

In the same thread, Micky confirmed when pedagogy was inclusive such as asking international students questions. By acknowledging and incorporating diverse perspectives around the globe, the faculty created an inclusive environment where students might value multiple worldviews rather than solely focusing on American perspectives. This approach recognizes that every student possesses valuable knowledge and promotes a more comprehensive understanding of different cultures and beliefs. For example, Micky said, “One of the reasons why the experiences are very nice and sweet and unforgettable is because we come from different backgrounds. So, they will always

want to hear your view." From the examples of Hannah, Soft Power, and Micky, the faculty's pedagogical design and intercultural attitudes toward international students' international and racial identities shaped the participant experience.

Besides the educational systems of the U.S. and participants' countries of origin, the last factor contributing to the differences between participants and other domestic students is their work experience. All the participants did not attend school in the U.S.; some had few opportunities to visit local schools or know about the U.S. school systems when entering their programs. Nevertheless, the EA programs are heavily related to the current school issues and systemic policies. Sometimes, the international students in this study needed help following the discussion and class content. Jenny articulated her example of assignments in a particular school. She may have had an idea about the school but needed in-person experience there:

> So, sometimes if international students struggle. It's because of a different page. So, I can give an example, if they say, you give me an assignment on something that has to do with education in K to 12, maybe in fifth grade at a particular school, I can generally know what that is, but I haven't experienced it in person.

Their schooling background experience might affect international students' learning, which differed from domestic students.

Participants continue sharing the vast differences between educational systems in the U.S. and their countries of origin. Bridging the knowledge and experience gap would be essential for faculty to consider in their course design. For example, Jenny talked about how the courses would need more global content instead of having the international students the ones to provide, "I had complained to some faculty that the program lacks a

global perspective because everything was just <Mountain State> specific, and it was sometimes difficult to engage in classroom conversations on things that I didn't know.” In addition, based on Juan's example, he was the only one not from the U.S. in his program, the educational systems differed from what he knew, and the classes lacked global content. He would bring innovative ideas to class:

> They're open to learning from that experience. Yeah. Because all of them are mainly from <Mountain State>, and then there're some from other states, but they are really from the U.S. Technically, I'm the only one from somewhere other than the U.S. Whatever I share, I share, let's say, the Singapore model I share about how we do things in the Philippines and all of that to them. Mainly I think our program is focused on here in the U.S.

Furthermore, when discussing their EA programs, many participants mentioned curricula to assist leaders in nearby schools. Many participants expressed concerns about the lack of global perspectives in these programs, and they saw themselves as a valuable source of international educational knowledge when comparing different systems. For instance, Meek mentioned that classes usually covered regional examples:

> I would say U.S. educational system, they often take examples from <Mountain State> because if we are in a combined EdD class with educational practitioners, they usually come up with <Mountain State> examples and we use those for class. But if we are in a Ph.D. class, we usually use the US context.

Finally, Hannah said that working in the context made it easier for her to understand the unique features of the U.S. school systems. She also mentioned that many international students needed the option to work in the school systems. Therefore, they

knew little about the educational practice:

> Maybe you don't know the context sometimes though we talk about a lot about education in the <East State> at the first beginning. I am not familiar with this context. Also, some issues about the board of regents or some of the school board, you don't have the experience to know that.

All in all, participants mentioned different examples of not having actual life and working experience in the U.S. school systems, and the contextual differences are apparent in discussions and classes. In the end, participants discussed their encounters with new educational systems and contexts. As per institution profiles in Chapter Three, most programs did not specify that their curriculum and course content were for local leaders. However, most participants mentioned that the examples and content primarily focused on the local school contexts. The goals of international students and programs differed, and the program descriptions needed to provide clarity for students before applying to the programs.

Cultural Differences in Advising Approaches and Expectations

The second category for theme one captured participants' experiences advising and mentorship within EA programs. Participants provided various responses when I asked about their interactions with their faculty. Participants viewed advisors as their guidance and support. In the next section, I provided examples of advising experiences, including challenging aspects of culture, attitude, and understanding. Then I included the nurturing experience to model how beneficial advising might be for international students. In the thread of quotes and findings, I recognized that one of the challenges that EA faculty and international doctoral students had was the cultural difference and

faculty-student relationship from their international backgrounds and personal communication styles. While the Western—individualistic and autonomous culture prevails in the U.S., students from the Eastern-collective cultures came with an opposite paradigm in building advising relationships, collaboration patterns, and expectations. However, students in this study did not perceive that those advisors and international students had conversations about cultural differences and ideologies.

Due to cultural differences, some international students expect to attend programs and adopt their advisor's research projects and directions. In their home countries, it was uncommon to have the flexibility to choose their research and classes. Participants mentioned that advisors were respectful and would not direct them to a particular decision. Subsequently, statements from my participants indicate that they had some cultural assumptions from their previous experience that advisors would help them decide on courses or project topics. For example, Hannah commented, “Even though I talk a lot to my academic advisor, usually they are just giving you some advice or suggestion but letting you decide what you are interested in.”

In Hannah's experience, there was a different expectation between international students and their faculty. In the U.S., students have more liberty to research their interests. However, in some cultures, such as Hannah’s background in China, students follow the faculty's labs or projects and assist with the current work. Hannah said, “But in China, usually [Ph.D. students] have a close connection with professor[s]; usually, you will definitely join one or even more than one professor's project.” Therefore, faculty and international students need to discuss their expectations before collaborating. Also, in some cultures, the faculty-student relationship tended to be closer and more practical.

Some faculty would give solid support and directions instead of waiting for students to approach them for help. Sometimes, Americans say, “Let me know when you need help. They're busy and [when] we send the email. They need some time to respond to your email.” It might feel like lip service for some students when faculty offer help, but they cannot support students promptly. When talking about the interactions with faculty, JiangHong was frustrated about their cultural behaviors and attitude, “I will say superficial nice. It's not like you can feel if a person cares[s] about you; you will feel that. You will understand based on that person's action or behavior.” Soft Power shared similar sentiments with the faculty willing to listen deeply to international students: “I recognize those who have the real heart and soul for international education who understand the international student issue. I'm more comfortable talking with them.” Some of the kind gestures were optional but emphasized by participants. Several participants talked about their faculty inviting international students to their homes and having celebrations or potlucks. They were excited and glad that they had the chance to celebrate the holidays with domestic faculty. In addition, Micky brought out another story of how he was cared for in his program:

> On that day, I was under the weather, so I was at home. My professor just called the students in the class. They all came out, and they called me on video, and you all sang for me, and they wished me well and all that. That was the best birthday I've ever seen.

As international students, some participants were more heartfelt when they received welcoming expressions from faculty, staff, or programs that made them feel extra included and supported.

The distinct advising styles created some ambiguity and uncertainty for some students. When faculty set up expectations and structures for advising schedules, assignments, and tasks would help international doctoral students navigate better. For example, Parker stated that his model of regular meetings and assigned work with his advisor had been helpful for him as a new student. The advisor assigned some readings for him, and they would talk about the articles and set goals:

> [He] told me to read the article, and we talked and reviewed the article. It is helpful to me too. So, he asked me, what do you think are this article's limitations or some suggestions? And we talked about our backgrounds and our goals.

Rose met with her advisor for different needs, such as studies, dissertations, and future careers. Advising with specific guidance such as recommendations, brainstorming, or additional information was instrumental in her transition between programs. In addition, the expectations and the goals of U.S. EA programs might differ from what international students understood from their countries of origin. Clarifying their aspirations, career directions, and the purpose of specific doctoral programs would help students choose their study paths more accurately. She transferred from Educational Technology to Educational Leadership for her interest and career goals:

> Then I talk to my advisor. I'm having fun studying, but I like to do something that I like to do. And then she asked me some questions. Then I transferred from educational technology to the educational leadership program in 2019.

Rose further discussed that her faculty would ask if anyone would like to visit the local schools together. For many international students who only work on campus, it was rare that they would get a chance to visit local schools; therefore, Rose was excited to go:

> [A faculty] had to go on a field trip to check the school district. And then she asked some of the GRA and GTA, if you would like to join me, you can join me. So, I joined her last week. So, I visited the school district and saw a student and teacher together.

Interestingly, several participants provided their hopes and recommendations for advising, and the points were helpful for us to frame the experience with a more diverse perspective. For example, Parker could email the faculty for detailed support by email:

> And in the class, so after the class when the class finishes at 7:00 PM. I ask them how I can do my assignments. And they explained that one faculty is kind and generous, and he gave me some resources via email, and she gave detailed feedback. That's helpful.

Besides, when faculty understand more about international students, they could regularly check with students about their learning, such as Meek's faculty, who supported her with a book on American K–12 school leadership and made the space for her to ask questions in class. As Meek noted:

> I think my advisor tried to plan at least a meeting once every month. One of my teachers gave me a book on leadership in K–12 in the United States. That was very helpful to have something to hold onto in the class; he often checked with my class to see if I understood. In that first semester, there was so much that I didn't know that I didn't want to disturb the pace of the class. So, it was nice of him to come back to me and ask to ensure I was okay.

Immersive Research Opportunities Enhanced Student Experience

The third category for theme one captured participants' experiences and expectations around research in EA programs. Many of the students in my study shared how research and publications were essential parts of doctoral students, and graduate assistantships were their primary source of funding in their programs. Granting GA positions for international students was an excellent way to support them financially and boost their work experience within the programs.

Despite the adjustment and adaptation, participants continuously showed determination to learn and contribute to research. Eight of the nine participants worked alongside faculty members and helped in the research projects. Most non-first-year participants also attended conferences and gave presentations in the past years. They were content with the contribution they made to the projects. For example, Micky, a Nigerian father of two, was firm on finding guidance from his faculty members for research projects. He asked to be involved in projects. He was later involved with a research team:

Well, normally, you, as a student, are the one that will tell them what you need. You are the one that runs after them. They are not ordinary; they're not the ones supposed to run after you. Immediately, I joined the program. I told them, please, sir, ma, I'm ready for any work you're doing. Please involve me. Let me be involved. Just let me know.

Similarly, with the same conviction as Parker, he wanted to join research projects and learn research skills to publish his work. For the period when I interviewed him, he regularly met with his advisor for research and work: “[In] my third year or fourth year, I wanna join many projects with faculty members, join faculty members projects so I can

develop my research skills. And I also want to submit my works to the journals. So yeah, if possible, I think it'll be perfect."

However, some participants reported a lack of structure of research collaboration in their program. For example, JiangHong had a conversation with a faculty member and received a research project invitation instead of instruction for how to apply for such opportunities:

> It was not like they introduced this [research collaboration model] to you. That was, I was chatting with that professor. He said, 'hey, by the way, I'm working on this research project. Do you have interest to join our team?' I said, 'yeah, sure. I want to gain experience.' And I was thinking, if I was not talking with that professor, then I still won't know how to do that [research].

Participants shared thoughts and experiences about academics and advising, and faculty intercultural understanding plays a vital role in international students' cultural adaptation and success.

Theme 2: Cultural Differences in Epistemologies and Expectations Added Challenges and Confusion

International doctoral students heavily rely on faculty for guidance in research and career. Interviews revealed that cultural differences and advising styles caused confusion and challenges between students and faculty. This next section discusses participant advising experience and career readiness in the EA program. This second theme was supported by two categories: advising and research guidance styles and career readiness differed for international students.

Advising and Research Guidance Styles

The first category for Theme Two captured cultural differences and expectations in advising and research guidance styles. Participants responded when asked about their interactions with faculty. Participants viewed advisors as their guidance and support. In the next section, I provided examples of advising experiences, including challenging aspects of culture, attitude, and understanding. Then I included the nurturing experience.

Subsequently, statements from my participants indicate that they had some cultural assumptions from their previous experience that advisors would help them decide on courses or project topics. For instance, international students can only work outside campus with authorization from the international office. Also, their work needs to be related to their field of study. Jenny mentioned that it was hard to find the right partners to work on her research projects, “I couldn't find anything, anybody in the department that I can partner with [in research], because they're education in <Mountain State> or education in USA, at least with internalization.” Typical part-time jobs such as serving food or babysitting are only eligible for some international students. For example, Jenny shared, “There was a suggestion [made by a faculty], ‘Oh, but you can babysit.’ No, we cannot because we are not allowed to do that.”

Jenny continued to share her experience in the program, and she hoped that students could be accommodated for different needs because they were from different countries. EA programs would need to understand that students from diverse backgrounds would have various communication styles and academic cultures, “One of the things that I always mentioned is I'm African from Malawi. To be specific, my background would be different from somebody from a different country. So, I would say

accommodating students based on where they're coming from and what the experience prior to joining the program."

Furthermore, cultural differences did not only exist in Asian participants; for a White student like Meek, she was misunderstood many times because people around her forgot she was not from the U.S. and expected her to know the norms and have the knowledge of the EA field, "When I ask that people seem surprised if I ask about what are the differences, what are the similarities? Because they assume that I understand this system because I kind of look like I'm from here."

Also, in some cultures, the faculty-student relationship tended to be closer and more practical. Participants needed to navigate interactions with their advisors. Some faculty would give solid support and directions instead of waiting for students to approach them for help. For example, JiangHong mentioned that she did not know if the differences were cultural or personal, "But I also know several American advisor[s] really care about their students. But I also learned from the internet, and some people shared similar experiences with me. So, I don't know if it's a culture thing."

Career Readiness Differed for International Students

Eight out of nine international doctoral students in my study went for the Ph.D. track because it was more recognizable outside the United States. Many were unsure if they could stay due to their immigration status. Ed.D. was more U.S.-centric and used for practitioners in school districts. If students wanted to join higher education or stay in academia, they would opt for Ph.D. However, not all international students understand the differences in career trajectories and program focus between Ed.D. and Ph.D. For example, When JiangHong considered her path to an Ed.D. and Ph.D. degree, she had to

reapply to the program for the Ph.D. track, "I did two years of Ed. D. When I got into the Ed.D. program in the first year, I was still thinking about whether to transfer it. Should I transfer to a Ph.D.?"

In the participant profiles, I listed the career goals of each participant. Participants only sometimes felt prepared for future careers, especially in higher education. For example, JiangHong said frankly that she often felt inadequate or doubtful about her career. She was unsure if she could make it, and she had to encourage herself to focus and return to her original goal even after her coursework and research in the EA program. Yet, she and her program had no conversations about her career readiness. JiangHong noted:

> I will look at it in the mirror … Do you want to write a part of the article? Would that make you happy? I want to help students. I want to be more practical. I want to develop a good idea to give students better services. That is my passion. I like international students.

JiangHong also realized workplace and cultural differences between China and the U.S. For example, in many Asian countries, employers expect applicants to display their pictures on their resumes. However, it is not a norm in the U.S.:

> I remember when I first submitted my resume to <Previous University>, I put my picture there and learned that in the U.S., you cannot put your picture there. That is definitely the cultural difference. I feel so dumb, there's common sense, but for us, it's not. So, I definitely need more details. We're not stupid. We just don't know about the culture.

Jenny, who had some teaching experience in the summer, talked about her struggles in searching for jobs. She was not sure how to present herself on her curriculum vitae (CV) and how to list the skills for certain positions:

> So, being a faculty, how does my CV have to look like when I'm applying for a job, do I have those things that I have that I need to ask? They can have the career services, but I don't think they would understand what I mean.

In addition, Rose mentioned that she needed more experience teaching graduate-level courses; however, it was not available due to the university policy, “especially to international students. I think they should make some kind of space that I can work as a main instructor, as a teaching assistant.”

Juan worked in a high school as a special education teacher and was the only participant who went for the Ed.D. degree. He was also one of the two participants with the U.S. Permanent Residence status. Juan wondered how his skills and abilities would match the positions due to the need for more networks in the local school districts. He had tried multiple times to get a promotion or a higher position in the marketplace, but it was challenging. There was limited job search and networking support when he recontacted the program. Most faculty and classmates could only listen to his updates if they provided solid solutions. He joked that he might need to get a Ph.D. in networking:

> But then, later, I realized the pattern. They [local leaders] hire their friends; they hire this. I said, so what's the point of going to school to be highly educated in educational leadership and policy? If the bottom line is your ability to network, then I should have done a Doctor of Philosophy in networking and educational leadership.

Since Juan had worked in the Mountain State local school systems for several years already, his perspectives on race and countries of origin were vital. For him, being a Filipino and having the experience back home meant exclusion in the EA conversations, “Black or Latino. If you are Asian, if you are Filipino, you are Chinese, you are Asian, or Southeast Asian. You are not included in those fighting for equity or opportunity.” He also thought that having diversity in the EA field in classrooms, programs, or the workplace still challenged international scholars like him:

> Unless you are Asian, and you are born and raised here, and your identity is American, and you already have established yourself. You may have the chance [in building a career locally], but again, they're not included when it comes to this whole notion of diversity.

Rose wanted to be strategic in their job search. She wanted to apply for only a few jobs. She was still trying to finalize her decisions when it came to her career with little support from her program. She wondered much about these job application questions: “I'm just trying my best. But sometimes I must decide. How many applications do I wanna make? Three or a hundred or ten. That’s my decision.” She also only had a little teaching experience before her interviews.

Essence: Cultural differences and American epistemology Caused Misalignment Between International Students and Faculty Expectations.

Through integrating participant statements and formulating their meanings, I developed a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of international doctoral students in EA programs in the United States. The collective experience of nine participants revealed that many international students had to adapt various aspects of their

academic journey upon joining the EA program. A common underlying feature emerged: Americanization by examining the strengths and misalignment of study goals and expectations between students and faculty in educational systems and curriculum contexts, the disconnects within research and career trajectories during the program, and the ideal pathways for students from EA programs.

For example, Jenny complained to some faculty that the program lacks a global perspectives. Juan also identified this issue: “mainly, I think our program really is focused on here in the U.S.” Rose confirmed her experience from Sooner University was also state focused. First, I probed with the following note:

> Ping: “You say that it would be great for them to provide some other content or context outside of the US or <Central State>. So, doesn't it mean that your curriculum is focusing more on <Central State> systems?”
>
> Rose: “Totally. Fully about <Central State>.”

In addition, Parker shared his experience as a first-year Korean student; he felt isolated and did not know how to situate himself in a class where he knew very little about the local contexts, “what we know is different. I can say I was really challenged to understand what they know. The system is different between the US and Korea. It was really difficult to catch the words, “board,” “committee,” “superintendent” cause I've never heard that words before. I know the [word] board, but I don't know how it works.”

The focus on state and U.S. contexts elevated cultural differences, and the dominance of American epistemology contributed to a misalignment between international students, domestic students, and faculty expectations. This Americanization was evident in instructional practices, pedagogies, course content, advising, and even the

core design of doctoral programs, particularly the Ed.D. Track. Participants often perceived EA curricula as U.S. and state-centric. International students typically only had the opportunity to introduce global perspectives in their classes when invited by faculty or classmates to share their experiences.

Pedagogies and course content in EA programs were primarily designed to cater to American educators. However, it is crucial to consider that international students are not guaranteed to stay and work in the United States due to their immigration status. International students may also have different career goals outside of local school systems. Therefore, when recruiting international doctoral students into the Ed. D track, programs must reevaluate their curriculum and consider what would be more suitable for international scholars, considering transferrable skills in diverse contexts in the United States and abroad. Furthermore, several participants expressed the challenges of heavy reading and assignment loads. For example, Hannah said, “In the first semester, I just feel a lot of a huge reading, writing assignments. I can catch up with the deadline to complete the bigger writing assignments.” Similarly, Jenny shared, “English is still my second language, so that's still something I battle with all the time.” In addition, Meek said:

> Also, with the English, even though I think my English is decent, I did feel like I suddenly had to write in English, and I suddenly had to write all of these papers, and I had never written an English paper before.

While international students understood the need to meet the academic standards of their U.S. counterparts, it was particularly demanding due to their limited background knowledge of local contexts and the U.S. education system, which further complicated their English language acquisition. These practices in EA programs prompted

international students to question the meaning of “internationalization in higher education in the U.S.” when most aspects were approached in an American manner.

Advising and mentorship approaches and styles varied between students and faculty, reflecting their cultural experiences and expectations. International students would benefit from more immersive research opportunities that prepare them for future careers. When faculty and international students come from different cultural backgrounds and educational systems, their expectations in advising and mentorship often diverge. Some participants mentioned being encouraged to proactively seek help and support from their faculty. Still, this expectation was unfamiliar to many international students who were more accustomed to a top-down approach from their advisors in their home countries. Taking a bottom-up approach to seeking guidance was not a common cultural expectation for them.

Career readiness differed between domestic and international students in EA programs, encompassing teaching experiences, career pathways, and additional support. While some participants aspired to enter higher education and academia as researchers or teaching faculty, they needed more teaching experience in graduate-level classes. They needed to be trained in the specific content relevant to EA programs. Conversely, international students often encounter challenges entering local school systems as practitioners without a principal or superintendent's license. Most participants pursued a Ph.D. degree, except Juan, a citizen pursuing an Ed.D. who had already worked in the local district. The design of the Ed.D. program was not intended for international scholars with foreign status, yet students from both the Ed.D. and Ph.D. programs were combined

in some EA courses. EA faculty should be more mindful and supportive of the aspirations of international doctoral students.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented the outcomes of my research, where I employed hermeneutic phenomenology to interpret and comprehend the ideas expressed by participants. By doing so, I aimed to distill a common essence of shared experiences from my nine participants across the United States. The research question that guided my findings was, “What is the essence of international doctoral student experiences in EA programs in the U.S.?” While most international students who come to the United States focus on studying and pursuing careers in STEM fields, this study aimed to capture the essential aspects of international students' experiences in EA doctoral programs in the United States as they strive to develop expertise and careers as primary or secondary school administrators or researchers.

I identified two key themes from my analysis of twenty-seven transcripts. The first theme concerns the significance of faculty intercultural understanding in facilitating international students' cultural adaptation and success. The second theme highlights the challenges and confusion caused by cultural differences in epistemologies and expectations. Chapter 5 discusses my findings, implications, updated conceptual framework, theories, practices, and policy recommendations.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Based on the purpose of the present phenomenological study to understand the experience of international doctoral students in the U.S. EA programs, I discussed two themes that emerged in my research results: The first theme is that faculty intercultural understanding plays a vital role in international students' cultural adaptation and success. The second theme indicates that cultural differences in epistemologies and expectations added challenges and confusion. As an underlying essence, findings indicate that cultural differences and American epistemology caused misalignment between international students and faculty expectations. Further, I presented implications and recommendations for related areas at the end.

Theme 1: Faculty Intercultural Understanding Plays a Vital Role in International Student Cultural Adaptation and Success.

In my findings, I listed three categories under Theme 1: pedagogies, advising, and research to strengthen the international doctoral student experience through intentional support and services. Faculty and staff are crucial as student support when they have intercultural skillsets and awareness to support international doctoral students inside and outside the classroom. Since student advising was a significant category for international doctoral students, I described and interpreted insights on general classroom instruction, faculty advising, and research options within the EA programs.

Classroom instruction and course design were one of the critical components for international doctoral students. All participants mentioned that their EA programs focused more on local educational systems, and they had to bring their global experiences as an "add-on" to the class. According to Knight (2003), “internationalization of higher education” refers to incorporating an international, intercultural, or global perspective into postsecondary education's goals, operations, or provision. Moreover, Rendón (2012) noted that engaging students using holistic pedagogies is also a form of social justice and liberation. However, this study's findings indicate an overall lack of internationalization and global content across EA programs. For example, Jenny and Juan’s feedback as per Chapter Four.

In the context of higher education, Adamo et al. (2019) emphasized the importance of restructuring pedagogies to embrace asset-based theories and frameworks, with a specific focus on providing support to marginalized or minoritized groups. The findings from this study indicate that it would be beneficial for EA programs to consider when implementing internationalization and improve their inclusive practices regarding international students. In this instance, EA programs should include more diverse content based on student needs, such as examples from students’ countries or outside the U.S. As many participants mentioned in this study, they would love to stay in the United States after graduation. However, immigration status was a factor they could not control. They might need to leave the United States and go to other regions of the world.

Rendón (2012) explored the idea that incorporating contemplative practices into education can lead to enriched transformative and multicultural learning. Course facilitators would encourage learners and educators to engage in contemplative practices

in the educational setting, fostering more profound and meaningful learning experiences within academic environments. Some participants could develop their skills and experiences in different contexts. However, intentional instructions and practice should be present in the EA programs instead of letting international scholars navigate alone. Therefore, EA programs must teach and prepare future educational leaders with explicit transferrable skills and knowledge to apply in multiple contexts, including those outside of the United States.

Findings from this study also indicate a need for proper and systematic advisory training that focuses on developing positive and empathetic attitudes toward learning about other cultures. Some participants felt the faculty expected students to be proactive in seeking support. However, this may not be a point of comfort or norm for students from different cultures. Some participants preferred asking questions after classes or on the side; for example, Parker struggled with his language, “But for me, it is not easy to ask in the class. So, I ask them after the class, and we know each other.” Moreover, Meek did not want to stall the whole class with her questions, noting, “I did ask a lot of questions. You just don't wanna hold up the rest of the group.” To support international doctoral students better, many participants thought having regular check-ins with their advisors helped them stay on track and feel more secure academically. Advising and mentorship approaches also varied based on students' and faculty's cultural experiences and expectations. International students would benefit from more immersive research opportunities that prepare them for future careers. These findings support Zhang (2015), who found that faculty advisors may need more awareness of cultural differences and strategies for effective international student advising. As programs continue to recruit

international students, providing adequate training on everyday issues such as academic credit management, unfamiliarity with the U.S. educational system, regulations, and limitations for faculty and staff can help create a more informed and inclusive campus culture for all students. By equipping advisors with the necessary skills and knowledge to support international students, academic institutions can foster a more supportive and inclusive learning environment for students from diverse backgrounds.

Click (2018) found that international graduate students require research assistance throughout the research process, including choosing a research topic, selecting appropriate data sources, and integrating the collected information into their writing. Likewise, participants often mentioned their engaging research collaboration with peers and faculty in the findings. Assisting international students in determining their research interests, strategies for conducting projects, and finding resources would be supportive, especially in their early years in the program. Some students went into the program with specific topics or methodologies, and they felt more successful when the faculty gave them options to work alongside related mentors.

Rice et al. (2009) and Preston et al. (2014) have suggested that scholars can offer valuable guidance on student advising by emphasizing the importance of cross-cultural empathy, establishing strong interpersonal relationships, providing tailored advice to address individual student needs, and offering financial assistance. Also, in a study by Glass et al. (2015), participants developed personal ways of knowing and established positive relationships with faculty members. Additionally, international students with strong social connections experienced a greater sense of belonging. The research also found that faculty members with high levels of intercultural competence and an inclusive

teaching approach positively impacted students' perceptions and career goals. In my study, participants shared positive and negative experiences with me and appreciated the faculty and staff's warm welcome. Sometimes even when the gestures were small, they cherished the moments dearly.

Theme 2: Cultural Differences in Epistemologies and Expectations Added Challenges and Confusion

Through my findings, international doctoral students experienced an immense number of differences between various contexts and students' countries of origin, such as English language, cultures, immigration status, racial identities, and curriculum contexts, and these findings matched with other studies (Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015; Mwangi et al., 2019). As newcomers on the campus, the social and political contexts shaped international students' perceptions and personal identities (Charles-Toussaint & Crowson, 2010; Zhang, 2016). International doctoral students feel more challenged when the disconnections between students and EA programs occur in academics, curriculum, and career readiness.

While English language, cultural, immigration status, and racial identities were like the existing studies, curriculum, and inclusive practice in higher education appearing in my findings were unique. According to scholars, designing inclusive practices in higher education for students from diverse backgrounds would be a way to support them (Danowitz & Tuitt, 2011; Tuitt, 2016). According to Davis (2016), scholars can learn and utilize various theoretical models of teaching, such as humanizing pedagogy, critical and inclusive pedagogy, engaging pedagogy, and performative pedagogy, to enhance their teaching practices and cater to the needs of a diverse student population (Rendón, 2012;

Lin and Scherz, 2014; Blasco, 2014; Click, 2018). In the results, I also found that participants prefer having global content and transferrable skillsets to utilize in various educational contexts in their future careers in the United States or worldwide.

Most participants chose the Ph.D. track for their degree since they did not know if they could stay in the United States for their future careers. They mentioned that their goals were to be able to work in higher education as professors, administrators, or policy researchers. The only participant, Juan, chose Ed.D. for his path but also received his Permanent Residency, which would change the trajectory and options for locations. Furthermore, for those programs offering both Ed.D. and Ph.D. degrees, the students would be allowed to take the same classes, and Ph.D. students would take extra research courses. EA programs emphasize that Ed.D. focuses on practice in the systems and more research skills for the Ph.D. route. Hence, I argue that international students know much about the curriculum differences between Ed.D. and Ph.D. students when most students are combined in the same classes and learning the same content. Considering the different designs for students with various career goals and pathways is imperative. From my findings, I could conclude how these two doctoral degree programs, the Ed.D. and Ph.D., impacted international graduate students in the same class or cohort; however, this is an important aspect that warrants future study.

Research on the experiences and needs of international students pursuing careers and development in educational leadership needs more study. My study contributes to this research by gathering key insights from international graduate students in EA programs regarding the curriculum, program expectations, and program and course design. First, when participants talked about their EA programs, they often discussed the

curricula designed to support local school leaders. As I looked through the program profiles, most descriptions did not specify whether the faculty designed the curriculum for local context, school leaders, or U.S. school systems. What was clear for EA programs and American domestic students may not be the same for international educators. For instance, the educational jargon, abbreviations, or the school system norms between public, private, and charter schools are region- and country-specific.

Culturally responsive pedagogy encompasses three essential elements: first, the ability to foster academic development in students; second, a willingness to nurture and support cultural competence; and third, the cultivation of sociopolitical or critical consciousness among students (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 483). Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of reciprocity (Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 2005). Recognizing and utilizing students' "funds of knowledge" (Kiyama & Rios-Aguilar, 2017, p. 1) encourages everyone to participate actively in the learning space and contribute to the classroom. Creating a humanizing classroom environment also involves dismantling elitist values and practicing epistemological equity, which entails inviting students to share their "multiple forms of knowledge, identities, locations, and ways of knowing" (Osei-Kofi et al., 2004) with both faculty and fellow students. Most participants talked about the need for global perspectives and how programs missed the opportunities to engage them as sources of international educational knowledge in comparing different systems. Also, students felt they needed more preparation in their program to advance to academia and higher education as faculty members. Adamo et al. (2019) suggested the integration of student perspectives in the course material and evaluations, fostering a learning community that collaborates for internal enhancement

and growth. The findings from this study indicate a need for EA programs to reframe their descriptions if the courses are only about local contexts and support local leaders, intentionally recruit and retain international faculty, and incorporate diverse content related to different educational administration knowledge and theories outside of U.S. ways of knowing and doing.

Another emphasis from the results is on student career readiness. International students enrolled in EA programs often pursue a practicum or internship as part of their graduate studies, either as advised by the program or to enhance their skills (Pounder, 2011). Engaging in such practical work offers valuable hands-on learning experiences within the American setting. Moreover, it aids in gaining insights into unspoken workplace conventions and expectations (Thessin & Clayton, 2013). Thessin and Clayton (2013) suggested that work experience offers valuable learning opportunities within the American work environment and can also facilitate the acquisition of knowledge regarding implicit workplace norms and expectations. Only some studies in the existing educational leadership literature focused on preparing international educational leaders; therefore, I could not compare my findings for this topic but offer a new contribution from which future studies extend. Several participants mentioned they received little advice on career planning and needed clarification about their readiness to enter the job market within education. None of the six programs involved in this study had externships for doctoral students. All participants except Hannah in this study worked as Graduate Assistants on campus. Juan and Hannah worked in local agencies due to their Permanent Residency. Participants needed more precise guidance to know what they needed to be ready to enter the marketplace. Several participants mentioned that they needed

opportunities to be Teaching Assistants in their college or program. They wish there were options for them to co-teach for experience and learn from senior instructors.

Essence: Cultural Differences and American Epistemology Caused Misalignment Between International Students and Faculty Expectations.

The acculturation difficulties experienced by international students differ based on factors such as their country of origin, racial identity, and political and religious affiliations (Boafo-Arthur, 2013; Lee, 2010; Lee & Rice, 2007; Reynolds & Constantine, 2007; Wadsworth et al., 2008). Students from Africa, Southeast Asia, and Middle Eastern countries tend to encounter more acculturation challenges linked to their actual or perceived identities than students from Canada and European countries (Lee, 2007). While nine participants had different stories, I found similar features in the essence of the phenomenon of being an international doctoral student in a U.S. EA program. I found strengths and challenges when international doctoral students enter their programs. Therefore, better aligning international doctoral students and their programs would enhance student success in preparing for future educational administration professions—also a tremendous success for international scholars and administrators who came to the United States with academic endeavors.

The influence of American culture on educational practices and programs, especially the Ed.D. program, was evident in various aspects such as teaching methods, course materials, advising, and even the overall structure. Scholars argued that the assumption of Western values, pedagogies, and English as the instruction language would be the best tools to serve students in higher education (Sperduti, 2017). I also argue that U.S. EA programs recruit international students to celebrate the U.S.'s dominant cultures.

Participants expressed concerns that the educational content in EA curricula was primarily focused on the United States. International students often bring global perspectives to the classroom when invited by faculty or classmates to share their experiences. Having co-constructed knowledge in class allows for international topics and more inclusivity in educational systems and EA programs.

Pedagogies and course content were typically tailored to suit American educators, disregarding that international students might not stay and work in the United States. For example, Soft Power would consider staying in the United States depending on the jobs, noting, “Depends, in the sense that after I graduate if I will have more opportunities to learn, I may stay some time in the U.S.” Jenny wanted to be close to her family: “I do mind staying long term because I have a family back home. … I just want to be close to my parents.” Besides, Meek added that international students were usually uncertain about where to stay after graduating, “I feel like that's the most common answer for international students. You never really know where you're going to end up.” When higher education discusses internationalization, we must also prevent creating more barriers and binary boundaries between the East and the West (Hailu, 2022; Sperduti, 2017; et al.). Therefore, when recruiting international doctoral students, programs must reconsider their curriculum and adapt it to serve international scholars' needs better, considering the transferable skills required in diverse contexts both within the United States and abroad. Additionally, several participants found the reading and assignment requirements to be burdensome. While they understood the need to meet the same standards as other students, it was challenging due to differences in background knowledge, language proficiency, and educational experiences.

Numerous studies have focused on supporting minoritized student groups in educational administration (EA) programs (Anderson, 1997). However, only a limited number of studies have explored the aspect of nationality concerning international students. For instance, some studies have investigated the integration of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and questioning (LGBTIQ) identities into principal preparation (O'Malley & Capper, 2015), feminist perspectives (Dentith et al., 2014), racial justice (Gooden & Dantley, 2012), special education (Pazey & Cole, 2013), and English Language Learners (Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011). At the beginning of my study, I did not expect the findings to show the essence of cultural differences and that the different epistemology would contribute to challenges for international doctoral students, including myself. In addition, the practices within EA programs prompted international students to question the true meaning of internationalization in higher education in the United States, as most things were done in an American-centric manner. Faculty and international students bring different experiences and educational backgrounds, and their expectations regarding advising and mentorship can differ. For example, many Asian students were accustomed to a more traditional approach from their advisors, making it difficult for them to engage with their advisors proactively. Some participants mentioned being advised to actively seek help and support from faculty, which was not an ordinary skill for them. Similarly, in research collaborations, faculty often expected students to develop their research agenda based on the U.S. system, which could be a new expectation for international students.

Furthermore, career readiness varied between domestic and international students in EA programs, including teaching experiences, career paths, and additional support.

Some participants aspired to pursue careers in higher education and academia as researchers or teaching faculty. However, they lacked teaching experience in graduate-level classes and had yet to receive training on teaching content in EA programs. For instance, Soft Power expressed his desire to teach, but he did not have the opportunity yet: “This [teaching experience] is one of the things I feel a little bit lacking. That's why I also request the department to provide me with some teaching assistant tasks.” Jenny, who taught with a faculty, also asserted that international students should have more teaching experience if they need to, “I would say more opportunities for those that want to teach.” On the other hand, international students faced difficulties entering local school systems as practitioners unless they possessed a principal or superintendent license. Most participants were pursuing a Ph.D., except for Juan, a U.S. citizen seeking an Ed.D. and already had experience working in the local district. The Ed.D. program was designed for something other than international scholars but for local educational leaders with less research focus (Foster et al., 2023).

Also, EA programs must clearly explain their design, goals, and expectations to international students, especially for the Ed. D track since it is designed for local educational leaders who have work experiences in the school systems and want to advance in their careers in related areas. As hosting programs, one should not expect any students, not just international students, to thoroughly understand the programs when they apply. Nevertheless, students from both Ed.D. and Ph.D. programs were combined in some EA courses. This allotment of different tracks required EA faculty to be more aware and supportive of the aspirations of international doctoral students. Also, the typical Ed.D. students are already practicing in the field of school systems. Therefore,

addressing the program objectives and expectations with international doctoral students becomes imperative. Participants mentioned their need for knowledge about suitable positions and networking opportunities, which often led them never to explore off-campus work. As a result, their resumes might look different from those in their home countries compared to the U.S. styles. Many participants also expressed uncertainty about their level of preparedness for future careers. Assessing career readiness would be more accessible upon graduation, so programs should establish collaborations between students, faculty, and staff to define mutually agreed-upon career readiness standards.

International students were expected to assimilate into American communication styles, relationship dynamics, and research practices, among other aspects. The EA programs predominantly embraced American epistemologies as a way of life rather than fostering a space for multicultural exchanges. Based on the experiences of the nine participants in this study, it became apparent that international students often had to adapt to many things when they joined the EA program.

Lastly, as mentioned in Chapter 2, to succeed, university administrators must be equipped to grasp the worldwide developments and the growing global influence on higher education (Rumbley et al., 2012). Internationalization has been a hot topic in American higher education. What can international students contribute to the EA programs? What should be the strategic plans for EA programs to develop internationalization with or without international students? It is not international students' responsibility to bring in global content. In contrast, findings from my study indicate that international students are not experiencing internationalization in their EA programs as per the examples in Chapter Four.

The features and experiences of international students in Educational Administration programs were complex. I could not simply put them into an orderly graph for the conceptual framework. For example, there were strengths and positive experiences around instructions, advising, and research. However, challenges and disconnections for academics, curriculum, and careers remained apparent in the research results. I provided a simple conceptual framework map (Figure 3) in Chapter 2, including international graduate students' academic experiences and inclusive excellence in educational administration programs. These two topics inform international graduate students in U.S. EA programs.

Figure 3

Original Conceptual Framework and Relations to the Study

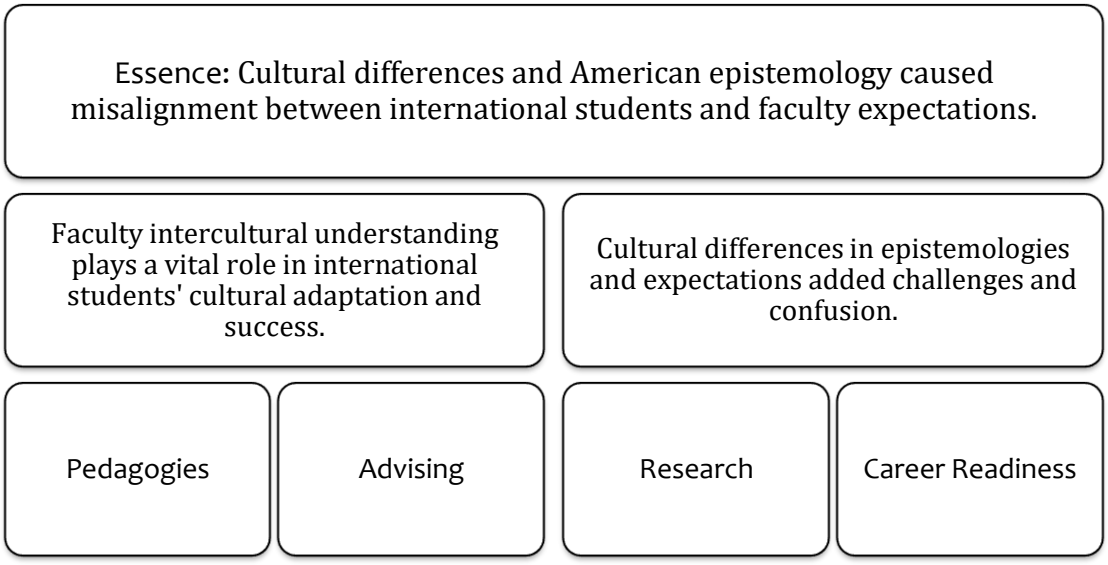
However, after conducting this study, the framework seemed too simple and inadequate to present the complexity of international doctoral students in the EA programs in the United States. I discussed Theme 1: Faculty intercultural understanding

plays a vital role in international students' cultural adaptation and success, and Theme 2, Cultural differences in epistemologies and expectations, added challenges and confusion. Later, I came to the essence of international doctoral students' experience in the EA program: Cultural differences and American epistemology caused misalignment between international students and faculty expectations.

After several attempts to bring the features into a visual graph, I chose a new map (Figure 4) to present the complexity of the international doctoral student experience in the EA programs in the U.S.

Figure 4 *Updated Essence of International Doctoral Student Experience*

Updated Essence of International Doctoral Student Experience



Recommendations

In the scope of the literature review, scholars talked about international students' challenges and experiences as a whole student body. However, they rarely studied the specific groups of students from certain programs. In this study, I contribute to the

existing literature on the intersections of inclusive higher education in EA programs and international doctoral students. Several recommendations emerged. I brought insights for research, practice, and policy below. These recommendations will help EA programs and faculty support international students better and prepare all graduate students in the EA field to thrive and be more culturally responsive in their practices.

Research

While conducting an extensive search of literature related to EA programs, I discovered various studies that examine different aspects of the field. These studies include research on concepts and practices conducted by Hitt et al. (2012), Fiore (2013), and Lunenburg and Ornstein (2021). Additionally, there are studies on the progression of doctoral students in EA programs by Ford and Vaughn (2011) and Murakami-Ramalho et al. (2013), as well as investigations into social justice within EA programs by Furman (2012) and Oplatka (2014). Some studies focus on school leaders or principals, such as those conducted by Myung et al. (2011), Orr and Orphanos (2011), and Fuller et al. (2011), exploring their roles and their relationship with P/K–12 school systems, as examined by Epstein et al. (2011), LaFrance and Beck (2014), and Sorensen (2019). However, it is essential to note that the literature on EA programs and international students lacks a discussion of inclusive practices. Therefore, I recommend more studies on international students in the EA programs.

This study contributes deep insight from the international doctoral students in the EA programs in the United States. Among the nine participants, the findings were profound. However, this was only a start for conversations on inclusive practice and international doctoral students. The results would be different if one took the same

protocol to study another group of participants. This phenomenon could bring very different experiences to each international student. I recommended the following areas of research and theory development based on the limitations of my study. Hence, scholars may investigate further in student groups based on different demographics such as race, native languages, religions, countries of origin, years in the program, gender, etc. Lastly, expanding studies on classroom pedagogy, advising, research, academics, curriculum, and careers of international graduate students in the EA programs would be necessary for faculty, practitioners, and policymakers.

Practice

Studies in higher education commonly recognize that international students face academic challenges due to linguistic and cultural differences in the American classroom (Tas, 2013). Also, having international students learn about U.S. college and university culture helps them settle in and be more aware of how to cope with the differences, an emphasized issue in studies (Jennings, 2017). For example, Shane et al. (2020) discussed their Foundation 500 Course for international students in their first term on campus. The course includes readings related to specific challenges that international students face, including the rules of academia, intellectual ownership, class participation, and expectations of the English language. The authors also shared their syllabus design. The course aims to help students develop their academic skills, self-confidence, and oral and written communication experiences. With these tools in mind, EA faculty might create a foundation course for international students to learn about local educational systems, ideology, issues, jargon, norms, and culture in American K–12 education and higher

education. This way, international students will be better prepared when starting their EA classes.

In Akanwa's (2015) literature review on the history of international students in Western countries, she located common challenges, including cultural adjustment, language barriers, medical concerns, pedagogical differences, housing, lack of support services, and financial difficulties among students in the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia. Cultural variation has a direct impact on the international student's academic experience. Adding cultural programs and engaging international students in the activities on campus improve their learning experiences. International students can be better supported when faculty incorporate language-focused assignments (e.g., writing with topic sentences) and provide feedback on language use. In addition, academic resources on campus, including the appropriate faculty-student ratio, funding, and engagement between domestic and international students, fosters a beneficial environment for all students on campus. Supplemental resources for conferences, scholarships, and awards also help international students with financial challenges. Also, American higher education needs a fundamental mindset shift. Previously, I discussed culturally responsive pedagogies that value students' experiences and knowledge; teaching international students on a graduate level requires intercultural understanding and competence.

At the beginning of this study, I aimed to provide recommendations for EA programs to consider when recruiting international graduate students. There are a few points to consider for EA practitioners and faculty members: needs assessment, customized support, and embedded inclusive practice within and beyond the programs.

First, a needs assessment would be ideal for each program to take into practice. Participants mentioned that many faculty might need to learn what they needed as international doctoral students, and if they had asked, the problems would be minor. Also, the six schools in my study were quite different, and the programs targeted diverse student needs. Therefore, having a direct and regular need assessment with international doctoral students would be meaningful in developing support for the audience. Secondly, some participants also recommended support groups that facilitate students to share their reflections, ideas, or feedback about the programs that would assist international students and programs with the proper traction for improvement.

Moreover, they create customized support and services after knowing what international student groups need. Talking about challenges and celebrating success may be helpful for international students to adjust to a new system in the program and provide resources in a time of need. Students may support each other better through peer mentorship, and faculty would understand the international students better culturally after communicating. If necessary, I recommend customized support and services after the need assessment, support group, or intercultural exchange programming. As mentioned, different student groups need additional help. Resources and needs are more than one-size-fits-all in the EA programs. All students come from diverse academic backgrounds and experiences, so evaluating their needs would be more beneficial.

Third, enhance the inclusion and equity practice in EA programs. While having international students is a great practice to be inclusive in higher education, domestic students would also promote cultural awareness and equitable approaches within their practice in-school systems consisting of children of multicultural backgrounds. Bringing

global content and having all doctoral students contribute to internationalization in a meaningful way assists programs in being more culturally responsive. Moreover, advising international students may need modeling of new ways of proactive interaction with students if the faculty expects advice to do so. Peer mentorship or international alums guest speakers can sometimes speak about their experience more directly to current international students and faculty. Some participants recommend having cultural exchange events, national spotlights, and discussions on different educational systems that may be valuable for the U.S. educational context. Lastly, I included a checklist on supporting international doctoral students in Appendix G.

Policy

Policy recommendations sometimes need to be more significant to fulfill. However, from my findings, participants repeatedly mentioned specific points suggesting that policymakers must consider them from the college, state, and federal levels. This section includes work authorization, a graduate assistantship as a safety net, and other professional development. If programs cannot provide full scholarships, faculty or administrators need to communicate realistic expectations with prospective international students in making informed decisions for enrollment.

Having exposure and experience in the educational field is crucial for EA students. Participants also appreciated the opportunities to work in the EA field, such as schools, district offices, or research projects. Programs should consider optional or mandatory internships for international students to learn about local school systems. International students would understand more course content and examples through on-site experience and hands-on practice from internships. Most participants had educational

experiences in K-12 or higher education back in their countries. However, not all students would have the same knowledge and concept of educational administration in the same EA programs. The prerequisite or foundation course requirement can also be made for all students. Matching students with related agencies related to their interests and career goals would be ideal. In the same way, providing teaching and research opportunities was one of the most talked about topics for doctoral students. Due to their focus on higher education, international students need related training and experience to prepare for their prospective careers. Lastly, differentiating Ed.D. and Ph.D. tracks for international students creates a better alignment in student and program expectations for degree objectives and career development.

Chapter Summary

This study explores the experiences of international doctoral students in Educational Administration programs in the United States. The study highlights the need for inclusive practices in higher education to support students from diverse backgrounds. The participants experienced significant differences between various contexts, including the strengths and weaknesses of the EA programs in pedagogies, advising, research, and careers. The themes that emerge in the results are as follows: Theme 1: Faculty intercultural understanding plays a vital role in international students' cultural adaptation and success; and Theme 2: Cultural differences in epistemologies and expectations added challenges and confusion. The study finds that cultural differences and American epistemology caused misalignment between international students and faculty expectations. The present study suggests that faculty designing inclusive practices in higher education for students from diverse backgrounds would be a way to support them.

I encourage EA faculty and programs to build more aspects of their curriculum, support, and expectations in recruiting international doctoral students. The study recommends a need for further research into the experiences of international students from different demographics, different conceptual and theoretical frameworks, or methodologies. EA programs and faculty should conduct need assessments, offer customized support, and embed inclusive practices. Policymakers could consider inclusive practices for international students in the EA programs.

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Appendix A: Online Survey Questions Alignment Matrix

Alignment with Research Question: Criterion Sampling

1. Are you an international student by status or culture (you may have citizenship but spent most of your time outside the U.S.)?
2. Are you enrolled in or graduated within five years from an Educational Administration doctoral program in Public and private higher education institutions?
3. Did you come to study in the U.S. after your undergraduate/bachelor studies?
4. Are you above 18 years old of age?
5. Do you consent to be in a video-recorded interview?

Survey After Confirming Participation

Alignment with Research Question: Participant Descriptions

1. What degree are you pursuing?
2. What is your gender identity?
3. What is your nationality (as listed on your passport)?
4. What is your country/country of origin (or the culture you relate to)?
5. Which race or ethnic group do you identify with?
6. What year of study are you in your program?
7. What is your first language?
8. Were you educated in English before coming to the U.S.?
9. List your home languages other than English below.

Appendix B: First Interview Question Alignment

Alignment with Research Question: What is the essence of international graduate students' experiences in EA programs in the U.S.?

Conceptual Frameworks: *Academics & Social Transitions*

Interview Questions

1. How do you define "inclusive higher education"?
2. Can you share examples of what your program is doing to be inclusive of international students?
3. What is your experience in the classroom?
    A. To what extent have you felt included in classroom instruction as an international student?
    B. Can you share examples of the moments when you felt included in classroom instruction?
    C. Can you share examples of the moments when you did not feel included in the classroom instruction?
4. Can you share examples of how your faculty interacted with you that made you feel included or excluded?
5. To what extent has your program prepared you for your future career?
6. What does your program's support for international students look like?
7. Provide some examples of internship or employment support in your program as an international student.
8. What recommendations do you have for your program to be inclusive for international students?
9. What would you suggest they do to improve?

Appendix C: Second Interview Questions Alignment

Alignment with Research Question: What is the essence of international graduate students' experiences in EA programs in the U.S.?

Conceptual Frameworks*: Finances & Mental Health*

Interview Questions

1. After the first interview, is there anything you want to add about your academic and social transitions?
2. Describe your **financial situation** while you are pursuing your doctoral degree. (Scholarships? Financial-Aids? Other)
    A. What else do you do to support your financial situation? If none, why not?
    B. What does your program provide to support your financial situation? If none, what resources did you hope you would receive from your program?
3. How is your **mental health** while pursuing your doctoral degree?
    A. What are some things that cause your stress? If not, what do you do to keep yourself mentally well?
    B. How do you cope with stress and maintain your mental health?
4. Do you want to add anything we must cover in the previous questions?

Appendix D: Third Interview Question Alignment

Conceptual Frameworks*: Inclusive Higher Education*

Interview Questions

1. After the first interview, is there anything you want to add about your mental health status or financial situation?
2. How do you define "**inclusive higher education**"?
3. Can you share examples of what your program is doing to be inclusive of international students? If none, what resources did you hope to see in your program?
4. To what extent has your program prepared you for your future **career**?
5. Have you applied for Curricular Practical Training (CPT)?
    i. If yes, why did you want to apply for CPT?
    ii. How was your experience with the administration process?
    iii. How was your CPT work experience?
    b. If not, why not?
        i. Would you like to apply for it in the future?
6. What has your program done to support you in finding internships/jobs? If none, what do you hope to see?
7. What does your **research** opportunity look like in your program?
8. Have you joined any research projects?
    a. If yes, please describe the experience.
    b. If not, why not? What would you hope to see in your program?
9. What is your program doing well to **support** you as an international doctoral student?
10. what could your program do to improve your experiences as an international doctoral student?
11. Any other thoughts that you would like to add?

Appendix E: Consent to Participate in Research

Study Title: A Phenomenological Study of International Doctoral Students' Experiences in Educational Administration Programs in the U.S.
IRBNet #: 1884293-1
Principal Investigator: Ping Robert, Doctoral Candidate
Faculty Sponsor: Lolita Tabron, Ph.D.
Study Site: Remote
Sponsor/Funding source: N/A
You are being asked to participate in a research study. Participation in this research study is voluntary, and you do not have to participate. This document contains important information about this study and what to expect if you experience it. Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether to participate.
The purpose of this form is to provide information that may affect your decision as to whether or not you want to participate in this research study. The research person will describe the study to you and answer your questions. Please read the information below and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether to give your permission to take part. If you choose to be involved in this study, this form will be used to record your consent.

Purpose

If you participate in this research study, you will be invited to my dissertation, "**A Phenomenological Study of International Doctoral Students' Experiences in Educational Administration Programs in the U.S."** The purpose of this study is to understand the voices and experiences of international doctoral students. Please share this invitation with the international doctoral students in your program or who may be eligible to participate. This phenomenological study aims to understand the experience of international doctoral students in the EA programs in the U.S.
This qualitative research uses phenomenology methodology to collect data via an online survey for volunteers to sign up for contact information. The online survey will take about 5-10 minutes. After confirming their eligibility, I will have **THREE** in-depth semi-structured online interviews with each international doctoral student participant in Educational Administration (EA) programs around the U.S. All the interviews will be video recorded on Zoom and transcribed into transcripts for data analysis.
Each interview will take about 50-60 minutes on Zoom, and all participants must digitally sign the consent form before taking the discussions.
Parts 1 and 2 of the interviews will focus on the student experience according to inclusive excellence in higher education classrooms. Part 3 will be the follow-up interviews to describe participants' experiences with their programs, academics, and social life.
The knowledge gained will contribute to my dissertation and 3-4 research articles for conferences and journal publications in support of international students in higher education and EA programs in the U.S. Also, the findings will inform practice and policies related to EA programs and U.S. higher education regarding supporting and serving international students.

Your participation will provide invaluable practice and experience in conducting qualitative research. However, participating in this research study is entirely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may skip any question and withdraw anytime. All the files will be coded into pseudonyms, and only I can access your contact information and real names. All the data will be destroyed five years after I graduate from DU.

Risks or Discomforts

Potential risks of being involved include the possibility that discussing specific issues about your experience may be upsetting. However, for most participants, the risks and discomfort may be minimal.

Benefits

The benefits of being involved in this study include being able to help student affairs practitioners create better systems of support for students after their experience as international students in the institution. Most people find the opportunity to share their experiences to be a positive and satisfying experience. If you would like a copy of the study results, I will gladly provide one.

Confidentiality of Information

I will treat all information gathered for this study as confidential. This means that only I will have access to the information you provide. The information that you provide in the survey will be handled confidentially. However, there may be circumstances where this information must be released or shared as required by law; for instance, you will harm yourself or others. Representatives from the University of Denver may also monitor the research records.

Limits to confidentiality

All of the information you provide will be confidential. However, suppose we learn that you intend to harm yourself or others, including, but not limited to, child or elder abuse/neglect, suicide ideation, or threats against others. In that case, we must report that to the authorities as the law requires.

Before you begin, please note that the data you provide may be collected and used by Qualtrics as per its privacy agreement. This research is only for U.S. residents over the age of 18. Please be mindful of responding privately and through a secured Internet connection for your privacy. Your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. Specifically, no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet by any third parties. Your name will not be used in any report. Identifiable research data will be password protected.

Your responses will be assigned a pseudonym. The list connecting your name to this code will be kept in an encrypted and password-protected file. Only the research team will have access to the file. The list will be destroyed when the study is completed and the data has been analyzed.

With your permission, I would like to videotape this interview to make an accurate transcript. You will create a pseudonym, or I can give you one to use in the interviews to protect your privacy. Your name will not be in the transcript or our notes. In other words, we will treat all information gathered for this project as confidential. Because of the nature of the data, it may be possible to deduce your identity; however, there will be no attempt to do so, and your data will be reported in a way that will not identify you.

Your name and identifying information will not be connected to your responses in this study. The online system will grant you credit when you submit your responses by separately submitting your Identity Code to the system. In contrast, the researcher sends your responses to a different database for retrieval.

The information that you provide in the study will be handled confidentially. However, there may be circumstances where this information must be released or shared as required by law. Representatives from the University of Denver may also monitor the research records.

Government or university staff sometimes review such studies to ensure they are done safely and legally. If this study is checked, your records may be examined. The reviewers will protect your privacy. The study records will not be used to put you at legal risk of harm.

Data Sharing

De-identified data from this study may be shared with the research community to advance science and health. We will remove or code any personal information (e.g., your name, date of birth) that could identify you before files are shared with other researchers to ensure that, by current scientific standards and known methods, no one will be able to identify you from the information or samples we share. Despite these measures, we cannot guarantee the anonymity of your data.

Incentives to participate.

You will receive USD$25 and enter a gift card lottery of two $ 25 gift cards for being in the study and will not be expected to pay any related costs. The gift card will be emailed to the winner after all the participants have finished their interviews which will take about 6-8 weeks from now.

Consent to video / audio recording solely for purposes of this research

This study involves video/audio recording. If you disagree to be recorded, you CANNOT participate in the study.

_____ YES, I agree to be video/audio recorded/photographed.

Questions

For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study, you may contact Ping Robert, ping.robert@du.edu, Educational Leadership & Policy Studies, University of Denver, or the faculty mentor, Dr. Lolita Tabron, Lolita.tabron@du.edu, Educational Leadership & Policy Studies, University of Denver.

If you are not satisfied with how this study is being conducted, or if you have any concerns, complaints, or general questions about the research or your rights as a participant, please get in touch with the University of Denver (DU) Institutional Review Board to speak to someone independent of the research team at 303-871-2121 or email at IRBAdmin@du.edu.

Signing the consent form: I have read (or someone has read to me) this form, and I know I am being asked to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and answer them satisfactorily. I agree to participate in this study.

I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. I will be given a copy of this form**.**

_____ _____ _____

The printed name of the subject	Signature of subject	Date

Appendix F: Visa Types of Participants

Types	Description
F-1	Student: academic, vocational
H-1B	It is for specialty occupations requiring highly specialized knowledge: To work in a specialty occupation. H-1B requires a higher education degree or its equivalent. It includes fashion models of distinguished merit and ability, government-to-government research and development, or co-production projects administered by the Department of Defense.
J-1	Exchange visitor
L-1	Intra-company transferee: To work at a branch, parent, affiliate, or subsidiary of the current employer in a managerial or executive capacity or a position requiring specialized knowledge. Individuals must have been employed by the same employer abroad continuously for one year within the three preceding years.
L-2	For the spouses of L-1 holders

Adapted from U.S. Department of State - Bureau of Consular Affairs. (n.d.).

Other Immigration Status

Permanent Residence: Having a Green Card (officially known as a Permanent Resident Card) allows you to live and work permanently in the United States. The steps to apply for a Green Card will vary depending on your situation (Green Card, 2022, July 11).

Appendix G: Recommendations for International Student Support in Academics & Research

1. Expand the curriculum and course content to global aspects. Include some case studies, theories, and options for students to learn about different educational systems outside the U.S.
2. Enrich conversations between domestic and international students by introducing their school systems and making them aware of the seminaries and differences. Invite international students to share their experiences and be patient with their responses.
3. Consider international students' English language proficiency and provide accommodations accordingly. Many cultures might not encourage students to approach faculty and ask for help; therefore, introducing the U.S. college culture to students and providing a guideline in the text would be helpful.
4. Have regular check-ins with international students in groups or one-on-one. Students may feel intimidated going to the office hours; however, when scheduled, they are more likely to address their concerns and challenges.
5. Arrange optional internships/work opportunities for international students to be in the local school systems and be familiar with the school or policy contexts.
6. Build a foundation course for EA 101 and introduce the basic notions, jargon, and structures of K-12 and higher education school systems.
7. Expand the scope of courses to higher education with seminars, workshops, and classes, while the programs may focus on K-12 school leadership. Many international students want to work in higher education.

8. Discuss research or study-abroad options with students and invite them to work alongside faculty. Plan the timeline of publications or presentations.
9. Train faculty and staff to be culturally responsive, empathetic, and have basic knowledge of the regulations of international students. Also, bring understanding to their considerations.
10. Be intentional in student grouping and incorporate international and domestic students' work. Sometimes "finding your partners" might create more divisions.

General Programming

1. Compile a student handbook that includes common topics such as culture, living needs, experiences, and tips for international students. The guide should be updated annually and have other students' insight.
2. Introduce and improve campus organizational culture and workflows. Many international students come from different backgrounds and must know how the offices work and email etiquette.
3. Organize international student events for all students to be involved and immersed in different cultures and awareness. These events may help break some myths among students, especially for specific racial or religious groups.
4. Engage students with meaningful field trips to schools or other offices for coursework and research.
5. Design support programs within the department, such as peer mentorship in which senior students meet with junior students and share tips. Also, student social and networking events will be helpful.

6. Have international faculty share their experience navigating graduate school life and other areas of knowledge in workshops or guest lectures. These topics serve international students and will also raise the understanding among different student groups to enhance their practices in the workforce.
7. Cultivate conversation techniques and check-in norms for faculty, staff, and students to be culturally responsive.

Financial Support

1. Have continued funding to secure Graduate Assistantships for international doctoral students. Consider inflation and increase the stipend accordingly.
2. Compile resources and lists of fellowships, scholarships, and grants for international students. Campus resources such as free software or apps are also helpful.
3. Provide resources on money-saving tips such as pantries, donations, or thrift stores. Having a used textbook exchange/buy-and-sell bulletin board could help save money for students.
4. Incorporate events with free food to increase participation and support students practically. Pizza may be easy but might not be international students' favorite or does not fit into their dietary restrictions. Having food diversity is also an inclusive practice.
5. Enhance student ability to apply for grants, fellowships, and scholarships.

Mental Health

1. Break the myth of seeking mental health support. Introduce the need for mental health and talk therapy for graduate students.

2. Promote emotional wellness and self-care while many doctoral students could be stressed and burnt out.
3. Be more proactive when talking to international students and asking them how they are.
4. Consider having regular support groups or focus groups for international students to talk about their experience within the program and provide follow-up support.

Career Support

1. Establish a timeline and tips for publication, working experiences, and job search.
2. Engage faculty and staff to know international students' working limitations.
3. Provide CV reviews due to the different fields' norms. Campus career resources might not all fit EA programs.
4. Host or co-host networking events and resources such as newsletters, listservs of possible hiring sites for international students, and international student career fairs.
5. Organize workshops on work culture or EA-related experiences and market trends with the understanding of international students' options, such as Curricular Practical Training (CPT) and Optional Practical Training (OPT).
6. Partner with different offices on-campus or off-campus to create internships and engage international students' work experience in administration, research, or teaching.
7. Incorporate teaching experience for those who want to be in academia, even when it is unpaid.