SOCIO-POLITICAL ECHOES ACROSS BORDERS: IRANIAN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' CROSS-CULTURAL ADAPTATION

by

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Abstract

Iran has undergone remarkable and unprecedented transformations throughout its history and continues to grapple with disruption in all domains, including the economic, social, political, and environmental spheres. These transformations and disruptions have had adverse consequences, such as the brain drain phenomenon, which has recently evolved into a new phenomenon known as mass migration. Since the 1979 revolution, many Iranians, including university students, have migrated from Iran, mainly due to socio-political factors.

The present dissertation comprises a comprehensive literature review and three empirical qualitative studies—two cross-sectional and one longitudinal— all aimed at investigating Iranian international students' cross-cultural adaptation and experiences. Twenty Iranian students in Hungary were interviewed only once for the three empirical studies, and for each study, a different portion of the interview data was analyzed. Additional interviews were conducted for the longitudinal study.

The first study was a comprehensive literature review of 130 studies conducted between 1955 and 2022. The inductive analysis revealed seven major themes and 16 sub-themes. The key themes were: (1) push-and-pull factors of migration, (2) academic adaptation, (3) socio-cultural adaptation, (4) psychological adaptation, (5) acculturation, (6) identity, and (7) future plans. The main findings indicated that most Iranian students' transition was involuntary and permanent, and this result challenged the classical taxonomy of international students as "voluntary" and "temporary." Additionally, socio-political factors, whether negative or positive, including but not limited to the 1979 revolution, the hostage crisis, the Iran-Iraq war, sanctions-related issues, and freedom in the host country, emerged as the most frequent factors influencing students' cross-cultural adaptation. Furthermore, Iranian students' adaptation was largely influenced by the socio-political context of their home country, the host country, and the diplomatic relations between their home country and the host countries.

The second study was a cross-sectional qualitative study focused on exploring the intercultural experiences of 20 Iranian international students in Hungary. The thematic analysis revealed three overarching themes: (1) sojourn's experience as self-growth, (2) uncertainty in intercultural interactions, and (3) striving for an autonomous-related self. The results indicated that Iranian students generally experienced more happiness than sadness in Hungary. Family support and longing for independence were potentially protective factors against negative psychological feelings.

The third study was a longitudinal qualitative study that aimed to trace the psychosocial adaptation trajectory of Iranian international students in Hungary. Interviews were conducted seven months to one year later, with 12 out of the initial 20 students who had participated in the first set of interviews. The follow-up interviews allowed a deeper exploration of the students' changing experiences and challenges. Inductive content analysis extracted three key themes: (1) visa and banking challenges, (2) impact of the currency crisis in Iran on mental health, and (3) positive and negative changes in psychological well-being. The results revealed that almost all students' well-being improved over time despite facing challenges related to visas, banking, and Iran's economic crisis.

The fourth study was a cross-sectional qualitative study that aimed to explore attitudes toward gender roles and perceptions of freedom among the same group of 20 Iranian students studying in Hungary. Four themes were derived from the combination of inductive and deductive content analysis of semi-structured interview transcripts: (1) gender essentialism, (2) gender-role egalitarianism, (3) traditional gender stereotypes, and (4) gendered freedom. Results indicated that, compared to Iranian women, Iranian men held gender essentialism, traditional gender role attitudes, and more gender stereotypes and sexism, whereas women held egalitarian gender role attitudes and fewer gender stereotypes and sexism. Gender equality and freedom were supported by all students, regardless of their gender, and they reported feeling more freedom in Hungary than in Iran.

Based on the results of the four studies, it was concluded that Iranian international students, particularly those who left Iran following the 1979 revolution, experienced an involuntary and permanent transition. In addition, their process of cross-cultural adaptation was marked by a complex interplay of both positive and negative socio-political factors, including but not limited to the 1979 revolution, the Iran-Iraq war, the hostage crisis, visa and banking issues, currency crises due to sanctions, freedom and independence in the host country, and higher quality education abroad. This process is significantly and more frequently influenced by broader socio-political and historical factors pertaining to the student's home country, the host country, and diplomatic relations between the home and the host country. Moreover, the adaptation of Iranian students is also influenced by the socio-political and historical chronology of both their home and host countries, with variations depending on different periods in history.

This dissertation proposes reclassifying international students as permanent and involuntary migrants. In addition, it introduces a new category, socio-political adaptation, to better address the challenges faced by students, particularly those from countries with complex

historical backgrounds. This new category considers the significance of adapting to the host and home countries, the diplomatic ties between them, as well as the differences in adaptation experiences throughout the historical chronology of both the home and host countries.

The present dissertation also suggests that policymakers and educators support Iranian international students as well as those from countries with similar socio-political challenges by providing financial aid, immigration assistance, job opportunities, academic guidance, and psychological support, along with addressing socio-political issues such as human rights, democracy, gender equality, and economic stability.

Keywords: Iran, Iranian, international student, adaptation, socio-political, economic, sanction, freedom, gender role

Lay Summary

Iran has undergone significant transformations throughout history. In recent years, many Iranians, including students, have migrated to other countries in search of better opportunities due to their dissatisfaction with the situation in Iran. The primary objective of this dissertation, comprising four studies, is to explore how Iranian students adapt to life abroad. Three of the studies conducted interviews with Iranian students in Hungary, while the fourth one analyzed previously published literature on Iranian students living abroad.

The findings from these studies revealed that most Iranian students did not choose to go abroad willingly; however, they were compelled to leave due to external circumstances. Moreover, many of these students planned to settle permanently in their new host countries or relocate to other nations. Additionally, the studies revealed that the adjustment of Iranian students abroad was positive and negative, and it was primarily influenced by various social and political factors related to their home country and the country where they resided.

Preface

  Iran has been grappling with the critical issue of brain drain, resulting in the country being ranked among the highest in the world for this issue. This challenge has been particularly pronounced since the 1979 revolution. In recent years, the situation has escalated beyond the brain drain stage, developing into a unique phenomenon of mass migration. The ongoing disruption in every aspect of Iranian society has resulted in a challenging situation for its citizens. As a result, Iranians, including students, have been leaving the country to pursue better opportunities and living conditions in foreign countries.

  This dissertation investigates Iranian international students' cross-cultural adaptation and experiences. These students are among many groups affected by the far-reaching societal challenges besetting Iran across all domains, including the economic, social, political, and environmental spheres. This study aims to deepen the understanding of the intricate social, political, economic, and cultural factors that shape the experiences of Iranian international students coming from a country that has been and is continually undergoing significant socio-political transformation and upheaval. This research intends to contribute to the body of knowledge that sheds light on the complex and dynamic realities of Iranian international students' experiences and the broader socio-political contexts that shape their adaptation.

  The present dissertation is divided into the following eight chapters:

  Chapter 1 provides a comprehensive overview, beginning with a general introduction encompassing various aspects of human migration and international students. These include the definition and significance of international students and their adaptation processes. The chapter further explores global trends in the flow of international students, both on a global scale and specifically within Hungary. Subsequently, the focus narrows down to Iranian international students. To contextualize this group, the socio-political characteristics of Iran are presented, followed by an exploration of the historical background and trends in the global mobility of Iranian migrants and international students. Additionally, recent patterns in the mobility of Iranian international students in Hungary are discussed. Lastly, the chapter concludes by outlining the overarching goal of the dissertation, providing a clear direction for the subsequent chapters.

  Chapter 2 offers a comprehensive theoretical literature review on acculturation and cross-cultural adaptation. The chapter discusses a detailed examination of the concept of acculturation, various forms of adaptation, theories on cross-cultural adaptation, and

expanded models of acculturation and adaptation. Through this review, the chapter aims to provide a solid theoretical foundation for the subsequent analysis of the cross-cultural adaptation of Iranian international students.

Chapter 3 delves into the intricate concepts of gender, sex, and gender role attitudes while exploring a myriad of gender theories that shed light on the complexities of gender roles, including but not limited to gender essentialism, social constructionism, structural functionalism, social conflict theory, symbolic interaction, and feminist theory. Furthermore, it provides a succinct overview of the historical evolution of gender dynamics in Iran from pre-Islam to post-Islam. The chapter ends with a reflection, offering a critical investigation of the applicability of various gender theories in the context of Iranian society.

Chapter 4 presents a comprehensive literature review investigating Iranian international students' cross-cultural adaptation and experiences throughout different socio-political epochs, such as pre-revolution and post-revolution.

Chapter 5 presents a qualitative cross-sectional study that delves into the intercultural experiences of Iranian international students in Hungary. The primary focus of the study is to explore the students' adaptation process and identify factors that might have served as buffers against negative psychological adaptation.

Chapter 6 presents a qualitative longitudinal study that explores the psychosocial adaptation trajectory of Iranian international students in Hungary. The study aims to identify the students' main challenges and how they impact their psychosocial adaptation over time.

Chapter 7 presents a qualitative cross-sectional study that investigates the perceptions of Iranian international students in Hungary regarding gender roles and freedom. The chapter highlights the differences in gender role attitudes and perceptions of freedom between Iranian female and male students.

Chapter 8 overviews the studies' primary objectives and key findings, connecting them to relevant theories and empirical evidence. It also discusses implications, limitations, and suggestions for further research, followed by a concluding section.

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CHAPTER ONE

General Introduction

Human Migration

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Recall the estranged exodus   کوچِ غریب را به یاد آر

From one exile to another exile   از غُربتی به غُربتِ دیگر

...

Remember: به یاد آر :

Our history was restlessness   تاریخِ ما بی‌قراری بود

</div>

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(Poem by Ahmad Shamlou, "جخ امروز" [Jakh Emruz], 1363/1984)

Translation[1]

</div>

      The world is experiencing significant migration due to economic, political, ecological, and military events, resulting in profound psychological, cultural, and political impacts on the arriving populations and the societies that receive them (Berry, 2019). International migration has risen in the past 50 years, with around 281 million people residing outside their country of origin in 2020 (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2020).

      According to Berry (2006b), migrants are categorized into four groups: *immigrants*, *refugees*, *asylum seekers*, and *sojourners*.

      Immigrants are defined as people who move to a new country voluntarily and permanently for a better life (Berry & Sam, 2016), whether in pursuit of work, better economic prospects, marriage, or to reunite with family members who have already emigrated (Schwartz et al., 2010). *Refugees* and *asylum seekers,* collectively referred to as *forced migrants* (Ager, 1999, as cited in Berry & Sam, 2016), relocate involuntarily to a new country, the majority of whom have endured traumatic experiences and lost personal belongings (Berry & Sam, 2016). Refugees are forced to flee their homes due to persecution, war, or natural catastrophes and look for a new country to resettle in, where the country has agreed to shelter them (Schwartz et al., 2010). A*sylum seekers* (also known as *refugee claimants;* Donà & Young, 2016) seek asylum in a new country in order to flee persecution in their home country; however, whether or not they are granted permission to stay in the new

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[1] A short segment from Ahmad Shamlou's poem, "جخ امروز…," found in his poetry collection "مدایح بی‌صله," has been translated into English by the author specifically for this dissertation. The intention of the translation is to capture the core meaning of the original poem without claiming to be a professional literary translation.

country as a final destination for asylum is uncertain (Allen et al., 2006). Last but not least, *sojourners* are considered voluntary and temporary migrants (Berry & Sam, 2016) who go overseas to accomplish a certain goal within a specific time frame and are expected to return to their home country after fulfilling their goal (Safdar & Berno, 2016). In the Oxford English Dictionary [OED] (n.d.-a), "*sojourn*" as a noun is defined as "*a temporary stay at a place,*" and as a verb is defined as "*to make a temporary stay in a place; to remain or reside for a tim*e." A "*sojourner*" is also defined as "*one who sojourns; a temporary resident*" (OED, n.d.-b).

International students, members of the diplomatic corps, corporate executives, humanitarian workers (Berry & Sam, 2016), military people, volunteers (Ward et al., 2001), tourists, instructors, missionaries, and technical assistants (Lynch, 2013) are all examples of sojourners.

The arrival and settlement of migrants, as well as the existence of indigenous peoples, have resulted in the development of *culturally plural societies* (Berry, 2013b). In culturally plural societies, groups are classified according to three dimensions: *voluntariness, mobility,* and *permanency* (Berry, 1997). To provide examples, it is believed that on the *voluntariness* dimension, migration is voluntary for immigrants but involuntary for refugees; on the *mobility* dimension, immigrants have come into contact with new cultures as a result of their mobility, whereas indigenous people have come into contact with new cultures as a result of other cultures being introduced to them; and on the *permanency* dimension, immigrants' settlement in the host society is permanent, while sojourners such as international students are temporary residents (Berry, 1997).

International Students

Definition

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics (UIS) (n.d.-b), international students or internationally mobile students are "*individuals who have physically crossed an international border between two countries with the objective to participate in educational activities in the country of destination, where the country of destination of a given student is different from their country of origin.*" The term "*international students*" has several definitions, many of which overlap; however, since 2015, UNESCO, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the Statistical Office of the EU (EUROSTAT) have agreed on the above definition (Migration Data Portal, 2023).

International students are distinguished from *foreign students* or *credit-mobile students*, the former referring to students who do not hold the host country's citizenship and may have lived in the host country for an extended period of time or even been born there, while the latter refers to students who are studying abroad temporarily to earn academic credit as part of their home institutions' tertiary education programs (OECD, 2019b). It has been reported that when data on international students is unavailable, the term "*foreign students*" may be utilized as a substitute (OECD, 2021c). The term "international students" is used exclusively in the current dissertation.

As previously mentioned, international students are a subgroup of sojourners in Berry's classification of migrants; therefore, they are voluntary migrants who temporarily stay in the host country to accomplish a particular goal, such as pursuing an educational degree.

A Brief Overview of International Students' Significance and Adaptation

International students are considered one of the most significant and largest groups of sojourners (Safdar & Berno, 2016). Today, international students make up a larger percentage of the world's migrants (Raghuram & Sondhi, 2020), and their enrollment in higher education has increased dramatically during the past two decades (Pekerti et al., 2020). International students provide the host country with significant economic and social advantages (Choi et al., 2021). They provide a plethora of cultural variety and diverse knowledge and skills to the host nation, assisting in the development of *intellectual capital* and labor force expansion (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). However, for a long time, international students were excluded from most discussions on migration since they were seen as transient sojourners, traveling for a few months or years before returning home or changing their status to that of employees (Raghuram & Sondhi, 2020). However, nowadays, international education is becoming an increasingly important component of higher education, and students from all over the globe leave their home nations to pursue educational opportunities in other countries, and many of them build professions in the host country (Nasirudeen et al., 2014). As the global population of international students continues to increase, it has become increasingly important for academics to investigate the significance of this group at a global level (Safdar & Berno, 2016).

In cross-cultural literature, the investigation of acculturation and its outcome, cross-cultural adaptation, has been the center of interest for many researchers (e.g., Brisset et al., 2010; Gui et al., 2016). Generally, extensive research has been conducted in the cross-cultural literature on the investigation of acculturation and cross-cultural adaptation. This

surge in research can be attributed to the rise of international education over the last few decades (Brisset et al., 2010, as cited in Meza & Gazzoli, 2011).

Living outside one's home country can present various challenges, including difficulties adapting to a new environment, particularly for international students (Mustaffa & Ilias, 2013). Every student who begins their university journey must learn to adapt to new academic and social environments (Yan & FitzPatrick, 2016); however, the process of adaptation can be notably more challenging for international students due to the significant differences in their cultural values, language, academic preparation, and learning approaches (Yan & FitzPatrick, 2016), given that they must concurrently adapt to a different language, cultural, and academic system (Nilsson et al., 2008). Students may face several challenges stemming from building relationships with local students, perceived discrimination, cultural distance, and academic and financial difficulties (Gui et al., 2016; Safdar & Berno, 2016), unfamiliar cuisine, unknown living conditions, and cultural and personal problems (Wu et al., 2015), separation from family, and the challenge of balancing studies, employment, personal life, and academic success (Alharbi & Smith, 2018), among others.

The relocation of international students to a new country is a significant life experience that can impact their mental health and well-being (Kanekar et al., 2010). For instance, it has been reported that international students experience various psychological difficulties, including loneliness and anxiety which negatively impact their psychological adaptation (Brisset et al., 2010; Ward & Kennedy, 1999).

It is important to note that students' adaptation to a new environment is not always negative and can lead to positive outcomes. Successful adaptation has been found to be related to language proficiency, previous intercultural experiences, the presence of social networks, knowledge of the host culture, a lack of perception of discrimination at the university (Hartshorne & Baucom, 2007; Markova, 2006), and satisfaction of autonomy and relatedness needs (Vansteenkiste et al., 2006). Furthermore, successful adaptation has been associated with favorable consequences, such as enhanced well-being, satisfaction, confidence, and positive emotional states (Taušová et al., 2019).

Trends in the Global Flow of International Students

International student mobility has steadily increased during the last two decades (OECD, 2021a). Between 1998 and 2019, the number of international and foreign students increased by an annual average of 5.5 percent (OECD, 2021a). According to a recent report by the UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (IESALC, 2022), the number of international students studying at higher education

institutions was only 0.3 million in 1963; however, it significantly increased to 2 million by 2000 and reached over 6 million in 2019. Their number is expected to reach 8 million by 2025 (Studee, 2022).

A vast majority of international students study in OECD member states[2] (OECD, 2021a); however, it is worth mentioning that in non-OECD nations, the number of international students has risen faster, by an average of 7% each year, as opposed to a growth of 4.9% per year for students from OECD countries (OECD, 2021a). Asia was reported to have the largest proportion of international students, accounting for 58% of all those in OECD countries in 2019 (OECD, 2021b), and the number of Middle Eastern international students has increased dramatically over the last decades (Bridgestock, 2021).

In 2020, the U.S. received the highest number of international students ($n=$ 1,075,496), followed by the U.K. ($n=$ 551, 495), Canada ($n=$ 503,270), Australia ($n=$ 463, 643), France ($n=$ 358,000), Russia ($n=$ 353,331), Germany ($n=$ 302,157), Japan ($n=$ 228,403), Spain ($n=$125,675), the Netherlands ($n=$ 94,236), and Poland ($n=$78,259) (Statista, 2021).

Among the countries that send a substantial number of international students to study abroad, China has been reported as the leading country with a total of 694,400 students, followed by India ($n=$ 189,500), Republic of Korea ($n=$ 123,700), Germany ($n=$ 117,600), Saudi Arabia ($n=$ 62,500), France (n= 62,400), The U.S. (n= 58,100), Malaysia ($n=$ 55,600), Vietnam ($n=$ 53,800), and Iran ($n=$ 51,600) (Sheth, 2017).

International Students in Hungary

Hungary has become a popular country among Central European countries for international students (European Migration Network [EMN], 2012). The impact of internationalization on Hungarian higher education has been evident for some time; however, recent socio-economic transformations since the 1980s have prompted a new phase of internationalization, characterized by trends such as a significant increase in international

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[2] The OECD member states are composed of 38 member states: Austria, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States (OECD, 2021d).

mobility (Kovacs & Kasza, 2018). Internationalization has become prominent in European higher education since the Bologna process[3] was launched in 1999 (Kovacs & Kasza, 2018). European ministers of higher education decided to pursue a similar higher education system with the strategic goal of increasing student mobility in two ways: (1) to make studying in European nations more appealing to international students and (2) to facilitate student mobility within Europe for transitory reasons (Teichler, 2012). Hungary has actively participated in the Bologna process since 1999 when it signed the Bologna Declaration (Kasza, 2019). Since the early 2000s, a strong governmental push has incorporated the Bologna model into the Hungarian higher education system (Kasza, 2019).

Student mobility is a key component of internationalization in Hungary (Kovacs & Kasza, 2018). Between 2009 and 2020, the number of international students in Hungary increased steadily, with a slight decrease in the school year 2020/2021 (Statista, 2022). Since 2010, the proportion of tertiary-level international students in Hungary has doubled, one of the fastest rises among OECD nations (OECD, 2019a).

According to the Hungarian Educational Office (Oktatási Hivatal, 2017-2018), in the year 2017-2018, there were 32,309 students in Hungary. Germany ($n=$ 3,258), Romania ($n=$ 2,141), China ($n=$ 2,075), Serbia ($n=$1,931), and Iran ($n=$ 1,878) were the top five countries sending international students to Hungary out of 167 countries. The data retrieved from the official website of UIS in 2021 (UIS, n.d.-a) regarding the global flow of tertiary-level students in 2021 revealed that Hungary hosted 35,479 internationally mobile students. The top five nations with the highest number of international students were Germany ($n=$ 3,430), China ($n=$ 2,377), Romania ($n=$ 2,216), Iran ($n=$ 2,169), and Serbia ($n=$ 1,944) (UIS, n.d.-a). However, the data obtained from the UIS website in 2023 (UIS, n.d.-a) indicates an increase in the number of mobile students hosted by Hungary, reaching 38,422. Similarly, the top five countries with the highest number of international students in 2023 are Germany ($n=$ 3,449), China ($n=$ 2,776), Romania ($n=$ 2,593), Serbia (n= 2,209), and Iran ($n=$ 2,024).

According to Kovacs & Kasza (2018), international students in Hungary are classified into four main groups, including (1) students from surrounding countries whose native

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[3] The Bologna Process is a collaborative reform initiative in higher education involving 49 European countries and various European organizations, including the EUA. Its primary goal is to increase the quality and credibility of European higher education systems while fostering better opportunities for cooperation and exchange within Europe and globally (The European University Association [EUA], n.d.).

language is Hungarian (e.g., Romania, Serbia, Slovakia), (2) students from the field of Medical and Health Sciences who do not have Hungarian as their first language, (3) students mostly from countries like China, Iran, Turkey, and Nigeria, and (4) students participating in short-term credit or exchange programs whose native language is not Hungarian.

Iran and Iranian Migration

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the history and trends regarding the mobility of Iranian international students, it is essential to first grasp the socio-political characteristics of Iran and the historical context of Iranian immigration. This background knowledge will provide valuable information that helps understand the cross-cultural adaptation of Iranian international students, which will be further investigated in the subsequent chapters.

Socio-Political Characteristics of Iran

Iranian students originate from a country with numerous socio-political transformations throughout history. It should be noted that Iran's history is complex, making it unfeasible to delve into every detail within the confines of this study.

Iran's history is characterized by a profound transformation from the pre-Islamic to the Islamic era that has significantly impacted world history; no other place in the world has undergone such a radical shift as Iran (Tor & Inaba, 2022).

In the 20th century alone, Iran underwent two significant revolutions: the Constitutional Revolution (1905–1909) and the Islamic Revolution (1977–1979) (Abrahamian, 1982). The first revolution witnessed the victory of the modern intelligentsia, influenced by Western concepts such as nationalism, liberalism, and socialism, resulting in the drafting of a primarily secular constitution. In contrast, the Islamic revolution brought to power the traditional ulama, who were inspired by Islam and drafted a clerical constitution based on Sharia law (Abrahamian, 1982). It is essential to note that the 1979 revolution was not Islamic in nature; the revolution was democratic, with the goals of achieving freedom, social justice, and independence; however, these objectives were not met because Islamic fundamentalists overtook the democratic revolution of the people and seized power (Iran Freedom Network, 2019).

In addition to these significant 20th-century revolutions, Iran has undergone various notable political events. These include but not limited to the shift from Zoroastrianism to Islam following the Arab Muslim invasion of Persia in the 7th century, the enforcement of Shi'a Islam as the official state religion by the Safavid Dynasty in the 15th century, the 1921 Persian coup, the forced unveiling of women in 1934 ordered by Reza Khan, the Anglo-

Soviet invasion of Iran in 1941, the nationalization of the oil movement in 1951–1953, the 1953 Iranian coup, the 444-day hostage crisis (1979-1981), the Iran-Iraq war (1980–1988), the Green Movement in 2009, sporadic economic protests (2017 –2021), and the ongoing Mahsa Amini' protests that began in September 2022, under the movement *Woman, Life, Freedom* (Syed, 2022).

For over a century, Iranians have been pursuing democracy and freedom (Ghodsi, 2022). Throughout Iran's 2,500-year history, the most significant impediment to the establishment of a democratic country has been the presence of a centralized political system, coupled with a pattern of power being concentrated in the hands of an individual, a social class, or a select group of individuals (Parchizadeh, 2023). Establishing a centralized political system has exerted pressure on the people, and the people themselves also exerted pressure and transformed the state, resulting in the two significant revolutions mentioned above – the Constitutional Revolution and the Islamic Revolution (Abrahamian, 2008). In each of these revolutions, people desired a democratic country; however, every time, that desire was unfulfilled (Esfandiari, 2018).

In addition, the long-term intervention of foreign powers in Iran's socio-political and economic affairs should not be underestimated, as it played a significant role in shaping the country's path toward democracy. One notable example is the Iranian coup in 1953, which "*cut short a move toward democracy in Iran*" (Kinzer, 2003, para. 5). The coup was orchestrated by the U.S. and the U.K., who re-installed Mohammad Reza Shah to power by overthrowing Iran's newly elected Prime Minister, Mohammad Mossadegh, who had nationalized Iran's oil industry (Wu & Lanz, 2019).

In light of various socio-political upheavals in Iran's history, it is critical to study the cross-cultural adaptation patterns of Iranian international students, as students' cross-cultural adaptation is significantly influenced by the socio-political changes they experienced personally and those their ancestors endured.

Global Mobility of Iranian Migrants

Iranian Migration: Historical Background

In the four decades following the 1979 revolution, Iran experienced one of the highest brain drain rates worldwide as many students and academics left the country (Emirates Policy Center, 2022). According to a 2009 report by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Iran had the highest rate of brain drain among 91 countries, with nearly 180,000 educated individuals leaving Iran each year for better lives and employment opportunities (Kasiralvalad et al., 2016). Numerous factors, including excessive inflation and

unemployment, income disparity and economic crisis, despair regarding the future (Kayhan Life Staff, 2022), lack of freedom, discrimination, and human rights violations (Mehdi, 2020), have contributed to Iran's brain drain crisis.

Generally, it is reported that economic factors play a central role in motivating individuals from developing countries to migrate to developed countries. However, for Iranian people, political factors are the primary driving force, while economic, social, and professional factors are considered secondary push factors that contribute to the migration of Iranians (Torbat, 2002).

According to Raji (2010), throughout history, people of Persian descent from diverse ethnic and religious groups, such as Zoroastrians, Jews, Armenians, and Baha'is, have left their country and relocated to other regions for various purposes. For instance, in the 8th century, Zoroastrians left Iran seeking religious freedom after the Arab conquest and established themselves in India as Parsis. In the nineteenth century, numerous Iranians moved to the Russian Empire to work in the Baku oil fields. There were also minor movements of Iranian Jews and Christians in the 19th century and post-World War II era, with a significant proportion of the Jewish population settling in Israel. Nonetheless, it was primarily the Iranian revolution in 1979 and the eight-year Iran-Iraq war that gave rise to the most significant exodus of Iranians toward the West and other parts of the world (Raji, 2010). Since the 1979 Revolution in Iran, the country has experienced multiple waves of mass emigration (Bavili, 2022; Ziabari, 2022).

In addition to the waves of immigration caused by the 1979 revolution and the Iran-Iraq war, further waves of immigration took place in 1997 when Khatami became president, and his pro-reform policies created new opportunities for young Iranians to explore the world after years of isolation (Ziabari, 2022). Another wave occurred after the Green Movement in 2009, where peaceful protests challenging the fraudulent re-election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad were met with violent crackdowns, sham trials, and social media restrictions, causing many Iranians to flee the country (Ziabari, 2022). The Bloody November 2019-2020 protests may have been another wave of immigration (Ziabari, 2022), which initially started as a response to a sudden rise in fuel prices but soon became a more significant manifestation of public dissatisfaction with the government's oppression and alleged corruption (Human Rights Watch, 2020). The current *Woman, Life, Freedom* movement could potentially be the fifth wave of mass immigration and political uprisings in Iran (Ziabari, 2022). The number of migrants from Iran increased by 30 percent between 2020 and 2021. However, after the political events of late 2022 and early 2023, the rate of migration skyrocketed, and the

number of migrants surpassed 100,000, mainly due to the economic crisis (e.g., unemployment and wage issues) and political situations (IFP Editorial Staff, 2023).

A recent report by the director of the Iranian Migratory Observatory (Salavâti, 2022) states that Iran has recently witnessed a significant shift in its migration patterns, primarily after 2022. Brain drain, primarily involving elite and educated individuals leaving the country, has evolved into a rare global phenomenon, namely, "mass migration" (توده مهاجرت) (وار), meaning that there are no more elite or educated individuals leaving the country; rather, individuals from various socio-economic backgrounds and classes are leaving the country (Salavâti, 2022). According to the director, Iran is currently experiencing an unprecedented wave of migration, unlike anything seen since the 1979 revolution. Social, economic, environmental, cultural, and political factors have converged, leading to this migration peak (Salavâti, 2022). It is no longer limited to a specific class; athletes, artists, professors, teachers, and workers from different professions are also part of this mass migration trend (Salavâti, 2022). These recent developments highlight the magnitude and complexity of the migration issue in Iran.

Iranian International Students

Iranian International Students: Historical Background

The practice of sending Iranian students abroad dates back to Shah Abbas II Safavid's era (1642-1666). As a result of his keen interest in European painting, he dispatched students to Rome to study painting (Sarmad, 1993). Subsequently, during the Qajar era, following Iran's defeat in the war against Russia, students were dispatched abroad to acquire education in science and technology and learn expertise in military tactics and new sciences (Sarmad, 1993). In 1811, Abbas Mirza[4] made an agreement with the British, led by Sir Harford Jones, to send two Iranian students[5] to the U.K. to study medicine and painting, where the travel expenses and a monthly stipend for the students would be covered by the British

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[4] Born on August 26, 1789, in Noor, Mazandaran, Nayebolsaltaneh (Crown Prince), Abbas Mirza served as the crown prince of Iran (Persia) under the rule of Fath Ali Shah of Qajar. He was the youngest son of Fath Ali Shah, and he passed away on October 25, 1833, in Mashhad (Iran Chamber Society, 2023).

[5] The two students were Mohammad Kazem, the son of Abbas Mirza's painter, and Mirza Baba Afshar, the son of one of Abbas Mirza's officers (NajafgholiPour Kalantari & Roshanfekr Jourshari, 2015).

(NajafgholiPour Kalantari & Roshanfekr Jourshari, 2015). Later in 1858, Amir Kabir[6] sent 42 students to France; nevertheless, between 1858 and 1911, the practice of sending international students overseas ceased, and only financially capable parents could afford to send their children abroad for higher education (Sarmad, 1993). During the Qajar era (1805-1920), around 1,000 students, primarily from prominent families and with financial support from their families or the government, were sent abroad for education (Azizi & Azizi, 2010).

Soon after the Persian Constitutional Revolution (1905–1911), the government reinstated the practice of sending students overseas, and the House of Assembly enacted legislation authorizing the government to send students abroad (Sarmad, 1993). As a result, every year, one hundred high school graduates were sent abroad to study in various disciplines in Europe with government funding (Sarmad, 1993).

After the rise of Reza Shah's Pahlavi dynasty in 1925, approximately 1,000 Iranian students were enrolled in European universities. In 1928, new legislation was introduced mandating that the government provide funding for a minimum of 100 students annually to study abroad (Encyclopaedia Iranica, 2011). Between 1922 and 1938, approximately 1,500 students received their education in Europe (Encyclopaedia Iranica, 2011). During Mohammad-Reza Shah's rule (1941-1979), the number of Iranian students studying abroad increased steadily. Between 1946 and 1947, about 2,000 Iranian university students studied abroad; this figure grew substantially from 20,000 students by 1960 to more than 40,000 students by 1977 (Encyclopaedia Iranica, 2011). Many Iranian students returned to Iran after studying abroad due to the country's rapid progress and economic prosperity in the 1970s (Mahmoudi, 2021).

Following the Iranian Revolution in 1979, Iranian students' mobility changed dramatically. In the mid-1990s, the number of Iranian international students increased again, and it has doubled over the past two decades, resulting in Iran having one of the largest outflows of students in the world (Zijlstra, 2020). According to a report (Azadi et al., 2020), the number of Iranian-born students (including Iranian international students) studying abroad has undergone three distinct phases: a significant increase in the decade leading up to the Iranian Revolution in 1979, followed by a considerable decline in the two decades following the revolution, and then a subsequent return to a steadily increasing trend from

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[6] Mirza Taqi Khan, who was also known as Amir Kabir (1807-1852), served as the Prime Minister of Persia from 1848 to 1851 during the reign of Nasser al-Din Shah Qajar (Britannica, 2023).

2000 until 2020. As previously stated, while Iranian graduate students during the 1970s were urged to return home, the majority of Iranian graduates' international students today still reside abroad (Azadi et al., 2020).

Trends in Iranian International Students' Global Mobility

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the number of Iranian international students who study abroad has been persistently rising, and their interest in pursuing education overseas has kept increasing (Nafari et al., 2017). The total number of Iranian-born students (including international students and those who emigrated before enrollment at their university) who have studied abroad is estimated to be around 700,000 (Azadi et al., 2020). According to UIS data for 2021, the number of mobile Iranian students studying abroad was 59,585. However, the latest data on the UIS website for 2023 shows that this number has increased to 66,701. The U.S. ($n=$ 10,462) is the most popular destination for Iranian students, followed by Germany ($n=$ 9,319), Turkey ($n=$ 8,776), Canada ($n=$ 7,854), United Arab Emirates ($n=$ 3,119), Italy ($n=$ 2,965), Hungary (n= 2,024), Australia (n= 1,953), Russia ($n=$ 1,836), France ($n=$ 1,809), and the U.K. ($n=$ 1,533) (UIS, n.d.-a).

As previously mentioned, the number of Iranian-born students (including Iranian international students) increased rapidly in the decade preceding the revolution, declined dramatically two decades later, eventually remained constant at around 40,000; and finally increased continuously from the early 2000s until 2018, reaching an unprecedented number of approximately 130,000 (Azadi et al., 2020). The rate of Iranian students returning to Iran has decreased significantly, dropping from over 90% in 1979 to less than 10% in recent years (Azadi et al., 2020).

Recent Trends in Iranian International Students' Mobility in Hungary

Under the previously discussed topic of "international students in Hungary," reports of international student data from various countries were mentioned. The trends revealed specific information regarding Iranian students in Hungary between 2017 and 2023. In 2017-2018, there were 32,309 students in Hungary, with Iran having 1,878 international students, ranking fifth. In 2021, Hungary saw an overall increase in international mobile students, hosting 35,479 students. Iran maintained its position in the top five sending countries, ranking fourth with 2,169 students. However, in 2023, while Hungary's total number of mobile students continued to rise to 38,422, the number of Iranian students slightly decreased to 2,024, resulting in Iran dropping from the fourth to the fifth position. Nevertheless, Iran maintained its position in the top five sending countries to Hungary. These reports highlight

the significance of Iranian students in Hungary's international student population, albeit with some fluctuations in numbers over the years.

The Current Dissertation

The particular focus of this dissertation will be on international students, who constitute a subgroup of sojourners. International students constitute one of the largest and most influential or significant groups among various sojourner groups (Neto, 2021; Safdar & Berno, 2016). With a rise in the number of international students, there has also been an increase in studies examining international students and their adaptation to the host country (Aldawsari et al., 2018).

Specifically, this study will explore the experiences of Iranian international students, who are among the most mobile student populations in the world (Rakhshandehroo, 2017).

The main objective of the current dissertation is to explore the process of cross-cultural adaptation among Iranian international students. In other words, the aim is to provide a comprehensive understanding of Iranian students' experiences and adaptation, given that they come from a unique cultural and historical background and political climate that has been under transformation and upheaval for centuries. By examining various aspects of the adaptation process, including psychological, socio-cultural, and academic adaptations, this study seeks to shed light on the multifaceted experiences of Iranian international students and contribute to the broader literature on cross-cultural adaptation.

This study can provide insight into broader societal issues that may affect the experiences of Iranian international students and other students from countries facing similar challenges. By identifying factors that influence, especially those that hinder cross-cultural adaptation, this study can inform discussions around social and political change and provide a foundation for policymakers and institutions to develop strategies that support the complex adaptation process of Iranian international students.

CHAPTER TWO

Theoretical Literature Review on Acculturation and Cross-Cultural Adaptation

Introduction

  This theoretical chapter presents some of the main theories of acculturation and adaptation in cross-cultural research, as these theories can help comprehend Iranian international students' cross-cultural adaptation and experiences. Given their distinct background, as they come from a country that has undergone significant socio-political challenges and transformation and witnessed extensive brain drain and mass migration trends, the diverse range of cross-cultural theories and frameworks presented in the following are chosen with the intent of exploring their relevance and applicability in elucidating the intricate adaptation processes faced by Iranian students abroad.

  Iran's complex socio-political context, characterized by a history marked by wars, revolutions, coups, protests, and ongoing socio-political and economic challenges, necessitates a profound investigation of the factors shaping the cross-cultural adaptation of its international students. The interplay between these socio-political phenomena and migration patterns makes the adaptation experiences of Iranian students unique and multifaceted. By including these theories in the theoretical chapter, a comprehensive understanding of whether these models can effectively explain the cross-cultural adaptation of Iranian students abroad is sought.

  Furthermore, the collective consideration of these theories aims to identify potential gaps or limitations in existing models when applied to Iranian students' cross-cultural adaptation. This theoretical exploration aims to pave the way for a more comprehensive analysis once the results of empirical studies and a comprehensive literature review are unveiled, contributing to the growing body of knowledge on cross-cultural adaptation in the Iranian international student population.

Acculturation

  Global migration has given rise to acculturation, leading to diverse forms of adaptation (Berry, 2021). This chapter begins with a discussion of acculturation before discussing adaptation.

  John Wesley Powel was the first person to coin the term acculturation in 1880, despite its ancient origins (Sam, 2006), defining it as psychological changes brought about by *cross-cultural imitation* (Tanabe, 2021). This definition focuses on the process of psychological development achieved by 'primitive' people imitating the 'advanced' group, viewing acculturation as a subjective adjustment from 'lower' to 'higher' cultures (Powell, 1880, as

cited in Rudmin et al., 2017). However, this classical definition has faced criticism, such as by Rudmin et al. (2017), for its biased assumption that some cultures are 'lower' and must change to become more like 'higher' cultures.

A later classic definition of acculturation was formulated by Redfield et al. (1936), stating that acculturation refers to the processes that occur when groups of people from distinct cultural backgrounds come into "continuous first-hand contact," resulting in modifications to one or both groups' original cultural patterns. They identified three outcomes of acculturation: *Acceptance*, *Adaptation*, and *Reaction.* Acceptance happens when the acculturation process leads to adopting the host culture and losing one's cultural heritage. Adaptation involves integrating native and foreign traits to form a cohesive cultural unit. Reaction arises when oppression or unforeseen consequences of accepting a foreign culture lead to "*contra-acculturative*" processes. In essence, reaction or "*contra-acculturation*" is marked by resistance to embrace the host country's culture (Castro & Rudmin, 2020).

A more specific and classic definition of acculturation was established by the Social Science Research Council in 1954. According to this definition, acculturation is the cultural transformation that occurs when two or more independent "cultural systems" come together, either directly through cultural contacts or indirectly through environmental or demographic changes. According to their analysis, assimilation is not the only type of acculturation process. Other types include *reactive*, which can induce resistance to change in both groups; *creative*, which involves the emergence of a new culture not found in either group; and *delayed*, where changes may be postponed and emerge more fully in the future. (Berry, 1997). It is worth noting that the initial definitions of acculturation focused mainly on cultural changes at the group level resulting from acculturation. However, Graves (1967) expanded on this by including individual-level psychological changes, which he referred to as *psychological acculturation* (Berry et al., 1987), to describe the acculturation that instigates psychological changes in the individual (Berry, 1997). Subsequently, Safdar et al. (2013) provided a working definition of acculturation that refers to "*those phenomena which result when groups of individuals with different cultures come into contact, with subsequent changes in the original patterns of either or both groups, or behavioural or psychological change in individuals from either or both groups*" (p. 215).

In addition to the psychological and cultural changes, Berry (1991) identified various other changes that occur during acculturation. These changes could be physical (e.g., a new home and style of dwelling and greater population density), biological (e.g., changes in diets

and exposure to new illnesses), political (e.g., the control of non-dominant groups that can lead to a loss of autonomy), economic (e.g., the transition away from traditional occupations), behavioural, and social intergroup/interpersonal relationship changes as a result of acculturation.

Berry's Psychological Approaches to Acculturation

Berry proposed three approaches for conceptualizing acculturation outcomes. These approaches include (1) *behavioural shifts*; (2) *acculturative stress*; and (3) *psychopathology* (Berry, 1997, 2006a). According to Berry (2006a), three processes involve behavioral shifts during acculturation: *culture shedding*, *culture learning*, and *culture conflict*. The first two processes involve relatively stress-free adjustments (e.g., in communication style, clothing, eating habits, and an individual's cultural identity; Berry & Sam, 2017), which help individuals adapt to the host society more easily, with assimilation being the most probable outcome (Berry, 2006a).

The third process, culture conflict, leads to a higher level of stress than culture shedding and culture learning processes (Berry, 2006a), resulting in *acculturative stress*. Although it can be controlled, individuals may struggle to adapt to these stressors and may adopt alternative acculturation strategies to manage them (Berry, 2006a). Psychopathology arises when the acculturation experience becomes clinically problematic and uncontrollable, requiring the individual to seek help managing the stressors (Berry, 2006a).

Acculturation Models

Unidimensional Acculturation Model

Earlier acculturation models proposed a one-way process where acculturating groups abandon their heritage culture and gradually assimilate into the dominant culture (Gordon, 1964). The unidimensional model conceptualizes ethnic identity as a continuum extending from strong connections to one's origin culture to strong ties to the host culture (Phinney, 1990). A classic example of the unidimensional model is the assimilation theory introduced by Milton Gordon (1975) (Liu, 2015). Gordon (1964) recognized seven types of assimilation, including (1) *cultural or behavioural assimilation* or *acculturation* (the ethnic groups adopt the dominant society's cultural patterns); (2) *structural assimilation* (the ethnic groups enter into the host society's social structure); (3) *marital assimilation or amalgamation* (the minority groups have had intermarriage with members of the dominant group on a large-scale basis); (4) *identificational assimilation* (the ethnic groups create a *"sense of peoplehood"* with the members of the host society); (5) *attitude receptional assimilation* (the ethnic groups do not hold prejudice against the dominant groups); (6) *behaviour receptional assimilation*

(the ethnic groups hold no discrimination toward the dominant groups); and (7) *civic assimilation* (there is no conflict between the ethnic and dominant groups in terms of value and power).

Due to the limitations of the unidimensional model, which precludes acculturating groups from establishing fully bicultural identities, the bi-dimensional model of acculturation was developed as a substitute for the unidimensional model, with the most prominent version developed by Berry and his colleagues (Kang, 2006). However, researchers sometimes use the term assimilation interchangeably with acculturation, incorporation, integration, and Americanization (Ramírez, 2021).

Bi-dimensional Model of Acculturation

Unlike the unidimensional model of acculturation, the bi-dimensional model posits that embracing the host culture and preserving the origin culture are two separate dimensions (Arends-Tóth & Van de Vijver, 2006; Celenk & Van de Vijver, 2011; Doucerain et al., 2017; Safdar et al., 2009) meaning that accepting the mainstream culture does not require giving up the heritage culture (Ryder et al., 2000). John Berry was the first to assert that the extent to which immigrants adopt the mainstream culture and retain their origin culture should be assessed independently (Navas et al., 2005). Berry (1997) developed a bi-dimensional acculturation model based on two key issues during the acculturation process: (1) the value placed on preserving one's culture and identity, and (2) the value placed on maintaining connections with the host society (Berry, 1997).

Fusion Model

The *fusion model*, the third type of dimensionality model, involves acculturating individuals who integrate both their heritage and mainstream cultures to create a new, integrated culture (Arends-Tóth & van de Vijver, 2006). As a result, acculturation is not limited to a binary choice between heritage and mainstream cultures but rather involves the synthesizing of features from both cultures (Arends-Tóth & van de Vijver, 2006). According to Castro (2016), the fusion model involves the ongoing interaction and exchange of knowledge between different cultures, resulting in the development of a new and diverse culture incorporating characteristics from multiple cultures.

Acculturation Strategies

By combining the two dimensions, four acculturation strategies were identified: (1) *assimilation* (embracing the host culture while dismissing one's own), (2) *separation* (rejecting the host culture while maintaining one's own), (3) *integration* (interacting with the

host culture while keeping one's own), and (4) *marginalization* (rejecting both one's own and the host culture) (Berry, 1997).

The design of the acculturation strategies is based on the perspective of non-dominant groups, assuming their freedom to choose these strategies; however, this assumption may not always hold true (Berry, 2005; 2006b). Therefore, Berry (1974) introduced a third dimension (Berry, 2009) which is the larger society's policies for permitting or restraining individuals' preferences to maintain heritage culture or interact with the host society (Berry, 2013a). The acculturation strategies that dominant groups impose on minority groups can also impact the acculturation strategies of non-dominant groups. There are four acculturation strategies enforced by the host society: *melting pot*, *segregation*, *multiculturalism*, and *exclusion* (Berry, 2009; Gui et al., 2016). When the dominant groups enforce assimilation, it is referred to as a melting pot; when they impose separation, it is referred to as segregation; when they accept integration, it is referred to as multiculturalism; and lastly, when they implement marginalization, it is referred to as exclusion (Berry, 2005).

Adaptation

In biology, adaptation is a population shift induced by natural selection in response to environmental forces, while in social sciences, adaptation generally refers to the changes that occur throughout an organism's lifespan in reaction to environmental pressures (Berry et al., 2002). Berry (1980) stated that "*adaptation*" refers to reducing dissonance and increasing harmony among interrelated components. In other words, it is a transformation process that aims to enhance the "*fit*" between cultural groups and/or people and their environment, which may produce well-adapted or maladapted outcomes (Berry & Ataca, 1999). This may be accomplished via three distinct strategies, resulting in three types of adaptation: *adjustment*, *reaction*, and *withdrawal* (Berry, 1980, 1992; Berry & Ataca, 1999).

In *adjustment*, changes in the individual's behaviour occur to decrease incongruity and enhance the '*fit'* between the individual's behaviour and the environment, thereby creating harmony with the environment. In *reaction*, changes in behaviour are directed against the environment; these changes may result in environmental modifications that enhance the fit between an individual's behaviour and the environment; however, these behavioural changes do not occur due to the individual's adjustment. In *withdrawal*, behavioral changes occur to reduce environmental pressures, which can happen through forced or voluntary exclusion/withdrawal (Berry, 1980, 1992; Berry & Ataca, 1999). In general, the term adaptation refers most frequently to the adjustment strategy (Berry, 1992).

<center>**Theories on Cross-Cultural Adaptation**</center>

There are numerous theoretical frameworks available in the literature to understand cross-cultural adaptation. One of these frameworks, proposed by Anderson (1994), involves categorizing the literature on cross-cultural adaptation into four models. These models provide an overview of the process of adapting to the host culture and include (1) *the Recuperation Model*; (2) *the Learning Model*; (3) *the Recovery* or *Journey Model*; and (4) *the Dynamic Tension Reduction Model* or *Equilibrium*/*Homeostatic Model* (Alamri, 2018; Anderson, 1994; Chen, 2013; Deal et al., 2003; Scheu, 1997).

First, a brief overview of each category based on Anderson's (1994) classification will be explained. Subsequently, the taxonomy of theoretical models of cross-cultural adaptation presented by Chen and Zhu (2020) in their book will be explained.

Anderson's (1994) Cross-Cultural Adaptation Classifications

Culture-Shock Recuperation Model

The first and most prominent model refers to the "*recuperation*" model with culture shock at its core, which views recovery from culture shock as a process of adapting to living in a new culture (Anderson, 1994). The study on culture shock[7] most accurately describes the recuperation model (Chen, 2013). Some significant theories on culture shock will be discussed in the following sections.

Sverre Lysgaard (1955) pioneered the concept of the U-curve of adjustment levels over time (Zheng & Berry, 1991). Lysgaard's (1955) culture shock U-curve consists of four stages: *honeymoon*, *culture shock*, *adjustment*, and *mastery*, each of which affects the emotional state and behaviours of individuals who find it difficult to adjust to life in a new country (Istrate, 2018). Lysgaard (1955) interviewed 200 Norwegian sojourners in academia (e.g., students, professors, and scientists) who spent around a year in the U.S. to investigate their adjustment. It was found that the adjustment process follows a U-curve pattern, with the first stage characterized by satisfactory adjustment, the second stage by a "crisis" in which the individual feels isolated and sad, and the third stage by the individual returning to being well adjusted and integrated into the host culture (Lysgaard, 1955). The adjustment phases of

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[7] There is a widespread misconception among credible sources that Kalervo Oberg was the first to coin the term "culture shock;" however, it should be noted that Oberg did not coin the term but was the first to thoroughly analyze and provide a model for culture shock (Dutton, 2011). Other scholars, such as Du Bois (1951), Gamio (1929), Holt (1940), and Carpenter (1931), have used the term "culture shock" before Oberg (Dutton, 2011).

Lysgaard's 1955 U-shaped model were revised and refined by Oberg (1960) (Levine & Levine, 2014).

Oberg (1960) focused on culture shock, which he described as an occupational ailment that occurs when individuals are "suddenly" relocated overseas and is caused by the anxiety associated with the loss of familiar cues and symbols during social contact. Oberg (1960) postulated four stages of culture shock: (1) the honeymoon stage, (2) the hostile and aggressive stage, (3) the recovery stage, and (4) the adjustment stage. In the initial honeymoon stage, which may last several days, weeks, or even six months, the majority of sojourners are enchanted by their new surroundings and have a pleasant sojourn experience. In the second stage, sojourners demonstrate hostility and aggression against the host country after encountering real-life challenges in the new environment, such as language barriers, university-related obstacles, transportation difficulties, and shopping issues, coupled with the fact that the majority of people in the host nation are oblivious to all of these challenges. The third stage of recovery occurs when the sojourners gain some language skills, begin navigating independently, and instead of being critical of the host country's people, they accept their challenges and even make jokes about them. The last adjustment stage occurs when sojourners function within their new environment without feeling anxious even in stressful situations and not only accept but also relish the host country's culture (e.g., traditions, cuisines, drinks, habits, etc.) (Oberg, 1960).

Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) expanded the U-curve model to the W-curve model (or reverse culture shock model; Purnell & Hoban, 2014) by including a new stage of readjustment upon sojourners' return to their home county. Their interview with returning American grantees revealed that student grantees experienced a similar process of re-acculturation in their home country as they did overseas. After returning home, many sojourners felt alienated and lonely. They expressed frustration and disappointment with their home institutions for prioritizing group maintenance tasks over pursuing innovative professional endeavors. Their exposure to the host culture had caused a shift in their values and expectations. Moreover, they experienced a sense of relative deprivation, feeling that they did not receive the level of respect in their home country that they believed was appropriate for their academic positions (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963). While culture shock is often linked with adverse outcomes, it may be essential to cultural learning, personal development, and individual growth (Adler, 1975).

Berry (1970) coined the term acculturative stress as an alternative to culture shock because the latter has only negative connotations, whereas stress can vary from positive to

negative; additionally "acculturation" emphasizes the interaction of two cultures rather than just one, as implied by "culture" (Berry, 2006a).

Adaptation as a Learning Process

The second model, the learning model, conceptualizes cross-cultural adaptation as a learning process. To successfully adapt to a new culture, sojourners must become familiar with the socio-cultural aspects of the host country and acquire the necessary socio-cultural skills to effectively engage in the new cultural environment (Anderson, 1994). One perspective posits that intercultural communication is crucial in cultural adaptation (Anderson, 1994). According to this school of thought, proficiency in the host language is a "*sine qua non*" for successful adaptation (Kim, 2001). Conversely, another approach, which takes a behavioral standpoint, underscores the significance of conforming to appropriate social norms (Anderson, 1994) in both the original and new cultural settings (Triandis, 1980).

The Recovery Model

The third model, the recovery model of adaptation, applies to both short-term sojourners and long-term immigrants. This model is distinct from the recuperation model, which primarily addresses culture shock symptoms (Chen, 2013).

The recovery model believes adapting to a new culture is like a *psychological journey*. It involves moving from the edges to the center of that culture and gradually gaining understanding and empathy. This journey starts with not knowing or denying the new culture (Anderson, 1994). According to Alamri (2018), typical examples of the recovery model are the U-shaped curve model proposed by Lysgaard (1955), which was previously discussed, and the developmental model of intercultural adaptation proposed by Bennett (1986), which will be discussed further.

The Dynamic Tension Reduction Model

The dynamic tension reduction model represents the fourth perspective on cross-cultural adaptation, viewing it as an ongoing and dynamic process. This model suggests that when individuals encounter a new culture, they experience internal inconsistency characterized by tension and uncertainty. However, these tensions can be alleviated over time through continuous and adaptable adjustments. In this model, sojourners are likened to balanced mechanical systems until they encounter dynamic circumstances or disturbances in the new culture. In response to these disruptions, the sojourner seeks to regain balance (Anderson, 1994) by addressing the internal incongruity caused by the stress and uncertainty of their situation (Chen, 2013).

Next, a recent grouping of cross-cultural adaptation theories that share similarities with Anderson's models will be addressed. These theories are outlined in Chen and Zhu's (2020) book: (1) *Cross-Cultural Adaptation Stage Model*, (2) *Cross-Cultural Learning Theory*, and (3) *Cross-Cultural Adaptation Development Model*.

Chen and Zhu's (2020) Cross-Cultural Adaptation

Cross-Cultural Adaptation Stage Model

Several scholars proposed multiple stages to explain the cross-cultural adaptation process, and it is reported that the U-curve adaptation model by Lysgaard (1955) and the W-curve adaptation model by Gullahorn & Gullahorn (1963) represent the cross-cultural adaptation stage model (Chen & Zhu, 2020); both models have been discussed earlier. According to Chen and Zhu (2020), the stage model of cross-cultural adaptation typically has a positive outlook on the process, assuming that adaptation improves over time. It focuses on the overall development of the adaptation process rather than the evolution of a particular incident within it.

Cross-Cultural Learning Theory

Cross-cultural learning theory (comparable to Anderson's (1994) taxonomy of "learning models," as previously discussed) explains that cross-cultural adaptation is a process of acquiring the host society's culture (Chen & Zhu, 2020), with two theories representing cross-cultural learning theory, including Anderson's (1994) *cognitive-emotional-behavioural three-dimensional theory* and Kim's (2001) *stress-adaptation-growth dynamics theory* (Chen & Zhu, 2020).

Anderson's (1994) Cognitive-Emotional-Behavioural Three-Dimensional Theory

Anderson's (1994) three-dimensional adaptation process involves "*affective/emotional, cognitive/perceptual, and (overt) behavioural*" components (Anderson, 1994, p. 308), with each obstacle faced by sojourners eliciting a unique combination of emotional, cognitive, and behavioural reactions (e.g., a person may feel anxious when confronted with an obstacle in one situation; but may be confident and capable of overcoming the obstacle in another situation) (Anderson, 1994).

Anderson (1994) proposed six principles for cross-cultural adaptation, which will be briefly discussed below.

(1) Cross-cultural adaptation includes *adjustments*. Adapting to a new culture involves more than just learning about it. It also requires accepting its legitimacy and addressing the emotional challenges that come with it, such as a sense of loss, an identity crisis, and conflicting values.

(2) Cross-cultural adaptation involves a process of *learning*. Sojourners may face challenges when their previous norms or work experiences do not apply in the host country. They can choose to adjust their behavior or environment or withdraw from the situation. For example, if language is a barrier, they may need to learn the host culture's language to adapt.

(3) Cross-cultural adaptation requires a dynamic *stranger-host relationship*. Sojourners need to adjust their values to adapt to the host culture, which can vary in terms of its treatment of the host country. Some cultures are more inclusive than others, with some nations aiding newcomers while others may be hostile.

(4) Cross-cultural adaptation is *cyclical*, *continuous*, and *interactive*. Cultural adaptation is not a linear process but rather a cyclical one with both ups and downs. It involves both successes and failures in dealing with obstacles and is interactive, with individuals modifying their surroundings and vice versa.

(5) Cross-cultural adaptation is *relative.* Most researchers focus on two extremes of the adjustment process: those who cannot adjust and those who adjust well. However, most sojourners fall somewhere in between, showing varying degrees of adaptation, making it a *relative* process.

(6) Cross-cultural adaptation involves *personal development.* Adapting to a different culture can result in personal growth; however, not everyone undergoes a significant transformation. Some may feel their identity and original culture are at risk during adaptation.

Kim's (2001) Stress-Adaptation-Growth Dynamics Model

Another theory presenting cross-cultural learning theory is Kim's (2001) stress-adaptation-growth model, as stated by Chen and Zhu (2020). Kim (2001) defines cross-cultural adaptation as "*the dynamic process by which individuals, upon relocating to new, unfamiliar, or changed cultural environments, establish (or re-establish) and maintain relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationships with this environment*" (Kim, 2001, p. 31). The stress, adaptation, and growth of newcomers' experiences in a new country are interrelated and dynamic (Kim, 2001), and the stress-adaptation-growth process is not straightforward but rather cyclical, with a "*draw-back-to-leap*" pattern (Kim, 2001, 2017). While newcomers may withdraw when faced with stress, this stress can motivate adaptation (Kim, 2001, 2017). As a result of this stress, newcomers are compelled to engage in new learning activities (Kim, 2001). The pressure to learn about a new culture and adapt to new customs can create stress and dissonance as newcomers strive to maintain their native identity

while conforming to new cultural norms (Kim, 2001). However, as time passes, the intensity of stress-adaptation fluctuations decreases (Kim, 2001), and effectively managing this imbalance can lead to psychological growth (Kim, 2017).

The cross-cultural learning model differs from the stage model in that it is open and continuous, with a circular adaptation process. This suggests that the outcome of the adaptation is not fixed and could be either positive or negative (Chen & Zhu, 2020).

Cross-Cultural Adaptation Development Model

Chen and Zhu (2020) identified three major theories that reflect the cross-cultural adaptation development model: (1) *Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS)*, (2) *Berry's theory of cultural integration strategy*, and (3) *Ward's theory of socio-cultural and psychological adaptation.*

Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS)

Hammer et al. (2003) stated that Bennett (1986, 1993) created the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) to explain how individuals perceive cultural differences. The model has a six-stage continuum of intercultural sensitivity development (i.e., *denial*, *defense*, *minimization*, *acceptance*, *adaptation*, and *integration*), which ranges from *ethnocentrism* to *ethnorelativism* regarding how individuals experience cultural differences. The shift from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism indicates a significant improvement in individuals' intercultural competence (Bennett, 2004).

The first three stages of the DMIS (denial, defense, and minimization) are ethnocentric, whereas the latter three phases (acceptance, adaptation, and integration) are ethnorelative (Bennett & Bennett, 2004; Bennett, 2017). Ethnocentric individuals view their culture as the only reality, whereas ethnorelative people consider their culture as one of many potential realities (Bennett, 2004).

Bennett's first ethnocentric stage, the denial stage, involves individuals who view their culture as the only reality, socially and psychologically distancing themselves from other cultures (Bennett, 1986). These people fail to recognize the importance of diverse cultures (Bennett, 2017). In the second ethnocentric stage, the *defense* against cultural differences stage, individuals feel threatened by cultural differences and have polarized perceptions of other cultures (e.g., immigrants steal our jobs, they hold negative stereotypes of cultural minorities, etc.) (Bennett, 2004). In the last ethnocentric stage, the *minimization* of cultural differences stage, individuals accept cultural variance openly, they do not perceive it negatively, and perceive components of their cultural worldview as universal; however, they trivialise and dismiss cultural variation, believing that cultural similarities (e.g., similarities in

physical characteristics, personality traits, religion, and politics, etc.) outweigh cultural differences (Bennett, 1986, 2004). Minimalism masks profound cultural variations in both people and organizations. For instance, it is common for organisations to overestimate the benefits of giving everyone equal opportunities in order to conceal the fact that the dominant culture is still in power (Bennett, 2017).

In the first ethnorelative stage, *acceptance* of cultural differences, individuals accept and respect cultural differences (e.g., accept variations in behaviour, such as language and cultural values) (Bennett, 1986). However, accepting cultural differences does not necessarily imply that people agree with them; in fact, they may perceive cultural differences unfavourably, although not in an ethnocentric way (Bennett, 2017). Individuals in this stage are eager to learn about various cultures; however, their inadequate knowledge of other cultures makes it difficult for them to adapt to a new culture (Bennett, 2017).

In the second ethnorelative stage, *adaptation* to cultural difference stage, individuals' experience of a new culture results in culturally acceptable behaviour, and their cultural worldviews grow to incorporate appropriate elements from different cultural worldviews (Bennett, 2004). Individuals at this stage are capable of communicating and interacting effectively with members of other cultures (Paige et al., 2013). Bennett (1986) distinguished two types of adaptation: *empathy* and *cultural pluralism*.

Empathy is the capacity to perceive things from another person's perspective or alter one's perspective in accordance with other cultures (Bennett, 2004). Individuals may temporarily shift their point of view in order to observe events through the eyes of another person (Bennett, 1986). For instance, one behavioural expression of empathy might be an individual's capacity to produce verbal and nonverbal communication that is regarded as suitable by the host culture (Bennett, 1986). *Cultural pluralism* refers to the capacity to switch between different cultural worldviews; when an empathic shift is habitualized and internalized, *cultural pluralism* occurs (sometimes referred to as *biculturality* and *multiculturality*) (Bennett, 1986; 2004). For example, an American who has lived in Japan for a long time may be able to easily switch to the Japanese cultural worldview to the point that she/he could be described as *bicultural* (Bennett, 1986).

The last ethnorelative stage, the *integration* of cultural differences, is primarily concerned with cultural identity (Bennett & Bennett, 2004). Individuals at this stage have already become multicultural or bicultural (Bennett & Bennett, 2004) and are capable of moving between ("*movement in and out of*") various cultural worldviews (Bennett, 2004, 2017) while at the same time facing issues associated with marginal cultural identity

(Bennett, 2004). There are two types of cultural marginality: *encapsulating marginality* and *constructive marginality* (Bennett, 2004). In the former, the individual feels alienated due to cultural isolation, while in the latter, moving in and out of various cultures is positive and necessary for the individual's identity (Bennett, 2004).

Sparrow (2000) criticized Bennett's concept of constructive marginality as the ultimate phase of intercultural sensitivity and suggested that factors such as gender, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status, and language proficiency shape individuals' intercultural development. Sparrow (2000) found that minority groups (e.g., women of colour) did not view marginality as a source of freedom or a chance for detachment; instead, they sought to reconnect with their origin culture (e.g., religions, languages, and customs). According to Sparrow's (2000) view, Bennett's perspective that individuals are not tied to a specific culture during the integration stage but rather are constructive marginals is criticized as excessively intellectualized and reflective of a male, Cartesian approach to development that prioritizes discovering an ultimate objective viewpoint to observe reality (Shaules, 2007).

Berry's Theory of Cultural Integration Strategy

Earlier in the chapter, the bi-dimensional model of acculturation by Berry (1997) was explained, leading to the formation of four acculturation strategies. The third dimension, which relates to the acculturation strategies adopted by the host country towards migrants, was also elucidated.

Compared to assimilation, separation, or marginalization, integration is the most commonly employed acculturation orientation and is frequently associated with better socio-cultural and psychological adaptation (Berry, 2007). The majority of research has also found that marginalisation is linked with higher levels of depression and anxiety than integration (Choy et al., 2021).

Ward's Theory of Socio-cultural and Psychological Adaptation

Ward and her colleagues (Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward, 1996; Ward et al., 2001; Ward & Kennedy, 1993, 1994, 1999) distinguished two distinct types of adaptation: *psychological adaptation* and *socio-cultural adaptation*. Psychological adaptation refers to the emotional component of cross-cultural adaptation, while socio-cultural adaptation refers to the behavioral domain (Ward & Kennedy, 1999). Psychological adaptation focuses on individuals' psychological health and sense of satisfaction, while socio-cultural adaptation is about how well individuals can "fit in" the host culture and learn cultural skills (Ward & Kennedy, 1999). Psychological adaptation is primarily influenced by factors such as social support, personality, life transitions, and coping mechanisms, while socio-cultural adaptation

is affected by factors such as cultural awareness, cultural distance, language competency, acculturation orientation, duration of stay in the host country, and level of out-group (local) contact (Ward & Kennedy, 1993).

Various other adaptation types have been suggested in the literature, which will be briefly addressed below.

Additional Forms of Adaptation

Intercultural Adaptation

Berry (2015) introduced a third type of adaptation known as intercultural adaptation, as cited by Gui et al. (2016) and Berry & Sam (2016), which can be positive or negative. Intercultural adaptation pertains to the extent to which individuals effectively interact in a multicultural society (Berry & Ward, 2016), and it is based on the attainment of harmonious intercultural connections (Berry & Sam, 2016).

Negative intercultural adaptation is associated with prejudice, discrimination, unfavorable attitudes towards other ethnic-cultural groups, and a rejection of multiculturalism (Berry, 2017), while positive intercultural adaptation is characterized by positive attitudes, low prejudice and discrimination, and acceptance of multiculturalism (Berry, 2017).

In summary, acculturation results in three types of long-term adaptations: *psychological adaptation* (also called *feeling well*); socio-cultural adaptation (also called *doing well*); and intercultural adaptation (also called *relating well*) (Berry, 2017). Three hypotheses were proposed to explain the origins of *psychological*, *socio-cultural*, and *intercultural adaptation*, namely, (1) *integrations hypothesis*, (2) *multiculturalism hypothesis*, and (3) *contact hypothesis* (Berry, 2017).

The integration hypothesis suggests that interacting with both origin and host cultures (e.g., adopting integration) leads to better psychological and socio-cultural adaptation (Berry, 2017). The multiculturalism hypothesis claims that when individuals are secure about their own cultural identities, they are more likely to embrace and accept diverse cultures, which can lead to decreased prejudice and discrimination (Berry, 2013b; 2017). Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis suggests that when people from different cultures interact, they can become more accepting and less prejudiced toward one another, provided that the groups share equal status, collaborate, work toward common goals, and receive support from authorities (Berry, 2017; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Lenz & Mittlaender, 2022).

Other types of adaptation mentioned in the literature include *economic adaptation* (Aycan & Berry, 1996), *marital adaptation* (Ataca & Berry, 2002), and *academic adaptation* (Shamionov et al., 2020; Sumer, 2009, as cited in Gladkova, 2017). *Economic adaptation*

refs to a person's sense of economic attainment and full labour force participation in the host society (Aycan & Berry, 1996). *Marital adaptation* involves adjusting to a new culture as a married couple and is influenced mainly by *marital stressors* and *marital support* (Ataca & Berry, 2002). *Academic adaptation* involves students' adaptation to their educational context, including interpersonal relationships, academic activities, and learning space (Shamionov et al., 2020), as well as language proficiency in the host country, familiarity with the host educational system, and effective educational skills (Sumer, 2009, as cited in Gladkova, 2017).

Expanded Model of Acculturation and Adaptation

Acculturation strategies have become increasingly complicated to conceptualize in recent years (Berry & Sam, 2016), as many scholars have expanded and criticized Berry's acculturation approach for being oversimplified and rigid (Gamsakhurdia, 2018), ignoring context, lacking reliable evaluation methodologies, and oversimplifying a complicated process into four types (Gamsakhurdia, 2018; Weiner & Craighead, 2010).

Arends-Tóth and van de Vijver (2006) criticized Berry's acculturation model for not recognizing differences in acculturation orientation between private (e.g., family) and public life domains (e.g., school), as evidenced by Turkish-Dutch immigrants in the Netherlands who preferred integration in public domains and separation in private domains (Arends-Tóth & van de Vijver, 2003). Similarly, Birman et al. (2014) found that acculturation to both Russian and American cultures improved life satisfaction and reduced distress among former Soviet Union refugees in the U.S.; however, the effects varied depending on the domain of life. That is, acculturation to the origin culture in the private life domain (e.g., family and friends) and acculturation to the host culture in the public life domain (e.g., job) resulted in increased life satisfaction and decreased distress for refugees (Birman et al., 2014). In the subsequent sections, several acculturation-adaptation models developed to complement Berry's acculturation model will be discussed.

Interactive Acculturation Model (IAM)

Bourhis et al. (1997) proposed the *Interactive Acculturation Model* (*IAM*) as a modified version of Berry's acculturation model. This model has the advantage over Berry's in that it considers not only the immigrants' viewpoint but also the viewpoint of the members of host communities regarding the immigrants since the two views are interconnected (Navas et al., 2005). IAM has three components: (1) immigrants' acculturation orientation in the host society, (2) the host society members' acculturation orientation toward immigrants, and (3) relational outcomes that arise from the interaction of these acculturation orientations. Bourhis

et al. (1997) revised Berry's two-dimensional acculturation model by changing the second dimension, from immigrants' desire to connect with the host culture to newcomers' preference for adopting the cultural identity of the host society. They categorized Berry's marginalization mode into *anomie* and *individualism*. Anomie refers to feeling culturally alienated by rejecting both origin and host cultures, and individualism refers to withdrawing from both cultures without feeling marginalized, as individuals can identify themselves as distinct individuals; "*such individualists reject group ascriptions per se and prefer to treat others as individual persons rather than as members of group categories*" (Bourhis et al., 1997, p. 378). Bourhis et al. (1997) also found that the acculturation orientation of immigrants (e.g., integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization [*anomie* and *individualism]*) and the host community (e.g., integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization [*exclusion* and *individualism*]) varied due to several variables such as age, gender, ethnicity, social class, state integration policies, and time. For instance, Montreuil and Bourhis (2001) found that the host community tends to adopt integration and individualism more strongly for "valued" immigrants who share their language and culture; however, they tend to adopt assimilation, segregation, and exclusion more strongly for "devalued" immigrants who are subject to negative stereotypes or have different cultural and religious backgrounds.

Interactional Model of Acculturation

Phinney et al. (2001) investigated the ethnic and national identities of adolescent immigrants from different backgrounds (e.g., African, Russian, Turkish, Mexican, and Vietnamese) living in different countries, including Finland, Israel, the Netherlands, and the U.S., and proposed an *Interactional Model of Acculturation*. Phinney et al. (2001) employed the terms *ethnic identity* and *national identity* to describe immigrants' desire to associate with their native and host cultures, respectively. They created four identities akin to Berry's four acculturation orientations by combining immigrants' ethnic and national identification scores: *integrated identity*, *assimilated identity*, *separated identity*, and *marginalized identity.*

According to the *Interactional Model of Acculturation*, the relationship between ethnic and national identity and the adaptation of immigrants is determined by the interplay between immigrants' identity attitudes and characteristics and the host society's policies toward immigrants; this interaction is moderated by a specific context and immigrants' perceptions of their circumstances in the host society (Phinney et al., 2001).

The model supported the idea that immigrants who adopted integrated ethnic and national identities had better psychological adaptation; however, acculturation was nonlinear

and varied among different ethnic groups and contexts. Integration was not always the dominant identity (Phinney et al., 2001). For example, immigrants in the U.S. and the Netherlands scored higher on ethnic identity than those in Finland and Israel; or, in comparison to other immigrants, immigrants in the U.S. and the Netherlands significantly scored the highest and lowest on national identity, respectively (Phinney et al., 2001).

Relative Acculturation Extended Model (RAEM)

Navas et al. (2005) also expanded an acculturation model and proposed the *Relative Acculturation Extended Model* (*RAEM*). As with Bourhis' *Interactive Acculturation Model* (*IAM*), the RAEM incorporates both the immigrants' and host communities' acculturation orientations (Navas et al., 2005; 2007; Urbiola et al., 2021). Furthermore, the *RAEM* acknowledges the domain-specific nature of acculturation processes, recognizing that adaptation is a *relative* and *complex* process as multiple acculturation strategies can be used concurrently and across multiple domains. Navas et al. (2005, 2007) identified six major domains through which immigrants interact with the host culture, including (1) *political and government system*, (2) *labour or work*, (3) *economic*, (4) *family*, (5) *social*, and (6) *ideological* (i.e., with two subdomains, (a) *religious beliefs and customs,* and (b) *ways of thinking, principles, and values*). Finally, *RAEM* distinguishes between acculturation processes in *real* and *ideal* situations (Navas et al., 2005, 2007; Urbiola et al., 2021). The real situations are determined by the acculturation strategies adopted by minorities and the perceptions of these strategies by the host populations, while the ideal situations in the acculturation process are represented by the preferred acculturation attitudes of both minorities and hosts (Navas et al., 2005, 2007; Urbiola et al., 2021).

Tri-directional Model of Acculturation (TDM)

Flannery et al. (2001) proposed a new *Tri-directional Model of Acculturation* (*TDM*) that incorporates the *Bi-dimensional Model of Acculturation* (*BDM*) (cultural orientations of the home and host cultures) and a third new dimension termed *ethnogenesis*. Ethnogenesis is characterized by the emergence of a new culture or cultural identity resulting from the interaction between the culture of origin and the host culture (Flannery et al., 2001). For instance, Chicana/o in the U.S. exemplifies ethnogenesis as their identity transcends 'being Mexican' and 'being American,' leading to the creation of a unique Chicano culture (Flannery et al., 2001).

Multidimensional Acculturation Model

Schwartz et al. (2010) proposed a *multidimensional* acculturation model and defined acculturation as "*a multidimensional process consisting of the confluence among heritage-*

cultural and receiving-cultural practices, values, and identifications" (Schwartz et al., 2010, p. 237). The model conceptualizes the adoption of host culture and the preservation of heritage culture as separate dimensions and encompasses cultural domains such as *cultural values*, *cultural practices*, and *cultural identifications* (Schwartz et al., 2010; Tsai et al., 2017). Schwartz et al. (2010) stated that the acculturation that is being researched is simply a portion of the whole and suggested categorizing it into *behavioral acculturation*, *value acculturation*, or *identity-based acculturation*. *Behavioral acculturation* focuses on cultural practices such as language usage, media choices, social connections, and cultural traditions. *Value acculturation* focuses on *cultural values,* whether they are universal (e.g., collectivism, individualism, independence, etc.) or culturally particular (e.g., familism, machismo, etc. in Hispanic culture, or conformity, emotional self-control, etc. in Asian culture). *Identity-based acculturation* focuses on *cultural identification,* which is the degree of attachment people have to their origin culture and/or the host society's culture (Schwartz et al., 2010).

The ABC Model of Acculturation

Other scholars concentrated on other domains important to the acculturation process. For instance, Ward (1996, 2001) and Ward et al. (2001) introduced the *ABC* (affect, behavior, and cognitive domains) model of acculturation, which was subsequently renamed the *ABCD* model to include an additional "*D*" (development) domain (Ward & Szabó, 2019). The affective domain relates to how individuals *feel*; the behavioural domain relates to how individuals *behave*; the cognitive domain relates to how individuals *think* and *perceive* (Ward et al., 2001); and the developmental domain refers to identity development (personal and cultural identity development) (Ward & Szabó, 2019), all during intercultural contact.

The *ABCD* model of acculturation has been explained using significant theoretical approaches such as the stress-and-coping approach (affective domain), the culture learning approach (behaviour domain), the social identification approach (cognitive domain) (Ward et al., 2001), and the identity development approach (development domain) (Ward & Szabó, 2019). In the following section, each of these approaches will be discussed.

Stress-and-Coping Approach (Affective (A) Domain)

The stress-and-coping approach is influenced by theories such as the stress, appraisal, and coping theory by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) or Berry's stress-coping model (1997) (Ward, 2001; Ward et al., 2001).

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) describe psychological stress as a specific interaction between individuals and their environment, which is appraised as stressful when it surpasses individuals' resources and jeopardizes their health. Individuals first do a *primary appraisal* of

their environment, which may be either *irrelevant* (when an encounter with the environment does not cause any harm), *benign-positive* (when an encounter with the environment results in positive outcomes such as happiness, love, etc.), or *stressful* (when an encounter with the environment may result in either *harm/loss*, *threat*, or *challenge*) (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). When people appraise their interactions with the environment as *stressful*, they engage in *secondary appraisal*, which involves determining their ability to cope with the stressful events and assessing the available coping resources (e.g., *problem-focused coping*, which is aimed at resolving the issue, or *emotion-focused coping*, which is aimed at alleviating distress-related negative feelings through coping strategies such as avoidance, emotional and social support, etc.) (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) work suggested that stress and coping are most noticeable when people (e.g., migrants) encounter significant life transitions or challenges such as migration (Kuo, 2014). Coping with the stress of cultural transition is considered a natural part of acculturation for most migrants (e.g., sojourners such as international students, immigrants, and refugees) (Kuo, 2014).

Berry (1997) proposed a stress and coping model that is comparable to Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) model. Berry's model is organized into five phases of psychological acculturation. The first phase is the individual's experience of acculturation; the second phase is the individual's appraisal of the acculturation experience (e.g., whether the acculturative experience is negative, referred to as *stressors*, benign, or provides opportunities). If the acculturation experience results in manageable stress (i.e., acculturative stress) or unmanageable stress (i.e., psychopathology), individuals use acculturation strategies to cope with the *stressors* (third phase); individuals then experience immediate impacts (e.g., physiological or psychological reactions) in the fourth phase, and finally, long-term adaptation may occur in the final phase (Berry, 1997; 2006c).

The psychological acculturation processes described above are influenced by group-level (macro-level) factors such as the political and economic features of the society of origin, as well as host nation characteristics such as multicultural ideology, attitudes toward minorities, and so on. On the individual or psychological level (micro-level), there are factors influencing the process that existed before the acculturation (e.g., age, gender, education level, health, language, cultural distance, etc.) and factors influencing the process that emerge throughout the process (e.g., acculturation strategies, social support, coping strategies, etc.) (Berry, 1997; 2006c).

Culture Learning Approach (Behaviour (B) Domain)

The culture learning theory draws from Argyle's (1969) social skill theory (Ward, 2001; Ward et al., 2001), rooted in experimental and social psychology, and draws significantly on his research on interpersonal behaviours and social skills (Ward, 2004). This approach assumes that intercultural challenges arise from the struggle of newcomers to manage normal social interactions (Masgoret & Ward, 2006; Ward, 2004), and adaptation is achieved through the development of culture-specific competencies to navigate the new culture (Bochner, 1972, 1986, as cited in Masgoret & Ward, 2006; Ward, 2004). Argyle (1982) listed various components of social interaction that differ among cultures and can create social interaction and communication challenges, including language, non-verbal communication (e.g., gesture, facial expression, etc.), rules (e.g., cultural differences in food, drink, gift giving, *nepotism*, *bribery*, etc.), social relationships (e.g., family relationships, group status, caste and class stratification, etc.), motivations (e.g., achievement motivation, assertiveness, etc.), values, concepts (e.g., the concept of freedom, democracy, etc.), and ideology (e.g., political, and religious concepts, etc.).

The Social Identification Approach (Cognitive (C) Domain)

The social identification approach is influenced by the social identity theory of Tajfel (1978, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986) or Phinney (1989, 1990) (Ward, 2001; Ward et al., 2001).

Tajfel defined social identity theory (SIT) as "*that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership*" (Tajfel, 1978, p. 63). SIT is based on three assumptions: (1) individuals aim to retain and increase their self-esteem and to develop a positive self-concept "*through social identification with members of their in-group*" (Gezentsvey & Ward, 2008, p. 227); (2) social identity may be either positive or negative, implying that both the social group itself and becoming a member of it can have either positive or negative connotations; and (3) individuals determine whether their own group (the in-group) is positive or negative by comparing it with the out-group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Individuals dissatisfied with their social identity will either quit their present group and join a more positive group or work to improve their present group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Tajfel's social identity theory mostly centers on groups that face perceived threats to their identity (Ward et al., 2001). Research indicates that the cognitive and affective domains of identity in minority groups (e.g., immigrants) are more strongly evoked, and they

have a greater desire for in-group identification than the privileged dominant groups (Ward et al., 2001).

Phinney (2000) defined ethnic identity as "*a dynamic, multidimensional construct that refers to one's identity, or sense of self, in ethnic terms, that is in terms of a subgroup within a larger context that claims a common ancestry and shares one or more of the following elements: culture, race, religion, language, kinship, or place of origin* (Phinney, 2000, p. 254). Phinney (1989, 1990) also identified several phases in the development of ethnic identity: (1) *diffuse*, at which individuals have not explored their ethnicity and have a limited understanding of it; (2) *foreclosed*, at which individuals have not explored their ethnicity; however, they have a clear understanding of it and have made a commitment to it only based on their parents' value; (3) *moratorium*, at which individuals have explored their ethnicity, yet remain confused about their ethnicity and its significance; and (4) *achieved,* at which individuals have explored their ethnicity, gained a clear understanding of it, and accepted it.

Social identity theories suggest that cross-cultural transition can alter one's cultural identity and intergroup relationships, and factors such as *cultural similarity* and *cultural identity*, awareness of the host culture (e.g., history, religion, and social norms), and reciprocal attitudes between hosts and sojourners all impact adjustment (Jindal-Snape & Rienties, 2016).

While stress and coping theory and culture learning theory focus on external factors affecting adaptation, social identity theory centers on how the internal cognitive processes of acculturating individuals impact their adaptation (Langlois, 2019).

Identity Development Approach (Development (D) Domain)

The identity development approach is influenced by the psychosocial identity development theories of Erikson (1968) (Ward & Szabó, 2019), and it is used as a framework for other developmental theories, including that of Phinney (Lebrun, 2019), which was mentioned earlier. Erikson (1968, p.18) defined identity "*as a subjective sense of an invigorating sameness and continuity*" and distinguished three types of identity: *ego identity* (i.e., awareness of one's own sameness*)*, *personal identity* (i.e., intrinsic goals and values), and *social identity* (i.e., social group commitment) (Erikson, 1968, as cited in Stanford et al., 2021, and Ward & Szabó, 2019). Erikson believed that an individual's identity is shaped through social interactions, and that an individual's development can change with external conditions (Balidemaj & Small, 2019).

Erikson (1950, 1959, 1968, 1980) outlined eight psychosocial stages of development spanning infancy to old age. Each stage has two opposing psychological states

(positive/*syntactic* vs. negative/*dystonic*) (Orenstein & Lewis, 2021). These stages are: (1) *basic trust* vs. *basic mistrust* (birth-18 months); (2) *autonomy* vs. *shame* and *doubt* (2-3 years); (3) *initiative* vs. *guilt* (3-5 years); (4) *industry* vs. *inferiority* (6-11 years); (5) *ego identity* vs. *identity diffusion* (or *identity crisis, role confusion)* (12-18 years); (6) *intimacy* and *distantiation* vs. *isolation* (or *self-absorption)* (19-40 years); (7) *generativity* vs. *stagnation* (40-65 years); and (8) *ego integrity* vs. *despair* and *disgust* (65-death). Conflict resolution is essential for progressing through each stage of development (Sokol, 2009) and achieving a fulfilling life (Erikson, 1950, 1964, 1968, as cited in Maree, 2021).

Ward and Szabó (2019) indicated that two theoretical assumptions underlying psychosocial theories of identity development are relevant to studies on acculturation. First, they argue that identity development is profoundly influenced by family and socio-cultural contexts. Second, they propose that identity development is a long-term process, similar to acculturation, that continues throughout adulthood. These principles can be observed in the experiences of immigrants who undergo cultural transitions. For example, such transitions may lead to personal identity crises, and resolving these crises can have significant effects. If resolved successfully, a crisis may lead to positive growth; however, an unsuccessful resolution may negatively affect the immigrant's well-being during acculturation (Ward & Szabó, 2019).

Multi-Dimensional Individual Difference Acculturation Model (MIDA)

Safdar and colleagues (2003) have proposed a thorough model of acculturation called the *Multi-Dimensional Individual Difference Acculturation Model* (*MIDA*), which synthesizes the three theoretical approaches to acculturation employed in Ward et al.'s (2001) ABC's model (i.e., stress-and-coping, culture learning, and social identification) (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Several assumptions underpin the MIDA model, including the following: immigrants seek to (1) preserve their ancestral culture, (2) interact with the host culture, and (3) sustain mental and physical balance when confronted with stressors associated with acculturation and other factors (Berry & Safdar, 2007).

Three predictor variables are included in the MIDA model: (1) *psychosocial resources*, (2) *co-national connectedness*, and (3) *hassles* or perceptions of discrimination. Psychosocial resources include *personal resilience*, *self-perceived cultural competency*, and *out-group social support*. Co-national connectedness includes *family allocentrism*, *ethnic identity*, and *in-group social support*. The third predictor variable is *hassle*, which is the stress associated with acculturation and normal everyday problems that individuals endure on a daily basis. Psychosocial resources and co-national connectedness are protective factors,

while hassles and/or discrimination are barriers that impact the adaptation of newcomers. These three predictor variables give rise to three outcome variables: (1) *in-group contact*, (2) *out-group contact*, and (3) *psychological and physical distress*, which all determine socio-cultural and psychological adaptation. The relationship between predictor and outcome variables is mediated by two acculturation dimensions (i.e., maintaining one's culture and engagement with the larger society). Safdar et al. (2009) also included acculturation strategies (i.e., integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization) as mediator variables in the MIDA model.

The MIDA model has been proven to be highly reliable in predicting the adaptation of various migrant groups, including immigrants (Safdar et al., 2003; 2009; 2012), international students (Rasmi et al., 2009), Erasmus students (Bekk et al., 2013; Berger et al., 2019), and refugees (Copoc, 2019; Fathi et al., 2018; Safdar et al., 2021; 2023).

Integrated Conceptual Model of Adjustment and Adaptation

Schartner and Young (2016) proposed an integrated conceptual model of adjustment and adaptation specific to international students in light of their two previous mixed-method studies with international students in the U.K., as well as two theoretical approaches, including stress and coping approaches and culture learning and social skills approaches. Their model is divided into three phases: *arrival*, *adjustment*, and *adaptation*, with both adjustment and adaptation incorporating three domains: *academic*, *psychological*, *and socio-cultural*. In addition to incorporating Ward's aforementioned socio-cultural and psychological adaptations, they also included academic adaptations in their model. This model distinguishes adjustment from adaptation, with adjustment viewed as a process of cross-cultural transition and adaptation as the outcome of the cross-cultural transition process. The model also considers the influence of pre-sojourn factors such as motivation to study abroad, host language proficiency, familiarity with the host country, previous international experience, emotional stability, open-mindedness, etc., as well as in-sojourn factors such as social interactions with locals and international students, and social support, on international students' adjustment.

Multidimensional Acculturation Model

As with Safdar et al. (2003), Arends-Tóth & van de Vijver (2006) have created a thorough acculturation model that incorporates the three theoretical approaches to acculturation used in the ABC model (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). In the Multidimensional Acculturation Model proposed by Arends-Tóth and van de Vijver (2006), acculturation is a multidimensional construct, and it comprises three main variables: (1) *acculturation*

conditions, (2) *acculturation orientations*, and (3) *acculturation outcomes* (Arends-Tóth & van de Vijver, 2006; Pekerti et al., 2020).

Acculturation conditions include features of the host society (e.g., cultural diversity, discrimination, etc.), country of origin characteristics (e.g., cultural diversity), and characteristics of the immigrant groups (e.g., *ethnic vitality*). Ethnic vitality refers to ethnic institutions that may aid in the process of acculturation, such as the presence of temples, stores, recreational facilities, and educational support (Galchenkoa & van de Vijver, 2007), and individual characteristics (e.g., norms, personality, etc.) (Arends-Tóth & van de Vijver, 2006; Pekerti et al., 2020).

Acculturation orientation deals with the way people cope with the conflict of adapting to the dominant culture's norms while retaining their culture of origin (Pekerti et al., 2020). Finally, *acculturation outcomes* incorporate variables such as (1) *psychological well-being* (e.g., mental distress, life satisfaction, etc.), (2) *socio-cultural competence in ethnic culture* (e.g., co-national interactions), and (3) *socio-cultural competence in the mainstream culture* (e.g., interaction with the host culture) (Arends-Tóth & van de Vijver, 2006; Pekerti et al., 2020).

In accordance with Berry and Ward's models, both the acculturation models developed by Safdar et al. (2003) and Arends-Tóth and van de Vijver (2006) used predictor variables that included characteristics of the individuals and host society, as well as stressors; however, the model developed by Arends-Tóth and van de Vijver (2006), includes characteristics of the individual's country of origin as an additional predictor variable (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). The acculturation outcomes in both models were psychological and socio-cultural adaptation, and both models used acculturation attitudes as mediator variables that connected the predictor variables to the outcomes (Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

Ecological Model of Acculturation

Ward and Geeraert's (2016) ecological model of acculturation considers the dynamic relationship between acculturation and adaptation, which is impacted by ecological context at the *familial* (e.g., family dynamics), *institutional* (e.g., school and workplace), and *societal* levels (e.g., attitudes toward migrants, multicultural policies, etc.), taking into account both home and host cultures.

Ward and Geeraert (2016) argue that since acculturation starts with international interaction, it is critical to understand the features of the home and host cultures, including cultural distance (perceived and/or objective) or the socio-political climate of the host and home cultures, which might impact the acculturation and adaptation. Greater cultural distance

makes integration and adaptation more challenging and can worsen acculturative stress, negatively affecting psychological and socio-cultural adaptation.

Ward and Geeraert's ecological model of acculturation highlights the significance of ecological contexts in understanding acculturation rather than specific life domains, unlike other models. What distinguishes this model from others is that it divides familial, institutional, and social contexts into home and host cultures, with individuals in the middle of two cultures, all of which are part of the *global culture*, and that it emphasizes the significance of cultural distance and acculturation stresses, as well as the stress and coping approach, in order to comprehend migrants' psychological health and adaptation (Juang & Syed, 2019).

Integrated Acculturation Model (IAM)

Garcia et al. (2020) introduced the Integrated Acculturation Model (IAM), which includes multiple levels of interaction across *psychological*, *instrumental*, *contextual*, and *developmental* dimensions of acculturation, in its *theoretical integration components*.

Psychological acculturation focuses on the affective and cognitive aspects of identity development, such as sense of *belonging*, *affirm* [ation], *allegiance* (i.e., the extent to which an individual desires to be a member of a group), and *salience* (i.e., the extent to which a particular aspect of cultural identity is salient to an individual's global identity) (Garcia et al., 2020). *Instrumental* acculturation includes adaptation to language, norms, and values (e.g., the degree to which an individual identifies with the values and norms of home and host culture) (Garcia et al., 2020). The *contextual* acculturations include three factors: (1) *conceptual factors* (e.g., perceived cultural similarity, the societal climate of the host society, etc.), (2) *domains factors* (e.g., the significant domains of life in which acculturation occurs, such as family, work, language, and education, etc.), and (3) *process* (*dynamics*) *factors* (e.g., the extent to which individual's and group's acculturation strategies are compatible or different; and whether individuals' stay in the host society is permanent or transient since their permanent stay in the host country requires more adaptation) (Garcia et al., 2020). *Developmental* acculturation states that acculturation strategies are dynamic and not static, and over time, the outcome of acculturation contributes to the initiation of subsequent acculturation processes (Garcia et al., 2020). This implies that there is continuous growth and transformation during the acculturation or adaptation process (Rahim, 2021).

CHAPTER THREE

Gender Role

Introduction

This chapter focuses on some of the gender role theories found in the literature and provides a glimpse into the historical context of gender dynamics in Iranian society.

Discussing gender role theories offers theoretical lenses to understand gender differences. These theories help explain how gender roles are shaped, shedding light on the complexity of gender-role attitudes and behaviors. Additionally, a brief historical transformation of gender roles in Iran offers essential contextual information. Tracing the changes from ancient times to the present allows an understanding of the socio-political factors influencing gender roles in Iranian society. This historical context helps to explain the attitudes and perceptions of Iranian students and their views on gender roles and freedom, which have been investigated in future chapters.

Gender and Gender Role

Theories

According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2023, para.1), gender is "*the characteristics of women, men, girls, and boys that are socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviours, and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl, or boy, as well as relationships with others*." In contrast to sex, which refers to the biological classification of male and female determined by genes, chromosomes, and hormones, gender is instead a social classification of male and female that is differentiated by a range of psychological and role attributes that are assigned by society to the biological classification of sex (Helgeson, 2012). As children get older, they acquire a sense of self and learn how to interact with others while also developing ideas about the roles that each sex (male and female) is expected to follow, referred to as gender roles (Stockard, 2006). Additionally, children form beliefs regarding their own self-identification as members of either the male or female sex groups, which is referred to as gender identity (Stockard, 2006).

Two prominent theories, namely evolutionary theory (Buss, 1997) and social structural theory (West & Zimmerman, 1987), address gender differences in human behaviour. Evolutionary theory claims gender differences in personality traits are due to psychological propensities that evolved through hereditarily-mediated adjustments to primitive contexts; meanwhile, social structural theory considers gender differences as a result of the gendered division of labor (Eagly & Wood, 1999).

The theories of gender essentialism and social constructionism each attempt to account for gender differences and correspond to variations of laypeople's speculations about certain social categories and distinctions (Klysing, 2020). Gender essentialists perceive

gender as a biological category, as "*natural, discrete, immutable, and historically persisting*" (Klysing, 2020, p. 254). In contrast, social constructionist theories do not perceive gender as an innate category but rather as a social category that "*performs a hierarchical, organizing function of individuals in society*" (Klysing, 2020, p. 254).

The gender division of labor constructs psychological differences and similarities between the sexes, giving rise to beliefs about gender roles (Eagly & Wood, 2012). It is argued that the gendered division of labor for women in the paid labor force implies that women are less likely to be regarded as career employees and more likely as "pin money" workers and that they are appropriate for certain part-time/low-wage jobs that are seen as relevant to women's caring and nurturing roles (e.g., office worker) (Rubin, 1997). On the contrary, males have been thought to be exempted from household roles, allowing them to have long-term full-time employment involving occupations that require logic, authority, and executive abilities, which are significantly correlated with masculine and male traits (Rubin, 1997).

In the latter half of the twentieth century, attitudes toward gender roles have become more egalitarian among both men and women (Sweeting et al., 2014). However, a majority of studies on gender differences in relation to such attitudes have found that females generally hold more egalitarian gender-role attitudes than males, while males hold more traditional gender-role attitudes (Brewster & Padavic, 2000; Katz-Wise et al., 2010; Larsen & Long, 1988; Van De Vijver, 2007).

Researchers have suggested three different gender-role attitudes: Traditional, Egalitarian (non-traditional), and Transitional (Helgeson, 2012; Hochschild & Machung, 1989). Traditional gender-role attitudes reflect the belief that women should perform the role of housekeeper or caregiver and should be caring and nurturing, while men should assume the role of the primary financial provider (the "breadwinner") for the family and should be assertive and independent. On the other hand, belief in egalitarian gender roles entails believing in equal and shared roles between females and males (Blackstone, 2003; Helgeson, 2012). Finally, transitional gender-role attitudes are a combination of traditional and egalitarian gender-role attitudes (Helgeson, 2012; Hochschild & Machung, 1989).

Attitudes—including those based on gender—could also be stereotypical. Gender stereotypes are either descriptive or prescriptive: Descriptive stereotypes are based on beliefs about what females and males are typically like and how they behave, while prescriptive stereotypes are based on ideas about what females and males are expected to be like and how they should behave (Koenig, 2018; Safdar & Kosakowska-Berezecka, 2015).

According to Lindsey (2015), gender roles are explained by three levels of analysis: (1) *micro*, (2) *mezzo*, and (3) *macro* levels, as well as by five sociological theories, which are *structural functionalism*, *social conflict theory*, *symbolic interaction*, *social constructionism*, and *feminist theory*.

Structural functionalism is a macro-level sociological theory that posits that society comprises interconnected components that all work together to make society function (Lindsey, 2015). Functionalism presumes that these components, which include practices, norms, traditions, and institutions, work harmoniously to keep society in balance and equilibrium (Bello, 2020), and social stability increases when people have shared beliefs and values (value consensus) (Lindsey, 2015). According to functionalists, gender roles were initiated long before the pre-industrial period, at which time men were responsible for work outside the home (e.g., hunting), and women were responsible for household chores, and since women were frequently unable to leave the house for extended periods of time due to the physical restrictions of pregnancy and breastfeeding, these roles were deemed functional (Little, 2013).

Social Conflict Theory is also a macro-level sociological theory that originated from Karl Marx's work, who posited that in society, there is class conflict (or class struggle) between the dominant power (the bourgeoisie) and the working class (the proletariat) who compete for scarce resources (Lindsey, 2015). The conflict can also happen among other groups, including women and men (Lindsey, 2015). For example, as a subordinate group, women experience social conflict with men, who hold a dominant position in society. This can be seen in the devaluation of women's social status, demonstrated by the income gap, women's underrepresentation in high-level positions (e.g., economic, political, etc.), and the systematic violent victimization of women by men (e.g., domestic abuse, rape) (Franklin & Fearn, 2008).

The Symbolic Interaction Theory is a micro-level sociological theory that posits that people do not directly react to their environment but rather to the meaning they assign to it (Lindsey, 2015). These meanings, which come from people's social interactions, may pertain to various things, such as physical objects, people, institutions, circumstances, etc. (Blumer, 1969). People ascribe meaning to these things to determine how to behave in certain situations (Franzese & Seigler, 2020). Social interactionists argue that gender is not an inherent state of being but a product of social interactions (Carter & Fuller, 2015). The Symbolic Interaction Theory significantly impacts the explanation of gender roles in a social context (Jayathilaka et al., 2021). Individuals' interactions with the outside world determine

the creation of gender roles as society continues to insist on the prescribed behaviors men and women are expected to exhibit (Jayathilaka et al., 2021).

Social constructionism asserts that human knowledge is constructed rather than pre-existing (Dombrowski, 1994) and that knowledge is constructed via social practices, such as advising girls to be obedient or boys not to cry, which these practices preserve socially constructed gender knowledge (Allen, 2005). Both symbolic interactionism and social constructionism are concerned with how individuals in their daily lives are doing gender (as well as redoing and undoing gender) (Lindsey, 2015). Doing gender is referred to as "creating differences between girls and boys and women and men, differences that are not natural, essential, or biological. Once the differences have been constructed, they are used to reinforce the 'essentialness' of gender" (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 137). For example, one of the ways in which people continue doing gender in their everyday lives is through housework; even when couples do the same amount of paid work and bring in the same amount of money, women may engage more in housework because doing housework is a way for women to show their femininity and men do less housework to show their masculinity (Goldberg, 2013).

The feminist theory emphasizes the empowerment of women and the numerous forms of oppression experienced by disadvantaged groups due to gender, social class, and race (gender-race-class intersectionality) (Lindsey, 2015). Generally, feminism is a global movement that seeks to eradicate sexism by empowering women, and its various kinds include liberal feminism, cultural feminism, socialist feminism, radical feminism, multicultural or global feminism, and ecofeminism (Lindsey, 2015).

A Glimpse into Gender Dynamics in Iran: Brief Insights from Pre-Islam to Post-Islam

Due to Iran's extensive and intricate history, it is not feasible to comprehensively analyze gender and gender roles throughout history. Therefore, the following only offers a brief glimpse of gender and gender roles in Iran from pre-Islamic to post-Islamic periods, focusing on selected historical periods and events relevant to this dissertation's scope.

Iranian women in ancient times, before the Arab invasion of Persia, had more rights and freedom (Rabandi, 1978). Women from the middle or lower social classes actively participated in various economic activities, working alongside men. Women's activities alongside men were mainly observed in sectors such as agriculture, herding, and other forms of production, as well as knitting activities (Ravandi, 1978). Women enjoyed several rights, such as the ability to travel independently, own property, run a business, and receive fair wages (Mark, 2020b). These are traced back to the influence of earlier Elamite and Median

cultures, particularly during the Achaemenid Empire (Mark, 2020b). During the Achaemenid Empire, women had more rights and freedom than in most ancient civilizations; however, it is worth mentioning that the empire still operated within a patriarchal system (Mark, 2020b), and practices like polygamy and the presence of concubines were known to exist (Baker, 2022; Price, 2023).

Iranian women were generally unveiled during ancient times (around 700 BCE) (Ravandi, 1978), meaning that their hair, head, face, and neck were uncovered, and parts of their hands and feet were also visible without any covering. With the invasion of Arab Muslims in 651 CE, women lost their autonomy and freedom; they were marginalized as second-class citizens, carrying the burden of inherent sin and subject to male supervision and authority (Mark, 2020b). However, women actively resisted the violation of their rights alongside men, refusing to remain passive in the face of oppression (Mark, 2020b). The struggle for women's freedom and rights continues to this day, as women in modern-day Iran defy government restrictions, inspired by courageous women of the past who fought for their rights (Mark, 2020a). Qurrat al-Ayn, a young poet and allegedly Iran's first female activist for women's rights and freedom, is a notable figure in Iranian history. She declined Nasser al-Din Shah's (the ruler of the Qajar dynasty) offer to join his harem through a poem, ultimately resulting in her execution (Ravandi, 1978). Qurrat al-Ayn appeared in men's assemblies without a hijab, which gave reactionaries an excuse to label anyone who advocated for the abolition of the hijab as filthy-minded (Ravandi, 1978). At the start of the establishment of national schools, claims about opening a girls' school were also considered corrupt beliefs (Ravandi, 1978).

Since the constitutional revolution, Iranian women have gradually entered an era of sexual and social liberation. Advocates and reformers, both men and women, have spoken extensively and made significant efforts in this regard (Tabari, 1978). During the Constitutional Revolution, women actively fought for their rights, advocating for education, the end of men's polygamy and seclusion, and the right to vote and form associations (Mahdi, 2004). After the constitution's establishment, discussions about the abolition of the hijab also emerged gradually (Ravandi, 1978). Although the establishment of a constitution aimed at the equality of all citizens under the law, women were unjustly excluded from being recognized as citizens due to the belief of religious leaders and some male constitutionalists that women lacked political and legal comprehension (Mahdi, 2004). Despite opposition and harassment, women persisted and successfully established schools for girls in major cities (Mahdi, 2004). The Iranian Women's movement gained momentum between 1910 and 1932, characterized

by the formation of women's associations and the emergence of publications dedicated to addressing issues such as women's rights, freedom, education, veiling, and the abolition of polygamy (Mahdi, 2004). Notably, influential male intellectuals also played a supportive role in this movement (Mahdi, 2004).

Further restrictions and repressions of the women's movement continued during the Pahlavi dynasty, such as under Reza Shah's rule (1925-1941). The government and the ulama consistently opposed women's activities, leading to the shutting down and banning of women's organizations (Mahdi, 2004). In 1928, a new dress code was enforced, requiring male government employees (except the ulama) to dress in European attire (Mahdi, 2004). From 1966 to 1977, women's organizations became apolitical and under state surveillance (Mahdi, 2004). Women's requests for their right to vote and participate in elections were also not granted during Reza Shah's rule. In 1936, Reza Shah forced women to unveil, which had detrimental effects on the women's movement (Mahdi, 2004). He commanded the police to remove women's hijab forcefully and even instructed them to use scissors to tear apart their veils (Vatandoust, 1985). Furthermore, veiled women were banned from public transportation and shopping in most stores (Vatandoust, 1985).

In later years, during Mohammad Reza Shah's rule, following the 1953 coup, the Shah eradicated oppositional political parties, including women's organizations connected to them (Mahdi, 2004). Women's organizations advocated for their rights, specifically their right to vote, which was eventually achieved in 1962 (Mahdi, 2004). Nevertheless, women's political engagement was subsequently prohibited, and those who defied this ban faced severe consequences, such as persecution, imprisonment, and even execution, beginning in 1975 (Mahdi, 2004).

Therefore, as mentioned earlier, since the constitutional revolution, Iranian women have gradually entered an era of liberation through their persistent advocacy for rights. The women's movement and societal pressure compelled the Pahlavi Dynasty to introduce changes (Tabari, 1978). However, it is essential to acknowledge that these changes often remained superficial and symbolic, primarily benefiting women from privileged backgrounds. Women from lower socio-economic classes endured persistent oppression throughout Iranian history, facing the denial of their human rights in both urban and rural areas (Tabari, 1978).

Generally, from the beginning to the end of the 20th century, gender equality in Iran continuously progressed; nevertheless, after the 1979 revolution, women's rights regressed significantly (Lakhiani, 2021). After the revolution of 1979, state law governed gender roles

and sexuality (Mahdavi, 2009). The revolution of 1979 created a significant transition in gender roles, and the government pursued a plan to overturn many of Iranian women's political and social advances over the past century (Afary, 1996). After the revolution, a contradiction has been imposed on Iranian women (Malekan, 2015). A woman is not supposed to be treated the same way her foremothers were, nor is she expected to be a "Westernized" woman. She must be the pivotal member of the family, a decent wife, and a devoted mother while adhering to cultural and religious norms. On the other hand, she is supposed to be a "modern" woman who is well-educated and involved in socio-political and cultural issues (Malekan, 2015).

Following the Iranian revolution, significant transitions in gender relations took place (Paidar, 2001). Gender segregation outside the household was implemented, and women were forced to wear the veil (*hijab*). Women were forbidden from being judges or presidents, and they could not travel, study, or work without the permission of either their father or spouse (Paidar, 2001). Some of the other discriminatory laws imposed against Iranian women were in the areas of marriage (e.g., the legal age for marriage was initially 9, then changed to 13 in 2002; men are allowed to have four wives, and women only one husband); divorce (e.g., women cannot get divorced from their husbands unless they provide proof to the court that their husbands are psychologically ill, abusive, or drug abusers); inheritance (e.g., a daughter receives half the share of the inheritance) (Hanna, 2020); and criminal law (e.g., in court, a woman's testimony is worth half that of a man's) (Freedom House, 2017). Female students were prohibited from 69 fields of study (e.g., agriculture, engineering, etc.), from attending men's sports in stadiums, participating in some sports, or singing (Mahdi, 2004). Furthermore, the law prohibited women from having premarital sex (Motamedi et al., 2016), as well as premarital relationships (AKA white marriages), which are becoming more and more widespread; however, the government has lately started to adopt a less strict approach toward young Iranians (Home Office, 2022). Iranian women are expected to be modest and control their sexuality; however, men are not expected to be like this to a similar degree (Nahidi et al., 2018). Although the restrictive laws were more imposed against women, men have also reportedly faced restrictions for their clothing styles and behaviors; they reported being harassed by the morality police because of their hairstyle, wearing jeans and short-sleeved and logo T-shirts, and so on (Gerami, 1996).

Despite the oppression, women have consistently fought for their rights since the 1979 revolution. For instance, on March 8, 1979, one month after the 1979 revolution, women and girls demonstrated against oppressive Islamic laws, such as mandatory veiling

(Jaynes, 1979). Another movement occurred on June 12, 2006, when women in Iran assembled in Tehran's public square to protest against discriminatory laws targeting women. The peaceful demonstration was met with a crackdown by the police (Human Rights Watch, 2006). In the same year, 2006, activists advocating for women's rights launched the One Million Signatures Campaign, intending to collect signatures from Iranians in support of gender equality laws. The campaign's leaders were subsequently imprisoned as a result (Bergum, 2022). Another movement among Iranian women is the Girls of Revolution Street, initiated by Vida Movahed. In December 2017, she stood on a metal box on Enghelab (Revolution) Street in Tehran, where she removed her white veil and placed it on a stick, waving it silently. Her action inspired other women to join the movement in response to discriminatory laws against women, such as the compulsory hijab (Hernroth-Rothstein, 2018).

Another major recent women's movement has emerged in Iran after the death of Mahsa Amini, an Iranian Kurdish woman who was killed while in police custody on September 16, 2022, allegedly for failing to comply with hijab regulations. Her death started widespread nationwide protests, primarily led by women and girls (Amnesty International, 2023). Initially centered on gender-based discrimination, symbolized by the slogan *Woman, Life, Freedom*, the protests have broadened their scope to encompass additional concerns, including corruption, poverty, repression, and discrimination targeting religious and ethnic minorities (Karim, 2022). The movement's scope has expanded to encompass diverse groups and social classes, including youth, students, middle-class laborers, low socio-economic groups, and religious and ethnic minorities (Asef, 2023). Like women, these groups experience marginalization and strongly relate to the principles of *Woman, Life, Freedom*, as they have faced challenges such as poverty, social and economic insecurity, drought, and the loss of their youth (Asef, 2023).

Despite the oppressive government, Iranian women have never ceased to fight for their rights, and as a result, they have also made significant progress. In Iran, 97% of women are literate, and women comprise more than 60% of university students. However, they still face obstacles in their pursuit of gender equality. Only 15.2% of women are employed, compared to 64% of men, and in 2016, only 6% of women were represented in Parliament (Parsa, 2020).

Reflection

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, theories related to gender and gender roles were discussed, as well as a brief history of gender dynamics in Iran from ancient times

to the present. Integrating gender theories and a brief overview of the history of gender in Iran in this chapter helps us align gender theories with the historical context of Iran. These theories offer insights into how gender roles are formed, maintained, and challenged and how they affect individuals and societies. Among the aforementioned theories, social conflict theory is the most applicable to the Iranian context because it provides a lens for understanding the dynamics of power struggles, particularly between dominant (men) and subordinate (women) groups. However, some theories, such as essentialism, which attributes gender differences solely to biology, are irrelevant in the Iranian context, as clearly societal impositions shape gender roles in Iran. Therefore, presenting these theories allows us to critically consider and evaluate them within the Iranian context and better understand Iranian international students' perceptions of gender roles and freedom.

CHAPTER FOUR

Cross-Cultural Adaptation Amidst Socio-Political Turmoil: A Comprehensive Review of Iranian International Students Pre- and Post-Revolution

Introduction

This chapter includes a comprehensive literature review investigating the adaptation and experiences of Iranian international students, spanning nearly 70 years of Iran's historical context, including the pre- and post-revolutionary periods. Understanding Iranian students' adaptation process was insufficient by merely relying on a few references to existing literature; therefore, a more thorough and comprehensive literature review was deemed essential. Gathering a large body of literature across various socio-political and historical epochs allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the adaptation process among Iranian students abroad. The current comprehensive literature review serves to identify influential factors that have shaped this adaptation process across time and context, providing a robust foundation for the three qualitative empirical studies on the adaptation of Iranian students in Hungary presented in subsequent chapters. By integrating insights from both the comprehensive literature review and empirical studies, the current dissertation offers a nuanced and in-depth exploration of how Iranian students have adapted abroad, thereby enhancing the overall depth and credibility of the research.

Generally, more international students Mobility (ISM) literature began to emerge in 2000 and has increased significantly since 2005 (Gümüş et al., 2019). A systematic review of the literature from 1990 and 2014 on international students yielded 147 articles, of which nearly half ($n = 70$, 48%) were "original research" (i.e., studies that included a methodology section); among the non-original studies ($n = 77$), 26% ($n = 38$) were programs and projects for international students, and only 39 (26%) were reported to be "general literature," which included but was not limited to literature reviews (Click et al., 2017).

Theoretical Background

In this review, the focus is on building upon a few comprehensive models that have been empirically validated on international students from cross-cultural literature, including Ward's (1996) theory of socio-cultural and psychological adaptation, Schartner and Young's (2016) integrated conceptual model of adjustment and adaptation, Berry's bidimensional model of acculturation (1997), the Multi-Dimensional Individual Difference Acculturation (MIDA) model (Safdar et al., 2003), and the ecological model of acculturation (Ward & Geeraert, 2016) to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences and adaptation of Iranian international students.

Methods

Search Strategy

This literature review was conducted using the PRISMA guidelines (Moher et al., 2009). Electronic scholarly databases, such as Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, JSTORE, PsycINFO, ERIC, and EBSCOhost, were systematically searched between September 2021 and January 2023 for all articles related to Iranian students studying abroad. No language or date constraints were applied to the article searches. Additionally, a simple Google search was performed on two relevant journals (e.g., *Journal of International Students* and *Diaspora Studies*), and the reference lists of some of the relevant articles were checked.

Boolean operators (e.g., AND, +, OR, NOT, -) were used to restrict search results to Iranian international students. Additionally, the truncation symbol (asterisk*) was used to broaden the search and only for the databases that recognized the symbol (e.g., JSTORE and PsycINFO). The following are examples of some of the most frequently used keywords or search terms that were combined in the electronic databases' basic or advanced search bars: (1) [Iranian international students], (2) [Iranian international students] AND [adaptation], (3) [Iranian international students] OR [Iranian overseas student] AND [adaptation] AND [adjustment] AND [acculturation] NOT [immigrant] NOT [refugee], and (4) [Iran* international* student*] OR [Iran* foreign* student*] OR [Iran* overseas student*] OR [Iran* study sojourn*] AND [adjustment] AND [acculturation]. In addition to English keyword searches (e.g., Iranian international students OR Iranian students abroad), Google searches for the equivalent Persian keywords (e.g., دانشجویان ایرانی خارج از کشور) were conducted to identify studies in the Persian language.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

For inclusion in this review, the studies had to (1) examine international students; (2) be conducted in English or Persian; (3) examine the adaptation, experiences, and/or problems of international students abroad; and (4) report findings particular to Iranian students, even if Iranian students constituted less than 50% of the whole sample.

The main exclusion criteria included (1) non-empirical studies or those with no data collection; and (2) studies that did not specify the number of Iranian students and did not report the findings regarding Iranians as an individual classification or category (i.e., they were presented only as part of an overarching category into which Iranians were classified, such as *middle eastern* or *non-western*).

<center>**Results**</center>

Characteristics of the Studies

        The PRISMA flow diagram of the study selection process is shown in Figure A1 in Appendix A. The total number of articles included in the systematic review was 130 (five Persian-language with English abstracts; and 125 English-language studies) (see Table B1 in Appendix B). One article was published in the 1950s, four in the 1960s, five in the 1970s, sixteen in the 1980s, four in the 1990s, twenty-six between 2000 and 2010, sixty-three between 2011 and 2020, and eleven between 2021 and 2022. One hundred twenty-three studies were conducted in a single host country, while six were conducted in multiple host countries. Regarding research populations, seventy-four studies included solely Iranian students, and 56 included students from both Iran and various other nationalities. Regarding research methods, fifty-two used qualitative methods (e.g., semi-structured interviews, observation), forty-nine used quantitative methods, and 29 mixed methods. More studies were conducted in the U.S. than elsewhere ($n = 46$); the remainder of studies were conducted in Malaysia ($n = 30$), the U.K. ($n = 1$), Canada ($n = 11$), India ($n = 7$), Australia ($n = 10$), Germany ($n = 4$), Hungary ($n = 5$), Cyprus ($n = 3$), Turkey ($n = 3$), Russia ($n = 3$), Sweden ($n = 3$), Finland ($n = 3$), the Netherlands ($n = 2$), and Ukraine ($n = 2$). Studies were conducted in various countries, including Austria, France, Italy, Pakistan, Philippines, Slovakia, Poland, Japan, Belgium, the United Arab Emirates, Ireland, Scotland, and New Zealand; each one of these countries was represented by one study ($n = 1$).

        Finally, one study did not specify the exact location ($n = 1$), and another only mentioned Scandinavia ($n = 1$).

        Ten (8%) of the studies were conducted before the Islamic revolution in 1979, while the remainder ($n = 120$, 92%) were conducted after it. All ten pre-revolution studies were carried out in the U.S. (only one of them was a multi-country study that also included Germany and the U.K. in addition to the U.S.). Studies conducted after the revolution, beginning with the Iran-Iraq war until the war ended and continuing until 1995, were all conducted in the U.S.

        Gender was disproportionately represented in the studies, with Iranian male students comprising the majority of participants in nearly 70% of the studies; this excludes studies that did not provide gender-based demographic data of Iranian students ($n = 34$) and studies that only included a single Iranian student ($n = 17$).

Major Themes and Sub-Themes

The current study primarily used an inductive approach to extract themes (Gale et al., 2013) and analyze the results of the studies. For the organization of data and themes, several comprehensive cross-cultural models from the literature (e.g., Berry, 1997; Safdar et al., 2003; Schartner & Young, 2016; Ward & Geeraert, 2016; Ward, 1996) were utilized. While the use of these models might suggest a deductive element, the overall approach remained primarily inductive. Consequently, the results were divided into seven major themes and 16 sub-themes (see Table A1 in Appendix A).

Theme 1: Push-and-Pull Factors of Migration

Among the 130 studies, 22 (17%) discussed *push* factors (i.e., aspects of Iranian society that compelled students to leave Iran) and/or *pull* factors (i.e., aspects of the host country that attracted students to those countries) (see Table A2 in Appendix A). Several pull factors were academic-related, such as the desire to pursue higher education (e.g., Busch, 1955; Hosseindoust, 1975; Payind, 1977; Valipour, 1967); the quality and reputation of the academic system in the host country (e.g., Ardakani, 1976; Borhanmanesh, 1965; Kazemi et al., 2018; Khodabandelou et al., 2015; Payind, 1977; Rakhshandehroo, 2017; Sadri & Chaichian, 2018); and the ease with which students could gain admission to universities in the host country (Kazemi et al., 2018) or obtain scholarships (Rakhshandehroo, 2017). Career-related pull factors included the possibility of employment for students upon their return to Iran (Li & Ling, 2011) and career opportunities in the host country (Borhanmanesh, 1965; Khodabandelou et al., 2015; Sadri & Chaichian, 2018). Other financially-related pull factors were the economic stability of the host country (Khodabandelou et al., 2015); the low cost of living (Kazemi et al., 2018); and affordable tuition fees (Kazemi et al., 2018; Li & Ling, 2011). There were cultural pull factors regarding host countries, such as multiculturalism (Khodabandelou et al., 2015; Li & Ling, 2011), cultural appeal (Rakhshandehroo, 2017), and cultural curiosity about living abroad (Valipour, 1967). There were also practical socio-political pull factors related to safety (Asgari & Borzooei, 2014; Khodabandelou et al., 2015; Nachatar Singh et al., 2014), freedom (Didehvar, 2020; Karimi & Bucerius, 2018; Kazemi et al., 2018), and the ease of obtaining a visa in the host country (Kazemi et al., 2018).

As evidenced by the preceding finding, multiple pull factors attracted Iranian students to various host countries. However, the pattern indicates that the Iranian students who went abroad prior to the revolution of 1979 went to the host country (the U.S.) primarily for

academic reasons, whereas the Iranian students who went abroad after the revolution were mainly attracted by the stability of socio-political factors in the host country.

It appeared that the pull factors that attracted students to other countries were mirrored in the push factors that prompted students to leave Iran. While pre-revolution studies primarily cited academic push factors, post-revolution studies mainly focused on the poor socio-political conditions in Iran that drove students away. Some of these socio-political push factors included political instability in Iran (Campbell, 2015; Doray, 2017; Nachatar Singh et al., 2014); mandatory military service for men (Ryazantsev et al., 2020); unemployment due to Iran's economic crisis induced by sanctions and or lack of freedom (e.g., lack of freedom of speech or religious freedom) (e.g., Didehvar, 2020; Karimi & Bucerius, 2018; Kazemi et al., 2018; Zijlstra, 2020), and gender discrimination in Iran (e.g., Didehvar, 2020; Ryazantsev et al., 2020). Academic-related push factors included the difficulty of the university entrance exam for public universities in Iran and a lack of facilities at Iranian universities (Zijlstra, 2020). Additionally, some students were unable to take the university entrance exam or simply did not want to study in Iran (Borhanmanesh, 1965) or were pursuing a major that was either not being offered or was too competitive in Iran (Busch, 1955).

Overall, socio-political issues were the main push and pull factors for post-revolution Iranian students desiring to transfer from their current host country (e.g., Finland, Turkey) to another host country. Pull factors primarily included career opportunities and socio-political freedom in the host country, followed by academic quality, graduate program availability in the student's field of study, and ease of obtaining residency and visas in the country of destination (Sadri & Chaichian, 2018). Push factors mainly included a lack of job opportunities in the current host country, followed by a language barrier and poor weather (Hosseini, 2018). Both of these studies were conducted in 2018, at which time Iran was experiencing a socio-political and economic crisis as a result of the U.S. reimposing the most severe sanctions on Iran; thus, it is logical that socio-political and economic push/pull factors dominated academic factors.

Theme 2: Academic Adaptation

Language in Academic Contexts. The academic adaptation of Iranian international students was influenced by their level of language proficiency. Language in academic settings was discussed in 33 studies (25%) of the 130 included studies (see Table A2 in Appendix A). In the majority of the aforementioned studies, many Iranian students encountered difficulties with the English language that negatively impacted their academic

adaptation; only a few reported difficulties with proficiency in target languages other than English (e.g., Nouri Hosseini, 2014), likely because more than half of Iranian students in these studies were studying in English-speaking countries or the language of instruction at their university was English.

In addition, Iranian students encountered numerous difficulties in interpersonal communication, because either they themselves were not proficient in English or the native language of their country of residence, or they were unable to comprehend the other parties' (teachers or other students) strong English language accents (e.g., Australian accent) (Doray, 2017; Lim, 2018), or poor English (e.g., Akhtari-Zavare & Ghanbari-Baghestan, 2010; Malekian et al., 2017). Although English language difficulties were encountered by Iranian students in the majority of the aforementioned studies, not all Iranian students encountered language difficulties. In fact, many students reported having no language difficulties or being proficient in English (e.g., Ahrari et al., 2019; Ardakani, 1976; Gharagozloo-Bahrami, 1983; Korouhi, 2020; Nouri Hosseini, 2014; Rakhshandehroo, 2017).

English communication with American students was reported to be significantly more difficult for Iranian students who arrived in the U.S. after the Iran-U.S. crisis (1979-1981) compared to students who arrived in the U.S. prior to the Iran-U.S. crisis (Shafieyan, 1983). However, this was primarily attributed to the fact that students who arrived prior to the crisis spent more time in the country than those who arrived after the crisis (Shafieyan, 1983). It was also explicitly reported that not all academic difficulties among Iranian students could be attributed to socio-political factors such as the Iranian revolution; rather, the majority of reported academic difficulties were attributed to a lack of English proficiency and unfamiliarity with the American education system (Moshfegh, 1989).

Similar to the "push-and-pull factor" theme that was affected by socio-political factors, the Iranian Islamic revolution in 1979 and the Iran-U.S. crisis generally had negative effects on academic adaptation for Iranian students in the U.S. (Moshfegh, 1989; Shafieyan, 1983). However, the revolution or crisis appeared to have had a greater impact on other adaptation factors (e.g., discrimination, academic work) than on language and communication, which will be discussed in greater detail later.

Academic System. Difficulty with understanding the academic system of the host nation was mentioned in 22 (17%) of the 130 studies included (see Table A2 in Appendix A).

In addition to language barriers, Iranian students faced academic challenges, which hindered their academic adaptation. Difficulties were reported in various areas, such as exam method in the host country (e.g., true/false questions or grading system) (e.g., Alavi &

Mansor, 2011; Busch, 1955), teaching or learning method (e.g., Akhtari-Zavare & Ghanbari-Baghestan, 2010; Alavi & Mansor, 2011; Campbell, 2015; Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005), and unfamiliarity with the host country's academic system prior to and/or upon arrival (e.g., Moftakhar, 1975; Moshfegh, 1989; Najimi, 2013).

In several studies, students mentioned differences between the academic systems of Iran and the host nation, especially with regard to "independent" versus "dependent" learning approaches. Adjusting to the academic system was even more difficult for some Iranian students in Scotland than adapting to the language because they were more accustomed to the dependent learning system of Iran than to the independent learning system of Scotland (Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005). Many Iranian students in Scotland and Malaysia were dissatisfied with the independent learning style of the host country (e.g., students are expected to go and learn on their own) rather than the dependent learning method used in Iran (e.g., Akhtari-Zavare & Ghanbari-Baghestan, 2010; Malekian et al., 2017; Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005). Iran follows a teacher-centered learning approach as opposed to a student-centered approach, which is likely why Iranian students expected their teachers to be "explicit" and provide "structured" guidelines as opposed to "open" and "disorganized" guidelines (e.g., Doray, 2017; Sigaeva & Gullu, 2020). Iranian students had similar expectations of their university counselor (Najmi, 2013; Yuen & Tinsley, 1981), and compared to American students, they preferred that they themselves play a more submissive role in therapy and expected the counselor to be a more directive, empathetic, and nurturing authority figure (Yuen & Tinsley, 1981). Similar to students from China, India, and Vietnam, Iranian students concurred that the role of the teacher as a "moral model" and "benevolent authority figure" is highly valued in their cultures, similar to that of the father (Lim, 2018).

Prior to the revolution, the majority of Iranian students in the U.S. reported no difficulties adjusting to the American academic system (Payind, 1977). In another pre-revolution study, Iranian students did not significantly report negative impressions of the American examination system, most likely because they received their prior education in a system that was influenced by British or European educational approaches (Galtung, 1965). However, other potential factors not explicitly mentioned in the studies reviewed in the current study that could have contributed to why Iranian students prior to the revolution did not report any difficulties with the academic system include the voluntary nature of their migration, which might have fostered greater willingness to adapt to the U.S. education system; variations in the social backgrounds of Iranian students before the revolution compared to those after it, potentially influencing their perceptions of the U.S. education

system; and temporal differences, with the U.S. education system evolving from the 60s and 70s to the 2020s.

Some of the factors that contributed to students' overall satisfaction with the academic system, whether before or after the revolution, included the high quality of the academic system of universities (e.g., Asghari, 2022; Campbell, 2015; Hosseini, 2022; Nouri Hosseini, 2014); flexible curricula (e.g., course variety) (Busch, 1955; Hosseini, 2022); and examination/assignment or assessment system (e.g., Ardakani, 1976; Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005); such as the host country's "formative" course evaluation system (i.e., assessment based on the results of all tests, assignments, and presentations), which students preferred over Iran's "summative" assessment system (i.e., assessment based on only midterm and final exams) (Doray, 2017).

In contrast, in some studies, it was reported that Iranian students were happier with the student-centered approach used in Finland (Hosseini, 2022), as several reported that the teacher-centered approach in Iran discourages the development of critical thinking and independent problem-solving (Malekian et al., 2017). The socio-political situation in Iran, which features "hierarchical relationships," may have influenced Iranian students' criticism of the teacher-centered approach. For example, a few Iranian students in Australia (Doray, 2017) who were critical of the teacher-centered approach believed teachers were superior in Iran, and compared to other international students (e.g., from Iraq and Saudi Arabia), they were more resentful of authorities, and they learned to question and think critically faster than their counterparts.

Academic Achievement. The academic adaptation of Iranian students was also influenced by their academic achievement. 21 (16%) studies out of 130 were identified that discussed academic achievement (e.g., academic success, academic progress, academic attainment) (see Table A2 in Appendix A). In the majority of these studies, Iranian students were motivated to pursue higher education (e.g., Busch, 1995), and this motivation was significantly influenced by factors such as the desire to increase their prestige, economic status, knowledge, and sense of competence (Reihani, 1982). One study found that the academic achievement of Iranian students was one of the most significant predictors of Iranian students' life satisfaction (Nabavi & Bijandi, 2018).

Nonetheless, various obstacles made academic achievement more difficult for students. As discussed earlier, language proficiency and familiarity with the academic system influenced the academic adaptation of Iranian students. These two academic-related factors also appeared to have had impacts on the academic achievement of Iranian students. Most

frequently mentioned was English language proficiency, the lack of which negatively impacted the academic achievement of Iranian students (e.g., grades) (e.g., Busch, 1955; Haghdoost et al., 2007; Hosseindoust, 1975; Tafazzoli-Moghaddam, 1980). Other academic-related obstacles were associated with the educational system (e.g., teaching method) (e.g., Akhtari-Zavare & Ghanbari-Baghestan, 2010), as well as the quality of the relationship between students and academic staff (e.g., supervisors) (Akhtari-Zavare & Ghanbari-Baghestan, 2010; Nouri Hosseini, 2014).

Obstacles to academic achievement among Iranian students also reportedly resulted in negative psychological or behavioral issues in some cases. For instance, Iranian female students exhibited some fear of success as measured by low self-esteem, preoccupation with evaluation, a tendency to repudiate one's competence, and self-sabotaging their own success (Oveissi, 1983). However, their fear of success was not significantly different from that of other international female students (e.g., Anglo-Americans, Filipinos, and Japanese). Furthermore, the Iran-U.S. crisis had a negative impact on the academic achievement of many Iranian students in the U.S., making the majority of students feel neglected by their teachers and struggle to organize their academic work (Moshfegh, 1989). Several Iranian students also felt pressure to perform well and/or complete their studies on time, either due to financial pressure and their parents' academic expectations (e.g., Bavifard, 2008; Malekian et al., 2017; Van et al., 2015) or the competitive atmosphere and pressure of their university to complete studies on time (e.g., Malekian et al., 2017). In one study, parental pressure per se did not significantly impact the motivation of students to pursue higher education; however, those for whom their parents were their primary financial support were significantly more motivated by parental pressure to pursue their education (Reihani, 1982).

These findings suggest that for many Iranian students, the motivation for academic success was strongly driven by external factors, particularly socio-economic (e.g., parental or financial pressure) and socio-political ones (e.g., the Iran-U.S. crisis).

Academic-Related Fees. Academic-related fees were mentioned in 14 studies (11%) of the 130 included studies (see Table A2 in Appendix A). High tuition fee was posed as one of the most significant academic-related financial obstacles for several Iranian students (e.g., Akhtari-Zavare & Ghanbari-Baghestan, 2010; Amiri & Alinezhad, 2007; Hosseindoust, 1975; Hosseini-Nezhad et al., 2021; Nahidi, 2014; Sigaeva & Gullu, 2020; Van et al., 2015), and many found it unfair that international students paid a higher tuition fee than domestic students (e.g., Sigaeva & Gullu, 2020; Van et al., 2015). Conversely, in some other studies,

Iranian students reported that they were satisfied with the affordability of the tuition fees at their Malaysian universities (e.g., Kazemi et al., 2018; Li & Ling, 2011).

Other academic-related financial barriers included university housing (Ardakani, 1976), expensive health insurance, an entrance exam, and admission fees that students were required to pay with credit cards, which is not permitted in Iran (Hefner-Babb & Khoshlessan, 2018) due to sanctions. The payment of tuition fees by Iranian students was also affected by socio-political factors, such as during the Iran-U.S. crisis after the 1979 revolution (Shafieyan, 1983). After the revolution, the Iranian government restricted students in certain study fields (e.g., art, nursing, and psychology) that had been open to them prior to the revolution. This resulted in many students losing financial support from the government unless they changed their majors. Moreover, after the Iran-U.S. crisis, American colleges and universities lost trust in Iranian students and demanded full tuition payments upfront, further complicating the situation for Iranian students in the U.S. As a result, many students were unable to pay for their tuition and were forced to drop out and seek part-time employment to make ends meet (Shafieyan, 1983).

Theme 3: Socio-Cultural Adaptation

Out-Group and In-Group Contact. Out of 130 studies, 32 (25%) discussed interaction with an out-group (locals or other international students) and/or an in-group (Iranian students) (see Table A2 in Appendix A). Not all Iranian students had difficulty interacting with locals (e.g., Hosseindoust, 1975; Korouhi, 2020; Pandian, 2008; Rafieyan et al., 2014; Ziai-Bigdeli, 1982). The majority of pre-revolution Iranian students in the U.S. expressed satisfaction with their interactions with Americans (Borhanmanesh, 1965), and were interacting primarily with Americans and students of other nationalities (Hosseindoust, 1975), and those who had more contact with Americans experienced significantly fewer difficulties with academic adaptation (e.g., understanding lectures). Additionally, the majority of non-returning Iranian students in the U.S. had more contact with Americans than the students who returned (Valipour, 1967).

In the majority of the above-mentioned studies, however, difficulties interacting with out-group members (locals) were reported more frequently than with other international students and fellow nationals. According to the findings of several studies, Iranian students' interactions with locals were influenced by their impressions of the locals and how the locals treated them. For instance, ethnic discrimination was one of the primary factors contributing to Iranian students' reported difficulties in interacting with locals (e.g., Bavifard, 2008; Hosseindoust, 1975; Moshfegh, 1989; Pandian, 2008; Przyłęcki, 2018; Robinson et al.,

2020). Notably, for many post-revolution Iranian students in the U.S., socio-political issues between the U.S. and Iran were the primary cause of discrimination and exacerbated the difficulty of interacting with Americans (e.g., Bavifard, 2008; Moshfegh, 1989).

Moreover, cultural distance (e.g., Asgari & Borzooei, 2014; Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004; Mahmoudi, 2008; Suanet & Van De Vijver, 2009) and language barriers (e.g., Asgari & Borzooei, 2014; Hosseini et al., 2020; Khojastehrad & Sattarova, 2015; Mahmoudi, 2008; Van et al., 2015) were frequently cited as reasons why Iranian students had difficulty interacting with locals. Due to these issues, many Iranian students preferred to interact with either other Iranians or international students with whom they shared many commonalities (e.g., a similar culture) (e.g., Bavifard, 2008; Moshfegh, 1989; Robinson et al., 2020). In one study, Iranian students (as well as Chinese students) in Russia reported a greater perceived cultural distance as the reason they preferred to interact with their in-group (other Iranians) more than other students (e.g., Bolivians, Cubans, Georgians, Nigerians, and Ukrainians) (Suanet & Van De Vijver, 2009). Similarly, in another study, Iranian students (along with students from Bangladesh, Singapore, and so on), compared to other students (from Brazil, China, Turkey, the U.S., and so on), were more likely to interact with international students because they wanted to experience other cultures or because it was not easy to connect to their fellow nationals because of their small size (Gomes et al., 2014). It appears that when Iranian students and locals shared more cultural similarities, they were more culturally sensitive and had fewer difficulties interacting with locals. As such, Iranian students in Turkey demonstrated cultural sensitivity toward both international and domestic students, thus allowing them to interact easily with these groups (Korouhi, 2020).

Sometimes politico-ideological similarities, rather than shared cultural experiences, influenced Iranian students' contact. Due to the hostage crisis, many Iranian students of different political ideologies (e.g., Leftist, Mujahedin, Monarchist, and Islamist) were rarely in contact with Americans a few years after the revolution. Instead, they were more likely to interact with members of their in-group, particularly those who shared their ideology (Khayat-Mofid, 1984). However, despite the fact that they were all Iranians, those with whom they did not share the same ideology no longer acted as their "homogenous" in-group; they became an out-group.

Cultural Distance and Cultural Sensitivity. Out of the 130 studies included, several studies addressed cultural distance (cultural differences) ($n = 14$, 11%) and cultural sensitivity or knowledge ($n = 11$, 9%) (see Table A2 in Appendix A). As mentioned in the preceding category (out-group and in-group contact), perceived cultural distance and cultural

sensitivity had an impact on Iranian students' interactions with locals. The majority of interaction issues with outgroups reported by Iranian students occurred in Western nations. Problems with cultural distance and cultural awareness were also reported more often in Western countries. For example, many Iranian students in Western countries asserted that their culture is more collectivistic than the individualistic host culture (e.g., Canadians or British) (e.g., Brown, 2008c; Tsang, 2002). Moreover, compared to their American counterparts, they demonstrated less individualistic tendencies (Litrenta, 1987). It is possible that the individualistic culture of Western nations contributed to the difficulty of Iranian students interacting with locals. Iranian students in Sweden noted that, in contrast to Sweden's individualistic culture that emphasizes personal value, Iran's collectivistic culture places a greater emphasis on in-group and family interactions (Nouri Hosseini, 2014). Likewise, several Iranian students in the U.S. had difficulty adjusting to the host culture's values (Shafieyan, 1983).

Furthermore, the majority of Iranian students, particularly those studying in Western countries, lacked cultural awareness of the host culture (e.g., Australia, Canada, and the U.S.) (e.g., Doray, 2017; Hosseindoust, 1975; Mahmoudi, 2008; Moftakhar, 1975; Nouri Hosseini, 2014). Examples of a lack of cultural awareness include a limited understanding of intercultural communication, cultural differences, and the values and norms of the host culture (Nouri Hosseini, 2014). However, this was not the case for pre-revolution Iranians who studied in Western countries (e.g., Germany, the U.K., and the U.S.), who exhibited cultural sensitivity and appeared to accept more of their host countries' values and norms (Galtung, 1965).

Although Iranian students reported cultural similarities in non-Western countries such as Malaysia (Khodabandelou et al., 2015), they also reported cultural differences, such as Malaysia's individualistic culture (Khodabandelou et al., 2015), asking personal questions upon first meeting (e.g., marital status, religion), and not being direct and empathetic in stressful situations (e.g., Asgari & Borzooei, 2014).

Other reported cultural differences between Iran and Malaysia concerned gratitude strategies in English (e.g., apologies, simple thanking) (e.g., Farashaiyan & Hua, 2012; Farnia & Sattar, 2015). Iranian students, when compared to Malaysian students, paid less attention to the context of their conversations, and lacked the necessary skills to show gratitude based on the status of the other party. For example, unlike Malaysians, Iranian students used the same strategy and language to express thanks to their employers and to a neighbor's child (Farashaiyan & Hua, 2012). They also expressed significantly more positive feelings (e.g.,

demonstrating a positive response to the favor provider, such as "you are a lifesaver," or "you are great") than Malaysian students (Farnia & Sattar, 2015).

Social Support. Out of the 130 studies, 30 (23%) contained information on social support (see Table A2 in Appendix A). In nearly all of the aforementioned studies, the support provided by families, particularly the parents, was primarily financial (e.g., Asefpour-Vakilian, 1981; Bavifard, 2008; Hosseindoust, 1975; Khayat-Mofid, 1984; Li & Ling, 2011; Mahdavi-Harsini, 1981; Payind, 1977; Rakhshandehroo, 2017; Reihani, 1982; Shafieyan, 1983; Tafazzoli-Moghaddam, 1980; Van et al., 2015) and/or emotional in nature (e.g., Campbell, 2015; Hosseini-Nezhad et al., 2019, 2021; Mahdavi-Harsini, 1981; Sigaeva & Gullu, 2020; Van et al., 2015). Support from others (e.g., co-nationals, friends, spouses, teachers, and universities) was mentioned in a few studies (e.g., Mahdavi-Harsini, 1981; Nabavi & Bijandi, 2018; Oh & Butler, 2019; Rakhshandehroo, 2017; Sadri & Chaichian, 2018; Sigaeva & Gullu, 2020). These social supports were primarily emotional (e.g., roommate relationships, in response to negative remarks about Iran) or informational or practical (e.g., difficulties with language, accommodation issues, information on transportation, and groceries) (e.g., Mahdavi-Harsini, 1981; Oh & Butler, 2019; Rakhshandehroo, 2017).

Higher perceived social support (i.e., family, friends, and significant others) significantly predicted Iranian students' life satisfaction (Nabavi & Bijandi, 2018), whereas lower perceived social support was associated with symptoms of poor psychological health, such as homesickness, depression (Shahmohammadi, 2014), and higher levels of distress (Nahidi, 2014; Nahidi et al., 2018). Even friend/peer support alone predicted increased self-efficacy (Sabouripour et al., 2017) and decreased stress (Malekian & Khan, 2017) among Iranian students. Additionally, perceived social support from the out-group (host) negatively predicted depression, whereas perceived social support from fellow nationals positively predicted separation acculturation orientation (Falavarjani et al., 2020).

Overall, Iranian students appeared to benefit more from social support than students from other cultures. Iranian students in Australia experienced less distress than domestic and other international students (Nahidi et al., 2018) due to their perception of greater social support. Additionally, living independently abroad appeared to be an opportunity for self-growth for several Iranian students who had previously relied on their families in Iran for assistance with everything from household chores to financial matters (Hosseini-Nezhad et al., 2019). Students valued the opportunity to live abroad independently because it taught

them how to perform numerous tasks independently (e.g., Didehvar, 2020; Hosseini-Nezhad et al., 2019). Moreover, another study found that autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, and so on as dimensions of psychological well-being, were related to self-efficacy and resilience among Iranian students (Sabouripour et al., 2021).

It was also found that, in comparison to other international students (e.g., Nigerians, Saudi Arabians, or Taiwanese), Iranian students were more dependent on their families for food expenses (Mahdavi-Harsini, 1981).

Discrimination/Racism. In 18 (14%) out of 130 studies, discrimination was addressed (see Table A2 in Appendix A). The majority of research that documented discrimination involved Iranian students in the U.S. (e.g., Ameli, 1980; Anderson, 2020; Arasteh, 1994; Bavifard, 2008; Hanassab, 2006; Hassan, 1962; Hosseindoust, 1975; Khoshneviss, 2017; Moshfegh, 1989; Valipour, 1967), while the remaining studies involved Iranian students in other countries such as Canada (e.g., Guo & Guo, 2017; Najmi, 2013); Malaysia (e.g., Akhtari-Zavare & Ghanbari-Baghestan, 2010; Pandian, 2008); Poland (Przyłęcki, 2018); North Cyprus (Sigaeva & Gullu, 2020); Hungary (Hosseini-Nezhad et al., 2021); and Belgium (Asghari, 2022). In one pre-revolution study, the majority of Iranian students in the U.S. (54%) experienced ethnic discrimination (Hassan, 1962). Conversely, about half (48%) of the Iranian students in the U.S. did not encounter discrimination in any form, while 46% reported experiencing discrimination (e.g., cultural or religious discrimination, exclusion from groups, refusal to be served in restaurants) (Hosseindoust, 1975). In another pre-revolution study (Valipour, 1967), many Iranian students generally criticized US ethnic discrimination in the southern states.

Overall, pre-revolution studies reported discrimination less frequently than post-revolution studies. This difference is likely due to the absence of socio-political tension between Iran and the U.S. prior to 1979. Moreover, the majority of discrimination faced by Iranians after the revolution was primarily attributed to the ongoing socio-political tension between Iran and the U.S. Iranian students in the U.S. claimed that the Iranian revolution of 1979/Iran-US conflict had a detrimental effect on their social adaptation since they felt discriminated against and excluded by Americans (Moshfegh, 1989). Iranian students reported feeling more accepted by Americans and encountering little prejudice prior to the Iran hostage crisis; however, following the conflict, they reported feeling less accepted by Americans and encountering significant prejudice (Ameli, 1980).

Following the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, which resulted in the accusation and arrest of Muslims, Iranian students reported a high level of discrimination in the U.S.

(Arasteh, 1994). In later years, after the September 11th attacks (9/11), Iranians were subject to FBI investigations and increased airport security inspections, and the situation worsened in 2002 when Iran was designated as an "axis of evil" by the U.S. government (Bavifard, 2008).

While students from all nations suffered differing degrees of discrimination, students from the Middle East (including Iranians) and Africa were shown to have faced greater levels of discrimination and stereotypes than students from other countries (Hanassab, 2006). In accordance with this finding, one study (Hassan, 1962) found that students from Iran (as well as students from India, Kenya, Nigeria, Thailand, and Turkey) encountered the greatest discrimination from Americans, while students from the U.K., Scandinavia, and the Philippines faced the least discrimination.

Iranians have faced discrimination/racism in countries other than the U.S., such as Malaysia, where they were teased in their classes by locals (Pandian, 2008) or faced racism because of their Hijab or religion (e.g., Przyłęcki, 2018; Guo & Guo, 2017). Additionally, students felt discriminated against in Hungary due to banking issues (Hosseini-Nezhad et al., 2021).

Immigration Regulations, Visa, and Banking Issues. Immigration regulations (e.g., visa) and/or banking issues altogether were mentioned in 21 (16%) studies out of 130 included studies (see Table A2 in Appendix A). Iranian students reported issues with immigration regulations primarily in post-revolution studies (e.g., Hosseini-Nezhad et al., 2021; Khodabandelou et al., 2015; Moshfegh, 1989). The majority of Iranian students in the U.S. had no issues with immigration regulations prior to the revolution (Hosseindoust, 1975).

The main issues with immigration regulations were visa related. According to a number of studies, Iranian students faced visa-related immigration challenges, such as obtaining and extending visas, a lengthy visa application process, and an inability to comprehend visa requirements (e.g., Anderson, 2020; Bavifard, 2008; Hefner-Babb & Khoshlessan, 2018; Hosseini-Nezhad et al., 2021; Johansson, 2013; Khodabandelou et al., 2015; Khoshneviss, 2017; Moshfegh, 1989; Nouri Hosseini, 2014; Payind, 1977; Shafieyan, 1983; Shahmohammadi, 2014; Toutant, 2009).

Prior to the revolution, visa issues were not as significant as they became after the revolution; only one study conducted two years prior to the revolution reported some difficulties with extending visas in the U.S. (Payind, 1977). Shortly after the revolution, as a result of the Iran-US crisis (and even more so during the hostage crisis), Iranian students encountered difficulties with visas, such as renewing visas (Shafieyan, 1983). As Iran-U.S. relations deteriorated, these visa issues persisted for Iranians long after the revolution, and it

appears that they worsened and victimized students more each time. Following the September 11 attacks, Iranian students in the U.S. had difficulty obtaining visas. Prior to 9/11, they were granted visas allowing for two or three entries; however, this was changed to a single entry after 9/11 (e.g., Bavifard, 2008; Toutant, 2009). Since Iran lacks a US embassy, Iranians had to travel to other countries in order to obtain a U.S. visa, a process that can take up to six months (Toutant, 2009). In 2018, after the U.S. imposed its toughest sanctions on Iran, Iranians reported greater difficulties obtaining and renewing visas (Hosseini-Nezhad et al., 2021).

Due to visa issues, many Iranian students reported preferring to travel to countries with less stringent visa requirements, such as Malaysia (Kazemi et al., 2018) or Turkey, where no visas are required (Korouhi, 2020). Although visas were not the primary concern for Iranian students in Malaysia (Li & Ling, 2011), Khodabandelou et al. (2015) found that strict visa regulations in Malaysia, such as getting lengthy visa extensions as well as obtaining visas for students' children, posed a significant barrier for Iranian students.

In addition to visa issues, Iranian students faced banking problems in their host country (e.g., Amiri & Alinezhad, 2007; Hosseini et al., 2020; Hosseini, 2018; Hosseini-Nezhad et al., 2021; Johansson, 2013; Nouri Hosseini, 2014). The economic sanctions imposed by the U.S. against Iran had a major impact on the banking issues of Iranian students. Due to sanctions imposed on Iranian banks, any international transactions by Iranians in the host country were limited or delayed (e.g., Amiri & Ainezhad, 2007; Asghari, 2022), or blocked (Johansson, 2013). Iranians were required to find a way to transfer their money via a reliable third party that received Iranian Rial from the students' families in Iran; then, someone related to that third party would have to give them money in the host country's currency. However, a majority of Iranian students reported that they did not know anyone who could conduct such transactions; the situation was exacerbated by the fact that the central bank and market rates for the Iranian Rial were not identical (e.g., Johansson, 2013).

Aside from transaction issues, Iranian students faced banking issues such as being unable to open a bank account or having their account abruptly closed (e.g., Hosseini, 2018; Hosseini-Nezhad et al., 2021). Moreover, their visa and banking issues appeared to be intertwined, as Iranian students were required to provide proof of a bank account in order to obtain a visa, despite their inability to access their account (Johansson, 2013).

Language in Social Contexts. Language was mentioned as an important factor in social contexts in 37 (28%) studies out of 130 studies included (see Table A2 in Appendix A). For many Iranian students, competency in the local language, especially English, was

essential. In their pre-sojourn period, students chose their study destination (e.g., Malaysia) based on the prevalence of English-language use in the host country (Khodabandelou et al., 2015) or the assumption that English was widely spoken in the host nation (Asgari & Borzooei, 2014). They made efforts to learn English or the host country's language before moving to the host country (e.g., Karimi & Bucerius, 2018). During their in-sojourn period, if they struggled with the host country's non-English local language, they decided to relocate to a country where English was the official language (Hosseini, 2018).

To improve their language learning, many students even avoided conversing in Persian with other Iranians in the host country (Busch, 1955). Although Iranian students were aware that knowing the local language would aid in their adaptation and integration in the host country (e.g., Davis, 2010a; Nouri Hosseini, 2014); this did not mean that they did not encounter language barriers in the host country. In fact, in the majority of the above-mentioned studies, Iranian students encountered a language barrier to some extent. However, their language barriers were not solely limited to the linguistic aspects of language (e.g., grammar, pronunciation) (Mahmoudi, 2008); culturally induced language misunderstanding and uncertainty accounted for a portion of their difficulties in communicating with locals or individuals from other cultures.

Many Iranian students reported being uncertain about non-verbal communication interactions in other cultures (e.g., facial expressions, gestures, greetings, and proxemics) (e.g., Brown, 2008b; Hosseini, 2022; Hosseini-Nezhad et al., 2019). To be more specific, some of the difficulties in communication due to non-verbal cues mentioned by students included but were not limited to sudden shifts in interpersonal behavior (e.g., from friendliness one day to coldness the next), difficulty in understanding the meaning of others' reactions in conversations, receiving suspicious looks, which caused confusion and uncertainty, uncertainty in greeting people from different countries, and concerns about close physical contact.

Iranian students' concerns with how locals perceived and evaluated them when they spoke and their desire to avoid saying anything inappropriate also contributed to communication difficulty (e.g., Hosseini-Nezhad et al., 2019).

One of the Iranian cultural characteristics, 'taarof,'[8] was cited as one of the factors influencing Iranian students' communication with Canadian locals (Mahmoudi, 2008). Many Iranian students' communication difficulties may have stemmed from 'tarof,' as many students overanalyzed the locals' reactions and wanted to ensure they pleased them. These explanations regarding communication were supported by several reports, such as those from students who resisted speaking Persian with the in-group in order to avoid offending locals (Busch, 1955) and attempted to remain silent and avoid conversation out of concern that no one would understand (e.g., Aziz, 2020). Several students also reported self-criticism and worry about whether they had upset locals (e.g., Brown, 2008a; Brown, 2008b; Hosseini, 2022; Hosseini-Nezhad et al., 2019). However, it is essential to note that the above-mentioned behaviors of Iranian students can be viewed as socially mature in cross-cultural situations and may not necessarily be attributed to 'tarof,' and are shared experiences among international students of different nationalities.

Economic Obstacles. Generally, financial difficulties encountered by Iranian students outside of the academic context were mentioned in 31 (24%) studies out of the 130 included studies (see Table A2 in Appendix A). In the majority of the aforementioned studies, Iranian students reported financial difficulties associated with essential living expenses in the host country (e.g., accommodation, rent, internet, and electricity) (e.g., Amiri & Alinezhad, 2007; Asgari & Borzooei, 2014; Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005; Shafieyan, 1983; Sigaeva & Gullu, 2020). However, in the majority of studies, especially post-revolution ones, Iranian students' financial difficulties were primarily attributed to the escalating political tensions between Iran and the U.S. over the past four decades. In the first decade following the revolution, as a result of the Iran-US crisis, the Iranian government imposed currency restrictions on Iranian students, such as making it difficult for them to obtain cheap dollars from the Iranian government (e.g., Moshfegh, 1989; Shafieyan, 1983). In the decades after the revolution, financial hardships for students continued to worsen as the country's currency was severely devalued as a result of the implementation of additional sanctions on Iran (e.g., Didehvar, 2020; Hosseini-Nezhad et al., 2021; Johansson, 2013; Khodabandelou et al., 2015; Madanian et al., 2013; Nahidi, 2014; Shahmohammadi, 2014). Moreover, the recent COVID-19

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[8] *Taarof* is a crucial aspect of Persian cultural practices that involves engaging in ritual politeness during everyday interactions (Izadi, 2019), and it is defined as "*compliment(s), ceremony, offer, gift, flummery, courtesy, flattery, formality, good manners, soft tongue, honeyed phrases, and respect*" (Aryanpour & Aryanpour, 1976, pp. 306–307).

pandemic has exacerbated the economic difficulties faced by the vast majority of Iranian students (Baharloo et al., 2021).

Compared to other international students from Confucianist heritage cultures (CHCs) (e.g., China), Iranian (as well as Iraqi) students' primary source of financial pressure was a traumatic background (e.g., war, political instability in their country). However, for Chinese students, the primary source of financial pressure came from family expectations (Doray, 2017).

In light of these economic difficulties, many Iranian students had to secure employment opportunities in the host nation in order to mitigate their financial difficulties and ensure stability in their future prospects (e.g., Arasteh, 1994; Hosseini, 2018; Hosseini-Nezhad, 2021; Kazemi et al., 2018; Khodabandelou et al., 2015; Korouhi, 2020; Li & Ling, 2011; Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005; Moshfegh, 1989; Nahidi, 2014; Payind, 1977; Sadri & Chaichian, 2018; Shafieyan, 1983).

Freedom and Gender Issues. Freedom and gender issues altogether were mentioned in 23 (18%) of the 130 studies included (see Table A2 in Appendix A). Freedom appears to be one of the important factors influencing the socio-cultural as well as psychological adaptation of Iranian students. In nearly every study that has addressed the topic, Iranian students, regardless of the host country's location, reported a greater sense of freedom (e.g., mainly social and political freedom) in their host country than in Iran (e.g., Bavifard, 2008; Doray, 2017; Hosseini, 2018; Hosseini-Nezhad et al., 2022; Reihani, 1982).

Pre-revolution research did not focus as heavily on freedom as did post-revolution studies. However, in some of the pre-revolution studies, freedom was also addressed. In one pre-revolution study, many Iranian students expressed admiration for freedom (e.g., freedom of speech and belief) in the U.S. and criticized the political oppression in Iran (Valipour, 1967). In other pre-revolution studies, many students perceived certain elements of the host society, such as freedom and/or legal equality in the U.S., as valuable to be introduced or implemented within Iran (e.g., Borhanmanesh, 1965; Galtung, 1965). Freedom was deemed even more valuable by Iranians for implementation in their home country than by students from India and Egypt. However, Iranians, like their Indian and Egyptian counterparts, did not regard the Western approach to women's rights as valuable for implementation in their home cultures (Galtung, 1965).

In addition to socio-political freedoms such as freedom of speech and belief, which were mentioned more frequently and appeared to be lacking both before and after the revolution, some forms of freedom which Iranians lacked in Iran mainly belonged to the post-

revolution period, such as freedom to choose not to wear the hijab (e.g., Didehvar, 2020; Hosseini-Nezhad et al., 2022; Kazemi et al., 2018), freedom in cross-gender relationships (e.g., Kazemi et al., 2018), and religious-related freedom (e.g., absence of religious pressure of the Islamic regime in the host country) (e.g., Johansson, 2013; Kazemi et al., 2018; Zijlstra, 2020), as all of these freedoms existed in Iran prior to the revolution when the country was secular but were denied to them under the Islamic regime.

When compared to Iranian male students, Iranian female students appeared to have benefited more from the freedom they experienced in the host country because of the extreme systemic gender inequality in Iran, a country founded on religious, traditional, and patriarchal values that discriminate against and oppress women more than men. Women expressed their satisfaction with the respect and security they felt as women in their host countries (Hosseini, 2018; Hosseini-Nezhad et al., 2022) or not having to wear the compulsory veil they had to wear in Iran (e.g., Didehvar, 2020; Hosseini-Nezhad et al., 2022). It was reported by Iranian students that gender discrimination against women in Iran was significantly related to the brain drain in Iran (Ryazantsev et al., 2020). Therefore, it is no surprise that Iranian students who travel abroad are concerned about gender equality. Generally, gender equality and women's rights in the host country were highly admired by Iranian students (e.g., Bavifard, 2008; Hosseini-Nezhad et al., 2022; Nouri Hosseini, 2014; Valipour, 1967). Although Iranian students valued gender equality, students, particularly males, held a more traditional view of gender (e.g., Hosseini-Nezhad et al., 2022; Litrenta, 1987), more traditional than American students but less traditional than Saudi Arabian students (Litrenta, 1987).

Food. Food (e.g., adaptation to local food and dietary practices) was mentioned in 15 (12%) of the 130 studies (see Table A2 in Appendix A). The majority of studies demonstrating Iranian students had difficulty adapting to local food were conducted in Malaysia (e.g., Akhtari-Zavare & Ghanbari-Baghestan, 2010; Asgari & Borzooei, 2014; Aziz, 2020), where most of the students reported negative experiences related to food (e.g., unhealthy local food, disruption in food routine). However, Iranian students expressed satisfaction with the local cuisine in Malaysia, such as the availability of healthy beverages and hot drinks and tasty fruits (Asgari & Borzooei, 2014); many even cited the country's cuisine diversity as one of the reasons for choosing Malaysia as a study destination (Khodabandelou et al., 2015). Additionally, the majority of Iranian students in the U.S. did not report negative experiences related to food in pre-revolution studies (e.g., university food service, unfamiliar food) (e.g., Ardakani, 1976; Galtung, 1965; Hosseindoust, 1975). A few other studies on food were primarily concerned with the ethnic food practices of Iranian

students or their general dietary habits (e.g., Abidin et al., 2021; Brown, 2009d; Khafaie et al., 2016; Mahmoodi et al., 2022; Zarei et al., 2013). For instance, the majority of Iranian students in Malaysia maintained their ethnic identity by cooking daily Persian meals (Abidin et al., 2021). Overall, Iranian students' eating habits appeared to be poor in the host country. More than half of the Iranian students in India were overweight or obese, and their physical activity and fiber consumption had declined significantly post-settlement (Khafaie et al., 2016). Iranian students in Malaysia had high carbohydrate and protein intake but lower than recommended intake amounts of fiber, vitamin C, calcium, and iron (Zarei et al., 2013). In one study, Iranian students, despite the fact that most of them (68%) were physically active, were found to be the least active when compared to Israeli, Scandinavian, and Hungarian students. Moreover, the study revealed that while most Iranian students (63.6%) consumed an average amount of vegetables, fruits, and high-fiber cereals per week, a smaller percentage of them (11%) had a healthy diet in comparison to other students from other countries, such as Israel (14.9%), Scandinavian countries (20.9%), Mediterranean countries (13.6%), and Hungary (13.5%) (Terebessy et al., 2016).

Mixed results regarding the dietary habits of Iranian students in India were reported (Mahmoodi et al., 2022). A lower percentage of Iranian students (47.7%) skipped meals compared to their African (85%) and Korean (81.2%) counterparts, and they consumed fewer packaged foods (18.2%) than those of African (50%) and Korean (37.5%) students. However, Iranians (45.5%), along with Koreans (56.3%), reported a drop in their serving size following settlement. A significant decline was also reported in beef consumption for Iranian and African students, and a significant decline in calcium consumption was reported for Iranian and Korean students. All groups experienced a significant decrease in non-vegetarian food intake and an increase in the consumption of biscuits and cake. Overall, a significantly higher percentage (59%) of students (all groups) rated their appetite as poor compared to before settlement (33%) (Mahmoodi et al., 2022).

Theme 4: Psychological Adaptation

Homesickness and Loneliness. Out of 130 included studies, homesickness was mentioned in 17 (13%) studies, and loneliness (or isolation) was discussed in 18 (14%) studies (see Table A2 in Appendix A).

In a number of studies, homesickness accompanied or was associated with loneliness among students (e.g., Hosseini, 2022; Mahdavi-Harsini, 1981; Moshfegh, 1989; Najmi, 2013). In the majority of studies, Iranian students felt homesick and/or lonely, although this appears to have been a greater problem for Iranian students after the revolution. Before the

revolution, homesickness was mentioned in only two studies, and in neither case did the majority of students experience homesickness (32% or 10%) (e.g., Hosseinidoust, 1975; Payind, 1977). In one study conducted after the revolution, the majority of students did not report homesickness, yet more than half of them did report feeling lonely (Hosseini-Nezhad et al., 2019). In most cases, the homesickness and loneliness experienced by Iranian students seemed to have been caused by missing the families back home from whom they were separated (e.g., Akhtari-Zavare & Ghanbari-Baghestan, 2010; Asghari, 2022; Brown & Holloway, 2008b; Didehvar, 2020; Moshfegh, 1989; Najmi, 2013). However, their feelings were sometimes exacerbated by socio-political events, such as the Iran-Iraq war, which occurred a year after the revolution in 1980. These factors caused half of the students to fear for the safety of their families in Iran and worry that they might not be able to see them again (Moshfegh, 1989), as families urged their children not to return home due to concerns about their safety (Shafieyan, 1983).

Homesickness and loneliness were found to be related to other factors among Iranian students. Homesickness was found to be significantly related to low social support, depression, being female (Shahmohammadi, 2014), and greater perceived cultural distance (Suanet & Van De Vijver, 2009). Loneliness was significantly and positively related to depression, anxiety, and neuroticism and negatively correlated with extraversion and self-esteem (Hojat, 1982). Iranian students (as well as Chinese students) experienced greater homesickness and stress than other international students because they perceived a greater cultural distance between their culture and the host country (Suanet & Van De Vijver, 2009).

Depression and Anxiety. Out of 130 studies, 22 (17%) discussed depression (a few studies used the terms sadness or unhappiness), and 43 (33%) mentioned anxiety (or stress, distress, worry, acculturative stress, state-trait anxiety, and tension) (see Table A2 in Appendix A).

In some of the aforementioned studies, depression in students was accompanied by anxiety (e.g., Hosseini-Nezhad et al., 2021; Moshfegh, 1989; Rezvan & Srimathi, 2022; Shafieyan, 1983); therefore, depression and anxiety were grouped together as a single category.

Mostly anxiety and depression were mentioned in studies conducted after the revolution. In the majority of studies, Iranian students experienced depression and/or anxiety to some degree. The most frequently cited causes of depression and/or anxiety were economic obstacles (Aziz, 2020; Hosseini-Nezhad et al., 2021; Johansson, 2013; Khayat Mofid, 1984; Shafieyan, 1983), separation from family (e.g., missing parents, homesickness)

(e.g., Akhtari-Zavare & Ghanbari-Baghestan, 2010; Hosseini-Nezhad et al., 2019; Khayat-Mofid, 1984; Moftakhar, 1975; Nouri Hosseini, 2014; Shahmohammadi, 2014), academic difficulties (e.g., language, workload) (e.g., Asghari, 2022; Brown, 2008a; Erfanmanesh, 2012; Malekian & Khan, 2017; Sigaeva & Gullu, 2020; Zhiping & Paramasivam, 2013), and visa issues (e.g., Bavifard, 2008; Hosseini-Nezhad et al., 2021; Toutant, 2009). In many of these studies, socio-political issues were the root cause of the obstacles that exacerbated students' depression or anxiety. The economic obstacles that contributed to students' depression and anxiety, for instance, had socio-political origins, such as the Iran-Iraq war and the Iran-US crisis (e.g., the hostage crisis) after the revolution (e.g., Khayat-Mofid, 1984; Shafieyan, 1983) or the recent currency crisis as a result of US sanctions on Iran (e.g., Hosseini-Nezhad et al., 2021; Johansson, 2013; Khodabandelou et al., 2015).

In addition, anxiety and depression resulting from family separation were sometimes socio-political in nature. Anti-government Iranian students (e.g., especially "leftists," except for "Islamists") reported being unable to return home due to safety concerns, and their communication with their families was limited (Khayat-Mofid, 1984). Moreover, other socio-political factors made it impossible or difficult for students to visit their families. These factors included the Iran-Iraq war (e.g., Bavifard, 2008; Khayat-Mofid, 1984; Shafieyan, 1983) and the Iran-US crisis, such as the visa restrictions imposed by the U.S. on Iranians (e.g., Bavifard, 2008).

Several factors that were found to be associated with depression and or anxiety were investigated. The most frequently reported factor was decreased perceived social support (e.g., Nahidi, 2014; Nahidi et al., 2018; Shahmohammadi, 2014). Additionally, several studies described higher levels of anxiety and/or depression among Iranian female students than their male counterparts (e.g., Hojat et al., 1986; Nahidi, 2014; Nahidi et al., 2018; Rezvan & Srimathi, 2022). To deal with stressors, Iranian students employed a variety of coping mechanisms. Some of these were adaptive mechanisms— such as "venting" (Ismail et al., 2016); searching for meaning in life (Didehvar, 2020); learning "self-control" techniques (e.g., meditation, music, and sport); and "seeking social support" (e.g., interacting with family and friends) (Sigaeva & Gullu, 2020); others were maladaptive—such as "escape avoidance" (e.g., alcohol consumption, unhealthy diets, and withdrawing from others) (Sigaeva & Gullu, 2020).

Iranian students had lower anxiety and or depression levels than other international and or local students (e.g., Nahidi, 2014; Nahidi et al., 2018); however, contrasting findings from other studies indicated that Iranian students demonstrated poorer psychological (e.g.,

higher anxiety) (Sadrossadat, 1995; Terebessy et al., 2016), as well as academic and economic adaptation (Sadrossadat, 1995) than other international students. Conversely, there were no significant differences between Iranian and other international and or local students psychologically (e.g., state-trait anxiety or general psychological health) (Oveissi, 1983; Vakili et al., 2012). One study reported that when under stress, Iranian students sought counseling more than other international students (Mahdavi-Harsini, 1981).

Happiness. Happiness (or joy as mentioned in one study) was discussed in 13 (10%) of the 130 studies included (see Table A2 in Appendix A). In the majority of these studies, the Iranian students reported feeling happy and/or happier in the host country than in Iran (e.g., Ahrari et al., 2019; Akhtari-Zavare & Ghanbari-Baghestan, 2010; Hosseini-Nezhad et al., 2019; 2021; Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005; Moftakhar, 1975; Nouri Hosseini, 2014; Valipour, 1967). In contrast, according to one early study, the majority of Iranian students felt as happy or happier in Iran than in the U.S., with females and those who had lived in the U.S. for a longer period of time feeling happier compared to males and those who had lived in the U.S. for a shorter period of time (Ameli, 1980). Some of the more frequently cited reasons Iranian students felt happy in the host country involved the feelings of freedom, and or independence/self-growth they experienced in the host country (e.g., Akhtari-Zavare & Ghanbari-Baghestan, 2010; Hosseini-Nezhad et al., 2019; 2021; Moftakhar, 1975).

Notably, for Iranian students, happiness was always accompanied by negative feelings (e.g., depression and anxiety). This result may reflect the Iranian students' extraneous difficulties, including economic crises, banking challenges, and visa issues. The association between happiness and negative feelings may also indicate that their happiness was dependent on external factors, particularly concerning the positive socio-economic aspects of their host country that were lacking in Iran.

In one study, Iranian students, despite being inclined toward a mix of happiness and sadness (happiness-sadness preferences in life), opted for sadness more than their peers (Saudi Arabian and American students) (Litrenta, 1987).

Theme 5: Acculturation

Acculturation (i.e., acculturation orientation, integration, assimilation, and separation) was mentioned in 20 (16%) of the 130 included studies (see Table A2 in Appendix A). In the majority of these studies, the integration and acculturation process for Iranian students was not smooth; for many, it was a gradual process in which integration into the host society became easier as time passed in the host country (e.g., Mahmoudi, 2008; Nouri Hosseini,

2014). The Iranian students in the U.S. and Australia chose integration as their preferred acculturation orientation (e.g., Rafieyan, 2016; Rafieyan et al., 2014), while separation was used by the majority of the Iranian students in Malaysia (Falavarjani et al., 2020) and Australia (Doray, 2017).

Additionally, language played a critical role in the acculturation of Iranian students. The characteristics of the host country, such as the spoken language in the host country, which often differs from the language spoken in one's country of origin, can affect how quickly students become acculturated, as illustrated by the very slow adaptation of Iranian international students (Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005). In one study, it was found that pragmatic instruction in class, which involved teaching students Australian English (pragmalinguistics) and Australian culture (sociopragmatics), was more effective for Iranian students who endorsed integration and assimilation acculturation orientation than those who endorsed separation and marginalization (Rafieyan, 2016).

The majority of Iranian students who endorsed integration acculturation orientation reported being proficient in English (e.g., telling jokes in both English and Persian and thinking equally well in English and Persian) (Rafieyan et al., 2014). Other factors that impacted integration for Iranian students in host societies were related to how they were treated by host nationals (e.g., Campbell, 2015; Khoshneviss, 2017; Robinson et al., 2020). For instance, positive social interaction and friendship with Canadian host-national students were found to be important for the integration of international students, including Iranians who felt socially excluded and had difficulty forming close friendships with Canadian host nationals (Robinson et al., 2020).

The influence of Iran's historical and socio-political past and present on Iranian students' integration into the host country should not be underestimated. Iranian students felt inferior due to the historical influence of the West on Iran's socio-political and economic systems (colonial mentality) and distressed regarding the current negative image of Iran in the world; thus, their acculturation process occurred long before their migration, such as students learning Western languages before migration, adopting Western values, and practicing secularism (Karimi & Bucerius, 2018).

The history of political conflicts between Iran and the U.S. was shown to cause anxiety among Iranian students regarding how they would be treated in the *liminal* phase (i.e., at the airport), and they felt *accountable* for their actions in the airport. Thus, even simply receiving a pleasant greeting when they arrived at the airport facilitated students'

integration into the U.S.; however, negative treatment at the liminal phase hindered the possibility of integration for students (Khoshneviss, 2017).

Theme 6: Identity

In general, identity (particularly ethnic/cultural as well as religious and sexual identity) was discussed in 19 (15%) of the 130 included studies (see Table A2 in Appendix A). In the majority of the aforementioned studies, Iranian students displayed cultural or ethnic pride (e.g., identity preservation, group membership, and the reinforcement of cultural elements). Students' ethnic or cultural pride was evident in behaviors such as cooking Persian food (e.g., Abidin et al., 2021; Brown, 2009d), incorporating Persian elements into daily life (Didehvar, 2020), using iconic Persian colors in artwork (Davis, 2010b), preserving original cultural identity (e.g., Rafieyan et al., 2014; Vredeveld & Coulter, 2019), and a strong identification with their own ethnic group (e.g., Doray, 2017). However, Iranian students' sense of ethnic/cultural pride was sometimes accompanied by a sense of ethnic shame, primarily due to the stereotypes about Islamic/religious identity with which they did not wish to be associated (e.g., Bavifard, 2008; Brown, 2008c, 2009d; Karimi & Bucerius, 2018). For instance, even those Iranian students who were proud of pre-Islamic Persian culture and civilizations expressed shame and ethnic/cultural inferiority as a result of the current Islamic government of Iran; moreover, this shame led them to adopt a secular Persian identity (Karimi & Bucerius, 2018). Iranian students in the U.S., despite their pride in their heritage culture, preferred to conceal their nationality and identify themselves as belonging to a different nationality in certain situations that provoked stereotypes and hostile reactions from locals (Bavifard, 2008).

Despite experiencing identity crises characterized by conflicting feelings of pride and shame, many Iranian students apparently were willing to re-evaluate or renegotiate their identities (e.g., by modifying behavior and attitude to conform to academic and/or socio-cultural norms) in order to better adapt to their new environments (e.g., Didehvar, 2020; Doray, 2017; Lim, 2018; Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013; Vredeveld & Coulter, 2019).

Theme 7: Future Plans

Among the 130 studies, 19 (15%) discussed the intentions of Iranian students during their time in the host nation, including whether they intended to remain in the host country, return to Iran, or transfer to another country (see Table A2 in Appendix A).

In several studies that were mainly conducted between the 1960s and the 1990s, either the majority or sizable students stated that they intended to return to Iran after graduation (e.g., Aflatouni, 1976; Amiri & Alinezhad, 2007; Arasteh, 1994; Borhanmanesh, 1965;

Hosseindoust, 1975; Johansson, 2013; Moftakhar, 1975; Rakhshandehroo, 2017; Valipour, 1967; Ziai-Bigdeli, 1982). However, several other studies found that Iranian students wished to remain in the host country (e.g., Arasteh, 1994; Borhanmanesh, 1965; Busch, 1955; Haghdoost et al., 2007; Lee & Ray, 1987; Rakhshandehroo, 2017; Valipour, 1967; Wu & Wilkes, 2017; Ziai-Bigdeli, 1982; Zijlstra, 2020).

With the shifting socio-political climate in Iran, a shifting pattern in the reasons why Iranian students wanted to stay in the host country or go back to Iran was noticed. Iranian students prior to the revolution desired to return home because of strong family ties (Valipour, 1967), while the two primary reasons why many international students did not want to return to Iran were uncertainty about finding jobs in Iran, as well as concerns about the lack of freedom in Iran (Valipour, 1967). Prior to the revolution, almost half of the students in the U.S. reported that they planned to return to Iran (Borhanmanesh, 1965). However, those with higher socio-economic status were more likely to return to Iran than those with lower socio-economic status (e.g., Borhanmanesh, 1965; Valipour, 1967), and those belonging to religious minorities (e.g., Jews and Christians) (Borhanmanesh, 1965) and more critical of the socio-political situation in Iran (Valipour, 1967) were more likely to stay in the U.S.

Although pre-revolution Iranian students cited socio-political motives for remaining in or returning to Iran, post-revolution Iranian students emphasized socio-political reasons more prominently. In the years between the 1979 Iranian Revolution and the Iran hostage crisis, the political unrest in Iran led to a desire to stay in the U.S. for the majority of Iranian students, while their Taiwanese and Venezuelan counterparts who desired to remain in the U.S. cited employment opportunities as the motivating factor (Lee & Ray, 1987). Iranians were also more likely than other international students (e.g., Nigerian and Venezuelan) to stay in the U.S. permanently (Lee & Ray, 1987).

A study conducted shortly after the revolution during the Iran-Iraq war found that the majority of the Iranian students in the U.S. wanted to remain in the country, but only temporarily because they had conflicting feelings about the situation in Iran (Ziai-Bigdeli, 1982). In another study that was conducted several years after the Iran-Iraq war ended (Arasteh, 1994), the majority of Iranian students in the U.S. wanted to return to Iran after graduation in times when the political situation was "stable" and the Iranian economy had somewhat recovered. Additionally, the decision to stay was highly correlated with factors such as convenient life and personal freedom in Iran, and other factors with moderate

correlation included personal safety in Iran (violence in the U.S.), acceptable political situations in Iran, and discrimination against Iranians in the U.S.

When the political situation in Iran became more unstable over the last two decades, many Iranian students, despite their desire not to return home, were forced to do so due to a currency crisis caused by economic sanctions imposed on Iran (e.g., Amiri & Alinezhad, 2007; Hosseini-Nezhad et al., 2021). Several studies reported that many Iranian students wanted neither to return to Iran nor to stay in the host country; they wanted to transfer to another country (e.g., Johansson, 2013; Li & Ling, 2011; Mehtap-Smadi & Hashemipour, 2011; Sadri & Chaichian, 2018; Zijlstra, 2020). Most of these studies were conducted when the so-called reform period in Iran ended and a more fundamentalist (conservative) period began (e.g., during the 2005 Ahmadinejad presidency and onward). For instance, Iranian students studying in non-Western countries (e.g., Cyprus, Turkey, and Malaysia) and Scandinavian countries were willing to transfer to another country (e.g., Johansson, 2013; Li & Ling, 2011; Mehtap-Smadi & Hashemipour, 2011; Sadri & Chaichian, 2018; Zijlstra, 2020), with the EU being the most popular final destination, followed by the U.S., Canada, and Australia (Sadri & Chaichian, 2018).

When compared to other international students from 26 different countries (e.g., Canada, England, India, Nigeria, Pakistan, Palestine, Romania, Syria, Tajikistan, and the U.S.), Iranian students had the highest desire to transfer to a Western country (Mehtap-Smadi & Hashemipour, 2011).

Analyses and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to conduct a review of studies involving Iranian international students in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of how Iranian students adapted in their host country. A conscious decision was made not to impose a publication date restriction so as to explore the adaptation processes of students across different socio-political periods, such as the period preceding and following the Iranian revolution. The review yielded a total of 130 studies. Seven major themes and 16 sub-themes emerged from the inductive analysis. Several empirically validated cross-cultural models on international students were used to categorize the themes (e.g., Berry, 1997; Safdar et al., 2003; Schartner & Young, 2016; Ward, 1996; Ward & Geeraert, 2016). Many of the themes and sub-themes that were included in the results were found within these theoretical frameworks. For example, socio-cultural and psychological adaptation from Ward (1996), academic adaptation from Schartner and Young (2016), acculturation and acculturation strategies from Berry (1996), in-group and out-group contact, social support, ethnic identity from Safdar's (2003)

MIDA model, and ecological (socio-political factors) of the home and host country from Ward and Geeraert (2016) were used.

Following are the major themes with their sub-themes enclosed in brackets: (1) push-and-pull factors of migration; (2) academic adaptation (e.g., language in academic contexts, academic system, academic achievement, and academic-related fees) (3) socio-cultural adaptation (e.g., out-group and in-group contact, social support, discrimination and racism, cultural distance and cultural sensitivity, immigration regulations, visa and banking issues, language in social contexts, economic obstacles, freedom and gender issues, food); (4) psychological adaptation (e.g., homesickness and loneliness, depression and anxiety, happiness); (5) acculturation; (6) identity; and (7) future plans. Rather than going into detail about each sub-theme, the most significant findings and patterns that emerged from the analysis, particularly in reference to the socio-political chronology of Iran, will be highlighted.

First and foremost, based on the findings of the studies, the classical literature's definition of international students (a sub-category of sojourners) as "voluntary" and "temporary" (Berry et al., 1987; Sam & Berry, 2016) challenged. Voluntary migration occurs when individuals decide to relocate to a different location of their own free will without being coerced by external factors, whereas involuntary (forced) migration occurs when individuals are forced to relocate to a different location due to external factors (e.g., economic crisis, war, unemployment) (Valentinyi et al., 2020). Temporary migrants typically return to their home country, whereas permanent migrants have no plans to do so (Chen et al., 2019). The current study clearly showed that for many Iranian international students, especially those who left Iran after the revolution, the motivation to move to a host country was not solely based on personal choice; rather, students were compelled to leave Iran due to external circumstances beyond their control, such as the negative socio-political conditions in Iran (e.g., lack of freedom in Iran, economic crisis).

Furthermore, not all Iranian international students' sojourns in the host country were temporary; many Iranian students opted to stay permanently, particularly when Iran's socio-political climate was unstable. Iranian students, particularly those after the revolution, had no intention of returning to Iran due to the country's negative socio-political conditions (e.g., war, hostage crisis, economic crisis), opting instead to settle permanently in their host country or move elsewhere as their socio-political, academic, and economic prospects were better elsewhere than in Iran. Therefore, this study proposes revising the classic definition of

international students as voluntary and temporary migrants and introducing involuntary and permanent migration as potential characteristics of international students.

This literature review also revealed the impact of socio-political factors on Iranian international students' adaptation. The socio-political factors were related to Iran, to the host country, or to the relationship between Iran and the host country. Specifically, the Iranian revolution, the Iran-Iraq war, the hostage crisis, economic sanctions, the U.S. travel ban, and lack of freedom in Iran were the most significant factors that were common and frequent across all the major themes that impacted Iranian students' academic, socio-cultural, and psychological adaptation.

The existing literature reviews found on international students, consistent with the current comprehensive review included in this dissertation, presented a range of adaptation issues (e.g., academic, social-cultural, and psychological adaptation, acculturation), including, but not limited to, economic challenges (e.g., Khanal & Gaulee, 2019; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Wenhua & Zhe, 2013), language barrier (e.g., Alharbi & Smith, 2018; Cao & Meng, 2021; Khanal & Gaulee, 2019; Li et al., 2014; Lillyman & Bennett, 2014; Wenhua & Zhe, 2013; Zhang & Goodson, 2011), discrimination (e.g., Alharbi & Smith, 2018; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Li et al., 2014; Cao & Meng, 2021; Wenhua & Zhe, 2013; Khanal & Gaulee, 2019; Zhang-Wu, 2018), homesickness-loneliness and/or depression-anxiety (e.g., Alharbi & Smith, 2018; Cao & Meng, 2021; Khanal & Gaulee, 2019; Li et al., 2014; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Wenhua & Zhe, 2013; Zhang & Goodson, 2011), academic system difficulties (e.g., Khanal & Gaulee, 2019; Wenhua & Zhe, 2013), social support (e.g., Alharbi & Smith, 2018; Li et al., 2014; Lillyman & Bennett, 2014; Zhang & Goodson, 2011), academic achievement (e.g., Alharbi & Smith, 2018; Lillyman & Bennett, 2014; Wenhua & Zhe, 2013), cultural differences (e.g., Lillyman & Bennett, 2014), visa obstacle (e.g., Khanal & Gaulee, 2019; Yan, 2020), and acculturation (e.g., acculturation orientation, acculturative stress, dietary acculturation) (Yan, 2020; Shi et al., 2021; Fu, 2015).

In contrast to the present study, where the most prevalent and significant contributing factors to cross-cultural adaptation difficulties were rooted in socio-political issues, the socio-political contributing factors were not heavily emphasized in the above literature reviews.

Several literature reviews have investigated the pull and push factors of international students (e.g., Abien & Mashatola, 2021; Lillyman & Bennett, 2014; Nafari et al., 2017; Zhai et al., 2019). Out of these reviews, only one (Nafari et al., 2017) focused specifically on Iranian international students, and their findings were in line with the findings of the present study. First, both the push and the pull factors were mentioned among Iranian students'

reasons for choosing their host country. In addition, consistent with the current study, in which socio-political push factors were mentioned, Iran's negative political situation and economic instability were the primary push factors for students in Nafari et al.'s (2017) study, and the pull factors were economic in nature (e.g., affordable tuition fees and living expenses, scholarship aid).

In contrast to the findings of the current review, only pull factors were mentioned in other literature reviews of international students (e.g., Abien & Mashatola, 2021; Lillyman & Bennett, 2014; Zhai et al., 2019). Academically related push factors were excluded from one literature review because the studies reviewed primarily focused on pull factors (Zhai et al., 2019). Some of the pull factors for international students among these reviews were employment opportunities (e.g., Albien & Mashatola, 2021; Lillyman & Bennett, 2014; Zhai et al., 2019), the colonial history between the host country and the home country (Albien & Mashatola, 2021; Lillyman & Bennett, 2014), easy visa policies (e.g., Zhai et al., 2019), language improvement and cultural exposure (Lillyman & Bennett, 2014), the pursuit of high-quality education, cost of living, and tuition fees (Albien & Mashatola, 2021).

One review specifically investigated the future plans of students (Zhai et al., 2019) and reported family ties, loneliness, the English language barrier, the perception of cultural distance, and better career opportunities in China as specific reasons why Chinese students return home. Family ties were also cited in the current study as a reason why pre-revolution Iranian students wanted to return home.

Overall, the majority of the aforementioned reviews relied on studies conducted predominantly after 2000. However, the current review differentiates itself by not imposing date restrictions, thereby allowing for the investigation and analysis of variations in adaptation experienced by Iranian students before and after the revolution. One notable finding from the present study was that post-revolution Iranian students encountered greater adaptation challenges compared to their pre-revolution counterparts. While it is important to note that pre-revolution students also faced adaptation issues, the findings suggest that post-revolution students reported more adaptation challenges related to their having experienced more negative socio-political issues compared to students who left Iran pre-revolution. These socio-political challenges include the 1979 revolution, the Iran-Iraq war, the U.S. hostage crisis, the ongoing economic crises, and sanctions against Iran. Even Iranian students who studied abroad in the early post-revolution years faced distinct adaptation challenges that differed from those faced by students who pursued education abroad in subsequent years after the revolution.

Iranian students have generally faced a variety of adaptation challenges; however, they have also exhibited signs of resilience and cross-cultural adaptability while actively seeking solutions to overcome the obstacles they encountered. The experiences of Iranian students abroad serve as a reflection of the hardships that continue to be faced by Iranians within Iran. The current *Woman, Life, Freedom* movement that started in 2022 captures the struggle that Iranians in Iran and outside of Iran encounter. Recently (November 30, 2022), Iranian students at over 200 universities around the world have been demonstrating solidarity with protesters inside Iran since Mahsa (Jina) Amini was killed in custody by Iran's morality police in September 2022 for violating hijab laws (Puchniak, 2022). Based on the studies included in the current review about Iranian international students, the attainment of a democratic society in Iran through the ongoing fight for freedom is anticipated to yield various positive outcomes specific to this group, such as a significant mitigation of the socio-political and economic adaptation difficulties encountered by Iranian international students, a significant decline in the rate of brain drain from Iran, and an increasing tendency for Iranian students who pursue education abroad to return home.

Implications

In the realm of research on international students, the prevailing focus has been on socio-cultural, psychological, academic, and economic factors (Alotaibi, 2021), aligning with the findings from prior reviews in the literature. As a result, it is suggested that future cross-cultural research also focus on encompassing the socio-political factors of both the home and host countries, as well as the diplomatic relationships between them. Moreover, it is essential for researchers to consider the chronological sequence of socio-political transformations when examining the experiences and cross-cultural adaptation of international students.

Limitations

There are a few caveats to this review. Given the extensive number of included studies, the most prominent and compelling themes and sub-themes were prioritized. Other potential sub-themes, such as the impact of demographic factors, university services, and student recommendations to universities, among others, could not be explored due to space constraints. Finally, considering the methodological heterogeneity across the large number of studies included in this review, a formal quality assessment (risk of bias) evaluation was not conducted. Instead, subjective evaluations of the quality of the studies were used to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. However, it is worth mentioning that this decision to not conduct a formal quality assessment acknowledges the diverse and unique

methodological approaches that shaped each study and avoids imposing a one-size-fits-all evaluation that may not fairly represent the richness and complexity of the existing literature.

Conclusion

This review comprehensively investigated the experiences and cross-cultural adaptation of Iranian international students. The analyses allowed for the observation of the challenges to the adaptation of Iranian students during different socio-political periods. Iranian students faced adaptation challenges to some degree during all socio-political epochs. Students before the revolution faced fewer adaptation challenges than Iranian students after the revolution, owing to the latter's greater exposure to political upheaval. Many of the challenges faced by Iranian students abroad mirror those experienced by people in Iran throughout history. If the socio-political characteristics of Iran improve and the *Woman, Life, Freedom* movement in Iran becomes successful, Iranian international students will encounter significantly fewer difficulties with their adaptation in their host nations, and they will become more inclined to return to Iran, which reduces the brain drain condition that Iran is currently facing.

CHAPTER FIVE

Longing for Independence, yet Depending on Family Support: A Qualitative Analysis of Psychosocial Adaptation of Iranian International Students in Hungary[9]

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[9] Hosseini-Nezhad et al. (2019)

Introduction

This dissertation has previously discussed the significance of acculturation and cross-cultural adaptation within the existing literature. Additionally, it was mentioned earlier in previous chapters that factors such as social support and satisfaction of needs for autonomy impact adaptation. Kagitcibasi (2005) developed a theory called Autonomous-Related Self with two separate dimensions: Agency and Interpersonal Distance. These dimensions make up four conceptualizations of agency and self-in-relation to others called: (1) autonomous-related self, (2) autonomous-separate self, (3) heteronomous-related self, and (4) heteronomous-separate self. *Autonomy* is defined as a willful agency without being separated from others; heteronomy is the action that is controlled from outside; separation is a low degree of connectedness with others on the interpersonal distance dimension; and relatedness is a high degree of connectedness with others on the interpersonal distance dimension (Kagitcibasi, 2005, 2007).

According to Kagitcibasi (2007), the psychological health and adaptation of immigrant children are enhanced when the development of the autonomous-related self is nurtured. It is argued that the autonomous-related self exhibits adaptiveness in response to societal demands for autonomy. Furthermore, this adaptiveness is bolstered by the mental support received from close connections (Kagitcibasi, 2007). In a study conducted with university students from Turkey, the U.S., Hong Kong, and Sweden, students admitted that an individual could be autonomous and have a close bond with someone at the same time (Kagitcibasi, 2005, 2007).

Research Aim

This qualitative research aimed to explore the intercultural experiences of Iranian international students in Hungary and investigate the factors that impacted their experiences. To achieve this goal, thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's approach (2006) was employed to identify the key themes related to psychosocial adaptation, which serve as the central focus of this investigation.

Method

It is important to note that this study is part of a larger research project encompassing three qualitative empirical studies, each with distinct aims while collectively focusing on the adaptation of Iranian students in Hungary. It should be highlighted that the subsequent qualitative empirical studies discussed in the following chapters (Chapters 6 and 7) also draw upon the same set of interview data and involve the same 20 Iranian students studying in

Hungary. By investigating the adaptation and experiences of Iranian students across these studies, a more comprehensive understanding of the adaptation processes among Iranian students in this specific context can be achieved.

The research design adopted in the current study was an inductive approach for qualitative data analysis carried out through semi-structured in-depth interviews to elicit the intercultural experiences of Iranian students in Hungary that were significant to their cross-cultural adaptation. Thematic analysis was deemed the most appropriate method of analysis as the study focused on identifying themes within the participants' perspectives on their intercultural experiences in Hungary.

Ethics

Permission to conduct this research, along with the subsequent empirical studies in Chapters 6 and 7, was granted by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education and Psychology at the Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) in Budapest, Hungary.

Participants

Twenty Iranian international students (13 males and seven females) participated in an in-depth semi-structured interview, of which 25% were graduates and 75% were undergraduates. Their ages ranged from 18 to 36 ($M = 25.8$, $SD = 5.59$), and they were studying in English. The study fields of the participants were Medicine ($n = 5$), Psychology ($n = 4$), Dentistry ($n = 4$), Pharmacy ($n = 3$), Fine arts ($n = 1$), Business Administration and Management ($n = 1$), International relations ($n = 1$), and Architecture ($n = 1$). At the time of the first interview round, the average duration of students' stay in Hungary was 4.22 years ($SD = 3.52$). The minimum length of stay was six months, and the maximum period of stay was 14 years.

The inclusion criteria were Iranian undergraduate and graduate students in Hungary aged over 18 who have lived in Hungary for at least three months. Each interview lasted approximately one to two hours and was digitally audio-recorded with the consent of the participants.

Procedures

Participants were mainly recruited via social media platforms, in particular via posting an advertisement form on Facebook groups (see Appendix C). They were recruited over five months, between October 2017 and February 2018. A few participants were recruited via snowball sampling. The benefit of the snowball sampling technique is that it "*often*

shorten[s] *the time and diminish*[es] *the cost required to assemble a participant group of sufficient size and diversity*" (Sadler et al., 2010, p. 370).

The primary purpose of the study presented to the participants in the advertisement form was to explore the intercultural experiences of Iranian students in Hungary. Prior to each interview, written consent was obtained from each participant (see Appendix C). Interviews were carried out face-to-face using a semi-structured format. The main reason face-to-face interviews were chosen was to establish rapport with the participants. Most participants preferred being interviewed in Farsi (Persian), while three preferred English. The longest interview transcription was 29 pages, and the shortest was 16.

Instrumentation

Demographic Questions

The demographic data questions consist of items including age, gender, the name of the college or university, previous experiences of living abroad, marital status, the field of study, students' sources of financial support, financial status, employment status, the language of studies, English and Hungarian language proficiency level, academic competency level, and housing information (living with co-nationals, internationals, or Hungarians).

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

A set of semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix C) comprising 13 topics was employed to facilitate open discussions on students' living experiences in Hungary. These interview questions were formulated based on existing literature that primarily explored international students' socio-cultural, psychological, and academic adaptation. The topics covered a broad range of factors, including but not limited to the factors influencing students' decision to study abroad (push and pull factors), socio-cultural adaptation (e.g., interactions with in-group and out-group members, perceptions of host attitudes, cultural differences, social support systems, prior intercultural experiences, gender-role related experiences, daily challenges, available resources, psychological adaptation (e.g., mental well-being in Hungary, intercultural stress, acculturative stressors, feelings of loneliness and homesickness, life satisfaction, and happiness), and academic adaptation (e.g., academic challenges, perceived academic competency, the need for and recommendations regarding university support systems, and the student's experiences with the academic system in Hungary).

Notably, in each of the three empirical qualitative studies (Chapters 5, 6, and 7), only a few selected topics were chosen for analysis, and not all were investigated.

Data Analysis

Thematic Analysis

The interview transcripts were mainly analyzed using the six thematic analysis phases outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006).

In the first phase, the audiotape was listened to several times before doing the verbatim transcription on *oTranscribe* software. For the three interviews conducted in English, the data were directly transcribed via *oTranscribe*; however, for the rest of the interviews conducted in Persian, the translation and transcription of the data from Persian to English co-occurred on *oTranscribe*.

In the second phase, the English transcripts were coded on Atlas.ti6. First, open coding was utilized both line-by-line and against a sentence or paragraph, which generated 103 initial codes.

In the third phase, the generated codes were further classified into categories based on their similarities. In order to organize groups of codes, two methods were used: (1) making families and (2) assigning prefixes to the codes. First families were made in "Code Family Manager" on Atlas.ti6. Following, specific prefixes —in this case, symbols (i.e., #, @, ¶, §, Ç, ©, ®, etc.) — were assigned to groups of codes (Woolf, 2007). "*This draws attention to the specialized purpose or features of codes and causes them to sort together as a group in the Code Manager*" (Woolf & Silver, 2018, p. 44). After grouping and organizing the codes were complete, searching for the themes was performed. The initial codes that were created in the second stage were re-coded and refined based on their similarities and overlaps, and then these new sets of codes were combined into potential themes.

In the fourth phase, the potential themes that were extracted in the third stage were reviewed again to see if they needed further refinement, elimination, combination, and/or separation to obtain final themes. The final themes were checked based on the similarity of the extracted codes.

In the fifth stage, final themes were refined, meaning that they were named and defined.

In the sixth stage, after the themes were defined and named, the final report conveyed the results of the analysis in a way that assured the validity of the result by using empirical evidence and a theoretical framework from the literature.

Results

The result of the thematic analysis generated three key themes: (1) sojourn's experience as self-growth, (2) uncertainty in intercultural interactions, and (3) striving for autonomous-related self.

Theme 1: Sojourn's Experience as Self-Growth

The majority of the participants reported being generally happy in Hungary and happy in their day-to-day lives. The participants stated:

> *"I am happy, even from the beginning. If I go back in time, probably I would choose here [...] I am satisfied"* (P8, male, 36 years old, 14 years in Hungary).
>
> *"I am both happy and unhappy at the same time. I am happy because I am independent [...] Living alone is the part that I am not happy about"* (P16, female, 24 years old, 1.5 years in Hungary).
>
> *"Living alone helps self-growth, and it will be part of your personality"* (P16, female, 24 years old, 1.5 years in Hungary).
>
> *"I am happy with the fact that I am in Hungary [...] I am happy with my day-to-day life in Hungary"* (P13, male, 20 years old, 5 years in Hungary).
>
> *"Right now I am satisfied and happy [...] I am happy that I have come here"* (P15, female, 30 years old, 3 years in Hungary).
>
> *"I am generally a person who tries to be happy [...] I try to keep myself happy anywhere I am [...] My family is not here with me, that is why I try to make myself happy with social media [...]"* (P6, male, 33 years old, 6 years in Hungary).

The majority of the Iranian students in Hungary stated that they are not sad about being away from Iran and family, and only a few reported being sad. Typical responses when asked if they were sad to be away from Iran and their families were:

> *"No, I am not sad"* (P10, female, 19 years old, 3 months in Hungary).
>
> *"I am pleased with the fact that I am not in Iran"* (P3, female, 22 years old, 2 years in Hungary).

"For sure I am sad that I am away, but the things that I have here, the good feelings that I have here, have been much better than being away from Iran [...]" (P13, male, 20 years old, 5 years in Hungary).

"Here there is more freedom; I am independent [...] I feel I will grow faster [...] I only like to be in contact with an international person, to learn a new culture [...] I have studied in English. It has been a huge benefit, and our university is accepted in most European countries" (P13, male, 20 years old, 5 years in Hungary).

Most participants did not experience homesickness in Hungary; only a few reported feeling homesick. Moreover, half of the participants reported feeling lonely, while the other half did not. Participants' responses stated that they did not feel homesick or alone; however, they did at times miss their parents:

"The feeling of homesickness [...], no; I mean because I can go back to Iran anytime I want [...] Feeling of loneliness, yes... It's not a feeling of loneliness, but perhaps I only miss my parents sometimes" (P9, male, 21 years old, 1 year in Hungary).

"Yes, I feel homesick [...] Iranians here should go after their interests because they are coming from Iran, they are given this opportunity to go after their interests [...] It is important for them not to only focus on studying, [...] If they make their life multi-dimensional, they can easier adapt to homesickness, depression, and being away from home" (P16, female, 24 years old, 1.5 years in Hungary).

Overall, most students expressed happiness and satisfaction during their time in Hungary, with very few reporting sadness. Additionally, they did not view their separation from family and Iran as a source of depression or anxiety. Their improved psychological well-being in Hungary compared to Iran was primarily attributed to the opportunities and resources available in Hungary that they lacked or could not access in Iran. These resources encompassed, among other things, the ability to live independently and experience personal growth, greater freedom in Hungary as opposed to the restrictions and constraints in Iran, the chance to learn a new language and engage with diverse cultures, the opportunity to study in English, exposure to a multicultural environment, and the pursuit of a European degree.

Theme 2: Uncertainty in Intercultural Interactions

Half of the participants reported being nervous about how to behave in certain situations in Hungary, and the other half did not experience any anxiety or nervousness. Typical responses included:

"A lot of times [to become nervous] [...] I think I am presenting Iranians and Iranian culture; I feel like the whole Iran depends on me [...] I try not to do anything wrong, or say anything bad [...] It is on my mind to watch my behavior, like don't do this, sit properly, or eat clean, stuff like these" (P13, male, 20 years old, 5 years in Hungary).

"In the beginning, I had [anxiety]; now I don't have [anxiety]; I feel more comfortable [...]" (P19, female, 33 years old, 5 months in Hungary).

"I have stress, like how to make myself understood, stressed about not to say a word wrong [...] I am worried about what if I have made a person upset about the things that I am doing, or what if I am trying to make very close contact and make him/her feel bad" (P3, female, 22 years old, 2 years in Hungary).

The student's above statement reflects her stress and worries about being culturally sensitive in her interactions in Hungary. In Iran, close physical contact between same-gender friends is culturally accepted, including holding hands, hugging, and cheek-kissing. However, she recognizes that in Western culture, excessive physical contact can sometimes be misinterpreted as a sign of homosexuality, leading to potential discomfort or misunderstandings. Her concerns highlight the importance of cultural awareness and adaptation in cross-cultural interactions.

"Yes, it happens a lot [to be nervous in certain situations] [...] I think about what I have said or what I have done when I am doing something [...] The biggest problem is that when you see people from different countries, you don't know if to shake hands, give hugs, or kiss [...] It's very problematic" (P12, male, 20 years old, 3 years in Hungary).

In the above excerpt, the male student experienced nervousness in specific situations. He was confused about how to greet people from different countries—whether to shake hands, hug, or kiss—likely due to cultural differences. In Iran, cheek kissing is more common among friends and family, whereas Western culture tends to favor hugging. This cultural distinction likely contributed to his confusion in non-verbal communication.

Theme 3: Striving for Autonomous-Related Self

In this study, many Iranian students embraced being independent in Hungary, and they responded:

"*You become more independent [...] because in Iran, unfortunately, the chance of living alone is very low; you are either married or living with your family [...] So when you come abroad, you become independent*" (P2, female, 31 years old, 7 years in Hungary).

"*I see myself as an independent person. Now I feel I am deciding about my thoughts, myself. Possibly I am not following my family in many situations, and I feel I'm starting a second life. Perhaps the first life is now over, and now this is the second life*" (P10, female, 19 years old, 3 months in Hungary).

"*When international students come here, they must live independently without the family; this is very beneficial for them. Because Hungarians who live with their family, keep nagging that their family controls them and doesn't let them go out*" (P12, male, 20 years old, 3 years in Hungary).

The oldest male participant articulated:

"*In Iran [...] you are beside your family. Family supports you in many things, and you also don't even need to do your personal stuff yourself. However, outside of Iran, the positive point is that you learn how to live independently [...] You should try to handle many things, like expenses, your friendship [...] These things teach you and increase your experience for your future life*" (P8, male, 36 years old, 14 years in Hungary).

He continued:

"*The family will focus on you so much, and they pay attention to whom you are hanging out with; however, here you somehow decide for yourself with whom you want to spend time. This stuff increases your experiences.*"

For many participants, their parents' control limited their independent living and encouraged more dependency on them, preventing them from learning how to manage everyday tasks (i.e., banking and transactions, shopping, and office work, etc.). Except for a few Iranian students in this study who were either financially or psychologically independent from their family, the majority relied on their family, mostly their parents, for financial and psychological support.

The participants noted that:

"Parents support me both financially and psychologically. I haven't had the experience of living alone. When they visit me, they give me support" (P16, female, 24 years old, 1.5 years in Hungary).

"When my parents visit me [in Hungary] I definitely don't need to cook [...] When I come back home [from university], the food is ready, which is so relaxing [...] My father does the shopping, and my mother does the cooking, so when I come home, I am only busy with studying [...]" (P6, male, 33 years old, 6 years in Hungary).

"For financial support, I turn to my father; for psychological support, I turn to my mother" (P9, male, 21 years old, 1 year in Hungary).

"During the exam period, I talk less to my parents, but if I have to do something and I need help that is related to them, I call them almost every hour [...], but on average I contact them every two days" (P13, male, 20 years old, 5 years in Hungary).

"My mom almost calls me once a day. If my phone is not off, then I can talk to her almost every night on Skype, almost every night" (P2, female, 31 years old, 7 years in Hungary).

"I am very close to my family; I talk to my mother almost every day [...] University was hard [...] I was getting help from my family [...] because my parents are doctors [...] I have a good family" (P20, male, 25 years old, 6.5 years in Hungary).

Although family support had beneficial effects on the psychosocial adaptation and mental health of Iranian students in Hungary, in some situations, the support from the family, especially parents, was not helpful since it created excessive worries in the parents.

A thirty-year-old female student stated that:

We talk to our families a lot because they constantly get worried [...] My mom gives me instructions [...] She tells me to close the door [...] close the window [...] I am very close to my parents [...] Parents are the only people who give you real love, period [...] Sometimes I get the feeling that I need their love [...]; however, for problems, I don't want to bother them [...] I used to bother my mom a lot on Skype, and I realized that it was really affecting her [...] If I have a problem, I try to solve it with my friends or one of my sisters, but I don't want to talk about problems with my parents. (P2, female, 31 years old, 7 years in Hungary)

The youngest male participant mentioned:

"For psychological support, I honestly turn to nobody [...] I don't want to contact my family because they get too sensitive and go crazy" (P5, male, 18 years old, 2 years in Hungary).

From these excerpts, it can be implied that although parents may have good intentions and doubtlessly care about their children, sometimes they have difficulties in managing and setting the boundaries between themselves and their children, and they might hold on to their adult children too tightly which makes their children feel incompetent to live independently abroad. The majority of Iranian students in Hungary preferred to get help from their parents, as they truly trusted them; however, when facing a difficulty, some chose to either solve their issues by themselves or turn to others for support.

Discussion

Using thematic analysis, this study explored the intercultural experiences of Iranian international students in Hungary and the factors that influenced their experiences. Thematic analysis identified three key themes: (1) sojourn's experience as self-growth, (2) uncertainty in intercultural interactions, and (3) striving for autonomous-related self. All three themes were significant in understanding the psychosocial adaptation of Iranian students in Hungary. Below, each key theme will be explored by referring to the relevant literature.

Theme 1: Sojourn's Experience as Self-Growth

Most students' evaluation of their sojourn experience was more positive as they reported being happy in Hungary, and the majority did not express sadness about being away from Iran and their families. This result is consistent with previous literature on international students. In one study conducted among Iranian international students in Australia, Nahidi et al. (2018) found that the majority of participants were not distressed due to several protective factors, including strong social support, good physical health, and more religious engagement and spirituality, which acted as buffers against students' psychological health. In one Australian study, Rosenthal et al. (2008) found that the majority of international students who were from different nationalities reported positive psychological well-being (low levels of depression, anxiety, and/or stress), and only a few of them perceived the experience of studying abroad profoundly damaging their mental health.

In addition to the positive feelings reported by the majority of the participants in the current study, many Iranian students believed that studying abroad led to their self-growth. This

result is also consistent with the findings of a qualitative study (Cui, 2013) conducted on international students in China and France that investigated the experiences of international students and their significant impact on students' self-development. According to Cui's research, studying abroad was perceived by many students as a transformative life experience that contributed to self-acknowledgment, achieving maturity, and exploring new aspects of themselves and the world around them. The students believed that moving abroad led them to become "independent," "tolerant," and "responsible" individuals. It became an "*experience of self-discovery and self-development in an unfamiliar context, a process of self-realization that reinforces their confidence, challenges their limits and helps them find their potential in an international environment*" (Cui, 2013, p. 472).

Many students in the current study expressed that they did not experience homesickness or loneliness despite missing their family back home. This apparent contradiction arises from homesickness typically associated with missing family and friends, the familiar home environment, and feelings of insecurity and loneliness (Fisher & Hood, 1987). Nevertheless, it is essential to highlight that merely missing family and friends is insufficient to consider someone homesick. Homesickness entails "*an intense longing for home accompanied by a depressive mood and a variety of somatic complaints*" (Van Tilburg et al., 1996, p. 899). Moreover, for Iranians, the term "homesickness might carry a distinct connotation of being separated from their homeland, as the Persian equivalent of "homesickness" literally translates to "moving away from homeland." This could explain why the mention of "homesickness" did not evoke feelings of missing their families but rather emotions of yearning for one's native home.

Theme 2: Uncertainty in Intercultural Interactions

Numerous Iranian students reported being unsure of how to behave in specific situations in Hungary, most likely because they lacked effective intercultural communication and intercultural adaptation due to high anxiety levels. This increased uncertainty and fear in interactions with non-Iranians. Moreover, some Iranian students may have experienced stress related to the responsibility of being seen as "foreign ambassadors" (Ward et al., 2001) during their interactions with out-group. This aspect likely played a role in influencing their feelings of anxiety. Some students became vigilant about their behaviour, possibly because they saw themselves as representatives of Iran. Their anxiety might be attributed to the concept of "*taarof*,"a social principle or art of social etiquette in Iranian culture defined as "*a system of*

ceremonial politeness" (Haghighat, 2016, p. 9); a more detailed definition of *taarof* was provided in the previous chapter. Many Iranians try hard to be respectful, modest, and humble toward other people. The attempt to be the best version of oneself in front of others requires effort and energy, which, in turn, could cause stress.

Moreover, nonverbal communication significantly differs across cultures and can create cross-cultural misinterpretations (Masgoret & Ward, 2006). Some students probably had problems understanding non-verbal communication due to the contradictions between their cultural schemas regarding non-verbal cues and those of the host culture. This further created anxiety in them since it is challenging to learn the "*heuristic knowledge that is embedded within a culture*" (Masgoret & Ward, 2006, p. 63).

According to Gudykunst (2006), successful communication in intercultural situations arises when individuals manage their anxiety and uncertainty. A way to improve this process is by practicing mindfulness in one's communication. In this study, some students reported feeling anxious and uncertain during their intercultural interactions. Moreover, some of these students acknowledged their struggle with effective communication, leading to heightened anxiety when interacting with non-Iranians.

Theme 3: Striving for Autonomous-Related Self

Family is possibly the most distinctive attribute of Iranian culture (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2003). In this culture, families bear the primary responsibility for their children throughout all stages of life, with the expectation that children will reside with their parents until they decide to marry (Valizadeh et al., 2018). Nevertheless, young Iranians are influenced by Western individualistic cultures through social media and by the collectivistic culture of their families (Mortazavi, 2006).

In many societies that embrace collectivistic cultures, families are distinguished by close connections (relatedness); conversely, in individualistic Western societies, emphasis is placed on prioritizing autonomy (Kagitcibasi, 2002, 2013). The Autonomous-Related self is a healthier conceptualization in Kagitcibasi's (2005) theory of the Autonomous-Related Self because autonomy and relatedness are considered two essential human needs. In Western countries with more individualistic values, autonomy is related to separation from others, while in the "Majority World" with collectivistic cultures, autonomy is related to integration with others (Kagitcibasi, 2016).

Hofstede's country comparison tool, which is used to assess and compare countries on various cultural dimensions like Power Distance, Individualism, Masculinity, Uncertainty Avoidance, Long Term Orientation, and Indulgence, shows that Iran scores 41 on the individualism dimension, classifying it as a collectivist country, emphasizing close and long-term group bonds, while in contrast, Hungary scores 80 on the individualism dimension, making it an individualistic country with a pronounced emphasis on individual autonomy over group relationships (Hofstede Insights, nd). This individualistic context in Hungary may, in part, have influenced Iranian international students' willingness and striving for autonomy. While cultural values play a role in Iran, making it a collectivistic society that emphasizes interdependence and strong group bonds, it is essential to recognize that economic hardship and unemployment often compel many Iranians to continue living with their families and rely on them for support. It is reported that approximately 75% of Iranians in their twenties still live with their parents, primarily due to financial constraints that prevent them from living independently (Chase, 2016).

Having a sense of relatedness greatly facilitates adaptation, and its absence can significantly impede happiness when someone finds themselves in a different cultural context. When both the needs for autonomy and relatedness are met, individuals can establish strong interpersonal bonds while retaining their independence in decision-making. Given that unfulfilled needs cause anxiety, elevated independence, and relatedness are identified with positive psychological well-being and happiness (Merdin-Uygur & Hesapci, 2018). Many students in the current study expressed motivation to have an autonomous and independent life.

It has been suggested that young immigrants adapt to the new ways of life and are influenced by their peers in the host society (Kagitcibasi, 2003); therefore, they are exposed and tend to adopt independent values. However, youth typically do not like being segregated from their parents; instead, they are happy to connect with them. In this way, they aim to have an autonomous-related self (Kagitcibasi, 2003). Many Iranian students had an intrinsic need to be autonomous, "*the need to feel like a personal agent in one's environment, competence, and the need to experience a sense of control and efficacy in one's actions*" (Hagger et al., 2014, p. 566).

While Iranian students were eager to live independently from their parents, they received most of their support from their families and maintained contact with them throughout their stay in Hungary. One study reported that Iranian students who felt homesick were more capable of adapting when they stayed in touch with their parents at home (Scharp et al., 2016). In the

present study, most participants as young as 18 and as old as 36 received either or both financial and psychological support from their parents. Brannan et al. (2013) examined the correlation between perceived social support and indicators of subjective well-being among students from Iran, Jordan, and the U.S. The findings showed that specifically for Iranian participants, only perceived support from their family, but not from friends, predicted more positive emotions and a significant reduction in negative emotions.

No study was found in the literature that specifically investigated the motivation of Iranian international students to be independent while also connecting with their families. However, in one study (Watkins et al., 2000), the importance and satisfaction ratings of independent and interdependent self-construals among students and adults in Iran, the USA, Russia, and Hong Kong were assessed. The result of the study demonstrated that Iranian students in Iran considered both independence and related-self to be more important compared to their peers from Hong Kong and Russia. Furthermore, Iranian students valued independent-self more than American students. Iranian students in Hungary, similar to those in Iran, may simultaneously value independence (autonomy) and interdependence (family relatedness).

Limitations

This study had some methodological limitations that need to be considered. In order to enhance the validity of the result and analytical reliability, further research is suggested to do double-coding, "*with more than one researcher independently assigning pre-specified codes to the data*" (Ranney et al., 2015, p. 10). Furthermore, although thematic analysis is a flexible method for data analysis, "*it can be potentially paralysing the researcher trying to decide what aspects of the data to focus on*" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 27). Initially, various themes emerged after the analysis of the interview data; however, to maintain a more focused investigation, many themes had to be excluded for later exploration.

Implications

Further research could implement quantitative research to explore psychosocial adaptation and the factors that facilitate or hinder the adaptation of international students. Additionally, to enhance the credibility of the findings, it is recommended that future research conduct longitudinal research. Observing the psychosocial adaptation of Iranian students in Hungary over an extended period can identify any significant changes, and the results will carry greater validity.

Furthermore, the result of the present study can help universities and clinicians provide counseling and therapy services to strengthen international students' positive feelings and reduce their negative ones. Interventions focusing on a broad spectrum of social, physical, and cultural activities that provide opportunities for international students to socialize with the host culture, which could effectively manage their negative feelings, are strongly recommended. It is also suggested that universities assist students in securing paid employment and internships in order to achieve partial financial independence.

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the intercultural experiences of Iranian international students residing in Hungary. The findings of the thematic analysis revealed that Iranian students in Hungary generally expressed more happiness than sadness. Additionally, most students did not express homesickness during their time in Hungary. Students' motivation for independence and their parents' psychological and financial support may have mitigated negative psychological feelings such as sadness, anxiety, and loneliness. Several participants expressed a desire for independent living while maintaining a connection with their family.

Autonomy and relatedness are essential for international students' well-being and psychosocial adaptation, including Iranian students in Hungary. In addition to motivation for autonomy and family support, various factors may have contributed to participants experiencing more happiness than sadness. These factors include socio-political freedom in Hungary compared to Iran, job opportunities, the value of obtaining a university degree abroad, avoiding a highly competitive university entrance exam in Iran, escaping adverse economic conditions, and exposure to new experiences. For numerous Iranian students, the combination of personal autonomy and psychological and financial assistance from their families significantly fostered their happiness and satisfaction during their time in Hungary.

CHAPTER SIX

"We Begin 300 Meters Behind the Starting Line:" Adaptation of Iranian Students in Hungary in the Post-Sanctions Era[10]

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[10] Hosseini-Nezhad et al. (2021).

Introduction

In the preceding chapters, it was demonstrated that Iranian international students faced negative socio-political factors that adversely influenced their adaptation while studying abroad. Some of these factors were associated with visa-related challenges, opening and closing bank accounts, and the currency crisis due to sanctions imposed on Iran.

This study specifically explores the trajectory of the psychosocial adaptation of Iranian students in Hungary and the challenges they faced regarding visas, banking, and the currency crisis. The currency crisis refers to the rapid depreciation of the Iranian currency (the rial) to a historic low point against the U.S. dollar in 2018, after the U.S. unilaterally withdrew from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, commonly known as the Iran nuclear deal, and imposed sanctions against Iran in 2018.

By looking at the lists of restricted and sanctioned countries (EU Sanctions Map, 2020; Office of Foreign Assets Control, 2019), Iran, compared with the other top 10 countries with the highest number of international students in Hungary,[11] is the only one that is restricted and sanctioned by three regions/organizations namely, the U.S., European Union (EU), and United Nations. A majority of the students in Hungary are from countries that either have no sanctions imposed on them, or have sanctions that are less restrictive compared with those on Iran.

This study aims to create new knowledge by focusing on students from one of the Middle Eastern countries with the highest number of students in Hungary and one that is under more restrictive regulations and sanctions. To date, no studies have longitudinally investigated the psychosocial adaptation of Iranian students in Hungary regarding the effects of sanctions against Iran on Iranian students' mental health.

Generally, research on the adaptation of international students is primarily based on a cross-sectional design, and there is a paucity of longitudinal studies (Hirai et al., 2015). Consequently, as suggested by Ward and Geeraert (2016), it is time to move beyond cross-sectional studies and focus on longitudinal studies to advance acculturation theory and research. As mentioned in the earlier chapter, Ward and Geeraert (2016) called attention to the importance

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[11] The 10 countries with the highest number of international students in Hungary were (in descending order): Germany, Romania, China, Serbia, Iran, Slovakia, Ukraine, Turkey, Norway, and Nigeria (Oktatási Hivatal, 2017-2018).

of including the broader ecological context in the home and host cultures. Policies such as visa and banking restrictions as well as sanctions could be understood as consequential changes in the ecological context that impact international students' adaptation.

Literature Review

There is considerable research on international students that has mainly focused on the psychological and social aspects of their experiences. However, comparatively few studies have investigated international students' experiences from political viewpoints (Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2017). International students share common experiences; however, specific experiences are comparatively more challenging for Iranian students than those from other countries, especially nations with fewer or no restrictions or sanctions imposed on them.

Previous research reported a range of challenges that Iranian international students encounter, such as finding jobs, language problems, culture shock, and cultural distance (Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005), obtaining a visa, immigration processes, and financial problems due to an unsteady economy and sanctions on Iran (Khodabandelou et al., 2015). This study focuses exclusively on visas, banking, and currency crisis challenges facing Iranian students in Hungary. Below, examples of these obstacles found in the literature are presented.

Visa and Immigration Challenges

Before the Iranian revolution in 1979, many Iranian students went abroad unhindered to continue their studies; however, during that time, Iranians could travel without a visa to many places, and the Iranian rial was strong (Ehteshami, 2017). Following the revolution, sanctions were imposed against Iran, resulting in weak diplomatic ties with the West, and restricted freedom of movement for Iranians traveling abroad (Bianchi & Stephenson, 2014).

The sanctions influenced many things, such as visa processing, which was considerably slowed down or halted altogether. The Iranian passport is globally ranked 101st (Henley & Partners, 2019), making it one of the world's weakest passports. Based on the Henley and Partners (2019) Passport Index, holders of the Iranian passport require a visa for 187 countries and can travel visa free to 39.

Generally, international students have been found to face adaptation difficulties related to visas and immigration (Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013). These include strict visa policies ranging from difficulties getting an entrance visa and extending a visa, to preparing documents. One study reported that the main issues that the Iranian students faced in the Netherlands were

related to getting a visa, gathering documents, such as proof of financial support for living and studying permit, providing an income certificate and passport for accommodation, and obtaining work permits (Astinova, 2011).

Iranian students in the U.S. have also experienced challenges such as difficulties obtaining visas before and after entering the U.S. (Ditto, 2014). In Ditto's (2014) study, the process of getting a visa frustrated Iranian students the most. Similarly, in another study, Iranian students in the U.S. reported that the limitations imposed on the validity and length of their student visas impacted their life to the point that they could not return to Iran to visit their family for an extended time out of the fear of losing their visa (Karimzad, 2016).

Banking Challenges

Following the sanctions, many banks discriminated against their Iranian customers by either making it difficult for them to open a bank account (Eurofast Global Ltd, 2017) or abruptly freezing or closing their bank accounts in compliance with economic sanctions against Iran (Mobasher, 2018). As a result of bank closures, Iranian students abroad faced challenges regarding transferring funds from Iran (Astinova, 2011), making it difficult for many families to transfer money to their children (Hafezi, 2016). Iranian students in European countries, such as Spain, Germany, Italy, and France, reported that the banks either refused to open bank accounts for them or froze their bank accounts (Jafari, 2019). Iranian students in Scandinavia (Johansson, 2013) and Canada (Eybagi, 2013) faced similar banking challenges.

Currency (Economic) Crisis Challenges

Shortly after the revolution, during the 1979–1981 hostage crisis, the U.S. imposed its first sanctions against Iran (Laub, 2015). In May 2018, the U.S. exited the Iran nuclear deal and reinstated economic sanctions against Iran (Gearan & DeYoung, 2018). Since 2018, Iran's economic situation has been sinking into a deep recession, and the Iranian currency is on the brink of collapse (Hossein-Zadeh, 2018). As of July 2020, the rial is considered the least valued currency in the world (Internet Forex Resource, 2020).

The sanctions affected ordinary people, including Iranian students abroad (Mehrabi, 2014). Students who were financially dependent on their families had to return home because their families could not afford to pay their tuition fees (Mehrabi, 2014). The situation has become even more difficult for students since there are reports that the Iranian government has

prevented students from buying dollars at a subsidized government rate (Financial Tribune, 2018; Torbati, 2012), which is lower than the free market rate.

Iranian students in Malaysia reported being affected by the collapse of the rial, which has led to many students withdrawing from their studies and dropping out (Bani Kamal & Hossain, 2017). The decline of the Iranian currency has also impacted Iranian students in the U.S. The currency crisis has made financial transactions difficult for students and for parents to transfer their children's tuition fees (Ditto, 2014). Iranian students in Scandinavia were also negatively affected by economic sanctions on Iran (Johansson, 2013). A majority of students were financially dependent on their parents, and as a result of the currency crisis, they either had less money to support themselves or had to ask their parents to send more money to pay for their expenses (Johansson, 2013). Similar currency crisis obstacles were experienced by Iranian students in Canada (Eybagi, 2013).

Aim of the Study

The current study explored the trajectory of psychosocial adaptation among Iranian students in Hungary and the challenges they faced. This study was conducted over a 7–12-month period to ensure there was at least a 6-month gap between the first and the second interviews (i.e., at least one full semester). The second interviews were conducted in the new academic year (2018–2019), as students' psychological adaptations in the host country tend to fluctuate with the new academic year (Golden, 1973; Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002). An attempt was made to ensure that sufficient time passed between the two interviews, allowing for follow-up on changes over at least one full semester.

The specific focus of this study was on visas, banking, and currency crisis challenges. In April 2018, the Iranian currency fell to its lowest rate in 35 years against the U.S. dollar, which occurred in between the two interviews. Initially, no specific challenges were predicted; however, after reading the interviews, the main socio-political and economic challenges that adversely impacted students' mental health were reported to be the currency crisis, visas, and bank-related issues. Hence, the main research questions guiding this study are as follows:

Q1: What are the main challenges that Iranian students face in Hungary that negatively impact their mental health?

Q2: How do Iranian students' mental health and adaptations change over time?

Methods

As mentioned in Chapter 5, the three qualitative empirical studies discussed in Chapters 5, 6, and 7 all utilize the same set of interview data collected during the initial round. The methodology pertaining to the first round of interviews has already been discussed in detail in Chapter 5; therefore, duplication of information is avoided in this chapter. Consequently, only the methodology employed for the follow-up interviews is presented in the following. This study adopted a longitudinal design using an inductive approach to qualitative content analysis (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004).

Participants

In the follow-up interviews, out of the 20 Iranian students who participated in the first interview round, 12 (five females and seven males) agreed to participate. The rest did not respond or had left Hungary due to the currency crisis.

Procedures

The follow-up interviews were conducted between September 2018 and October 2018 via audio call since the interviews were anticipated to take less time. Additionally, rapport had already been established in the first interviews. All the follow-up interviews were conducted in Persian.

A total of 32 interviews were conducted: 20 for the first round and 12 for the second round. The follow-up interviews were between 30 and 60 minutes in duration, and all were concurrently translated to English and transcribed verbatim on *oTranscribe* software. All the interviews similar to the first interview round were transferred from *oTranscribe* to Microsoft Word. The length of the interview transcripts in the second round ranged from six to eight pages.

Materials

Semi-structured Interview Questions

In the previous chapter, the demographic questions and the topics comprising the semi-structured interview questions were outlined. For the subsequent follow-up interviews, similar questions (see Appendix C) were posed; however, the primary emphasis was on exploring how the students' adaptation had changed over the last six months (since the first interview). Additionally, given the occurrence of a currency crisis during the second interview, questions pertaining to the influence of the currency crisis on the students' mental health were also included.

Data Analysis

An inductive approach to content analysis was employed to analyze the interview transcripts (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). An inductive approach is one of the most common methods of analyzing data utilized in qualitative research, in which the authors do not have any preconceived theories or categories for data analysis (Burnard et al., 2008). During the initial stage, the data was listened to, translated, and transcribed using *oTranscribe*. The transcripts were then thoroughly reviewed to gain familiarity with the data and identify recurring patterns and themes.

The interviews were considered as units of analysis, as "*the most suitable unit of analysis is whole interviews*" (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004, p. 106). After that, each interview text was divided into meaning units. Meaning units were considered to be the paragraphs or sentences from the interview transcripts that were similar with regards to the content.

Codes were constructed from these meaning units. In order to formulate codes, open coding on Atlas.ti was performed, line by line. The initial codes were reviewed for similarity in content, and then combined into code groups on Atlas.ti. In the Code Manager, 59 distinct code groups for the first interviews and 27 code groups for the follow-up interviews were classified. Examples of meaning units and codes are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Meaning Unit to Code from Interview Transcripts

Meaning unit	Code
"The visa that immigration gives is miserably hard to get. The visa expires very soon."	Challenges with immigration visa validity and obtaining visas
"One day, you wake up, and you realize that the currency's value has decreased by half."	A substantial decrease in the value of the rial

Table 2

Themes Emerging from the Interview Transcripts.

Themes (Topics)	Higher-order category	Code group	
Visa and banking challenges	Obtaining and expiry of a visa	•	Problems with obtaining a visa
		•	Frustration with visa expiration.
	Bank account opening and closure issues	•	Problems with opening a bank account.
		•	Bank account closure
Impact of the currency crisis in Iran on mental health	Currency crisis issues	•	A decrease in the value of the rial
		•	Financial pressure due to the currency crisis
	Currency crisis and mental health	•	Currency crisis causing depression or Anxiety
		•	Currency crisis causing uncertainty
Positive and negative changes in psychological well-being	Positive mental health	•	Mental health improved in Hungary
		•	Optimism about future
	Negative mental health	•	Mental health got worse in Hungary

Similar or overlapping code groups were combined into higher-order categories on Atlas.ti. Similar higher-order categories were further clustered into potential themes. In line with content analysis methodology, the study did not limit itself to categories but instead focused on creating comprehensive topics that addressed the research question by merging similar higher-

order categories (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). Examples of code groups, higher-order categories, and themes are presented in Table 2. Finally, the emerged themes and findings were summarized and analyzed using the relevant literature.

<center>**Results**</center>

Three major interconnected themes emerged from the data. They were visa and banking challenges, the impact of the currency crisis in Iran on mental health, and positive and negative changes in psychological well-being. All themes that emerged from the data analysis are presented separately below.

Theme 1: Visa and Banking Challenges

Challenges in obtaining and extending visas and the underlying reasons made students anxious. According to many participants, one of the reasons they faced visa challenges was their nationality, which was perceived as discriminatory. One participant who encountered many problems applying for a visa to spend one semester studying in another country stated:

> *"My worst experience was anxiety regarding visas … I think because I am Iranian, things will continue like this"* (P4, female, 25 years old, 13 years in Hungary).

The anxiety caused by applying for a visa as an Iranian seemed to persist over time. Some participants also expressed worries about extending their visas after graduation. However, participants were aware that being Iranian was an obstacle, which created uncertainty. One participant elaborated:

> "A big question mark appears after graduation, about what we should do … For us, Iranians, things are much harder because we are not EU citizens*"* (P8, male, 36 years old, 14 years in Hungary).

This new graduate student seemed ready to start doing her residency in a field of study that she liked; however, she felt discriminated against because she was aware that her EU peers could easily work after graduation, without visa complications. She further noted:

> *"We are placed in the second level. First, they give jobs to EU citizens … to us much later. Hassles about visas are in the first place."*

Iranian students have to leave Hungary after graduation since they cannot easily extend their visas unless they plan to work or continue with their studies. Most international students, especially students from the EU, will return to their home country to start working after graduation since their degree is recognized in their country. However, they also have the

opportunity to stay in Hungary for work or to move to other EU countries where they could find jobs. Since this opportunity is not available to Iranian students, it created a sense of inferiority among some students compared to their peers from the EU.

A participant used the analogy of a "*marathon*" to show the hardships Iranian students go through due to economic, political, and visa problems. He commented:

"Consider a marathon in which everyone wants to compete. If some start from 100 meters and others start from zero, we [Iranian students] begin 300 meters behind the starting line" (P9, male, 21 years old, 1 year in Hungary).

The visa obstacles created anxieties and uncertainties among Iranian students because they were unsure whether they would be able to extend their visas. This created even more anxiety because if they were not able to get a visa, they had to leave Hungary.

A majority of the participants did not intend to go back to Iran after graduation, because if they left the country, there would be no guarantee that they would be able to obtain a visa again; that is, there would be no way for them to return.

Considering that obtaining a visa is not guaranteed, and the visa application takes time, students were motivated to find jobs before their student visa expired so they could apply for a working visa, which is valid for a longer time than a student visa. Obtaining a working visa allows students to stay in Hungary longer and offers them enough time to apply for a visa to another country. One participant said:

"If I could find a job, I would be able to solve my visa problems because I would like to stay here" (P14, male, 27 years old, 2 years in Hungary).

Iranian students put their best efforts into finding jobs so they would be able to extend their visas to stay abroad longer and avoid getting deported. Their adaptation would have been improved if Hungary would "*give [students] visas, treat them better, and let them study, stay and work*," as one student acknowledged.

Another problem that Iranian students faced was banking restrictions. Due to regulations associated with the sanctions, Iranians could not hold a bank account in almost any bank in Hungary. The discriminatory actions of many banks against Iranians (including terminating their bank account abruptly or not opening an account for them, allegedly because of their nationality) were unreasonable for some students. One participant reflected:

"I went to open an account, and they asked for my passport ... they said, you can't open an account because you are Iranian" (P11, male, 28 years old, 7 years in Hungary).

Even the banks that allowed Iranians to open bank accounts required more strict paperwork for countries under sanctions. The fact that the banking process took longer only because of their nationality disappointed several students. One female participant noted:

When I went to open a bank account, they told me to go home and get my passport. Although it only took my friend ten minutes to get her bank card ... They said, "You should get permission because you're Iranian" (P19, female, 33 years old, 5 months in Hungary).

Besides the problem of opening a bank account, students reported problems with bank account closures. Because the banks had to comply with regulations, providing financial services to Iranians was halted. Many banks started to close the bank accounts of Iranians abroad. One participant expressed his anxiety regarding the closure of bank accounts:

"Anxieties exist for Iranians abroad ... I received a letter from a bank ... They are planning to close all Iranians' accounts" (P11, male, 28 years old, 7 years in Hungary).

This participant spoke about the anxieties that Iranians have to go through because if their bank accounts get closed, they have no idea where to keep their money.

Banking obstacles are not common challenges among international students; they seem isolated to students whose countries are under sanctions. One participant perceived that banking obstacles were "*specific to Iranians ... that Iranians are struggling with*" " (P9, male, 21 years old, 1 year in Hungary).

Theme 2: Impact of the Currency Crisis in Iran on Mental Health

During the second round of interviews, students reported that the sudden and steep decline in the value of the Iranian currency adversely influenced their mental health. One participant stated:

"One day, you wake up, and you realize that the currency's value has decreased by half ... This makes people depressed ... These things make me sad" (P7, male, 21 years old, 4.5 years in Hungary).

The devaluation of the currency affected her so much that she preferred "*not to check the news*" and "*the price of Euro.*" She was glad that she did not have to live in Iran to directly witness the crisis:

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"If I were in Iran, my depression would have been worse."

A majority of the participants were from the upper-middle class, and during the first interview, they did not report financial hassles. However, in the second interview, almost all of them reported financial difficulties. Many participants' families had to sell their belongings or find a second job and could not afford to pay for their children's tuition fees. One participant claimed:

> *"When I buy something, the price is three times higher. I had two cars: one of them is gone ... I am not mentally healthy because the value of the Euro keeps going up [relative to the rial]"* (P3, female, 22 years old, 2 years in Hungary).

This high-upper class participant was also affected by the currency crisis, as she had to sell one of her cars when she planned to open a business, and she was asked by her father to go back to Iran.

A majority of the participants were financially dependent on their parents, and after the economic crisis, they were motivated to find jobs and to work harder to earn more money to compensate for their monetary losses. The currency crisis made them anxious about their future. One participant noted:

> *"I get stressed that in addition to my studies ... I have to start working"* (P8, male, 36 years old, 14 years in Hungary).

The preceding demonstrates that the currency crisis prevented this student from focusing on both the academic and career aspects of her life. She acknowledged that if she had a job, she could "*at least pay for* [her] *weekly expenses*."

Additionally, participants' families were unable to transfer money to their children, because the money exchange services stopped transfers until the currency rate stabilized. This issue led to some participants looking for jobs as it was not possible to transfer money from Iran. The currency crisis seemed to be one of the main reasons for students' psychological problems, as it directly affected other issues, such as financial security, the need for employment, and obtaining a visa.

Theme 3: Positive and Negative Changes in Psychological Well-Being

During the second round of interviews, most participants reported that they felt better than they had at the time of the first interview. However, a few reported being more anxious and

depressed. Several participants stated that they were satisfied to be in Hungary and that their anxiety had decreased. One female participant reported:

> *"My mental well-being has changed because I have never lived independently … This independence has made me grow … I am still happy [to be in Hungary]"* (P2, female, 31 years old, 7 years in Hungary).

Independent living was a challenge for many participants at the beginning. However, it became a great asset for them after living in Hungary as they believed they learned to complete life chores independently, such as cooking, cleaning, managing life expenses, and so on. Participants seemed to be happy to live their own way as one student acknowledged that "*independence will never develop when the family is present*" (P8, male, 36 years old, 14 years in Hungary).

Other factors associated with better mental health among participants were economic opportunities and educational attainments in Hungary. Some students believed that because the economic situation was unstable in Iran, and their future was unknown, they felt more secure and positive about their prospects in Hungary. One participant remarked:

> *"I feel better in Hungary … In Iran, your future is unknown, and an unknown future gives you a bad feeling"* (P9, male, 21 years old, 1 year in Hungary).

Furthermore, participants emphasized the importance of the social and political freedom that they experienced in Hungary, which improved their mental health. One participant, when asked whether he felt mentally better in Hungary or in Iran, replied:

> *"Definitely here [in Hungary] … There are some low-level freedoms that you have here, but you don't in Iran … I don't want to live in Iran now with the current situation"* (P4, female, 25 years old, 13 years in Hungary).

Similar to most participants, he may have been alluding to higher order freedoms such as freedom of speech and gender equality which existed to a greater extent in Hungary than in Iran. However, even simple freedoms in clothing were perceived as essential and helped him "*compensate for* [his] *bad days*."

Overall, a majority of participants felt more content over time. They valued more independence along with better socio-political and economic opportunities abroad than they would have had living in Iran. A previous study in Chapter 6 (Hosseini-Nezhad et al., 2019) also

found that Iranian students in Hungary embraced the independence and freedom they had in Hungary.

A few participants in the second interview reported that their mental health had declined over time, mainly due to the economic crisis. One female participant said she was depressed, and that her mental health got worse as "*the Euro is getting expensive*" (P3, female, 22 years old, 2 years in Hungary).

Despite various challenges, participants stayed hopeful. Their positive attitude as a way of coping with their challenges was evident in their statements that they were "*optimistic about the future*," they tried "*not to think about the economic crisis*," and felt that "*the future will change*." Students were aware that they had no choice but to stay positive, as they would not be able to stay focused on their goals otherwise.

It is expected that students' anxieties will persist as the Iranian currency's value continues to tumble, given that the U.S. imposed strong sanctions on Iran and that the Iranian government cut subsidies and increased the prices of goods. This is evident from one student's remark:

> "*The subsidies cut down ... Every day the price of meat, cheese, and milk is increasing*" (P5, male, 18 years old, 2 years in Hungary).

Discussion

This study explored the adaptation trajectory as well as the challenges faced by Iranian students in Hungary. Each of the themes that emerged will be investigated by referring to relevant literature.

Theme 1: Visa and Banking Challenges

Iranian students in Hungary experienced issues with visas and with opening and closing bank accounts due to sanctions. The visa challenges faced by Iranian students in Hungary were not without precedent; several studies have reported visa and immigration challenges among Iranian (Hefner-Babb & Khoshlessan, 2018) and Chinese (Yan, 2017) international students in the U.S., and other international students in South Africa (Lee et al., 2017). Considering that most international students in Hungary are from countries with no or less restrictive sanctions compared with Iran and that the Iranian passport is one of the weakest globally, Iranians probably struggle with visa and immigration processes more than most international students.

Another challenge some Iranian students experienced in Hungary due to sanctions was discriminatory banking restrictions and policies. Iranians reported problems opening a bank account, and some existing bank accounts were closed abruptly. As a result, they had to withdraw their cash from the bank and either keep it at home or transfer it to another bank. The banks that allowed Iranians to open an account required them to go through extra hurdles of passport and security checks. Banking obstacles in response to the sanctions have been previously reported among Iranian students in the U.S. (National Iranian American Council, 2020), Canada (Mobasher, 2018), and elsewhere. Notably, the discriminatory banking regulations might only apply to some Hungarian banks. As previously reported in the news (Daily News Hungary, 2014), one bank in Hungary, Evobank, offered banking services that allowed Iranian individuals and businesses to open bank accounts despite the difficulties posed by international sanctions against Iran.

Banking and visa issues caused anxiety, uncertainty, a sense of inferiority, and discrimination among some Iranian students. For example, the visa obstacles caused anxiety and uncertainty among several Iranian students because they were unsure whether they could extend their visas, especially after graduation. These feelings could be exacerbated because they knew they would have to leave Hungary if they could not obtain a visa. Students needed to figure out where to go because getting visas to other countries is generally difficult for Iranians. These challenges and subsequent mental health concerns are not exclusive to Iranian students residing in Hungary. The literature review presented in Chapter 4 highlighted the presence of similar challenges and mental health implications experienced by Iranian students across different host countries.

Some students also felt a sense of inferiority. For example, when they compared themselves to other international students, they realized that peers from the EU did not experience obstacles similar to theirs in obtaining visas, finding jobs, and opening bank accounts. People perceive a situation as discriminatory and experience identity threat once they realize that they are being categorized and negatively treated based on their group membership (Branscombe et al., 1999), as was reported by the Iranian students in this study.

Iranians might have experienced relative deprivation, which is defined as "*a judgment that one or one's in-group is disadvantaged compared to a relevant referent, and that this judgment invokes feelings of anger, resentment, and entitlement*" (Smith & Pettigrew, 2015, p.

2). The feeling of being relatively deprived is salient to how Iranian students felt when they compared themselves to EU students.

The findings of this study highlight the significance of considering visa and banking challenges that have created mental health problems among Iranian students abroad and indicate that international students' challenges extend far beyond micro-level aspects and that macro-level policies require more attention.

Theme 2: Impact of the Currency Crisis in Iran on Mental Health

This study represents one of the few studies that provides an understanding of the impact of the currency crisis on Iranian international students' mental health, with the broader intention to inform about the adverse consequences of economic sanctions on students' adaptation and mental health abroad. This study contributes to the literature as it has analyzed a critical phenomenon that deserves closer attention.

A majority of the Iranian students moved to Hungary with their parents' financial support and with at least half the price of the current value of the Iranian currency. Following the economic crisis, Iranian students' financial situation has become so dire that it has caused anxiety and depression among them. Students were in a rush to find jobs, and many decided to return home. International students in China (Shi, 2016), Venezuela (Valverde & Hemlock, 2015), and South Korea (McNeill, 2009) have reported facing currency crisis challenges akin to Iranian students' challenges in Hungary.

Similar to the visa and banking challenges in the host country, the currency crisis in the sending country proved to significantly impact the adaptation of Iranian international students in the present study. This finding is in line with Ward and Geeraert's (2016) model, which posits the significance of ecological context in both the host and home countries.

Notwithstanding all the challenges Iranian students face, they have remained strong. However, these challenges will continue to get worse for them, especially after the increased levels of the Iran-US conflict in January 2020, which followed additional U.S. sanctions against Iran (Timofeev, 2020), and the COVID-19 pandemic[12], all of which occurred after the interviews.

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[12] The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated Iran's economic crisis as it led to a further depreciation of the rial (Wallace, 2020).

Theme 3: Positive and Negative Changes in Psychological Well-Being

A majority of participants in this study felt that their psychological health had improved, their anxieties had declined over time, and they were happy to be in Hungary. Only a few participants felt mentally worse in the second interview. The findings of the current study are consistent with previous studies (Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002; Hirai et al., 2015; Ward et al., 1998), in which the adaptation of international students was enhanced over time.

Inconsistent with the findings of this study, Cemalcilar and Falbo (2008) reported that the psychological well-being of international students in the U.S. significantly decreased over time. On the one hand, the findings indicated that the mental health of the majority of participants improved over time, while on the other hand, they demonstrated a decline in the mental health of a few Iranians. Thakar's (2010) result is more compatible with the findings of this study, as the author found significant variations in the mental health trajectories of international students from India in the U.S.

Participants in the current study reported that the currency crisis had a negative impact on their well-being. It is important to note that while a majority of the students expressed their sadness and anxiety regarding the currency crisis and the psychosocial challenges they experienced; a majority remained positive overall. They believed that their mental health was better in Hungary than in Iran due to a range of factors, including more freedom, independence, socio-political stability, and better economic and career prospects.

Additionally, participants' negative or positive feelings could be associated with whether they made an upward comparison with out-group members or a downward comparison with their in-group members (Martinot & Redersdorff, 2006). In this study, several students seemed to report more negative emotions when they made an upward comparison with the situations of other international students, especially those from EU countries. They also reported more positive emotions when they adopted a downward comparison with circumstances back home in Iran, where they would be less satisfied with the socio-political and economic situations relative to Hungary.

Limitations

This study has some limitations. One is the rate of participant attrition, as some students had to leave Hungary due to the currency crisis. Another limitation relates to the inherent constraints of content analysis techniques. This study faced the challenging task of deciding

which sets of categories and themes to prioritize from those that emerged through the content analysis. Other potential themes were set aside for later consideration, and only themes related to socio-political and economic conditions in Iran were analyzed.

Implications and Conclusion

This study provides relevant information to various sectors (such as governments, the EU, and the United Nations) about the challenges confronting Iranian international students. Understanding these challenges by these sectors could help with policy reforms designed to improve the students' situations.

Iranian students' challenges also have negative long-term implications for universities across Hungary. Over time, they will face a decline in the enrollment of new international students who contribute to social, cultural, and economic growth in Hungary. Consequently, they need to continue to support international students who experience challenges, especially when they are fundamentally political (Todoran & Peterson, 2019).

This research has focused primarily on the psychosocial adaptation trajectory and challenges faced by Iranian students in Hungary. The current study indicates the negative impacts of visas, banking, and currency crisis challenges (due to sanctions on Iran) on Iranian students' mental health. These challenges have been shown to create negative feelings such as anxiety, depression, uncertainty, perceived discrimination, identity threat, and relative deprivation among the students. It is hoped that this study will contributes to policy changes and be useful for the policy sectors. If these challenges persist, students' mental health might decline, and more complex interventions may be needed to ameliorate the adverse impact.

Additionally, to better understand international students' adaptation processes, future studies are encouraged to address the broader ecological context of intercultural contacts. Ward and Geeraert (2016) acknowledged the importance of the home and host cultures' ecological contexts on the familial, institutional, and societal levels. Factors such as sanctions, visas, and banking issues operate within a broader ecological context that impacts acculturation and adaptation of international students. There is an essential gap in the literature concerning this specific group since few studies have considered the broader ecological context. There is also a paucity of longitudinal studies on the negative impacts of challenges on Iranian international students' mental health as a result of sanctions on Iran.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Perceptions of Gender Roles and Freedom among Iranian International Students in Hungary[13]

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[13] Hosseini-Nezhad et al. (2022).

Introduction

Investigating the perceptions of gender roles and freedom can expand knowledge about Iranian students abroad for various reasons. Generally, international students' mobility has been under-investigated in global migration studies, and only in the last few years has international student migration research been rising increasingly (King & Sondhi, 2016). Second, there is a dearth of research examining gender-role attitudes among international students; only a few empirical studies have "specifically" investigated gender-role attitudes among international students, all of which are at least two decades old (e.g., Gibbons et al., 1989, 1991, 1997; Matsui, 1995). Additionally, in migration research, the emphasis on gender and gender role transformation has been traditionally overlooked (Farahani, 2018).

Furthermore, Iranians' attitudes about gender and freedom could be unique, complex, and yet contradictory, as Iran's history is marked by periodic and abrupt socio-economic and political turmoil and upheaval, as already mentioned in earlier chapters. It is reported that abrupt transitions and shifts in socio-economic situations inevitably lead to a crisis in gender roles (e.g., uncertainty and confusion) (Aidala, 1985).

Meanwhile, it is shown that foreign sojourners' exposure to a new culture is a transformative experience (Brown, 2009b). This transformation could be more salient for the Iranian students in Hungary who have moved from a non-secular country governed by Islamic (Sharia) laws, which is comparatively more traditional with fewer gender-egalitarian rules compared to Hungary, which is secular. According to the World Economic Forum (2020), Hungary ranks higher in indices of gender equality compared to Iran. Furthermore, in contrast to Hungary, Iran is more traditional and religious (World Values Survey [WVS], 2020).

It is reported that people are prone to display more egalitarian gender attitudes when exposed to a gender-egalitarian setting outside their country (Pessin & Arpino, 2018). However, it is noteworthy to mention that there is no country in the world that has completely fulfilled the pledge of gender equality (Equal Measures 2030, n.d.). Hungary is also not an exception; the Hungarian government has actively sought to exclude the terms "gender" and "gender equality" from EU records and has targeted women's and LGBTIQ rights (Zalan, 2020). However, compared to Hungary, Iran has imposed more stringent and traditional gender roles, which will be discussed in greater depth later.

Overall, "international" and "cross-cultural" studies enhance knowledge regarding gender roles and gender-role attitudes and shed light on theoretical issues in research about gender roles (Gibbons et al., 1997).

Attitudes toward gender roles are different between groups within a society (Walter, 2018). Kiani et al. (2009) assessed gender egalitarianism among Iranian students and employees in Iran. Women displayed more egalitarian attitudes when compared to men; the former also desired equal rights with the latter (Kiani et al., 2009). Similar results were found among students in Jordan (El Kharouf & Daoud, 2019) and China (Zuo et al., 2018).

Rafatjah (2012) conducted a meta-analysis of 14 studies about gender stereotypes in Iran in both public (i.e., in the job market and higher education) and private (i.e., family) spheres. Although it was reported that gender stereotypes have been decreasing in both individual Iranians and the country's social institutions, it was also reported that gender stereotypes are still persistent in both the public (e.g., a significant portion of the labor market remains masculine) and domestic spheres (e.g., household chores are considered feminine).

This study further illustrates the gendered perceptions of freedom among Iranian students in Hungary. Hungary, compared with Iran, ranks higher on a broad range of freedoms such as personal, political, and economic freedom (i.e., equality, political engagement, freedom of speech, personal autonomy, religion, safety, etc.) (Freedom House, 2020; United Nations Association Coventry Branch, 2019).

Aim of the study

This study aims to investigate gender differences regarding gender-role attitudes and perceptions of freedom among Iranian students in Hungary. It also explores how the students subjectively experienced freedom and what aspects of freedom in Hungary were perceived as advantageous for each gender.

The primary research questions are as follows:

Q1: How do Iranian men and women in Hungary perceive gender role differences?

Q2: How do Iranian men and women in Hungary perceive freedom?

Methods

This cross-sectional qualitative study utilized an integration of inductive and deductive approaches to content analysis (Nyquist et al., 2019).

Materials

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

The semi-structured interview included a combination of closed and open-ended questions pertaining to various topics—including perceptions of gender role differences, psychological and socio-cultural adaptation, and perceptions of freedom (see Appendix C).

Data Analysis

The inductive content analysis (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004) part guided the process of data analysis (e.g., the procedure entails open coding, category, sub-category, and theme development). In the first phase of analysis, the data was listened to in order to get familiar with the interviews. In the second phase, the interviews were translated and transcribed verbatim using *oTranscribe* software. The whole interview was considered as the unit of analysis; each interview was then divided based on paragraphs or sentences (meaning units). Codes were created from the meaning units. The initial open coding was performed on Atlas.ti line-by-line. The initial codes were reviewed for similarity in content and thereafter consolidated into code groups (or sub-categories) on Atlas.ti. In Code Manager, 59 code groups were classified. Similar code groups were merged into categories on Atlas.ti and then incorporated into potential themes (topics). The topics identified with the initial research questions were created by combining similar categories. Below, examples of meaning units and codes (Table 3) and sub-categories, categories, and themes (Table 4) related to the research questions are presented.

After an inductive content analysis was completed, a deductive content analysis was also carried out, relying on prior knowledge and theories presented in the "theoretical framework" section, which proceeded this study from general observation to a specific conclusion (Elo & Kyngas, 2008).

Table 3

Meaning Units Condensation to Formulate Codes

Meaning Unit	Code
"Every gender has a unique physiology and is made for something. That's why it [the difference] is normal."	Physiological differences in gender. Gender-role differences are natural.
"In Iran, when you go to the library, you have to cover up and wear the hijab. Here you can go out with the opposite sex and study together."	Compulsory hijab in Iran. Freedom to have opposite-sex friendships in Hungary. Opposing the degree of freedom.

Table 4

Emerged Themes Through Analyses of the Interview Transcripts.

Themes (Topics)	Categories	Code groups (Sub-Categories)
Gender Essentialism	Evolution and gender differences	Evolutionary perspectives on gender role differences
	Physiology and gender differences	Physiological differences explain gender-role
	Support gender equality	Unfair social expectations from women
Gender-Role Egalitarianism	Concerns about gender inequality in Iran	Women's rights and legal restrictions in Iran
Traditional Gender Stereotypes	Gender stereotype and physical strength	Men are stronger than women
	Gender stereotype and personality	Women are more sensitive
	Gender stereotype and behaviour	Women seduce a lot
Gendered Freedom	Freedom of clothing	Absence of morality police in Hungary
		Hijab freedom in Hungary

| | Freedom of relationship | Men are free to have many relationships |
| | | Women are more conservative in relationships |

Results

The results are presented in the form of the following four themes: (1) gender essentialism, (2) gender-role egalitarianism, (3) traditional gender stereotypes, and (4) gendered freedom.

Theme 1: Gender Essentialism

Several Iranian men attributed differences in gender roles to biological attributes, and they considered these differences natural. One student, when asked about his general ideas and feelings on gender role differences, reported:

> *"I see it [gender role difference] as something evolutionary … it's a natural evolution"* (P5, male, 18 years old, 2 years in Hungary).

This youngest male student perceived gender differences through the lens of evolution, in essence, believing that the differences between females and males are best explained in terms of biological adaptations. He believed that these differences are not "*bad*" or "*evil*," but rather "*normal*," as they have existed in certain countries since "*70 years ago*" and continue to exist today. However, he acknowledged that gender role differences are changing in "*today's culture*." Perhaps he meant shifting away from essentialist or traditional ones and more toward an egalitarian stance, adding that in the past, certain groups became "*very irritated*" over disparities, and as they eventually noticed that their attitudes and behaviours were "*unacceptable*," thus, they "*strive*[*d*] *for a change*."

Similarly, another male student explained the gender role gap in terms of biology, stating that females and males are inherently different because of their biological differences:

> *"I see gender roles in terms of their biological differences"* (P12, male, 20 years old, 3 years in Hungary).

He emphasized that "*it's a reality that biological differences exist*." He justified his gender essentialism by arguing that even in the "*Scandinavian nations,*" where both females and males have equal freedom to choose an occupation, the number of female nurses already exceeds the number of males. Consequently, he argued, "*certain skills and tendencies in*

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women lead them to seek occupations with more feminine characteristics." He attributed a fixed gender role to women, assuming that men and women are innately distinct in their interests. His gender essentialist view has probably fostered and reinforced his gender-stereotyped beliefs.

Gender-essentialist attitudes of a few older men were entwined with anti-feminist or feminist stereotypical sentiments. One male student pointed out that men and women are physiologically different and gender role distinctions are "*natural:*"

> *"We are not equal at all, not psychologically nor physiologically ... I think it's a beautiful feeling to see differences naturally within yourself and the opposite sex"*
> (P17, male, 33 years old, 2 years in Hungary).

He further contended that particularly in "*Western countries,*" owing to the "*equalization of men and women*," these "*natural differences*" between men and women are not adequately represented. This was his reason why he felt "*uncomfortable*" when he noticed women with "*short and dyed hair*" who looked like "*feminists,*" not that he "*hates*" them, he added; nevertheless, he thought that in fact, "*men and women should not be physiologically and mentally equivalent*" as this is what "*nature demands it.*" He thought it would be "*problematic*" for him to connect with a "*feminist*" woman. Women with that particular look that he considered "*no way attractive*" were probably indicative of "*feminists*" losing their feminine nature since it was not "*natural*" for a woman to look like a man.

Likewise, another graduate male student who was also very much against restrictions placed on women in Iran, and criticized the Iranian government for it, used gender essentialism with resistance to feminist approaches regarding the natural differences:

> *I don't think that they [men and women] are equal in any way at all. It would be impractical to see it through a feminist lens. I often deal with reality. In fact, men and women vary greatly and are very distinct ... Men and women have the right to be equal, but having equal rights does not mean that men and women are equal. No, men and women are not equivalent at all.* (P11, male, 28 years old, 7 years in Hungary)

The gender essentialist's view would strongly suggest that some male students perceive and accept differences in gender roles as natural, inevitable, and unchangeable. Although several Iranian men have made statements supporting gender equality, it seems that they prefer retaining the status quo's gender role inequalities.

In this study, no women held gender essentialist views, meaning that they did not connect gender role disparities to biological factors; instead, they only attributed them to

social factors. This is apparent in the responses presented in the following section summarizing the gender-egalitarian views of some of the participants.

Theme 2: Gender-Role Egalitarianism

As highlighted above, although many Iranian male students attributed gender role differences to biological factors, others attributed these differences to social factors, manifesting themselves in gender-egalitarian attitudes. In general, Iranian men were more likely to hold transitional gender-role attitudes compared to their female counterparts, who were more inclined to hold egalitarian gender-role attitudes.

Many Iranian male students endorsed the advancement of women and their equal rights in society, the family, and the law. Indeed, the oldest male student stated:

> *"In society, there shouldn't be a lot of differences [in terms of gender roles]; I mean regarding the laws ... The same laws that exist for men should also exist for women"* (P8, male, 36 years old, 14 years in Hungary).

He perceived the laws in Iran as "*more strict*" than those in Hungary, providing an example of the laws enforced by academic institutions, including rigid laws for "*dress code*" enforced primarily on women, as well as men.

Another male student who previously held gender essentialism and shared his disagreement with the feminist point of view on explaining gender disparities in roles ironically expressed his opposition against gender-unequal laws in Iran and vocalized his frustration with unjust laws in Iran that are weighted in favour of men and deem women as inferior to men.

> *"I believe that men and women deserve equal opportunities. ... In Iran, the inheritance law ... is not logical ... A woman cannot serve as a judge in Iran ... These issues are entirely women's rights"* (P11, male, 28 years old, 7 years in Hungary).

A younger male student similarly supported gender equality, asserting:

> *"Generally, it's not a good thing [gender role difference] ... Everything should be equal"* (P9, male, 21 years old, 1 year in Hungary).

Generally speaking, Iranian women emphasized inequality in gender roles more than men. One female student noted the inequalities in gender-based wages and hiring discrimination, expressing her concern about the gender pay gap, as well as the fact that women continue to be hired less and earn less money than men.

> *"I think it's not equal [the gender role] ... Even in the U.S., men are more frequently hired and earn a higher salary than women. I think it must be equal"* (P2, female, 31 years old, 7 years in Hungary).

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This female student proceeded to support women's rights and was quite upset that "*gender role inequality*" has remained an "*unresolved*" issue in the "*21st century*" and that women everywhere are "*pushed*" to believe in pursuing professions that are "*easier*" and "*less demanding*" merely because they would "*have a family*" in the future. However, she was delighted that women would not hold back when she claimed that women are more employed in male-dominated fields as "*bankers,*" "*doctors,*" and "*surgeons,*" and their numbers are higher than men at the university. She wished that "*nothing stops a woman from achieving her dreams.*"

Similarly, other women expressed resentment toward and emotional protest against the differences in gender roles.

"*It [gender role difference] upsets me. I believe that men and women should have equal rights*" (P19, female, 33 years old, 5 months in Hungary).

This newcomer student said that she has not yet witnessed gender-role disparities in Hungary; nevertheless, she argued that Iran's gender-role inequality is "*deeply disappointing.*" What made her "*really upset*" was hearing men say such "*things*" were "*masculine*" or that they are "*ghairati.*"[14]

In contrast, another female student who also "*dislike*[d]" gender-role difference and was "*highly defensive*" about it stated that, contrary to her expectations, gender role disparities in Hungarians' "*mentality*" are the same as those in Iranians', as she said, her Hungarian boyfriend's gender stereotypical opinions proved to her that Hungarians are not "*familiar*" with the concept of "*gender equality.*"

"*Anytime I try to go up the ladder, my boyfriend tells me no, no, no, this is not your job*" (P15, female, 30 years old, 3 years in Hungary).

Another female student noted:

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[14] "*Gheirat is an important phenomenon in Iranian culture … It is a distinctive set of thoughts, feelings, and actions associated with violations of namoos*, a set of people and entities one feels protective toward. People who are prone to gheirat are described as ghairati*" (Srivastava, 2020, para. 6).

* "*Namoos represents people (e.g., one's partner and family members) and entities (e.g., one's country, religion, gender category, sports team) toward which a person feels a strong connection and a tendency to protect*" (Razavi et al., 2020, p. 3).

"It [gender role difference] doesn't sit well with me, because I think there shouldn't be any differences between men and women" (P16, female, 24 years old, 1.5 years in Hungary).

She emphasized that gender role differences were more evident among Iranians in Hungary who came directly from Iran. She believed Iranian women feel expected to behave according to the demands of their respective gender roles based on Iranian social and cultural norms.

"I think here [in Hungary] you feel it [gender role difference] more, especially among Iranians, because they have come from Iran and have Iranian culture … Girls feel they should behave in a specific way."

One student expressed her feelings regarding gender inequality, noting that she felt as if she were not equal to her brother and was treated differently as such:

"I compare myself to my brother … I wish I were in the place of my brother … There is no justice, at least not for Iranians" (P3, female, 22 years old, 2 years in Hungary).

Although her family was secular and non-religious, she still appeared to believe that her parents had more control over her than her brother.

She expressed that she was "*upset*" that she did not feel as much "*freedom*" as her brother, she could not "*easily travel*," spend time with her friends "*after midnight*," and "*sleepover*" at their place as much as his brother could.

Theme 3: Traditional Gender Stereotypes

Iranian males supported gender equality and egalitarian gender roles; however, many of them still held traditional attitudes and stereotypes regarding gender. Generally, Iranian men held more rigid gender stereotypes than women who adopted much fewer gender stereotypes than males.

Students held stereotypes around such issues as occupational roles, relationships, behaviours, personality traits, and so forth. Many students believed that certain traits and abilities of each gender predispose members of the gender in question to different types of behaviours and activities.

One male pharmacy graduate student displayed evidence of gender stereotyping when discussing women's intimate relationships. He believed that women start relationships to fulfill their emotional or financial needs:

"I feel that if a woman wants to get to know a guy, it's more due to emotional reasons … or it's only for financial matters. These things are becoming less frequent" (P8, male, 36 years old, 14 years in Hungary).

Meanwhile, he was delighted that women have become more "*up-to-date*" and "*independent*" in general and that they are no longer "*dependent*" in their interpersonal relationships.

A stereotypical conception concerning aging and marriage was retained by a male Ph.D. student who had a generalized view regarding men's and women's thoughts on marriage.

> *One of the challenges that women face, and men don't is marriage. Because women are more concerned that by getting older, their physical appeal will diminish, they might have less opportunity to get married ... This is the opposite for men; the older a guy gets, the more mature he becomes, and the greater his opportunity for marriage. Women prefer to marry a mature man. Guys prefer to marry a young woman with a more attractive face than marrying an older woman.* (P6, male, 33 years old, 6 years in Hungary)

This student's gender stereotype is reflected in the notion of "*double standard of aging*,[15]" in which society puts a stricter standard for beauty and age on women than men.

Another male student (P17, male, 33 years old, 2 years in Hungary) who formerly displayed feminist stereotypes also upheld traditional prescriptive gender stereotypes. He reported that he had seen a woman coming from a "*bar*," "*urinating*" in the street late at night, which he found "*unexpected*" and "*cheap*" for a "*very stylish*" woman doing such "*behaviour*" that did not "*match*" her "*dress style*." However, he said that seeing such behaviour now is "*normal*" unless seeing it "*during the day*," even in the "*empty street*." Paradoxically, in another part of the interview, he opposed the "*restrictions*" enforced by the Iranian regime on both men and women and was grateful that at least Iranian men and women feel more "*mentally relaxed*" in Hungary, where the government does not "*guide*" them on "*how they should dress*."

Some Iranian male participants furthermore expressed occupational gender-role stereotypes. For example, one student considered surgery as a masculine occupation:

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[15] The double standard of aging coined by Susan Sontag "*shows up most brutally in the conventions of sexual feeling, which presuppose a disparity between men and women that operates permanently to women's disadvantage*" (Sontag, 1997, p. 286). "*Women are at a disadvantage because their sexual candidacy depends on meeting certain much stricter 'conditions' related to looks and age*" (Sontag, 1997, p. 287).

When I used to go to the hospitals, the only difference that I felt was that surgery for a woman is much more difficult … Once a female doctor couldn't continue with the operation because orthopedic surgery is much more difficult for a woman. (P9, male, 21 years old, 1 year in Hungary)

However, in another part of the interview, he noted that gender role differences are "*wrong*" and that both genders should have "*equal conditions.*"

Other male students believed that some jobs were more appropriate for one gender than the other because they felt that different genders are more competent in some specific fields than others. One participant elaborated that men are more capable of doing jobs requiring strength, while women were better in occupations requiring more focus.

In the field of studies such as orthopedics, I am not saying women can't do it … A man is physically stronger compared to a woman. Men have more power and can perform mechanical work better … In some jobs that require more concentration … women might be able to do it better compared to men. (P6, male, 33 years old, 6 years in Hungary)

One male student held stereotyped beliefs regarding different personality traits between genders:

"I think that psychologically, women are a little bit different from men … Some men are psychologically stronger; women are a little bit weaker" (P8, male, 36 years old, 14 years in Hungary).

There were also statements exemplary of ambivalent sexism (e.g., hostile and benevolent sexism[16]) among Iranian male students in Hungary. One student stated, most women like to be "*tidy*" (P13, male, 20 years old, 5 years in Hungary). Another student believed women "*seduce a lot*" and passing exams at university is "*easier*" for them (P1, male, 32 years old, 8 years in Hungary). Another participant stated, "*professors are more easy going with girls during exams*" (P18, male, 19 years old, 3.4 years in Hungary). Likewise, another student (P6, male, 33 years old, 6 years in Hungary) displayed hostile sexism with an anti-feminist discourse, stating that at university, he had seen male professors

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[16] "*Benevolent sexism encompasses subjectively positive (for the sexist) attitudes toward women in traditional roles: protective paternalism, idealization of women, and desire for intimate relations. Hostile sexism encompasses the negative equivalents on each dimension: dominative paternalism, derogatory beliefs, and heterosexual hostility*" (Glick & Fiske, 1997, p. 119).

grading and treating females better, and vice versa or he had seen one of his female professors was "*treating girls better*," since she was a "*feminist*." On the one hand, he made gender stereotypes and sexists remarks; on the other hand, he disliked that in Iran, there is a traditional gender role belief that women should work "*within the house*" and men "*outside the house*;" and that women are "*objectified*." Ironically, he condemned "*sexism*" that he considered "*extremely widespread*" in Iran because of "*gender segregation*" that begins from "*elementary schools*" until "*university*," unlike Hungary, where he believed there is no "*sexists mindset*" among the people since there is no "*gender segregation*" from childhood.

Overall, traditional gender stereotypes and sexist attitudes were mainly evident among male participants; only one female student displayed benevolent sexist values in her belief that women are more "*sensitive*" and "*vulnerable*" (P3, female, 22 years old, 2 years in Hungary).

Theme 4: Gendered Freedom

The term "*gendered freedom*," was used in this study, which is conceptualized as the processes by which freedom is experienced, perceived, and evaluated according to gender.

Iranian students generally reported feeling more freedom in Hungary than in Iran. Freedom or its relative lack were mentioned in various domains; the most frequently discussed topics concerning freedom included: freedom of speech, clothing, hairstyle, choosing relationships, and sexual behaviour. It should be noted that a majority of Iranian participants belong to the upper-middle-class group. For the majority of them, freedom is defined by more "*superficial*" concerns (e.g., clothing or relationship freedom) rather than more fundamental questions of social justice (e.g., healthcare, employment, and housing equality). Nonetheless, several participants have emphasized economic inequalities.

Some participants opposed the existence of morality police at universities who control students' appearance and clothing. They were dissatisfied with the existence of morality police at Iran's universities. They may have experienced anxiety any time they went to university in Iran, resulting in fear of being punished for their clothes or hairstyle. As one student said:

> At the university [in Hungary], it is easier for girls; in Iran, they must wear the hijab ... However, here [in Hungary], there is no restriction ... Guys always had to wear long pants [at the university in Iran]. Here [in Hungary] we can wear shorts and go to the university ... You can have any haircut and hairstyle you want. (P6, male, 33 years old, 6 years in Hungary)

Similarly, the oldest male student stated:

When you go to university in Iran, they [the morality police] question you: 'Why did you wear a short-sleeved T-shirt?' or question women why they have nail polish. Here the entrance guard doesn't exist ... Imagine you are heading off to university with a positive attitude in the hope of having a pleasant day, and then all of a sudden, you run into the university guard ... These things make you upset (P8, male, 36 years old, 14 years in Hungary).

This participant appreciated the absence of morality police at Hungarian universities. As he continued:

What I have always liked about Hungary was that when we used to go to the university…we felt comfortable ... nobody was there to question our appearance, like 'why did you dress like that?' or 'why your hair is like this?' This was great that none of these mattered here [in Hungary].

He condemned the "*strict*" dress code "*rules*" in the Iranian "*academic settings*," claiming they were "*obstacles*" and an "*off-topic*" issues and thus did not belong in such settings where students are meant to have a "*free mind*," feel "*motivated*," and "*concentrated*" on their studies. He felt that pushing rigid dress code law in an academic environment "*decreases*" students' "*interests*" in learning.

Iran's morality police are not confined to university environments. There are morality police in public areas that spot and arrest people who break the Islamic dress code, especially women with improper hijab. One participant criticized the Iranian government for interfering with people's private lives while also criticizing the country's obligatory veil for women.

In Iran ... you go out with the hijab …From the perspective of the hijab, from controlling relationships, family pressure, morality police pressure ... Here, suddenly, all of these are being eliminated (P3, female, 22 years old, 2 years in Hungary).

She valued personal freedom; therefore, she preferred her social life in Hungary to that in Iran. As she further reported:

I enjoy my social life here more because of freedom, freedom in behaviour, freedom to do anything I want. Nobody picks on what you are wearing, on the music you're listening to. You are in your car, listening to loud music; nobody would interrupt you and question why your music is loud. You are trying to party, not stressed to drink alcohol, you go to a grocery shop nearby and buy it ... You can party with friends, and they [the police] won't raid parties.

One male student spoke with deep dismay and anger about the Iranian regime's crackdown on "Girls of Revolution Street" —a women's peaceful protest against wearing compulsory headscarves.

> *"When you see Girls of Revolution Street being pushed off [the platform], it is hard to see these things … It is hard when you see gender differences"* (P20, male, 25 years old, 6.5 years in Hungary).

Excerpts from Iranian men suggest that they are well conscious that, relative to men, women in Iran do not have "*many rights*," "*much freedom*," and are "*restricted*" and "*oppressed*." They clarified that in Hungary, Iranian women encountered much more "*freedom*," "*security*," and "*safety*," and felt greater "*relaxation*," and "*less pressure*" compared to Iran; or for them, Hungary is a "*new world*," or probably "*hijab freedom attracts their attention faster*." Consequently, these male students felt that the degree of freedom enjoyed by Iranian women in Hungary was much greater than that enjoyed by Iranian men. "*Possibly*" because "*men can achieve their goals in Iran*; *whereas, women can't since they have fewer opportunities available to them*" (P8, male, 36 years old, 14 years in Hungary), or it is because Iranian men in Iran have more "*freedom*" and were "*more social*" than Iranian women (P7, male, 21 years old, 4.5 years in Hungary). Excerpts from Iranian men imply that the level of freedom experienced by Iranian women in Hungary is perceived to be significantly greater than that of Iranian men. This is because Iranian women in Iran face a higher degree of repression compared to men, and when they arrive in Hungary, the contrast in freedom becomes more pronounced and enjoyable for them. Iranian men, who were not as repressed as women in Iran, may not experience the same noticeable increase in freedom when they come to Hungary.

One female medical student addressed the feeling of freedom gained by being far-removed from the restrictions of the compulsory *hijab*, but also for other less tangible reasons:

> *"Many women don't want to wear it [the hijab] … Besides the superficial things, here [in Hungary] I think it's safer for a woman … We are respected equally alongside men"* (P2, female, 31 years old, 7 years in Hungary).

According to many students, the extent of freedom within relationships between men and women in Hungary is particularly striking. Many Iranian female students believed that Iranian men in Hungary have as much freedom as they had in Iran in terms of relationships. They also felt that Iranian men enjoy the freedom in Hungary more than Iranian women.

One female student said:

"Iranian guys have more freedom here [Hungary]. They go out, party, and they experience Hungarian and international girlfriends" (P4, female, 25 years old, 13 years in Hungary).

She explained that experiencing relationships for Iranian women also depends on their "*personality type*" and the "*family culture*" under which they have been raised; nevertheless, in any case, she thought that Iranian men had more "*freedom*" to explore "*various international relationships.*" She put the blame on the fact that she had been "*raised*" in Iranian society, where "*men and women are defined by separate roles.*" Therefore, she thought it is impossible to "*persuade*" herself that men and women are equal, as she was "*born*" and "*grew up*" in Iran; "*in the end* [she] *is Iranian*, [she] *cannot copy foreigners.*" Additionally, she believed that gender inequality in the freedom to experience many relationships did not pertain to other international students, reasoning that men and women have equal relationship freedom in all those societies.

Similarly, some other Iranian women perceived that Iranian men are more open to relationships and enjoy the freedom associated with forming different relationships to a greater extent than Iranian women. One female bachelor's student perceived such a big difference between boys' and girls' freedom—as well as the existence of a robust double standard. She expressed her feelings as follows:

I have always wished to be a boy, so I could be more free ... No problem happens if guys have many relationships; however, for a girl, even if she were only with one guy, people would talk behind her back. Then it would be harder for her to get married ... Guys who have had many girlfriends will choose a girl who hasn't had any relationships with anyone. (P3, female, 22 years old, 2 years in Hungary)

Another female student said:

Being a man or woman here [in Hungary] is not that different. However, perhaps this will affect your personality ... It might affect you later on. It will create a past. When you go back to Iran, people will ask, what were you doing there? (P10, female, 19 years old, 3 months in Hungary)

This newcomer student, who came from a "*religious*" family, declared that both men and women had the same degree of relationship freedom in Hungary, as opposed to Iran, where girls have to "*hide*" their relationships, and boys are "*free.*" She also believed that it also depends on how much parents have given their children freedom in Iran. She explained that she and one of her girlfriends struggled with "*cultural confusion*" when attending "*mixed-gender parties*" in Hungary; however, her other Iranian girlfriend did not have to

endure the same "*challenge*" and "*cultural confusion*" since her friend's parents offered her a lot of "*freedom*" when she was in Iran. She believed that many Iranians, especially men, when they come abroad, they feel very "*confident*" and "*empowered*," and they go too far to the point that they think everyone should "*change*" and live "*absolutely like Europeans*." According to her, Iranian women are like this as well; however, she thought it is more "*prevalent*" among Iranian men, as she believed some Iranian women are still willing to "*keep their Iranian culture*." She claimed that many Iranians go "*extreme*" and "*over the limit*" because of "*too much freedom*" that they have in Hungary, ranging from "*little*" things such as "*drinking*" and "*smoking*" to "*relationship freedom*."

Similarly, another female student stated:

I think Iranian girls compared to Iranian boys behave more conservatively … Some people think they [girls] should not have a boyfriend. For boys, everything is more straightforward, especially in society, in their relationships, and in everything else (P16, female, 24 years old, 1.5 years in Hungary).

One male student (P17, male, 33 years old, 2 years in Hungary) also reported that, relative to Iran, Iranian men and women feel greater freedom in Hungary in all aspects, including the freedom to form a relationship.

Some Iranian female students were not open to new relationships or having sexual relationships. This does not appear to primarily be the result of a lack of openness, however; rather, it seems to be the result of pre-emptive self-restraint to guard against possible future consequences and out of fear of social judgment, or it may even be the result of perceiving "*virginity*" as a "*value*." As one student (P3, female, 22 years old, 2 years in Hungary) explained, she had stayed a "*virgin*" because this is a "*value*" in Iran, and she wished to retain this value for the sake of her "*parents*." This participant believed that when Iranians go abroad, they get "*confused*," their "*ideologies*" change, and they become more "*open-minded*," to the point that they equate virginity with possessing "*leprosy*." Although she valued virginity," she considered it very "*unfair*" that men were free to engage in many sexual relationships while women are expected to be virgins and "*control*" their sexuality. As she was outraged over her therapist, who told her that "*Persian men*" never marry their girlfriends with whom they already had sex; to which she replied:

You mean Persian guys should be with all women? And [women] *should stay virgins, so they will be chosen for marriage? What kind of life is this? What kind of justice is this*? (P3, female, 22 years old, 2 years in Hungary)

One Iranian female Ph.D. student was particularly outraged by the restrictions on women, especially in terms of sexual relationships:

Anytime here [in Hungary] that I see a young girl with the freedom to spend time outside with anyone, until any time at night, and can have sexual relationships easily—without any pressure on her—I become upset. Iran is very restricted. (P19, female, 33 years old, 5 months in Hungary)

Other types of freedom, such as economic and political freedom, were emphasized by some participants. One female medical graduate student reflected:

Now, if they tell me I am free, and I can go to the street [in Iran] without a hijab, I will definitely not take off my hijab because people will start staring at me so much that I will get annoyed ... Iran is now facing many problems concerning economic issues, employment, culture ... In Iran, there is injustice ... a general lack of freedom and a lack of freedom of speech. When these things are present ... You feel that you are in prison, and this makes me depressed. (P4, female, 25 years old, 13 years in Hungary)

From the above excerpts, it is clear that the participant's main concern was not freedom from the veil. She seemed to prioritize other rights, such as economic security and political and cultural freedom. Similarly, a male bachelor student reported:

Now, it [freedom] has become essential for me because I have seen and tasted it. When I was in Iran, I had no idea. I mean, what is the definition of freedom—that you don't wear a hijab? But it [freedom] is more than that ... There are some freedoms here that are low-level freedoms, but you don't have in Iran. (P12, male, 20 years old, 3 years in Hungary)

He experienced some basic freedoms that he appreciated; however, he perceived these to be "*low-level*" freedoms that allowed him to distance himself from more significant barriers and to avoid preoccupation with basic concerns such as clothing:

Some freedom of actions exists [in Hungary] that allow me to have fun to compensate for my bad days—for example, wearing shorts when the weather is hot ... If I take off my shoes and walk barefoot, nobody cares ... These are very important ... At least you don't have to be preoccupied with these things.

Discussion

This study investigated gender differences in terms of attitudes toward gender roles and perceptions of freedom among Iranian students in Hungary. The content analysis extracted four themes: (1) gender essentialism, (2) gender-role egalitarianism, (3) traditional

gender stereotypes, and (4) gendered freedom. The term "*gendered freedom*" has been used in the literature; however, in a different context (e.g., the emancipation of enslaved women in the French Caribbean revolution (Dubois, 2010) and African-Americans in the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta (Bercaw, 2003), or "*gendering freedom*" (Kern, 2010) highlighting the gendered imagery of neoliberal urban revitalization in Toronto condo ads; creating "*feminine*" and "*erotic*" views of revitalization centering on "*freedom*" and "*fear*" that shapes "*neoliberalism*" (e.g., patriarchal predominance). In the current study, gendered freedom is conceptualized as subjective experiences and perceptions of freedom that is gender-based.

The findings revealed that only male students held gender essentialism, and they were more likely than females to hold transitional gender-role attitudes (a combination of traditional and egalitarian gender-role attitudes), gender stereotypes, and sexism. At the same time, females were more likely to hold egalitarian gender-role attitudes and fewer gender stereotypes and sexism. Furthermore, a majority of students—regardless of their gender—strived for greater freedom. However, female students emphasized gender inequality more than their male counterparts. Almost all students reported having more freedom in Hungary than in Iran; however, it was perceived that men benefited most from the freedom to take part in relationships and women from the freedom of not having to wear the veil.

When initially asked the participants to give their general opinions regarding differences in gender roles, many males—without being prompted to cite biological and social factors—viewed differences in gender roles as something natural and/or evolutionary, and in terms of biological factors. Conversely, when posed the same questions, females explained these differences largely in terms of social factors. Thus, some male participants showed an essentialist view about gender role differences—a finding compatible with the results of previous research (Parker et al., 2017; Smiler & Gelman, 2008) in which higher essentialist tendencies were observed in males than females.

Regarding traditional-egalitarian attitudes, the results of this study are consistent with those of Serajzadeh and Javaheri (2006), who found that a significant number of Iranian female and male students in Iran held egalitarian attitudes toward gender roles, and females generally displayed more egalitarian attitudes than their male counterparts.

The results of this study are also similar to the study by Sharepour (2005), in which Iranian females and male students held gender stereotypes; however, males possessed stronger gender stereotypes, viewing some jobs (e.g., lawyer or engineer) as better performed by males. Additionally, in the current study, Iranian men displayed greater sexist attitudes, mainly hostile sexism, than women, with women showing no hostile sexism, and only one

female holding benevolent sexism. The findings of the present study are in line with the results of a study (Glick et al., 2000) conducted among 15,000 individuals across 19 nations, in which men significantly showed greater hostile sexism than women. Although women are less likely than men to hold hostile sexism, they frequently display examples of benevolent sexism, like men. Indeed, women may uphold benevolent sexism in order to prevent becoming the victims of hostile sexism, considering that complying with traditional gender roles serves as a "buffer" against hostile sexism (Grubbs, 2017). The results of the current study did not show a clear distinction between participants' exhibition of gender stereotypes and sexism, which is consistent with the argument that "*sexism is* [already] *expressed through gender stereotypes*" (Brown & Stone, 2016, p. 106), and both benevolent and hostile sexism suggest a stereotypical view of women (Etchezahar & Ungaretti, 2014).

In this study, pervasive patterns of contradictory and transitional gender-role attitudes among Iranian men are witnessed, as opposed to Iranian women, who were mostly consistent in their gender-role attitudes. A majority of Iranian men in Hungary supported women's equality and rights, accused the Iranian government of imposing limitations on women in Iran, promoted mutual freedom for all genders, and disapproved of sexism while simultaneously upheld traditional gender-role attitudes, gender stereotypes, and sexism. Similar contradictory and ambivalent gender-role attitudes were reported among young and middle-aged Iranian urban middle-class men in Iran, who on one hand supported gender role equality, and on the other hand, held gender essentialism and stereotypes (Ghaffari, 2020).

It is important to note that all of the studies mentioned above were conducted among locals; the participants in the current study were international students who are a unique group as their gender-role attitudes may be influenced by the origin and the host society. However, based on the results of the studies presented above, it appears that the gender-role attitudes of Iranians in Hungary were not significantly different from those of Iranians in Iran, as will be discussed later in this article.

Previous studies reported that migrants from less secular countries — after being exposed to a secular society — exhibit more egalitarian attitudes over time (Van Klingeren & Spierings, 2020). At the same time, research reported that gender-role attitudes are developed during the early stages of life; additionally, being exposed to more traditional values in the home country impacts gender attitudes (Röder, 2014). It is also stated that gender-role attitudes are quite changeable during adolescence and somewhat consistent during adulthood (Roder & Muhlau, 2014, referring to Alwin et al., 1992). Conversely, another research indicated that gender-role attitudes undergo both substantial change and consistency at

transitions across adolescence into adulthood (Fan & Marini, 2000). Reportedly, there is a propensity for gender-role attitudes to remain consistent because changing involves the previously-held gender-role attitudes being transformed, and people are inclined to search out new knowledge in line with their previously acquired beliefs. However, changes could arise when people are subjected to new social stimuli (Fan & Marini, 2000).

It is not possible to precisely determine which factors influenced the gender-role perceptions of Iranian men and women; possibly various factors on a macro-level (e.g., societal and cultural level) and a micro-level (e.g., age and gender) may have influenced their gender-role attitudes. It is reported that both gender-related structural characteristics of a society (e.g., gender equality policies) and socio-cultural factors (e.g., social norms and values) influence gender-role attitudes (Boehnke, 2011).

Based on the above, it can be assumed that on a macro level, the gender-role attitudes of Iranians in Hungary are primarily a representation of the social, religious, and cultural characteristics of Iranian society, as well as a reflection of Hungarian society. Moreover, micro-level/ individual factors, such as gender and age, seemed to affect the general attitude of Iranian students in Hungary more than other micro-level factors. As such, females compared to males exhibited greater gender egalitarianism and fewer gender stereotypes and sexism; additionally, younger male participants seemed to hold less traditional gender-role attitudes and gender stereotypes compared to the older Iranian men. Other micro-level factors such as length of residence in Hungary (e.g., no differences were found in gender-role attitudes of an Iranian man who lived in Hungary for a longer period of time than a man who lived in Hungary for a shorter period), family background (e.g., conservative/religious families), study major, level of education, etc. did not seem to play roles in students' gender-role attitudes. Overall, among all the micro-level factors mentioned, gender seemed to be the most powerful predictor of gender-role attitudes.

Another aspect of this study's findings is related to the freedom of dress choice. As mentioned in earlier chapters, after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iranian women were obliged to wear the *hijab* (Mahmoudi, 2019), which has become "a symbol of oppression" for a lot of Iranian women (Lindsey, 2015). In the present study, besides the freedom of clothing choice in Hungary—referred to by a few students as "*superficial*" or "*low-level freedom*"—some students did consider freedom to entail privileges beyond merely the question of the *hijab*. These greater freedoms included freedom of speech, freedom to form different and multiple relationships, and sexual freedom. However, based on the interview data, freedom from the

veil seemed to be the most common privilege experienced by Iranian women in Hungary, while "*relationship freedom*" was perceived as generally more advantageous to Iranian men.

The findings of the current study are also consistent with the study by Ghayournejadian (2012), in which Iranian-American women—similar to the participants of this study in Hungary—appreciated the freedom of dress and reported that unlike in Iran, they did not always have to worry about what to wear. Furthermore, Iranian-American women's perception of freedom in the study by Ziabakhsh (2000) was similar to that of Iranian students in Hungary, with both reporting they had more freedom of choice, freedom of speech, and individual freedom abroad.

In this study, some Iranian women seemed to limit themselves from experiencing relationships with the opposite sex. They believed that Iranian men have relationships, including sexual relationships, more easily with other women in Hungary—compared to Iranian women, who tend to appear more conservative.

These findings are comparable with the result of Hanassab's (1998) study, in which Iranian males showed more open attitudes about partner selection, sexuality, and dating compared to Iranian females, who were more serious about their relationships. Furthermore, in Hanassab's (1998) study, males were revealed to hold double-standards toward females, both in their belief that it is men's right to have many relationships (while being critical of women for doing the same) as well as in their preference to marry virgins. In the present study, similar patterns of belief among female students were observed. For instance, one female participant in Hungary reported, nothing happens to a man if he enjoys many relationships, but if a girl does likewise, it will likely prove problematic for her in the future. This participant further added that men enter many relationships but eventually prefer a virgin when marrying. Contrary to the above, in one recent study (Ghaffari, 2020), Iranian men in Iran showed inconsistent gender-role expectations, endorsing women to discard traditional values (e.g., virginity) on one side and condemning them for being Westernized.

Evidently, the continued influence of traditional values and norms, as well as social and family expectations, has led some Iranian females in Hungary to limit their experiences of relationships, especially sexual ones. Some women were worried about being judged for having many relationships or for losing their virginity, which they feared might jeopardize their chances of getting married in the future. Similarly, some Iranian women in Sweden (Farahani, 2018) spoke about their past experiences with expectations that they should remain virgins — which affected their sexual behaviours — as well as the strong tie between family honour (*namoos*) and female sexuality in Iran.

Generally, both men and women worldwide are embracing more gender egalitarianism (Pessin & Arpino, 2018). The present study found that Iranian students, regardless of their gender, supported gender equality and freedom in general. In addition, they reported feeling more freedom in Hungary than in Iran. In the case of Iranians, who come from a country with a "*contradictory*" history (Farahani, 2018), their mentality surrounding issues such as gender and freedom might be more complicated and at times inconsistent, probably because of the prompt shifts in the content of various concepts in Iran, which is undergoing a high degree of socio-political mobility and transition (Farahani, 2018). One example of such contradictions can be observed in the imposed unveiling of Iranian women in 1935 and re-veiling in 1983, which have had an outstandingly complex impact on Iranian men and women (Farahani, 2018).

Several factors influenced Iranian students' gender-role attitudes and perceptions of freedom in Hungary, including their exposure to secular Hungarian society. This exposure was significant because it contrasted significantly with Iran's non-secular society, which has strong traditional gender norms. According to research (Uz, 2015) reporting the Index of Cultural Tightness and Looseness among 68 countries, Iran is a significantly tighter society than Hungary, which is looser in comparison to Iran. These cultural differences between Iran and Hungary are likely to have influenced Iranian students in Hungary, regardless of their gender, to perceive greater freedom in Hungary than in Iran.

The drastic socio-political shifts within the Iranian historical context also impact Iranian students' gender role attitudes. Over the past century, Iran has continuously undergone a greater unexpected political shift (e.g., significant changes in the role and status of women) compared to any other country during this era (Keddie, 2000).

It is reported that the gender role attitudes of women in today's Iran have dramatically changed as a result of globalization, environmental stresses, and most significantly, "mass media" (e.g., the internet) (Karimi, 2015). Moreover, it was stated that in modern Iran, socio-political and economic changes had impacted men and women at varying rates and degrees (Ghaffari, 2020). As such, the narratives of men in Iran indicated that the weakening of traditional gender roles, along with women's growing autonomy, correspond to undermining Iran's patriarchy and men's power simultaneously (Ghaffari, 2020).

Iranian women are increasingly progressing, from being largely restricted to the private realms of their households as "*mothers*" and "*housewives*" to being prominent actors in public life (Karimi, 2015). Women in Iran are "*active*" and not "*passive*" in society; they dynamically engage in the political movement for reform, resist oppression, and question

gender inequalities and patriarchy (Sedghi, 2007). Despite encountering constant barriers, they fight hard to obtain freedom and gender equality (Haghighat, 2014). The findings of a qualitative study (Salehi et al., 2020) among educated young women in Iran indicated that despite the limitations reported by these women (e.g., hijab, social media filtering, limitations in social networks, leisure activities, social and sexual relationships), they perceived themselves as "*agents of social change*," capable of overcoming the socio-cultural constraints of the patriarchal society. As such, these women used tactics to impact social change and strengthen their status by creating "*digital freedom*" (e.g., using anti-filtering programs to access the internet to communicate with the rest of the world and share their true identity, which remained concealed in their ordinary lives owing to socio-cultural barriers); new dressing style (e.g., wearing hijab in a trendy style such that it accentuates their beauty for self-expression), leisure opportunities (e.g., secret house parties for breaking the dancing/drinking taboos); and fighting for sexual and social relationship freedom (e.g., insisting on their rights for having sexual and social relationship freedom by practicing them, so it will eventually become a norm) (Salehi et al., 2020).

The foregoing studies show that comparable results will most likely be obtained if an investigation is conducted on gender roles and freedom perceptions among Iranians in the middle or upper classes within Iran. However, probably different results may be obtained for lower-class groups since they may place a higher value on deeper issues of freedom (e.g., social justice).

Limitations and Implications

This study has several limitations. First, most of the participants in this study came from the upper-middle class; their opinions on gender roles and freedom could only be comparable to those of other upper-middle class Iranians in Iran or international students, most of whom are affluent. Consequently, the perceptions of the participants may differ from those of Iranians of lower socio-economic status. Second, a majority of the participants were females, and as such, patterns of students' responses were likely skewed. It is recommended to conduct quantitative research on a large sample of Iranian international students abroad to study the topics that emerged from data analysis and examine gender attitudes and gendered freedom among Iranian expats.

The findings have substantial implications for the educational system. The education sectors in Hungary could play an essential role in decreasing gender stereotypes and gender inequality by promoting gender equality within the education system (e.g., by revising curricula, offering courses, training teachers, and so on). Universities across Hungary are

encouraged to develop gender awareness programs in order to educate students about gender issues.

Conclusion

This study explored attitudes toward gender roles and perceptions of freedom among Iranian students in Hungary. The findings revealed that Iranian females held more egalitarian attitudes and fewer gender stereotypes and sexism compared to their male counterparts, who displayed transitional gender-role attitudes with greater gender stereotypes and sexism. The traditional gender-role attitudes of men in this study could be a reflection of Iranian society, which for a long time, has been a male-dominant society (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2003) that imposes more restrictions on women and grants greater privileges to men in various areas, such as freedom of dress, inheritance, marriage, divorce, child custody, access to certain professions, etc. (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2003; Kian, 1995). It is believed that on a macro-level, social policy reflects gender-role attitudes, which influence and sustain an individual's gender-role ideology (Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2016, p. 2). For instance, individuals who live in more traditional societies are more likely to have traditional attitudes toward gender roles (Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2016). Additionally, the gender roles that society prescribes to people are prone to being internalized and self- imposed (Eisenchlas, 2013). Perhaps these are the reasons why Iranian males who spent most of their life in Iran held fewer egalitarian attitudes and displayed more gender stereotypes compared to females. The former most likely have been influenced by patriarchal norms in Iran.

On the other hand, living in Hungary—which boasts relatively higher levels of gender equality when compared to Iran—could have influenced students' egalitarian attitudes toward gender roles. Furthermore, one study reported a significant and positive relationship between living in a more gender-egalitarian society and holding gender-egalitarian attitudes in that society (Pessin & Arpino, 2018).

While both Iranian female and male students in Hungary held different attitudes toward gender roles, both emphasized gender equality and the fact that they enjoyed freedom in Hungary more than in Iran. However, some forms of freedom—namely, freedom of clothing for women and freedom of relationship choice for men—in Hungary nonetheless seemed to remain privileges specific to each respective gender.

There is no question that exposure to the host country and international interactions affected Iranian students' views on gender roles. However, the tremendous changes in gender and sexuality between the beginning of the 19th century and the early 20th century that already took place in Iran (Najmabadi, 2005), the progressive weakening of "Islamic

hegemony" over the past two decades (Hoominfar & Zanganeh, 2021); the traditional gender roles that are challenged and redefined by Iranian women in today's Iran (Karimi, 2015); as well as the dual-gender roles (e.g., traditional and modern) assigned to women in Iran (Mehran, 2003), should not be underestimated, as such phenomena could be even stronger predictors of the Iranian students' gender-role attitudes than merely being exposed to the host society.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Integrated Discussion

Overview of Objectives and Key Results

This dissertation explores the cross-cultural adaptation and experiences of Iranian international students. It comprises four studies, including a comprehensive review of the literature and three empirical qualitative studies—two cross-sectional and one longitudinal. The three empirical studies were part of the same project, in which one-time interviews were conducted with 20 Iranian international students in Hungary. Additionally, an extra interview was conducted for the longitudinal study.

The first study (Chapter 4) conducted a comprehensive literature review to investigate Iranian international students' cross-cultural adaptation and experiences. The review analyzed 130 relevant studies published between 1955 and 2022, covering nearly seven decades, spanning both pre- and post-revolution periods. An inductive approach was employed to extract themes from the study's findings. The study used various cross-cultural models solely as a means of guiding the process of categorizing the themes. The analysis identified seven major themes, including push-and-pull factors of migration, academic adaptation, socio-cultural adaptation, psychological adaptation, acculturation, identity, and future plans. The study's findings revealed that the transitions of Iranian students, particularly those who left Iran after the revolution, were both involuntary and permanent. Furthermore, the study found that socio-political factors affecting cross-cultural adaptation were the most significant and frequent factors. These factors included but were not limited to the revolution, war, the presence of freedom in the host country, and sanctions-related difficulties such as visa and banking issues and economic crises.

The second study (Chapter 5) employed a cross-sectional qualitative approach, in which semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 Iranian students in Hungary to investigate their psychosocial adaptation and identify the potential factors that may influence it. Thematic analysis of the interviews revealed that although some participants experienced uncertainty and anxiety in their intercultural interactions, the majority of Iranian students reported feeling more content than distressed about their experience of living in Hungary. Moreover, the study indicated that students' desire for independent living in Hungary, coupled with the social support they received from their families, played a protective role in preventing negative psychological outcomes.

The third study (Chapter 6) employed a qualitative longitudinal design to explore the trajectory of psychosocial adaptation among Iranian international students in Hungary and identify the obstacles they encountered. In the first round of interviews, the data from the semi-structured interview used in the second study (Chapter 5) was analyzed, focusing on

different aspects of the data (e.g., socio-political challenges). A second round of interviews was conducted after 7 to 12 months, and only 12 out of the 20 students who participated in the first round agreed to participate. The transcripts from these interviews were analyzed using inductive content analysis. The findings revealed that Iranian students faced several significant challenges, including visa and banking problems related to sanctions, and the currency crisis. These obstacles had a detrimental effect on students' mental well-being, resulting in anxiety, depression, and uncertainty. Despite the challenges faced by the students, their psychological health improved gradually over time as they gained greater independence and access to better socio-political and economic opportunities in their host country.

In the fourth study (Chapter 7), a cross-sectional qualitative approach was used to explore the attitudes of 20 Iranian students in Hungary towards gender roles and their perceptions of freedom. This study used the same data from semi-structured interviews with these same 20 Iranian students as previous studies (Chapters 5 and 6). However, this study concentrated on various aspects of the interview data related to gender roles and freedom. The findings of the study, which utilized content analysis of semi-structured interviews, revealed that women generally held more egalitarian gender-role attitudes than men, whereas men tended to exhibit more gender stereotypes and sexism compared to women. Irrespective of gender, nearly all the participants expressed their support for gender equality and freedom and reported a greater sense of freedom in Hungary compared to Iran. Nonetheless, female students showed more concern about gender inequality than their male counterparts.

Integrating Results: Connecting Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Evidence

The present dissertation drew upon four studies, including a comprehensive literature review and three qualitative studies, which generated a plethora of valuable findings. However, the primary main findings associated with the cross-cultural adaptation of Iranian international students will be discussed rather than an in-depth investigation of every aspect explored in each study.

Generally, the cumulative results indicated that Iranian students, particularly those who went abroad after the revolution, are non-voluntary migrants, driven primarily by external socio-political push and pull factors such as the lack of freedom in Iran, the economic crisis, and better socio-political, academic, and economic opportunities abroad. It is reported that Iranians in the diaspora who migrated to the West after the revolution felt that they were forced to leave Iran and become homeless in a foreign land, a sentiment captured by the term '*avaregi*' (Raji, 2010). It can be inferred that regardless of whether Iranians fall

into the category of international students or immigrants, they are not voluntary migrants but rather compelled to move abroad due to external factors.

Moreover, the majority of Iranian students did not intend to return home after completing their studies and instead planned to remain in the host country or move to a third country, suggesting that their transition was not temporary. Therefore, this result challenges the classical taxonomy of international students (e.g., as provided by Berry & Sam, 2016), which defines international students as voluntary and temporary migrants who go abroad for a specific educational purpose and are expected to return to their home country after completing their studies. Although Berry (1997) acknowledged in his earlier work on acculturation and adaptation that the intersection of economic, political, and demographic factors in an individual's country of origin is a key factor in understanding the level of voluntariness behind the decision to migrate, his recent works still categorize international students as voluntary migrants. Bierwiaczonek and Waldzus (2016) recognized that although Berry's (1997) taxonomy may not fully reflect the complexity of present-day situations, since the world has undergone significant transformation since this taxonomy was proposed, and the patterns of international transitions have transformed, with phenomena such as serial migration, sojourners, especially international students, becoming permanent migrants, and the rise of transnationalism; the authors mentioned that Berry's taxonomy continues to reflect the research practice, and the literature still tends to define target populations solely based on a shared objective (Bierwiaczonek & Waldzus, 2016).

Drawing on the comprehensive literature review and empirical studies presented in the current dissertation, overall, the cross-cultural adaptation process of Iranian international students did not have a fixed outcome, as the studies revealed that these students had both positive and negative experiences in their adaptation process. The findings indicated that the cross-cultural adaptation experiences of Iranian students were both positive and negative. This aligns with several existing theories of cross-cultural adaptation, including the ones that were previously discussed, such as Berry's intercultural adaptation model, Anderson's (1994) cognitive-emotional-behavioural theory, and Kim's stress-adaptation-growth dynamic framework, which suggested that adaptation outcomes may vary widely, from positive to negative.

Positive and negative cross-cultural adaptation processes were encountered by Iranian students in the academic, socio-cultural, and psychological domains. Several negative adaptation challenges included but were not limited to both linguistic and culturally induced misunderstandings, discrimination, currency crises, and difficulties with visas and banking.

As a result of adaptation difficulties, Iranian students experienced negative psychological adaptations such as anxiety, uncertainty, depression, and loneliness. However, the findings also revealed that Iranian students had positive cross-cultural adaptation experiences in the host country, including but not limited to increased freedom, happiness, and satisfaction in the host country, as well as a sense of personal growth and independence, while also benefiting from emotional and financial support from their families.

It is worth noting that the results from the comprehensive review and empirical studies were congruent with each other, and collectively they yielded a comprehensive understanding of the adaptation experiences of Iranian international students. The positive and negative adaptation experiences of Iranian students in Hungary were found to be consistent with the experiences reported by other Iranian students in the comprehensive literature review, especially those after the revolution. These experiences included gaining more freedom, happiness, and independence in the host country, as well as facing challenges related to sanctions, such as banking, visa, and currency crises which caused anxiety and depression in the students.

Based upon the collective results of the studies, it can be inferred that the cross-cultural adaptation process of Iranian students is not exclusively influenced by cultural factors but rather heavily influenced by broader socio-political and historical factors associated with the students' country of origin and the host country, as well as the diplomatic relations between them. This is in line with the notion that culture is shaped by a society's historical and political conditions, which impact how that society is organized socially, politically, and culturally (Storey, 2018).

The studies revealed that socio-political factors, whether positive or negative, were the most frequent factors influencing Iranian students' adaptation and had a considerable impact on their adaptation at both the origin and host country levels (see Table 5). Negative socio-political factors at the origin country level, such as the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the hostage crisis, the Iran-Iraq war, the lack of freedom in Iran, and the economic crisis, adversely affected students' adaptation. On the other hand, positive socio-political factors at the host country level, including increased safety and freedom such as socio-political and gender-related freedoms, economic and job opportunities, and a high-quality educational system, facilitated positive adaptation. However, negative socio-political factors at the host country level and host-home level, such as the U.S. travel ban on Muslims, the 9/11 attack, visa and banking restrictions, and the imposition of sanctions on Iran by the U.S., had a negative impact on adaptation.

Table 5

Several Examples of Positive and Negative Socio-Political Factors Impacting the Adaptation of Iranian International Students: Home, Host, and Home-Host Levels

Socio-Political Factors	Origin Country: Iran	Host Country	Home-Host Relationship
Positive Socio-Political Factors Impacting Adaptation	N/A	-Freedom -Independence -Economic and Employment opportunities - Higher-quality education	N/A
Negative Socio-Political Factors Impacting Adaptation	- The 1979 Iranian Revolution - Iran-Iraq war -Lack of freedom in Iran -Economic (currency) crisis (e.g., devaluation of the Rial)	-The U.S. travel ban on Muslims -Visa restrictions -Banking restrictions - September 11 attack	-The Hostage crisis -Economic sanctions

In line with the studies conducted in this dissertation, Raji (2010) documented several socio-political adaptation experiences of the Iranian diaspora. It was explicitly reported that the adaptation experiences of the Iranian diaspora were influenced by the various historical, socio-political, and economic relationships between Iran and the specific host nation, as well as immigration policies. Examples were cited to demonstrate these experiences, including but not limited to the 1981 hostage crisis in Iran that led to a surge of discrimination against Iranians in the U.S., as well as the post-9/11 '*culture of fear*' experienced by individuals from Middle Eastern, Muslim, and South Asian backgrounds, leading Iranians to be fearful of identifying as Iranian or Persian. However, unlike the first generation (i.e., those who left Iran shortly after the revolution), newer generations (i.e., children of parents who left Iran

shortly after the revolution) were reported not to be ashamed of their ethnic identity. Raji (2010) highlighted additional socio-political factors that affected the Iranian diaspora in the U.K. For instance, the political turmoil in Iran during the 1980s led to mistrust between Iranian political groups (e.g., pro-monarchy, pro-Islamists, pro-leftists, and pro-Mujahedin), which in turn hindered cohesion within the Iranian diaspora community. According to Mobasher (2018), the experiences of Iranian immigrants were significantly shaped by a triadic relationship between their home country, the host country (e.g., diplomatic tensions), and historical and structural changes in both home and host. The studies conducted in the current dissertation support this view and emphasize the complex interplay among these three factors. These consistent findings also support the applicability of Ward and Geeraert's ecological model (2016) in understanding the process of acculturation and adaptation of international students, which highlights the important role of ecological context on three levels, namely familial, institutional, and societal levels, while also considering the importance of home and host countries' characteristics, including the socio-political climate of both countries that impact the acculturation and adaptation process.

The majority of the acculturation and cross-cultural adaptation theories discussed in the theoretical chapter primarily concentrate on cultural, psychological, and behavioral changes that influence adaptation and acculturation, overlooking the significant role of socio-political factors related to the home and host country on permanent migrants' or sojourners' (in this case, international students') adaptation. The ecological theory of Ward and Geeraert (2016) is relatively more relevant to the findings of this dissertation, as mentioned earlier.

Another significant finding of this dissertation is that the chronology of historical timelines in both the host country and the student's home country is crucial to the adaptation of Iranian students. In essence, the adaptation of Iranian students is also related to the historical periods in their home and host countries. Consequently, shifts in the socio-political landscapes of these countries have resulted in varying degrees of adaptation for Iranian students over different historical periods. For example, it was observed that before 1979, Iranian students abroad did not face visa complications, currency crises, or banking issues because Iran had more positive diplomatic relations with the U.S. However, after the revolution, significantly since 2018, when the U.S. imposed its harshest sanctions on Iran, these challenges have intensified due to the deterioration of Iran-US relations.

A similar chronological perspective can also be applied to Hungary. While the Hungarian government imposed certain obstacles for Iranian students, such as visa and banking restrictions, in compliance with the sanctions on Iran by the U.S., the UN, and the

EU, there have also been positive developments within the Hungarian education system in recent years. Notably, the introduction of the Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship program launched in 2013 offers monthly stipends and tuition fee exemptions to students from various countries, including Iran (Stipendium Hungaricum, n.d.), which signifies the existence of some positive diplomatic relations between Iranian and Hungarian education ministries, and these supports can alleviate the financial difficulties faced by Iranian students.

It is worth emphasizing that socio-political factors do not emerge in a vacuum but rather are shaped by the complex historical context of Iran, which has undergone significant transformations over the centuries. The present behaviours of the Iranian people are significantly shaped by their history; therefore, it is impossible to comprehend Iranians without a thorough understanding of their history (Daryaee, 2012).

As previously stated, the history of Iran is complex and extensive, making it impossible to cover all the events. However, some aspects of Iran's socio-political context were briefly mentioned in previous chapters. During the last century, Iran has undergone monarchy and theocracy and has also explored revolution, constitutionalism, and developmentalism, while simultaneously resisting social unrest, foreign influence and occupation, wars, and coups (Gheissari & Nasr, 2006). While Iran has undergone significant changes during this time, it continues to face challenges in establishing a democratic system (Gheissari & Nasr, 2006).

Due to centuries of socio-political turmoil and instability in Iran, the level of dissatisfaction among its population has been steadily rising. This discontent has been pronounced in recent decades, especially after the 1979 revolution. In earlier chapters, it was mentioned that several factors have contributed to Iran's brain drain crisis, including the economic crisis, inflation, unemployment, lack of freedom, discrimination, and human rights violations. Consequently, many Iranians, including students, have been leaving the country in pursuit of a better future.

For women in Iran, the situation has been even more challenging than for men due to their continuous experience of systematic discrimination and inequalities for over two millennia in a society dominated by men (Mohammadi, 2019). These inequalities have their roots in essentialist views, tyranny, an authoritarian and patriarchal societal structure, and Islamic Sharia laws, among other factors, all of which have limited the freedom of women (Mohammadi, 2019). It was discussed earlier how women in Iran experience discrimination in multiple areas of law and practice. These discriminations and inequalities manifest in various forms, including in the realm of criminal law (e.g., compulsory hijab, gender-based

differences in punishment, age of criminal responsibility, testimony, blood money, etc.), family law (e.g., marriage, divorce, custody, travel, etc.), inheritance, and employment and the right to work (Nayyeri, 2013). The presence of discriminatory laws targeting Iranian women has been identified as one of the factors contributing to the rise in the number of Iranian women migrating to other countries, with their number having been reported to exceed that of men (Bavili, 2022). Iranian women are reported to be more likely to consider migration due to discrimination based on their gender, limited opportunities, and a significant disparity in values between women in society and the Islamic government. These factors were reported to contribute to a sense of hopelessness about their future, which leads to a higher tendency to migrate (Rezaei, 2022). In a recent survey conducted by the Iran Migration Observatory, while 80% of Iranian graduate students considered external factors and situations in Iran as the reasons for their desire to migrate, Iranian women were 6% more likely than men to cite these factors as influential in their decision to migrate (Independent Persian, 2023).

The gender discrimination and inequalities in Iran are frequently rationalized by essentialist views on gender (e.g., the belief that women are naturally weaker and more emotional, leading to their unsuitability for decision-making roles) and traditional gender roles (e.g., the idea that women exist solely for providing pleasure to men and bearing children, while men should act as women's protectors and providers) (Nayyeri, 2013). These attitudes have had an impact on Iranians, particularly men. While the majority of men in one of the studies in this dissertation expressed support for gender equality, they exhibited more traditional gender role attitudes, essentialist views on gender, sexism, and gender stereotypes compared to women who held egalitarian gender role attitudes. Traditional gender roles were also reported to be evident among Iranian men in the diaspora (e.g., in social media), with Iranian women who were perceived to be defying cultural norms and behaving in ways deemed "*un-Iranian*" being subject to criticism (Raji, 2010). Iranian women in the diaspora have also expressed cultural shock regarding the shift in gender roles and have appreciated the greater gender equality found abroad (Shirazi & Afary, 2020).

The gender discrimination and inequalities observed in Iran, as well as the disparities in gender role attitudes between Iranian men and women, reflect the social conflict between women (the subordinate group) and men (the dominant group). This is in line with the Social Conflict Theory, which was presented in earlier chapters. Despite traditional gender role attitudes being internalized by many Iranians, especially men in Iranian society, it is worth noting that throughout history, many Iranian men have also supported the Iranian women's

movement in their fight for gender equality, as discussed earlier. For instance, in response to the mandatory hijab law introduced shortly after the 1979 revolution, men supported women who protested against this law. Similarly, after the Green Movement was suppressed in 2009, men expressed their solidarity with women by posting pictures of themselves wearing headscarves online (Mohammadi, 2022).

The findings of this dissertation regarding perceptions of gender roles and freedom are also consistent with the historical dynamics of Iran from the past to the present, which were discussed in greater depth in earlier chapters. While many Iranian men held traditional views on gender roles, gender stereotypes, and sexism, the majority supported freedom and gender equality. Iran's historical context, as well as the host country's context (e.g., Hungary), has influenced the perceptions of Iranian international students regarding gender roles and freedom. For example, Iranian male students' traditional and sexist views reflect Iran's context as a male-dominated society. However, the context of Hungarian society as a secular and loose society and periods of relative secularism and freedom in Iran's past likely influenced their support for gender equality and freedom. In addition, the egalitarian gender role attitudes of Iranian female students in Hungary and their consistent endorsement of gender equality and freedom may be rooted in their historical oppression by men and exposure to higher freedom in the Hungarian context. Nevertheless, it is crucial to recognize, as also previously stated, that various influential factors, such as changes in gender dynamics in Iran, the declining impact of Islam, the transformation of traditional gender roles, and the existence of dual-gender roles in Iran, may have exerted a substantial influence on the gender-role attitudes of Iranian students in Hungary.

Nonetheless, the recent *Woman, Life, Freedom* movement in Iran has experienced growing support from males, with men and boys risking their lives to advocate for gender equality (Mohammadi, 2022). Therefore, the recent increase in male support for the movement in Iran suggests a shift in Iranian men's consciousness, as they have come to realize that achieving freedom for all requires freedom for women (Gedeon, 2022).

Generally, Iranians have faced socio-political struggles that have compelled many to seek opportunities abroad. Recent events following Mahsa Amini's death in 2022 have underscored the significance of freedom and democracy, attesting to the long-standing desire of Iranians, both in Iran and overseas, to overcome the cycle of socio-political hardships they have endured for a long time.

The difficulties encountered by Iranian students overseas are indicative of the wider challenges present within Iran. Despite the obstacles, these students remain devoted to their

academic and personal growth and value the opportunities they have while studying abroad. The issues experienced by Iranian international students ultimately stem from the lack of freedom within Iran. The attainment of freedom in Iran has the potential to resolve the root causes that contribute to the mass migration phenomenon and the socio-political challenges faced by Iranian international students.

Implications

Drawing upon the outcomes of the four research papers, the key implications that are common across all four studies will be highlighted. Some implications of the studies are addressing the literature. Based on the findings of the studies, clearly, Iranian students' transitions, especially those who left Iran after the 1979 revolution, were rather involuntary and permanent; therefore, it is suggested that the traditional taxonomy of international students as "voluntary" and "temporary" migrants will be revised and incorporate potential characteristics of "involuntary" and "permanent" migration of international students.

Additionally, it is evident that socio-political factors play a critical role in the cross-cultural adaptation of Iranian international students. The impact of these factors is not fully captured by the existing categories of cross-cultural adaptation (i.e., socio-cultural, psychological, and academic adaptation), suggesting that a new category of socio-political adaptation might be needed to fully understand and address the challenges faced by international students. While the existing categories are useful in understanding certain aspects of the adaptation process, they do not account for the role of socio-political factors in shaping the experiences of international students. Therefore, the proposed category of socio-political adaptation would focus on how international students adapt to the socio-political factors of both their origin and host countries, as well as the diplomatic relations between the two. Additionally, this new category would consider the differences in cross-cultural adaptation experiences across the chronology of the socio-political history of both the origin and host countries.

Further research is required to fully grasp socio-political adaptation in cross-cultural contexts, advancing our understanding of the complexities faced by international students, particularly those from Iran with its unique socio-political background.

Furthermore, this research suggests that policymakers and educators should work to create a more supportive environment for international students, particularly those from countries like Iran, who face unique challenges related to socio-political factors. To achieve this goal, there should be endeavors to raise awareness and empathy among the residents of the host country, as well as initiatives to provide further assistance and resources such as

financial aid, immigration assistance, job opportunities, academic guidance, and psychological support to enable Iranian international students to better cope with their socio-political challenges. Policymakers are recommended to also work toward addressing the socio-political challenges in Iran that impact Iranian international students. This can include advocacy efforts to promote human rights and democratic values, as well as support for gender and economic equality and stability.

Furthermore, it is important for policymakers to implement measures that promote a fair representation of Iran and its people, particularly Iranian women, on Western social media platforms. This is necessary as these platforms have a tendency to perpetuate stereotypical images of Iranians, portraying their women as passive (Nezhadhossein, 2020). Such measures can aid in decreasing discrimination and promoting better integration and adaptation of Iranian international students in the host country. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that recently there has been a positive change in how Iranians are presented in Western media since the *Women, Life, Freedom* movement. In 2022, Time magazine named Iranian women the "Heroes of the Year" in recognition of their courage in leading protests against the oppressive government.

In conclusion, the findings of these studies highlight the challenges and opportunities that Iranian international students face in their cross-cultural adaptation process. It is important for universities and policymakers to be aware of these challenges and provide appropriate support and resources to help Iranian students adapt and succeed in their new environment.

Limitations and Future Research

Several overarching limitations are common in most or all of the studies in the current dissertation, which will be elucidated below. Although the studies provided essential insights into the experiences and adaptations of Iranian international students, limitations must be acknowledged.

Firstly, the participants in these studies were mainly Iranian students from middle to higher-middle-class backgrounds whose majority primarily relied on their families for financial support. While this may provide valuable insights into the experiences of Iranian international students who are financially dependent on their families, it may limit the generalizability of the findings to Iranian international students who are financially independent or from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Another limitation is the underrepresentation of female participants in the empirical studies and the comprehensive review. Although efforts were made to include a diverse

sample of Iranian international students in terms of age, field of study, and other demographic factors, the samples in the majority of the studies included fewer female participants than males. Future studies could focus on recruiting more female participants to provide a more representative sample and a better understanding of the experiences of female Iranian international students. Similarly, Mobasher (2018) recommended that researchers explore the experiences of Iranian women in the diaspora, pointing out that the existing literature has relatively overlooked these experiences.

Furthermore, the sample size of 20 international students in the empirical studies was small; therefore, it could have impacted the results of the three empirical studies, making them biased and not representative of all Iranian international students. However, it should also be noted that, considering the potential limitations of small sampling, a comprehensive literature review of 130 studies was conducted to compare the adaptation of the 20 students in the empirical studies with those reported in the existing literature. The comprehensive review confirmed the qualitative studies' findings and provided a more in-depth understanding of the adaptation experiences of Iranian international students. Additionally, a longitudinal study was conducted to increase the reliability of the study's findings. A longitudinal study mitigated the impact of small sample size by repeatedly measuring and observing the same cases over time, allowing for richer insights, comparative analysis, and a better understanding of context.

Last but not least, while this study has highlighted the significance of socio-political and historical factors in shaping the adaptation experiences of Iranian students abroad, it is essential to acknowledge the potential presence of cultural bias stemming from the researcher's background, ideology, gender (female), and international student status. This bias could have inadvertently influenced the research outcomes. Therefore, it would be advantageous to conduct future research on this particular group by non-Iranian researchers, including males and individuals who are not international students. This approach would enable the comparison of findings, potentially leading to a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

Conclusion

Based on the comprehensive literature review and four empirical studies presented in this dissertation, it is evident that the cross-cultural adaptation process for Iranian international students is complex and mainly influenced by the socio-political contexts of both their home country and the host country, as well as the diplomatic relations between the two. Iranian students faced mainly involuntary and permanent transitions, with socio-political

barriers being the most frequent obstacles to their adaptation. Despite facing negative adaptation primarily related to negative socio-political challenges, including but not limited to revolution, war, discrimination, visas and banking, and the economic crisis, which resulted in negative psychological states such as anxiety, depression, and uncertainty, Iranian students also experienced positive adaptation due to mainly socio-political factors such as the freedom, independence, employment, and educational prospects they gained abroad, which resulted in their satisfaction and happiness in the host country.

Therefore, it is imperative for policymakers and institutions to prioritize providing support to facilitate the complex adaptation process for Iranian international students, particularly in light of the socio-political challenges they often face. Additionally, future research should focus on underrepresented groups, including Iranian female students and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, as they are often overlooked in current literature.

The primary focus of the current research findings presented in this dissertation is juxtaposed with the existing body of classical cross-cultural literature pertaining to the process of adaptation and acculturation of migrants, as illustrated in Table 6.

Table 6

Comparison of Cross-Cultural Adaptation: Current Study and Main Focus in the Literature

Category	Main Focus in the Literature	Emphasis in the Current Research
Sojourners (e.g., International Students)	Voluntary Temporary	Involuntary Permanent
Main Adaptation Types	Psychological Socio-cultural Intercultural Academic	Socio-political adaptation
Cross-Cultural Adaptation and Acculturation Theories	Cultural Psychological Behavioural	Socio-political: • Socio-political factors of home and host country • Diplomatic ties between home and host country

	• Chronological history of home and host country

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<div align="center">**Appendices**</div>

Appendix A[17]

Table A1

Themes and Sub-Themes of Results from Included Studies

Major Themes	Sub-themes
1. Push-and-pull factors of migration	
2. Academic adaptations	(2.1) Language in academic contexts
	(2.2) Academic system
	(2.3) Academic achievement
	(2.4) Academic-related fees
3. Socio-cultural adaptation	(3.1) Out-group and in-group contact
	(3.2) Social support
	(3.3) Discrimination/racism
	(3.4) Cultural distance and cultural sensitivity
	(3.5) Immigration regulations, visa and banking issues
	(3.6) Language in social contexts
	(3.7) Economic obstacles
	(3.8) Freedom and gender issues
	(3.9) Food
4. Psychological adaptation	(4.1) Homesickness and loneliness
	(4.2) Depression and anxiety
	(4.3) Happiness
5. Acculturation	
6. Identity	
7. Future Plans	

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[17] This appendix pertains to the research conducted in chapter four of this dissertation titled "Cross-Cultural Adaptation Amidst Socio-Political Turmoil: A Comprehensive Review of Iranian International Students Pre- and Post-Revolution."

Table A2

References for Themes and Subthemes

Themes and subthemes	References
Push-and-pull factors of migration	Asgari & Borzooei, 2014; Borhanmanesh, 1965; Busch, 1955; Campbell, 2015; Didehvar, 2020; Doray, 2017; Hosseindoust, 1975; Hosseini, 2018; Iravani & Soltani, 2012; Karimi & Bucerius, 2018; Kazemi et al., 2018; Khodabandelou et al., 2015; Mehtap-Smadi & Hashemipour, 2011; Nachatar Singh et al., 2014; Payind, 1977; Rakhshandehroo, 2017; Ryazantsev et al., 2020; Sadri & Chaichian, 2018; Li & Ling, 2011; Valipour, 1967; Ardakani, 1976; Zijlstra, 2020
Language in academic contexts	Ahrari et al., 2019; Akhtari-Zavare & Ghanbari-Baghestan, 2010; Amiri & Alinezhad, 2007; Ardakani, 1976; Asghari, 2022; Aziz, 2020; Borhanmanesh, 1965; Brown, 2008a; Busch, 1955; Davis, 2010a; Doray, 2017; Erfani & Mardan, 2017; Farahbakhsh, 2004; Gharagozloo-Bahrami, 1983; Haghdoost, 2005; Haghdoust et al., 2007; Hosseindoust, 1975; Korouhi, 2020; Lim, 2018; Mahdavi-Harsini, 1981; Malekian et al., 2017; Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005; Moftakhar, 1975; Moshfegh, 1989; Nouri Hosseini, 2014; Payind, 1977; Rafieyan, 2016; Rakhshandehroo, 2017; Shafieyan, 1983; Sigaeva & Gullu, 2020; Tafazzoli-Moghaddam, 1980; Van et al., 2015: Zhiping & Paramasivam, 2013

Academic system	Akhtari-Zavare & Ghanbari-Baghestan, 2010; Alavi & Mansor, 2011; Ardakani, 1976; Asghari, 2022; Bavifard, 2008; Busch, 1955; Campbell, 2015; Doray, 2017; Galtung, 1965; Hosseini, 2022; Ilagan, 1997; Korouhi, 2020; Lim, 2018; Malekian et al., 2017; Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005; Moftakhar, 1975; Moshfegh, 1989; Najmi, 2013; Nouri Hosseini, 2014; Payind, 1977; Shafieyan, 1983; Sigaeva & Gullu, 2020
Academic achievement	Aflatouni, 1976; Akhtari-Zavare & Ghanbari-Baghestan, 2010; Ameli,1980; Bavifard, 2008; Busch, 1955; Doray, 2017; Erfani & Mardan, 2017, Haghdoost et al., 2007; Haghdoost, 2005; Hosseindoust, 1975; Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013; Korouhi, 2020; Malekian et al., 2017; Moftakhar, 1975; Moshfegh, 1989; Nabavi & Bijandi, 2018; Nouri Hosseini, 2014; Oveissi, 1983; Reihani, 1982; Tafazzoli-Moghaddam, 1980; Van et al., 2015
Academic-related fees	Akhtari-Zavare & Ghanbari-Baghestan, 2010; Amiri & Alinezhad, 2007; Ardakani, 1976; Hefner-Babb & Khoshlessan, 2018; Hosseindoust, 1975; Hosseini-Nezhad et al., 2021; Kazemi et al., 2018; Nahidi, 2014; Payind, 1977; Shafieyan, 1983; Sigaeva & Gullu, 2020; Li & Ling, 2011; Valipour, 1967; Van et al., 2015
Out-group and in-group contact	Aflatouni, 1976; Asgari & Borzooei, 2014; Borhanmanesh, 1965; Brown, 2009a; Brown, 2009b; Brown, 2009c; Busch,

	1955; Campbell, 2015; Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004; Didehvar, 2020; Doray, 2017; Galtung, 1965; Gomes et al., 2014; Hosseindoust, 1975; Hosseini et al., 2020; Hosseini, 2022; Khayat-Mofid, 1984; Khojastehrad & Sattarova, 2015; Korouhi, 2020; Lértora et al., 2021; Mahmoudi, 2008; Moftakhar, 1975; Moshfegh, 1989; Bavifard, 2008; Nouri Hosseini, 2014; Pandian, 2008; Przyłęcki, 2018; Rafieyan et al., 2014; Robinson et al., 2020; Suanet & Van De Vijver, 2009; Valipour, 1976; Van et al., 2015; Ziai-Bigdeli, 1982
Social support	Ardakani, 1976; Asefpour-Vakilian, 1981; Bavifard, 2008; Campbell, 2015; Falavarjani et al., 2020; Hefner-Babb & Khoshlessan, 2018; Hosseindoust, 1975; Hosseini-Nezhad et al., 2019, 2021; Johansson, 2013; Khayat-Mofid, 1984; Mahdavi-Harsini, 1981; Malekian & Khan, 2017; Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005; Nahidi et al., 2018; Nahidi, 2014; Oh & Butler, 2019; Payind, 1977; Rakhshandehroo, 2017; Reihani,1982; Sabouripour et al., 2017; Sadri & Chaichian, 2018; Shafieyan, 1983; Shahmohammadi, 2014; Sigaeva & Gullu, 2020; Nabavi & Bijandi, 2018; Li & Ling, 2011; Tafazzoli-Moghaddam, 1980; Vakili et al., 2012; Van et al., 2015
Discrimination/racism	Akhtari-Zavare & Ghanbari-Baghestan, 2010; Ameli, 1980; Anderson, 2020; Arasteh, 1994; Asghari, 2022; Bavifard, 2008; Guo & Guo, 2017; Hanassab, 2006;

	Hassan, 1962; Hosseindoust, 1975; Hosseini-Nezhad et al., 2021; Khoshneviss, 2017; Moshfegh, 1989; Najmi, 2013; Pandian, 2008; Przyłęcki, 2018; Sigaeva & Gullu, 2020; Valipour, 1967
Cultural distance and cultural sensitivity	**Cultural distance:** Akhtari-Zavare & Ghanbari-Baghestan, 2010; Amiri & Alinezhad, 2007; Asgari & Borzooei, 2014; Brown, 2008c; Farashaiyan & Hua, 2012; Farnia & Sattar, 2015; Galtung, 1965; Gharagozloo-Bahrami, 1983; Khodabandelou et al., 2015; Litrenta, 1987; Mahmoudi, 2008; Shafieyan, 1983; Suanet & Van De Vijver, 2009; Tsang, 2002)
	Cultural sensitivity: Brown, 2009b; Brown, 2009c; Doray, 2017; Hosseindoust, 1975; Hosseini, 2018; Ilagan, 1997; Korouhi, 2020; Lim, 2018; Mahmoudi, 2008; Moftakhar, 1975; Nouri Hosseini, 2014
Immigration regulations, visa and banking issues	Amiri & Alinezhad, 2007; Anderson, 2020; Asghari, 2022; Bavifard, 2008; Hefner-Babb & Khoshlessan, 2018; Hosseindoust, 1975; Hosseini et al., 2020; Hosseini, 2018; Hosseini-Nezhad et al., 2021; Johansson, 2013; Kazemi et al., 2018; Khodabandelou et al., 2015; Khoshneviss, 2017; Korouhi, 2020; Li & Ling, 2011; Moshfegh, 1989; Nouri Hosseini, 2014; Payind, 1977; Shafieyan, 1983; Shahmohammadi, 2014; Li & Ling, 2011; Toutant, 2009

Language in social contexts	Ahrari et al., 2019; Ameli, 1980; Ardakani, 1976; Asgari & Borzooei, 2014; Aziz, 2020; Brown, 2008a; Brown, 2008b; Brown, 2009a; Brown, 2009b; Busch, 1955; Davis, 2010a; Davis; 2010b; Didehvar; 2020; Doray, 2017; Erfani & Mardan; 2017; Farashaiyan & Hua, 2012; Gharagozloo-Bahrami, 1983; Gomes et al., 2014; Hosseini et al., 2020; Hosseini, 2018; Hosseini, 2022; Hosseini-Nezhad et al., 2019; Karimi & Bucerius, 2018; Khayat-Mofid, 1984; Khodabandelou et al., 2015; Khojastehrad & Sattarova, 2015; Khoshneviss, 2017; Korouhi, 2020; Mahmoudi, 2008; Malekian et al., 2017; Moshfegh, 1989; Nahidi, 2014; Najmi, 2013; Nouri Hosseini, 2014; Pandian, 2008; Rafieyan et al., 2014; Rafieyan, 2016; Zijlstra, 2020
Economic obstacles	Akhtari-Zavare & Ghanbari-Baghestan, 2010; Alavi & Mansor, 2011; Amiri & Alinezhad, 2007; Ardakani, 1976; Asgari & Borzooei, 2014; Asghari, 2022; Aziz, 2020; Baharloo et al., 2021; Brown, 2008c; Didehvar, 2020; Doray, 2017; Haghdoost et al., 2007; Hosseindoust, 1975; Hosseini, 2018; Hosseini-Nezhad et al., 2021; Johansson, 2013; Khayat-Mofid, 1984; Khodabandelou et al., 2015; Madanian et al., 2013; Mahdavi-Harsini, 1981; Mahmoudi, 2008; Malekian et al., 2017; Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005; Moshfegh, 1989; Nahidi, 2014; Najmi, 2013; Nouri

	Hosseini, 2014; Payind, 1977; Shafieyan, 1983; Shahmohammadi, 2014; Sigaeva & Gullu, 2020
Freedom and gender issues	Ahrari et al., 2019; Arasteh, 1994; Bavifard, 2008; Borhanmanesh, 1965; Brown, 2008c; Didehvar, 2020; Doray, 2017; Galtung, 1965; Hosseini, 2018; Hosseini-Nezhad et al., 2021; 2022; Johansson, 2013; Karimi & Bucerius, 2018; Kazemi et al., 2018; Khayat-Mofid, 1984; Litrenta, 1987; Mahmoudi, 2008; Nouri Hosseini, 2014; Reihani, 1982; Ryazantsev et al., 2020; Sadri & Chaichian, 2018; Valipour, 1967; Zijlstra, 2020
Food	Abidin et al., 2021; Akhtari-Zavare & Ghanbari-Baghestan, 2010; Ardakani, 1976; Asgari & Borzooei, 2014; Aziz, 2020; Brown, 2008c; Brown, 2009d; Galtung, 1965; Hosseindoust, 1975; Khafaie et al., 2016; Khodabandelou et al., 2015; Mahmoodi et al, 2022; Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005; Terebessy et al., 2016; Zarei et al., 2013
Homesickness and loneliness	**Homesickness:** Akhtari-Zavare & Ghanbari-Baghestan, 2010; Amiri & Alinezhad, 2007; Asghari, 2022; Aziz, 2020; Brown, 2009d; Busch, 1955; Hosseindoust, 1975; Hosseini, 2022; Hosseini-Nezhad et al., 2019; Khayat-Mofid, 1984; Mahdavi-Harsini, 1981; Moshfegh, 1989; Najmi, 2013; Nouri Hosseini, 2014; Payind, 1977;

	Shahmohammadi, 2014; Suanet & Van De Vijver, 2009
	Loneliness: Asghari, 2022; Brown & Holloway, 2008b; Brown, 2008c; Brown & Brown, 2009; Busch, 1955; Didehvar, 2020; Hojat et al., 1986; Hojat, 1982; Hosseini, 2022; Hosseini-Nezhad et al., 2019; Khayat-Mofid, 1984; Mahdavi-Harsini, 1981; Moshfegh, 1989; Nabavi & Bijandi, 2018; Nahidi, 2014; Najmi, 2013; Sadri & Chaichian, 2018; Shafieyan, 1983.
Depression and anxiety	Depression: Akhtari-Zavare & Ghanbari-Baghestan, 2010; Ameli, 1980; Amiri & Alinezhad, 2007; Bavifard, 2008; Brown & Holloway, 2008a; Brown, 2008c; Falavarjani et al., 2020; Hojat et al., 1986; Hojat, 1982; Hosseini-Nezhad et al., 2019, 2021, 2022; Khayat-Mofid, 1984; Moftakhar, 1975; Moshfegh, 1989; Najmi, 2013; Nooripour et al., 2021; Nouri Hosseini, 2014; Rezvan & Srimathi, 2022; Safara et al., 2012; Shafieyan, 1983; Shahmohammadi, 2014
	Anxiety: Akhtari-Zavare & Ghanbari-Baghestan, 2010; Asghari, 2022; Aziz, 2020; Baharloo et al., 2021; Brown, 2008a; Brown, 2008b; Brown, 2008c; Didehvar, 2020; Doray, 2017; Erfanmanesh, 2012; Falavarjani et al., 2020; Farahbakhsh, 2004; Hefner-Babb & Khoshlessan, 2018; Hojat et al., 1986; Hojat, 1982; Oveissi, 1983; Hosseini et al., 2020; Hosseini, 2018, 2022; Hosseini-Nezhad et al., 2019,

	2021; Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013; Ismail et al., 2016; Johansson, 2013; Khayat-Mofid, 1984; Khodabandelou et al., 2015; Khoshneviss, 2017; Lee & Ray, 1987; Mahdavi-Harsini, 1981; Malekian & Khan, 2017; Moshfegh, 1989; Nahidi et al., 2018; Nahidi, 2014; Najmi, 2013; Nooripour et al., 2021; Payind, 1977; Rezvan & Srimathi, 2022; Shafieyan, 1983; Sigaeva & Gullu, 2020; Suanet & Van De Vijver, 2009; Terebessy et al., 2016; Toutant, 2009; Zhiping & Paramasivam, 2013
Happiness	Ahrari et al., 2019; Akhtari-Zavare & Ghanbari-Baghestan, 2010; Ameli, 1980; Brown, 2009d; Didehvar, 2020; Hosseini-Nezhad et al., 2019; 2021; Khodabandelou et al., 2015; Litrenta, 1987; Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005; Moftakhar,1975; Nouri Hosseini, 2014; Valipour, 1967
Acculturation	Baharloo et al., 2021; Bavifard, 2008; Campbell, 2015; Didehvar, 2020; Doray, 2017; Falavarjani et al., 2020; Karimi & Bucerius, 2018; Khoshneviss, 2017; Litrenta, 1987; Mahmoodi et al, 2022; Mahmoudi, 2008; Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005; Nahidi, 2014; Nouri Hosseini, 2014; Rafieyan et al., 2014; Rafieyan, 2016; Rahimi, 1990; Robinson et al., 2020; Sadrossadat, 1995; Suanet & Van De Vijver, 2009
Identity	Abidin et al., 2021; Anderson, 2020; Asghari 2022; Bavifard, 2008; Brown, 2008c; Brown; 2009d; Busch, 1955; Davis,

	2010b; Didehvar, 2020; Doray, 2017; Karimi & Bucerius, 2018; Lértora et al., 2021; Lim, 2018; Mahmoudi, 2008; Nouri Hosseini, 2014; Rafieyan et al., 2014; Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013; Vredeveld & Coulter, 2019; Zijlstra, 2020
Future Plans	Aflatouni, 1976; Amiri & Alinezhad, 2007; Arasteh, 1994; Borhanmanesh, 1965; Busch, 1955; Haghdoost et al., 2007; Hosseindoust, 1975; Hosseini-Nezhad et al., 2021; Johansson, 2013; Lee & Ray, 1987; Li & Ling, 2011; Mehtap-Smadi & Hashemipour, 2011; Moftakhar, 1975; Rakhshandehroo, 2017; Sadri & Chaichian, 2018; Valipour, 1967; Wu & Wilkes, 2017; Ziai-Bigdeli, 1982; Zijlstra, 2020

Figure A1

PRISMA Flow Diagram of Study Selection Process

Identification

# of records identified through database searching

Total (*n* = 9, 099)

Google Scholar: (*n* = 6,582)

Science Direct (*n* = 533)

JSTORE (*n* = 661)

PsycINFO (*n* = 775)

ERIC (n = 294)

EBSCOhost (n = 254)

# of additional records identified through other sources

Total (*n* = 663)

Google Search (*n* = 619)

References list (*n* = 6)

Journal of International Students (JIS)

(*n* = 15)

Diaspora Studies Journal (n = 23)

Screening

# of records after duplicates removed

(*n* = 1,852)

Eligibility

# of records screened based on title and abstract

(*n* = 7,910)

# of records excluded based on title and abstract

(*n* = 7,620)

Included

# of full-text articles assessed for eligibility

(*n* = 290)

# of studies included in the systematic review

(*n* = 130)

# of full-text articles excluded, with reasons

Total (*n* = 160)

The results of Iranian students were not reported (*n* = 68)

No access to full texts (*n* = 34)

No Iranian students mentioned in methodology (*n* = 14)

Only immigrants Iranians (*n* = 14)

Irrelevant (e.g., about children of Iranian international students ; Iranian international students' advisors; international students' families; Iranian students in Iran; linguistic focus, etc.) (*n* = 13)

Study by the same author(s) with same results (*n* = 6)

No data collection (e.g., autobiography, literature review) (*n* = 5)

Irrelevant following theme creation (e.g., marital adjustment, meta-stereotype, quality of education service (*n* = 3)

Iranian students mentioned in participants, but their results not discussed (*n* = 2)

Vague results (*n* = 1)

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Appendix B[18]

Table B1

Summary of the 130 Studies Included in the Literature Review

No	Author(s) & Year	Title of Paper	Sample	Host Country	Research Methodology	Study Type	Main Purpose
1	Busch (1955)	The Iranian student in Logan, An exploratory study of foreign student social experience and adjustment	Iranian international students ($n = 16$) No information on gender was provided. The study only broadly stated that the number of male students at Logan is greater by more than two-thirds compared to the number of female students.	USA	Interview & observations	Master thesis	To explore the experiences and adaptations of Iranian students studying in the U.S.

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[18] This appendix pertains to the research conducted in chapter four of this dissertation titled "Cross-Cultural Adaptation Amidst Socio-Political Turmoil: A Comprehensive Review of Iranian International Students Pre- and Post-Revolution."

| 2 | Hassan (1962) | Attitudes of America-educated foreign students toward American democratic orientation | International students (*n* = 304) The majority of students were from India (*n* = 55) Latin America (*n* = 53) China (*n* = 32) Arabic countries (*n* = 30) Korea (*n* = 20) There were also students from Formosa (Taiwan), Great Britain, Greece **Iran:** No gender information was found. Japan Kenya | USA | Questionnaire | Journal article | To examine the attitudes of international students toward US democracy. |

			Nigeria Philippines Scandinavia Siam (which is known today as Thailand) Turkey Males ($n = 267$) Females ($n = 7$)				
3	Borhanmanesh (1965)	A study of Iranian students in Southern California	Iranian international students ($n = 100$) Males ($n = 84$) Females ($n = 16$)	USA	Qualitative (Interviews)	Ph.D. thesis	To identify the factors that impact Iranian students to go to the U.S., and those that impact them to determine whether to return home or stay in the U.S.
4	Galtung (1965)	The impact of study abroad: A three-by-three-nation study of	Data from UNESCO research Male students	1/3 returned home from one of the	Interviews	Journal article	To investigate how studying abroad affected international

		cross-cultural contact	The United Arab Republic (Egypt), India, Iran: No gender information was found.	three countries: The U.K. USA Germany			students who returned home
5	Valipour (1967)	A comparison of returning and non-returning Iranian students in the United States	Iranian students Total: ($n = 78$) Returning students ($n = 42$) Non-returning students ($n = 36$) No gender information was found.	USA	Questionnaire and open-ended questions	Ph.D. thesis	Returning (i.e., returned to Iran from the U.S.) and non-returning (i.e., either remained in the U.S. or undetermined if to remain in the U.S. or return to Iran) Iranian students were compared in terms of their level of attachment to Iranian culture, their level of U.S. cultural acceptability, and the

							extent to which Iran and the U.S. offer comparable opportunities.
6	Hosseindoust (1975)	The study of adjustment problems of Iranian students in the United States	Iranian international students ($n = 214$) Age range: $\leq 20–26 \geq$ Males ($n = 152$) Females ($n = 27$) No response ($n = 35$)	USA	Questionnaire, checklist	Ph.D. thesis	To investigate Iranian students' academic, individual, and social adaptation difficulties in the U.S.
7	Moftakhar (1975)	A descriptive study of some of the problems of Iranian students attending Oklahoma State University	Questionnaire ($n = 10$) Interview ($n = 65$) Males ($n = 61$) Females ($n = 6\%$)	USA	Interview, observation, and questionnaire	Ph.D. thesis	To investigate the adjustment process and the obstacles encountered by Iranian international students studying in the U.S., and to determine if they arrived in the U.S. with correct knowledge about

							American universities and culture. Additionally, to determine whether there is a link between students' adjustment and their prior knowledge of the U.S. and academic success.
8	Aflatouni (1976)	Adjustment of Persian students at Utah State University	Iranian international students Total: ($n = 128$) Males (90%) Females (10%) Average age: 20 (74%)	USA	Quantitative (questionnaire)	Master thesis	To examine the social adaptation process of Iranian students at an American institution, taking into account their attitudes towards American people, spoken English abilities,

							education level before moving to the U.S., social class, religion, and length of stay in the country
9	Ardakani (1976)	The educational sojourn of the returned Iranian alumni from University of California, 1963-64–1973-74	Iranian graduate (alumni) students ($n = 76$) Males ($n = 67$) Females ($n = 9$)	USA	Questionnaire and open-ended questions	Ph.D. thesis	To evaluate the socio-economic and academic experiences of Iranian graduate students who returned to Iran from the U.S., as well as whether their education in the U.S. prepared them for employment in Iran.
10	Payind (1977)	Academic, personal and social problems of Afghan and Iranian students	**Questionnaire :** Iranians ($n = 125$) Afghans ($n = 120$) **Iranians** Females ($n = 24$)	USA	Questionnaire and interview	Ph.D. thesis	To determine the adaptation difficulties (academic, individual, and social) encountered

| | | in the United States. | Males ($n = 101$) **Afghans** Females ($n = 17$) Males ($n = 103$) The majority of both groups were between 20–30 years old. ▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪ **Interview:** Afghan and Iranian Students Total ($n = 40$) Afghans ($n = 20$) Iranians ($n = 20$) | | | | by Iranian and Afghan students in the U.S., and to determine whether age, gender, marital status, nationality, length of stay in the U.S., and study major, etc. were associated with these adaptation difficulties. |
| 11 | Ameli (1980) | American culture and the mental health of Iranian students in the United States | Iranian students ($n = 41$) Females ($n = 22$) Males ($n = 19$) Age range: 17–32 | USA | Questionnaire | Master thesis | To examine the cultural adjustment of Iranian students in the U.S., as well as the impact of American culture on their psychological well-being. |

12	Tafazzoli-Moghaddam (1980)	A study of the interrelations of attitudes, perceived English proficiency, and academic achievement of Iranian students at Kansas State University	Iranian students ($n = 100$) Males ($n = 84$) Females ($n = 16$) Age range: ≤20–>30	USA	Questionnaire	Ph.D. thesis	To examine the correlation between Iranian students' English language skills and academic achievement, as well as their perceptions of the U.S.
13	Asefpour-Vakilian (1981)	Attitudes of Iranian students in the United States toward vocational education in Iran	Iranian students Total : ($n = 96$) Males ($n = 72$) Females ($n = 24$)	USA	Survey	Ph.D. thesis	To assess Iranian students' attitudes toward vocational education in Iran
14	Mahdavi-Harsini (1981)	Perceived adjustment problems of a selected sample	International students ($n = 302$)	USA	Questionnaire	Ph.D. thesis	To determine international students' adjustment difficulties and

		of international students and the sources of help sought for solutions	Iran ($n = 59$): No gender information was found. Malaysia ($n = 89$) Nigeria ($n = 31$) Saudi Arabia ($n = 44$) Taiwan ($n = 79$) Usable data: Total: ($n = 176$) Percentage of students responded (out of 176): Iran (67%) Malaysia (63%) Nigeria (55%) Saudi Arabia (51%) Taiwan (61%) Males ($n = 97$) Females ($n = 77$) Gender not identified (n = 2)				identify the resources used to overcome them. Additionally, to compare the students' adjustment difficulties with the types of help they sought for resolution.

| 15 | Yuen & Tinsley (1981) | International and American students' expectancies about counseling. | Chinese ($n = 39$) Iranian ($n = 36$): Based on the range given below, the number of males were higher than females. African ($n = 35$) Freshmen males ($n = 10$) Senior males ($n = 10$) Freshmen females ($n = 8$–10) Senior females ($n = 7$–9) AND American students ($n = 40$) Males ($n = 20$) | USA | Quantitative (Questionnaire) | Journal article | To ascertain if the expectations about counseling at an American university differed between international students (e.g., Iranians, Chinese, and Africans) and American students. |

| 16 | Hojat (1982) | Psychometric characteristics of the UCLA loneliness scale: a study with Iranian college students | Iranian students in the U.S. ($n = 232$) Males ($n = 156$) Females ($n = 76$) Age range: 18-39 AND Iranian students in Iran ($n = 305$) Males ($n = 168$) Females ($n = 137$) Age range: 17-39 | USA | Questionnaire | Journal article | To examine the revised UCLA Loneliness Scale's psychometric properties (reliability and construct validity) in Iranian students. |
| 17 | Reihani (1982) | Factors motivating Iranian students in the U.S.A. to pursue higher education | Iranian graduate and undergraduate students Total: ($n = 100$) Males ($n = 50$) Females ($n = 50$) Age range: 18–45 | USA | Questionnaire (One-group posttest only design) | Ph.D. thesis | To examine the motives behind Iranian students pursuing higher education, their sense of independence in making decisions, and their satisfaction level with their chosen major. |

18	Ziai-Bigdeli (1982)	A comparative study of returning and non-returning students from Iran and Nigeria studying in the United States	Iranian and Nigerian students Iranian ($n = 95$) Males ($n = 67$) Females ($n = 28$)	USA	Quantitative	Ph.D. thesis	To examine the factors influencing Iranian and Nigerian students' decision to return home or stay in the U.S. after graduation.
19	Gharagozloo-Bahrami (1983)	Communication difficulties of Iranian students in the United States: A case study	Iranian students ($n = 71$) Males ($n = 54$) Females ($n = 17$)	USA	Questionnaire (factorial design)	Ph.D. thesis	To determine the influence of gender and the length of stay in the U.S. on Iranian students' communication efficiency, and what are the most challenging aspects of communication for them?
20	Oveissi (1983)	Fear of success: A cross cultural study comparing	Female Students ($n = 120$)	USA	Questionnaire	Ph.D. thesis	To determine whether fear of success was different

		Iranian, Anglo-American, Japanese, and Filipino female college students	Iranian ($n = 30$): No information on gender was provided. Anglo-American ($n = 30$) Japanese ($n = 30$) Filipino ($n = 30$) Age range: 17-25 Total: Males (74.3 %) Females (25.7%)				among female Iranian, Anglo-American, Japanese, and Filipino students in the U.S.
21	Shafieyan (1983)	Psychosocial, educational, and economic problems of Iranian students in the United States and the effect of the Iran-America crisis on selected problems	Iranian students **Questionnaire :** Total : ($n = 180$) Males ($n = 124$) Females ($n = 56$) **Interviews:** Total ($n = 5$) Males ($n = 3$) Females ($n = 2$)	USA	Questionnaire and interview	Ph.D. thesis	To investigate the psychosocial, academic, and financial difficulties faced by Iranian students studying in the U.S., and whether any of the difficulties were associated with the Iran-U.S. conflict,

						and to provide recommendations to relieve the difficulties.
22	Khayat-Mofid (1984)	A comparison of the adjustment problems of four groups of Iranian students after the 1978 revolution.	Iranian students with F1 Visa Total: ($n = 40$) Islamists ($n = 10$) Males ($n = 4$) Females ($n = 6$) Mujaheddin ($n = 10$) Males ($n = 4$) Females ($n = 6$) Leftists ($n = 10$) Males ($n = 8$) Females ($n = 2$) Monarchists (n = 10) Males ($n = 7$)	USA	Interview and questionnaire (descriptive comparison and case study method)	Ph.D. thesis	To examine the adaptation difficulties faced by four distinct groups of Iranian students in the U.S. with different political ideologies (e.g., Islamists, Mujaheddin, leftists, and monarchists), after the Iranian revolution in 1978.

				Females ($n = 3$)				
23	Hojat et al. (1986)	Psychometric properties of a Persian version of the short form of the Beck Depression Inventory for Iranian college students	Iranian students in the U.S. ($n = 232$) Males ($n = 156$) Females ($n = 76$) AND Iranian students in Iran ($n = 305$) Males ($n = 168$) Females ($n = 137$) Age range: 17-39	USA	Questionnaire	Journal article	To examine the psychometric characteristics of the Beck Depression Inventory (short form) among Iranian students in the U.S. and Iran
24	Lee & Ray (1987)	Return intention of students from four developing countries	Total: ($n = 1,897$) 102 countries (the study excluded students from developed and socialist countries). Iran ($n = 122$) Nigeria ($n = 188$) Taiwan ($n = 139$) Venezuela ($n = 78$)	USA	Questionnaire	Journal article	To compare international students from Iran, Nigeria, Taiwan, and Venezuela in terms of their perceived likelihood of permanently residing in the U.S., as well as identify the

							motivating factors behind their decision.
25	Litrenta (1987)	A quantitative assessment of the value orientations of Iranian students studying at selected universities in southern California	Total : ($n = 68$) * Iranians Females ($n = 20$) Males ($n = 44$) Age Range: $\leq$21-22$\geq$ AND American students ($n = 55$) Females ($n = 33$) Males ($n = 21$) Age range: $\leq$21-22$\geq$ * The total number of male and female students did not equal the total number of students, as there were missing data.	USA	Quantitative (questionnaire)	Ph.D. thesis	To examine the value orientations of Iranian international students (e.g., self, family, human nature, nature, society, and supernatural) and to compare them to those of American students.
26	Moshfegh (1989)	An examination of the social,	Iranian students Total: ($n = 88$)	USA	Questionnaire and interview	Ph.D. thesis	To investigate the challenges (e.g.,

		academic, and personal problems encountered by Iranian students enrolled at Indiana University in 1980–81	Females ($n = 24$) Males ($n = 64$) Age: The majority (52.2%) ≥30 years old				academic, personal, and social) faced by Iranian students in the U.S., whether these challenges were related to Iran's revolution and the ensuing global crisis, and the sufficiency of assistance services.
27	Rahimi (1990)	Attitudes of selected Iranian students toward seeking professional psychological help	Graduate and undergraduate Iranian students ($n = 60$) Females ($n = 36$) Males ($n = 24$) Age range: 17-54	USA	Questionnaire (correlational design)	Ph.D. thesis	To determine Iranian students' opinions regarding seeing mental health services and to investigate whether their perspectives were influenced by factors such as age, gender, religion, academic level,

							acculturation level, and previous experiences with mental health services.
28	Arasteh (1994)	Evaluation of Iranian students in the United States and their returnability to the Islamic Republic of Iran	Iranian students ($n = 130$) No gender information was found.	USA	correlational research design	Non-journal (Reports) ERIC document	To examine the factors that make Iranian students decide to stay in the U.S. or return to Iran after graduation.
29	Sadrossadat (1995)	Psycho-social and cultural adjustment among international students at the University of Wollongong	International students survey: Total ($n = 384$) China ($n = 40$) Hong Kong ($n = 60$) India ($n = 30$) Iran ($n = 48$): No gender information was found.	Australia	Mainly quantitative (survey) with pre-survey primary interview	Ph.D. thesis	To explore the cross-cultural adjustment (cultural and psycho-social) of international students attending an Australian university

			Indonesia ($n = 56$)				
			Malaysia ($n = 40$)				
			South Korea ($n = 28$)				
			Taiwan ($n = 35$)				
			Thailand ($n = 25$)				
			The U.S. ($n = 26$)				
			Males ($n = 298$)				
			Females ($n = 86$)				
			Primary interviews ($n = 50$) (10 nationalities)				
30	Ilagan (1997)	Buddy Program, a participatory approach to cross-cultural adjustment of international students	International students ($n = 8$) including Iranian students. The study did not specify the number of Iranian students who participated, and no information on gender was provided.	Canada	Interview and questionnaire (rating scale)	Master thesis	To determine international students' difficulties in their initial few weeks at their institution and to develop and implement a peer support program (Buddy program) to

			Canadian students (n = 4) International Centre for Students (ICS) Staff member (n = 1) Volunteer (n = 1) English language teacher (n = 1) The author (n = 1) Males (n = 5) Females (n = 10)				address students' cross-cultural adjustment barriers while evaluating its effectiveness.
31	Tsang (2002)	International conversations: A support group for international students	International students (n = 9) Males (n = 6) Females (n = 3) Botswana (n = 1) China (n = 2) Taiwan (n = 1) Korea (n = 1) Saudi Arabia (n = 1) Thailand (n = 1)	Canada	Focus group and individual interviews, and questionnaire	Master thesis	To investigate the adaptation challenges faced by international students in Canada and create and implement a support group to assist them with their adaptation challenges.

			Iran ($n = 1$): Male Mexico ($n = 1$)				
32	Chapdelaine & Alexitch (2004)	Social skills difficulty: Model of culture shock for international graduate students	Male international students Total: ($n = 156$) China ($n = 31$) India ($n = 29$) Iran ($n = 22$) AND 35 other countries ($n = 74$) from South and Central America, Europe, Africa, and Asia	Canada	Quantitative (questionnaire)	Journal article	To extend and evaluate Furnham and Bochner's (1982) culture shock model to determine the impact of cross-cultural differences in social interaction, co-national group size in the host society, family status in the host country, prior cross-cultural experience, and degree of social connection with hosts on culture shock.
33	Farahbakhsh (2004)	A comparative study of mental	Iranian male PhD students ($n = 80$)	England ($n = 19$)	Questionnaires	Journal article	To assess the psychological well-

		health of Iranian research scholars regarding their academic variables		Russia ($n = 15$) India ($n = 19$) Australia ($n = 9$) and other countries (Canada, France, the Netherlands, and Slovakia) ($n = 18$)			being of Iranian male Ph.D. students who were studying in various locations across the globe.
34	Haghdoost (2005) **Persian-language article**	Durations of studies of Iranian Ph.D. students graduated from U.K. and Irland Universities	Iranian Ph.D. students ($n = 988$) No gender information was found.	Britain and Ireland	Iranian PhD students' data were gathered from the Iranian Embassy in the U.K.'s Deputy of Science.	Journal article	To examine the length of studies of Iranian PhD students who graduated from institutions in the U.K. and Ireland between 1995 and

		between 1995 and 2001					2001. Additionally, to compare the length of studies of medical students to that of other students.
35	Mehdizadeh & Scott (2005)	Adjustment problems of Iranian international students in Scotland.	Postgraduate Iranian international students ($n = 70$) The study only indicated that the number of males was higher than that of females.	Scotland	Mixed methods	Journal article	To examine cross-cultural adaptation challenges faced by Iranian international students studying in Scotland about material, academic, and cultural concerns.
36	Hanassab (2006)	Diversity, international students, and perceived discrimination: implications for	International students ($n = 640$) Asia ($n = 327$) Europe ($n = 158$) Americas ($n = 62$), Southeast Asia ($n = 39$)	USA	Questionnaire and open-ended questions	Journal article	To examine international students' perceptions of discrimination in the U.S.

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		educators and counselors	Middle East ($n = 27$) (The study mentioned Iranian students but did not specify the exact number or provide any information regarding their gender). Oceania ($n = 7$) Africa ($n = 6$). Canada ($n = 14$) (Canadian students' replies were omitted from the results). Males ($n = 369$) Females ($n = 271$) Age range: 17-47				
37	Amiri & Alinezhad (2007)	Studying the problems of Iranian university	Iranian students ($n = 140$)	Ukraine	Descriptive study (questionnaires,	Journal article	To identify the difficulties encountered by

		Persian-language article	students in Ukraine	(27% females and 67% males) Age range: 18-41		interviews and observations)		Iranian students in Ukraine.
38	Haghdoost et al. (2007) **Persian-language article**	A survey of important factors affecting the degree duration of Iranian Ph.D. students in Britania	Iranian students ($n = 126$) Average age: 36.6	U.K.	Quantitative (Questionnaire)	Journal article	To determine the factors that impact the academic success and the length of Ph.D. studies undertaken by Iranian scholarship recipients in the U.K.
39	Bavifard (2008)	Examining perceptions of experiences of Iranian college students in the post 9/11 context	Total Students ($n = 11$) Females ($n = 6$) Males ($n = 5$) Age range: 18 to mid-30s ··················· Iranian international students or "visa students" ($n = 3$ Males)	USA	Qualitative study (semi-structured, open-ended, and ethnographic interview)	Ph.D. thesis	To explore the experiences of Iranian students in the U.S. following the September 11 attacks.

			Age range: 19 to mid-20s AND Iranian immigrants (Iranian American students) ($n = 8$) with one student having international student status.				
40	Brown (2008a)	The incidence of study-related stress in international students in the initial stage of the international sojourn	International postgraduate students Interviews ($n = 13$) Thailand Taiwan Indonesia China Brazil South Africa Malaysia Slovenia Russia	U.K.	Ethnographic approach (in-depth interviews and observation)	Journal article	To investigate the incidence of stress among international students during the early stage of their stay in the U.K., and the factors contributing to their stress and its effects on the students.

			Jordan				
			Iran ($n = 1$) (Female)				
			Korea				
			Germany				
			Observation ($n \sim$ 150)				
			Observation: Most students were from South-East Asia AND 1/3 from Europe, Africa, and Middle East.				
41	Brown (2008b)	Language and anxiety: An ethnographic study of international postgraduate students	International postgraduate students Interviews ($n = 13$) Thailand Taiwan Indonesia China	England	Ethnographic approach (in-depth interviews and observation)	Journal article	To investigate an "emic" viewpoint on how international students adapt in terms of their language skills.

			Brazil				
			South Africa				
			Malaysia				
			Slovenia				
			Russia				
			Jordan				
			Iran ($n = 1$) (Female)				
			Korea				
			Germany				
			Observation ($n \sim$ 150)				
			Observation: Most students were from South-East Asia, AND 1/3 from Europe, Africa, and Middle East.				

| 42 | Brown (2008c) | The adjustment journey of international postgraduate students at a university in England: An ethnography | Total Interviews (*n* = 13) Females (*n* = 11) Males (*n* = 2) Brazil (*n*= 1) China (*n* = 1) Germany (*n* = 1) Indonesia (*n* = 1) Iran (*n* = 1) Jordan (*n* = 1) Korea (*n* = 1) Malaysia (*n* = 1) Russia (*n* = 1) Slovenia (*n* = 1) South Africa (*n* = 1) Taiwan (*n* = 1) Thailand (*n* = 1) .... Observation (*n* = 150) | England | Ethnographic approach (observation and in-depth interviews) | Ph.D. thesis | To investigate the adjustment process of international postgraduate students in England. |

| 43 | Brown & Holloway (2008a) | The initial stage of the international sojourn: excitement or culture shock? | Interview with students from 13 different countries ($n = 13$) Thailand Taiwan Indonesia China Brazil South Africa Malaysia Slovenia Russia Jordan Iran ($n = 1$) (Female) Korea Germany Observation ($n = 150$) | England | Ethnographic approach (observation and in-depth interviews) | Journal article | To explore international postgraduate students' adaptation during their early stage of sojourn. |

			Observation: Most students were from Southeast Asia, AND 1/3 Europe, Africa, and Middle East.				
44	Brown & Holloway (2008b)	The adjustment journey of international postgraduate students at an English university: An ethnographic study	Interviews ($n = 13$) from 13 nations Thailand Taiwan Indonesia China Brazil South Africa Malaysia Slovenia Russia Jordan Iran ($n = 1$) (Female)	England	Ethnographic approach (observation and in-depth interviews)	Journal article	To develop a model for adaptation, drawing on the one-year experience of international postgraduate students attending a university in England.

			Korea				
			Germany				
			Observation ($n \sim$ 150)				
			Observation: Most students were from Southeast Asia, AND 1/3 Europe, Africa, and Middle East.				
45	Mahmoudi (2008)	Iranian university students' perceptions of their social interactions in Canada	Iranian students * Total: ($n = 8$) Males ($n = 5$) Females ($n = 3$) * The students mentioned in the findings are referred to as international students.	Canada	Qualitative (interviews) (Grounded theory analysis)	Ph.D. thesis	To investigate the perspectives of Iranian students regarding the difficulties they encountered in social interactions with Canadians.

46	Pandian (2008)	Multiculturalism In higher education: a case study of Middle Eastern students' perceptions and experiences in a Malaysian university	International Middle Eastern students. Questionnaires ($n = 100$) Focus Group ($n = 20$) which included Iranian students (The study did not specify the number of Iranian students, but excerpts from Iranian students were included in the findings).	Malaysia	Questionnaire (survey and open-ended questions	Journal article	To examine the impact of multiculturalism on the international students. Additionally, students' intergroup/outgroup interaction, friendships, and social networks, as well as their perceptions of locals (e.g., discrimination, tolerance, prejudice, etc.) were investigated.
47	Brown (2009a)	An ethnographic study of the friendship patterns of	Interview ($n = 13$) from 13 nations Observation (n ~ 150)	England	Ethnographic approach (observation and	Journal article	To explore the adaptation experience of postgraduate

		international students in England: An attempt to recreate home through conational interaction	Observation: Most students were from Southeast Asia, AND 1/3 Europe, Africa, and Middle East.		in-depth interviews)		international students in England.
48	Brown (2009b)	The transformative power of the international sojourn: An ethnographic study of the international student experience	Interviews ($n = 13$) from 13 different countries Thailand Taiwan Indonesia China Brazil South Africa Malaysia Slovenia Russia Jordan	England	Ethnographic approach (observation and in-depth interviews)	Journal article	To explore the adaptation experiences of international postgraduate students in England

			Iran ($n = 1$) (Female) Korea Germany Observation ($n \sim$ 150) Observation: Most students were from Southeast Asia, AND 1/3 Europe, Africa, and Middle East.				
49	Brown (2009c)	A failure of communication on the cross-cultural campus	Interviews ($n = 13$) from 13 different countries ▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪ Observation: ($n \sim$ 150) Observation:	England	Ethnographic approach (observation and in-depth interviews)	Journal article	To investigate the experiences of international postgraduate students adapting to life in England.

			The majority of students were from Southeast Asia, and 1/3 Europe, Africa, and Middle East				
50	Brown (2009d)	The role of food in the adjustment journey of international students	Interviews ($n = 13$) from 13 different countries Thailand Taiwan Indonesia China Brazil South Africa Malaysia Slovenia Russia Jordan	England	Qualitative study (ethnographic approach) (Observation and in-depth interviews)	Book chapter, Taylor & Francis group	To investigate the importance of food in the adaptation of international students to life in England.

			Iran ($n = 1$) (Female) Korea Germany ···················· Observation (n ~150) Observation: The majority of students were from Southeast Asia, AND 1/3 Europe, Africa, and Middle East				
51	Brown & Brown (2009)	Out of chaos, into a new identity.	Interviews ($n = 13$) from 13 different countries Thailand Taiwan Indonesia China Brazil	U.K.	ethnographic approach (observation and in-depth interviews)	Journal article	To demonstrate how international students' sojourn can have a transformative impact on students' identities.

			South Africa				
			Malaysia				
			Slovenia				
			Russia				
			Jordan				
			Iran ($n = 1$) (Female)				
			Korea				
			Germany				
			▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪				
			Observation				
			($n = 150$)				
			The majority of students were from Southeast Asia, and 1/3 Europe, Africa, and Middle East				
52	Suanet & Van De Vijver (2009)	Perceived cultural distance and acculturation	Total: ($n = 187$) * China ($n = 21$) Iran ($n = 11$)	Russia	Quantitative (questionnaire)	Journal article	To assess how perceived cultural distance affects the

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		among exchange students in Russia	Nigeria ($n = 22$) Ethiopia ($n = 13$), Zambia ($n = 11$), Cuba ($n = 29$), Bolivia ($n = 18$) Paraguay ($n = 12$) Georgia ($n = 19$) Uzbekistan ($n = 14$) Ukraine ($n = 17$) Males ($n = 110$) Females ($n = 77$) Medium of instructions: Russian * NOTE: Although the authors of the study referred to the subjects as exchange students, they specifically mentioned that these				adaptation of exchange students in Russia.

			students have come to Russia to pursue a 5-year master's degree. Given the extended duration of the program, this study was included in this review. The 5-year period for the degree goes beyond what is typically considered an exchange, and the subjects may be more appropriately classified as international students.				
53	Toutant (2009)	International graduate students, the F-1 visa	Total ($n = 30$) UCLA ($n = 20$) and CSUN ($n = 10$)	USA	Qualitative (interviews)	Ph.D. thesis	To investigate international students'

| | | process, and the dark side of globalization in post 9/11 American society | Males ($n = 18$)
Females ($n = 12$)
Age: 20–39
■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■
International graduate students at UCLA ($n = 20$)
Males ($n = 13$) :
Iran ($n = 2$)
Peru
Turkey
Spain
Italy
Mexico
the Czech Republic
Chile
Jamaica
Kenya
Germany
Ukraine
Females ($n = 7$):
Belarus | | | | experiences, as well as difficulties associated with acquiring an F-1 visa |

			Ethiopia				
			India ($n = 2$)				
			Taiwan				
			Spain				
			China				
			Majority of students ($n = 8$) in the Age group of 20–29				
			Graduate students at CSUN ($n = 10$) Middle East Asia 50% male 50% females				
54	Akhtari-Zavare & Ghanbari-Baghestan (2010)	Iranian Student's emotion in government university in Malaysia	Iranian international students ($n = 3$)	Malaysia	Qualitative (interviews) Constant comparative data analysis method	Journal article	To gain insight into Iranian students' feelings regarding living and studying in Malaysia, the impact these feelings have on Iranian students'

							scholastic progress, and the underlying factors contributing to these feelings.
55	Davis (2010a)	Academic and social adjustments international students deal with attending U.S. universities	International students (*n* = 65) Iran (*n* = 3) Korea (*n* = 7) Ukraine (*n* = 2) Mexico (*n* = 4) Iraq (*n* = 8) Poland (*n* = 1) Guatemala (*n* = 1) Haiti (*n* = 1) Russia (*n* = 5) Syria (*n* = 3) Mongolia (*n* = 2) Jamaica (*n* = 1) Philippines (*n* = 1) Columbia (*n* = 1) Japan (*n* = 1)	USA	Questionnaires (close-ended and open-ended questions)	Master thesis	To investigate international students' experiences, social and academic difficulties in the U.S., as well as their recommendations for addressing international students' issues.

			Turkey ($n = 1$)				
			Pakistan ($n = 1$)				
			Males ($n = 10$)				
			Females ($n = 45$)				
			No information about Iranian students' gender was found.				
56	Davis (2010b)	Hermeneutic methods in art therapy research with international students	Total: ($n = 19$) China ($n = 8$) Japan ($n = 2$) Pakistan ($n = 2$) India ($n = 1$) Indonesia ($n = 1$) Iran ($n = 1$) Singapore ($n = 1$) Sri Lanka ($n = 1$) Switzerland ($n = 1$) Taiwan ($n = 1$) Age range: 20–51	Australia	Phenomenological approach (hermeneutic grounded theory methodology)	Journal article	To explore the lived experiences of international students who participated in many art therapy sessions over one week.
57	Alavi & Mansor (2011)	Categories of problems among	Postgraduate students Total ($n = 135$)	Malaysia	Exploratory mix method	Journal article	To determine the most distressing

		international students in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia	Iran ($n = 117$) Saudi Arabia ($n = 10$) China ($n = 8$) International students (survey) AND Three students' representatives (interviews) Total: Females ($n = 57$) Males ($n = 78$)				difficulties encountered by international students in Malaysia.
58	Li & Ling (2011)	The decisive factors of international students from Africa, Asia and Middle East in choosing Malaysia	Undergraduate international students ($n = 60$) Nigerian ($n = 20$) Chinese ($n = 20$) Iranian ($n = 20$) Gender information was not found.	Malaysia	In-depth interviews with industry professionals were conducted to generate questionnaires and open-ended questions	2011 International Conference on Management Learning and Business	To determine the factors influencing international students' decision to pursue further education in Malaysia.

					administered to international students	Technology Education	
59	Mehtap-Smadi & Hashemipour (2011)	In pursuit of an international education destination: reflections from a university in a small island state	International students (*n* = 184) Males (67.4%) Females (32.6%) Iran (*n* = 41) Pakistan (*n* = 12) Albania (*n* = 6 Jordan (*n* = 6) Palestine (*n* = 10) Nigeria (*n* = 61) China (*n* = 1) Ghana (*n* = 5) The U.S. (*n* = 5) Azerbaijan (*n* = 5 Kazakhstan (*n* = 4) India (*n* = 3) Tajikistan (*n* = 2) Cameroon (*n* = 2)	Cyprus	Questionnaire	Journal article	To determine the reasons why international students opted to study in Cyprus.

			Sudan ($n = 4$)				
			Russia ($n = 1$)				
			Lebanon ($n = 1$				
			Syria ($n = 1$)				
			Oman ($n = 2$)				
			Bosnia ($n = 2$)				
			Bangladesh ($n = 3$)				
			Moldavia ($n = 1$)				
			Canada ($n = 1$)				
			England ($n = 2$)				
			Romania ($n = 2$)				
			Sierra Leone ($n = 1$)				
60	Erfanmanesh (2012) **Persian-language article**	Investigating information seeking anxiety among postgraduate students: A case study of Iranian students in Malaysia	Iranian students ($n = 375$) Females ($n = 185$) Males ($n = 190$)	Malaysia	Quantitative (Questionnaire)	Journal article	To determine the prevalence of anxiety associated with information seeking among a sample of Iranian postgraduate students in Malaysia.

| 61 | Farashaiyan & Hua (2012) | A cross-cultural comparative study of gratitude strategies between Iranian and Malaysian postgraduate students | Iranian ($n = 20$) AND Malaysian ($n = 20$) postgraduate university students Total: Males ($n = 20$) Females ($n = 20$) | Malaysia | Multiple-choice questionnaires and open-ended questions | Journal article | To examine and compare the frequency and type with which Iranian EFL and Malaysian ESL students used gratitude strategies (e.g., simple thanking, apologies, complementing the individual, promising, etc.) in the English language, as well as the differences in how men and women expressed gratitude. |
| 62 | Iravani & Soltani (2012) | Influence of gender and age on pull factors of | Iranian students ($n = 468$) | India | Quantitative (questionnaire) | Journal article | To examine the factors that motivate Iranian students to study in India, as |

		Iranian students studying in India	No information on gender and age was found.				well as the effect of gender and age on the pull factors.
63	Safara et al. (2012)	Comparing the effect of cognitive therapy and spiritual therapy on depression between Iranian students residing in Iran and India	Iranian female students in India and Iran ($n = 32$) All females Iran ($n = 16$) India ($n = 16$) Age range: 18 to 45	India	Quantitative (pre-post test score)	Journal article	To assess the efficacy of cognitive and spiritual therapy in the treatment of depression among Iranian students living in Iran and India.
64	Vakili et al. (2012)	A quantitative study of quality of life (QOL) on postgraduate students in Universiti Sains Malaysia	Iranian students ($n = 35$) Malay students ($n = 35$) Females ($n = 42$), Males ($n = 28$)	Malaysia	Quantitative study (questionnaires)	Journal article	To compare the quality of life (QOL) (e.g., four domains including physical health, psychological health, environmental health, and social

							relationships) of Iranian and Malay postgraduate students in Malaysia.
65	Hotta & Ting-Toomey (2013)	Intercultural adjustment and friendship dialectics in international students: A qualitative study	International students (*n* = 20) France (*n* = 2) India (*n* = 2) Japan (*n* = 2) Iran (*n* = 1): Male Brazil (*n* = 1) Canada (*n* = 1) China (*n* = 1) Colombia (*n* = 1) South Korea (*n* = 1) Kyrgyzstan (*n* = 1) Malaysia (*n* = 1) Mexico (*n* = 1) Saudi Arabia (*n* = 1) Sweden (*n* = 1) Thailand (*n* = 1)	USA	Qualitative research (interview)	Journal article	To investigate the patterns of identity-adjustment and intercultural friendship among international students.

			Turkey ($n = 1$)				
			Vietnam ($n = 1$)				
			Females ($n = 13$)				
			Males ($n = 7$)				
			Age range: 21–42				
66	Johansson (2013)	The sanctioned students: -an empirical study of sanctions effects on Iranian students studying abroad	Iranian international students ($n = 12$) Females ($n = 3$) Males ($n = 9$)	Scandinavian countries	Qualitative study (interview)	Bachelor thesis	To explore the effect of sanctions on Iranian international students studying in Scandinavia.
67	Madanian et al. (2013)	Marital satisfaction of Iranian female students in Malaysia: A qualitative study	Female Iranian international students ($n = 10$)	Malaysia	Qualitative (interview)	Journal article	To investigate the variables influencing marital happiness among female students from Iran in Malaysia.
68	Najmi (2013)	A qualitative exploration of international	Total : ($n = 3$) Females ($n = 2$) Males ($n = 1$)	Canada	Phenomenological qualitative study	Master thesis	To investigate the psychological counselling

		students' experience of counselling services at university	Iran ($n = 2$) Females --- Mexico ($n = 1$) Male --- Age range: 25–29		(semi-structured interview)		experiences of international students in a university context.
69	Tummala-Narra & Claudius (2013)	A qualitative examination of Muslim graduate international students' experiences in the United States	Muslim graduate international students ($n = 15$) Turkey ($n = 8$) Libya ($n = 2$) Bangladesh ($n = 1$) China ($n = 1$) Iran ($n = 1$) Morocco ($n = 1$) Saudi Arabia ($n = 1$) Males ($n = 3$) Females ($n = 7$) Age range: 23–35	USA	Qualitative (semi-structured interview)	Journal article	To investigate the cultural adaptation of Muslim international graduate students

70	Zarei et al. (2013)	Factors associated with body weight status of Iranian postgraduate students in University of Putra Malaysia	International Iranian postgraduate students ($n = 210$) Males ($n = 100$) Females ($n = 110$) Age range: 22–55	Malaysia	Cross-sectional study (quantitative) Questionnaire	Journal article	To determine the variables influencing Iranian students' Body Mass Index (BMI) in Malaysia
71	Zhiping & Paramasivam (2013)	Anxiety of speaking English in class among international students in a Malaysian university	International students ($n = 8$) Iran ($n = 3$) Nigeria ($n = 3$) Algeria ($n = 2$) Age range: 30–34 Females ($n = 1$) (Iranian) Males ($n = 7$)	Malaysia	Case study design (observations and interviews)	Journal article	To explore the factors which contributed to students' anxiety while speaking English in class and their strategies for coping with their anxiety. Additionally, the professors' viewpoint on students' anxiety was investigated, as was

							the students' perspective on the teachers' response to their anxiety about speaking English in class.
72	Asgari & Borzooei (2014)	Evaluating the perception of Iranian students as educational tourists toward Malaysia: in-depth interviews	Iranian international students ($n = 30$) Males (57%) Age range: 24–36	Malaysia	Qualitative (in-depth interviews)	Journal article	To investigate the perspectives of Iranian international students on the factors that impact their satisfaction while studying in Malaysia.
73	Gomes et al. (2014)	Home away from home: international students and their identity-based social networks in Australia	Seven focus groups of international students ($n = 35$) **Group 1 ($n = 5$)** China ($n = 2$) South Korea ($n = 1$) Vietnam ($n = 1$)	Australia	Qualitative (focus group methodology)	Journal article	To investigate the function of identity in assisting international students in forming social networks at an Australian university, as well as the

			Hong Kong ($n = 1$) Males ($n = 2$) Females ($n = 3$) **Group 2 ($n = 3$)** Iran ($n = 1$) China ($n = 1$) Singapore ($n = 1$) Males ($n = 2$) Females ($n = 1$) **Group 3 ($n = 6$)** Japan ($n = 1$) The U.S. ($n = 1$) Brazil ($n = 1$) Sri Lanka ($n = 1$) Bangladesh ($n = 1$) Vietnam ($n = 1$) Males ($n = 1$) Females ($n = 5$) **Group 4 ($n = 6$)** Indonesia ($n = 2$) Hong Kong ($n = 2$)				significance of these social networks in creating a "home away from home" feeling.

			Malaysia ($n = 1$)				
			Brunei ($n = 1$)				
			Males ($n = 2$)				
			Females ($n = 4$)				
			Group 5 ($n = 4$)				
			Chile ($n = 2$)				
			China ($n = 1$)				
			Turkey ($n = 1$)				
			Males ($n = 1$)				
			Females ($n = 3$)				
			Group 6 ($n = 5$)				
			Brazil ($n = 1$)				
			China ($n = 1$)				
			Indonesia ($n = 1$)				
			Thailand ($n = 1$)				
			Kuwait ($n = 1$)				
			Males ($n = 1$)				
			Females ($n = 4$)				
			Group 7 ($n = 6$)				
			Colombia ($n = 3$)				
			Brazil ($n = 1$)				

			Chile ($n = 1$)				
			Vietnam ($n = 1$)				
			Males ($n = 1$)				
			Females ($n = 5$)				
74	Nachatar Singh et al. (2014)	The importance of place for international students' choice of university: A case study at a Malaysian university	International students ($n = 33$) Iran (NS) Yemen (NS) India (NS) Iraq (NS) Indonesia (NS) China (NS)	Malaysia	Qualitative (interview)	Journal article	To investigate the importance of location in selecting study destinations for international students in Malaysia.
75	Nahidi (2014)	Mental health and psychological help-seeking of Iranian international students at UNSW Australia	Interview ($n = 22$) AND Survey ($n = 180$) Age range: (survey) 18–40 Males ($n = 109$) Females ($n = 71$)	Australia	Mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative (focus group discussion and individual interview)	Unpublished Ph.D. thesis	To investigate the psychological distress level and attitudes toward mental health help-seeking among Iranian international students in Australia, and to compare these

							findings with those of other university student populations in Australia.
76	Nouri Hosseini (2014)	Intercultural communication: social and academic integration of international doctoral students in Sweden	Iranian international Ph.D. students Quantitative ($n =$ 30) : 60% male, 40% females Interview ($n = 11$): Females ($n = 6$) Males ($n = 5$) Avg age: 31	Sweden	Mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative)	Master thesis	To examine the cultural disparities faced by Iranian Ph.D. students in Sweden related to intercultural communication, as well as their degree of social and academic integration and adaptation.
77	Rafieyan et al. (2014)	Language learners' acculturation attitudes	Iranian undergraduate students studying English as a Foreign Language Total: ($n = 70$)	USA	Quantitative (questionnaire)	Journal article	To assess Iranian students' acculturation attitude in the U.S.

			Males ($n = 35$) Females ($n = 35$) Age range: 19–27				
78	Shahmohammad i (2014)	Depression and homesickness among Iranian students in University Malaya	Iranian international students ($n = 201$) Females ($n = 89$) Males ($n = 112$) Age range: The majority (41.9%) were between 25–29.	Malaysia	Cross-sectional quantitative study (questionnaire)	Master thesis	To determine the prevalence of depression and homesickness among Iranian students in Malaysia and the variables associated with them.
79	Campbell (2015)	A phenomenologica l study on international doctoral students' acculturation experiences at a U.S. university	International students Total: ($n = 10$) Iran ($n = 1$): Female, Age: 33 India ($n = 3$) China ($n = 2$) Indonesia ($n = 1$) Nepal ($n = 1$) Ghana ($n = 1$) Saudi Arabia ($n = 1$)	USA	Qualitative methods (phenomenologic al design)	Journal article	To investigate international Ph.D. students' acculturation experiences at a U.S. university.

			Males ($n = 5$) Females ($n = 5$) Age range: 24–41				
80	Farnia & Sattar (2015)	A cross-cultural study of Iranians' and Malays' expressions of gratitude	Iranian international students ($n = 25$) Males ($n = 6$) Females ($n = 19$) Malay students ($n = 28$) Males ($n = 5$) Females ($n = 23$)	Malaysia	Open-ended questionnaire (Discourse Completion Task (DCT) and structured-interview	Journal article	To compare the expressions of gratitude of Iranian international students in Malaysia with those of Malaysian students.
81	Khodabandelou et al. (2015)	Challenges of International Higher Education Students in a Foreign Country: A Qualitative Study	Iranian international students Total: ($n = 21$) Males ($n = 15$) Females ($n = 6$)	Malaysia	Qualitative design (semi-structured interview)	Journal article	To assess the obstacles Iranian students encountered while studying in Malaysia, as well as the reasons for selecting Malaysia as a study location.

82	Khojastehrad & Sattarova (2015)	International students' linguistic awareness of Malaysian English and its impact on intercultural communication effectiveness	International students Total: ($n = 372$) for survey Focus group ($n = 3$) * * The study included an excerpt from an interview with an Iranian student; however, the number of Iranians was not specified.	Malaysia	Mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative)	Journal article	To determine the extent to which international students knew Malaysian English and if their degree of linguistic knowledge influenced their efficacy in communication with Malaysians.
83	Van et al. (2015)	Role of academic advising in mitigating the challenges of ethnic minority students at University Teknologi Malaysia	Total students from ethnic minorities ($n = 15$) divided into two groups: **1st group:** Ethnic minority students in Malaysia (The study did not specify the number of students).	Malaysia	Qualitative (interview)	Journal article	To explore the obstacles faced by ethnic minority students, their strategies for overcoming these challenges, and the influence of academic advisors on their timely

			2nd group: International students from 9 countries. Iran ($n = 1$) No information on gender was found. Pakistan ($n = 1$) Yemen ($n = 1$) Thailand ($n = 1$) Vietnam ($n = 1$) Morocco ($n = 1$) Nigeria ($n = 2$) Somalia ($n = 2$) Indonesia ($n = 3$) No information on gender was found.				completion of studies.
84	Ismail et al. (2016)	Stress level and the common coping strategies among international	International postgraduate students Total: ($n = 126$) Males (61.9%)	Malaysia	Quantitative cross-sectional study	Journal article	To determine the stress level among international postgraduate students in Malaysia and

| | | postgraduate students at University Kebangsaan Malaysia Medical Centre (UKMMC), Cheras, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia | 1) Arab students (Yemen, Sudan, Libya, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt (52.4%) ($n = 66$) 2) Iran (27.8%) ($n = 35$): No gender information was found. 3) Other Asians (Indonesia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Vietnam, China, Afghanistan, and Mongolia (19.8 %) ($n = 25$) Males ($n = 78$) Females ($n = 48$) | | | | identify the coping strategies commonly employed to alleviate their stress. |

85	Khafaie et al. (2016)	Health behavior of Iranian students in India- impact from migration	Iranian students Total: ($n = 284$) * Males ($n = 140$) Females ($n = 144$) * An inconsistent number of Iranian students was reported throughout the study.	India	Mixed methods (interview and questionnaire)	Journal article	To investigate the prevalence of cardiovascular risk factors (e.g., smoking, diet, and physical activity) among Iranian students studying in India.
86	Rafieyan (2016)	Relationship between acculturation attitude and effectiveness of pragmatic instruction	Iranian postgraduate students ($n = 52$) Females ($n = 32$) Males ($n = 20$)	Australia	Quantitative (questionnaires) and Pragmatic test (a discourse completion task), which required participants to write responses to various scenarios.	Journal article	To determine if there was a correlation between acculturation attitude and pragmatic teaching efficacy (i.e., Australian language and culture (pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatic).

87	Terebessy et al. (2016)	Medical students' health behaviour and self-reported mental health status by their country of origin: a cross-sectional study	Total fourth-year medical students ($n = 777$) International students ($n = 510$) Domestic ($n = 267$) Only five major nationalities were analyzed ($n = 629$) (267 males, 341 females, 21 unknown) 1) European Mediterranean countries (e.g., Spain, France, Italy, Greece, and Cyprus) Males ($n = 37$) Females ($n = 31$)	Hungary	Quantitative cross-sectional research (survey)	Journal article	To compare international and Hungarian medical students' health behaviors (e.g., diet, physical activity, cigarette use, and alcohol consumption) and psychological health in Hungary.

			2) Scandinavian countries (e.g., Norway and Sweden) Males ($n = 54$) Females ($n = 78$) 3) Israel Males ($n = 65$) Females ($n = 33$) 4) Iran Males ($n = 23$) Females ($n = 19$) 5) Hungary Males ($n = 88$) Females ($n = 180$)					
88	Doray (2017)	Academic and sociocultural adjustment of international students from Arabic-Persian cultures and	International students Total: ($n = 17$) Arabic-Persian culture (APC) ($n = 9$) Saudi Arabia ($n = 3$) Iraq ($n = 3$) Iran ($n = 3$):	Australia	Qualitative (semi-structured interview) Collective case study research design	Ph.D. thesis	To explore the experiences and perspectives of international students in terms of their academic and socio-

		Confucianist heritage cultures at an Australian university	Females ($n = 1$) Males ($n = 2$) Confucianist Heritage culture (CHC) ($n = 8$) ▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪ Females ($n = 10$) Males ($n = 7$)				cultural adaptation in Australia.
89	Erfani & Mardan (2017)	The relationship between big-five personality traits, English language proficiency Scores on IELTS, and academic success of Iranian foreign Students	Iranian international students Total : ($n = 202$) Males (n = 126) Females ($n = 76$)	Armenia Austria Australia Canada Cyprus Germany Hungary India Italy Malaysia New Zealand Pakistan	Quantitative (descriptive ex-post-facto research design)	Journal article	To assess the causality and correlation between the Big-Five personality traits (i.e., Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Openness to Experience, and Neuroticism), IELTS English language proficiency scores, and academic success

			Philippines			among Iranian
			Sweden			international
			The United			students.
			Arab			
			Emirates			
			The U.K.			
			Ukraine			
			The U.S.			
90	Guo & Guo (2017)	Internationalizati on of Canadian higher education: discrepancies between policies and international student experiences	International students ($n = 26$) from 9 countries China ($n = 16$) Brazil ($n = 1$) El Salvador ($n = 1$) Hong Kong ($n = 1$) Iran ($n = 1$) : Female Japan ($n = 2$), Kuwait ($n = 1$) South Korea ($n = 1$) Taiwan ($n = 1$) The U.S. ($n = 1$)	Canada	Qualitative (semi-structured interviews)	Journal article	To investigate international students' personal experiences adjusting to life in Canada

			Age range:18–49				
91	Khoshneviss (2017)	Accountability in a state of liminality: Iranian students' experiences in American airports	Iranian students Total: ($n = 8$) Only demographic information of seven participants was provided. Males ($n = 3$) Females ($n = 4$)	USA	Qualitative (in-depth interviews)	Journal article	To investigate Iranian students' experiences (using the liminality and accountability concepts) upon arriving at U.S. airports, and the impact of airport treatment on their opinions of the U.S.
92	Malekian et al. (2017)	Academic challenges of Iranian postgraduate students in Malaysia: A qualitative analysis	Iranian international postgraduate students ($n = 8$) Males ($n = 5$) Females ($n = 3$) Age range: 31–38	Malaysia	Qualitative (interview)	Journal article	To explore the academic difficulties encountered by Iranian postgraduate students at a Malaysian university.

93	Malekian & Khan (2017)	Determinants of burnout and stress on students health: A study of Iranian expatriate international students	Iranian international students ($n = 233$) No gender information was found.	Malaysia	Descriptive design (questionnaire used)	Journal article	To analyze the prevalence of stress and burnout among Iranian students, as well as its relationship to their overall health status.
94	Rakhshandehroo (2017)	EMI and internationalisation: the experiences of Iranian international students in Japanese universities	Iranian international students Interview ($n = 18$) Males (61%) Females (39%) Questionnaire ($n = 73$) Males (63%) Females (37%)	Japan	Mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative)	Journal article	To investigate the experiences of Iranian students enrolled in English-language programs at Japanese institutions.
95	Sabouripour et al. (2017)	Optimism, social support and self-efficacy among Iranian students	Iranian students ($n= 251$) Male ($n= 134$) Females ($n= 117$)	Malaysia	Descriptive correlational design	Conference paper	To assess the relationship between optimism, perceived social support dimensions (family,

							friends, and significant others), demographic characteristics, and self-efficacy among Iranian students in Malaysia.
96	Wu & Wilkes (2017)	International students' post-graduation migration plans and the search for home	International students from more than 50 countries ($n = 232$) * Females (66%) * The U.S. ($n = 45$) China ($n = 35$) Japan ($n = 18$) The U.K. ($n = 12$) India ($n = 10$) Other countries ($n = 112$) s *The study did not mention Iran; however, the	Canada	Qualitative (interview)	Journal article	To explore international students' post-graduate migration plans by investigating how they perceived "home."

			"findings" section has a result for Iranian students. *The study did not include a percentage of male students in its report.				
97	Hefner-Babb & Khoshlessan (2018)	Iranian student experience pursuing admission to universities in the United States	Iranian international students Total: ($n = 7$) Males ($n = 5$) Females ($n = 2$) Age range: 25–35	USA	Qualitative phenomenological study (in-depth interview)	Journal article	To investigate the barriers and resources available to Iranian students during the admissions process to a university in the U.S.
98	Hosseini (2018)	The current international students in Europe or future immigrants: A	Iranian students Total: ($n = 23$) Males ($n = 14$) Females ($n = 9$)	Finland	Phenomenographic approach (semi-structured in-depth interview)	Journal article	To examine the push-pull variables that influenced Iranian students in Finland to seek post-graduate residency.

		phonomyographic study					
99	Karimi & Bucerius (2018)	Colonized subjects and their emigration experiences. The case of Iranian students and their integration strategies in Western Europe	Iranian students Total : (*n* = 23) Males (*n* = 15), Females (*n* = 8)	Netherlands Germany Sweden	Fieldwork and qualitative study (semi-structured interviews)	Journal article	To investigate Iranian students' immigration and their integration strategies into their host nations through the lens of "colonial mentality" and "Anglo-conformity."
100	Kazemi et al. (2018)	Contributing factors to migration growth among Iranian students: Drivers of migration to Malaysia	250 Iranian undergraduate and post-graduate students were selected randomly; 219 completed the survey. The majority of students were males (*n* = 161, 73.5%)	Malaysia	Cross-sectional descriptive analytical study (questionnaire)	Journal article	To identify the push-pull factors that influenced Iranian students' migration to Malaysia, as well as the primary reasons for the current surge in migration among this group.

101	Lim (2018)	Intercultural doctoral supervision: barriers and enablers in international PhD students' cultural adaptation and academic identity formation in an Australian university	International PhD students. Survey ($n = 147$) ▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪ Interviews: international students ($n = 42$) Supervisors ($n = 20$) Learning advisers ($n = 4$) Interviews demographic information: China ($n = 14$) Iran ($n = 4$): No gender information was found. Vietnam ($n = 3$) India ($n = 3$) Indonesia ($n = 3$) The U.S. ($n = 3$)	Australia	Mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative)	PhD thesis	To investigate the effect of intercultural Ph.D. supervision on the academic and socio-cultural adaptation of international Ph.D. students in Australia.

			The rest of the participants were from Bangladesh, Germany, Hong Kong, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, and Taiwan				
102	Nabavi & Bijandi (2018)	An investigation of predictors of life satisfaction among overseas Iranian undergraduate students	Iranian undergraduate students Total: ($n = 361$) Males ($n = 210$) Females ($n = 151$) Age range: 17–30	Malaysia	Quantitative (Survey)	Journal article	To identify life satisfaction predictors and investigate the relationship between a variety of psychological variabless (e.g., perceived social support, loneliness, career maturity or

							career readiness, and university adjustment), and the level of life satisfaction among Iranian students in Malaysia.
103	Nahidi et al. (2018)	Psychological distress in Iranian international students at an Australian university	Total ($n = 100$) Males ($n = 109$) Females ($n = 71$) Age range: 18–40	Australia	Quantitative (cross-sectional survey)	Journal article	To investigate the levels of psychological distress among international students and the psychosocial factors that contributed to it.
104	Przyłęcki (2018)	International students at the Medical University of Łódź: Adaptation challenges and	Paper-based questionnaire Total: ($n = 74$) 21 countries Asia ($n = 42$): Saudi Arabia ($n = 28$)	Poland	Paper-based questionnaire and focus-group interviews	Journal article	To investigate culture shock and the adaptation challenges of international students in Poland.

		culture shock experienced in a foreign country	Afghanistan ($n = 1$) India ($n = 1$) Iraq ($n = 3$) Iran ($n = 3$): No gender information was found. Religion: (1 Muslim, 1 Zoroastrianism, 1 Atheism). Lebanon ($n = 1$) Pakistan ($n = 1$) Tajikistan ($n = 1$) Taiwan ($n = 2$) Turkey ($n = 1$) Africa ($n = 8$) (Kenya ($n = 1$) Nigeria ($n = 5$) Sudan ($n = 1$) Zimbabwe ($n = 1$) North America ($n = 1$)				

			(Canada ($n = 1$)				
			The U.S. ($n = 5$)				
			South America				
			($n = 1$)				
			(Brazil)				
			Europe ($n = 17$)				
			(Germany ($n = 7$)				
			Norway ($n = 4$)				
			Great Britain ($n = 6$)				
			Australia ($n = 1$)				
			Males ($n = 41$)				
			Females ($n = 33$)				
			Age range: 17–29				
			No data on age				
			($n = 3$)				
			▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪				
			Focus-group interviews with a subset of the students mentioned above.				
			Total: ($n = 24$)				

| 105 | Sadri & Chaichian (2018) | The role of shared ethnicity in facilitating stepwise migration of educated and skilled individuals: The case of Iranian graduate students in Turkey | Iranian graduate students ($n = 50$) Males (58%) Females (42%) Age range 18–37+ | Turkey | Quantitative (surveys) and Qualitative narratives (students provided comments on the survey questions). | Journal article | To determine whether Iranian students in Turkey can be classified as stepwise migrants (i.e., they migrated legally to Turkey as a transitory study site to eventually settle in their final destination for their long-term professional plans). Additionally, to determine if the cultural and ethnolinguistic similarities between Turkey and certain parts of Iran (e.g., West and East Azerbaijan) made |

							Turkey the preferable transit destination for Iranian students from these regions.
106	Ahrari et al. (2019)	A stranger in a strange land: experiences of adjustment among international postgraduate students in Malaysia	International postgraduate students Total: ($n = 10$) Iran ($n = 3$) : Females ($n = 2$), Males ($n = 1$) Iraq ($n = 2$) Yemen ($n = 2$) Chile ($n = 1$) Ghana ($n = 1$) Nigeria ($n = 1$) Males ($n = 6$) Females ($n = 4$) Age range: 26–48	Malaysia	Qualitative study (semi-structured interview)	Journal article	To investigate the social and academic adaptation of international postgraduate students in Malaysia.

107	Hosseini-Nezhad et al. (2019)	Longing for independence, yet depending on family support: a qualitative analysis of psychosocial adaptation of Iranian international students in Hungary	Iranian students Total: (n= 20) Males (n = 13) Females (n = 7) age range: 18–36	Hungary	Qualitative (semi-structured interview)	Journal article	To investigate the psychosocial adaptation of international students in Hungary.
108	Oh & Butler (2019)	Small worlds in a distant land: international newcomer students' local information behaviors in unfamiliar environments	First-year newcomer graduate students Survey (n = 149) China, India, and Korea (international-common group of (students) (n = 55) 18 other countries: (international-less-	USA	Mixed methods approach (Surveys and semi-structured follow-up interviews)	Journal article	To investigate newly arrived international students' local information behaviour (LIB) (e.g., information on transportation, groceries, accommodation,

| | | | common group of students) Central/South America, Africa, Europe, Middle East (e.g., Iran) (the number of Iranian students in the study was not specified; however, two excerpts from male Iranian students were included). South/Southeast/East Asia, and Oceania (*n* = 28) Domestic U.S. newcomer students (*n* = 66) Age range: 21–41 | | | | restaurants, locations affiliated with the university, etc.) as they adapt to life in the U.S. |

			Follow-up interviews ($n = 57$)				
			▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪				
			International students:				
			Females ($n = 20$)				
			Males ($n = 20$)				
			Domestic U.S.:				
			Females ($n = 10$)				
			Males ($n = 7$)				
109	Vredeveld & Coulter (2019)	Cultural experiential goal pursuit, cultural brand engagement, and culturally authentic experiences: sojourners in America	International students Total: ($n = 16$) Out of the nine countries, only eight were included in the list: China ($n = 3$) France ($n = 2$) India ($n = 1$) Iran ($n = 3$) All three Iranians were female graduate	USA	Interpretive research approach (semi-structured interviews)	Journal article	To investigate sojourners' cultural experiences, and how these experiences were related to their engagement with the American brand.

			students; two were 28 years old, and one was 30). Based on the pseudonyms used in the study, it was evident that all three Iranians were females. Ireland ($n = 1$) Taiwan (n = 2) Turkey ($n = 1$) The U.K. ($n = 3$) Age range: 20–30				
110	Anderson (2020)	Muslim international students in the United States: A phenomenological inquiry into the experience of identities	International Muslim students Total: ($n = 10$) Males ($n = 7$) Females ($n = 3$) Saudi Arabia ($n = 7$) Iran ($n = 1$): Female Bangladesh ($n = 1$)	USA	Qualitative phenomenological method (semi-structured interviews)	Journal article	To investigate the experiences of international Muslim students prior to their arrival in the U.S., in terms of their identities (e.g.,

			Kuwait ($n = 1$) One student was between the ages of 18 and 23, and nine were over the age of 24.				gender, ethnicity, and religion).
111	Aziz (2020)	Exploring the stress towards self adjustment among international students: a qualitative study	International postgraduate students Total: ($n = 5$) Males ($n = 3$) Females ($n = 2$) Age range: 24–29 Iran ($n = 2$) : Males ($n = 1$) Females ($n = 1$) Bangladesh ($n = 1$) South Korea ($n = 1$) Turkey ($n = 1$)	Malaysia	Qualitative (semi-structured interview)	UUM International Qualitative Research Conference (QRC 2020)	To investigate the stress associated with self-adjustment among overseas students.
112	Didehvar (2020)	Uncanny phenomenon:	Iranian international students Total: ($n = 6$)	Canada	Qualitative methodology— Interpretative	Unpublished master thesis	To explore Iranian international students' existential

		Existential experiences among Iranian international students	Males ($n = 2$) Females ($n = 4$) Age range: 24–32		Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (semi-structured interviews)		experiences/concerns (e.g., loneliness, death, anxiety, identity, freedom, guilt, responsibility, etc.) during their acculturation process in Canada.
113	Falavarjani et al. (2020)	Exploring the effects of acculturative stress and social support on the acculturation-depression relationship in two countries of similar social status	Iranian students Total: ($n = 154$) 64.3% males 35.7% females. Age range: 24–53	Malaysia	Quantitative (questionnaire)	Journal article	To assess Iranian students' acculturation orientations in Malaysia.

114	Hosseini et al. (2020)	The potential of social media to enhance cultural adaptation: A study on Iranian students in the Finnish context	Iranian students Total: ($n = 23$) Males ($n = 14$) Females ($n = 9$)	Finland	Qualitative research (thematic analysis)	Journal article	To determine whether social media may facilitate the cultural adaptation of Iranian students in Finland using integrative communication theory as a framework.
115	Korouhi (2020)	International Iranian students' profiles, educational and social experiences at an English medium university in Turkey	Iranian international students Total: ($n = 115$) Males ($n = 65$) Females ($n = 50$) Age range: The majority (46%) were between 28 and 32.	Turkey	Mainly quantitative and qualitative open-ended questions	Master thesis	To determine the characteristics of Iranian students (e.g., socio-economic status, professional goals, Turkish language proficiency, and motivations for coming to Turkey, etc.), as well as their

							social and academic experiences at a university in Turkey.
116	Robinson et al. (2020)	Understanding friendship formation between international and host-national students in a Canadian university	International students Phase 1: Survey ($n = 109$) 39 countries The majority of students were from China ($n = 18$) India ($n = 14$) Males (41%) Females (46%) Age range: 17–40 .... Phase 2: Interviews ($n = 30$) among the survey participants 15 countries. The majority of students were from China ($n = 5$)	Canada	Mixed methods (survey and in-depth interview)	Journal article	To investigate the friendship patterns of international students at a Canadian institution and the variables that contributed to these friendship patterns.

			India (*n* = 5)				
			Females (*n* = 16)				
			Males (*n* = 14)				
			Age range: 18–35				
			The study did not specify the number of Iranian students and included only two excerpts from Iranian students, of which two were females.				
117	Ryazantsev et al. (2020)	Current factors of Iran's brain drain analysis, reasons and influences	Iranian students and workers (*n* = 6 interviews). Iranian students (*n* = 100 survey) Males (*n* = 67) Females (*n* = 33) Age range: 81% were between 18 and 24	**Interview**: U.S Germany Malaysia Russia **Survey:** Russia (Moscow)	Mixed methods (survey & interview)	Journal article	To examine whether push-and-pull factors such as "military service," "gender discrimination," "unemployment," "infrastructures," and "hope for the future" influenced Iranians' brain drain.

118	Sigaeva & Gullu (2020)	Psychological distress and coping mechanisms amongst international students	Iranian master and Ph.D. students Total: ($n = 10$) Males ($n = 6$) Females ($n = 4$) Age range: 28–45	North Cyprus	Qualitative case study (semi-structured interview)	ECLSS Cyprus conference	To determine Iranian students' social and academic stressors, as well as their coping strategies in response to these stressors.
119	Zijlstra (2020)	Stepwise student migration: A trajectory analysis of Iranians moving from Turkey to Europe and North America	Iranian students Total: ($n = 36$) Males ($n = 26$) Females ($n = 10$) Age range: 26–30 years	Fifteen out of 36 students in Turkey relocated to other places in a "stepwise manner" (11 moved to Europe (e.g., Germany, Sweden, and	Qualitative (interviews) Mobile research method (trajectory approach)	Journal article	The author used trajectory analysis (i.e., a longitudinal and mobile technique that allows for the tracking of migrants through time and location) to compare the stepwise movement of Iranian students (i.e., moving from Turkey to the West, primarily to

| | | | | Netherlands), and four moved to the U.S.). Of the remaining 21, 18 remained in Turkey, and three returned to Iran. | | | Europe and the U.S.) to the crosswise movement of Iranian students (i.e., students who remained in Turkey) in order to highlight the significance of different types of capital (e.g., academic, cultural, and economic) in "multinational migration." |
| 120 | Abidin et al. (2021) | Foodways practices among Iranian students in Malaysia | Postgraduate Iranian students Total: ($n = 7$) Males ($n = 3$) Females ($n = 4$) Age range: 27–33 | Malaysia | Qualitative research (semi-structure interview) | Journal article | To investigate Iranian students' food consumption and preparation habits (foodways practices) in Malaysia. |

121	Baharloo et al. (2021)	Prediction of psychosocial adjustment based on COVID-19 stress, COVID-19 anxiety, acculturation, and perceived discrimination in Iranian students living abroad	Iranian students Total: ($n = 480$) Males ($n= 304$) Females ($n= 176$) Age range: 18–49 years	Abroad (N/A)	Cross-sectional study (Questionnaires)	Journal article	To determine whether COVID-19 stress, COVID-19 anxiety, acculturation and perceived discrimination predicted psychosocial adjustment among Iranian overseas students.
122	Hosseini-Nezhad et al. (2021)	"We begin 300 meters behind the starting line:" Adaptation of Iranian students in Hungary in the post-sanctions era	Iranian students first round Total: ($n = 20$) Males ($n = 13$) Females ($n = 7$) age range: 18–36 Second interview-round Total: ($n = 12$) Males ($n = 7$)	Hungary	Qualitative (semi-structured interview)	Journal article	To longitudinally investigate the psychosocial adaptation of Iranian students in Hungary.

			Females ($n =5$)				
123	Lértora et al. (2021)	Lesbian, gay, and bisexual international students transitions conceptualized using Relational-Cultural Theory: a phenomenologica l study	Lesbian, gay, and Bisexual (LGB) international students Total : ($n = 8$) Males ($n = 3$) Females ($n = 5$) Iranian student: Female	USA	Qualitative phenomenological approach (semi-structured interview)	Journal article	To explore the experiences of LGB international students using relational-cultural theory.
124	Nooripour et al. (2021)	Psychometric validation of the Farsi version of the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) in a sample of Iranian	Iranian students Total: ($n = 181$) Males ($n = 94$) Females ($n = 87$) Age range: 22–40	USA	Questionnaire (cross-sectional correlational method)	Journal article	To determine the psychometric validity of the Farsi version of the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) among Iranian students in the U.S.

		students in the USA					
125	Sabouripour et al. (2021)	Mediating role of self-efficacy in the relationship between optimism, psychological well-being, and resilience among Iranian students	Iranian international students Total: ($n = 251$) Females ($n = 117$) Males ($n = 134$)	Malaysia	Questionnaire	Journal article	To determine whether self-efficacy acted as a moderator in the association between optimism, psychological well-being, and resilience in Iranian international students
126	Asghari (2022) **Persian-language article**	A phenomenological study of the lived experience of Iranian students as international students	Iranian international students Total : ($n = 12$) Males ($n = 6$) Females ($n = 6$) Age range: 28–34	Belgium	Qualitative (phenomenological approach)	Journal article	To investigate the experiences of Iranian students.
127	Hosseini (2022)	Academic and social challenges	Iranian students Total: ($n = 25$)	Finland	Qualitative (semi-structured	Journal article	To investigate the academic and social

		encountered by Iranian students in Finland: A phenomenographic study			interviews, phenomenological approach)		obstacles of the Iranian students.
128	Hosseini-Nezhad et al. (2022)	Perceptions of gender roles and freedom among Iranian international students in Hungary	Iranian students Total : ($n = 20$) Males ($n = 13$) Females ($n = 7$) age range: 18–36	Hungary	Qualitative (semi-structured interview)	Journal article	To investigate Iranian students' attitudes toward gender roles and perceptions of freedom.
129	Mahmoodi et al (2022)	Dietary acculturation of international students in Pune, India: A cross-sectional study	International students Total: ($n = 100$) Iran ($n = 44$) Africa ($n = 40$) South Korea ($n = 16$) Age range: 18–30	India	Quantitative cross-sectional study (questionnaire)	Journal article	To examine international students' "dietary acculturation" (i.e., the process through which an immigrant adapts to a host country's cuisine) in India.

			No gender information was found.				
130	Rezvan & Srimathi (2022)	Impact of levels of education on depression and anxiety in Iranian students	Iranian students Total : ($n = 600$) Males ($n = 300$) Females ($n = 300$)	India	Quantitative	Journal article	To investigate depression and anxiety among Iranian students.

* The column describing the results has been omitted from the table because most studies, particularly dissertations, had extensive and detailed findings. A table containing detailed results will be provided upon request.

Appendix C

Advertisement Form

روانشناسیِ تحقیقِ: مجارستان در ایرانی دانشجویانِ

Intercultural Psychology Research: Iranian-Persian International Students in Hungary

مجارستان در ایرانی عزیزِ دانشجویان

ی دکترِا دانشجوی, نژاد حسینی سارا توسط شده هدایت روانشناسی پژوهشي پروژه دریك تا کنیم مي دعوت شما از ما دکتر توسط شده رهبری و مجارستان لورِاند اتوش دانشگاه در بالینیِ روانشناسی

Lan Anh Nguyen Luu

نمایید شرکت بوداپست لورِاند دانشگاه اتوش, آموزشی و فرهنگی میان روانشناسی انجمن

که باشد می مجارستان در خارجی دانشجویان تجربیات بر موثر عوامل و فرهنگی تجربیات بررسی تحقیق این از هدف شود می انجام مصاحبه صورت به

, شناسید می بهتر را خودتان تجربیات ایرانی دانشجوی یک عنوان به شما تنها نه, تحقیقیِ ی مصاحبه این در شرکت با خدمات توسعه و پیشرفت به کمک همچنین و دانشجویان اجتماعی - فردي سازگاري در عمیق فهم به بزرگی کمک بلکه کنید می مجارستان در ایرانی دانشجویان رفاهِ

این در شرکتِ ی ادامه از تواند می خود اختیار با موقع هر کننده شرکت و ، ست اختیاری کاملا تحقیق این در شرکت شوند می نگهداری و ضبط محرمانه شما شخصی اطلاعات که است ذکر به لازم. کند گیری کناره پژوهش

کنید ارسال را خود اطلاعات زیر آدرس به یا دهید پاسخ زیر سوالات به, مصاحبه این در شرکت به تمایل صورت در

ایمیل sara_hosseininezhad@yahoo.com

کنیم می قدردانی تحقیق این در شرکت برای شما از
تشکر با
نژاد حسینی سارا

Dear Iranian International Students,

We would like to invite you to participate in psychological research conducted by Sara Hosseini-Nezhad, a clinical psychology Ph.D. candidate at Eötvös Loránd University, which is led by Dr. Lan Anh NGUYEN LUU (Institute of Intercultural Psychology and Education, ELTE Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest).

The interview study aims to explore the cultural experiences and the factors influencing these experiences of international students studying in Hungary.

By participating in this interview research, you better understand your experiences as an international student and contribute to a deeper understanding of the cultural adaptation of and help make recommendations to improve support services for international students in Hungary.

Participation in the interview is voluntary. Participation can be interrupted and withdrawn at any time, and your personal information will be kept confidential.

You can indicate your intent to participate in the interview and write your questions below this form or send them in an email to us at the following address:

Email: sara_hosseininezhad@yahoo.com

Thank you for considering participating in the research.

Lan Anh Nguyen Luu and Sara Hosseini-Nezhad

If you know anyone willing to participate in this study, please provide us with her/his contact information below.

اگر کسی را می شناسید که مایل به شرکت در این مصاحبه می باشد, لطفآ به ما معرفی کنید

Information and Consent Sheet

Dear International Student,

You are participating in research led by Dr. Lan Anh NGUYEN LUU (Institute of Intercultural Psychology and Education, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest) conducted by a team of researchers from the Institute of Intercultural Psychology and Education at ELTE. This research has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education and Psychology at Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE).

This research will allow us to explore the cultural experiences of international students studying in Hungary and reveal the factors influencing these experiences.

If you are an international student in Hungary, above 18, and agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview conducted by a research team member. Questions concerning your experiences as an international student will be asked. Participation in this research is anonymous and voluntary. During the research, you are free to withdraw at any point without justification. In this case, any data you have provided, along with any records, must be erased. The interview will be voice-recorded, and it will be transcribed into written text for later analysis. We inform you that all information collected during the research will be treated strictly confidential. The audio materials of this study will also be treated with strict confidentiality. Research records will be kept in a locked file, and all electronic information will be coded and secured using a password-protected file. This consent form with your name and contact address will be securely stored by a third person independent from the researchers, separately from your answers to the interview questions. Qualitative analyses are performed on information collected in the research, and we ensure the respondents' anonymity.

You will never be identified in this research project or any other presentation or publication. The information you provide will be coded by number only. The results of the research will be submitted for publication in scientific journals or presented at scientific conferences. Verbal or written information will be provided about the findings at your request.

Your signature below indicates that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this study and have read and understood the information provided above. We would like to say thank you for your cooperation.

I have thoroughly reviewed the information about this research, and all of my inquiries have been addressed satisfactorily. I concur with the conditions and parameters of the research.

Date: ………………………

Name: _____

Address/FB/Email: _____

Participant's signature _____

Any further question related to this research will be answered by Dr. Lan Anh NGUYEN LUU and the research team:

E-mail : international.students@ppk.elte.h

Sample Interview Questions

First interview round:

Why did you want to study abroad? Why in Hungary?

How do you feel here in Hungary?

How do you adapt to the language?

Have you faced any daily life hassles?

Have you ever faced discrimination in Hungary?

How important is it to you to maintain Persian culture?

What do you think about the differences between men and women in society? What about these differences in Hungary? And Iran?

How does it feel to be outside of Iran?

Do you have a sense of freedom in Hungary?

Follow-up interview:

How has your life changed since the first interview (e.g., education, work, relationships)

How has your mental health changed since the first interview?

Would you have better psychological health living in Hungary or Iran?

How has your everyday life management changed since the first interview? (e.g., learning language, friendship formation, transportation, food, etc.)

How have your academic hassles changed since the first interview?