

Acculturation of International Single Students of Higher Education in the Philippines: A Phenomenological Study

Godwin Kato*, Istiarti Berci Sarempaa, Naw Ei Phyu Sin Lay, Prema Gaikwad

Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Philippines

Abstract

International students move with fractions of their cultural heritage. When they enter a new country, they often encounter a mismatch between their culture and the host culture. In adapting to a new culture, such students experience acculturation. Several studies have been conducted on acculturation. However, knowledge and methodology gaps were found regarding the acculturation of single students in higher education. This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of international acculturated single students of higher education in Philippine international schools. The study is based on Berry's acculturation model, which involves assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization. Moreover, hermeneutic phenomenology was utilized to describe and interpret the participants' experiences. Purposive sampling and maximal variation were used to select the four participants from two faith-based universities. Data was collected through in-depth interviews and visual representations. Based on the findings, acculturation is an eye-opening and identity search process embodying comparative support and continuous inquiry contexts. Participants viewed acculturation as a learning occasion requiring constant change. The findings portray several episodes of cultural preservation, engagement, and voluntary integration consistent with Berry's acculturation model.

Keywords: Acculturation, international single students, Berry's acculturation model, hermeneutic phenomenology, Philippines

Introduction

Cross-border movements can occur for several reasons. Chamie (2020) estimated that 272 million people crossed national borders by 2020, primarily for safety reasons. Other motives include business, education, and recreation (Hamlin, 2021; Hanlon & Vicino, 2014; Starr-Glass, 2019; Tazzioli, 2020; Ward et al., 2020). Like most immigrants, international students move along with portions of their cultural heritage. Consequently, they often encounter a mismatch between their culture and culture in the new setting (Fargion & Nuttman-Shwartz, 2019). International students experience acculturation while adjusting to the new environment.

Acculturation constitutes elements of adaptation that thrive in an invisible contention. Fargion and Nuttman-Shwartz (2019) clarified

that acculturation occurs between two or more unique cultures, whereby the ascendant culture overshadows others. During acculturation, constant patterns of conserving, adapting, and rejecting norms, values, and practices occur. The acculturation process constitutes a degree of discomfort (Driscoll & Torres, 2022; Ma et al., 2020; Odhiambo et al., 2018). Coincidentally, responses to discomfort differ from person to person.

Acculturation among international students in higher education has become a critical phenomenon affecting student life. As the quest for empirical studies increases, many international single students report feelings of irresistible stress, disengagement from academic pursuits, or even enlightening experiences. Despite the increasing awareness of acculturation, a concrete understanding of the expe-

riences of international single students in higher education is lacking. Moreover, the existing literature overlooks the diverse experiences of international single students across different institutions. This study explores the lived experiences of international single students of higher education in the Philippines. Notwithstanding some qualitative research studies on acculturation and international students, applying Miles' (2017) framework to the literature review portrays a knowledge gap and methodology gap between acculturation and international single higher education students (Ma et al., 2020; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). By addressing these gaps, this study intends to provide insights that can inform interventions and support systems to enhance wellness among international single students in higher education, consequently boosting their academic, emotional, and social experiences.

This study explored the lived experiences of international acculturated single students (IASS) of higher education in Philippine international schools. The student population in the selected schools includes Africans, Americans, Asians, Europeans, and Oceanians. The findings of this study are significant to education administrators responsible for student welfare, student communities, and future researchers who may conduct acculturation studies. The following questions guided this research:

1. What is it like for international acculturated single students in higher education to experience acculturation in the Philippines?
2. What are the contexts of the lived experiences of international acculturated single students in higher education in the Philippines?
3. How do the international acculturated single students in higher education in the Philippines view cultural diversity in the future?

Literature Review

A heightened focus on acculturation continues to produce a ripple effect in society. In addition to its connotations, acculturation is a "dynamic process" (Ward et al., 2001, p. 43) that occurs in societies and among individuals (Berry, 1992; Karim, 2021; Szapocznik et al., 1978; van der Zee & van Oudenhoven, 2022; Ward & Szabó, 2023). Considering acculturation and psychological regulation, the former is an adaptation of a foreigner who settles in an unfamiliar environment (Nailevna, 2017). Adaptation occurs when people from different cultures interact (Dentakos et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2020; Paolillo & Jager, 2020); thus, acculturation is an unending process that tends to alter norms and practices among culturally heterogeneous groups that interact.

There is a connection between acculturation and culture shock. The latter is the usual primary reaction to encountering an unfamiliar culture and constitutes adverse emotional and physical repercussions (Furnham, 2004; Ward et al., 2020). These include anxiety, frustration, and confusion due to the disruption of familiar social structures (Ward et al., 2020). Unquestionably, the existence of culture shock never discounts the simultaneous occurrence of acculturation (Wa-Mbaleka & Ryszewski, 2012). Instead, they affect each other productively or retrogressively when adopting a new culture.

Acculturation encompasses adjusting routines, language usage, cultural practices, and values (Paolillo & Jager, 2020; Szapocznik et al., 1978; van der Zee & van Oudenhoven, 2022). It is a complex developmental process that takes time because adjustment occurs with the major cultural components. In an earlier projection, Ghebrekidan (2018) postulated that cultural identity is not automatically discarded within acculturated communities. The original culture is scarcely lost. Instead, interacting cultural groups are influenced by each other's practices (Croucher & Kramer, 2016; Liu et al., 2020; van der Zee & van Oudenhoven, 2022), thus engendering instances of cultural dominance or subordination.

The socio-emotional aspect of life, underscored by Odhiambo et al. (2018) as a psychological component, is significant in acculturation (Ma et al., 2020; Sullivan & Kashubeck-West, 2015; Ward & Szabó, 2023). Nailevna (2017) clarified that acculturation is a psychological process because encountering and coping with a new culture preoccupies the mental faculties and emotions. This process is associated with mental stressors that, when managed correctly, can benefit personal growth (Ghebrekidan, 2018; Ma et al., 2020; Nailevna, 2017; Sullivan & Kashubeck-West, 2015).

This study used Berry's (1992) acculturation model, which comprises assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization. The model's components are choices and results an individual could leverage to survive in an unfamiliar culture. Berry articulates that an individual completely blends into a more prominent group in the assimilation component. Integration occurs when an individual retains some of their original cultural heritage and adopts the cultural values and practices of the prominent group. However, separation occurs when individuals resist practicing the cultural norms and patterns of the prominent group, thus retaining their original cultural identity. Finally, marginalization leads individuals to reject the original and prominent cultures, ending up without attachment to any group.

From a theoretical perspective, acculturation consists of cultural learning, social identification, and a stress and coping framework (Ward et al., 2001). Cultural learning is rooted in experimental psychology and social behaviors (Masgoret & Ward, 2006). It enables foreigners to adapt to new environments by mastering the necessary skills and knowledge pertinent to the host culture (Ward et al., 2001). Cultural learning is congruent with Masgoret and Ward's (2006) view that language, interpersonal and communication skills, and knowledge of the host's culture are necessary to adapt to a multicultural context. Moreover, cultural learning occurs when a person undergoes assimilation (Berry, 1992). From a psychological perspective, cultural learning

involves imitation, instruction, and collaboration (Hall, 2022; Tomasello et al., 1993).

Social identification explains the mental process foreigners experience in discovering their identities in a new cultural environment. Hence, the focus is on how individuals perceive themselves and other groups (Ward et al., 2001). In social identity theory, individuals define themselves as pertinent to their original group (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). This theory also applies to international students, who find their identity in other cultural contexts.

People who experience acculturation encounter changes in their relationships (Berry, 1992). The stress and coping framework, which is part of the acculturation model (Ward et al., 2001), sheds light on the stress and coping stages in managing change. Sam and Berry (2010) state that acculturation stress is born out of challenging situations that a person cannot cope with simply by changing their actions.

International students are among the most researched groups in an intercultural context (Ward et al., 2001). According to the International Consultants for Education and Fairs (2024), international students studying in various Philippine institutions were 22,250. Such students encounter academic challenges, including language barriers and academic pressure (Elliot et al., 2016; Ma et al., 2020; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Similarly, Maguddayao (2018) specified that the prevalent issues among international students in the Philippines include language barriers, cultural adaptation, academic adaptation, and social life issues. Consequently, a common thread of experience is traceable in the aforementioned student category.

Among international students, undergraduate students experience the highest level of self-perception as strangers in another country during their first school year (Starr-Glass, 2016). Accordingly, Krsmanovic (2020) developed coping strategies for acculturation using Berry's (1992) model. The strategies are (a) voluntary integration, (b) involuntary integration, (c) voluntary

assimilation, (d) involuntary assimilation, (e) voluntary separation, (f) involuntary separation, (g) voluntary marginalization, and (h) involuntary marginalization. This study will also use these strategies to understand the participants' experiences.

Methodology

This qualitative study intended to capture the essence of the lived experiences of IASS in Philippine higher education. Qualitative research signifies the use of “different research methods to explore human lived experiences or social phenomena in a natural setting in order to come up with interpretation and solutions based on meaning co-constructed by the research participants and the researcher” (Wa-Mbaleka & Rosario, 2022, p. 4). Hence, individuals, their experiential realities, and their interpretation of these realities are the three main components of qualitative research.

Research Design

Hermeneutic phenomenology was used to describe and interpret the participants' subjective realities. This research design facilitated a better comprehension of the participants' acculturation experiences and aided in connecting the latter to human reality through phenomenological reflection (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; van Manen, 1990, 2014).

Research Setting

This study was conducted in two faith-based higher education institutions in the Philippines. One institution had over 3700 students from approximately 43 countries, and most of the professors were Filipino. The other institution had fewer than 300 students from nearly 68 countries, and most professors were foreigners.

Sampling

Purposive sampling and maximum variation were used to select the participants (Creswell, 2016). The latter were four single students and foreigners who had studied in the Philippines for at least two years and had taken courses in

an international school setting, interacting with students from different countries. Their cultural backgrounds were dissimilar to the Filipino culture, which provided reasonable grounds for the study. Table 1 summarizes the participants' demographic profile.

Table 1

Demographic Profile of the Participants

<i>Demographic Profile of the Participants</i>				
Pseudonym	Diego	Gama	Muntari	Sangua
Gender	Male	Female	Male	Female
Level of education	Undergraduate	Graduate	Graduate	Undergraduate
Years of study at the Philippine institution	3	6	3	3
Years of stay in the Philippines	3	6	3	3
Country of origin	Colombia	Nigeria	Madagascar	Myanmar
Mother tongue	Spanish	Yoruba	Malagasy	Burmese

Instrument and Data Collection

Data were collected through individual in-depth interviews using the Zoom communication platform, and the interview sessions were recorded with permission from the participants. Using Seidman's (2019) suggestion, four phenomenological interviews with each participant (each about one hour) were conducted to collect details of personal experiences related to acculturation (van Manen, 2016). The overarching question was, “What is it like to be experiencing acculturation?” After obtaining the data, it was transcribed and analyzed through coding, categorizing, and developing themes (Saldaña, 2013). These themes enabled us to describe and interpret our research findings.

The study used visual images to enhance triangulation. This data collection method supplements the interview data when research participants reflect and share their experiences using visual images (Banks & Zeitlyn, 2015; Herzog, 2019). Hence, the study participants were asked to take photos representing personal experiences of acculturation and write a short interpretation for each selected photo. The guidelines for taking photos were disseminated through participant orientation. These included the number of photos and preferred methods of shooting them.

Data Analysis

This started after obtaining every interview transcription using the Otter.ai software. Collaboratively, we analyzed the data using Google Docs for coding, categorizing, and establishing themes—following Moustakas' (1994) model. According to the latter, data analysis goes from horizontalization to conception clustering, textural description, imaginative variation, and essential invariant structure.

Using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) trustworthiness criteria, we ensured that the findings were credible, transferable, confirmable, and dependable. Credibility was achieved using interviews and photos to collect the data. A rich description of the research context and data collection methods assisted in maintaining transferability. Confirmability was established through collaborative data collection and analysis. Similarly, collaborative data collection and coding, member checking, peer review, and participant debriefing propelled the dependability of this study.

Ethical Considerations

The study addressed essential ethical considerations, including obtaining approval from the institution's Ethical Review Board and having participants sign informed consent forms that outlined voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, and safety. Following the interviews and transcribing, the data was shared with the participants for member checking, and any revisions suggested were integrated into the final dataset.

Researchers' Reflexivity

This empirical study involved collaboration among four researchers. Three are female from India, Indonesia, and Myanmar, while the male researcher hails from Uganda. All the researchers experienced acculturation in the Philippines and intentionally aimed to minimize personal bias by adhering to their roles throughout the study.

Results and Discussion

After analyzing the data from the interviews and visual representations, several themes emerged to answer the research questions. These themes are presented in the following subsections.

Research Question 1

Two themes emerged to answer research question one: *What is it like for international single students to experience acculturation in the Philippines?* The first is “eye-opening,” and the second is “initial encounter.” These themes sought to respond to the experiences of international single students as they adapt to the host cultures in the Philippines.

Theme 1: Eye-opening

This theme consists of the participants' impressions of experiencing acculturation. There are five categories under this theme: greetings, unique campus culture, gastronomy, dress policy, and value of time.

Greetings. The participants identified the greeting practices as strange. Diego mentioned that greetings are different in the Philippines. He compared the method of greeting in the Philippines to his home country, where, in his culture, greeting includes hugging and kissing on the cheek. According to Schwartz et al. (2014), cultural comparisons are prevalent in the initial stages of acculturation.

Unique Campus Culture. The participants were amazed by the vast diversity of cultures in one place, with natives and foreigners interacting. Gama commented about her institution: “This campus has its own unique subculture, distinct from the broader national culture, that defines our community here on this campus” (p. 7 & Caption 1). Cultural diversity was Gama's leading eye-opener in the new environment.



Caption 1: *Diversity (Tableware)*

Nevertheless, participants acknowledged the uniqueness of other cultures. They realized the need to accept the process of activities in the host environment. Reflecting on his survival strategy, Diego articulated that “it was acceptance, of course, I am not in my country, I have to accept the values that my friends have” (p. 1 & Caption 2). In the assimilation phase, people acknowledge others’ cultural practices and adjust accordingly (Szapocznik et al., 1978).



Caption 2: *Trust and jeepney*

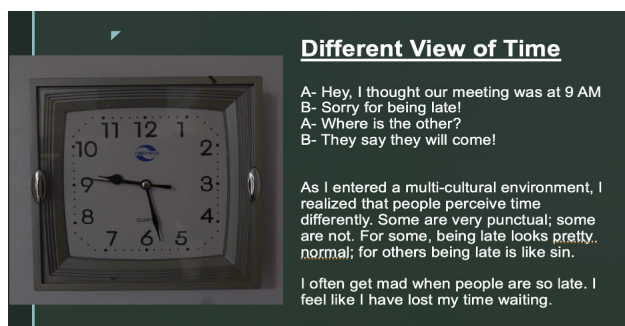
Participants also identified significant cultural practices in their host environments. Sangua mentioned, “They respect the elder and whenever you go. You can see that they are always respecting the elder” (p. 15). She identifies similarities and differences in learning how to behave in this new culture (Schwartz et al., 2014), which depicts voluntary integration (Berry, 1992).

Gastronomy. The participants experienced different types of food in the Philippines. Some participants acknowledged that Filipino food tastes differently. International students expe-

rience dietary differences as an acculturation stress (Jin et al., 2023). Muntari commented, “I was shocked by the food because the taste was totally different” (p. 24), yet he expressed the joy of having meals with rice, the staple food in his country. Moreover, social connections with others in the environment could lower acculturative stress on food (Jin et al., 2023). Generally, the participants experienced new cuisines.

Dress Policy. Another experience relates to the dress code. Specific requirements for appropriate dress in the selected institutions differed from those of the participant’s original country. Different cultures have unique dress codes for various occasions and social norms (Safdar et al., 2020). Sangua stated, “Some people here in the Philippines like only wearing dress in the church but back in Thailand, you can wear pants for worship (p. 19). Muntari expressed his surprise at how individuals walk into offices for official business dressed in casual outfits like t-shirts, while he is required to wear formal attire, including a tie, in his home country.

Value of Time. Differences in perceptions of keeping time were another acculturation experience. Sangua underscored the relaxed approach to punctuality in her new environment, which resonated with Maliwanag’s (2019) claim that “Filipino time essentially is the practice of unpunctuality, accompanied by the cultural allowance and acceptance of it” (p. 1). Equally, Muntari revealed shocking incidents in which meeting appointments would be set but commence hours later because the attendees arrived late (Caption 3). These expressions echo the involuntary separation in acculturation (Berry, 1992). The differences in timekeeping caused stress and discomfort to the participants.



Caption 3: *Different view of time*

Theme 2: Initial Encounter

This theme comprises categories that represent the psychological navigational process. The categories include initial discomfort, loneliness, fitting-in, positive perspective, acceptance, and social interaction. Most participants shared that the acculturation process affected their personalities. Some were primarily shy, timid, and less outspoken but later overcame. Personality and language fluency play essential roles in the level of acculturation required for an individual to adapt to a different culture (Ward et al., 2001).

Initial Discomfort. As an initial discomfort (Caption 4), most participants faced communication barriers in English or Tagalog. The language barrier is one of the experiences encountered by international students (Elliot et al., 2016; Maguddayao, 2018). Two participants confessed that communication became more complicated when they realized that Tagalog was mainly used, even in classrooms that constituted international students. Sangua mentioned that she was too shy to speak to fluent English speakers, which lowered her self-esteem.

In contrast, Diego confessed that he struggled with two second languages—English and Tagalog. Muntari also mentioned that he was not confident with his English proficiency. He added, “I am afraid that people may judge me because of my language” (Muntari, p. 20). Generally, the level of language proficiency among international students affects the adjustment of social and psychological components (Lashari et al., 2023). However,

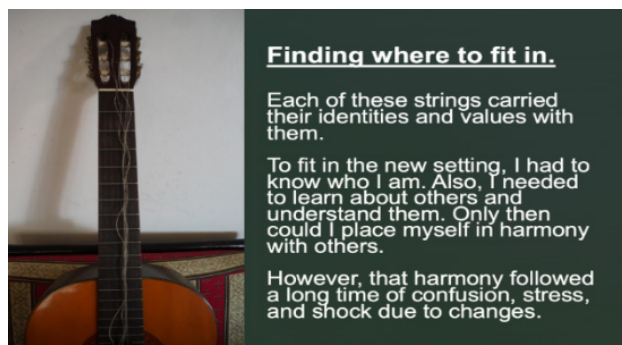
Muntari mentioned that speaking English helped him to make new friends. Thus, communication is one of the keys to strengthening cultural adaptation (Lashari et al., 2023; Masgoret & Ward, 2006).



Caption 4: *Initial discomfort (Wearing shoes that do not fit)*

Lonely. Acculturation is similar to living in a lonely world. The lesser the integration, the more loneliness an individual experiences in a foreign country (Neto et al., 2022). There is no one who, you know, come and talk to you; you feel like you are left alone” (p. 15). To feel less lonely, Neto et al. (2022) advise that a person should have a strong ethnic identity and less discrimination against other cultures. In agreement with Lashari et al. (2023), Muntari emphasized that loneliness is inevitable amid limitations in language fluency. Gama mentioned that she used the “chameleon’s personality” to adapt to new cultures, which reflects voluntary integration that leads to another category of adjustment (Berry, 1992).

Fitting In. For Muntari (Caption 5), fitting in the new environment is similar to fitting in the strings of a guitar to produce harmony. He added that it is essential first to identify personal beliefs, principles, and values while fitting into a new environment. Muntari realized a sense of belonging after making friends and becoming more confident. Sangua mentioned that it is with God’s help that she continues to study at the institution. The acculturation process drew her closer to divine guidance.



Caption 5: *Fitting in*

Positive Perspective. Participants also gained new perspectives on other people's cultures. For instance, Gama became empathetic towards different cultural practices and beliefs. He said, "Now when I talk to people, I don't talk from my perspective; I talk thinking about what other people think" (p. 9). She developed an understanding of the different perspectives of others by adopting voluntary integration to show respect for others' cultural practices. Muntari also shared similar sentiments. Such experiences made the participants think openly about other cultures.

Acceptance. Moreover, the participants developed a sense of cultural inclusion. Their stereotypical lenses were shattered when their eyes were opened to the beauty of other cultures. Diego admitted, "It has shaped me in the way of looking at others to understand, not judge" (p. 6). In the participants' minds, positivity towards the host and other cultures should be maintained.

Social Interaction. Interaction helps people know others better, gain more friends, and cope with acculturation stress (Kristiana et al., 2022). Participants initiated interactions with others by observing, asking, and participating, which are the elements of assimilation in Berry's (1992) model. Muntari shared, "I am someone who likes soccer. Even though it was very hard to go there, the first few months, but I tried to join" (Muntari, p. 20). Diego confessed that fitting into the larger group resulted from the realization that it was up to him to adjust and adapt. The participants took the first step to involve themselves and blend into society in the host country. This

finding accentuates the initial assimilation phase of acculturation.

Research Question 2

The second research question was: *What are the contexts of the lived experiences of the international acculturated single students in the Philippines?* Two themes emerged: continuous inquiry and comparatively supportive.

Theme 3: *Continuous Inquiry*

Participants viewed the context around them as an occasion for continuous inquiry. The categories under this theme include learning and unlearning, being more observant, and engagement and communication. These are expounded as follows:

Learning and Unlearning. There is a constant process of learning and unlearning in different respects. Diversity in cultural backgrounds compelled participants to learn and adapt to new lifestyles in the Philippines. One participant experienced awkwardness in the cultural context where she resided because of the differences in addressing people.

More Observant. Living in a new environment made participants more observant of their surroundings. Many practices have made them question, wonder, adjust, or adapt. Kristiana et al. (2022) commented that students should adapt to new conditions at the onset of schooling. Those who struggle to adjust may encounter various problems leading to increased stress. Adjustments involve searching for identity and making career-related decisions, among others. The participants mentioned that their residences were learning environments. Gama declared, "I think I observed a lot that is something I do regularly. I observe before engaging to see." (p. 11 and Caption 6). Observation is vital in a new environment to avoid mistakes or offenses.



Caption 6: *Observation*

Engagement and Communication. These emerged as conduits for learning. This finding confirms the integration phase in Berry's (1992) model and Krsmanovic (2020) supports it by stating the importance of voluntary and involuntary participation in the acculturation process. The participants engaged in activities, such as singing and making friends. Muntari testified that engaging in a singing ministry helped him learn many things including communication. He said, "Not only in the language but also when we go out reaching out to people. Those are some good ways that I develop myself in communication" (p. 22). Besides engaging in different activities, Sangua affirmed, "I think the most important thing here is communication to adjust" (p. 18). Communication and interaction helped participants in their inquiry.

Theme 4: Comparatively Supportive

Under this theme, categories such as support from countrymates and communities were unmasked. The acculturation context is supportive based on the participants' experiences in the new environment.

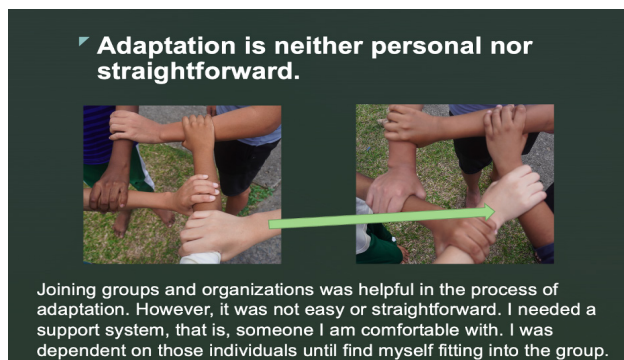
Support from Countrymates. Participants found support systems in the context of lived acculturation experiences. The support came from parents back home, countrymates, classmates, and friends. Such support to the participants during their initial stay helped them survive the first weeks in a new environment. Three participants, Diego, Muntari, and Sangua, expressed that they found comfort and support from friends with whom they spoke the same language. Sangua explained, "When we have a

countrymate, I feel happy, I'm happy to come back to the dorm because I have my countrymates that I can talk to freely" (p. 17).

In contrast, some unpleasant encounters occurred when participants felt alienated. Diego felt like somebody from another planet because they called him an alien. Sangua shared similar feelings when she mentioned, "I am a foreigner; they do not care about me; that kind of thought is in my mind" (p. 17). Occasionally, students experience inequitable treatment, which can significantly affect their mental health (Ma et al., 2020); however, divisions sometimes arise between local and foreign students in school (Parray et al., 2020).

Participants also shared the context of unfair treatment. For example, Sangua said she faced difficulties during enrollment because she was non-native. Even in class, she felt forsaken. Diego also expressed frustration when he said, "They expect you to be like them speak like them have the same values that they have" (p. 3). Berry's (1992) acculturation model points to the possibility of negative experiences such as separation and marginalization. These experiences stressed participants.

Supportive Communities. On-campus communities helped the participants adjust to the new cultural environment. Muntari attested, "I will not forget my community. I think that also makes a huge impact on me" (p. 23 and Caption 7). Correspondingly, Gama suggested that communities should continue to support students, especially during their initial stays. Aladegbaiye et al. (2022) explained the importance of having support groups; they revealed that participants with diverse friends experienced acculturation more smoothly. Varied friend groups provided exposure to intercultural interactions and opportunities for new friendships, making the new members more willing to engage in intercultural academic and social activities



Caption 7: *Support system*

Research Question 3

To answer Research Question 3, *how do international acculturated single students of higher education in the Philippines view cultural diversity in the future?* Two themes emerged from the analysis: cultural diversity as a learning occasion and surprising changes.

Theme 5: Learning Occasion

According to the participants, the future of cultural diversity is a learning opportunity. Categorically, it implies exceptional opportunities, a habitat for reflection, open-mindedness, adventuring, and cultural shock.

Exceptional Opportunities. The participants declared that the future of cultural diversity implies exceptional opportunities to experience unique student life, learn new languages, make friends, compare cultures, acquire new perceptions, discover self, and broaden problem-solving approaches. For instance, Sangua admitted that life in a multicultural community enabled her to improve her English and learn a new local language, which would later furnish her classroom performance. On the other hand, Diego stated emphatically, “You will find friends to understand you, your experience and when you are a friend of Filipino, that guy will be your best friend in this foreign land” (p. 7). Based on Sangua and Diego’s experiences, future multicultural domains are precedented avenues of interaction, adaption, and learning (Fargion & Nuttman-Shwartz, 2019; Nailevna, 2017).

Habitat for Reflection. Additionally, the future of cultural diversity is a habitat for reflection. The participants reported that cultural diversity would help an individual realize personal biases, examine personal culture, become considerate, focus on God, and find value in the cultural patterns of the new environment. The participants agreed that all current and future reflections are rooted in the experiences gained from acculturation. Diego shared that cultural diversity provided the opportunity “to understand that I am not always right” (p. 6 & Caption 8). Looking back at her days of independent living at home, Sangua declared how she was shaped by life in the new environment “to focus on God, rather than on the paper and assignments” (p. 19). These episodes attest to the positive outcomes of the assimilation component embedded in Berry’s model, which signals future constructive reflection.



Caption 8: *Not always right (rose and thorns)*

Open-mindedness. This denotes the spirit of restraint from bias in the face of an unexpected phenomenon. The participants wished for a culturally diverse community where dwellers harbored good attitudes towards each other. Sangua stated, “I should not be complaining about the language they are talking about because everybody loves their language” (p. 19). Moreover, open-mindedness constitutes a change in attitude towards the native population and becoming more tolerant. Gama proved this when she remarked, “So now when I talk to people, I don’t talk from just my perspective, I talk thinking about other people” (p. 9). Hence,

living in a multicultural environment for an extended length weakens narrow-mindedness and conservatism (Ward et al., 2001).

Adventuring. All participants admitted the importance of comprehending the rationale of other cultures' heritage. From the findings, the participants declared that there would be an effort to understand other cultures, learn or memorize others' music, find new ways of doing things, and gain a broader perspective. Muntari said, "there is a new way of thinking and talking about the environment. There is a new way of appreciating the places and the people around me" (p. 20). On the other hand, Diego emphasized the goodness and comfort of learning and speaking a new language with the natives. As highlighted in Berry's model, such instances could be direct results of interactions at different levels.

Cultural Shock. Finally, shocking practices and occurrences were underscored as future cultural diversity and acculturation components. The participants agreed that shocking practices and occurrences involved being labeled, not keeping time, scamming, forgetting the mother tongue, shocking food prices, and disquieting architecture. These shocking incidents are fertile grounds for frustration, which can result in separation or marginalization (Berry, 1992).

Theme 6: Surprising Changes

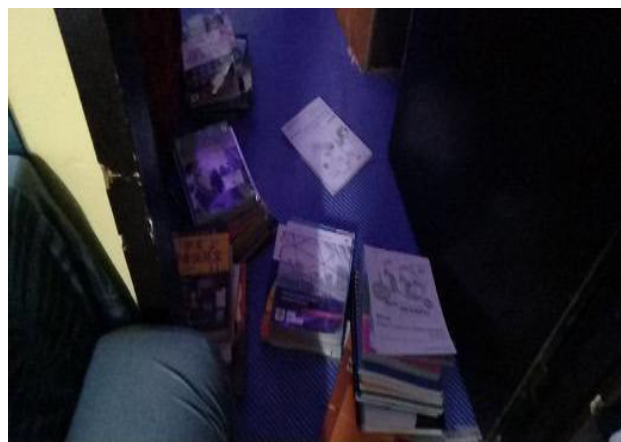
This is the second theme for the third research question. The IASS of higher education in the Philippines views cultural diversity in the future as a series of surprising changes. This theme has two categories: adherence to expectations and acknowledgment of other cultures.

Adherence to Expectations. According to the participants, this category is grounded in being more responsible, following rules and regulations, and having self-control. The participants acknowledged that being in a foreign country demands more vigilance because noncompliance would be too costly. In despondence, Sangua expressed the burden of having too many college rules and regulations. Diego mentioned, "I am forced in a certain way to follow what it

is here to accommodate myself in it" (p. 1 and Caption 9). Besides that, Muntari stated, "And when I see certain things, I tend to react, now I could say, it is okay, though sometimes it hurts" (p. 23 and Caption 10). The participants affirmed Fargion and Nuttman-Shwartz's (2019) claim that, at all costs, one culture earns supremacy and homage when two or more cultures clash.



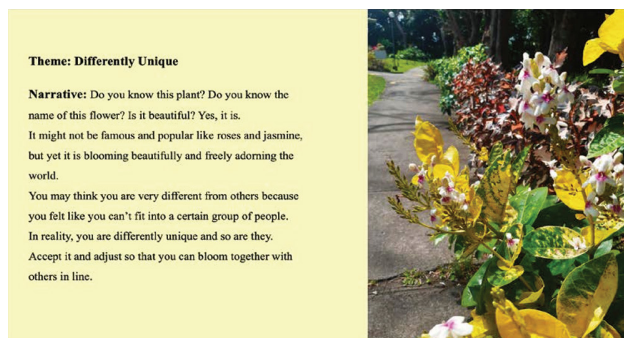
Caption 9: *Respect*



Caption 10: *Letting go*

Acknowledgment of other Cultures. This is founded on the uniqueness of human beings and their realization of cultural diversity (Caption 11). The acknowledgment of other cultures is transformational. Whereas Diego confessed the need to appreciate the values of his Filipino friends, Gama mentioned the reality of being "surrounded by people of all nationalities, people from different countries, tribes, languages, and to deal with adapting to each different culture" (p. 7). She added that adaptability enhanced gratitude towards other cultures.

Muntari exclaimed, “Position may differ, degree may differ, nationality may differ, but actually, I’ve learned that everyone is the same” (p. 24). Acculturation provides prospects for understanding other people on humanitarian grounds (Ghebrekidan, 2018). Ultimately, the acculturation process undergoes stunning change.



Caption 11: *Differently unique*

Discussion

Transitioning into a new environment takes optimism, a flexible mindset, acceptance, and a teachable spirit. International students should acknowledge the presence of different cultural heritage in foreign lands. They ought to develop the determination to initiate change by themselves and be flexible in adapting to certain values and traditions while maintaining their cultural principles. These are essential coping strategies for international students' acculturation (Cao et al., 2017). In contrast to Larionova et al.'s (2020) findings that students use separation and marginalization while maintaining a strong ethnic identity, the participants in this study coped with acculturation stress by using voluntary integration with assimilation attempts (Berry, 1992). Nevertheless, Cao et al. (2017) discovered that integration is the most used acculturation strategy among international students.

The contexts of the IASS embodied continuous inquiry and comparative support. Living in a different country with a different culture encourages students to observe and engage in various activities continuously. Students find support from their community and countrymates to undergo acculturation. This

finding contrasts with that of Aladegbaiye et al. (2022). The latter found that having international friends helps better in the acculturation process, but not with countrymates. In addition, the students faced discrimination from native people and felt alienated due to differences in language and culture. This finding is supported by Parray et al. (2020).

Evidence from these findings indicates that acculturation is a learning opportunity. However, the extent of learning is subject to the attitudes and mindsets of the acculturated individuals. According to Berry (1992), participants are willing to succumb to the demands of the host culture, while in other circumstances, they are hesitant—a common tendency. Regardless of the choice made, Croucher and Kramer (2016) cautioned that maintaining a positive attitude and an open mind towards other cultures lessens personal biases and fuels reflective thinking that helps devise coping mechanisms and fusion in multicultural communities.

Limitations of the Study

This phenomenological study has several limitations. A limited number of participants were willing to participate in the study. Although at least eight participants were desired, only four accepted the invitation. Perhaps others declined due to the tight restrictions, protocols, and constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic that prevailed when conducting this study. Moreover, the study had a specific timeframe; therefore, individuals who agreed to participate within that window were selected. Similarly, time constraints may have strained the depth of engagement with the participants.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of IASS in two faith-based institutions in the Philippines. Acculturation is an eye-opening experience that constitutes the search for identity in continuous inquiry. The lived contexts highlight a comparatively supportive society intertwined with alienation and prejudice. Nonetheless, participants maneuvered through support

systems. The IASS viewed cultural diversity in the future as a learning occasion and compelling change.

Based on the findings, administrators should orient students about cultural shock to enhance their cultural awareness. They should encourage faculty to use language understandable to all students. Students should also prepare by reading about the host country's culture and hone their speaking skills for smooth communication. For future research, a quantitative study to determine the predictors of the acculturation process would broaden the knowledge of acculturation. Alternatively, studying the lives of acculturated students using a qualitative design with more participants from different countries would enhance and extend the trustworthiness of the findings.

Funding Statement

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Declaration of Interest

Conflicts of interest: none.

References

- Aladegbaiye, A. T., De Jong, M. D. T., & Beldad, A. D. (2022). How international students' acculturation motivation develops over time in an international learning environment: A longitudinal study. *Journal of International Students, 12*(2), 510–530. <https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v12i2.3642>
- Ashforth, B. E., & Mael, F. (1989). Social identity theory and the organization. *Academy of Management Review, 14*(1), 20–39. <https://doi.org/10.2307/258189>
- Banks, M., & Zeitlyn, D. (2015). *Visual methods in social research* (2nd ed). Sage.
- Berry, J. W. (1992). Acculturation and Adaptation in a New Society. *International Migration, 30*(1), 69–85. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2435.1992.tb00776.x>
- Cao, C., Zhu, C., & Meng, Q. (2017). Predicting Chinese international students' acculturation strategies from socio-demographic variables and social ties. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology, 20*(2), 85–96. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajsp.12171>
- Chamie, J. (2020). International migration amid a world in crisis. *Journal on Migration and Human Security, 8*(3), 230–245. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2331502420948796>
- CNN Philippines. (2020, February 5). *Number of foreign students in PH drops to all-time-low in 2020*. <https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2021/2/5/foreign-student-count-in-ph-drop-in-2020.html>
- Creswell, J. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (2016). *30 essential skills for the qualitative researcher*. Sage.
- Croucher, S. M., & Kramer, E. (2016). Cultural fusion theory: An alternative to acculturation. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication, 10*(2), 97–114. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17513057.2016.1229498>
- Dentakos, S., Wintre, M., Chavoshi, S., & Wright, L. (2017). Acculturation motivation in international student adjustment and permanent residency intentions: A mixed-methods approach. *Emerging Adulthood, 5*(1), 27–41. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2167696816643628>

- Driscoll, M. W., & Torres, L. (2022). Cultural adaptation profiles among Mexican-descent Latinxs: Acculturation, acculturative stress, and depression. *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology, 28*(2), 248–258. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cdp0000503>
- Edmond, C. (2020). *Global migration, by the numbers: Who migrates, where they go and why*. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/01/iom-global-migration-report-international-migrants-2020/>
- Elliot, D. L., Reid, K., & Baumfield, V. (2016). Beyond the amusement, puzzlement and challenges: An enquiry into international students' academic acculturation. *Studies in Higher Education, 41*(12), 2198–2217. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2015.1029903>
- Fargion, S., & Nuttman-Shwartz, O. (2019). Acculturation theory, cultural competency and learning from differences: Reflections from a European short student mobility program. *European Journal of Social Work, 23*(5), 849–861. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2019.1608911>
- Furnham, A. (2004). Education and culture shock. *Psychologist, 17*(1), 16.
- Ghebrekidan, S. (2018). *Acculturation and belongingness: The keys to international student satisfaction* (Publication No. 10981602) [Master's thesis, South Dakota State University]. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2154835381?pqorigsite=gscholar&fromopenview=true>
- Hall, G. C. N. (2022). *Multicultural psychology*. Routledge.
- Hamlin, R. (2021). *Crossing: How we label and react to people on the move*. Stanford University Press.
- Hanlon, B., & Vicino, T. J. (2014). *Global migration: The basics*. Routledge.
- Herzog, P. S. (2019). Visual research methods. In A. Marvasti & A. J. Treviño (Eds.), *Researching social problems* (1st ed. pp. 172–187). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315107882-10>
- International Consultants for Education and Fairs. (2024). *The rise of alternative destinations: Thailand, Poland, and the Philippines*. <https://shorturl.at/M8l0F>
- Jin, R., Le, T. T., Vuong, T. T., Nguyen, T. P., Hoang, G., Nguyen, M. H., & Vuong, Q. H. (2023). A gender study of food stress and implications for international students acculturation. *World, 4*(1), 80–94. <https://doi.org/10.3390/world4010006>
- Karim, S. (2021). Acculturation in a globalised world: Implications for theory and educational policy and practice. *International Journal of Comparative Education and Development, 23*(1), 44–58. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCED-11-2020-0078>
- Kristiana, I. F., Karyanta, N. A., Simanjuntak, E., Prihatsanti, U., Ingarianti, T. M., & Shohib, M. (2022). Social support and acculturative stress of international students. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 19*(11), 6568. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19116568>
- Krsmanovic, M. (2020). “I was new and I was afraid”: The acculturation strategies adopted by international first-year undergraduate students in the United States. *Journal of International Students, 10*(4), 954–975. <https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v10i4.1160>
- Larionova, A. L., Liventsova, E., Yu., Fakhretdinova, A. P., & Kostyukova, T. A. (2020). International student

- migrants from Asian countries: features of their ethnic identity and acculturation strategies. *Perspectives of Science and Education*, 48 (6), 311-323. <http://dx.doi.org/10.32744/pse.2020.6.24>
- Lashari, S. A., Awang-Hashim, R., Lashari, T. A., & Kaur, A. (2023). Acculturation stress and social support for international students' adjustment in Malaysia: Does language proficiency matter? *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education*, 15(2), 496–508.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage.
- Liu, S., Dane, S., Gallois, C., Haslam, C., & Nghi Tran, T. L. (2020). The dynamics of acculturation among older immigrants in Australia. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 51(6), 424–441. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022120927461>
- Ma, K., Pitner, R., Sakamoto, I., & Park, H. Y. (2020). Challenges in acculturation among international students from Asian collectivist cultures. *Higher Education Studies*, 10(3), 34–43. <https://doi.org/10.5539/hes.v10n3p34>
- Maguddayao, R. N. (2018). Social lived experiences and coping mechanisms of the foreign students in the Philippines: A phenomenological approach to intercultural communicative competence. *Asia Pacific Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 6(4).
- Maliwanag, R. J. (2019). *The interaction of Filipino time and informal power dynamics in the university of the Philippines school of economics: A case study*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.22621.77289>
- Masgoret, A. M., & Ward, C. (2006). Culture learning approach to acculturation. In D. L. Sam & J. W. Berry (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of acculturation psychology* (pp. 58–77). Cambridge University Press.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). John Wiley & Sons.
- Miles, D. A. (2017). A taxonomy of research gaps: Identifying and defining the seven research gaps. *Journal of Research Methods and Strategies*. https://www.academia.edu/35505149/ARTICLE_RESEARCH_A_Taxonomy_of_Research_Gaps_Identifying_and_Defining_the_Seven_Research_Gaps
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Sage.
- Nailevna, T. A. (2017). Acculturation and psychological adjustment of foreign students (the experience of Elabuga Institute of Kazan Federal University). *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 237, 1173–1178. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2017.02.175>
- Neto, J., Quintana-Orts, C., & Neto, F. (2022). Acculturation, adaptation, and loneliness among Cape Verdean immigrants. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 87, 98–107. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2022.01.013>
- Odhiambo, J. N., Marticio, F., & Aclan, E. (2018). Acculturation of children as experienced by foreign mothers studying in the Philippines. *International Forum*, 21(1), 72–94.
- Paolillo, R., & Jager, W. (2020). Simulating Acculturation Dynamics Between Migrants and Locals in Relation to Network Formation. *Social Science Computer Review*, 38(4), 365–386. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0894439318821678>

- Parray, A. A., Sohely, S., Mallick, S., Zahura, F. T., Mistry, B., Sharkar, P., Nahar, J., Zumi, K., Islam, A., & Khan, M. S. (2020). *Acculturation and adaptation issues among International students: Experiences from the largest Public University of Bangladesh*. <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-51527/v1>
- Safdar, S., Goh, K., & Choubak, M. (2020). Clothing, identity, and acculturation: The significance of immigrants' clothing choices. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science*, 52(1), 36. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/cbs0000160>
- Saldaña, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Sage.
- Sam, D. L., & Berry, J. W. (2010). Acculturation: When individuals and groups of different cultural backgrounds meet. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 5(4), 472–481. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1745691610373075>
- Schwartz, S. J., Vignoles, V. L., Brown, R., & Zagefka, H. (2014). The identity dynamics of acculturation and multiculturalism: Situating acculturation in context. In V. Benet-Martínez & Y.-Y. Hong (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of multicultural identity* (pp. 57–93). Oxford University Press.
- Seidman, I. (2019). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences* (5th ed.). Teachers College Press.
- Smith, R. A., & Khawaja, N. G. (2011). A review of the acculturation experiences of international students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35(6), 699–713. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2011.08.004>
- Starr-Glass, D. (2016). The self, the other, and the international student. *Journal of International Students*, 6(1), pp. 314–318. <https://shorturl.at/TXzpf>
- Starr-Glass, D. (2019). Seeing international students as students: Changing institutional classification, identity, and stereotype. In K. Bista (Ed.), *Global Perspectives on International Student Experiences in Higher Education: Tensions and Issues* (1st ed.), pp. 19–32). Routledge.
- Sullivan, C., & Kashubeck-West, S. (2015). The interplay of international students' acculturative stress, social support, and acculturation modes. *Journal of International Students*, 5(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v5i1.438>
- Szapocznik, J., Scopetta, M. A., Kurtines, W., & Aranalde, M. D. (1978). Theory and measurement of acculturation. *Inter-American Journal of Psychology*, 12(2), 113–130.
- Tazzioli, M. (2020). Governing migrant mobility through mobility: Containment and dispersal at the internal frontiers of Europe. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, 38(1), 3–19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2399654419839065>
- Tomasello, M., Kruger, A. C., & Ratner, H. H. (1993). Cultural learning. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 16(3), 495–511. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1017/S0140525X0003123X>
- van der Zee, K., & van Oudenhoven, J. P. (2022). Towards a dynamic approach to acculturation. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 88, 119–124. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2022.04.004>
- van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. State University of New York Press.

- van Manen, M. (2014). *Phenomenology of practice: Meaning-giving methods in phenomenological research and writing*. Left Coast Press.
- van Manen, M. (2016). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. Routledge.
- Wa-Mbaleka, S., & Rosario, A. H. (Eds.). (2022). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research in the Asian context* (1st ed). Sage.
- Wa-Mbaleka, S., & Ryszewski, S. (2012). Coping with culture shock in second language settings: A phenomenological study in the Philippines. *IAMURE International Journal of Education*, 4(1). <https://doi.org/10.7718/iamure.ije.v4i1.447>
- Ward, C., & Szabó, Á. (2023). Acculturation, cultural identity and well-being. *Nature Reviews Psychology*, 2(5), 267–282. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s44159-023-00171-2>
- Ward, C., Bochner, S., & Furnham, A. (2001). *The psychology of culture shock*. Routledge.
- Ward, C., Bochner, S., & Furnham, A. (2020). *The psychology of culture shock*. Routledge.