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Navigating a New Culture: Analyzing Variables that Influence Intensive  
English Program Students' Cultural Adjustment Process

Sherie Lyn Kwok

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

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## ABSTRACT

### Navigating a New Culture: Analyzing Variables that Influence Intensive English Program Students' Cultural Adjustment Process

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Master of Arts

Research has documented cultural adjustment as an important issue influencing international students and other sojourners in their success abroad (Foster, 1962; Lysgaard, 1955; Oberg, 1960; Smalley, 1963). Few studies, however, have investigated particular variables influencing the cultural adjustment process of ESL learners enrolled in intensive English programs (IEPs). This mixed method study was designed to better understand the individual complexity of IEP learners' cultural adjustment by looking for patterns of variables that aid or hinder these students' experiences. Using the Culture Shock Questionnaire (CSQ), Index of Social Sojourners Support Survey (ISSS), and language-specific focus groups, this study investigated the individual cultural adjustment experiences of Chinese, Korean, Portuguese, and Spanish-speaking students enrolled in an intensive English program attached to a large private university in the United States. Statistically significant results were found when comparing students' demographic variables with the survey results. Students who identified themselves as having high levels of social support were more likely to experience low levels of culture shock. While, female students were more likely to experience higher levels of culture shock compared to male students. Additionally, qualitative data gathered from the open-ended survey questions and focus groups revealed three common variables that appeared to aid as well as hinder the students' cultural adjustment process: social support, self, and environment. Findings from this research have implications for the development of cultural adjustment training materials which might aid ESL students attending intensive English programs in the United States in their cultural adjustment process.

Keywords: cultural adjustment, acculturation, culture shock, IEP, ESL

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE PAGE .....	i
ABSTRACT .....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
LIST OF TABLES .....	viii
CHAPTER ONE .....	1
Introduction .....	1
CHAPTER TWO .....	5
Review of Literature.....	5
Background .....	5
Defining Cultural Adjustment.....	5
Factors Affecting Culture Shock .....	8
Culture Shock Questionnaire .....	10
Index of Social Sojourner Support.....	12
Open-Ended Questions and Focus Groups .....	13
Research Questions .....	14
CHAPTER THREE .....	15
Research Design.....	15
Participants.....	15

Instruments .....	16
Qualtrics Survey.....	16
Focus Groups .....	16
Procedures.....	17
Analysis.....	22
Quantitative Data .....	22
Qualitative Data .....	22
Inter-Rater Reliability.....	23
CHAPTER FOUR.....	24
Results.....	24
Research Question #1: Quantitative Data Analysis .....	24
Research Question #2 – Part A: Qualitative Data Gathered from Open-Ended &	
Focus Group Responses.....	26
Social Support.....	26
Open-Ended Responses .....	27
Focus Group Responses.....	28
Self.....	28
Open-Ended Responses .....	29
Focus Group Responses.....	29
Environment.....	29

Open-Ended Responses .....	30
Focus Group Responses .....	30
Quantitative Data Gathered from Open-Ended Responses.....	30
Research Question #2 – Part B: Qualitative Data Gathered from Open-Ended & Focus Group Responses .....	32
Environment.....	33
Open-Ended Responses .....	33
Focus Group Responses .....	34
Self .....	34
Open-Ended Responses .....	35
Focus Group Responses .....	35
Negative Social Support & Relationships.....	36
Open-Ended Responses .....	36
Focus Group Responses .....	37
Quantitative Data Gathered From Open-Ended Responses.....	37
Discussion .....	39
Language Proficiency .....	39
Age .....	41
Length of Sojourn .....	41
L1 .....	42

Gender.....	42
Social Support.....	43
Variables IEP Students’ Stated That Aided or Hindered Cultural Adjustment .....	44
Social Support.....	44
Self .....	47
Environment.....	48
Implications .....	49
CHAPTER FIVE .....	51
Conclusion.....	51
Limitations .....	51
Suggestions for Future Research.....	53
Conclusion.....	54
REFERENCES .....	55
Appendix A.....	63
Appendix B.....	65
Appendix C .....	67
Appendix D.....	68
Appendix E .....	70
Appendix F.....	72

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Variables Influencing Cultural Adjustment.....	25
Table 2: Factors Aiding Students' Cultural Adjustment Process .....	26
Table 3: Social Support Factors Aiding Students' Cultural Adjustment.....	27
Table 4: Self Factors Aiding Students' Cultural Adjustment.....	28
Table 5: Environment Factors Aiding Students' Cultural Adjustment.....	30
Table 6: Factors Aiding Well-Adjusted & Ill-Adjusted Learners' Cultural Adjustment .	31
Table 7: Factors Hindering Students' Cultural Adjustment Process .....	33
Table 8: Environment Factors Hindering Students' Cultural Adjustment.....	33
Table 9: Self Factors Hindering Students' Cultural Adjustment.....	35
Table 10: Negative Social Support & Relationship Factors Hindering Students' Cultural Adjustment.....	36
Table 11: Qualitative Factors that Hindered Well-adjusted & Ill-adjusted Learners' Cultural Adjustment.....	37

## CHAPTER ONE

### **Introduction**

Lauren,<sup>1</sup> an ESL instructor at an intensive English program (IEP) in the United States had students in her class from South America, Asia, and the Middle East. Her goal was to help her students learn English so they could either score high enough on the TOEFL to enter an English-medium university or increase their English ability so they could receive a higher paying job in their home country. During the first few weeks of school, Lauren noticed a drastic difference between two of her students who had recently arrived at the school. While one seemed to be adjusting well to his new environment, the other was not. Although both of these Middle Eastern ESL students arrived in the U.S. around the same time, one had adapted to his new environment with little trouble, while the other was struggling to adapt in multiple ways. While the first student participated consistently in class, the second student frequently left in the middle of class, returning right before the class ended, missing half of the class period. While the first student did fine on his daily quizzes in the class, the other student constantly talked with his neighbors and inappropriately asked the teacher if his answers were correct during the quiz. While the first student was respectful to the instructor and followed classroom instructions, the other often ignored the teachers' instructions and openly told the teacher he did not respect them. After talking with the student multiple times about his unacceptable behavior and researching the student's cultural background more, Lauren found that much of the reason for the second student's classroom behavior was centered around cross-cultural difficulties. She soon discovered that the student frequently missed class because he was struggling to learn how to use American toilets. He struggled to follow rules during testing, because he had come from a

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<sup>1</sup> Based on a true story. Name was changed to keep anonymity

culture where testing was considered group work and he did not understand the educational differences in the American classroom. He admitted to having a hard time respecting and following the teacher's instructions because he had never had a woman in charge of him before. While Lauren had been trained to deal with language issues in the class, she had not been trained on how to deal with cultural issues. In reading about general cultural adjustment models described in the culture shock literature, Lauren understood that her student was in a phase of the cultural adjustment process typically identified as "culture shock" (Oberg, 1960). This general information, however, did not provide her with the resources she needed to help her student appropriately adjust. She sought to know why two seemingly similar students were clearly having very different adjustment experiences. Why was one of her students flourishing in this new environment while the other was struggling to adapt? What factors were hindering this student's ability to adapt to the new culture?

This instructor's story may be like that of many other ESL instructors who teach international students studying English in the United States. While they may be able to identify which students appear to be well-adjusted to their new environment and which students are not, they may not know what variables are impacting their students' adjustment status. With large numbers of international students attending U.S. universities, it is likely that this type of cultural adjustment problem may affect more students. Open Doors (2017) reports that in 2016/17, U.S. colleges and universities hosted more than one million international students, just over five percent of the more than twenty million students enrolled in U.S. higher education, thus marking the eleventh consecutive year of continued expansion of the total number of international students in U.S. higher education. Eighty-five percent more international students are studying at U.S. colleges and universities than was reported a decade ago (Open Doors, 2017). This strong

growth confirms that the U. S. remains a key destination for international students pursuing degrees in post-secondary education. The Institute of International Education's President states,

International experience is one of the most important components of a 21st century education. Studying abroad is one of the best ways undergraduate and graduate students gain the international experience necessary to succeed in today's global workforce. Studying in another country prepares students to be real contributors to working across borders to address key issues in the world we share (Open Doors, 2015, p. 1).

When studying abroad, however, international students face a series of transitional difficulties affecting academic, social, and professional success (Madden-Dent, 2014). Not only is the language different, but students must study in a completely different educational and cultural context (Berry & Williams, 2004). As the numbers of international students increase, it will be necessary for university staff, instructors, and international-student service professionals to understand the challenges students may experience and to realize what factors influence positive cultural adjustment experiences (Feng, 1991). Research has shown that foreign students studying abroad often face more challenges than just learning a foreign language (Beusaert, Grohnert, Kommers, Niemantsverdriet, & Rienties, 2012; Gebhard, 2012; Portela-Myers, 2008).

Past research has shown that the bigger the difference is between the host culture and the home culture, the more difficult the process of adjustment and cross-cultural adaptation is, and the longer it will take sojourners to become acclimated to their new environment (Beusaert et al., 2012; Zuo, 2015). Research has also identified general patterns that learners' experience in their cultural adjustment processes (Foster, 1962; Lysgaard, 1955; Oberg, 1960; Smalley, 1963). Unfortunately, these general models do not examine specific factors that may affect individual learners' cultural adjustment process, leading to some important questions. Are there key factors

that learners identify as having a dramatic impact on their ability to effectively adjust to their new environment, both inside and outside the language classroom? What are the factors that aid and influence positive cultural adjustment experiences?

This study has two main goals. The first is to identify strong individual factors that separate IEP learners into those who would be classified as well-adjusted versus ill-adjusted. The second goal of the study is to identify common themes expressed by participants regarding those factors that specifically aid or hinder the students' adjustment processes. These findings might then be used to create a foundation for cultural adjustment training materials that in the future could help ESL administrators, teachers, and student-services personnel understand and facilitate the unique challenges their students experience and what factors aid their cultural adjustment.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Review of Literature**

#### **Background**

The purpose of this literature review is to provide a contextualized understanding of cultural adjustment and why it is an important element that needs to be further researched. First, this section will provide definitions of cultural adjustment. Next, there is some discussion regarding factors that have been identified as affecting cultural adjustment. A discussion of the importance of the Culture Shock Questionnaire (CSQ) (Mumford, 1998) and the Index of Social Sojourner Support Survey (ISSS) (Ong & Ward, 2005) in relation to this research will follow. The CSQ is a survey instrument designed to provide quantitative data on respondents' cultural adjustment status. The ISSS is a survey instrument designed to provide quantitative data on the level and type of social support sojourners experience. Finally, the gap in the research field, and how this research aims to fill that gap, will be discussed.

#### **Defining Cultural Adjustment**

Brislin (2009) describes culture as “the sum of many diverse elements, including beliefs, values, norms, taboos, and attitudes” (Brislin, 2009). These diverse elements may stem from the social interactions within the environment in which one lives and appear to guide the individuals appropriate social behavior and interaction. Culture can also shape the expectations people have in judging the appropriateness of social behavior and communication. Since culture provides its members a framework, “to both enact and construe meanings, people from different cultures will perceive and interpret others' behaviors in different ways” (DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2016, p. 17).

Traveling abroad is one way for individuals to be placed in a new social environment

within a new cultural group where they are faced with people who identify with beliefs, traditions, values, and thoughts that may differ from their own. According to Shaules (2007), those traveling abroad may have one of two experiences—intercultural contact or intercultural adaptation. Someone traveling overseas for a short period of time will briefly observe the new environment and culture, thus experiencing intercultural contact. One, who lives in a foreign country for an extended period of time, sometimes referred to as a sojourner, may adapt to these cultural differences on a more permanent basis in a process known as intercultural adaptation (Shaules, 2007). Students who travel abroad to study for an extended time period will experience this adaptation process through being faced with a different educational and cultural context (Berry & Williams, 2004, p. 118). In describing the process a sojourner experiences adapting to a new cultural environment, research has used the following terms: *cultural adjustment process*, *cultural adaptation*, *acculturation*, *sojourner adjustment*, *cross-cultural adjustment*, and *culture shock*. This paper will use the term *cultural adjustment process* to represent the process a sojourner experiences.

Several models have been developed that explain the process a sojourner experiences when adapting to a new culture (Gabriel, 2008, p. 19). These models can be said to focus on defining the specific stages that sojourner's experience when adapting to a new cultural ecology. Lysgaard (1955) first described the stages of sojourners' adjustment process with the idea of the U-shaped curve. He concluded that people go through three phases: initial adjustment, crisis, and regained adjustment. Further research conducted by Foster (1962) and Smalley (1963) supported the U-curve model. In 1960, Oberg coined the term "culture shock" and defined it as "the anxiety that results from losing all of our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse" as cited by (Gabriel, 2008, p. 177). He explained sojourners' adaptation process in terms of four

stages: honeymoon, culture shock, recovery, and adjustment. Gullabom and Gullabom (1963) found that once sojourners returned to their home country, they often underwent a similar re-acculturation process that expanded the idea of the U-curve model and produced the double U or W model of culture shock. Over the years, many versions of the W-shaped model have appeared in literature.

A principle of the “adjustment curve theorists is that sojourners will undergo a period of adjustment that is predictable for virtually everyone” (Gabriel, 2008, p.12). However, this etic approach to studying cultural adjustment, suggests looking at cultural adjustment from an outside perspective. An etic approach refers to looking at individual cultural adjustment experiences from a universal perspective rather than looking at it within cultural groups. This view has caused other researchers to question the developed models. Some researchers suggest that the U and W curve theories are weak, overgeneralized, or inconclusive (Becker; 1968; Breitenbach, 1970; Church, 1982; Fleck & Spaulding, 1976; Gabriel, 2008;). Becker’s research (1968) specifically argues that there is not a honeymoon stage in all sojourner adjustment. He also found that the U-Curve hypothesis might be more applicable for sojourners from Europe than from third world countries. Hull and Klineburg (1979), in their study of foreign students to the United States from eleven different countries, found that while depression does occur in some cases, it does not occur in all sojourners from all cultures. Gabriel’s research (2008) identified another limitation these previously developed universal models share about sojourners’ adjustment process by pointing out that “many sojourners never make it past the first stage of the model while others only progress to certain stages and then develop no further” (p. 21). While models, such as Oberg’s Four Stages, the U-Shaped curve, and the W-shaped curve help define general steps a sojourner may experience while adjusting, they fail to help administrators and teachers

really understand some of the unique and individual challenges ESL learners may experience. It is therefore, necessary for research to include the study of individual factors in order to achieve more practically-applicable constructs that can lead to prediction and prevention of cultural adjustment difficulty (Benson, 1978).

### **Factors Affecting Culture Shock**

In the 1980's, Hammer turned away from looking at the stages sojourners experience and focused on identifying factors that were important to what he called "intercultural effectiveness." His work identified the management of psychological stress, effective communication, and the ability to establish interpersonal relationships as skills that aided sojourners in their adaptation process (Hammer, 1987). More researchers followed his approach by turning away from identifying models of sojourners stages of acculturation to focusing their research instead on identifying factors that aid or hinder a sojourner's cultural adjustment. Abe and Wiseman (1983) replicated Hammer's research and expanded his results from three to five dimensions of intercultural effectiveness: interpersonal communication, adjustment to different cultures, adjustment to different societal systems, establishment of interpersonal relationships, and ability to understand others.

Hammer's (1987) research was initially designed to investigate cultural adjustment factors from an emic approach. In an emic approach, cultural adjustment would be analyzed by looking at factors within the specific cultural group. This means identifying unique variables that affect individual sojourner experiences within cultural group. Later replications of his study, which used different cultural populations of students, concluded that the factors he identified could be generalized to other cultures (Abe & Wiseman, 1983; Gudykunst & Hammer, 1984; Gudykunst, Hammer, & Wiseman, 1978; Hammer, 1987). Mendenhall and Oddou (1985)

identified four universal dimensions of acculturation in their research. These dimensions were the self-oriented dimension, the interpersonal relationship dimension, the perceptual dimension, and the cultural toughness dimension. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, more researchers classified cross-cultural adjustment into two types; psychological and sociocultural (Armes & Ward, 1989; Kennedy & Ward, 1992, 1993, 1994; Searle & Ward, 1990, 1991). While universal generalizations have a place in the research field, “the concern with the etic approach is that it can lead to stereotyping and overgeneralization” (DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2016, p. 19). An etic approach to analyzing cultural adjustment processes fails to capture specifics of cultural adjustment, which may be descriptive of particular demographics. In order to “help international students smoothly adapt to American culture, and universities in particular, university personnel and international student service professionals must realize that international students have common adaptation problems and, importantly they also have problems peculiar to their own cultural groups” (Feng, 1991, p. 15). It is unrealistic to assume that students from a myriad of cultural backgrounds experience their personal trajectories the same way. The generalization of past studies suggest further research is needed that includes research into specific individual-level variables that affect sojourners’ cultural adjustment processes within cultural groups. Gabriel (2008) indicated “that further studies are needed to determine culture specific or culture general indicators” (p. 29).

This study, along with other modern studies, attempts to do just that by looking at sojourners’ cultural adjustment by investigating individual student’s experiences with cultural adjustment within a defined cultural group. Some studies have focused on investigating specific populations of international students such as Asian international students studying in universities abroad (Berliner & Yan, 2009; Brown & Huang, 2009; Holmes, 2004; McLeod, 2009; Skyrme,

2007; Yu, 2013; Zhang, 2013). Other studies have focused on different populations of international students studying at universities specifically in the U.S. (Buck, 2001; Edwards-Joseph, 2009; Li, 2000; Zuo, 2015). Within this field, there is a plethora of research that focuses on investigating the demographic characteristics of sojourners. These variables include: language proficiency, nationality, age, gender, marital status, cultural empathy, self-efficacy, social connectedness, length of sojourn, and previous cross-cultural experience (Buck, 2001; Gebhard, 2012; Li, 2000; Portela-Myers, 2008). This field of study needs more research on individual sojourner experiences to see if there are patterns of variables that positively aid cultural adjustment. Focusing on learner variables is essential to help us more fully understand the unique challenges ESL students may experience. The information gained from this research might help create an improved framework for cultural adjustment training that will ultimately help educators and administrators recognize what challenges and difficulties students are facing and what they can do to aid their students in their cultural adjustment process.

### **Culture Shock Questionnaire**

The goal of this descriptive study is to help researchers better understand the individual complexity of cultural adjustment by identifying patterns of sojourner experience in an intensive English program in the U.S. In an attempt to isolate individual variables that influence sojourners' cultural adjustment and to better understand sojourners individual adjustment process, research in this area has frequently used questionnaires (Gabriel, 2008; Portela-Myers, 2008). In order to gather quantitative data on student's individual cultural adaptation experience, researchers have used questionnaires that specifically identify sojourners' cultural adjustment status. The questionnaires on cultural adjustment status within this field of research range from cultural specific to universal cultural adjustment questionnaires. Since multiple nationalities were

represented in this study, a universal questionnaire on cultural adjustment was chosen. The first section of the questionnaire used in this study included questions from the Culture Shock Questionnaire (CSQ), originally developed by Mumford in 1998.

Mumford's (1998) CSQ specifically identifies students' level of adjustment to their new environment by identifying the level of culture shock they are currently experiencing. Throughout the research field "the concept of culture shock has been established as an unavoidable part of the transition into a new cultural environment" (Portela-Myers, 2008, p. 30). Thus, it is an inevitable part of sojourners' and international students' experience. However, "it is common for people experiencing culture shock not to be aware of it" (p. 30). Hence, this questionnaire serves as a tool to identify what level of culture shock sojourners are currently experiencing. The specialized questions identify if participants are experiencing specific difficulties associated with culture shock, or if they show that they no longer experience these difficulties and therefore are more adjusted to their new environment. The main questions were derived directly from the six aspects of culture shock delineated by Taft (1977). The questionnaire consists of twelve Likert-type questions with three possible answers for each one (see Appendix A). The scale contains seven core culture shock items—such as "do you feel strain from the effort to adapt to a new culture?"—and five interpersonal stress items—such as "do you feel anxious or awkward when meeting local people?" (Portela-Myers, 2008, p. 47). In addition to culture shock items, the questionnaire also includes items about stress due to the reality "that any important life transition will likely result in stress and discomfort" (p. 32). The CSQ has been a validated instrument used to identify participants' level of culture shock by researchers for the past twenty years (Gabriel, 2008; Portela-Myers, 2008). According to Mumford (1998), the reliability analysis on the seven core culture shock items yielded a

Cronbach's coefficient of 0.75. The reliability analysis for the five interpersonal stress items yielded a Cronbach's coefficient of 0.52. The five interpersonal stress items were individually significantly correlated with the culture shock score. A reliability coefficient on the twelve items yielded a Cronbach's coefficient of 0.79. Each of the three possible answers for each item on the CSQ receives a score which is then totaled by " summing the points for each answer, which produces a range of scores" (Portela-Myers, 2008, p. 48). The range of scores is 12-26. Lower scores show that participants are experiencing a higher level of culture shock and are therefore less-adjusted to their new environment. Higher scores show that participants are experiencing a lower level of culture shock and are therefore more adjusted to their new environment. The 12 multiple-choice questions provide Likert-scale data that place respondents on a spectrum of ill-adjusted to well-adjusted. The CSQ was used in this study to provide data that would divide the participants into two populations: ill-adjusted and well-adjusted.

### **Index of Social Sojourner Support**

Another approach to studying cultural adjustment has been the use of questionnaires to isolate specific variables that may affect the adjustment process. The following variables have been noted throughout literature as being significant to cultural adjustment: age, gender, nationality, social support, length of sojourn, and language proficiency. The demographic and CSQ data gathered in this study provided insight into all of these variables except for social support. Social support can be defined as "the mechanisms by which interpersonal relationships presumably protect people from the deleterious effects of stress" (Kessler, Price, & Wortman, 1985, p. 541). In order to research this area, a second instrument, the Index of Social Sojourner Support (ISSS), was used. This scale was originally developed by Ong and Ward (2005) to measure sojourner's social support and incorporate "both the theory of social support and the

particularities of the construct to sojourners” (Portela-Myers, 2008, p. 42). The ISSS index consists of eighteen, five-point Likert-type questions ranging from 1 (no support) to 5 (high level of support). This index provides students the opportunity to rate their socio-emotional support and instrumental support experiences related to cultural adjustment (see Appendix B for the ISSS). The higher scores in this index relate to a strong social support system.

The construction and validation of the ISSS index were based on three phases of a study conducted by Ong and Ward (2005). The first phase produced 64 questionnaire items. The second phase aimed to eliminate inappropriate items and produced the final ISS index, while the third phase was used for cross-validation of the instrument. According to Ong and Ward’s research, there are four main supportive behaviors in social support: emotional support, social companionship, tangible assistance, and informational support. They describe emotional support as displays of love, care, concern, and sympathy. Social companionship relates to belongingness to a social group that provides company for a variety of activities. Tangible assistance portrays a concrete form of help through physical services, material aid, or finances. Lastly, informational support refers to communicating opinions and advice regarding current personal difficulty (Ong & Ward, 2005). The ISSS instrument was created based on the previously mentioned multidimensional understanding of the social support construct. The ISSS index was included as an instrument in this study to provide data that would place participants on a spectrum of low to high social support.

### **Open-Ended Questions and Focus Groups**

The majority of studies conducted on sojourners’ cultural adjustment experiences have included both questionnaires and focus groups or interviews. According to recommendations of previous research (Huang, Leng, & Zhang, 2018; Portela-Myers, 2008), the collection of data for

this study took place in two stages. Multiple researchers advocate the study of cultural adaptation from the point of view of those experiencing it. These studies have shown that one of the most effective means for carrying out research on sojourners' individual perspectives should involve the use of open-ended questions and focus groups or one-on-one interviews. These instruments are used to provide participants an opportunity to express additional attitudes, feelings, and factors affecting their individual cultural adjustment experiences studying at an intensive English program. Open-ended questions and focus groups were included in this study for the purpose of obtaining qualitative data that the quantitative data does not provide. The combination of quantitative methods with separate qualitative methods resulted in methodological triangulation that served to strengthen the validity of this mixed-method research.

### **Research Questions**

The following questions were investigated in this study:

1. Are there strong individual factors that separate IEP learners into those who would be classified as well-adjusted or ill-adjusted within their new environment?
2. What do IEP students identify as factors that (a), aid or (b), hinder their cultural adjustment process?

## CHAPTER THREE

### **Research Design**

This section will describe the study participants, the survey instruments used, the data collection procedures followed in implementing the survey and follow-up focus groups, and a description of the mixed method analysis performed on the data. There were two parts to the data analysis. First, a quantitative analysis was performed on the survey data. Then, a qualitative analysis was conducted on the open-ended response questions in the survey and comments obtained from the focus groups held with small groups of the participants (organized by language group).

### **Participants**

Of the 214 English as a Second Language (ESL) students attending Brigham Young University's intensive English program, a total of 167 students (78%) completed a Qualtrics survey designed to assess their level of cultural adjustment. The participants ranged in age from 18 to 64 years old. The mean was 25, the median was 23 and the mode was 21. These numbers help to identify that the majority of participants were in their early twenties. As to gender, 87 subjects (52.1%) were female and 80 (47.9%) were male. These students also came from a variety of different countries with the total number of L1s: Spanish (70%), Portuguese (12%), Chinese (10%), and Korean (8%). Students who spoke these languages were targeted for the survey because these four language groups account for nearly all the students attending BYU's ELC (78%), as well as a majority of IEP students studying nationwide (Institute of International Education, 2015). Twenty additional questionnaires were completed in English by students who spoke languages other than those listed above (e.g. Mongolian, Japanese, Russian, Hungarian). However, since providing native language translations of the survey for these additional students

was beyond the scope of this study, their responses were not used in calculating the results. Twenty-seven additional questionnaires—which were incomplete due to technical issues—were also not used in calculating the results in this phase of the study.

## **Instruments**

### **Qualtrics Survey**

The first instrument used for data collection was a Qualtrics survey administered online to the ELC students. The survey consisted of three sections totaling thirty-five questions. The first section included the original questions from Mumford's (1998) CSQ. The second section of the questionnaire included the original questions from the Index of Social Sojourner Support (ISSS) scale originally developed by Ong and Ward (2005). The third section included four open-ended questions that were created by the principal investigator in order to provide participants an opportunity to express additional attitudes, feelings, and variables affecting the students' individual cultural adjustment experience in studying in an intensive English program in the United States (see Appendix C for the open-ended questions used in the survey). These three open-ended questions were created and included for the purpose of obtaining qualitative data that the previous questions did not provide. After the questionnaire was compiled, it was translated into Chinese, Korean, Portuguese, and Spanish by volunteer independent translators. The translators collaborated with the survey creator on the meaning of individual items to ensure that the translations provided were not just direct word-for-word translations, but culturally and etymologically sound.

### **Focus Groups**

The second method used in the study was focus groups. After analyzing and categorizing the results from the questionnaire, questions for the focus group were created based on the

emerging picture of the IEP students' individual experiences with cultural adjustment. Based on the responses to the open-ended questions, the focus group questions were formed to gather more detailed data from each language group in stage two of the research. These focus group questions were formed to further probe students' experiences with cultural adjustment. Questions were adapted from the questionnaire and also various interview models available in the cultural adjustment literature (Buck, 2001; Portela-Myers, 2008).

After students were grouped into those labeled as well-adjusted and ill-adjusted, an invitation to participate in a language specific focus group was sent by ELC administration via student email. A total of 42 students who had previously completed the questionnaire were recruited from BYU's ELC to participate in the focus groups. This group of participants represented 25% of the questionnaire respondents. Four focus groups were conducted and audio recorded, one in each of the language groups participating in the study: Chinese ( $n=12$ ), Korean ( $n=9$ ), Portuguese ( $n=8$ ), and Spanish ( $n=13$ ). In each focus group, an English speaker conducted the session along with a translator who communicated in the participants' first language (L1) what was said in English. Participants had the option of responding in their native language or English.

## **Procedures**

This research took place in two stages. The first stage of data collection took place through an online questionnaire that was administered to all IEP students at the ELC during the eleventh week of the Fall, 2017 semester. Permission was obtained from BYU's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to collect data from these students regarding their cultural adjustment experiences. The questionnaire, which included a modified consent form, was translated into Chinese, Korean, Spanish, and Portuguese, by volunteer translators who were proficient in both

English and the additional language. Once the translations had been prepared, the survey was piloted with native speakers of each of the four languages. The purpose of the pilot was for respondents to identify any items that were unclear in regards to translation. After completing the pilot, a few minor adjustments were made in the word choice and presentation of a few individual items. For example, a word originally translated from English to Korean was noted to be a direct translation which led to a confusing statement. The word was changed to improve the clarity and keep the integrity of the meaning of the original statement.

Following the first pilot, the questionnaire was subsequently piloted in two classes at the ELC. The purpose of this pilot was to identify any issues with administering the survey within the institution, such as broken Internet links or other computer related issues. After the second pilot was completed, it was noted that out of the thirty surveys taken, only three responses were recorded. The researcher identified broken Internet links and technical issues that caused the respondents results to not be recorded and made the necessary changes in order to record students' responses accurately. No changes in the wording of questions were needed as a result of this pilot.

After completing both pilot studies, the questionnaire was sent by the ELC administration via student email to all remaining students at the ELC, eleven weeks into the fall semester. Teachers at the ELC administered the computer survey in their classes on an online platform. During class, each student had access to a computer and were able to complete the survey electronically through the online link sent to their individual student email account. Students who were absent on the day the survey was administered were invited to complete the survey electronically through the online survey link sent to their student email. Participants were given two weeks to complete the survey. To increase the number of responses, emails were sent via the survey software.

Prior to participation, students were required to read a modified waiver of consent form embedded as a cover sheet to the survey. This consent form included a brief summary of benefits, risks, and the rights of research subjects. It informed participants that completing the survey constituted permission for the data they provided to be included in the research study (see Appendix D). The subjects were also informed that the researcher and the school were interested in knowing more about their cultural adjustment experiences as ELC students, and that the survey would aid in improving the school, administration, and teachers' understanding of their unique perspective. Participants had to agree to the waiver of consent in order to be granted access to the survey. Students were also informed that if they did not feel comfortable answering the survey in English, they had the option of completing the questionnaire in Chinese, Korean, Portuguese, or Spanish. After removing responses that were incomplete or not completed in the previously mentioned languages, a total of 167 completed questionnaire surveys were collected for data analysis.

Following the two-week period that participants had to complete the questionnaires, data from the first portion of the survey were analyzed in order to place participants on a spectrum of well-adjusted to ill-adjusted, based on their first language groups. Students who were shown to be at either end of the spectrum were invited via student email to participate in the second stage of the study: volunteer focus groups. Due to feasibility issues in conducting focus groups in multiple languages, participants for the focus groups were limited to native speakers of Chinese, Korean, Portuguese, and Spanish. Since there were below twenty questionnaire respondents in each of the three language groups (Chinese, Korean, and Portuguese), all students in these groups were invited to participate in the focus group that corresponded to their L1. A total of forty-two students collectively participated in the focus groups.

Four focus groups were conducted and audio recorded at the institution where the research was carried out, one in each native language of the respondents (Chinese, Korean, Portuguese, and Spanish). In each focus group, an English speaker conducted the session with a translator present who communicated the material in the students' native language. In addition to the participants, only the interviewer, volunteer translator, and respondents were present. The researcher conducted three of the four focus groups and trained an interviewer to conduct the Spanish focus group. The translators were volunteer university students who were proficient in the target language and English and who were not teachers of the student participants. This was done in an effort to increase students' confidentiality and allow them to speak freely about their experiences. Each focus group lasted approximately thirty minutes. The focus group questions were translated into the respondents' native language so participants could respond either in English or their native language. If participants spoke in their native language, then responses were translated back to English so the audio recording had every comment in English for later transcription. This process was used so students could respond in their native language and all conversation and feelings could be easily expressed. Before the focus groups began, participants read and signed a consent form that notified them of the risks, benefits of the research study, and requested permission for the researchers to use data collected in the interview (see Appendix E). Participants were also informed that the researcher was interested in learning more about their experiences living in the United States and studying in an intensive English program. In order to preserve anonymity, every respondent was asked to refrain from using their or other participant names during the focus group recording. The first focus group was considered a pilot in which the researcher validated a list of focus group questions to later be used in the language specific focus groups. Following the pilot study, the number of questions asked were reduced from

twelve to eight in order to ensure that each focus group only lasted a total of thirty minutes. The focus group format was not significantly altered following the pilot focus group, so data collected from this session was included in the data analysis portion of the study.

The focus group leader began by asking respondents about the educational culture they experienced before coming to the U.S. The interviewer then proceeded to ask the respondents questions about their cultural adjustment experiences, first in the English Language Center (ELC), and then outside the ELC. The questioning followed a basic autobiographical format (see Appendix F), followed by additional probing from the interviewer when necessary for greater clarity or detail. After individual responses were given, the interviewer asked each respondent to express his or her opinion to see if there were similar or different responses within the language group. The interviewer used a blackboard to capture the students' responses in order to help categorize the respondents' answers. The interviewer also had students vote which categories were of greater difficulty, ease, or importance to them regarding their individual cultural adjustment process. This task required the interviewer to make a list on the board and write the number of respondents that agreed with the statement. The purpose of this exercise was to elicit data on how these responses were generally accepted within the group to see if the experiences and variables identified were individual or shared by everyone within the language group.

After the collection of the focus group data, the audio recordings were transcribed into English. Pictures were taken of the blackboard at the end of the focus group sessions for further analysis. Participation in the focus groups was voluntary. Those who participated were later treated to either an ice cream or pizza party at the conclusion of the study.

## **Analysis**

### **Quantitative Data**

Qualitative data were collected using a Qualtrics survey—an online research software tool for gathering data from a large pool of subjects. A linear regression analysis was then run on these data in order to determine if there was a meaningful relationship between students' cultural adjustment status and social support network, age, gender, length of sojourn, L1, and proficiency level. The results of this analysis led to preliminary conclusions about variables that significantly impacted IEP students' cultural adjustment. The CSQ results were also broken down into quartiles in an attempt to identify participants that were well-adjusted (scores higher than the third quartile) or ill-adjusted to their new environment (scores lower than the first quartile). Quartiles were used as a statistical way to divide the participants into four groups in order to identify which participants were on either end of the culture shock spectrum. In order to further test these hypotheses through a mixed method approach, data from the questionnaire's open-ended responses and focus groups were gathered to provide greater clarity and detail regarding the identified variables.

### **Qualitative Data**

Data from the open-ended responses in the questionnaire and the focus groups were analyzed using a Grounded Theory Approach (Kroger & Wood, 2000; Meyer, Titscher, Vetter, & Wodak, 2000). This approach requires the researcher to read all the responses and then identify natural categories in which the comments grouped themselves. This process enables common categories to emerge from within the data. Comments expressed in the open-ended and focus groups responses were used to help categorize factors affecting students' cultural adjustment process. The qualitative data from the survey's open-ended responses in the

questionnaire and the focus groups were then organized into two groups: respondents who had been identified as well-adjusted or ill-adjusted to their new environment depending on whether their CSQ scores fell below the first quartile and above the third quartile. This grouping was done as a means to provide clear separation regarding variables that correlate with participants at either end of the adjustment spectrum.

### **Inter-Rater Reliability**

In an effort to ensure the trustworthiness of the data gathered from the open-ended questions, an additional researcher who had graduate-level, research experience in TESOL, analyzed a 10% random sample of the students' comments. The open-ended responses were put into an Excel spreadsheet where they were randomized using the (=RAND) function. They were then sorted from smallest to largest using the sort feature. After this, the randomized comments were reduced to a 10% sample and given to the additional rater. The rater also received a taxonomy of categories that had been created from the data delineating factors that students reported had influenced their adjustment experience. An initial attempt at establishing inter-rater reliability showed that a few of the categories in the taxonomy were not specific enough leading to some confusion for the second rater.

The taxonomy was redefined and example comments were included with each category in the taxonomy. At this point, a second attempt was made to determine the inter-rater reliability of the taxonomy. In comparing the results from the third rater and the researcher, 96.77% agreement was achieved with the revised taxonomy.

In the results section, the data analysis will be reported in relation to each of the two research questions asked in the study. Thus, quantitative results from the Qualtrics survey can be further clarified by the qualitative data from the open-ended responses and the focus groups.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Results

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the unique individual adjustment processes experienced by intensive English program students at Brigham Young University's English Language Center (ELC). Specifically, this study focused on two research questions: (1) Are there strong individual factors that separate IEP learners into those who would be classified as well-adjusted or ill-adjusted to their new environment?, and (2) What do IEP students identify as factors that (a), aid or (b), hinder their cultural adjustment process? By answering these questions, this study sought to identify common elements of IEP students' sojourn experience that identified students as well-adjusted or ill-adjusted as a means to identify variables that aid or hinder their adjustment process. Additionally, the ultimate goal of this research was to provide a foundation for the future development of cultural adjustment training materials to be used in BYU's ELC.

#### **Research Question #1: Quantitative Data Analysis**

The first research question asked whether there are strong individual factors that separate IEP learners into those who would be classified as well-adjusted or ill-adjusted to their new environment. Data from the CSQ survey questions were analyzed according to the instructions given by Mumford (1998). Data from the Index of Social Sojourner Support (ISSS) scale questions were analyzed according to the instruction given by Ong and Ward (2005). The results from each survey along with the demographic variables of age, gender, L1, length of sojourn, and proficiency level were analyzed through a stepwise regression analysis. The results produced an adjusted  $R^2$  of .12, accounting for about twelve percent of the culture shock observed in this study. Additional information is presented in **Table 1**.

**Table 1: Variables Influencing Cultural Adjustment**

<b>Factors</b>	<b><i>B</i></b>	<b><i>SE</i></b>	<b><math>\beta</math></b>	<b><i>p</i></b>
(Constant)	25.090	1.052		<0.001
ISSS	0.071	0.017	0.310	<0.001
Female	-1.443	0.562	-0.187	0.011

The results of the regression model showed that two of the six variables examined were meaningful in predicting cultural adjustment, while four had no observable impact. The betas ( $\beta$ ) in Table 1 indicate the relative importance of each factor in the model in predicting cultural adjustment. The beta scores also show that social support is almost twice as important to the model as the gender of the respondent in predicting students' cultural adjustment. Social support scores ( $\beta=0.310$ ) show that students who had high social support are more likely to have a high cultural adjustment status. However, the negative beta for being female ( $\beta= -0.187$ ) shows that female students were less likely to be culturally well adjusted. Variables with no observable impact on cultural adjustment included: L1 ( $p=.803$ ), proficiency level ( $p= .498$ ), length of sojourn ( $p= .062$ ), and age ( $p=.281$ ).

Quartiles were also identified for the distribution of CSQ scores (Q1=26, Q3=33). Students whose scores fell below Q1 ( $M=22.92$ ,  $SD=2.69$ ) were identified as experiencing greater culture shock or poor adjustment and those whose scores were above Q3 ( $M=32.90$ ,  $SD=1.06$ ) were identified as experiencing less culture shock or greater adjustment. As expected, the difference between these groups was statistically significant,  $F(1,73)=450.46$ ,  $p<.001$ , suggesting group differences in cultural adjustment were meaningful. Thirty-eight students' scores fell below Q1 and were identified as poorly adjusted, while 38 students' scores were above Q3 were identified as well adjusted, 92 students were in the middle.

## **Research Question #2 – Part A: Qualitative Data Gathered from Open-Ended & Focus Group Responses**

The first part of the second research question asked, “What do IEP students identify as factors that aid their cultural adjustment process?” In addition to the data from the Likert scale, data were gathered from open-ended questions. Using a Grounded Theory approach (Meyer et al., 2000), all open-ended responses were grouped according to categories that arose from the data. There were several categories that emerged from the questionnaire data that were classified as positive factors that impact the IEP students’ cultural adjustment process. Responses from the focus groups further reinforced categories in the taxonomy that were developed from the responses to the open-ended questions. The categories that were identified within the data can be seen in **Table 2**. While the taxonomy includes positive factors in IEP students’ cultural adjustment process related to social support, self, and environment, each section also contains subsections that provide additional details.

**Table 2: Factors Aiding Students’ Cultural Adjustment Process**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Social Support	This theme included specific people and social support groups.	228
Self	This theme included comments that defined the participants’ personal experiences, ability state of mind, attitude, and beliefs.	78
Environment	This theme included any mention of factors that related to participants new environment.	30

### **Social Support**

A total of 228 responses included reference to social support as a positive adjustment factor throughout the open-ended questionnaire responses. They stated that specific types of relationships helped them adjust to the ELC and America. Sub-categories and example comments are given in **Table 3**.

**Table 3: Social Support Factors Aiding Students' Cultural Adjustment**

<b>Taxonomy</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
<b>I. Social Relationships</b>		118
a. Friends from same country or L1	"To <sup>2</sup> have friends from my country and Hispanic friends."	20
b. American friends	"I think the principal thing is that I have some really good Americans friends that help me to understand the American culture."	9
c. Roommates	"The support of my friends and roommates."	4
<b>II. Academic Relationships</b>		41
a. Teachers	"The teachers are really good and try to help me."	32
b. Classmates	"My classmates" "The encouragement of my ELC friendships"	9
<b>III. Family Relationships</b>		40
a. Family living in the U.S.	"Receive the help of my husband." "My husband has lived for more time here, so he helps me to understand the culture better."	7
<b>IV. Religious Community</b>	"The religion, because I am Mormon so my Mormon friends help me."	6

### **Open-Ended Responses**

These comments exemplified that positive relationships are a practical means for positive cultural adjustment experiences. The questionnaire showed that social relationships were the most frequently mentioned variable influencing positive adjustment. Additional comments from students in the questionnaire explained why having friends benefited their adjustment process. One student explained "know that I'm not the only one having problems in the US. My friends help me to feel better." Some students commented that friends from their own country helped them adjust. One student shared "The Brazilians or Latinos who were already studying at ELC and gave me tips and help." Students expanded on this by adding that friends from their country who had previous experience created social support that helped them adjust. Another student commented that having "another Brazilian who had the same difficulties" helped them adjust.

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<sup>2</sup> Non-native language has been grammatically edited for readability.

This social support network was a big factor for students expressing positive adjustment experiences. Many students also commented that having American friends also helped with their adjustment.

### Focus Group Responses

The focus groups responses further reinforced the categories that were developed from the responses to the open-ended questions. In reply to the request for suggestions that students would give to future students at an IEP in the U.S., Korean, Chinese, and Spanish language groups answered with the suggestion to, “make friends.” All three of these language groups specifically suggested the importance of making “American friends.” They further explained the importance of making American friends in order to “understand the American culture” and have “friends to speak English to.” Chinese students’ additionally expressed the importance of making friends from their “home country who have experienced cultural adjustment for support.”

### Self

A total of 78 responses included reference to self as a positive adjustment factor throughout the questionnaire responses. They stated that specific types of personal variables and attributes helped them adjust to the ELC and America. Sub-categories and example comments are given in **Table 4**.

**Table 4: Self Factors Aiding Students’ Cultural Adjustment**

<b>Taxonomy</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Attitude	“To be focused on what I have to do here.”	43
Knowledge/Experience		16
1. Cultural knowledge	“The knowledge acquired before has helped me adapt to a new environment”	10
2. Experience	“that I visited America several times before I came to study here”	6
Ability		11
1. Language ability	“It was easier to adapt when I started to understand better English.”	8
Personal Resources	“The thing that helped me to adjust at the ELC is my car”	6

### **Open-Ended Responses**

These comments exemplified that self-related attributes and abilities contribute to positive cultural adjustment experiences.

### **Focus Group Responses**

Responses from the focus groups further reinforced categories in the taxonomy that were developed from the open-ended question responses. Students expanded on the attitude that helps them adjust. Korean students commented how they needed to, “be patient” during their adjustment process. A Chinese student responded, “I understand that different cultures have different cultures, so when we come here we have to embrace this kind of culture whether we really don’t like to or we are not getting used to it.” Another Korean student also suggested teachers help increase their students’ cultural knowledge by sharing experiences of previous students, “If teachers share about the experience about the students they taught before that would be helpful. Share their experiences adjusting.” Brazilian students reinforced the importance of cultural knowledge. This suggests they understand cultural behaviors that “are very important to Americans.”

### **Environment**

A total of 30 responses included reference to environment as a positive adjustment factor in their questionnaire responses. They stated that specific environmental factors (academic, social, occupational, and religious) helped them adjust to the ELC and America. Sub-categories and example comments are given in **Table 5**.

**Table 5: Environment Factors Aiding Students' Cultural Adjustment**

<b>Taxonomy</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Academic	"Feeling comfortable at the ELC"	6
Social	"My friends and the environment of activities that they make to meet each other"	5
Occupational	"Go to work"	3
Religious	"My church."	1

### **Open-Ended Responses**

These comments exemplified that specific environmental factors are a practical means for having positive cultural adjustment experiences.

### **Focus Group Responses**

Responses from the focus groups further reinforced categories in the taxonomy that were developed from the responses to the open-ended questions. Korean students discussed the importance of social activities at BYU and the ELC as an important factor that helped their adjustment process. All language groups remarked that the academic environment and specific features within that category affected their adjustment process. When asked what made them comfortable in class, students responded, "a dynamic" classroom. For example, one student suggested, "when a teacher will give games and make it easy to learn vocabulary." Another said, "I think it's good when students can ask questions in class." Chinese-, Portuguese-, and Spanish-speaking students commented that having an interactive classroom was a factor that aided their adjustment by making them feel comfortable in their classroom

### **Quantitative Data Gathered from Open-Ended Responses**

In addition to looking at the overall responses of students, the comparison of two populations of participants, well-adjusted and ill-adjusted, that were identified through data analysis on the CSQ was used to further analyze the questionnaire's open-ended responses. This

was done in an attempt to identify variables that were specific to each population and to further support the quantitative analysis that shows a significant difference between the two populations. Themes that emerged from well-adjusted and ill-adjusted participants as factors that aided their cultural adjustment are shown in **Table 6**.

**Table 6: Factors Aiding Well-Adjusted & Ill-Adjusted Learners' Cultural Adjustment**

<b>Taxonomy</b>	<b>Well-adjusted</b>		<b>Ill-adjusted</b>	
	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Social Support Network</b>	46	71.9	48	69.2
1. Social Relationships	29		30	
a. Friends from same country or <b>L1</b>	2		11	
b. Friends from America	2		0	
c. Roommates	2		1	
2. Academic Relationships	9		12	
a. Teachers	7		8	
b. Classmates	2		4	
3. Family Relationships	5		4	
a. Family living in US			2	
4. Religious Community	1		0	
<b>Self</b>	10	15.6	19	27.5
1. Attitude	3		14	
2. Knowledge/ Experience	6		0	
a. Cultural Knowledge	1		0	
b. Experience	5		0	
3. Language Ability	1		3	
<b>Environment</b>	8	12.5	2	2.9
1. Academic	2		0	
2. Religious	1		0	
<b>TOTAL</b> <sup>3</sup>	64	100	69	100

<sup>3</sup> Categories were equally counted in responses and therefore do not equal the total of sub-categories.

In comparing the responses from both groups, it is evident that the significant differences explained through regression analysis are supported by the qualitative comments. Additional details regarding these differences are discussed below. According to the responses, it is evident that students who were considered well-adjusted and ill-adjusted agreed that social relationships were the number one factor that helped them adjust to their new environment. However, students who were ill-adjusted believed that having friends who were either from their country or spoke their language is what helped them adjust, while students who were already considered well-adjusted did not share this belief. Another difference between the two groups lies in the fact that ill-adjusted students believed their personal attitude played a significantly larger role in helping them adjust than their environment, while well-adjusted students recognized that their environment and self-attributes played nearly equal roles in their adjustment process. There were significant differences in the responses of well-adjusted and ill-adjusted students, which further supports the quantitative results that indicate a significant difference between these two populations.

### **Research Question #2 – Part B: Qualitative Data Gathered from Open-Ended & Focus Group Responses**

In addition to knowing what ESL learners said helped their adjustment, the second research question also asked what factors IEP students said hindered their cultural adjustment process. The same process used in analyzing data in part one of the second research question was used to analyze the data connected to part two. Data were gathered from open-ended responses using a Grounded Theory approach (Meyer et al., 2000) and grouped according to categories that arose from the data. Several categories emerged from the questionnaire data that were classified as factors that hindered the IEP students' cultural adjustment process. Responses from the focus

groups further reinforced the categories used in the taxonomy that were developed from the responses to the open-ended questions. The categories that were identified within the data can be seen in **Table 7**. While the taxonomy includes factors that hinder students’ cultural adjustment process related to environment, self, and negative social support and relationships, **Tables 8-10** also contain subsections and response examples which provide additional details.

**Table 7: Factors Hindering Students’ Cultural Adjustment Process**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Environment	This theme included any mention of factors that related to participants new environment.	111
Self	This theme included comments that defined the participants’ personal experiences, ability, state of mind, attitude, and beliefs.	85
NSSR	This theme included specific people and social support groups.	59

### **Environment**

A total of 111 responses included reference to environment as a negative adjustment factor. They stated that specific environmental factors (cultural, academic, physical, occupational) hindered their adjustment to the ELC and America. Sub-categories and example comments are given in **Table 8**.

**Table 8: Environment Factors Hindering Students’ Cultural Adjustment**

<b>Taxonomy</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Cultural	“New culture”	70
Academic	“ELC system”	27
Physical	“Distance, everything is far”	11
Occupational	“Shift at work”	2

### **Open-Ended Responses**

These comments exemplified that specific environmental factors hinder cultural adjustment processes. The biggest environmental factor that hindered students’ adjustment was

the cultural differences. Students explained that what hindered their adjustment was, “The American culture itself” and, “the different customs nothing more.” Other students explained this factor by specifically stating that it was, “The different culture and university programs.” Many students commented that the academic environment was a struggle for them to adjust to. Many comments included, the “schedule and homework” and said, “it was hard for me to get used to the tasks” and, “Adapt to new material.” “The strict rules” of the academic environment and keeping up with the, “the start time is too early sometimes I cannot wake up.” Some students commented on the physical environment and pointed to the fact that “distance” from where they lived and went to school to shopping was a big issue along with the “weather in Utah.”

### **Focus Group Responses**

Responses from the focus groups further reinforced the categories identified in the taxonomy derived from the responses to the open-ended questions. For example, with regards to academic environment, one student responded, “For me it would be to have a lot of group discussions and talking to our classmates about our opinions. We need to work with our classmates for our homework. It’s very different because in my country we just do everything by ourselves.” In regards to cultural environment, students made multiple comments about the difficulty of adjusting to food, a new social culture, the speed of local services such as medical and government offices, differences in how hospitals are run, how the economy works, and social norms such as the appropriate ways to interact with staff, teachers, friends, and strangers.

### **Self**

A total of 85 responses made reference to self as a negative adjustment factor throughout the questionnaire responses. They mentioned specific self attributes and variables (language ability, personal resources, attitude, physical, and lack of cultural knowledge) that hindered their

adjustment to the ELC and the United States of America. Sub-categories and example comments are given in **Table 9**.

**Table 9: Self Factors Hindering Students’ Cultural Adjustment**

<b>Taxonomy</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>N</b>
Language Ability	“At the beginning I don't speak the language very well.”	48
Personal Resources	“Lack of documents such as SSN and credit in the Bank”	17
Attitude	“I feel that I am not worth much here”	11
Physical	“Trying to learn like the younger people”	5
Lack of Cultural Knowledge	“Understand the culture and the rules.”	4

### **Open-Ended Responses**

These comments exemplified that specific environmental factors hinder cultural adjustment processes.

### **Focus Group Responses**

Responses from the focus groups further reinforced categories identified in the taxonomy derived from the responses to the open-ended questions. One student expanded on the difficult experience with the language: “I’m in the last level, but there are some aspects that are hard for me to understand when a native speaker is speaking English because it’s faster. I think for me, the most challenging thing is the language.” Students explained that it wasn’t just academic language they needed to adapt to, but their conversational language ability hindered their adaptation by decreasing their ability to successfully communicate with native speakers outside of the classroom. Students commented that adapting to their new environment was difficult because they either didn’t know the cultural rules or just had a hard time changing the way they did things.

## Negative Social Support & Relationships

A total of 59 responses included reference to negative social support and relationships as a negative adjustment factor throughout the questionnaire responses. They stated that lack of specific types of relationships and negative relationships (social relationships, academic relationships, family relationships) hindered their adjustment to the ELC and America. Sub-categories and example comments are given in **Table 10**.

**Table 10: Negative Social Support & Relationship Factors Hindering Students' Cultural Adjustment**

<b>Taxonomy</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>N</b>
Social Relationships		34
1. Relationship with Americans	“That people are very cold and do not care about helping others.”	29
Academic Relationships		14
1. Teacher/Staff	“It has been difficult for me to have to deal with one or two teachers who think they are better because they are from here”	10
2. Classmates	“Different culture classmates”	4
Family Relationships	“It is hard to be far away from my relatives.”	7

## Open-Ended Responses

These comments explain that specific social support factors hinder cultural adjustment processes. One area many students struggled with was their relationship with Americans. Students' comments showed that aspects of the American culture affected their relationships. “The culture. It is hard to make American friends here, especially in Utah.” One student said it was because, “They have their own groups of friends.” Other students commented that it was because of prejudices Americans had against them. “It has been difficult for me to deal with stigma or prejudice [...], for example when you go to the supermarket and people listen to you speak Spanish, instantly they look at you and think you are illegal or at least think about your legal status.” Even students that are usually very social and outgoing struggled with this factor,

“The people here are a bit strange in their behavior and cold and quite different from our Latin culture. I am very friendly with the people but it is difficult for me to approach the Americans.”

Students commented that this made it difficult to “See the people here as [their] friends.”

### **Focus Group Responses**

Responses from the focus groups further reinforced categories in the taxonomy that were developed from the responses to the open-ended questions. One of the difficulties students faced were their relationships with their classmates. One student explained her struggle, “In my class most students are speaking Spanish (everyone agrees) and some of them speak in Spanish to others from their same culture and I don't understand what they said.”

### **Quantitative Data Gathered From Open-Ended Responses**

In addition to looking at the overall responses of students, the classification of two populations of participants, well-adjusted and ill-adjusted, were used to further analyze the questionnaire’s open-ended responses. This was done in an attempt to identify variables that were very specific to each population and to further support the quantitative analysis results that showed a significant difference in variables that affect each population. Themes that emerged from well-adjusted and ill-adjusted participants as factors that hindered their cultural adjustment are shown in **Table 11**.

**Table 11: Qualitative Factors that Hindered Well-adjusted & Ill-adjusted Learners’ Cultural Adjustment**

<b>Taxonomy</b>	<b>Well-adjusted</b>		<b>Ill-adjusted</b>	
	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Environment	25	41.7	30	43.5

1. Cultural	9		19	
2. Academic	10		7	
3. Physical	4		3	
4. Occupational	1		0	
<b>Self</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>30.4</b>
1. Language Ability	6		10	
2. Personal Resources	4		4	
3. Attitude	2		6	
4. Physical	0		1	
<b>Lack of Social Support/Negative Relationships</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6.7</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>23.2</b>
1. Social Relationships	2		13	
a. relationship with American	0		11	
2. Family Relationships	2		0	
3. Academic Relationships	0		3	
a. Teacher/Staff	0		3	
<b>IV. Nothing</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>31.7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2.9</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>100</b>

While well-adjusted and ill-adjusted students identified similar variables that hindered their adjustment processes, there are noteworthy differences in the percentages of the variables each population identified. According to the responses shown in Table 11, it is evident that students who were considered well-adjusted and ill-adjusted agreed that environmental factors were the number one variable that hindered their adjustment process. A total of 31.7% of well-adjusted students and 2.9% of ill-adjusted students identified nothing as a hindrance to their adjustment process, thus showing that well-adjusted students perceived themselves as facing fewer issues that hindered their adjustment process. Another significant difference was present in the students' social support network. A total of 23.2% of students who were considered ill-adjusted identified the lack of a social support network and negative relationships as the

variables that hindered their adjustment process. On the other hand, only 6.7% of well-adjusted students identified their lack of social support network and negative relationships as variables that hindered their adjustment process. It is not surprising that 31.7% of well-adjusted students commented that nothing hindered their adjustment while only 2.9% of ill-adjusted students mentioned that nothing hindered their adjustment. In comparing the responses from both groups, it is evident that the significant differences identified in the quantitative analysis are further supported through the qualitative comments.

## **Discussion**

This section will provide a synthesis of the data gathered from this study in relation to the two research questions asked. The goal of the first research question was to identify strong individual factors that separated IEP learners into those who could be classified as well-adjusted and those who were ill-adjusted. The second goal of this research was to identify common themes found within the qualitative survey data and focus group responses to further delineate factors that ESL learners reported that specifically aided or hindered their adjustment processes. Each research question was analyzed using quantitative and qualitative data in an effort to assess the factors that influence cultural adjustment for adults learning English as a second language. The results of each variable identified and analyzed are discussed below.

### **Language Proficiency**

A demographic variable considered in this study was students' language proficiency. Past research has concluded that fluency in the language of the host culture does positively affect sojourner adjustment (Coleman & Erwin, 1998; DiMarco, 1974; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Tomich et. al., 2000). However, a study by Gabriel (2008) which studied American and Canadian ex-patriot teachers who were employed in international schools in the Caribbean

concluded that proficiency level was not a factor that could predict cultural adjustment status. The results of the stepwise regression analysis from the current study support Gabriel's (2008) findings. Proficiency level in the second language did not predict students' level of culture shock and therefore their level of cultural adjustment. In the open-ended comments, L2 proficiency was noted by less than 1% of responses as a variable that aided learners' adjustment process and by only 1% as a variable that hindered IEP students' cultural adjustment process. In the quantitative comments, one student commented that they felt there was a connection between his ability to adapt to the new environment and his language ability. He said, "It was easier to be adapted when I started to understand better English." Another student noted that lack of English ability hindered her adjustment. This student remarked, "At the beginning I don't speak the language very well." These comments were further clarified by the focus group comments.

Focus group responses related to language ability revealed that students believed the ability to practice the English language was more connected to their positive adjustment experiences than their current proficiency level. These results support past research conducted on language and cultural adjustment. Awa and Cui (1992) found that use of the host country language is the most important factor in successful sojourner adaptation. This could explain why students' comments focused on their environment and relationships as variables that aided or hindered their cultural adjustment, rather than language proficiency alone. Gabriel's research (2008) further determined that students' willingness to learn the language upon arrival (attitude) was a predictor of cultural adjustment status which could also explain why language proficiency alone was not a factor that predicted students' adjustment status.

## **Age**

Age is another demographic variable that has been considered in past research as a factor in sojourners' cultural adjustment. Some studies have shown that younger sojourners tend to have more contact with host nationals, develop friendships with host nationals, and are more inclined to include host nationals their living arrangements, therefore, the younger the sojourners are, the quicker and easier the adjustment process will be (Deutsch, 1970; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Hull, 1978; Ibrahim, 1970; Johnson, 1970; Tomich et. al., 2000). However, the results of the stepwise regression analysis from the current study showed that the variable of age did not predict students' level of culture shock and therefore their level of cultural adjustment. This could be due to the fact that the population was limited in range of ages. These results produced similar conclusions as previous studies that have determined that age is not significantly related to culture shock (Chung, 1988; Li, 2000; Shardiz, 1981). Since this was not a longitudinal study and did not take into consideration the speed or length of adjustment, the findings of this study cannot be applied to the role age played in the speed of adjustment.

## **Length of Sojourn**

Length of sojourn was considered as a possible cultural adjustment factor given that previous research studies had established that the length of stay in the U.S. was a factor which had a significant impact on culture shock adaptation (Lysgaard, 1955; Li, 2000). However, the results of the stepwise regression analysis showed that the variable *length of sojourn* did not predict students' level of culture shock and therefore their level of cultural adjustment. These results produced similar conclusions to Gezi's (1965) research of sixty-two Middle Eastern students studying in universities in the U.S., which claimed that the length of stay in the U.S. did not relate to culture shock.

## **L1**

L1 was analyzed in this study as a means to identify if sojourners from specific cultural groups experienced similar or distinct variables affecting their cultural adjustment process. The results of the stepwise regression analysis showed that the variable L1 did not predict students' level of culture shock and therefore their level of cultural adjustment. Further analysis of open-ended and focus group comments further supported the idea that L1 group responses did not significantly differ in variables identified that hinder and aid students' cultural adjustment since there were no statistically significant differences among language groups.

## **Gender**

Another demographic variable that has been studied in relation to sojourners' cultural adjustment is gender. While some studies have shown that gender is not significantly related to culture shock (Chung, 1988; Li, 2000; Shardiz, 1981), others have shown that female students may have more adjustment difficulties than their male counterparts (Fong & Peskin, 1969; Gabriel, 2008; Hill, 1966; Portela-Myers, 2008; Rohrlich, 1991). The results of the stepwise regression revealed that the variable of gender was able to predict students' level of culture shock. Thus adding additional evidence to a question that has received conflicting results in the literature. If participants were female, then they were more likely to experience higher levels of culture shock and a lower cultural adjustment status. Portela-Myers (2008) research supports this result, showing that "females presented a higher level of core culture shock in comparison to males: feeling more strain to adapt, more homesickness, more shock, more helplessness, more identity confusion, and having more wishes of escaping" (Portela-Myers, 2008, P. 76). Kim (1988) believed this gender bias was due to the fact that the women in the studies had lower levels of education, while Fong and Peskins (1969) concluded that this gender bias could be due

to the fact that traditional cultures might experience specific difficulties since gender roles in their own culture were more defined than in the United States culture. While researchers have come to different conclusions on why females have more difficulty adjusting than males, they do agree that the existing literature does point to a slight gender bias favoring males over females in the adjustment process (Tomich et. al., 2000). This study supports this idea, suggesting that there is a statistical significance between being a female sojourner and being less well-adjusted.

### **Social Support**

The results of the stepwise regression also showed that the variable of social support was able to predict students' level of culture shock. Higher levels of social support predicted participants who were experiencing lower levels of culture shock and therefore were more culturally adjusted. These findings are not a surprise as a plethora of previous research has shown similar results of the positive impact social support plays in relation to positive cultural adjustment experiences. Previous studies have shown that having a support system during an international student's adaptation process can result in the reduction of cultural conflict (Pederson, 1995), a protective factor to stress and depression (Kessler, Price, & Wortman, 1985; Ong & Ward, 2005), and ultimately a reduction in culture shock (Portela-Myers, 2008). Feng showed that even having one friend will help lessen sojourners' burden (Feng, 1991). The results of the Portela-Myers study suggest that "the more social support an international student has, the less culture shock he or she is likely to experience" (Portela-Myers, 2008, p. 73). Her findings also showed that all variables of social support and of culture shock were negatively correlated which suggest that all types of social support may be an influencing variable to the experience of culture shock. While all sojourners experience some form of culture shock throughout their adaptation process, these findings suggest that having a strong social support network may be a good preventive measure against it.

## **Variables IEP Students' Stated That Aided or Hindered Cultural Adjustment**

When IEP students in this study were asked what variables aided and hindered their cultural adjustment process in the open-ended and focus group questions, three categories emerged from the comments: Social Support Networks, Environment, and Self.

### **Social Support**

Social Support was a variable IEP students identified as both an aid and hindrance to their cultural adjustment process. This theme included specific people and social support groups. Almost 68% of students' overall comments identified variables related to social support as an aid to their adjustment process, while 23% of students' overall comments identified variables related to lack of social support as a hindrance to their adjustment process.

Sub-categories of social support that students commented aided their adjustment process included social relationships, academic relationships, family relationships, and the religious community. Almost 72% of well-adjusted students commented that the sub-categories of social support aided their adjustment process. A total of 69% of ill-adjusted students commented that social, academic, and family relationships aided their adjustment process. Social relationship was the most common variable mentioned by ill and well-adjusted students. These results show that students believe social relationships play the biggest role in aiding their adjustment process.

While the overall responses of students identified social support as the variable that had the greatest impact on positive cultural adjustment, there were notable differences in the types of friends well-adjusted and ill-adjusted students noted helped them. The majority of ill-adjusted student responses specified that friends who spoke their L1, understood their culture, or were from their country of origin were the type of social support that helped them adjust. Well-adjusted students identified friends and positive relationships in general as the type of

relationship that helped them adjust. The results show that it was ill-adjusted students specifically sought out friends from their own country for support. Even though ill-adjusted students believed having friends that spoke their L1 and were from the same country helped their adjustment, this may be one of the reasons they were ill-adjusted. Feng's study (1991) indicated that students were ill-adjusted to their new environment because of their lack of socializing with Americans. Feng's study noted that "due to contrasting cultural differences Chinese students tend to form their own community, and isolate themselves from the host culture" (Feng, 1991, p. 10). Consequently, these actions further isolated the students from American culture which led to a lack of cultural understanding which ultimately "impacts negatively on their cultural adjustment" (Feng, 1991, p.10).

Other researchers found similar findings in their survey that showed that newly arrived international students were not sure about their new environment so "they always choose to escape the local cultural communication, with a large part of the students preferring to communicate in the small circle of their own people" (Huang, Leng, Zhang 2018, p.125). Huang, Leng and Zhang's research showed that "the students who chose to isolate themselves socially from natives encountered more culture shock in their interactions with the natives and new environment, thus showing that social engagement is closely related to cross-cultural adaptation" (p. 125) Similarly, Li's study (2000) noted that "some international students feel socially alienated, and they seek out primary support from people of their native country, instead of Americans. Therefore, international students perceive a sense of alienation which results in their feeling of social estrangement and powerlessness" (Li, 2000, p. 90-91). Additional studies support these findings and have concluded that the number of American friends appears to be a significant factor that relates to culture shock adaptation (Juffer, 1983; Li, 2000). Further studies found that deep and positive interactions with host nationals were perhaps the most important

factor in successful sojourner adjustment (Abe & Wiseman, 1983; Gudykunst, Hammer, & Wiseman, 1978; Hall & Klineburg, 1979; Kennedy & Ward, 1992; Searle & Ward, 1991; MacFarlane, 1958). For example, Davidsen and Sewell (1961) reported a significant relationship between the social interaction of Scandinavian students with Americans and their satisfaction with their sojourns. Additionally, Gabriel (2008) concluded that the ability of the sojourner to establish close relationships with host country nationals does positively affect sojourner adjustment.

While the category of *Social Support Networks* was found to be a common variable that aided adjustment, 23% of comments about adjustment hindrance related to lack of social support networks. Sub-categories of lack of social support that students commented hindered their adjustment process included social, academic, and family relationships. In contrast to comments of social support aiding adjustment, less than 7% of well-adjusted students commented that social and family relationships hindered their adjustment process, while 23% of ill-adjusted students commented that social and academic relationships hindered their adjustment process. The stepwise regression analysis showed that students who were experiencing higher levels of culture shock and therefore were less adjusted also had lower levels of social support. Therefore, lack of social support was a variable that correlated with ill-adjusted students. In addition to the quantitative results, comments of ill-adjusted students showed that social support and specifically negative relationships were a greater hindrance to their adjustment process than well-adjusted students. A total of 23% of Ill-adjusted students' comments mentioned lack of social support as a hindrance to their adjustment process, while well-adjusted students' comments relating to lack of social support and negative relationships only accounted for less than 7% of the responses. From these findings, it appears that lack of social support leads to adjustment problems. Portela-Myers' (2008) research suggests that those international students who experience high levels of

culture shock are likely to lack a good social support system (Portela-Myers, 2008, p. 75).

In response to social relationships that hindered their adjustment process, 85% of ill-adjusted students' comments specifically identified lack of social relationships with Americans as a variable that greatly hindered their progress, while 0% of well-adjusted students mentioned lack of social relationships with Americans as hindrance. The comparison of these responses inarguably shows that there is a distinct difference in the mindset of well-adjusted and ill-adjusted students. One reason for students being in either group could be due to their belief of what aid and hinders their adjustment. Li's (2000) study points out that "the majority of the research has found that the more American friends the international students have, the better adjustment and less culture shock they experience" (p. 32). Since an overwhelming number of ill-adjusted students identified having American friends was a hindrance, it could be because this is a variable that is increasing their culture shock and decreasing their ability to positively adjust to their new environment. Since well-adjusted students did not identify relationships with Americans as a hindrance it could be suggested that they were more adjusted because of their positive relationship with Americans.

## **Self**

Factors relating to self were variables identified as both an aid and hindrance to students' cultural adjustment. This theme included comments that defined the participants' personal experiences, state of mind, ability, attitude, and beliefs. A total of 23% of students' overall comments identified variables related to self as an aid to their adjustment process, while 33% of students' overall comments identified variables related to self as a hindrance to their adjustment process. Sub-categories of self that students commented aided their adjustment process included attitude, cultural knowledge and past experiences, ability and language ability, and personal

resources. Almost 16% of well-adjusted students commented that all the sub-categories of self aided their adjustment process with past experience and cultural knowledge comprising 60% of the comments. Almost 28% of ill-adjusted students commented that only the sub-categories of attitude and language ability aided their adjustment process with attitude comprising 74% of the comments. These results suggest that while well and ill-adjusted students both believed variables of “self” influenced their adjustment, the majority of well-adjusted students believed it was their past experience and cultural knowledge that helped them, while the majority of ill-adjusted students believed it was their attitude that ultimately helped them adjust. These results could suggest that ill-adjusted students did not have as much cultural knowledge and past experiences as well-adjusted students to help them adjust.

Sub-categories of self that students commented hindered their adjustment process included language ability, lack of personal resources, attitude, physical self, and lack of cultural knowledge. Approximately 20% of well-adjusted students commented that language ability, personal resources, and attitude hindered their adjustment process with the majority of responses comprising language ability and personal resources. A total of 30% of ill-adjusted students commented that all the sub-categories of self hindered their adjustment process with the majority of responses comprising language ability and attitude.

## **Environment**

Environment was another variable IEP students identified as both an aid and hindrance to their cultural adjustment process. This theme included any mention of factors that related to participants new environment. Nearly 9% of students overall comments identified variables related to environment as an aid to their adjustment process, while 44% of students overall comments identified variables related to environment as a hindrance to their adjustment process.

Sub-categories of environment that students commented aided their adjustment process included academic, social, occupational, and religious. Almost 13% of well-adjusted students commented that their academic and religious environment aided their adjustment process, while less than 3% of ill-adjusted students commented that environment in general with no mention of any specific sub-categories aided their adjustment process. Sub-categories of environment that students commented hindered their adjustment process included cultural, academic, physical, and occupational. In contrast to comments of environment aiding adjustment, almost 42% of well-adjusted students commented that all sub-categories of environment hindered their adjustment process with the majority of responses comprising academic environment at 40% and cultural environment at 36%. Similarly, almost 44% of ill-adjusted students commented that the cultural, academic, and physical environment played a role in hindering their adjustment processing language ability and attitude. However, 63% of ill-adjusted student comments identified cultural environment as the biggest hindrance to their adjustment with academic environment only comprising 23% of the responses. These results suggest that the academic and cultural environment were the biggest factors of hindrance for all IEP students, including school environment, new educational system, new communicative culture, new cultural foods, and cultural taboos and norms. While well-adjusted students struggled with both variables almost equally, ill-adjusted students mostly struggled with a new cultural environment.

### **Implications**

Cultural adjustment is a process that administrators and teachers should be aware of in their ESL students. Cultural adjustment issues can be the cause of classroom management issues, a distraction to language learning and progression, and inability to succeed abroad. Unfortunately, “many adaptation problems of international students remain relatively unknown

to academic and support staff of universities and colleges” (Feng, 1991, p. 16). IEP administrators and teachers should be aware of specific factors that aid and hinder students’ adjustment experiences. While students’ experiences may vary greatly within a program, there are universal factors that have been identified throughout this research. Feng (1991) recommends that “workshops may be arranged for university personnel who are in daily contact with foreign students to help them understand the adaptation problems and to develop encouraging and supportive response patterns” (p. 16). Some items that should be addressed in these workshops include the importance of making American friends, helping students create positive relationships, improving students’ self factors, and creating a positive environment for students.

Administrators and teachers should also realize that while the CSQ and ISS are validated instruments, this study was limited in its population and may not have fully captured the factors that ESL students felt expressed their experiences. This study showed that social support, self, and environment were important factors that affected students’ cultural adjustment experience. Other researchers who want to assess their IEP students’ cultural adjustment process should account for these variables. Additionally, since not all IEP students with the same language come from the same cultural backgrounds, using culturally specific instruments that are similar to the CSQ and ISS could be used to account for the differences in L1 backgrounds and nationalities.

Using only the CSQ to determine students’ adjustment level may not help identify specific phases of cultural adjustment students are experiencing which in turn may be a variable that affects positive and negative adjustment factors. Modifying an instrument to meet the needs of the IEP setting and including open-ended questions for further clarification could be a helpful way to understand the unique factors that aid or hinder students’ cultural adjustment in an ESL setting. Regarding the results of this study, IEP administrators and teachers should identify ways

in which they can take an active role in identifying and overcoming factors that negatively influence students' adjustment process.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **Conclusion**

This study investigates individual IEP students' cultural adjustment process. The purpose of this study was to identify variables that IEP learners identified that aided or hindered their cultural adjustment process. Variables that were analyzed using a regression analysis included age, proficiency level, length of sojourn, L1, gender, and social support.

The results indicate that social support and gender indicated learners' level of culture shock. Learners who were female were more likely to have higher levels of culture shock and be less well-adjusted. Learners who had high levels of social support were more likely to be experiencing lower levels of culture shock and were more well-adjusted. The qualitative analysis revealed three common variables that learners identified as aiding and hindering their cultural adjustment process. These categories included environment, social support, and self factors. This chapter discusses the limitations in this study followed by suggestions for future research.

### **Limitations**

Using existing instruments to capture cultural adjustment data from a new population had some benefits as well as limitations. One benefit of using the CSQ to measure the level of culture shock in adult ESL students is that it is an instrument that has been validated and used in similar studies for the past twenty years. Therefore, the results from this study can be compared to results from earlier studies. The same benefits apply to the ISS survey that measured the level of social support adult ESL students had. Unfortunately, both surveys were only published in the English language and required translation to the other languages (Portuguese, Spanish, Chinese,

and Korean) spoken by ESL students participating in this study. Due to limited funds, non-professional translators were used to translate the survey making it possible for translation errors and differences in translated meanings to have occurred in the surveys. While steps were taken to avoid this, such as pilot testing, discussion of translation meaning between translators and the researcher, and double translation checks, it is still possible that translation errors may have occurred and have affected the results of the study. In this study, there were no findings significantly unique to particular language groups.

Another possible limitation was that only speakers of four language groups participated in the study. While there were very small numbers of students at the ELC from language groups not represented in this study, it could be important to include additional language groups as a means of having a more representative sample of speakers from several of other languages in the program. These data would provide a more complete picture of variables affecting the range of students' cultural adjustment process.

In this study, participants were organized by their first language in order to identify patterns of cultural adjustment that naturally occur in cultural groups. Korean speaking participants were all from Korea and generally the same cultural background nationally. Portuguese speaking participants were all from Brazil and represented that nation's culture. While Portuguese and Korean speaking participants represented one nationality for each language, Chinese and Spanish speakers included participants from multiple nationalities. Grouping participants in language groups was done for feasibility and to show patterns within language groups, however, it needs to be mentioned that having Spanish speaking participants from thirty countries, resulted in the inclusion of participants from multiple nationalities and cultural backgrounds to represent one language group. In addition, Chinese speaking participants

represented two nationalities: mainland China and Taiwan. Therefore, cultural groups were organized by L1, not by country of origin.

Another limitation in the study occurred in the data collection process. While students had the option of responding to open-ended questions in their first language, it was later noted that the data collected from the survey did not recognize responses in non-Romanized alphabets, resulting in the loss of Korean and Chinese written responses. This failure of the survey instrument led to fewer responses from these language groups that could be included in the qualitative data analysis, thus potentially altering the findings.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

Given the limitations in this study, it is clear that much more research could be done on the topic of cultural adjustment with English language learners. There are currently over a million international students in the United States learning English as a second language and pursuing the completion of academic coursework (Open Doors, 2017). Duplicating this study using larger populations could be done to gather more data to verify results found in this study. Since there is the issue of generalizability of the results of this study, it is essential for this study or a variation of it to be repeated in different regions and with different populations. Understanding and helping students during their adjustment process while learning English is extremely important for their success in the language programs they attend. In order to gain a better understanding of this specific group of sojourners and their experience, more thorough analyses with different populations of sojourners needs to be considered regarding factors that shape sojourners' cultural adjustment experiences. Another suggestion is to limit the focus group questions to direct questions that reflect the goals of the study. Additionally, given the difficult nature of capturing all students comments during focus groups, individual interviews would

provide more detailed responses from participants and serve to include all participants' personal experiences. In regards to the responses given to open-ended questions included in the survey, changing the questions to ask participants to explain their reasons and expand upon their answers would help produce more detailed data that could clear up any ambiguity of the responses.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study clarifies the various types of variables that appear to affect adults' cultural adjustment experience in an intensive English program (IEP) in the U.S. The CSQ created by Mumford (1998) proved a useful tool in showing the level of students' cultural adjustment. The Index of Sojourner Social Support (ISSS) scale also proved useful in showing the level of students' social support. In addition, qualitative data collected from the questionnaire's open-ended responses and focus groups led to findings that supported the quantitative findings provided through the regression analysis conducted on the CSQ, the ISSS, and participants' demographic information. These findings provide a foundation from which cultural adjustment training materials could be developed to help administrators, teachers, and students better understand the challenges of cultural adjustment and the variables that aid students' adjustment process within an IEP in the U.S.

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## Appendix A

### Culture Shock Questionnaire (CSQ)

The following questions address your experiences with culture shock in Utah. There is no wrong answer. Choose the response that best matches your experience.

1. Do you feel strain from the effort to adapt to a new culture?  
Most of the time/Occasionally/Not at all
2. Do you feel anxious or awkward when meeting local people?  
Most of the time/Occasionally/Not at all
3. Have you been missing your family and friends back home?  
Most of the time/Occasionally/Not at all
4. When talking to people, can you make sense of their gestures or facial expressions?  
Not at all/Occasionally/Most of the time
5. Do you feel generally accepted by the local people in the new culture?  
No/Not Sure/Yes
6. Do you feel uncomfortable if people stare at you when you go out?  
Very Uncomfortable/Slightly Uncomfortable/Not at all
7. Do you ever wish to escape from your new environment altogether?  
Most of the time/Occasionally/Not at all
8. When you go out shopping, do you feel as though people may be trying to cheat you?  
Most of the time/Occasionally/Not at all
9. Do you ever feel confused about your role or identity in the new culture?  
Most of the time/Occasionally/Not at all

10. Are you finding it an effort to be polite to your hosts?

Most of the time/Occasionally/Not at all

11. Have you found things in your new environment shocking or disgusting?

Many things/A few things/None

12. Do you ever feel helpless or powerless when trying to cope with the new culture?

Most of the time/Occasionally/Not at all

## Appendix B

### **The Index of Sojourner Social Support (ISSS)**

Instructions: The statements that follow relate to certain helpful behaviors that might make your stay in Utah easier or more pleasant. Read each description carefully and consider if you know persons who would perform the behaviors described. Use the following scale: *No one would do this, Someone would do this, A few would do this, Several would do this, Many would do this*

1. Listen and talk with you whenever you feel lonely or depressed.
2. Give you tangible assistance in dealing with any communication or language problems that you might face.
3. Explain things to make your situation clearer and easier to understand.
4. Spend some quiet time with you whenever you do not feel like going out.
5. Explain and help you understand the local culture and language.
6. Accompany you somewhere even if he/she doesn't have to.
7. Share your good times and bad times.
8. Help you deal with some local institutions' official rules and regulations.
9. Accompany you to do things whenever you need someone for company.
10. Provide necessary information to help orient you to your new surroundings.
11. Comfort you when you feel homesick.
12. Help you interpret things that you don't really understand.
13. Tell you what can and cannot be done in America.
14. Visit you to see how you are doing.
15. Tell you about available choices and options.

16. Spend time chatting with you whenever you are bored.
17. Reassure you that you are loved, supported and cared for.
18. Show you how to do something that you didn't know how to do.

## Appendix C

### **Questionnaire: Open-ended Questions**

1. What has helped you adjust to studying at the ELC?
2. What has made it difficult for you to study at the ELC?
3. What has made it difficult for you to adjust to life in America?
4. What has helped you adjust to living in America?

Were any of the questions on the survey unclear or confusing?

## Appendix D

### Questionnaire: Consent Form

#### Consent Form

My name is Sherie Kwok, a graduate student at Brigham Young University conducting this research under the supervision of Dr. Mark Tanner, from the Department of Linguistics and English Language. You are being invited to participate in this research study on cultural adjustment.

Your participation in this study will involve completing the attached survey. This should take approximately five minutes of your time.

Your participation will be anonymous. You will not be paid for being in this study. This survey involves minimal risk to you. The benefits, however, may impact society by helping increase knowledge about the cultural adjustment process of international students studying in America.

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to be. You do not have to answer any question that you do not want to answer for any reason. If you have questions about this project or if you have a research-related problem you may contact me, Sherie Kwok at [sherie.kwok@byu.edu](mailto:sherie.kwok@byu.edu) or my advisor, Dr. Mark Tanner at [mark\\_tanner@byu.edu](mailto:mark_tanner@byu.edu).

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB

Administrator at A-285 ASB, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602; [irb@byu.edu](mailto:irb@byu.edu); (801) 422-1461. The IRB is a group of people who review research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research participants.

The completion of this survey implies your consent to participate. If you choose to participate, please complete the attached survey and press the submit button when you are finished.

Thank you!

## Appendix E

### Focus Group Consent Form

#### RESEARCH SUBJECT CONSENT FORM

##### **Purpose**

The purpose of this research study is to gain information about the experiences of intensive English program students. It is being conducted by Sherie Kwok, a graduate student in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) at Brigham Young University. You were selected for participation because you are an intensive English program student whose native language is (Chinese, Korean, Portuguese, or Spanish).

##### **Procedures**

You will be asked to participate in one focus group session conducted in your native language. The focus group will last approximately 30 minutes. The interviewer will ask you questions about your experiences in the United States as an intensive English program student. A translator will be present to translate questions and answers. The focus group will be audio-recorded and later transcribed for use in the research study.

##### **Risks and Benefits**

Loss of privacy is a potential risk. Also, because focus groups include discussion of personal opinions, extra measures will be taken to protect each participant's privacy. The researcher will begin the focus group by asking the participants to agree to the importance of keeping information discussed in the focus group confidential. They will then ask each participant to verbally agree to keep everything discussed in the room confidential and will remind them at the

end of the group not to discuss the material outside. Only the researcher will have access to the data collected. Any recordings and transcripts of the focus group will be destroyed after one year or at the end of the study. The information you give about your experiences in the United States may help teachers and researchers better understand what it is like to be an intensive English program Student. The information may benefit future students and teachers and improve the quality of instruction in intensive English programs.

### **Confidentiality**

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You have the right to refuse to participate and the right to withdraw later without any negative consequences to yourself. Strict confidentiality will be maintained. Your real name will not be used at any time in the research. A unique ID number will be assigned to identify your focus group responses.

### **Contact Information**

If you have any questions regarding this research project you may contact Sherie Kwok at [sherie.kwok@byu.edu](mailto:sherie.kwok@byu.edu). If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant you may contact the IRB Administrator at A-285 ASB, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602; [irb@byu.edu](mailto:irb@byu.edu); (801) 422-1461.

### **Signature**

I have read, understood, and received a copy of the above consent form and desire of my own free will to participate in this study.

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*Signature of Research Subject*

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*Date*

## Appendix F

### Focus Group Questions

1. Describe what the schools/colleges/universities are like in your country? How do teachers teach? How do students study and learn?
2. Describe what makes a classroom feel comfortable for you. (i.e fun, interesting, relaxed, slow pace, etc.)
3. **At this point, give a definition of cultural adjustment: the process a person experiences adjusting to a new culture.**
4. Which of your classes at the ELC (reading, writing, speaking/listening, etc.) was the easiest for you to adjust to? Why?
5. Which of your classes (reading, writing, speaking/listening, etc.) did or have you had the most difficult time adjusting to? Why?
6. What would you identify as the biggest cultural challenge for you here at the ELC?
  - a. Why would you identify that thing as the biggest cultural challenge?
  - b. How does or did it affect your desire to continue studying English?
  - c. How does or did this issue affect your desire to continue living in the U.S.?
7. In what ways has the language learning experience at the ELC positively influenced your ability to adjust to living in the U.S.?
8. Has your adjustment to the U.S. increased or decreased since coming to the ELC? Why?
9. **What suggestions do you have for how teachers at the ELC can help students adjust to learning English in the U.S.?**
10. What would you identify as the biggest cultural challenge you have faced outside of the ELC? Is there one of these suggestions that you would rate as most important?

11. What things for you make studying/living in the US stressful? (group these)
12. How do you know if other students are adjusting well? How do you know if they are not adjusting well?
13. Did you learn anything about yourself from taking the survey?