

The Socialization of International Students in American Society and its Education System: A Comprehensive Literature Review

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Abstract

This article presents a systematic review of the socialization and adjustment challenges experienced by international students at US campuses and society. The study aims to explore difficulties, opportunities, and strategies in the social integration of international students, shedding light on the factors influencing their adjustment and overall well-being. Based on a wide range of scholarly empirical works, this study applies a systematic literature review approach based on Scopus and Web of Science online databases. It incorporates peer-reviewed and indexed research on the sociocultural integration of international students in the United States, published between 2004 - 2024. The results highlight the significance of acculturation, loneliness, and social isolation among international students caused by language barriers and cultural differences. While language and cultural obstacles are common concerns for East Asian students, discrimination and social isolation problems are more likely to dominate among Saudi Arabian, African, and Indian students. The analysis also indicates a lack of studies exploring the international students' communication challenges with faculty members and their abilities to navigate US social and racial structures. The findings emphasize enhancing mental health and counseling services at US campuses. This research could contribute to expanding an understanding of social integration and adjustment challenges among international students and offer potential strategies and interventions related to this process.

Keywords: *American education system, American society, international students, literature review, socialization, USA.*

Introduction

Globalization has propelled a significant rise in the number of internationally mobile tertiary students studying abroad. According to UNESCO, in 2021, the total number of outbound internationally mobile tertiary students reached 6,387,488 individuals (UNESCO, 2024). Among these, the largest contingents hailed from China (N=1,021,303) and India (N=508,174), with notable representation from other countries such as Vietnam, Germany, and the United States itself (Figure 1).

Meanwhile, the United States remains the premier destination for international students worldwide. The latest Open Doors Report indicates that in 2022, the country hosted 1,057,188

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international students from over 210 countries, marking a 12% increase over the previous academic year. Notably, Chinese students constituted the largest group (27%), followed by Indian (25%) and South Korean (4.1%) students (Open Doors Report, 2023). California, New York, and Texas have emerged as key host states (Statistica, 2023).

The influx of international students not only enriches cultural diversity but also significantly impacts the financial landscape of host universities. International students typically pay higher tuition fees, averaging \$24,914 USD in 2023 (Statistica, 2024), and contribute substantially to university budgets.

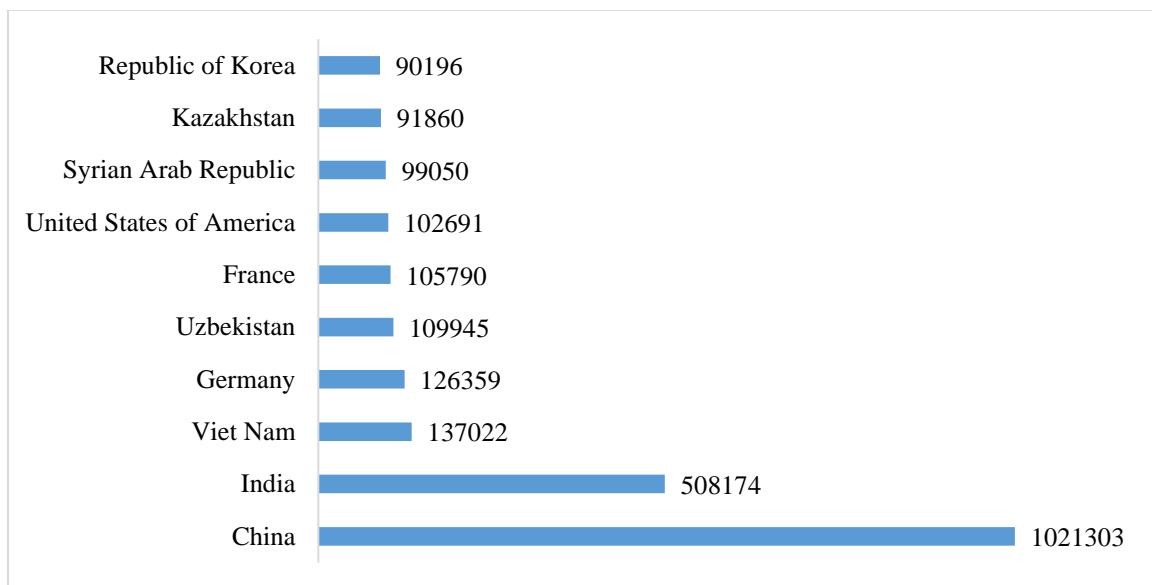


Figure 1. Numbers of International Students by Country of Origin

However, despite these benefits, international students often encounter numerous adjustment barriers that affect both their academic performance and psychological well-being (Alswayel, 2019; Ibraymova et al., 2023; Ma, 2020; Mesidor, 2016; Mori, 2007; Wang & Xiao, 2014). Understanding and addressing these challenges can aid prospective international students planning to study in the US, while also prompting hosting universities to enhance social support services. The most prevalent sociocultural adaptation challenges faced by international students encompass linguistic barriers, adjustment to new social norms and educational systems, homesickness, financial constraints, and the impact of stereotypes (Bound et al., 2021; Han et al., 2013; Hsieh, 2007; Huang & Klinger, 2006; Karimova et al., 2023; Li et al., 2014). This study acknowledges

the nuanced experiences of international students, influenced by their cultural backgrounds (Bartram, 2008; Coates, 2004; Lin & Yi, 1997; Yuan, 2011; Wu et al., 2015). It aims to address two key research questions:

1. What primary challenges do international students encounter while adjusting to the US educational and social environment?
2. What factors hinder their adjustment process?

This study's systematic analysis of the existing literature on international students' socialization on American university campuses categorizes cross-cultural adjustment challenges into academic, socio-cultural, and psychological domains. It offers insights into facilitating better communication, promoting inclusive campus practices, providing cultural resources, and expanding student-led organizations focused on socialization issues.

Despite these contributions, existing literature has tended to focus more on the adjustment challenges of Chinese, Indian, and Saudi Arabian students, neglecting students from other regions, such as Central Asia and post-Soviet countries. Moreover, there's a dearth of research on students' efforts to navigate American social and racial structures, including through their interactions with US faculty.

The theoretical framework draws from various *acculturation models* (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936; Berry, 1980; Ward et al., 2001; Bochner, 2003; Masgoret & Ward, 2006; Zhou et al., 2008) to elucidate the sociocultural adaptation process. It underscores the significance of affective, behavioral, and cognitive aspects in facilitating international students' integration into the host culture, emphasizing communication skills, social networking, and acceptance of cultural differences as key determining factors.

One acculturation model by Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits (1936) explains acculturation as the process of cultural change that occurs when individuals from different cultural backgrounds come into continuous contact. Significant aspects of acculturation include:

- Acculturation conditions: individual and group-level factors, such as the traits of the immigrant group, the receiving society, and the society of origin, which delineate the context of the acculturation process (Arends-Tóth & van de Vijver, 2006).
- Acculturation orientations: factors pertaining to how immigrants relate to their place of origin and the host society, also known as cultural adoption and maintenance (Snauwaert et al., 2003).

- Acculturation outcomes: internal or external factors related to processes of psychological adjustment and adopting culturally relevant skills to cope with various challenges (Ward et al., 2004; Van Oudenhoven, Judd, & Ward, 2008).

Another model of acculturation offered by Berry (1980) divides adaption processes and strategies into two categories: 1) the retention or rejection of one's inherent culture; 2) retention or rejection of the host culture. These dimensions yield the following four acculturation strategies:

- Assimilation: adopting the cultural norms of a host culture (Rejection/Retention)
- Separation: maintaining one's original culture (Retention/Rejection)
- Integration: preserving one's original culture while also assimilating into the host culture (Retention/Retention)
- Marginalization: rejecting both the original and host cultures (Rejection/Rejection)

Other models include Bochner's (2003), which highlights the importance of affective aspects in adaptation, emphasizing communication abilities. Zhou et al. (2008) stress the role of social networks in facilitating acculturation, and there are also models that underscore cognitive aspects, emphasizing the acceptance of cultural diversity (Ward et al., 2001; Masgoret & Ward, 2006).

Method

Design of the study

The design of this study utilized a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) methodology for several reasons. First, an SLR provides a comprehensive and systematic approach to synthesizing existing literature on a specific topic. By adhering to predefined criteria for study selection and data extraction, an SLR ensures transparency and minimizes bias in the review process. Moreover, this approach allows for the inclusion of a diverse range of studies. By encompassing quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods research, it offers a holistic understanding of the socialization issues confronted by international students on American campuses. Additionally, the use of an SLR facilitates the identification of gaps in the literature, thereby guiding future research directions. As noted by Kepes et al. (2013), an SLR is akin to meta-analysis in its capacity to aggregate findings from multiple studies, providing valuable insights into the phenomenon under investigation.

Data sources

In conducting the systematic literature review, a comprehensive search was conducted using academic databases such as Web of Science and Scopus. These databases were chosen to streamline the literature search process (Bakkalbasi et al., 2006).

Table 1 indicates the study's sources of data, including articles, journals, and authors, and denotes themes found in each. These articles were selected based on their relevance to the research questions and their contribution to understanding the socialization experiences of international students on American campuses. Among the included research articles focusing on international students in US higher education, key themes include:

- Adjustment challenges (social, academic, cultural)
- The role of social support and acculturation in mental health and adaptation
- Issues of racism and discrimination
- Mental health concerns (e.g., stress, anxiety, depression)
- Factors affecting academic performance
- Cultural adjustment experiences
- The effectiveness of support services
- Other aspects of acculturation

These themes collectively highlight the breadth of research exploring the experiences and challenges faced by international students in American universities.

The data collection

The data collection process search protocol was guided by predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, focusing on studies that examined the socialization experiences of international students on American campuses.

The inclusion criteria specified the year of publication between 2004 and 2024, the language of the document being English, and the document types including articles, dissertations, books, conference papers, reviews, and book chapters. Additional criteria specific to Scopus and Web of Science databases are presented in Tables 2 and 3. Papers that did not meet these specific criteria, as well as those not focusing on international students within American universities, were excluded from the analysis. Excluded document types included notes, editorials, letters, short surveys, retracted articles, and conference reviews.

The keywords search followed a stepwise technique, adding each word incrementally upon screening and reviewing every article. This method enabled the identification of the most relevant keywords pertaining to international students' adjustment and socialization issues on US campuses, facilitating the retrieval of necessary articles. The search engines utilized the following keywords: Students, International Student, Foreign Students, International Student-United States, International Student-United States-Socialization, and Foreign Student-United States-Socialization.

Trustworthiness of data

To ensure the trustworthiness of data and data analysis, the researcher independently assessed the scientific quality of the selected studies, focusing on their research design and methods. Only empirical works involving international students in the US were considered suitable for inclusion, resulting in the compilation of 61 studies.

Thematic and document analysis

Thematic and document analysis techniques were employed as the study's primary method of data analysis. It is known that structured methods for examining existing literature and data, including electronic and paper-based resources, thematic and document analysis are effective at making sense of the data, raising awareness, and developing empirical knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The current study examined various articles and research works on the socialization aspects of international students in the US to gather the information and evidence necessary to understand this phenomenon.

In particular, the article themes were curated based on their alignment with the research questions, which aimed to explore the socialization issues faced by international students on American campuses. Initially, a preliminary list of themes was identified through a careful examination of the literature and in consultation with subject matter experts. Subsequently, during the data collection phase, themes were refined and expanded as new insights emerged from the selected articles. Themes, including but not limited to cultural adaptation, academic support networks, social relationships, and sense of belonging, were selected based on their significance in influencing the socialization experiences of international students.

Data analysis

The most relevant works (61 studies) were collated, summarized, organized, and compared to other works. Following the guidelines outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), the data were systematically coded and organized into themes relevant to the research questions. Each theme was identified based on recurring patterns and commonalities across the selected articles. To ensure rigor and reliability, multiple researchers independently coded the data, and discrepancies were resolved through discussion and consensus. The results of the analysis are presented as quotes and excerpts from the reviewed articles, providing rich textual evidence to support the findings and answer the research questions. This approach yields a nuanced understanding of the socialization issues faced by international students on American campuses, grounded in empirical evidence from the literature.

Table 2 summarizes sources reviewed from Scopus, covering documents such as articles, books, and dissertations published between 2004 and 2024. The content includes keywords related to students, international students, higher education, universities, academic achievement, study abroad, globalization, educational measurement, migration, and decision making. The sources were taken predominantly from journals and books, with options for various levels of open access. Table 3 details sources reviewed from Web of Science, spanning publication dates from January 1, 2004, to January 2, 2024. Document types include articles, proceeding papers, review articles, book chapters, data papers, early access publications, and book reviews, all in English. Keywords focus on international students in the USA, emphasizing socialization and various aspects of their educational experiences. The database provided access to publications from all countries.

The screening of the search process through the tables shows that the search process was run for all selected keywords. More decisive keywords were more effective at yielding relevant sources, however, despite the many advantages of Literature search engines, it proved challenging to balance broad and specific searches (for example, on student adjustment in general and challenges during this process).

Findings

The studies highlight that the United States is the destination of choice for diverse groups of students with varying cultural backgrounds. In some cases, this is because American educational

and career prospects are unavailable in the students' home countries. In addition, American education gives additional benefits that facilitate more job and training opportunities.

Although international students contribute to campus diversity and university resources, research on international students' socialization indicates that these students face various challenges while integrating into American society. However, currently the extant literature mainly focuses on Chinese, Indian, and Arabian students' experiences.

According to existing acculturation theories, the acculturation process has two outcomes that can be characterized as internal and external (Ward et al., 2004; Van Oudenhoven, Judd, & Ward, 2008). While internal aspects indicate the outcomes of psychological adjustment, the external refers to the ability of individuals to adapt to new cultures and norms. As they undergo this process, international students make many decisions to accept or reject these norms, defining the extent to which they are assimilated or marginalized (Berry, 1980).

The literature selected for the analysis concerns:

- Adjustment and acculturation challenges of international students: 24 studies focused on the overall population, as well as six that examined Chinese students; four that looked at Asian students; three that examined African students; and one each that focused on Indian students, Taiwanese students, Saudi students, and British students respectively.
- Issues of depression and psychological well-being: four studies, of which two examined the mental health difficulties of Arabian and East Asian students, and two focused on the overall international student population.
- Issues of stereotypes, discrimination, and racism: 10 studies, of which two examined African students; two looked at Indian students; one focused on Chinese students; and five looked at the overall international student population.
- Academic challenges: Six studies, of which two focused on Saudi students; two on Chinese students; and two on the general international student population.

Thus, the most frequently analyzed dimensions of the socialization process among international students in the US are the adjustment and acculturation difficulties.

In addition, the systematic analysis indicates that within the selected 61 studies, 28 works were quantitative, 21 were qualitative, and 12 were mixed research studies.

Table 4*Summary of Research Subjects*

No	Research subjects	Number of works
1.	Adjustment challenges of Chinese students	10
2.	Adjustment challenges of African students	5
3.	Adjustment challenges of Saudi Arabian students	4
4.	Adjustment challenges of Asian students	3
5.	Adjustment challenges of Indian students	3
6.	Adjustment challenges of Taiwanese students	1
7.	Adjustment challenges of British students	1
8.	Adjustment challenges of international students	33

Created by author

Most selected works were published in US-based peer-reviewed journals in International Students, Higher Education, and Intercultural Relations Cross-Cultural Psychology. A sample of empirical qualitative works showed they generally captured a comparatively small number of students, from 1 to 15; the quantitative and mixed method studies involved up to 2500 participants.

Cross-cultural adjustment challenges of international students in the US varied between academic, socio-cultural, and psychological (or mental health) challenges.

Table 5*Cross-cultural challenges of international students in the US campuses*

Academic	Socio-cultural	Psychological (or mental health)
Language barriers	Cultural shift	Homesickness
Learning mode/active classroom participation	Navigating in a new social structure	Loneliness
Academic restrictions	Accommodation problems	Depression
Student-supervisor relationship	Adapting to time zones	Isolation
Different academic standards and content	Financial Problems Prejudice or discrimination. Harassment Stereotypes Domestic hostility	Exclusion Resistance

Created by the author based on the literature review.

According to the study's findings, the most frequently reported acculturation and adjustment issues among international students are language barriers, cultural differences and shocks, and feelings of homesickness and loneliness. English language limitations (Huang and Klinger, 2006), socio-cultural barriers or cultural shock, and psychological distress (Han, et al., 2013; Li et al., 2014) are among the most common problems encountered by Chinese students, however researchers highlighted that language barriers contribute to widespread problems within the entire international student community, not only among Chinese students (Lin & Yi, 1997; Yuan, 2011). Learning strategies and communication styles of international students varied depending on their level of language proficiency and confidence (Hsieh, 2007; Bound et al., 2021). The extent of such difficulties varied depending on the students' cultural backgrounds.

Studies also highlighted that adjustment challenges affecting East Asian students, including Japanese, Korean, and Chinese students, negatively impact their cross-cultural transition and adaptation (Wu et al., 2015). Again, these challenges included English language proficiency and cultural shock (Zhou et al., 2008; Leong, 2015), while more specific challenges were connected to academic culture, time management, American college party culture, exclusion from the American social network, depression, and overwhelming family obligations (Vogel, Wester, & Larson, 2007; Ma, 2020). In a high-pressure environment, East Asian students prioritize socio-cultural integration to maintain good academic progress and adequate psychological and mental strength (Bender et al., 2019). Their psychological well-being is significantly associated with the length of academic study, attitudes toward seeking help, and depression (Li, Wang, and Xiao, 2014).

On the other hand, scholarly works examining the difficulties faced by Indian students in the US suggested that this group makes enormous efforts to overcome cultural barriers and struggle to maintain their family values (Glod, 2005). Stereotypes and racism against Indian students affect their social development, while psychological stigma impacts their mental well-being (Bartram, 2008; Coates, 2004).

There are also many works on the challenges faced by African students in the US higher education system (Blake, 2006; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). Empirical works conducted among African students' highlighted that despite these students not necessarily having language barriers, they still face major cultural problems related to discrimination (Blake, 2006; Irungu, 2013). Students report mistreatment based on discrimination due to social class, ethnicity, and accent. Another

category of problems are those relating to financing their education, causing many psychological consequences (Blake, 2006).

On the other hand, socio-cultural adjustment issues among Arabian students often relate to gender roles and identities (Morshedi, 2011). Arabian students continue to face discrimination and stigma due to the association with the 9/11 attacks (Al-Dayel, 2018; Alswayel, 2019). Being treated with dignity and social support to replace lost family support has been defined as the most crucial factor affecting the overall well-being of Arabian students (Alswayel, 2019; Hofer, 2009). This kind of support extends to lifestyle qualities such as family size, working hours per week, age, and other factors that could reflect students' ability to assimilate into a new setting (Al-Dayel, 2018).

Meanwhile, empirical studies indicate that most international students feel satisfied that their "US experiences" fulfill their personal and professional goals (Hofer, 2009; King et al., 2013). Despite various challenges, they express overall satisfaction with their academic and social experiences in the United States (Yang, 2018).

The results of the systematic literature review on international students' social adjustment challenges allow us to categorize those difficulties into academic, socio-cultural, and psychological barriers that hinder international students' successful integration into American society.

A. Academic Barriers. International students are constantly struggling with their academic workload and relationships with host nationals (Yan & Berliner, 2009; Syed, 2021; Barbayannis et al., 2022). Scholars emphasize that the academic successes of international students depend on their ability to participate in class discussions and interact with peers outside of class, both linguistically and culturally (Bahmani et al., 2018; Martirosyan et al., 2019). The use of English as a second academic language leads to serious stresses among international students (Duanmu, Li, & Chen, 2010; Robertson et al., 2000). For example, international students report that they face difficulties in comprehending lectures and get anxious when speaking in front of American audiences (Burdett & Crossman, 2012; Lin & Scherz, 2014). Performing multiple tasks such as being a student, teaching, or serving as a research assistant adds further academic stress and burdens to international students (Green et al., 2021). Studies confirm a positive correlation between academic stress and mental well-being (Syed, 2021). Findings suggest that academic expectations, workload, grading, and students' academic self-perceptions affect international students' psychological well-being (Barbayannis et al., 2022).

B. Socio-Cultural Barriers. Apart from having to deal with academic challenges, studies claim that international students must adapt to a new social and cultural environment which may be different from their country of origin (Kristiana et al., 2022). International students might feel a great amount of shock while encountering a new environment with different norms, cultural values, standards of public appearance, or other characteristics (Ma, 2020; Mutongoza & Olawale, 2023; Schartner & Young, 2015). Challenges also involve troubles with communication and developing friendships, a lack of cultural awareness, housing and financing issues, eating habits and food preferences, etc. (Johnson et al., 2007; Eustace, 2007).

International students are most often subject to discrimination that is focused against their language, culture, or country of origin (Lee & Rice, 2007; Poyrazli S., Lopez, 2007; Russel et al., 2010). Discriminatory attitudes reflect negative stereotypes associated with language barriers, miscommunication, disintegration, and cultural resistance (Ruble & Zhang, 2013). The relevant concept of “neo-racism” emphasizes the likelihood of domestic hostility towards international students in general, which reflects the sentiment of resistance and exclusion. It helps explain the commonly reported social exclusion felt by Chinese students on American campuses (Ma, 2020). Socio-cultural barriers may affect both the physical and mental conditions of international students (Bae, 2020; Barbayannis et al., 2022). Studies highlighted the importance of available social networks supporting students undergoing such circumstances (De Araujo, 2011; Razgulin, 2023). How hosting universities handle the adaptation issues experienced by international students can either address or further intensify their socio-cultural troubles (Beoku-Betters, 2004). The extent to which domestic students establish a welcoming atmosphere also plays a significant role in decreasing the socialization challenges of their international peers (Charles-Toussaint, & Crowson, 2010).

C. Psychological Barriers. Issues of depression and other psychological troubles are widespread among international students (Han, et al., 2013). Studies highlight that support for mental and physical health is associated with positive outcomes for international students (Wei et al., 2007; Li, et al, 2014). Along with other factors, the psychological wellbeing of international students is heavily affected by their experience of linguistic and communication barriers (Chalungsooth & Schneller, 2011; Mamiseieshvili, 2012).

Studies highlight that while adjusting to the host country, psychological difficulties often consist of depression, anxiety, and feelings of loneliness (Nilsson et al., 2004; Yokushko et al., 2008).

Findings suggest that international students, despite experiencing psychological and other difficulties, demonstrate less propensity to seek help (Xiong & Yang, 2020). Scholars emphasize that while engaging with students facing psychological challenges, hosting universities should group international students into a specific category (Hanassab, 2006). There is enough indication that certain groups of international students, such as those from the Middle East and Africa, are more frequently being victimized and discriminated against to justify focused responses (Al-Dayel, 2018).

The main implication of this study is that international students are particularly vulnerable compared to domestic students. They are joining an often-completely unfamiliar setting, creating new stresses compared to those faced generally by university students. Host communities should provide appropriate and thoughtful accommodations where international students can develop new behaviors and focus on addressing their adjustment issues.

Discussion, Conclusion and Implications

Literature has reported that language barriers, cultural differences, and stigma against international culture are the main variables that influence international students' adjustment process (Duanmu, Li, & Chen, 2010; Robertson et al., 2000; Schartner & Young, 2015; Ma, 2020). Findings from this systematic literature review support this notion, as these variables along with other factors influence international students' socialization and overall wellbeing in the United States.

This study found that the adjustment challenges of international students can be categorized into larger academic, socio-cultural, and psychological factors. It confirms the significance of student-supporting services and how a hosting university addresses the mental health problems of international students, as discussed in previous studies (Wei et al., 2007; Lashari et al., 2018).

- Academic challenges seem to depend on the ability of international students to be involved in class discussions and interact with their peers. This aspect of socialization has been portrayed in the findings of previous studies (Bahmani et al., 2018; Martirosyan et al., 2019). In addition, the research highlights language barriers that reflect primary difficulties in comprehending study materials and giving public speeches, as indicated by earlier empirical studies (Burdett & Crossman, 2012; Lin & Scherz, 2014).
- Socio-cultural challenges relate to difficulties such as adjusting to new cultural norms and values due to a lack of cultural awareness, as well as to troubles with networking and

accommodating in a new setting (Johnson et al., 2007; Eustace, 2007; Schartner & Young, 2015; Ma, 2020).

- Psychological barriers relate to mental and psychological health issues caused by feelings of loneliness, homesickness, and depression (Han et al., 2013; Chalungsooth & Schneller, 2011; Mamiseieshvili, 2012).

Meanwhile, differences in the scale of adaptation difficulties among student groups suggested that country of origin and cultural perceptions may impact the extent and features of the acculturualization process. The ability to communicate and engage with American peers seemed to increase international students' awareness of local culture and reduce miscommunication risks, while granting greater access to available student supporting services and international student facilities. This finding supports previous studies and suggests that newly arrived international students are particularly vulnerable to potential adjustment risks and challenges. As such, this highlights specific areas that social support and international student services in a host university should address.

The selected scholarly works focus mostly on challenges experienced by Chinese and East Asian, Indian, African, and Arabian students (Wu et al., 2015; Leong, 2015; Yang, 2018; Bound et al., 2021; Glod, 2005; Bartram, 2008; Blake, 2006; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Hofer, 2009; Alswayel, 2019; Ma, 2020). This can be explained by the high number of students from these countries as a proportion of the entire number of international students at US campuses. The Open Doors data consistently highlights that Chinese students represent the largest group of international students on the US campuses.

Chinese and East Asian students often experience acculturualization, interpersonal shame, loneliness, and isolation cases caused by language barriers and cultural differences (Huang and Klinger, 2006; Lin & Yi, 1997; Yuan, 2011). The adjustment practice among Saudi Arabian students emphasizes the dominance of issues related to immigration rules, airport procedures, and visa difficulties. According to previous studies, instances of stigma and discrimination have occurred due to the perception of the 9/11 attacks (Al-Dayel, 2018; Alswayel, 2019). Bartram (2008) and Coates, 2004) indicate that Indians and Africans on US campuses also face heightened problems with racial discrimination.

While these problems should not be minimized, the results of this study also indicate that international students are generally satisfied with their academic and social experiences in the US

and are able to realize their personal and professional ambitions. Many empirical works supported this notion (Hofer, 2009; King et al., 2013; Yang, 2018), and emphasized that the higher education system in the USA is competitive because of its strict learning and grading rules. Struggling with academic difficulties is normal - considering the potential differences in education and language contexts. It is also reasonable that language barriers limit the ability to comprehend lectures and assignments, which affects international students' academic success. Moreover, according to previous research (Robertson et al., 2000; Martirosyan et al., 2019), faculty members at US universities recognize that English language competence is a primary problem for international students.

The increased focus on social inclusion and student diversity in the US academia likely indicates the existence of stigma and discrimination against international students. Weak support levels negatively influencing international students' well-being is supported by previous empirical works (Bae, 2020; Barbayannis et al., 2022; De Araujo, 2011; Razgulin, 2023). Therefore, improving the state of weak social support or inadequate student support services is important for improving the international students' adaptation process. However, discrimination or other forms of social exclusion, while not appropriate for the academic environment, are confirmed by previous studies and place additional demands on the hosting society seeking to provide effective services (Lee & Rice, 2007; Ma, 2020). Prejudice and hostility, according to Russel et al. (2010) may occur both verbally and physically, causing isolation, depression, and mental health issues among international students.

The findings indicate the significance of fostering a student-inclusive environment on US campuses. Earlier empirical works also suggest that community inclusion with specific attention to building an international student-inclusive environment cuts adjustment barriers among international students (Beoku-Betters, 2004; Charles-Toussaint, & Crowson, 2010). Should that effort be made, positive outcomes result beyond improving the feelings of international students, as the results of the current study specify that international students play an important role in designing the academic and campus environment. There is therefore a benefit to reducing barriers, especially those that are derived from biases against certain cultural and language backgrounds (Al-Dayel, 2018; Alswayel, 2019; Bartram, 2008; Coates, 2004).

Indeed, the results of this study consistently emphasize the importance of social support services facilitated by the host universities. According to Xiong & Yang (2020), social support facilities

are a critical subject for student attraction strategies. They are also recognized as a strong predictor of student mental health since the belonging feature of social support is crucial for psychological well-being. Lashari et al. (2018) and Razgulin et al. (2023) add that higher emotional-social support reflects overall well-being and social adjustment. The findings of the current study suggest the importance of facilitating the various sources of social support, including academic peer groups, informal communications with faculty, individual tutorials, social networks, student support services, and close relationships with friends and family.

Meanwhile, the analysis indicates a lack of studies concerning the social adjustment issues of international students from other regions, particularly Central-Asian and post-soviet states. Scholarly works often report on challenges of those students representing the largest donors of international students in the US, like China, India, Saudi Arabia, and other East and South Asian states. Studies perhaps underestimate the challenges associated with international students' interactions with US faculty and their ability to navigate within existing social and racial infrastructure. Further study of these issues may help more international students to integrate smoothly into American society and culture.

Other areas for improvement identified in this study include enhancing communication practices with student communities and leveraging international students' cultural resources for information dissemination. Encouraging the development of student-led organizations focused on raising awareness about socialization challenges through workshops and support initiatives for mental health issues is also recommended.

This study underscores the ongoing need for targeted support and inclusive practices to enhance the social and academic integration of international students in U.S. higher education. Addressing these challenges effectively can foster a more welcoming and supportive environment for international students, ultimately enriching the educational experience and promoting global diversity on American campuses. Future research endeavors should continue to refine methodologies and explore diverse student experiences to better inform policies and practices in international higher education contexts.

Acknowledgement

This research has been funded by the Science Committee of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Grant No. AP13067766).

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Appendix

Table 1.
Sources of data

	Article Title	Journals	Authors	Themes
1.	Adjustment Issues of International Students Enrolled in American Colleges and Universities: A Review of the Literature	Higher Education	Araujo, A.	Adjustment
2.	Role of social support, hardiness, and acculturation as predictors of mental health among international students of Asian Indian origin	International Quarterly of Community Health Education	Atri, A., Sharma, M., & Cottrell R.	Social support, acculturation
3.	The Perceived Stressors and Coping Skills of Graduate Students: A Development and Validation Study	The Journal of Counseling Research and Practice (JCRP) Volume 4, No. 1 (86-101)	Anekstein, A., Wells, P., Hill, N., Kerwin, A., & H. Wagner	Adjustment challenges and strategies
4.	The Globalization of Postsecondary Education: The Role of International Students in the US Higher Education System	The Journal of Economic Perspectives	Bound, J., Braga, B., Khanna, G., & Turner, S.	Socialization
5.	Social Support Benefits Psychological Adjustment of International Students: Evidence from a Meta-Analysis.	Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology	Bender, M., van Osch, Y., Sleegers, W., & Ye, M.	Social support, Adjustment
6.	Supporting international students in higher education: Constructions, culture, and clashes.	Teaching in Higher Education	Bartram, B.	Social support, acculturation
7.	African Women Pursuing Graduate Studies in the Sciences: Racism, Gender Bias, and Third World Marginality	NWSA Journal	Beoku-Betts, J.	Racism, discrimination
8.	The experiences and adjustment problems of Africans at a historically black institution	College Student Journal	Blake, A.	Adjustment
9.	Academic Stress and Mental Well-Being in College Students: Correlations, Affected Groups, and COVID-19.	Frontiers Psychology	Barbayannis G, Bandari M, Zheng X, Baquerizo H, Pecor KW, Ming X.	Academic Stress, Mental Well-Being
10.	Academic socialization: A comparative study of the experiences of the Emirati and Saudi students at US universities	Doctoral Dissertations, The Pennsylvania State University, USA.	Al Morshedi, G.	Academic socialization
11.	The academic and social integration of Saudi international students in the US higher education institutions	East Carolina University. Theses & Dissertations	Al-Dayel, N.A.	Academic and social integration
12.	An examination of death anxiety, psychological depression, and adult attachment patterns among Saudi students in the USA	Theses & Dissertations	Alswayel, S.	Death anxiety, psychological depression
13.	Engaging international students	Quality Assurance in Education	Burdett, J., & Crossman, J.	Socialization
14.	Development of translation materials to assess international students' mental health concerns.	Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development	Chalungsooth, P., & Schneller, R.	Mental health
15.	Prejudice against international students: The role of threat	The Journal of Psychology: Interdisciplinary and Applied	Charles-Toussaint, G. C., & Crowson, H. M.	Racism, discrimination

	perceptions and authoritarian dispositions in U.S. students			
16.	Stereotyping between African Americans and West Indian college students.	American Sociological Association	Coates, R.	Racism, discrimination
17.	Examining the cultural adjustment experiences of African international college students: A qualitative analysis.	Journal of Counseling Psychology	Constantine, M. G., Anderson, G. M., Berkel, L. A., Cadwell, L. D., & Utsey, S. O.	Cultural adjustment
18.	Acculturation level, perceived English fluency, perceived social support level, and depression among Taiwanese international students	College Student Journal	Dao, K. T., Lee, D., & Chang, H. L	Acculturation
19.	Factors Influencing Acculturative Stress among International Students in the United States	Ph.D. Thesis. Kansas State University; Manhattan, KS, USA	Eustace R.W.	Acculturation
20.	Determinants of International Students' Academic Performance: A Comparison Between Chinese and Other International Students	Journal of Studies in International Education	Gang Li, Wei Chen, & Duanmu, J.-L.	Academic Performance
21.	Emotional support received moderates academic stress and mental well-being in a sample of Afghan university students amid COVID-19	International Journal of Social Psychiatry	Green, Z. A., Faizi, F., Jalal, R., and Zadran, Z.	Academic stress, mental well-being
22.	Stressors, anxiety, acculturation and adjustment among international and North American students	International Journal of Intercultural Relations	Fritz, M., Chin, D. & V. DeMarinis	Anxiety, acculturation and adjustment
23.	Report of a mental health survey among Chinese international students at Yale University	Journal of American college health	Han X, Han X, Luo Q, Jacobs S, Jean-Baptiste M.	Mental well-being
24.	Diversity, International Students, and Perceived Discrimination: Implications for Educators and Counselors	Journal of Studies in International Education	Hanassab, S.	Racism, discrimination
25.	The identification issues serving as a barrier to positive educational experiences for Saudi Arabian students studying in the state of Missouri	Doctoral dissertation from ProQuest Digital Dissertations. (339682)	Hofer, V.E.	Acculturation
26.	Challenges for international students in higher education: One student's narrated story of invisibility and struggle	College Student Journal	Hsieh, M.-H.	Acculturation, struggle
27.	Chinese Graduate Students at North American Universities: Learning Challenges and Coping Strategies.	Canadian and international education	Huang, J. & Klinger, D.	Learning Challenges and Coping Strategies
28.	African Students in the US Higher-Education System	Palgrave Macmillan, New York	Irungu, J.	Acculturation
29.	Isolation, adjustment, and acculturation issues of international students: Interventions strategies for counselors	American Counseling Association	Johnson L.R., Sandhu D.S	Isolation, adjustment, and acculturation
30.	British Students in the United States: Motivations, Experiences and Career Aspirations	Palgrave Macmillan, New York	King, R., Findlay, A., Ahrens, J. & Geddes, A.	Adaptation

31.	Social Support and Acculturative Stress of International Students	International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health	Kristiana Karyanta, NA, Simanjuntak E, Prihatsanti U, Ingarianti TM, Shohib M.	Social Support and adjustment
32.	Factors affecting international students' transition to higher education institutions in the United States: From the perspective of the office of international students	College Student Journal	Kwon, Y.	Adaptation and integration
33.	Welcome to America? Perceptions of NeoRacism and Discrimination Among International Students	Higher Education	Lee, Jenny. J. and Charles Rice	Racism, discrimination
34.	Coming to America: Assessing the Patterns of Acculturation, Friendship Formation, and the Academic Experiences of International Students at a U.S. College	Journal of International Students	Leong, P.	Acculturation
35.	East Asian international students and psychological wellbeing: A systematic review	Journal of International Students	Li, J., Wang, Y., & Xiao, F.	Psychological Well-Being
36.	Asian international students' adjustment: Issues and program suggestions	College Student Journal	Lin, J.-C. G., & Yi, J. K.	Adjustment
37.	Challenges Facing Asian International Graduate Students in the US: Pedagogical Considerations in Higher Education	Journal of International Students	Lin, Shu-Yuan & Scherz, S.	Adjustment Challenges
38.	Ambitious and Anxious: How Chinese College Students Succeed and Struggle in American Higher Education	Columbia University Press	Ma Y.	Acculturation
39.	International student persistence in U.S. postsecondary institutions	Higher Education	Mamiseishvili, K.	Adjustment
40.	Academic and Social Support Services for International Students: Current Practices	Journal of International Students	Martirosyan, N., Bustamantea, R. & D. Patrick Saxon	Academic and Social Support
41.	Utilization rate and presenting concerns of international students at a university counseling center: Implications for outreach programming	Journal of College Student Psychotherapy	Nilsson, J. E., Berkel, L. A., Flores, L. Y., & Lucas, M. S.	Adjustment
42.	Understanding stressors of international students in higher education: What college counselors and personnel need to know	Journal of Instructional Psychology	Olivas, M., & Lee, C.	Adjustment
43.	Determinants of health-related quality of life in international graduate students	Currents in Pharmacy Teaching and Learning	Ogunsanya, M., Bamgbade, B., Thach, A., Sudhapalli, P. & K. Rascati,	Adjustment challenges
44.	An exploratory study of perceived discrimination and homesickness: A comparison of international students and American students	Journal of Psychology	Poyrazli S., Lopez M.	Discrimination, homesickness
45.	Barriers to Adjustment: Needs of International Students within a Semi-Urban Campus Community	Journal of Instructional Psychology	Poyrazli, S., & Grahame, K.M	Adjustment

46.	The role of social support and sociocultural adjustment for international students' mental health	Scientific Reports	Razgulin J, Argustaitė-Zailskienė G, Šmigelskas K	Social support and sociocultural adjustment
47.	International students, learning environments and perceptions: A case study using the Delphi technique	Higher Education Research & Development	Robertson, M., Line, M., Jones, S., & Thomas, S.	Social support and sociocultural adjustment
48.	Stereotypes of Chinese International Students Held by Americans	International Journal of Intercultural Relations	Ruble, R. and Yan Bing Zh.	Stereotypes of international students
49.	The international student experience: Three styles of adaptation.	Higher Education	Russell, J., Rosenthal, D., & Thomson, G.	Adaptation
50.	Predictors of depression and anxiety among international students	Journal of Counseling and Development	Sümer, S., Poyrazli, S., & Grahame, K.	Depression and anxiety
51.	Variation in the prediction of cross-cultural adjustment by Asia-Indian students in the United States	College Student Journal	Tochkov, K., Levine, L., & Sanaka, A.	Cross-cultural adjustment
52.	Mixing it up: International graduate students' social interactions with American students.	Journal of College Student Development	Trice, A. G.	Cross-cultural adjustment
53.	Acculturative stress, perfectionism, years in the United States, and depression among Chinese international students	Journal of Counseling Psychology	Wei, M. Heppner, P., Mallen, M., Ku, T., Liao, K. & Wu, T	Acculturative stress
54.	International Student's Challenge and Adjustment to College	Education Research International	Wu, H., Garza, E., & Guzman, N.	Adjustment challenges
55.	Asian international students' help-seeking intentions and behavior in American Postsecondary Institutions	International Journal of Intercultural Relations	Xiong, Y. & L., Yang	Social support and sociocultural adjustment
56.	Seeking help in a foreign land: International students' use patterns for a U.S. university counseling center	Journal of College Counseling	Yakushko, O., Davidson, M., & Sanford-Martens, T. C.	Social support and sociocultural adjustment
57.	Traditional and online support networks in the cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese international students in the United States.	Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication	Ye, J.	Cross-cultural adaptation
58.	US-based social media use and American life: A study of Chinese students' acculturation and adaptation in America	Global Media and China	Yang, C.	Cross-cultural adjustment
59.	Academic and cultural experiences of Chinese students at an American university: A qualitative study	Intercultural Communication Studies	Yuan, W.	Cross-cultural adjustment
60.	Critical issues of literature on counseling international students	Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development	Yoon, E., & Portman, T. A. A.	Social support and sociocultural adjustment
61.	Chinese international students' academic stressors in the United States	College Student Journal	Yan, K., & Berliner, D. C.	Adjustment challenges

Table 2
Source Review from Scopus

Source	Scopus
Year (range)	2004-2024
Document type	Article Book Dissertation
Language	English
Keywords	Students International Students Higher Education United states Universities University Students Academic Achievement Internationality University Student Study Abroad Internationalization Globalization Educational Measurement Migration Decision Making
Country/territory	All countries
Source type	Journal Book
Open access	All open access Green Gold Bronze Hybrid gold

Table 3
Source Review from Web of Science

Source	Web of Science
Publication date (range)	2004-01-01-2024-01-02
Document type	Article Proceeding Paper Review Article Book chapters Book Data Paper Early Access Book Review
Language	English
Keyword	International Student Foreign Students International Student-USA International Students-USA International Student-America International Student-United States International Student-United States-Socialization Foreign Student-United States-Socialization
Country/territory	All countries