STUDENTS FROM ENGLISH EDUCATION SYSTEMS IN AN INNER CIRCLE WORLD

By

AMY THERESA WETTERAU ZHUPIKOV

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By

Amy T. Wetterau Zhupikov

MA/TESL

Date:___________________________

Approved:

____________________________
Dr. Mary Martha Savage, Chair/Supervisor, ELC

____________________________
Dr. Mary Jeannot, ELC

____________________________
Laura Adkins, Summit Country Day School

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research study explores the perspectives and the challenges of international university students. The three South Asian student participants are from English-medium education systems living in societies where English is only one of multiple languages spoken. Scholarship suggests that English speakers from this area of the world are Lingua Franca English speakers who are willing to negotiate meaning of varying English varieties (Higgins, 2003; Jenkins, 2006). This research study is supported by scholarship that found that international students face a multitude of challenges when entering the United States university system. Using interviews, this research investigated the participants’ perceptions of the United States classroom environment as it relates to their own personal experiences of the challenges faced and adaptations made in order to succeed. It then discusses how the participants were able to negotiate, accept, and balance the differing classroom environments because of the skills they learned negotiating English in their home countries.
DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to…

…my family, Zhenya, mom, Bill, Stefanie, Dave, Katharina, and Joe, who supported and believed in me through the entirety of this research.

…my advisor, Martha, who read through a number of drafts and walked me through many moments where I thought I may quit.

…my thesis partner, Sarah, who kept me motivated through it all.
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List of abbreviations

NNS ................................................................. Non-Native Speaker (of English)

NS ................................................................. Native Speaker (of English)

LFE ................................................................... Lingua Franca English

WE ........................................................................ World Englishes

CALP ......................................................... Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency

BICS ........................................................ Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills

ESL ................................................................. English as a Second Language
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

At home, we could ask the lecturer [questions], but we couldn't suggest changes the syllabus or we couldn't do that. But here students can do that, you know, they want a topic to be added incorporated in the lecture or in the syllabus, they are free to suggest... That’s different because professor had the upper hand they had the more power than students. But here students can, you know, express themselves. - Jane

International students coming to study in universities in the United States face a multitude of challenges, not limited to financial, linguistic, and social. In order to succeed, the students must collaborate with offices on campus, professors, roommates and friends, families, and others. When crossing a language barrier, this collaboration has the potential to be especially challenging. Students coming from English speaking educational systems, however, face unique challenges. This study explores their current reality.

According to the Institute for International Education (2013), 819,644 international university students are studying in the United States during the 2012/2013 academic year. Of these students, approximately 15.4% come from countries where English is a prominent language, the language of education and/or government. The participants of the current research are from countries in South Asia where English is a dominant language. The three participants are a part of the 11.8% of international university students coming from South Asia.

1.2 Need and Significance of this Study

This research investigates the international students’ perspective as they come to study at university in the United States. The majority of current research shows that “academic adjustment problems for international students tend to focus on language issues”
(Andrade, 2006, p. 135). The participants in this study however hail from English education systems. As noted by Baumgardner and Brown (2003), international students coming from English-medium education systems, “who want to study in the United States need to be aware of the dialect- and especially accent-intolerance of our nation” (p. 248). This study focuses on the participants’ perceptions of the classroom, including, but not exclusively, any language issues experienced.

The participants of this study speak an English known as a variety of World English (WE), Lingua Franca English (LFE) or Outer Circle English from Kachru’s (1996) concentric circle model, depending on the scholar. Current research is pushing for WE or LFE vocabulary usage in an attempt to not standardize particular groups of English speakers (Jenkins, 2006a; Canagarajah, 2007). However, for the purpose of this study, we will be using a mixture of the three, WE, LFE, Kachru’s model. Jenkins (2006a) and Meierkord (2004) have also included Kachru’s model because “it makes it possible to group speakers with regard to their background of learning, using, and being exposed to English” (Meierkord, 2004, p. 117).

Further, research indicates that international students coming from education systems from all over the world are surprised and challenged by the environment of the United States classroom, including the expectation of active participation. “International students, mostly coming from teacher-centered educational cultures where students do not speak without being called on, find the rules of classroom participation in the United States to be unfamiliar and complex” (Tatar, 2005, p. 338). Taking a closer look at the English education system in South Asia, Kumar (1988) found that the classrooms strictly adhered to textbooks with little to no deviation “as prescribed by state authorities” (p. 453). In India, for example, “[the textbook] regulates their interaction through questions, exercises, and time” (Bhattacharyya et al., 2007, p. 481).
The classroom and university environment in the United States is unique to each teacher; whereas the classroom in South Asia is textbook focused leaving “no space for engaging in any authentic or creative way with the relationship between words” (Bhattacharya et al., 2007, p. 479). In many U.S. classrooms, active oral classroom participation is a skill that is strongly encouraged (Tatar, 2005, p. 337). International students are often unfamiliar and unprepared for this expectation and other aspects of the classroom environment. They come from classroom environments where “typically the teacher asked questions; the students almost never did” (Ramanathan, 1999, p. 221).

With the increased number of international students, universities have had to address the challenges that arise and “institutions cannot simply admit foreign students and expect them to adjust to life in a new country and educational system without appropriate support and programming” (Andrade, 2006, p. 133).

This study aims to give insight into the minds of those attending the universities. Through semi-structured interviews, this study will also explore the perspectives on international students from the Outer Circle.

1.2.1 Researcher’s Interest

When I arrived to the Northwest to begin my Master’s degree, I was living in a house with ten other women from all around the world. Half came to the university after having studied in English in their home countries. Through many informal conversations while sharing the kitchen space, I came to learn more about some of the situations they were facing. Most of the women shared stories about being asked how or why they spoke English so well. A couple also mentioned some of the changes they had to adapt to in the classroom and when completing their assignments. The women talked about the difficulties they had with professors and other classmates. With these conversations in mind, I began reading and researching a bit more on the topic of students coming from ex-British colonies, where
English remains a significant language especially in education, to the United States to study at the university. I found studies pertaining to culture shock and language issues (Andrade, 2006). But I found less research on the specific topic of classroom culture and social challenges.

At that point, I decided to research the topic more thoroughly. I was curious to see if other students, who were educated solely in English, noticed or were challenged by any significant differences between the classrooms here in the United States and those classrooms back home.

1.3 Purpose and Description of this Study

This research emerged as a way to look at how students adapted to university classrooms in the United States. “For suitable programming and services to be developed, an understanding of adjustment issues is needed” (Andrade, 2006, p. 133). As a qualitative study, this research cannot be generalized, but it can be used as a guide for further research, both qualitative and quantitative (Holmes, 2004).

The three participants are multilingual: English is their academic language and each participant additionally speaks one to two languages in their home town and with their families and friends. The participants, all three from South Asia, attended a small university in the Pacific Northwest in the United States. Though coming from English-medium education systems, all three participants were required to take a standardized English exam as a part of the university’s application process.

I interviewed students who are currently completing their Bachelor’s or Master’s degrees at the university. For my qualitative research study, it is important that my participants had the opportunity to reflect on their experience, as they were in the midst of it (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The interviews took place during their studies at the university. The interviews and analysis hope to answer the following research question:
• What are the perceptions and challenges of three international students coming from English-medium schools in South Asia to university in the United States? What changes or modifications do these international students have to make in order to achieve success?

1.4 Roadmap of this Study

This paper examines the classroom environment faced by three students who came to university in the United States from English educational backgrounds and how these students adapted and adjusted to the challenges and surprises. The second chapter will outline current scholarship related to the topic of this study. Included will be a description of South Asia’s regional educational systems, followed by theories related to ownership of English and different varieties of English. The final section of the chapter will speak to the classroom challenges, linguistic and others, faced by international students in the university setting. The third chapter will outline the method of research used for this qualitative study. The next chapter will give an expansive review of the data collected by the interviews. Finally, the fifth chapter will discuss the analysis and conclusions of the study. It then discusses implications and limitations of this study as well as recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

The following chapter will place the current research into the context of scholarship. The research provided in this chapter explores the important role that background and linguistic variety plays on the participants’ university experience, particularly in the classroom. First, there will be a general description of the participants’ background, followed by an overview of their education system and the role of English. To maintain confidentiality, the participants’ South Asian countries are designated as Country A, Country B, and Country C. Following this background is a focus into scholarship on the linguistic variety of participants. Finally, the chapter will introduce research on challenges faced by other international students in the university setting. This study adds to the current focus on the challenges faced by international students aiming to understand the United States educational system’s culture, and more specifically, how to succeed in the classroom.

2.2 Role of English in South Asia

All three participants in this study come from South Asia. English originally came to Southern Asia by way of the spice trade centuries ago. From there the colonization by Great Britain began. Even after independence, English has remained a dominant language in the region. Some political support for the local languages exists; however, “English has established itself as the language of power often benefiting from internal conflicts between competing linguistic assertions” (Mohanty, Panda, Pal, 2010, p. 211). Tupas (2008) agreed with this sentiment, reporting that “the colonial languages, English especially, were the key tools of ideological subjugation and social oppression” (p. 7). The societies of South Asia are
“not just demographically multilingual, but also functionally multilingual” (Annamalai, 2004, p. 177). The role English in the greater society significantly impacts the role of English in the education systems and the classroom. As Mohanty, Panda, and Pal (2010) suggested, the variety of English used in the community will influence the variety that is spoken in the classrooms.

2.2.1 Role of English in Education

“The issues of languages in society and education are very complex” (Tupas, 2008, p. 5). As independence came to the separate countries, so too came a new road for the Ministries of Education. They needed to maintain “‘unity’ among the various ethnic groups that comprise [Country A] and ‘development’ to ensure a better future” (Ali, 2009, p. 40). The Ministries of Education saw the reformation of the education system as the top priority of the new countries. In both English-medium and regional language-medium schools, “students have to learn a common curriculum largely (except for regional changes in mother tongue) [until] the end of high school in the South Asian region. There is some amount of specialization possible at the higher secondary level” (Kumar, n.d., The School System section, para 4).

In specific countries, the education system enforces a focus on Islamic ideology, with indigenous languages as the official languages of education. However, “the language issue has remained politically charged” (Ali, 2009, p. 42; Rahman, 2007). The indigenous languages have remained the official languages, but English has either official or elite status in the countries represented in this study. Its status maintains importance because of a policy established in 1998 which “allowed English teaching in any school that had the means to do so mainly because of the commercial benefits associated with English Language” (Country B Ministry of Education, 1998; Ali, 2009, p. 42).

In the region, the federal and the state governments have jurisdiction over the
education system (Mohanty, Panda, Pal, 2010). In one region, it is law, that “students throughout the country have to learn three languages (namely, English, Hindi and their mother tongue) except in regions where Hindi is the mother tongue” (Kumar, n.d., The School System section, para 4). In another country in the region, the favoring of English-medium education over an indigenous education system came about in the 1830s as the outcome of a strong debate. This structure has remained even after independence. However, these English-medium schools have never been available to the entire population; enrollment has historically been based on class. This remains today – those families with more money can afford English-medium school (Ali, 2009). All three participants in this research study, attended private English-medium schools and at home, they spoke their respective regional language(s).

According to Kumar (1988), these education systems are part of a group of education systems where the government prescribes textbooks for each subject, “and the teacher is expected to elucidate the text, lesson by lesson, in the given order” (p. 452). Her job is to ensure that the students follow the curriculum, and she is given no flexibility on the organization, the pace or the assessment. The Directorate of Education plans out the specific time for the curriculum and “[the textbook] regulates [the teacher and student’s] interaction through questions, exercises, and time” (Bhattacharya et al., 2007, p. 481).

Some written policies support a more communicative classroom environment that “have largely remained unimplemented and have failed to substantially influence what actually happens in classrooms” (Mohanty, Panda, Pal, 2010, p. 211). Bhattacharya et al. (2007) agreed when they found “in practice, language learning is still largely examination driven and textually oriented” (p. 478). They found this disappointing because it left no room for more authentic English learning or competence to take place.

One significant challenge with textbook focused classrooms, especially where English
textbooks are required, include the origin of the textbook. Baumgardner and Brown (2003) found that in Country A the English textbooks for science came from the United States. Since they were too expensive for each student to purchase, the textbooks were donated, older editions. In addition, “the ideology represented in [the textbook] contrasted with societal codes” in the country (p. 247). To remedy this, the teachers and school officials had to revise the clashing sections (Baumgardner and Brown, 2003). If less of a reliance on textbooks in English considered standard from the United States or England existed, the school systems could have chosen more suitable and affordable textbooks.

Policies supporting the use of mother tongue and regional languages were first written in the 1950s, but they have yet to see much implementation in the Country B’s classrooms (Mohanty, Panda, Pal, 2010). Regional language-medium schools have increased the power of English by making it the first foreign language taught instead of Hindi. There also appears to be a hierarchy of language-medium schools, with English-medium (mostly private schools) being the top choice of parents. The Hindi-medium and regional language-medium schools have become less desirable than those English schools (Mohanty, Panda, Pal, 2010).

2.2.2 The Role of English in the Classroom

English is a part of the curriculum in almost all schools in the region of the participants in the current study. In English-medium schools, English is the language of the classroom, whereas in regional language-medium (mostly government) schools, English is taught as a single subject. In both English-medium and regional language-medium schools, students are seen as “consumers and reproducers of English” rather than creative speakers of the language (Bhattacharya et al., 2007, p. 483).

In an English-medium charity school in South Asia, Mohanty, Panda, and Pal (2010) observed that the English in the classroom, when used, is focused on “the main content and memorization of the information that the teachers cover in the class” (p. 217). It was then
translated into Hindi or a Hindi-English variety so the students could comprehend. Similar to that, Bhattacharya et al (2007) found “English is produced in the narrow focus on the redesigning of the textbook as restricted dialogue in the classroom” (p. 285). According to observations by Mohanty, Panda, and Pal (2010), rote memorization of the main content in English is the most important. The deeper understanding comes in Hindi or a Hindi-English variety. In a conversation, “the teachers refer to the students’ requirement to memorize the correct answers so that they can perform well in the examinations in which they are to write in English” (p. 217).

With a focus on exam structures and "lack of availability of other books particularly in the government schools, there is a general ‘textbook culture’ in Country B’s schools” (Kumar, 1988; Mohanty, Panda, Pal, 2010, p. 218). The textbooks in the lower-income English-medium schools as well as the government schools are typically lower quality, focusing on the prescribed curriculum of the government with “minimal focus on activities for stimulating students’ interest and curiosity” (Mohanty, Panda, Pal, 2010, p. 218). The students’ lives are not brought into the English-medium classroom at school. English production is limited to the textbook and authenticity is not brought into the classroom (Bhattacharya et al., 2007).

In conversations with teachers in the school observed in a big city, Mohanty, Panda and Pal (2010) found the teachers seem to believe that the lower quality of the textbooks is acceptable because of the lack of support possible by the parents/home life. They said that at more expensive English-medium schools, the parents are more likely to be able to support their child’s education at home, so the student can handle a more challenging textbook. This reasoning is also explained by Annamalai’s (2004) research who wrote that only a small minority group of students have English support or exposure at home while the majority of students in English-medium schools are exposed to English only at school.
2.3 World Englishes

English did not come about as a language of dominance by accident rather it began with expansion, colonization and institutionalization. Beginning in the 1600s, English served as the language used between Great Britain, the colonizers, and its colonized countries, and as the British empire grew, English quickly became (and has remained) a language of power (Wardhaugh, 2011). The participants in this research study come from South Asian countries that were colonized by the British and as such were surrounded by the remaining influences of the British. The 1950s saw decolonization but not a loss of English as the contact language between countries and the greater world. With the rise in technology and transnational trade, English has also become the contact language for much of international communication (Canagarajah, 2006; Bhatt, 2001). However, this has not made way for a unanimously accepted standard of English.

Coming into contact with unique cultures, societies and languages, English has been morphing, indigenized and localized, with norms relevant to the local needs of each speech community (Higgins, 2003). The localized, indigenized varieties of English are often discussed as World Englishes (WEs). The participants in this study come from communities with their own distinct varieties of English.

Today it is approximated that only one in four English speakers world-wide are considered native speakers and that the majority of exchanges in English do not in fact involve a native English speaker (NS) nor are the goals of many interactions to converse with NSs (Nayer, 1997; Seidhofer, 2005; Jenkins, 2006a). The speakers of WEs can be grouped into speakers of Lingua Franca English (LFE) (Jenkins, 2006a; Canagarajah, 2007). In its truest definition, LFE is defined as English used between two non-native English speakers (NNS). However, it is widely accepted that LFE can be any international communication in English between individuals of two differing mother-tongues (Jenkins, 2006a, p. 160-161).
In her article, *Points of View and Blind Spots: ELF and SLA*, Jennifer Jenkins (2006b) discussed the viewpoints of different scholarship pertaining to LFE, seeking explanation or standardization. Should American or British English be the standard to which LFE is measured, when in reality, LFE is not striving to emulate standard American or British English? According to Canagarajah, (2007) LFE needs its own standards, its own norms, and these are always changing. As international students, the participants in this study were expected to communicate in English in the United States, a variety of the language that they had not spoken much of their lives. Coming from South Asia, they are considered LFE speakers and when coming to study in the United States, daily they had to negotiate meaning of the language variety spoken by their professors, classmates, and friends.

LFE is a living being and those who speak it, those often considered NNS, use learned strategies not often seen as the same strategies used in one’s mother-tongue. These strategies help to negotiate meaning – a set of ever changing standards. One specific strategy is content monitoring of meaning (Jenkins, 2006a). Each speaker brings his or her own culture and practices to the conversation and therefore the meaning is subjected to a unique context. In each conversation, language and meaning are negotiated by the interlocutors.

Canagarajah (2007) argued that it is more likely to have miscommunication between a NS and a NNS than the same confusion between two NNSs because the NS is less likely to have experience in negotiating meaning from the context. For the NS, norms of his or her language are typically seen as universal, whereas the NNS is more accustomed to accept other norms that reveal themselves throughout the conversation (Canagarajah, 2007).

In his article discussing LFE and WEs, Canagarajah (2006) found that scholars accept different norms for the English language, agreeing with Higgins (2003) that local norms may well differ from the norms of international communication (Canagarajah, 2006, p. 199). Jenkins (2006a) gave three commonly used definitions of the term WEs. The first,
WEs is an overarching category that includes all varieties of English; the second is seen as
the English spoken in Kachru’s Outer Circle; thirdly, it can represent “the pluricentric
approach” to studying English (p. 159). With the numbers of traditional NNS outnumbering
NS, “scholars are now moving to alternate models of WEs that chart the relationship between
communities in more fluid and egalitarian terms” (Canagarajah, 2006, p. 199).

Canagarajah (2006) referred to House (2003) saying that LFE is culture-free and
neutral and is a “language for communication” not a “language for identification” (p.
199). LFE speakers aim to communicate with the international world as opposed to
communication with NSs – therefore producing two different outcomes: multilingual
communities and the constant use of two or more languages. In multilingual communities,
the simultaneous use of multiple languages creates an environment whereby the cultures and
languages “overlap, interpenetrate, and mesh” (Canagarajah, 2007, p. 930).

Even with the physical, geographical separation, there are forms and strategies
recognized world-wide by LFE speakers to ensure effective communication. These
strategies, the monitoring and the negotiation, allow for LFE speakers to create a virtual
speech community where competence is not measured by effective communication with a NS
or knowledge of decontextualized grammar structures but by effective use of multilingual
strategies.

An openness to varied discourse is an underlying value of LFE and this necessitates
speakers to be open to variation in meaning and context. Without this positive outlook and
preparation for the unexpectedness of LFE, effective communication with the outside world
cannot take place. Deciphering meaning in LFE must be on-the-spot, a strategy honed by
LFE speakers, and not found a priori, it is negotiated through context which varies with each
interaction (Canagarajah, 2007).

2.4 Geo-Political Implications of World Englishes
In current scholarship, there is a tension between the fairly newer idea and acceptance of LFE and WEs and the relatively older idea from Braj Kachru. Throughout his career, Kachru has worked to define the various English speaking communities world-wide using a concentric circle system. Jenkins (2006a) has argued that the concentric circle model gives priority to certain groups of English speakers. Her studies of LFE have “specifically excluded mother tongue speakers from their data collection” with the goal of not standardizing certain norms (p.160).

2.4.1 Kachruvian Model

Kachru (1992) provided a brief and concise definition of his concentric circles model used to describe the status of English in the modern world. He noted that the roles of English in these countries may vary as the status of languages in multilingual societies is not permanent. According to Kachru (1992), the Inner Circle includes countries where English is the first language with unquestioned use in government, education, media, etc.; this definition would include countries such as the United States, Great Britain and Australia. The Outer Circle includes countries where English has long been institutionalized; where English remains, even after decolonization in many cases, important in government and education, for example Nigeria, India, and Zambia. Kachru (2006) reminded us that the discussion of the Outer Circle includes the original spread of the English language and the institutionalization of the language in specific countries and cultures. The Outer Circle is the largest English speaking community. With its many users, it has very distinct and diverse characteristics, including, “(a) English is only one of two or more codes in the linguistic repertoire of such bilinguals or multilinguals, and (b) English has acquired an important status in the language policies of most of such multilingual nations” (Kachru, 2006, p.242). Lastly, according to the Kachruvian model, the Expanding Circle includes countries where English is used for specific purposes, for example, in a scientific role. This would include
countries such as China, France or Mexico.

Bhatt (2001) claimed, though others have also attempted to explain the status of English, “Kachru’s concentric circle model captures the historical, sociolinguistic, acquisitional and literary contexts of the spread and diffusion of English” (p. 529). Christine Higgins (2003) summarized the first two of Kachru’s circles, explaining countries from the Inner Circle are where there is a traditional base of English and countries from the Outer Circle are where English is institutionalized as an additional language. This research study asked the participants about their lived experience in the Inner Circle classroom environment, looking closely at the role of Inner Circle English and the language adjustments the participants had to make.

2.4.2 The Tension between Kachrus and World Englishes

In current scholarship there remains a tension between to describe English speakers from ex-British colonies. The Kachruvian concentric circle model vocabulary maintains a monolingual bias, while the WEs vocabulary has a more pluricentric approach. In a narrower sense, WEs is used “to refer to the so-called new Englishes in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean (Kachru’s Outer Circle)” (Jenkins, 2006a, p. 159). The tension comes from the notion that the use of the Kachruvian model prioritizes a monocentric English, with American or British English being the World Standard (Spoken) English (p. 160). However, when researching WEs and LFE, scholars must “specifically exclude [English] mother tongue speakers from their data collection” to ensure they are not standardizing American or British English. Meierkord (2004) argued that when researching WEs and LFE, the view of prioritizing a monocentric English is “inherently problematic since it is usually based on the assumption that every learner aims at complete mastery of a form of English spoken in the Inner circle” (p. 111). When, as mentioned above, the goal of LFE speakers is to communicate with other LFE speakers, not specifically with mother tongue English speakers.
In response to such an idea, Jenkins (2006a) remarked that “the existence of [LFE] is not intended to imply that learners aim for an English that is identical in all respects” (p. 161).

However, Meierkord (2004) asserted that over the years, these distinctions between Kachru’s Inner, Outer, and Expanding Circles have become quite fuzzy, however, the model itself provides valid and useful distinctions among different types of language users (p. 117). In addition, Jenkins (2006a) would assert that the theoretical debate to move away from the Kachruvian model vocabulary in order to embrace a less monocentric English standard is far from complete. She emphasized the practice has further to go (p. 158). For these reasons, this study has maintained the use of the Kachruvian model vocabulary.

2.4.3 Ownership of English

Braj Kachru (1996) described the idea of WEs as “is indicative of distinct identities of the language and literature. Englishes symbolizes variation in form and function, use in linguistically and culturally distinct contexts” (p. 2). Using this definition of WEs, Higgins (2003), studied speakers’ view of their ownership of the language in their own contexts. The ownership of English is explained as the speakers’ perspective of their language ability on a continuum and of their membership in the English speech community worldwide. While the participants in this study have been education solely in English, they were still required to take a standardized English exam before being accepted in the university. The students maintain that they have ownership over the English language; this research examines the role their English variety plays in their studies here in a United States university.

In her study, Christine Higgins (2003) investigated the discussion of the legitimacy of English sentences by pairs of university students representing both of Kachru’s Inner and Outer Circle groups. Her research falls into the current conversation about an idea of ownership of English, instead of an idea of Native Speaker or Non-Native Speaker. For the research, she used 16 participants working in pairs, each partner group had similar
backgrounds (either both Inner Circle or both Outer Circle). Together the pair read through a group of sentences, chosen to be structures with which the participants may not often come in contact. As the participants read through the different sentences, they were to examine if the sentences were correct and if not, why. According to Higgins (2003), the speakers from both the Inner and Outer Circles showed ownership and authority over English using the same or similar lexicon and paths to judge the sentences. Interestingly, more uncertainty appeared among those speakers who had more experience with multiple languages and conflicting localizations of English - those speakers from the Outer Circle (p. 640). And living with this kind of uncertainty is exactly the kind of skill that will be required of Wes speakers.

From that, Higgins claimed that the NS/NNS dichotomy is not linguistically based, but rather a social construct. In her study, Higgins found this type of labeling inhibits success, “particularly for those who speak a variety different from the Standard English of a center nation such as England or the United States” (p. 617). Higgins found two complimentary definitions of ownership, as indigenization and as legitimacy.

Higgins (2003) asserted that the NS-NNS dichotomy is too simple. Researcher Nayer (1997) agreed and has different qualifiers and classifications for English speakers from Outer Circle countries, but unlike Higgins, continued to use the term English as a Second Language (ESL) to describe students who are fluent in academic English alone. Academic English can be described as “the variety of language used by the educated and valued in educational settings in the United States” (Scarcella, 2003, p. 2).

Many students from this Outer Circle group have been schooled solely in English, such as the students in the study, and some as well have only spoken English in the home, albeit not an American or British variety of English. It is only recently that these varieties of English from the Outer Circle have been accepted as legitimate (meaning not deficient); however they are still considered non-native forms. Many of these countries are former
colonies of Great Britain and have indigenized and regionally accepted forms of English (Higgins, 2003, p. 618).

Kachru (1996) and Bhatt (2001) agreed that through contact with so many different languages and cultures, English includes pluralistic and socially acceptable meanings. And classrooms must include “appropriate concepts, theories, and practices in English language education…[which] take into account social context and the indigenization of English” (Baumgardner and Brown, 2003, p. 249). English education has the potential to be innovative and resourceful, creating a cross-cultural, cross-linguistic universal language, if it could “move beyond an Inner Circle definition of professional identity and practice” (Baumgardner and Brown, 2003, p. 248).

Baumgardner and Brown (2003) went on to discuss the necessity of “enlighten[ing] our Outer and Expanding Circle students as to the linguistics facts of life in Inner Circle countries” (p. 248). This research explores the perception of the classroom experience of students from the Outer Circle, including the linguistic characteristics of the classroom in the Inner Circle.

2.4.4 Standard verses Non-Standard English

Speakers in the Outer Circle countries have appropriated English to their needs and have created grammatical norms that may not be consistent with those varieties from the Inner Circle but are arguably still legitimate. These forms include the language of the participants in this study, who grew up surrounded by Outer Circle English varieties. The participants spoke about the changes to which they were required to conform to the language used in the United States university classrooms. Higgins (2003) argued that the Inner Circle variety should no longer be the only Standard English in our globalized world. Globalization has brought rise to a new idea of standard. The ownership of English is explained as scholars’ efforts “to move beyond the NS-NNS dichotomy and the dominance of the
linguistic norms for English associated with center countries such as England and the United States” (p.617). Higgins (2003) claimed that the NS/NNS dichotomy is not linguistically based but rather a social construct. Institutionalized varieties of English, according to many researchers, are not considered NS even if that is the sole academic language.

Scholars have found that speakers from the Outer Circle are not attempting to identify as Inner Circle speakers, supporting the movement away from the NS-NNS dichotomy and their local varieties take precedence over Inner Circle English in their home countries (Jenkins, 2006a; Baumgardner and Brown, 2003). Jenkins (2006a) argued that the norms present in Outer Circle Englishes are not, in fact, errors, but appropriations of English.

Anyone participating in international communication needs to be familiar with, and have in their linguistic repertoire for use, as and when appropriate, certain forms (phonological, lexi-cogrammatical, etc.) that are widely used and widely intelligible across groups of English speakers from different first language backgrounds. (Jenkins, 2006a, p. 161). Seidhlofer (2005) agreed when she discussed the tendency for NS to be “regarded as custodians over what is acceptable usage” when this should not necessarily be the case (p. 339).

2.5 Negotiation of English

In her article, Lucy Pickering (2006) found that up until recently, most intelligibility and comprehensibility studies of NS-NNS interaction has been focused on accent and its effects. While she saw this shift to more studies involving NNS-NNS interaction in the early 2000s, it has still been concluded that phonological errors are most often seen as the reason for miscommunication or misunderstanding.

Outer and Expanding Circle English speakers are said to have an easier time accepting and understanding different varieties as they can "store multiple representations of the phonemes and that the more we are exposed to a certain production, the more intelligible it will be" (Pickering, 2006, p. 225). This adaptation is supported by research from Bent and
Bradlow (2003) who suggest that a NNS listener is better equipped to understand phonetic differences of the "target language norm" (p. 1607). These factors and the negotiation of meaning are important when measuring intelligibility.

The increase in contact between the different varieties around the world that have led to cross cultural communication studies, such as Meierkord’s (2004), who studied natural interaction in English amongst Outer and Expanding Circle speakers. Meierkord used Kachru’s model when introducing modern, transcontinental communication in English, saying that with transnational trading and technology there has been “an upsurge of interactions involving the participation of speakers of these different Englishes” (p. 110). She suggested that Outer and Expanding Circle English speakers may be more prepared to enter into conversations with international English speakers based on their exposure to different English norms. Baumgardner and Brown (2003) pointed out that, “the pluricentrality of English should be a part of [their] students’ linguistic knowledge, and they should know when to use one variety versus the other” (p.248). Their experiences teaching in both the Inner and Outer Circles found that the students and professors from the Inner Circle are less likely or unable to accept different varieties of English. Although, they could have a great advantage if they would consider the possibility of expanding their definitions of correct English (Baumgardner and Brown, 2003).

When looked at from a sociolinguistic point of view, Kachru (1996) cited Ferguson who said, even in the early 1990s, “much of the world’s verbal communication takes place by means of languages which are not the users’ ‘mother tongue,’ but by their second, their third, or nth language, acquired one way or another and used when appropriate” (p. 141).

Although early in research stages, it is suggested that listener attitude can also play a role in intelligibility. It is also important not to discount the other factors that may affect the listener’s ability to understand including, listener attitude, the familiarity with the topic or
subject at hand, or environmental or social factors (Pickering, 2006).

Familiarity with the language and the varieties that may present themselves, specifically in the classroom setting, is one of the key components from which students and professors alike may benefit. Many English-medium classrooms in South Asia have strict academic English policies, focusing solely on the material in the textbook (Mohanty, Panda, Pal, 2010). The participants in this study were introduced to different classroom Englishes over the course of their schooling, in the classrooms back home and the classrooms they experienced in the university in the United States.

2.5.1 Basic Interpersonal Language Skills, Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency and Sociolinguistic Language Context

Originally introduced by Jim Cummins (1979), there are two types of language English as a second language students must become proficient: basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). Cummins’s idea expanded the findings of Oller (1979, as cited by Cummins, 2008), realizing that language acquisition could not be simplified. The relationship between BICS, “conversational fluency in a language,” (Cummins, 2008, p.72) and CALP, the ability of students “to understand and express, in both oral and written modes, concepts and ideas that are relevant to success in school” (p.72), more clearly explained the acquisition process. Arguably, the participants in this study were more familiar with CALP and less familiar with BICS.

Looking at language learning as acquiring multiple areas can be used for multilingual speakers as well as monolingual English speakers.

For example, if we take two monolingual English-speaking siblings, a 12-year old child and a six-year old, there are enormous differences in these children’s ability to read and write English and in the depth and breadth of their vocabulary knowledge, but minimal differences in their phonology or basic fluency. (Cummins, 2008, p. 73) The 12-year old and the six-year old have developed what may appear to be similar oral
English levels when having simple conversation; however, once the conversation leaves the surface level, differences will likely be noticeable in the children’s abilities.

According to Scarcella (2003) there are two perspectives of academic English, the one discusses English in terms of BICS and CALP (Cummins, 1979; Cummins, 2008). According to this model, with BICS, “students do not have to depend only on language in order to attain meaning; rather, to attain meaning they can use a variety of cues, including body language and intonation” (Scarcella, 2003, p.4); whereas CALP (or academic language proficiency) develops through social interaction from birth but becomes differentiated from BICS after the early stages of schooling to reflect primarily the language that children acquire in school which they need to use effectively if they are to progress successfully through the grades. The notion of CALP is specific to the social context of schooling, hence the term “academic” (Cummins, 2008, p. 73).

A second perspective, Scarcella (2003) suggested, is a more diverse view of academic English as one of multiple varieties and ever changing standards. Bunch (2014) argued “that focusing predominantly on the distinction between ‘academic’ and ‘other’ forms and uses of language can unintentionally mask how students productively use a wide variety of linguistic resources to approach academic tasks” (p. 72). Those scholars who have furthered this model suggest that a wider range of English should be accepted at the university level, including varieties of WEs such as those stemming from South Asia, allowing for less conventional English in academia. This rejection of Cummins’ BICS and CALP dichotomy “is not useful for understanding the complexities of academic English or the multiple variables affecting its development” (Scarcella, 2003, p. 5). Bunch (2014) also argued that Cummins BICS and CALP differentiation as too simple or lacking in contextualization of language. He said, “It has also been criticized for privileging certain class-based varieties of language, confusing oral language and written literacy, conflating language proficiency and academic
achievement, and ignoring the sociolinguistic context of language use” (Bunch, 2014, p. 71).

Scarcella (2003) has proposed a framework to analyze learning and using academic English.

The framework rejects strictly formal views of academic English that do not examine the personal, social and cultural factors that affect linguistic choices. It does not insist on a perfect, error-free, production of academic English or a single interpretation of linguistic features and texts. Nor does the framework embrace an exclusive focus on surface-level, formal descriptions of language features. (p. 7) The characteristics of academic English in the United States including three dimensions: linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural/psychological. “Academic language not only includes several dimensions of knowledge, but it also emphasizes the context where learning takes place” (Uribe, 2008 p. 2). Each dimension has its own components.

In Scarcella’s (2003) study the participants went through English language learning programs in an Inner Circle country, where the student’s conversational fluency was used as a guide for where the student might be in his/her academic language development. However, in this study, the participants are coming from an academic English environment where the linguistic and the cognitive dimensions already exist.

Each dimension brings its own challenges. The linguistic dimension, the first of the three, includes five components: phonological, lexical, grammatical, sociolinguistic, and discourse. These components describe the movement of English from ordinary to academic, moving through knowledge of the phonological features, of the lexical component “the forms and meaning of words that are used across academic disciplines,” of the grammatical component (Scarcella, 2003, p. 13).

In the sociolinguistic component of the linguistic dimension, Outer Circles students must learn to adapt and adjust to the difference in ordinary and academic conversation. “A conversation between strangers and a chat with a friend are linguistically quite distinct” (Scarcella, 2003, p. 17). In this dimension, the knowledge of academic English can be explicitly taught.
According to this framework, Scarcella (2003) includes a second dimension in academic English, the cognitive dimension. This is more than just understanding the words and meanings, the students “must predict, infer, and synthesize meaning to create and transform knowledge” (p. 22). This dimension includes four components: knowledge, higher order thinking, strategic, and metalinguistic awareness.

The last of the three dimensions is the sociocultural/psychological dimension. This dimension encompasses the cultural and societal norms of the language. Each student must "acquire sociocultural and psychological features. Social and cultural norms, values, beliefs, attitudes, motivations, interests, behaviors, practices, and habits constitute the sociocultural/psychological dimension of academic English (Scarcella, 2003, p. 29).

As the title of the dimension suggests, Uribe (2008) said, “Second language learners frequently fall behind when it comes to educational excellence” (p. 1). The students he was referring to, are made up primarily of students coming from the Expanding Circle (Kachru 1992) where English is not a significant language. These students must learn comprehensive English in order to be successful in the classroom. This knowledge includes all three of Scarcella’s (2003) dimensions. "Academic language not only includes several dimensions of knowledge, but it also emphasizes the context where learning takes place" (Uribe, 2008, p. 2).

However, for Outer Circle speakers in this study this factor is not exactly the case. For Outer Circle speakers, the role of English is (solely) academic, therefore reading, writing, and listening skills are arguably comparable to that of a student from the Inner Circle, though other accepted varieties may have been included throughout their educational experience. But the inclusion of the sociocultural/psychological dimension, the conversation within the classroom, seems to differ tremendously. This research looks closely at the classroom environment and the role of English as experienced by the participants. The
classroom is an important and challenging variable that international students must understand as they navigate the culture of their host countries and the culture of the classrooms.

2.6 Cultural Realities

The United States began formally accepting international students after World War II. Since then the numbers of study abroad students has increased world-wide, this includes students leaving the United States to study in foreign countries and those students from other nations choosing to attend university in the United States. Studies across disciplines have discussed the uncountable amount of benefits gained by studying abroad. A significant amount of stress is also associated with living in a culture other than one’s home (Wan, Chapman, Biggs, 1992). As international students to the United States, the participants in this study were asked to reflect on their experiences with culture shock, especially as it pertained to their classroom experience, adjustment, and any challenges that brought. This section will provide a brief explanation of some of the stress associated with culture shock.

2.6.1 Culture Shock

Sherry, Thomas, and Chui (2009) looked at international student stress and found that one of the most challenging parts was the expectation of adapting and adjusting to the culture so quickly. The Compass Blog (2013) used the chart below to describe a common flow of culture shock:
1. The Honeymoon Stage — This is when everything is new and fascinating about your host country. It’s in this stage that when you may fall in love with Italian pizza or the Irish accent.

2. The Distress or Negotiation Stage — This is when the differences between your home culture and the host country become apparent and feelings of frustration or anxiety occur. For example, you really want a peanut butter and jelly sandwich to remind you home, but you realize your host country doesn’t carry grape jelly anywhere. You become frustrated and even more homesick for familiar foods and grocery stores.

3. The Autonomy or Adjustment Stage — At this stage, you become familiar with your surroundings and develop a routine. The same concerns will occur, but you will be better equipped to handle them.

4. The Independence or Mastery Stage — No one ever does a complete conversion into a new culture, but eventually, you learn to comfortably adjust to the new environment. (Tankersley, 2013, para. 3)

Adjustment and acculturation may come at different rates, but it can also be closely related to environment. Rajapaksa and Dundes (2002) studied the degree of adjustment of international students at universities in the United States. The study looked to correlate the participant’s social network satisfaction and the number of close friends with their adjustment. “The social network satisfaction is particularly intriguing because it correlates so well with adjustment variables - yet in this study it does not seem to be determined by the number of close friends” (p. 22). The researchers found participants were more likely to feel...
lonely if they were not satisfied with their social network. But they did not find that the number of close friends was directly related to feelings of loneliness.

Environment and social challenges may also affect performance in the classroom. Students may benefit from more pre-arrival information, including “valuable cultural, education, and linguistic knowledge not so easily addressed within the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) structure” (Holmes, 2004, p. 304). The students in this study also were expected to take a standardized English exam before acceptance into their university. As Holmes (2004) argued, this testing was perhaps not a measure of their understanding of United States classroom culture.

2.6.2 Classroom Culture Shock and Figured Worlds

The focus of the current study is the perceptions of, challenges faced, and adjustments made by international students from South Asia in the United States university classroom. As such, this section will delve more deeply into culture shock as it pertains to the classroom, while the preceding section gave a more generic view of culture shock faced by international students.

Cultures may have different norms for the classroom environment and expectations. James Gee (2011) discussed the idea of figured worlds, he described it as a person’s interpretation of a specific environment around them, such as that of a classroom. These figured worlds are influenced by the assumptions of what is considered normal. He elaborated by adding what knowledge might be valued or the balance of power. “We all belong to different and sometimes conflicting groups; and we are all influenced by a wide array of groups, texts, institutions, and media” (Gee, 2011, p. 322). When asked what a classroom is, a person will reply based on their personal experience and also what they may have seen on television or read in books. When international students are asked what a classroom is, there may be “competing or conflicting figured worlds at play” (p. 334).
In her research, Prue Holmes (2004) followed thirteen Chinese business international students for eighteen months to see “how Chinese students perceive and make sense of the learning and interpersonal communication styles in a New Zealand business school” (p. 294). She found that in their first year of undergraduate, diploma, or post graduate work, all had difficulties adjusting to the learning environment. Holmes’ participants discussed challenges in writing, critical thinking and analysis, reading and analyzing, and listening and understanding. She noted that some difficulty was based on language level, but that these international students would likely feel challenged by the learning and communication styles (p. 296). For example, “the participants’ assumptions that success is quoted with effort and willpower…was misleading as a gauge for such…In the first semester, participants worked hard but found that their efforts did not necessarily bring them good grades” (p. 298).

According to Gee (2011) the nature of these students’ education and social challenges stemmed from the changing idea of normal or their figured world. “The taken-for-granted nature of the figured world, however, often stands in the way of change” (Gee, 2011, p. 253). For Holmes’ (2004) participants, there was a change in the idea of success and this was challenging. The study found that the “onus is on these Chinese students to reconstruct and renegotiate their primary culture learning and communication styles to accommodate another way” (p. 303). These students had to reconstruct their figured world of a classroom (Gee, 2011). In response to this, Holmes (2004) recommended that institutions with Chinese students may benefit from exchange of cultural differences between the Chinese students, professors and the host students as well as expanding bridge courses. Here the professors could address “valuable cultural, educational, and linguistic knowledge” that an international student may not understand immediately upon arrival (p. 304).

Sarkodie-Mensah (1998) similarly found that when international students come to study in the United States “one of the biggest challenges is the classroom culture” (p. 216).
For international students from various language backgrounds, “the classroom experience can involve roles and expectations that are not clearly defined and that conflict with their previous academic experiences” (Wan, Chapman, & Biggs, 1992 p. 607). The classroom environment can include the role of and relationship with the professor, for example, “[p]rofessors must be addressed in the right way” (Sarkodie-Mensah, 1998, p. 216). Classroom environment can also include participation, assignments, and expectations. The current study explored the classroom environment as it was perceived by the participants, international students from English-medium education systems and multilingual societies.

When participating in Tatar’s (2005) qualitative study, the participants spoke extensively on their perceptions of participation in the United States classroom settings. Tatar collected data on four graduate students from Turkey who were studying in the United States. She explored the individual thoughts of the students as they adjusted to a new classroom situation. She found the students noted three particular factors: the educational culture, environmental factors, and the classroom dynamics with classmates. Participants discussed how the professors used discussion and participation in the classroom very differently. Participants in Tatar’s study expected participation to be a “presentation of formally acquired academic knowledge” and not thoughts and ideas by the students shared informally (p. 343). They generally enjoyed participating in class and saw value in the informal nature of participation. However, they wished the professor had provided more explicit expectations and many students expressed they were concerned with how their language sounded when they did participate.

Tatar (2005) described that the participants identified these factors because this was where their ideas of a typical classroom clashed with the new reality. Gee (2011) described this as their figured world of a classroom. “The findings of this study point out the complexities of the nature of participation,” and looked closely at the perceptions of the
individual students and the effects of positive classroom environments (Tatar, 2005, p. 350).

In his study, Sarkodie-Mensah (1998) looked at issues affecting international students in the classroom. Students are here “to study. Thus one of the biggest challenges is classroom culture” (p. 216). International students are faced with differences in the student-professor relationship (Sarkodie-Mensah, 1998; Tompson & Tompson, 1996; Andrade, 2006). Sarkodie-Mensah (1998) found that when a classmate challenged the instructor or a fellow classmate during a lecture or class discussion in the United States, the international student often saw this as disrespectful (p. 219). The United States professors might see the expression of critical thinking skills as successful learning. Whereas the international student participants in Sarkodie-Mensah’s study had difficulty changing their behavior - challenging the professor - and that was reflected negatively, they felt the professor saw them as unsuccessful students. The students in this study were asked explicitly about their experience with relationships at the university as it pertained to the classroom and their studies. Sarkodie-Mensah noted that he purposefully excluded language as an area of difficulty because of the vast amount of scholarship already on the topic.

In their study of international students in business schools, Tompson and Tompson (1996), surveyed faculty members of two universities where “international students are well represented” (p. 54). The faculty were asked questions regarding their perceptions on international student success and what inhibited success. In turn, the international students were surveyed, and laterquested in a focus group on the most difficult areas of their experience at the university in the United States. Professors in the study commented, “International students will rarely debate issues in class, disagree with the opinion of a classmate or instructor, or challenge the status quo” even when classroom discussion participation was listed as part of the grade on the syllabus (Tompson & Tompson, 1996, p. 55). In addition, professors found that international students did not ask for clarification
questions on the assignments.

The three top areas students found most difficult in Tompson and Tompson’s (1996) study were: social isolation, language skills, and knowing norms, rules, and regulations, for example “not knowing what behaviors would be punished in their classes or dorms” (p. 56). Appropriate behavior in a classroom could be conflicting in differing figured worlds, the international students must negotiate the competing ideas and make sense of them (Gee, 2011). Seemingly in agreement, Sarkodie-Mensah (1996) described the United States university classroom as a unique environment for international students, “this includes jovial atmospheres…involving excessive talking, clowning, eating, engaging in distracting activities…and entering and exiting the classroom” (p. 219).

The challenges related to classroom culture in the United States is an issue that permeates throughout an international student’s university career. Each student must negotiate his or her own path to success, often with little direction (Andrade, 2006). All three participants in the current study had completed at least two semesters of university in the United States before the study began. These three international students were asked to speak about their perceptions from their entire experience. They began with the first classroom they entered in the United States and compared it to classes they were currently taking during the study.

2.6.2.1 Writing Assignments

Helen Fox (1991) began her dissertation with a very poignant question: “Do graduate students from non-Western backgrounds have difficulties with analytical writing, or does the Western university have difficulty interpreting their way of understanding the world?” (p. vi). The international students in this study were commenting on this question when they expressed frustration regarding their own English composition courses. When Fox (1994) published on the same topic, she was teaching a course on academic writing at a university in
the United States; she realized that she “was assuming that international students understood
the ideas of ‘organization’ ‘coherence, ‘clarity,’ depth’ and ‘continuity’ in the same way
[she] did, when in fact this might not be the case at all” (p. xv). International students from
non-Western academic cultures often either omit obvious information so as not to disrespect
the audience or the opposite, include too much seemingly irrelevant information. These
practices are not what professors in the United States expect in an academic, college-level
essay (Fox, 1994, p. 13). Her participants from Chinese, Latin, and South Asian cultures “all
are struggling with the same problem: understanding - even believing - the necessity for
‘transparent’ communication in their new cultural context.” (p. 25). They reported feeling
that they were not having to only change their writing styles, but their view of the world
(Fox, 1994).

Writing assignments have been the focus of other research with international students.
The challenges faced by international students actually begin well before the student arrives
in the United States (Kuo, 2011). Kuo, after looking through the qualifications required for
graduate students applying to universities in the United States, studied the challenges that
graduate students face when transitioning. He noted that international students found the
language challenge just as prominent as navigating the university culture. The exams and
registration requirements in their home countries, “do not focus on developing the language
skills that students need to participate and study at American universities” (p. 41). After
overcoming these obstacles, the student must then face the United States classroom. This
study explored the students’ perceptions of the United States classrooms as it pertained to
both language and culture. The participants were asked to reflect on their experiences.

Writing was one of the multiple adjustments and factors faced by Chinese international
students (Holmes, 2004). The participants attributed the challenge to the writing style. This
was not the case in Gao’s (2012) study. Lianhong Gao (2012) studied the role native culture
played on ESL graduate students in the classroom in an American university writing classroom. The Chinese ESL students were interviewed on the differences and challenges between their schooling in their home country. Gao found that the students described differences between the classroom culture related to culture outside of the classroom, though he did not find that it inhibited their success. In fact, he found that, “their major problems with English academic writing were associated with content familiarity” (p. 15).

2.7 Conclusion

Current research shows that international students face challenges when transitioning to university in the United States. The researcher of this study chose to expand the research and interview three international students from countries in South Asia. They are academically trained in English. This study supposes that since these students may not have an academic language barrier, perhaps they would not be facing the same difficulties as international students not educated solely in English-medium schools or in countries where English has an elite status. The following chapter will explain the method used for this study as it explores the perceptions of and challenges faced by the three international student participants.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Plan

This investigation will explore:

- What are the perceptions and challenges of three international students coming from English-medium schools in South Asia to university in the United States? What changes or modifications do these international students have to make in order to achieve success?

From a pilot study that was not completed due to a participant’s withdraw, the researcher had the foundational knowledge and questions which formed the base of this research. This work helped guide the questions and the research for the current study. The goal was to engage in a phenomenological study based on the phenomenon of students arriving from post-colonial countries to study at a university United States.

3.1.1 Theoretical Base

This is a qualitative, phenomenological action research based on semi-structured interviews of three students studying at a university in the Northwest United States. Qualitative research “aims to study subjects in their natural settings” (Macnaughton, 1996, p. 1099). All three students came from the Outer Circle and were educated in English-medium schools in their respective home countries. The goal of this research is to gain an emic understanding of their thoughts and perspectives of the classroom environment and speaking interactions as an English speaker from the Outer Circle who is studying at a university in the Inner Circle.
Phenomenological refers to the study of life experiences, researching, “the world as we immediately experience it rather than as we conceptualize, categorize, or theorize about it” (van Manen, 1984, p. 37). The goal of phenomenology is not to theorize, but rather to gain insight into a particular experience. For this reason, the researcher will conduct thoughtful interviews in order to gather participants’ perceptions of life and life experiences as it pertains to the topic of the research – the “possible meaning structures of our lived experience” (p. 38). In this research project, emic perspective is defined as the ideas, thoughts and feelings conveyed by the participants. The participants are not simply “objects to be studied” (Baptiste, 2001, para. 26). Recording the interviews helps shape the notion of reality; but, more importantly, having the participants look over the notes and transcriptions better shapes this notion, removing some of the researcher’s bias and giving the participants the right to censor what they would like (Richards, 2003, p. 67).

3.2 Participants

Three participants, two male, undergraduate students and one female, graduate student were interviewed. All three were studying at a religious institution in the Northwest United States. Their areas of study differed. All three came from academic English backgrounds, meaning all three were educated in English. The two males finished high school in English in their respective countries. The one female Master’s student finished her high school and her undergraduate degree before coming to the United States; both degrees were completed in English.

3.2.1 Role of the Participants

The role of the research participants is to be informants rather than serve as objects to be observed. The researcher looks to the participants to provide meaningful insight into their cultures, and, more importantly for this study, insight into their lives as students at university. The interviews with the participants were not merely fact-gathering escapades, rather they
looked for the deeper truth and implications of my participants’ perceptions “to pursue understanding in all its complex, elusive, and shifting forms” (Richards, 2003, p. 50). The goal of the study is not to find one generic meaning or truth, but rather to explore the beliefs, feelings, and frustrations of individuals as it relates to their experiences in the classroom. The participants are the source of knowledge. Their behaviors, perceptions and beliefs are the very basis of the research. Because the study is not looking at causality, the perceptions of my participants’ relationships with their professors, classmates and roommates, more specifically their reaction to the university classroom environment in the United States were the foundation (Baptiste, 2001).

At the beginning of the second and third interviews and the focus group, the researcher spoke with each participants about her thoughts and understandings of the previous conversation. It was important to maintain an environment where the participants knew they have any and all editing rights and that the goal of the research is to properly represent them. Each participant could change his or her mind at any point in the process of the thesis. Several times the participants expanded on the researcher’s comments to solidify understanding. The majority of the time, the participants validated the researcher’s comments on the previous conversations.

3.3 Method of Sampling

The three students were from a convenient sample. Originally, there was no intention of finding students from similar geographic areas. However, more similarities certainly exist in culture and identity with the three participants from South Asia than would have had a more geographically diverse group of participants from Outer Circle countries engaged.

To find the participants, the researcher first asked the International Student Advisor on the campus to send out an email to all international students who came from Outer Circle countries. The students were to contact the advisor if they had questions, and were given the
email address of the researcher if they were interested in participating. The email was accidentally sent out to all international students. Eight to ten students offered to join; but, since their academic classrooms in their home countries were not in English, they did not qualify. No participants were found through this mailing.

Instead the participants were found through personal connections. One participant was found as a part of a conversation to a group of colleagues. When explaining the research premise, she approached the researcher, volunteering to be a participant. The other two were asked personally. The same international advisor who sent out the email recommended speaking directly with these two students. It was important that the students did not to feel obligated to say yes simply because they were being asked in person. Some safety existed in being asked via email since the students could choose to ignore or respond negatively without facing a personal connection. However, the window of opportunity was closing, and at that point there was only one confirmed participant with a goal of three to four. So the researcher asked two students personally. It proved to be a good decision. Both students seemed to understand the power they had to say no. When they heard the research idea, they both were interested in participating. In fact, in explaining the hypothesis about a potential in differing behavior when in a new classroom environment, one participant, very enthusiastically, affirmed the thought by saying, "Yes! I did change." The idea that he changed was not new. It seemed to be an exclamation of reassurance that someone was recognizing the changes and that these differences may create challenges.

3.4 Procedure

As a neophyte interviewer and qualitative researcher, I looked to Keith Richards (2003) and Anne Burns (2010) for research and interviewing skills. Research “involves taking a self-reflective, critical and systematic approach” to the topic (Burns, 2010, p. 2). I needed to establish a relationship with my participants; Richards (2003) suggested that this
method was the best way to gain a deeper understanding of the participant in a qualitative interview, “to get a sense of the subtleties of the interactional negotiation in interviews” (Richards, 2003, p. 49). Advice from Richards included a check and reflect method where I reworded a statement back to the participant looking for clarification and understanding. This method was positively accepted by my participants who, each at different times during the three interviews, took this opportunity to either correct or confirm my understanding of their statements. In addition, as one of my research objectives was to compare and contrast classroom environments, I took Richards (2003) recommendation to have “more careful questioning designed to elicit” more information from my participants (p. 56). Supporting this, Burns (2010) said, “The more focused and ‘answerable’ the questions, the more they are likely to bring you good results” (p. 30).

For this interview, I chose a semi-structured format to allow my interviewees to dictate the flow of the conversation while still accomplishing my goals (Burns, 2010). Before each set of interviews (i.e. the first set with all participants and then the second set with all the participants), I met with my research group and my thesis advisor to compile a list of questions and topics I hoped to cover. Due to the nature of a semi-structured interview, I did not limit the time each participant spoke on a topic, but I regularly referenced the list during each interview to ensure each participant had an opportunity to speak on each topic.

When looking at Freeman’s (1998) different categories of interview questions, I collected data from the six types of questions: behavior/experience, feelings, knowledge, demographics/background, opinions/values and sensory information (p. 216). In follow-up interviews, I expanded the conversation to gather any information I may have missed.

I chose to collect the data via a face to face interview rather than an anonymous questionnaire because I was looking “to establish a relationship with people that enables [me]
to share in their perception of the world” (Richards, 2003, p.50). To help ease the stress sometimes associated with interviews, I referred to each interview as a conversation when I spoke with each participant. I was also sure to provide a list of the topics and questions for each interview to the participants when we set the date for the conversation. At the end of each interview I reminded them of the next step(s) and topics.

Using semi-structured interviews allowed me to focus on the journey that an interview can be and “allow for some flexibility according to how the interviewee responds” (Burns, 2010, p. 75). I wanted the follow up questions and the probing to be candid and as important if not more important than the original questions I brought to each conversation (Richards, 2003). As the researcher, I did not already have an idea of what my participants might say. I wanted personal experience where, as the researcher, I could ask for more details and examples.

When interviewing, Richards (2003) advised that “it is possible to develop specific skills that will improve your performance and where practice adds polish, provided it is followed by proper reflection” (p. 53). In doing so, I would listen and re-listen to my recorded interviews, noting where I could have improved as an interviewer. I also met regularly with my research group for tips and interviewing recommendations. All the interviews were conducted in the library on campus, a convenient location for both the participants and me. I recorded and transcribed each of the interviews. The interview questions and topics were based on personal conversations with international students as well as research based on these conversations.

Before beginning my formal interviews, I reflected on the challenges I noticed in my limited interviewing experience and what I learned in my research class. I remembered the importance of not interrupting the participant and allowing for pauses for the interviewee to gather or add to their thoughts. Richards (2003) reminded us to note the subtleties of speech
when interviewing. The interviewee will be sensitive to even the very small intakes of breath, possibly expecting an interruption (p. 49).

My interviews were formal, following the definition of Richards (2003) interviews that “are formally arranged in advance and all parties understand what is taking place” (p. 51). I chose to do this type of interview instead of informal interviews that, according to Richards are more observation-based, because I wanted to be sure my overarching questions were being addressed. Additionally, by giving the participants an idea of the topic and the questions, they had a chance to reflect on the questions before meeting and talking with me (Burns, 2010).

Before choosing the participants of this qualitative study, I chose to lay out a plan of action for my research. My research looks at the adaptations made and challenges overcome by students studying in the United States after coming from degrees from English medium schools in the Outer Circle. I wanted the thoughts, actions, reactions, and perceptions of the individual students. I decided to approach the study from a qualitative perspective using multiple semi-structured interviews. Rossmann and Rallis (1998) described, “indepth interviewing [as] the hallmark of qualitative research” (p. 124). In-depth, semi-structured interviews allowed me to ask follow-up questions to my participants and expand on the areas they found interesting.

My interviewees and I communicated solely through email or text message to set up interview times. When I invited each of my participants to their interviews and before the beginning of each interview, I reiterated to my participants the importance of their candidness. I wanted them to know that I am here to represent them; I have no agenda. The purpose of my research was to come to an understanding of the changes they may have made and the challenges they may have faced while studying here in the United States.
Throughout each interview session, I “provide[d] feedback and reinforcement to responses” to the interviewees (Burns, 2010, p. 77).

Each participant was interviewed three times over the period of approximately six months. The first interview was for a better understanding of the students’ lives – to better understand the school system in their individual home countries and to begin to engage the student in thinking about comparisons between the United States university and the high school or university from which they came. We discussed why the student was at this specific university in the United States and if they were content here. Lastly, we talked about language – the language used at home with family and the language used in the classroom at school in their home countries.

Before the second interviews, I summarized each interview. I formulated the structure of my second interview, gathering clarification questions and new questions. When we scheduled the second conversation, each student was given the second interview topics and general questions.

The second interview compared and contrasted the university classrooms in the United States to the participants’ classroom experience back home. The second interviews focused on the perceptions and experiences of the classroom and schooling at the university in the United States. The participants were asked to describe their education and compare and contrast it with the education they received in their home countries.

After the second interview, I was able to begin classifying, tagging, and categorizing my data (Baptiste, 2001). The major question was providing my theme idea to my participants for their reactions and thoughts. After listening to my interviews, I also reviewed my questioning techniques, reminding myself of my role as the researcher.

The third and final interview took place in two different ways though the goal remained the same. The third conversation was to verify the information gathered and the
themes analyzed by the researcher. Two of the participants were interested in a focus group, which allowed for some comparison between their experiences. The third participant met with the researcher later individually.

At the focus group, I provided the males with a paper of the common topics brought up during the previous six interviews. I asked them to write down how they felt about these common threads. I had expected more writing, as they only wrote about a sentence for each topic. I had hoped for more in depth sentences. However, the writing was followed up with a conversation about these topics and about my idea of a theme.

I did not bring the paper with me to the third conversation with my one female participant. Instead, we just talked. For her specifically, the paper felt redundant as she had spoken to each theme previously.

All three participants agreed, enthusiastically, with my proposed theme. After approaching this topic, each of the participants began providing specific examples of classroom cultural differences. I followed up by eliciting answers regarding how each participant dealt with the differences which he or she noticed.

3.5 Data

As noted above, semi-structured interviews were used primarily for the research. The third interview with the two male participants was combined and created a focus group setting. When approached about a group interview instead of individual interviews, the two men were enthusiastic about the idea, anxious to hear the perspectives of others in similar situations. The one woman in my study was not available for this group interview and asked if we could speak on our own.

During the interviews, I took limited notes (with the exception of the focus group) and used these as data for my research. Before the focus group, I organized a list of topics with the help of my research group. I wrote these seven topics on two extra-large pieces of
paper. At the beginning of the focus group, I asked the two participants to write down thoughts, examples, and perceptions of the topics. I included a section titled “other” for topics they felt I had excluded. These papers were used as data. Then, at the end of each interview, including the focus group, I took time to write notes. I used these notes as data as well.

Following the interviews, I would first summarized each one. I used these summaries as a basis for the interviews following. In addition, I transcribed each interview. I used the summaries in conjunction with the transcriptions as data for my research.

Analysis and conversations with research group became important data as I began writing my thesis. I processed and organized my thoughts aloud and received immediate feedback and formative criticism.

3.6 Data Analysis

When analyzing the data, the steps I took were not “discrete, sequential, hierarchical steps; they are iterative, interactive and non-linear” (Baptiste, 2001, para. 3). Baptiste (2001) suggested analytic strategies for qualitative research. I found immersing oneself in the data particularly pertinent. I conducted, transcribed, read and reread the interviews which aided this immersion. While going through my data multiple times, I used “an explicit classification tactic…color cod[ing] pieces of data” (para. 3). Once accomplished, I looked for common themes. In his article, *Qualitative Data Analysis: Common Phases, Strategic Differences*, Baptiste (2001) discussed three of his four phases of qualitative research. In “Phase 1: Defining the analysis,” Baptiste (2001) suggested that by defining ourselves as researchers, we are in turn defining our research; it is by understanding the paradigm through which we see the world, what is our individual reality, and how that affects the reality of the research we wish to investigate that we define our research (para. 14). Researchers should “strive to make these decisions as transparent and defensible as possible (para. 14). Phase 1
“begins at the inception of the research process” and is developed with the study, but phase two and three focus more on the research’s composition and organization of the data.

Phase 2: Classifying the data is the tagging and grouping process. Baptiste (2001) reminded researchers not to keep everything. Researchers must sort the data into that which is relevant and that which is not. First, the data must be tagged. In this research study, the data was primarily transcriptions and interview notes. “Once tagged and labeled, the analyst places data with similar characteristics into the same group or category” (Baptiste, 2001, para. 32). The categories are defined and often re-defined by the researcher, as this is an iterative process.

Using creativity and scholarship, the categories from Phase 2 are taken into Phase 3: Making connections - Constructing stories and theories. The data should not be presented in the form of a glossary, but “by positing a parsimonious, integrated set of associations and relationships between and among the various concepts they have formulated” (Baptiste, 2001, para. 37). This organization can be difficult at times, but it really began with Phase 1 (Baptiste, 2001). It is vitally important that “analysts do not get too wedded to their initial hunches and working hypotheses” but that they allow the data to come to life and present its theories and insights (Baptiste, 2001, para. 40).

3.7 Research Trustworthiness

The research trustworthiness of this study can be defined by the role of the researcher, the methods of triangulation used during the research process, and the confidentiality kept by the researcher. In addition, an IRB was submitted to the university to protect the participants of this study.

3.7.1 Role of Researcher

My role as the researcher is to listen and reflect on my participants thoughts. After so much reading and research, it is vitally important for me to not jump to conclusions and to
keep an open mind to my participant’s perceptions while being explicit about my own personal bias. One way I accomplished this task is to keep myself from interrupting my participants during their interviews. It is with explicit and transparent analysis of my data that I become a more trustworthy and reliable researcher (Baptiste, 2001).

I took time and used personal reflection to deliberately craft questions with limited emotion. It was important that in the beginning I did not assume differences in the classroom environments between the countries. I needed to be cautious to not interrupt or generalize and allow the participants to be the informants.

After each set of interviews, I listened, reflected, and summarized the recordings, and most importantly I took time to envelop myself in the research as not to be “too hasty in drawing conclusions without seeing the deeper meanings of the data” (Burns, 2010, p. 130). Later in the research process, I transcribed each interview.

I met regularly with my community of practice. We discussed common threads found in the interviews and in the scholarship collected. We talked about the three participants’ viewed experiences. At this time, the connections between current scholarship and the perceptions of my participants began to come together. Over time, I developed a theme and worked to organize my findings. The transcriptions and the theme were presented to the participants for verification.

3.7.2 **Triangulation**

Burns (2010) presented a series of questions related to validity of the research, including, “Are there other people I can collaborate with or consult, who might shed new light on my data analysis?” (p.130). As a way of triangulation, I spoke with my thesis advising group regularly to complete my thoughts and themes. The first theme was timed such that at the third interview with each participant, I proposed the theme during the interview. All three participants were in agreement with my analysis of their conversations.
A few weeks following my third interview, I had the opportunity to present my coding and methodology thus far to a Masters/TESL research class. It was preparing for the presentation and the feedback from the class and professor that helped me formulate an additional theme. For verification of this theme, I wrote the theme out and emailed it to my participants, who all replied positively. One participant requested to meet for coffee to further discuss this theme. The notes from that conversation were also used as data.

3.7.3 **IRB and Confidentiality**

Before beginning the study, I submitted a proposal to the university’s Institutional Review Board. My research study was approved. This protected my participants and in addition to the IRB, I had each participant sign an informed consent form that included a confidentiality clause. I allowed each participant to choose his/her own pseudonym and have purposefully not disclosed the specific countries in South Asia represented in this study.

3.8 **Summary**

The qualitative research conducted in this study involved semi-structured interviews to allow the participants to discuss in depth their perceptions and challenges of the classroom in the university in the United States. The researcher had that opportunity to ask follow up questions. Consistent with scholarship from Burns (2010) and Richards (2003), the researcher maintained objectivity and perspective in the research, triangulated with a community of practice, connected the data to scholarship, was explicit in her own bias, and gave herself time for reflection. The following chapter will give in depth accounts of the interviews with the three participants.
CHAPTER 4: THE DATA

4.1 Introduction

The participants in this study are multilingual speakers and come from multilingual societies where English has a significant role and in some cases, official status. The countries in South Asia are ex-British colonies, and English, in these specific countries, has a prominent role in society. Jenkins (2006a) argued that these students are speakers of LFE. They are from a region accepted as Outer Circle regions, and when reading through the transcripts, they use some of the “salient features of [English Lingua Franca] lexicogrammar that Seidlhofer [2004, p. 220] has identified in VOICE” (Jenkins, 2006a, p. 170). VOICE is the Vienna Oxford International Corpus of English.

Each participant’s words and ideas are summarized in the following three sections of this chapter. Throughout the course of their interviews, the participants discussed topics related first to their home life and their educational experiences in their home countries. Throughout this chapter, the participants’ countries of origin are referred to as Country A, Country B, and Country C. Following those conversations, the participants took time to compare and contrast the university classroom experience in their home country and in the United States. They spoke on matters related to the role of the professor in the classroom, the relationship between the students and the professor, and the role assignments and assessment, on their personal experiences. All participants’ words are noted by the italic typeface.

4.2 Jane: The Open-Minded One

Jane, a pseudonym chosen by the participant, was born and raised in a small coastal city in South Asia. She was schooled until grade ten and then she attended university where
she received her bachelor's degree in pharmacy. She came to the United States to earn her Master's in Business Administration at a university in the Pacific Northwest. We spoke during her first year of study.

4.2.1 **Home Country**

Jane grew up in a small family. Her mother and father had moved away from their home town in the south before her older sister and Jane were born. *My mother tongue is Telagu it's a southern language* but this is not a language that she speaks fluently. *But we speak Oriel so that's the state [language] so basically like I don’t know [my] mother tongue like that...and the main [language] is Hindi like most people they speak that and [Oriel]. I can speak these two really well.* Of course, that is in addition to English.

The majority of people in her city will first speak Oriel. *The language, the main language of communication was not English, it was the local language of the state.* They learn Hindi to communicate with people from other parts of this South Asian country. If they attend local, government-run schools, school language medium would be Oriel, with English and Hindi taught as additional languages.

Jane and her older sister both attended a private, religious, English-medium school. *I went to a [religious] high school like right from kindergarten to, you know [through] the whole process you know, before college.*

At home, Jane communicates with her parents in a combination of Oriel and Telagu and with her sister it is a mixture of three languages, *at home, like you know it wasn't like purely the local language, it was like sometimes English sometimes in the [evening] because you know because we used to stay from 8 to like 4pm in the evening at school and that was like more than like half of [our day].* Now, the two sisters live together in the Pacific Northwest and are more likely to speak their mother tongue when together.
4.2.1.1 Schooling

The entirety of Jane’s schooling, *we had like from the first grade to the it was til the twelfth grade, was in one school and completely in English*, from morning assembly on the lawn, until the last class ended, often late into the afternoon. Her sister and she had to be sure to be on time each day, *in [our country], like most of the schools, you know like, they are closed and then there’s security guard at the gate...if it’s beyond 8 no one is allowed, you’re late and you miss school*. After Jane finished grade twelve, she went on to study pharmacy at a state university, *everything was English in University*.

4.2.1.2 Preparing for the United States

Before flying and moving to the United States, Jane said she spoke a bit to her sister about university and life in the Pacific Northwest. In addition, she *had a heard a lot about this specific university [back home] you know the [priests and] the sisters*. She did not think of applying to other universities. *I wanted to come here and I heard that [the Pacific Northwest] is like an evergreen state people are like uhh in a you know go [team] and stuff it’s pretty famous you know...especially the basketball!*

Her philosophy about studying in another country was such, *I went with an open mind, because I knew I had to start...fresh...I couldn’t you know just be the, the frame of mind [that] it could be as it is back home because the culture is really different*. She believes this worked in her favor, *I did have to change but I knew what [the professors] wanted, so I became a better person and the end result is good*. She feels as successful a student here in the United States as she was back home.

As for Jane’s thoughts on studying in the United States,

*I have come here to study so I have to do my best. You just you know fly and land in a different place and you have never been here before. You just try and try to not be homesick. But back home you know there is so much struggle to get in the university and so in the US when you set foot here in the US it is a dream come true.*
4.2.1.3 Transition from English in Her Home Country to English in the United States

Having come from English-medium schools, Jane was comfortable with English in the classroom before coming to the university in the Pacific Northwest,

*But sometimes you know people, do you know, because you know we by nature tend to speak a bit fast so people were like staring...Yeah, because there are people who didn’t quite get what I was saying, sometimes they were able to understand [but] other people were like oh gosh you...speak good English and we thought most Asians don’t speak good English, yeah.*

Jane said she was patient when explaining to her classmates, both undergraduate and graduate students, that where she is from, she was educated solely in English. Her patience came from a place of understanding, and she enjoyed sharing some of her stories with her classmates who were interested in her background. Though, she did have to learn to slow down when she spoke.

*It's more of like here everyone basically speaks English like you know be it in the school or when you go to a store you know, you communicate with English. Whereas in her home country, at the store or in the home, people communicate in the local language. But what I’ve seen is back home, like [because of the] British English influence we speak a lot more formal than the English here, even like, umm I’m also learning, like how to communicate as the American.*

4.2.2 Classroom Culture

Even with the same language medium, Jane noticed a change in the classroom culture of university here in the United States compared to schooling and university in her home country. She spoke about the different roles and relationships of teachers and students, the differences in class structure and environment, and curriculum. *I think it took like um it you could say it took a semester, yeah to fully get into the mold you know.* She observed her classmates and spoke with her professors in order to get more comfortable in her new
surroundings.

4.2.2.1 Classroom Environment

According to Jane, there was a classroom environment shift. Back home each class began by standing up when the professor entered to bid him/her a good day. When there were questions, you have to either stand up or just raise your hand, you know like excuse me, I have a question, but here sometimes people just you know people just relax and then they just shoot out the questions. It took some time to recognize these differences, but did eventually adapt to this new and different way.

It was the first couple of classes I was like busy taking notes and I was just listening to what the professor, you know trying to understand the material and the topics, I didn't have to observe you know what people, you know how they were interacting, but it did take time you know. In the middle of class sometimes, but when I observed the other people doing it, I just thought I should take the initiative and ask [questions]. I used to stop by the office hours because you know they used to mention you know just stop by and then ask those questions, so yeah. I did that, so that made it easy you know.

Back home, we were not allowed to like eat in the class, we could drink water and stuff, but eating was...disrespectful and then you couldn't sleep in the class, or just keep your head down. While here at university in the United States, Jane noticed that eating is acceptable in most classrooms.

In the interviews, she noted there's a classroom difference when referring to class sizes as well as classmates. Here it's a really a small size but back home you have like you know I think it's about like 100 students sometimes in each class and for like for an undergrad you know the whole of the four years, you have the same class, you know you don't have different people. She said it was an adjustment to come here and change your classmates in each class and have to change classrooms or even buildings.

Here like people like it was quite surprising...I just took four classes the first semester and they were all in different rooms, but back home you know you have like a room and you sit and the professor comes there and then different professors. And so it was difficult finding the rooms and I had to take the print out you know and go looking for the room number you know and then I like to check you know I didn't want to go in...
the wrong classroom and people staring and you know. So that was funny, you know, yeah, like different classroom for each class you know. Jane spoke mostly about the differences between schooling back home and in the

United States. In her MBA program here in the states, she had expected to get to know her classmates incredibly well over the course of her three years here, but that was not the case. [Here] it depends based on…the courses that you choose you…every semester it changes but we have like a fixed…course curriculum and then...you see [the same classmates] every day the whole four years of their undergrad degrees so that’s different.

4.2.2.2 Teacher’s Role

In her home country, the respect for the professor was of upmost importance. We are taught as kids to respect our teachers...we are taught even in my high school we were taught like God and then parents and teachers. According to Jane, respect was displayed differently, perhaps more outwardly, than here in the USA. I guess when the teacher entered the class, we had to stand up and wish them good morning, sir or good morning, sister, you know.

In her home country, the State’s university program was significantly different. The professors did not create the curriculum, the tests or the final exams. This process was used to create consistency throughout the country in the different fields of study. Our professor didn’t check [the exams], they went, we don’t know… Jane appreciated the difference here in the USA. Here, I think it’s pretty good, because you know what you did and then you can just ask your professor, like, "Why did you choose, why did I get 1/2 credit less.” But back at her university, she could only see her grade, never her mistakes.

Also here, professors have the freedom to create their own course using their own knowledge and research of the field. The syllabus here is designed by the...individual professor, but back home, the syllabus is designed by the board, you know, everybody has a standard syllabus, every college has to follow the same procedure. She felt adjusting the course to focus on the professor’s area(s) of expertise enhanced the course and was especially positive and helpful when transitioning to the working world.
4.2.3 Student and Teacher Relationship

Jane felt very supported by her professors here in the United States. Professors you know they are all around to help you...you know 24/7 to help you...you could just shoot an email to anybody and you just get a reply back from them. She felt there wasn’t the same, because back home there was more a hierarchy. It’s like you know it’s like you there’s not much a gap between teacher and student you know like a hierarchy, but back home it’s a bit hierarchical system.

She went on to reflect about the differences,

That's good, you know because here the professor and yeah, that’s different because professor had the upper hand they had the more power than students. But here students can you know express themselves and if they don’t like something in a course or something, they can just suggest a professor, you can just change this. But we couldn’t suggest. She found sometimes students took advantage of this and that should not always be accepted. We...couldn’t say that you have to change the syllabus...but here people can do that, you know, they want a topic to be added incorporated in the lecture or in the syllabus, they are free to suggest. However, she liked that there was some room for a conversation with most professors, unlike back home.

4.2.3.1 Teacher’s Strategies in the Classroom

Jane found significant differences in the way courses were taught in the different countries. Basically like [the professors] wanted us to learn the hard way. So they thought that you know like using board and chalk you know that was traditional way. Whereas in the USA, I’ve seen a few of the professors here like they like to use chalk but more often, they use technology and PowerPoint to present the information. Jane thinks the reliance on computer presentations may be making its way to classrooms in the university setting in her home country but not at the high school or elementary school levels.
Jane appreciated the time many professors dedicated to helping their students succeed, especially since the idea of turning in homework and writing assignments for points was a new concept.

*The professors* take time you know they just discuss you know like what they want you know how they want students to write you know or to plan the homework or assignments you know so that helped me and I could get an idea you know what the professor you know was looking for and that was really nice.

Jane gave an example where she was surprised by the American students’ lack of appreciation for the time the professor dedicated,

*The professor said like we could have like a class like where were we could just drop by and like you know ask him questions, but you know but just just two person turned up there...Then I just thought you know like here people are lucky to have you know such a learning cultures but still they don’t show up you know, yeah then I felt you know really sad.*

Finally, Jane spoke about the frequency of knowledge checks and assessment. *Then the quizzes you know really helped you know to stay like up-to-date you know you go back and read you know if you have quizzes like you know weekly quizzes...so that was really nice.*

It was unlike the demonstration of knowledge in her home country, back home...we have like either like it could be like monthly tests and then you have like a final [annually] but that makes it too much of a load. It was the monthly tests and most importantly the final that determined if the students could pass to the next level.

### 4.2.3.2 Curriculum

Jane separated the two differing school systems by looking at the focuses of the syllabi: *back home there was you know more focus on quantitative stuff, the professors didn’t explain much and so there was not as much like framework.* In the university classroom that she experienced in the United States, the professors assessed the students on quantitative exams, but gave more significance to the qualitative skills, such as thinking, presentations, writing and organization, and *you know how you approach this and that.*
Jane felt the classroom was more relaxed in the United States than back home, I practically speaking you know like there's a lot of hands on experience here in the US like yeah. And in [my home country] we are like made to struggle and learn...from the books, but little is practical making it less seamless when transitioning into the business world.

4.2.3.3 Writing Papers

When asked what her first reflection paper looked like, Jane noted that the assignment was well scaffolded which was very helpful, as this type of assignment was very new to her.

Initially I think my first class you know put the writing skills, I did you know I had to go back and meet the professor and take feedback you know because I did write well but I didn’t quite understand you know what the professor was looking for you know so it did take a couple of weeks to get into that writing. It was about like the class you know like it was a business class and we had to play a game. So it was about like it was an operations class and you know you learn like the supply game you know how products are manufactured and then to the market you know so it was a reflection class and then I think the guidelines were provide so like it was like similar to like to just a check list. Yeah it really helped and then yeah. Americans write different from the way she wrote back home. Here students use shorter, more informal writing compared to the long, formal sentences of her essay assignments from back home. She took advantage of the professor’s office hours, feedback from the professor is very helpful, and I you know, actually improved, what the professor needed. He wanted to help me out. For the first assignment, the professor would discuss what he wanted in the submitted assignments, you know what he wants in the next assignment.

She noted that back home, differing fields of study will focus on writing, but not her chosen fields. There’s not much focus on writing skills you know, yeah. Like you know [here] you have like assignments just write up yeah, so but you don’t have that back home. Jane was not expecting so many writing assignments but quickly found what it took to be successful.

4.2.3.4 Textbooks
Similar to the computer presentations of professors, Jane was surprised to see so many online textbooks. She also sees that the classroom here is more focused on lectures. *I think the education system back home it’s more like the textbook based...but I think it will take ten or twenty years to become you know as the US.* Jane does see much of a reliance on textbooks, but she misses the fixedness it brought to the classroom. *I did I like to read textbooks, and I just go through the material but you know I like to take good notes in class.*

In one of the last interviews, this question was asked, *were you prepared [for the lack of reliance on textbooks], when you first started?* For example, another student said: *that the first semester he read every single page of every single textbook.* She laughed and then said,

*I took a finance class and I took notes you know and then um I did look at the textbook, but then I ask the professor, is it okay, like do I have to like go through each page or do I have to just you know follow your notes and your lectures and he said you know that should be fine, because you pay attention the class then you could just take my notes...so I think I was really shocked in a way and then I was also really happy and then because how I really appreciated how professors break down the stuff for students you know they just make them, you know it’s like you know feeding on, yeah on a plate yeah so I was really impressed you know like how much hard work professors put in. I was impressed by you know how professors are here.*

### 4.2.3.5 Group Projects

Jane liked the addition of group projects to her classes. She said it gave her a chance to work on her managerial skills. Back home, *the projects was individual and it was mostly in history and then it was in um science.* Whereas in her classroom in the United States, *it was nice you know because it was most of the business classes you have like collaboration projects where you could interact with your group so that makes it really good you know teamwork.* This opportunity gave the class a chance to work as though in a business setting.

Jane related this group focus to the classroom and assessment on qualitative assignments. *Yeah it was but I guess teamwork is a a lot better here. You know like the presentation here there’s lot more focus here.* And even though this was something new she
had to learn, I wanted to learn, I wanted to fit myself in the learning process here. I know here things would work differently.

4.2.3.6 Exams

The exam structure was one of the most surprising elements of the classroom.

The stuff the professor covered in class, in the textbooks, was all on exam. But you know back home the questions could actually be from anywhere in the book. It doesn’t matter if the professor covered it or not. But here, you know what is going to be on the test. If you paid attention and took notes, you know. When Jane remembered her first exam, a big smile came across her face, so like I just read the notes you know so when I saw the you know it was like a quiz you know I was like oh gosh it’s so easy! She said, back home she was expected to like seventy percent of the hard work, like we need to go and find you know topics and you know different books and you know make our own notes. But here she was able to study her lecture notes and the presentation slides the professor would post online.

4.2.4 The Outside World

Jane had more expectations that the world outside the classroom would be different.

But even so,

It did take a semester you know to get acclimated to the weather the culture and everything just learning you know how to like do people drink coffee you know like it’s different and everything is different. How do people order a sandwich or you know or a taco you know, it’s yeah. You need like yeah, I did take like it was almost a semester course on this time perfectly, but it does take time.

She believes that keeping a positive attitude and an open mind are the keys to success in and outside the classroom.

I think you know everything has a positive side to it, so at the university here, people have been friendly you know like you know I don’t feel like I’m an international student, but I just feel like a part of the culture you know, people have been friendly and they are quite excited, so where are you from and stuff so yeah. I think that’s good, you know in a way. yeah. But I guess like I’ve learnt a lot from here. I think I’ll take with me you know all these experiences and stuff, yeah. Even like, the classroom learning, everything has been um experienced.

4.2.5 Summary
During the conversations, Jane was invested in coming to the United States with an open mind, ready to face anything. As a Masters student in a new country and in a different education system, she did not lack in challenges she had to face, including the informality of the classroom environment in the United States university classroom and the strategies the professor used to approach learning in her classroom. Jane attributes her success to her openness to accept new and different experiences, not to see these as challenges but as learning opportunities.
4.3 Zeeshan: The Reflective One

Zeeshan, a pseudonym chosen by the participant, was a sophomore at a small, private university in the Pacific Northwest. He is one of a family of four: his parents, he, and his younger sister who is back home in Country B studying environmental studies at a local university. His parents run a business together. In Zeeshan's province, the official languages, as in the rest of the country, are Urdu and English. However, according to CIA Worldfact book (2014) and to Ethnologue (Paul, Simons, & Fennig, 2014), English is not an official language but a language of affluence. When I asked Zeeshan about the role of English in his country, you have to read and write in English in order to be employed in the first place. In addition to English and Urdu, each province has its own language. Zeeshan’s province is no different giving this area three distinct languages.

4.3.1 Home Country

At home Zeeshan primarily speaks Urdu and it is, he says, his mother tongue. His parents regularly encouraged him and his sister to speak English with one another from the time we were seven to about 14. His parents both received Masters’ degrees from English medium universities. They experienced the difficult of learning and speaking additional languages. However, English was not exclusive in their home. A significant amount of Urdu was also spoken. [My mother] wanted [speaking English] to be a habit for us because it is one of the official languages of Country A. His mother understands the importance of speaking English, so she and Zeeshan’s father sent their two children to English medium schools.

I am no exception that I knew English, but the level is a lot different when it comes to schooling, because when I went to a school that was private and was English-medium, that meant that the school will enforce you to speak English in class and to practice your English skills with the English teacher and you are not allowed to speak and you’re not supposed to be caught speaking Urdu in the premises of the education system.
While attending an English medium school in the city, Zeeshan and his sister both spoke English fluently as their academic language. In a follow up conversation, he said *if I wrote an essay in Urdu, it would sound like a second grader.* Growing up, it was more natural for him to speak Urdu, with his family and his friends, *of course you speak your language all the time, so [at school] it was an enforcement to learn [English].* Although, with his parents’ encouragement, his sister and he spoke a significant amount of English together. While now Zeeshan will speak almost only Urdu with his parents and friends from back home in Country A, with his sister he continues to speak a complete mixture, *when we text it is in English and I would say, when we email, it is in English, too, but when we Skype, it is of course Urdu.*

### The School System in Zeeshan’s Home Country

The public school system in Country A is run by the government, and they are mostly Urdu medium schools and have an English foreign language class. In the 1970s, the English language courses began in the fifth grade and in the 80s it changed to begin in the first grade. According to Zeeshan, the education system now is poor because the government does not have enough funding. He says the quality of the education suffers and the building resources are almost non-existent, especially in the rural areas. He also mentioned that he does not see the public schools fulfill the needs, in that there are not enough schools for the amount of children. Private schools help create more school options, but they are expensive.

*Public schools are extremely cheap and the poor people send their kids to the public schools because they cannot afford education higher than that. Public education is very subsidized, I would say, it is about three to four dollars a month. Which for a poor person, they can afford that.* Textbooks are free; but, at the public schools they are old, and there is not enough oversight from the administration to improve materials. Most people who are well educated either went to private schools or spent a lot of time studying on their own. He sees this especially as a problem in the rural areas where there does not seem to be a focus in the
families on education, so the students are not motivated by their parents to study. Zeeshan acknowledged that these students will likely never leave their place in society. *Not saying there is anything wrong with working on a farm,* but they cannot leave even if they wished to. There is no support to strive for more education.

*The education system now, talking about present times, is all English, even in the public schools, they prefer, I mean children don't talk in English, it's not that kind of enforcement, but most courses, like science social studies, and any of those first one to sixth grade subjects that basically encompass any kind of social studies will be in English.*

### 4.3.1.2 Zeeshan’s Schooling

At the age of three, Zeeshan began school at a local English medium private school, one of the best schools in town. From the beginning the students were studying English, Urdu, and math. With schooling based in the British system, he had preschool, kindergarten, then elementary school, then took his O (Ordinary) levels in eighth grade and then A (Advanced) levels in 11th grade.

The language of instruction for all his classes was English with the exception of his Urdu language class and his Islamic studies class, both of which were taught in Urdu. This changed in the 8th grade, *only in 8th grade for the O levels they want to transition from Urdu Islamic studies to English because you have to give the exam in English.* And it was at this point that the syllabus changed. From first to seventh grade, the focus was more on stories of the Quran and the Islamic faith; but once the eighth grade Islamic studies class began instruction in English, the syllabus was guided by the British system, Zeeshan explained it as more systematic, focusing on history and terminology.

Zeeshan found the switch from an Urdu medium Islamic studies class to a class in English especially interesting since everything had been contextual. Switching to English to speak about his faith was difficult, as much was translated from Arabic to Urdu and finally to English; it seemed to lose much of the meaning. However, he thought it a good experience,
especially learning the names of the prophets and places are completely different in English and Urdu.

In both his English medium classes and the few classes taught in Urdu, Zeeshan felt he completed his schooling successfully. *I was a straight A student and I think my efforts were fruitful.* He was also very involved in his school, including participating in model United Nations and being involved and planning activities to help build my resume. *I was not very into sports, but I was more involved in organizing essay writing competitions and organizing galas and all that fun stuff.* His headmistress supported such involvement, knowing this could help him stand out to universities abroad, and here in the United States.

*[Our headmistress] was amazing. She reviewed our applications separately, just to make sure we had everything we were applying for, so that we get admissions abroad. I got 12 admissions out of 18, with aids and scholarship, of course [this private university] had the largest one, so [it] was my first choice after all.* At the end of the first interview, Zeeshan gave more information regarding his experience with similar questions from his classmates here in the United States. When responding to questions such as, *How do you speak English so well coming from a country that does not speak it?* He said, *Well, that's not the case that we don't speak English, it's just that we don't fluently practice it.*

4.3.1.3 Preparing for the United States

Late in his third year of high school, Zeeshan attended a seminar offered by the United States Education Foundation Programs, Country B, where former Fulbright scholars had a seminar to educate students on Visa, schools, scholarships, all these different things. The two women also talked about their experiences in the United States, culture shock, homesickness, and expectations to have as an exchange or international student traveling to the United States.

*The girls were sharing these things and they were their reality. But I felt that I did not get as much of a culture shock, as one would expect. Just because I think I was familiar enough with the, sort of the culture here, uh but then also with the language.*
I thought that I could properly explain myself to a teacher, a student, a fellow mate without being super nervous about speaking it. Because once I was past Dubai, there was no return. I landed in Washington, D.C. the first time I came here and um it was completely switched over to English, right. No Urdu speakers anymore. That transition meant that I was completely on that side now, no matter what, I would be speaking it. And I felt that SATs really helped with that too. It was intense English course I was doing myself, basically …and I think that that helped a lot, too. The fluency doesn't come from that.

For Zeeshan, the preparation was more from the classroom than from this preparation seminar. However, there were still parts where he felt he wasn’t quite prepared. The English he learned in high school was not the English that he found at the university in the United States.

I stopped studying English in 11th and 12th grade, but before I took the SATs, I began studying again, but this was individual studying and school allows two months off to study for college entrance exams. 12th grade I began applying for university. I chose the United States because the universities here offer a lot of financial help and really aim for international students. This is unique, not many other countries do this. I was looking specifically for schools that were strong in Engineering and also offered good financial aid scholarships. I applied to 18 colleges all over, and this university offered the best scholarship package. I gave the TOEFL exam as well, however, no one asked for this exam.

The size of the city was not what shocked him the most. I had some idea what that might look like based on television and Hollywood. But he could not have guessed what it would be like to live with those people he had been seeing on television. I had no idea what the area looked like before I came, I had never been to the United States before. And it has been a really good experience.

4.3.1.4 Transitioning from the English of his Home Country to English in the United States

When asked if he was more comfortable speaking about his feelings and thoughts in Urdu or in English he was able to recognize that it hasn't been static,

I would say that has changed. When I first came here I would say I was translating my words that I spoke here from Urdu to English. And that made me slightly slower when I would talk to people. I mean I would understand people just fine, but then when I would reply I felt that in a lot of cases I was translating from my mother tongue that I would think in, and translate it into English, make it grammatically correct and then just like speak it. So there was a lot of calculation going on in my
However, after two and a half years, there has been a transition. He no longer has to think in Urdu. When he speaks with his friends back home in Country A, he still feels inclined to speak in Urdu, even though these friends also know English. Late in the first interview, Zeeshan reflects again on this point of translation,

But I felt, that when I was talking about the translation part, when I was actually trying to translate my Urdu phrases and Urdu sentences when I was talking initially freshman year, for example, it was it was harder to sustain certain situations because they, these certain phrases that people would tell me was so Americanized, that a response in a timely manner would be harder. Yeah, just because of the context. It seems this has changed after living and working in the United States for some time. He says that he can understand almost everything he hears.

Except if they use a very slang word which I have no idea about, but otherwise I do understand American slang and the words and all that. So it's slightly different than British English, I would say. They don't use a lot of words here that I studied as normal English literature, because that was mostly UK's English, too. ...The word awesome here is used so much, that the people in Britain would not like that. Of course, talking to people here, I am of course more comfortable talking to them in English because I would assume that they don't know my language, but then talking to my family I don't think I would be very comfortable expressing myself in English probably because I have never spoken to them in English the way that I have spoken here.

When asked how he thinks his English has changed, Zeeshan references his mother’s reaction to his English. She said that it is his stress on words that has changed the most. It is not so different, it is just a few things. Also, I had no idea why Microsoft Word would give me so much red. It was a transition from the spelling rules of British English to the American English rules.

4.3.2 Classroom Culture

Zeeshan took some time in the second interview to compare how he understood the classroom in the public education system in his country to his experience in the classroom here in the United States. He said that a student coming from the public school system in Country A to the United States university system would have a lot of difficulties. The learning style in the public school system is based on rote memorization and the exams are
just reproducing the lectures. *They lose the capacity of understanding the material. For them, the same problems from class show up to the exam, you learn the solution and not how to do the problem. That is not the case here.*

In the following pages, I will share Zeeshan’s reflections, discussions, challenges, and reactions to the transition from English medium secondary school in his home country to the university here in the United States.

### 4.3.3 Teacher’s Role

When talking about the teacher's role in the classroom, Zeeshan first said that in his experience

*...they enforced more lectureship. Here you have more opportunity to interact with the professor. And it's less formal. Back home....the teacher's role was to lecture, to make sure that you understand things, but you were only able to ask questions when the floor for questions was open. So don't interrupt a lecture; it's against etiquette. Later on in the second interview, Zeeshan mentions that the professor’s role in the classroom in the United States is a little less formal and a little more passive. He explains,*

*I feel like I have to be the one to make myself noticed. And to do that, I have to be, I mean the ways I probably use, is that I am definitely very nice in class, I try to participate, I try to, when I'm leaving say, thank you so much for lecture, and that kind of thing, so um, the active/passive role is really important because that's I think that that's kind of based on how you treat your professor, too. He noticed the professors are not always worried about each individual’s progress and performance in the class,*

*For example, when I was in 9th grade and I got a very bad grade on my math exam and my professor, it was a final, and the next year I had the same guy who taught me 10th grade and he asked me, ‘Why did you do so poorly on your exam last time? It was a D and you were an A student. I don't know why you did so awfully’ and he was interested in my performance, so he comes up to me and talks to me about it. It was more relaxed in that sense - if you were in the good books. This played to the advantage of the "good" students, the ones who had good grades, because these students would be the favorites, the teacher would likely be more lenient with them.*

*If you were a naughty student in school the professor would treat you differently. He would definitely treat you the way that he or she knows that they can control you.*
the sense that they don't want to you to misbehave...They definitely had a different attitude toward a student who was good or bad and they would express it openly. Zeeshan saw a difference between the relationship between the teacher and students, especially in the way favoritism was expressed was less explicit in the United States classroom.

4.3.3.1 Student and Teacher Relationship

The relationship difference was not only about favoritism it also had to do with the informality of the relationship.

I noticed that um people could leave the classroom without permission, for example. Unlike in high school when we have to say, excuse me, ma'am or excuse me, sir, could we please go to the bathroom or can I please go to have some water? Like that kind of thing, and you and to get the permission. But here I realized that you can just pretty much leave without telling anybody. That was one thing that really struck me.

In the classroom environment in his home country, this was seen as a very rude disruption. I realized that here all you really needed to do was raise your hand and ask a question and most teachers would be okay with that...but back home usually most professors would...lecture first, questions at the end.

He went on to reflect on the reasons, that it has more to do with the courtesy and etiquette of not interrupting the professor.

I don't know if it's the school difference or the difference in the teaching culture, I feel like that professors here won't be interested if you are listening or not, they can teach the class regardless. In high school, I've noticed that the teacher wanted you to pay attention or they will say, leave the classroom. If they see that you are on your mobile phone or just not paying attention in class, or disinterested in whatever's going on, they will probably tell you by name, excuse me, you are not interested in listening to my lecture, you are more than welcome to leave.

Zeeshan said that this is actually the courteous way, that when talking with his cousins who attended the public schools that the teachers would be furious, they would insult them in class, and it's a whole lot um less respected to the student from the teacher, but the teacher, the student should respect them a lot, there's like a give less, take more situation in that case.

At first, Zeeshan was hesitant to accept this less formal relationship.
I definitely did not know how to approach [the professors] as readily as a student here for example. I think I noticed that I was a lot, I was in the same methods, like for example, I think I actually asked once, Can I get some water?, and they were like, yeah go ahead and do whatever you want. And I realized that oh you don't need to ask them here, you can probably go without telling them. They would not mind.

Personally for Zeeshan, respect for his professors has always been of utmost importance. This was engrained in him by his mother, who was a professor for a period of time. He has maintained this respect in the United States, too. He no longer asks to leave the classroom and will ask questions during lectures as other American students do. He showed this respect by trying to look for the positive aspects of the professors teaching style even when he may not have understood, and he maintains formal relationships with his professors.

4.3.4 Comparing Teaching Strategies

Zeeshan reflected on teaching styles and strategies noticing differences and challenges between his home country and the United States’s classroom environments. In the following section, I will discuss his comparison of classroom structure and curriculum, student participation, assignments, and the reliance on textbooks.

4.3.4.1 Discussion-Based Classrooms

According to Zeeshan, professors both here in the United States and back home are similar in that they expect you to have read the material before coming to class and to be prepared. However, the classes here are much more discussion-based in the United States,

It's not like that at all back home. The professors are going to talk and talk until it's done. And if they don't have anything more to say, it's not going to be a small group discussion - we have never had a small group discussion, never had a large group discussion, or anything like that, ever before I came here. So it was a very new thing to me to have students engage in a conversation within the classroom which, I mean, in a lot of cases, from what I have seen, I think that they would say that it's a very, that it's a waste of time to have in classroom [discussions] when it's only fifty minutes, when [the lecturer] can tell them something.

Zeeshan used his discussion-based religion class from a previous semester as an example of a United States classroom based solely on student lead discussion.

There were small groups, large groups, presentations, we were teaching each other
more than the professor lecturing us. She hardly lectured us ten, fifteen minutes in class out of the hour and fifteen minutes we had in each lecture. Students have presentations prepared - I mean she’d tell us what to do - she would have questions prepared, thank God, only the first three weeks were the only lectures we got. That class we basically discussed material that we all researched and presented to each other.

This class was different from any other he had experienced back home. The knowledge came from fellow students and their research, not the professor and the assigned textbook.

He did feel like he learned the material that was laid out in this discussion-based theology class. But I don't know how I was graded, I mean I never had an exam in that class. He thinks it was a dynamic and flexible way of learning about eleven different Christian denominations. However, while he thought it was a different way of learning, he does not think he was alone in thinking that this was a different style. The domestic students also seemed to think this was a different way of learning. The professor acknowledged this, saying her role was more passive in the classroom; she was there as a facilitator.

Zeeshan was surprised at the openness of this and other professors when they led in-class discussion. First, discussions were uncommon in classes in his home country. But second, the professors in the United States, unlike back home, were accepting of most opinions. Here you were encouraged to speak without the fear of having the wrong point of view. Whereas back in his home, the professors would have been more forward to say “I would disagree with that” or “That is incorrect.”

4.3.4.2 Participation

Participation in the classroom was an adjustment for Zeeshan. Group projects never seemed challenging for Zeeshan either. He attributes this ease to his personality since it was not something he had much experience with in school in Country A. He discusses the fact that in Country A there are no grades based on participation. It was lecture, midterm, final and this is what your grade was based on. However, in his experience in the United States,
class participation could account for up to fifteen percent of the final grade, including journals, in-class discussion, and reflection papers. He said his personality helped him adapt to these expectations. He was comfortable speaking with people. However, he wasn't used to it. *I was shy when I came in, not because I felt I couldn't answer, but because I didn't need to answer. I wasn't used to the one-on-one interaction.* It was especially difficult because the professors changed each semester.

### 4.3.4.3 Curriculum

When Zeeshan arrived to university, he felt as though he had a solid background in math and science, chemistry, physics, and calculus. Some of his first classes, he felt he already knew the material *so I didn't have to cater to my habits,* since I knew things in advance, I just didn't even read the book, I mean if I had to, I think I would have approached [learning]: okay, the teacher doesn't care about the book, but I need to know these things. But since he already knew the material, it was just about reviewing the material, which the homework and the lectures helped with finding what this particular professor seemed to find important. But his second year, the classes became more specific and focused on his major, engineering.

*So then I started realizing that the way I used to read the book over there, for example, I didn't have to do it over here as much.* Zeeshan realized that it was the material that was presented in class, be it from book or from lecture notes not from the book, was the information needed for the exams. It was not important in his experience to study the chapters or sections of the book that were not covered in class.

### 4.3.4.4 Writing Papers

Writing papers in general came as a shock to Zeeshan. As he was preparing for his O and A levels in school, the focus was on short, concise 250 word essays. Here *I had to learn*
what a paper had to look like. I had to learn the writing structure with a thesis. There was one class, a theology class, in Zeeshan's first semester where he felt frustrated. He professor continually graded him poorly on his essays based on sentence structure flaws and inexperience with the Bible. The professor was very rigid. After the first poor grade, I followed his [written] instructions, after the second poor grade, I talked with him. He said the way I was writing wasn't correct and the sentence structure was ambiguous and un-understandable. He never was able to figure out how to write for that professor and ended up with his only C grade. So then I feared English 105, because if I didn't do well in a theology class, what about an English class! But [my professor] loved my writing style. He thinks part of it was that she had a detailed rubric that helped him follow the instructions. He did not get his last paper returned from this challenging theology class and still wonders if the format was what his professor was looking for.

In addition to writing structure, he noticed he had to change some of his vocabulary and spelling in his writing. The examples he gave related to speaking, the words awesome and perfect are used much more often here in the United States than in Country A.

4.3.4.5 Textbooks

He gives an example of a current class he was taking. If he were taking this class back home, he would be very focused on the details of the book, whereas here in the United States, he will be better pinpointing the information that the professor expects me to know. The exam is the focus, yet back home he noticed that a professor may test him on the material in the book even if it had not been discussed in class. But the approach was different here, so I did mend my ways, but it was a smarter way of going around it, because having six subjects, his time was completely full of classes and studying.

When asked directly about textbooks, Zeeshan said that there wasn't much to which he had to adapt. The textbooks back home were often published in Singapore, Malaysia, and
sometimes Great Britain so there was some differing vocabulary, though this didn't impede understanding.

And that was a whole different way of learning religion for me then would be in an Islamic studies class back home that the professor would probably talk about what is in the textbook. It is a very textbook oriented study, too.

The professor would reference the textbook and refer to specific passages in the textbook. They might say, I am analyzing that for you. Whereas in the United States, the professors expect you to read the book, but don't necessarily talk about the textbook. They have rarely referenced a textbook page unless it's a table in a science class. Otherwise, the lecture is very different, very much separate from the textbook.

Zeeshan had trouble understanding the reason he had to buy certain textbooks for a course, like speech. He had taken a similar course in high school, but there was a different focus. Home in Country A, he was given a more clear instructions, whereas here sometimes it was unclear why the class was important, and more often, why he bought books for the class. There were a number of classes where the professor did not rely on the textbook, but used other outside materials and his or her own knowledge on the subject matter.

4.3.4.6 Zeeshan’s Preferences

When asked about which he prefers, Zeeshan recognizes that it is a different approach and that perhaps the goals of the courses are different. The lectures back home were to prepare him for O and A level exams.

And the professors make the syllabus in a way that would solve questions and problems for that exam. Here I know that the course is made by the dean or made by the senior professor or the head of that department and they have their objective goals. They don't necessarily rely on a book for that. Professors can provide that information on their own, can maybe can give you some background information from the book.

Here in the United States he sees his professors using the book as a piece of background information, as a basis for what then they use to delve deeper into the more practical aspects of the course.
He sees both approaches as having advantages that having a textbook as the guide is good, because you know what to expect. However, he believes that it is interesting to have the professors and student-led discussion and research add so much to the class and the field of study.

4.3.5 The World Outside

The world outside the classroom played a huge role. He went through a few periods of homesickness and while he says it becomes easier, it was still hard missing birthdays, missing out on the experiences, and my mom misses me so much. He remembers, I came here for a reason, I am getting a degree, meeting friends, a summer internship, and getting a cultural experience. Now I see I have a path, I know what I am doing and how to get there, a relief for me and my family, who miss me and love me so much.

His recommendations to future South Asian students include:

- You will feel prepared, if you took the O and A level classes and exams
- Be open-minded, receptive, adaptable, and friendly so that you are accepted and you make the most of your time.
- Be rational about things rather than thinking based only on emotions

4.3.6 Summary

Zeeshan was enthusiastic about delving into the reasons behind the challenges he overcame and the adaptations he had to make during his time as a university student in a new education system. He joked about some difficulties having a quick fix, such as all the red that Microsoft Word gave him when he spelled words the British way. But when he spoke about the steps he took to become a successful writer in the eyes of his professors, and when he worked to grasp the purpose of a student-led discussion-based classroom, he then took a serious look into understanding and succeeding in the United States university system.
4.4 Tommy: The Passionate One

Tommy, a pseudonym chosen by the participant, is from a small country in South Asia. After he finished high school, he took a gap year before studying engineering at university in the United States. Once I explained the topic, Tommy was eager to be a part of this research study. At the end of each interview, Tommy had many ideas for more interviews that could have been included in this research study.

4.4.1 Home Country

Tommy grew up in a large city with access to many English-medium schools. His immediate family is small, just his mother, father, and one younger sister. His parents both have jobs in the city. So my dad graduated as mechanical engineer but he owns his own engineering firm. His mom is also well-educated. She is a professor and she teaches grade 11 and 12 and she teaches diploma level classes so she’s like a college professor and a high school professor at the same time.

With his family, Tommy speaks exclusively Bangle. He also has command of several other languages including English, French and Hindi. English and French he learned in school.

I used to be quite fluent in [Hindi] because we used to make yearly trips to Country B...We used to stay for two three weeks and I used to be I used to be fluent enough to understand and talk to a person. Like get my message across in really bad Hindi, I would feel like. But you know, it worked.
His extended family lived in the neighborhood as well. He would spend significant time with his cousins. With them, he is also most comfortable in Bangle. Some of them attend English-medium schools like he and his sisters, but others had attended Bangle-medium schools. About Bangle and English, Tommy says, I have been speaking in both languages long enough to you know be comfortable I guess, like self-sufficient and comfortable.
According to Tommy, in his country English is important, especially for jobs at multinational firms. He explained,

*If you are going to work in a multinational company...everything is in English because it’s multinational and since we are an ex-British empire country so like that’s one. like there’s such a lot of [reasons], like a lot of the companies...are all in English and [so] English is kind of important, like it is important in an everyday basis, but it’s not something that you need to survive but it is important if you wanna like you know like if you wanna [help] yourself...if you have a command over a second language which a lot of people use it’s obviously better for your job perspective and everything.*

### 4.4.1.1 Tommy’s Schooling

In his home town, Tommy went to two private, religious, English-medium schools from grade one to twelve. The first from grade one to ten. In this school we *had to study* Bangle til like grade 8 there it was compulsory for all of us and after that it was you get to choose. Tommy chose to continue just with French and forego the additional Bangle course. Then, *there’s a major exam in grade 10...O levels are the Ordinary levels I gave in grade 10.* Students, including Tommy, switch schools after grade ten.

Tommy continued on in an English-medium school. This school was more crowded and was set up in an old, very large, home. He was in this school for two years.

*And there’s another major exam in grade 12...the A levels, the advanced levels, I gave in grade 12. But it’s not the same for everyone. If you’re following...the Bangle medium...what you study under the government system...you give [an exam] there...but you cannot give the O levels and the A levels in Bangle because they’re under the British system.*

Tommy’s parents sent him to English-medium school, though they joke that his dad only wanted him to attend a school with a cricket pitch. When he asked his parents how he ended up at his school, he said his mom explains it so:

*Your dad wanted you to go to a school with a field. I wanted, my mom’s like I wanted you to study in an English-medium school. The school I got into, was easily the only one which within my mom and dad’s income range.*

He is glad his parents sent him to the school they did, because it helped him to study at university in the United States.

Even though the school was strict about speaking English only inside the school building, *outside school [my friends and I] do speak Bangle more than not, umm and then in school English*
more than Bangle, but yeah, we speak both. While in the United States, Tommy maintains he friendships from his schooling years and then they speak mostly Bangle.

4.4.1.2 Preparing for the United States

When deciding about colleges, Tommy knew he wanted to study outside his home country. There are so few universities in his home country that they are extremely competitive. The thing there’s not that many government colleges...they have a very minimum charge...it’s just for you know showing that students are enrolled. It’s super hard to get into one. It’s close to impossible.

He took the SAT in Bangladesh. I chose not to [give the TOEFL], but I gave an alternative, the IELTS. I applied to Canada and also England as well and Malaysia as well. So like because of that all these countries accept the IELTS except except the US. The schools in England were his reach schools. The ones in Malaysia were his backups. The Canadian schools were too expensive, so he ended up choosing a small, private, religious university in the Pacific Northwest in the United States that gave him a good scholarship.

The reason I chose [this university] - the colleges I applied to in America were designed for a couple of things. The first two things I looked at superficially were good engineering schools and small schools. So [this university] fits under those categories. And then I talked with a lot of colleges and whatnot and learned this and that. Ultimately I ended up applying to four places only [in the USA] and [this university] was the one of them and I got accepted here with a good scholarship which allowed me to come here.

4.4.1.3 Transition from English in Tommy’s Home Country to English in the United States

Tommy faced some challenges when he transitioned to university in the United States. One of the most notable differences was the importance placed on homework.

Freshmen year, first semester...I was like it’s homework, it’s not supposed to be worth it, so I never went through the stuff properly. However, he noticed his grades reflected this so by
freshman year spring semester...I got [to] doing homework on time and everything and after that I’ve been doing homework on time.

There were other things Tommy noticed when comparing the classroom. From his school in his home town and at university here in the USA, he saw classroom numbers were about the same but to him there seemed to be a shift from formal to informal relationship between the students and the professor.

4.4.2 Classroom Culture

Tommy found similarities between the physical classroom in his home country and the classroom at the university here in the United States. The classrooms umm compared to like at least numbers-wise, the compared to like the schools back home, were it nearly the same. He also noted that the seating was similar, we...had like two people sitting on one desk you know, like bigger, longer desks pretty much other than that, are the smaller desks, depending on class to class it.

Tommy also found a few surprises when he arrived for class at university, including the location of classes.

We just used to sit in that room you know like stay and then the professors used to come and go, like here’s it’s the other way...we go around from class to class so you need to get your geography right. I mean the geography of the whole place to actually know where you’re going and what you’re doing in like five minutes you have to be from [one building] to somewhere [else].
But at least here you are given time to move from one class to another, there was like no like no gap between classes like it was like it was like one class and then the other and like three classes in a row and then took a break or lunch break and more classes.

He spoke a little about the core curriculum; back home, once a student focused his studies, they no longer needed to take certain classes. But he seemed to appreciate a choice, like either you take this or that subject or you don’t take a class and you had to take a minimum of like 8 or 9 courses depending on what you wanted to study in.
As for the classroom environment, Tommy did notice significant differences between the professor’s role and relationship with their students, the participation in the classroom and the assessment of various assignments, among other things.

4.4.2.1 Teacher’s Role

In Tommy’s experience, it was more like to the professor would teach us an idea like a new topic just like they would over here as well. But then to hone the skills, the students were expected to have tutors. Tommy, too, had tutors to help him. In grade ten, I was sent to all the tutors for like for like all the subjects...because the tutors knew how to work this stuff out and the right answers. Many of his classmates were tutored beginning at the fifth or sixth grade levels.

4.4.2.2 Student and Teacher Relationship

After arriving, Tommy quickly noticed the difference between the professors from back home and those here in the United States.

The professors back home were always a little more strict, here professors are little more friendly and like my professors were all good, but you know, there were more strict professors back home...like I mean I couldn’t as well as approach them back home, here you’re more relaxed in approaching them. He went on to give examples of different interactions with professors, a professor would be here to explain you like the topic and you can go to them and talk and about studies they’re professional and they’re friendly here. But back in his home country, Tommy’s experience with professors was different, there’s no like very few of them are friendly.

Tommy very much appreciated the conversations he could have with his professors here.

I can go to my religion professor or my physics professor and talk to them about stuff, and you know just talk sometimes just talk you know, I talk with my advisor and over there I could talk to like more of them, but there were some who were like you know you never like got the vibe from them that they like want to like talk to you about your everyday stuff, but they want to help you with your school work.
He felt supported by his professors back home for classwork and assignments, but the conversation would never go outside that professor’s course. Unfortunately, not all his experiences here were positive.

Tommy’s first English course was his most negative classroom experience in the United States. He would try to talk with her outside of class, but never felt she gave him support or explanation. Tommy was affected by that classroom experience. He felt that would not have happened in his home country,

*That never happened back home. So I was not, I never had that experience where a professor would be straight up just shove you in the corner and be like so you’re not from here and you don’t, it’s not your first language or you’re not supposed to know this I guess. So you’re not gonna be good at it. So never had that pre-assumption on me laid upon you know like the lack of equal treatment, that’s what I feel like.*

After that class, Tommy started his second English class, you know the first book I didn’t read through it because I was still demoralized from the last English course, but he then found that this professor was different – a stringent grader, but he was so entertaining and even though I got a C in that class as well, I would do that class over and over the first English course any given day.

### 4.4.3 Comparing Teaching Strategies

When he spoke of strategies used by his professors back home, Tommy seemed to miss the completeness with which the professors would teach. *Back home our professor would like [to] describe...an experiment...he would start off by telling us the history behind it, then he would try to relate it to everyday stuff, then he would go through the theories and the maths.* But here in the United States, it’s like we don’t go into details of anything...it’s like this is the topic, it was done by this guy, this is the theory, this is the math behind it...I mean here...the math’s always good. So it has been a change for him to have to fill in some of the details of the material on his own.
He found a similar challenge in an English composition course. When he approached the professor with questions about the assignment, she went through [the requirements] so quickly, it was like oh okay! That doesn't look that important and um so I decided to just do it on the last page and I got a zero because of that. This was his first writing assignment was his first during his first semester and so was quite startling for him as a new student.

4.4.3.1 Participation

Understanding the importance of qualitative assessment here was an adaptation that Tommy had to make. Back home, there was homework, professors used to collect homeworks and they used to go through and it and check it and return it as to see whether you’re doing it right or wrong but no grade was assigned to it. I don’t like the idea of homework being worth something because you know it’s homework, and it’s like you gotta do it and then you learn...but that’s because you know I’m know I’m not used to that. It was the quizzes, tests and midterms, and finals that were included in the grade. And classroom participation grades were completely foreign to Tommy. Here there’s a lot more day to day work like the homework are more rigorous...in the sense that there’s a lot more work.

Tommy did not have as much written homework during his schooling as he does in the United States classroom.

*Here everything’s a lot of homework based, like over there it was more like challenging a concept based. There were homeworks but um it was never like this much and it was like always the ideas of the whole thing that you used to pass along. They used to like give us things to think on. Like, here, go and think about this, come back tomorrow and let me know what you learn about it and it’s not like it wasn’t like like you like go and do this experiment or do this, figure this out.*

And so when grades were attached to homework, Tommy found that especially different and challenging at first.

4.4.3.2 Writing Papers
Tommy had a poor experience in his first English composition course. The professor was challenging the way Tommy wrote, but he didn’t feel she took the time to explain her expectations. *I wasn’t used to that, I mean that kind of got my grades to go down a lot.* It was not only one writing concept, but the entirety of the paper that seemed different to him, *all of these like back home the system of writing was different.*

*[Back home] like it was more based towards creativeness it was more story writing you used to get a topic and write about it it could be a personal experience, it could be a story you just made up. That was like it was more creative writing and here it’s like more like oh you said that! You gotta prove it why. You need to cite the course. You know. it’s like like that’s like um that’s the difference, I didn’t know about citations and I didn’t know about MLA*

*We never had a thesis statement. Back home, like everything would build up for the conclusion. Like not like we don’t as I feel like we don’t give all of the story at the start, we build it up til we get to a conclusion, like instead of you know writing a thesis statement.*

Even though it was different, he understood that to succeed, he needed to change. *I know it’s supposed to be the way you do it here, but we never used to… like back home the system of writing was different.*

Outside of the professor’s interactions with writing, Tommy also noticed a difference in his classmates’ ownership of their writing. *People here are a lot more individualistic.* Back home, he was used to sharing his writing with his peers - not to copy, but sharing ideas, saying to a classmate, *that’s nearly what I wanted to write, except it’s like different in this approach and that* was a positive way that Tommy and his classmates would learn from one another. He found that here *there’s no sharing and*[students are] conservative when it comes to their papers.

### 4.4.3.3 Working Together with Classmates

Similar to idea sharing and paper writing, Tommy found that in group projects people here are a lot more individualistic. *It is so weird because...group project...like we would only discuss like a few things and then people would just go off and then that was it.* To Tommy, this didn’t feel the same at all.
Like back home whenever it was a group assignment, even though it was three different people supposedly writing three different things, we would all look through each other’s stuff - hey! What you wrote? Can I look? And that was completely acceptable, in fact, it was expected.

4.4.3.4 Tommy’s Preferences

As a student, Tommy prefers to figure things out on his own.

Whenever I feel like I need to like learn something new, and then I would just look it up on the internet or something or study it again through the book unless I’m I’ve tried like a couple of times, three or four times then I can’t do it then I would go up to a professor and ask help.

He finds that he is much more apt to have a conversation with a professor about life than school work, and he likes that difference here in the university environment in the United States.

4.4 The Outside World

Tommy sees that there are many things that affect him outside the classroom.

There was a lot to adapt because I’m here in a different country speaking like a language which I know quite well and I’m speaking it all the time and not moving back to my mother tongue and speaking one language and it sticking with it and adjusting to everyday basis and like everyday things and what are those were tough I feel like there’s a lot of things which is different from back home, but a lot of things I was prepared for like...for example, lack of traffic here [but] the food has to be big my biggest struggle.

One of the biggest differences has been when he struggles.

Here you can’t be like super friendly with someone and super nice and super close with them until...you know for a fact they got your back. It’s super different compared to back home. back home it was like, you know like if you ask someone, they take it as their personal problem like if it’s your problem it’s my problem, like that’s how friends are back home, I mean it’s kind of a bit shocking, but ehh I guess that’s how it is here.

He finds that people are more superficially friendly here. For Tommy that experience was shocking and unexpected.

4.4.5 Summary

During all the conversations, Tommy showed a similar passion for the differences he
encountered between the classrooms back home and the classroom environment in the United States as he did when he discussed the strategies he used to succeed. Tommy was an A student back home, and when he came here, he discovered the differences as soon as he began to see he grades drop. The challenges for Tommy came especially with the difference in writing techniques and the focus the professors put on assignments here in the United States classrooms. After finding the support he needed from his professors and advisors, Tommy understood the adaptations he wanted to make to feel successful academically.

4.5 Conclusion

Jane, Zeeshan, and Tommy all gave time and energy to discover the inconsistencies they saw between the English-medium classroom environment in the United States and the English-medium classroom environment in their own respective countries. There are some similarities with their ideas and how they negotiated those tactics used to become successful students in their new and unfamiliar environment. The next chapter will first summarize the similarities faced by all three participants and will conclude this research with an analysis of the themes presented by these topics.
CHAPTER 5: MEANING AND IMPLICATION

5.1 Introduction

The current research explored the perceptions and challenges of international students from English-medium education systems, studying in the United States university system. The participants discussed how classroom culture in South Asia differs significantly from that of classrooms in the United States. Consistent with scholarship, the participants found they had to modify their behavior and expectations as well as redefine their identity in order to succeed in the United States university classroom (Holmes, 2004; Cheng et al., 2004; Andrade, 2010). The participants found that global English was helpful when negotiating their new environments. This chapter will weave together the scholarship and data to support the two themes found from this research:

- The resiliency of the participants
- Complexities of an Outer Circle background

5.2 Theme One: The Resiliency of the Participants

The participants in this study spoke extensively about examples of challenges they faced as they entered into university in the United States. They were surprised by the specific challenges to overcome within the classroom setting. The three participants had come with the expectation that they knew how an English classroom appeared. They had to redefine what a successful student was and how a successful learning environment appeared. According to Gee (2011) these three participants had to redefine their figured world of a classroom. The participants in this study had to navigate and adjust to find a new way to be successful. They spoke of not giving up and instead pushing through these challenges. They
exhibited a resiliency in the face of the changes.

In their home country, the participants were successful students. Zeeshan felt he was a successful student and this helped him receive acceptance to university in the United States. *I was a straight A student and I think my efforts were fruitful.* Because of past success, the participants were under the assumption that they understood an English-medium classroom whether it was in their home country or in the United States. Their figured world of an English-medium classroom was based on their constructed view of what they had experienced in their home country (Gee, 2011).

The participants were not prepared for the time it took to make the necessary adjustments to become successful students in the United States classroom. Their original strategies for success collided with what they were witnessing in their new contexts. Similar to the participants in Holmes (2004) study, the students in the current study were not getting grades they felt reflected their efforts in their first semester. Instead, they found, according to Jane, it took like um it you could say it took a semester, yeah to fully get into the mold, you know. Zeeshan agreed saying that he began feeling more comfortable and successful in the classroom only after his first semester. After a semester of grades lower than he wanted, Tommy changed some of his habits, *freshman year, spring semester...I got [to] doing homework on time and everything and after that I’ve been doing homework on time.* The figured world of the participants in this study was influenced by “their social and cultural groups” (Gee, 2011, p. 248). But Gee reminded us, that “figured worlds are not static” (p. 251-252) and the figured world of the classroom did not remain static for the three South Asian students in this study. Their sense of resiliency in the face of a context that directly conflicted with their figured world of a classroom, was part of the challenge. In effect, they had to recreate their perspective of a classroom. This required serious persistence and a deep level of resiliency.
Before arriving, when the participants thought about a classroom, they thought of the typical classroom environment in their home country. This was shown in how often they compared the differences. Differences in the classroom’s physical aspects, such as when Tommy said *we just used to sit in that room you know like stay and then the professors used to come and go*, this concept changed for him, *like here’s it’s the other way...we go around from class to class so you need to get your geography right*. The participants also saw significant differences in the role of the professor, similar to Tatar’s (2005) participants where “learning situation was one in which the instructor was more in control of teaching the activity and the discussion” (p. 344). For Zeeshan, *the teacher’s role was to lecture, to make sure that you understand things, but you were only able to ask questions when the floor for questions was open. So don’t interrupt a lecture; it’s against etiquette*. This was very different in the United States, Zeeshan said *here [in the United States] you were encouraged to speak without the fear of having the wrong point of view*.

During the time it took to redefine and accept a new figured world of a classroom, Jane, Zeeshan, and Tommy had some difficulties. The participants of this study often attributed the less-than-successful first semesters to the difference between classroom expectations and participation in their home country and here in the United States. Jane summed it up this way, *I wanted to learn, I wanted to fit myself in the learning process here. I know here things would work differently*. Jane’s suggestion of wanting to fit in is consistent with Andrade’s (2006) findings who described that international students want to fit in, they want to develop and to succeed in the United States classroom. This agreed with Uribe (2008), “*academic language not only includes several dimensions of knowledge, but it also emphasizes the context where learning takes place*” (p. 2).

The participants in this study had strategies proven to be successful in their home countries. Here, they modified these strategies, demonstrating their resiliency. When these
three students came to realize that their strategies were not successful, they kept trying and did not give up. Tompson & Tompson (1996) found that international students did not ask for clarification questions on assignments, but first waited for a grade and feedback from the professor. This was consistent with the participants in this study. Jane told us, *initially...I had to go back and meet the professor and take feedback you know because...I didn't quite understand you know what the professor was looking for.* Jane learned a new strategy and now, she takes advantage of the professors’ office hours before the assignment is due, *feedback from the professor is very helpful, and I you know, actually improved, what the professor needed.* Jane had to learn new strategies and implement them in order to be successful in this new figured world.

Zeeshan spoke about attempting new ways or strategies to organize his thoughts to fulfill the expectations set by his professors; he continued to try new ways of making sense of his new world *I had to learn what a paper had to look like. I had to learn the writing structure with a thesis.* Tommy also found the organization of a paper was completely foreign to him, *all of these like back home the system of writing was different....I know it’s supposed to be the way you do it here, but we never used to... like back home the system of writing was different.* The change was difficult, but it was the professor’s assumption that Tommy already knew this organization structure that ended up costing him a grade. He received a zero on his first paper. According to Fox (1994), “These students want to learn what the university expects of them; they are accustomed to doing well in their home countries, and they want to continue to excel” (p. 10). Jane is seemingly in agreement, *I did have to change, but I knew what [the professors] wanted so I became a better person and the end result is good.*

Andrade (2006) wrote that we cannot simplify the difficulties faced by international students to just one distinct area of learning or adjustment. International students’ challenges
“may actually be culturally based ways of seeing the world” (p. 143). It was interesting to note that participants didn’t identify the challenge of the classroom environment as a result of cultural differences. They focused on specifics of assignments, student and teacher roles, or expectations. When presented with the idea that the challenges were due to classroom cultural norms that differed from their previous experience in their countries, participants readily agreed, Tommy said that students attending school that was not in their mother tongue had a way of making them more open-minded. Zeeshan also agreed saying, that actually sounds solid! It was this agreement that solidified the theme of the participants’ resiliency in the face of challenges within the classroom environment.

5.3 Theme Two: Complexities of an Outer Circle Background

Coming from the Outer Circle, all three participants had to manage issues that might not be inherent to a student coming from a monolingual society, such as the United States. For example, Zeeshan did not know, when he first arrived, how to request help from a professor, I definitely did know how to approach [the professors] as readily as a student here. This is corroborated by Andrade’s (2006) study who compared adjustment factors with international students to local students, from monolingual societies. For example, an issue that the participants in the current study perceived as an issue inherent to them as international students was participation expectations in the classroom. Zeeshan said, I was shy when I came in, not because I felt I couldn’t answer, but because I didn’t need to answer. I wasn’t used to the one-on-one interaction. Tommy also had a challenge with the expectations of participation, especially that grades were attached to homework, I don’t like the idea of homework being worth something…that’s because I’m know I’m not used to that. For these three international students, homework or classroom participation did not have a grade attached, but they perceived that this was a norm for all domestic students.
Consistent with the scholarship (Caragarajah, 2003, 2006, 2007; Jenkins, 2006; Higgins, 2003; Meierkord 2004) the participants’ success in the classroom was linked to the negotiation skills they learned growing up in the Outer Circle. Having learned a localized, contextualized English, seemed to allow the participants to better understand, negotiate, and accept other varieties of English. Baumgardner and Brown (2003) found that the international students from societies where English is a significant language, have a much easier time accepting other varieties of the language. The linguistic negotiation skills they learned were adaptable to negotiating other ideas of classroom culture and environment. Zeeshan realized, that the way I used to read the book over here, for example, I didn’t have to do it over here as much. Tommy was more generic when he said There was a lot to adapt because I’m here in a different country speaking like a language I which I know quite well…and it sticking with it and adjusting to everyday. When I prompted my participants with such an idea, they all agreed. Jane said,

You put it all together very well discussing how international students coming from a multilingual culture are more open minded and willing to adapt easily. I think societal influence also plays an important role in these multilingual cultures. From a young age, individuals are taught to be more open-minded towards others around them and how every person is different based on their background.

Negotiating the process of completing an assignment or asking for feedback from a professor can be paralleled with Canagarajah’s (2007) research on LFE speakers who negotiate and adapt in interactions based on the context. The participants in this study had to find balance in order to succeed. They used their negotiation skills learned in their Outer Circle communities to approach adjusting to the expectations set by their professors, such as when to ask for feedback or when to turn in assignments.

For Tommy, it took a few months, by freshman year [second] semester…I got [to] doing homework on time and everything and after that I’ve been doing homework on time. It was similar for Jane, I’ve learnt a lot from here. I think I’ll take with me you know all these
experiences...the classroom learning, everything...I did take like it was almost a semester course on this time perfectly, but it does take time.

The three participants in this study all agreed that it was after the first semester that they began to better grasp the process of homework and writing assignments. Zeeshan relates the negotiation of the different classroom environments to negotiating the differing vocabulary.

I knew different works for like for the car, like the bumper, or like any of that words, people might use something else and then I immediately would have the realization that ‘oh, this is a different word’ and you kind of pick up stuff.

In the classroom, he and the other two participants had to adjust as well, and quickly. By the second semester, they all felt they had realized the changes they had to make and where okay with it. The participants of this study seem to be able to accept multiple representations of a correct academic paper in the same way Pickering (2006) and Bent and Bradlow (2003) wrote that speakers coming from communities where English plays a significant role are more accepting of different varieties of English.

5.4 Summary of Themes

The three participants were in agreement that the culture in the United States would be different. Jane said, I went with an open mind, because I knew I had to start...fresh...I couldn’t you know just be the, the frame of mind [that] it could be as it is back home because the culture is really different. It was the new classroom environment that came as a shock in their first few semesters. These students showed their resilience as they redefined their idea of a classroom as well as their own identity as successful students. That was a bit uncomfortable for the participants, but felt they had been able to adjust. Zeeshan said that now that I know how to communicate here, I use those phrases so I don't sound weird...So negotiation - as you said - is definitely there. Because of their resiliency, the participants were able to persevere using the negotiation skills they learned growing up in a society in the
Outer Circle to become accustomed to the expectations of them in the United States university classroom.

Zeeshan recommended that future South Asian students to be open-minded, receptive, adaptable, and friendly so that you are accepted and you make the most of your time a skill he learned growing up in a multicultural community.

5.5 Implications of this Study

Scholarship tells us that we shouldn’t expect international students to adjust alone. Andrade (2006) wrote, “Institutions cannot simply admit foreign students and expect them to adjust to life in a new country and educational system without appropriate support and programming” (p. 133). The international students in this study were already a part of an English speaking community and owners of academic English (Higgins, 2003). The challenge they face is the acceptance of the differences and the acceptance and negotiation of academic English specific to the United States university system.

Helen Fox (1991) put it very succinctly in the beginning of her dissertation, “Do graduate students from non-Western backgrounds have difficulties with analytical writing, or does the Western university have difficult interpreting their way of understanding the world?” (p. vi). As a qualitative study, the goal was to go in-depth with a small number of participants, but, of course, no one student has the exact same experience. The current study is consistent with scholarship that suggests international students studying in the United States often struggle with the classroom culture differences and therefore need to (re)define their identity as successful students (Baumgardner & Brown, 2003; Andrade, 2006). Three possible implications of this study are the following:

- a change to new student orientations
- implementation of bridge courses
- expanded professional development for professors and advisors
5.5.1 New Student Orientations

Orientation is a common practice in the university system as is international student orientation. However, different populations require, and benefit from, different support. There are often additional or different orientation programs for internationals students, but it should be recognized that international students come with different figured worlds.

There should be directed orientation for students coming from English-medium classrooms. While these students have been educated in English, orientation should highlight the advantages and challenges specific to that population. This group has the advantage of the negotiation skills of global English. Similar to the students in the study, global English plays a significant role in adapting to various classroom environments. Instruction on possible areas of difference in classroom culture could be outlined. Orientations could also outline how their negotiation and adaptive skills could work to their advantage. Additionally, this population from English-medium education systems should be prepared for the classroom that will be different. They should be prepared for their figured world to be jolted. As one participant in this study said *I was surprised at how many red lines Microsoft gave me!*

5.5.2 Bridge Courses

Another implication of this study is advocating for more bridge courses. There are many definitions of bridge courses, according to Bettinger, Boatman, and Long (2013), a bridge course’s goal, “is to help students make the academic and social transition to college” (p. 102). This course is taken before the student begins university. This course would assist international students with adjustments to the classroom environment such as participation expectations or a new writing style. These courses can support international students with some of the unique adjustments they face. This could assist international students coming from any country, regardless of their academic language or mother-tongue. A bridge course would instruct students beginning at the University in the United States to understand some
of the generally accepted factors of classroom culture including writing style and classroom participation. These represent aspects of student behavior and classroom culture that many professors, advisors, and fellow classmates take for granted.

Negotiating novel figured world is not something that the international students should do alone. The universities should aim to find a middle ground between the students, professors, and advisors, so that together they can achieve success. Sherry, Thomas, and Chui (2010) found that “a University’s emphasis on the international students having to ‘adapt’ or ‘adjust’ may effectively involve placing all the responsibility for change on the international student, and none on the University” (p. 35). While there are some conversations in the scholarship above that suggest changing the university culture, this study found that the three students’ current realities required adaptations that must be made upon arrival by the student. The recommendation for orientation addresses this reality. The best answer, however, is that mutual work begins on both sides.

5.5.3 Expanded Professional Development

In that regard, an implication of this study is that more professional development for the professors and student advisors to introduce the differences and challenges of the specific students coming from English-medium education backgrounds. The participants themselves were surprised that their linguistic negotiation skills were helpful when adapting to the university, so professors and advisors cannot be expected to have these same conclusions.

In her article, Andrade (2006) linked the international student’s adjustment to his or her achievement in the classroom. It is “[t]hrough a better understanding of the factors affecting international students’ experiences, U.S. faculty and peers can support their efforts to become more active participants in their classes and thus more competent members of the academic community” (Tatar, 2005, p. 338). Through expanded professional development,
perhaps the perceptions and challenges of international students, especially those coming from the Outer Circle, can be addressed, discussed and understood.

5.6 Limitations of this Study

One of the inherent limitations of a qualitative research study is that the findings cannot be generalized. Another limitation of the study, was the grouping of Outer Circle students, they were all from South Asia, whereas the Outer Circle consists of countries from many different continents. All the participants in this study had been in the United States for at least six months, however, the unknown impact of differing lengths of time in country is a limitation to this study.

In addition, Canagarajah (2007), said that “we need more emic perspectives from non-Western communities” (p. 924). And while I do try to represent the perception of the South Asian participants in this study, I do not come from the non-Western community but the host country of the international students. It is from this host culture, where my bias and reality lies.

5.7 Future Research

The implication that leads to professional development also lends itself to future research. Further research recommendations include exploring language development of students from English-medium education systems and exploring present thoughts on the challenges faced by international students by the professors and advisors in Western university systems. Further research might enlighten scholarship on what is perceived and assumed. Exploration into factors affecting international students might also provide the basis for further conversation on supporting international students by providing a more realistic context of what is expected of faculty and staff.

5.7.1 Language Development of Outer Circle Students
The majority of studies focused on international student adjustment look to students coming from foreign language backgrounds - where “a lack of English proficiency may be the single greatest barrier” (Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2010, p.34). The factors faced by students where English is their academic language that should be researched further. Having studied at English-medium schools from the age of four or five, they were engaged academically in English. With their families and friends in and outside of school, however, the conversational language is typically not in English as was the case with the three participants in this study.

Zeeshan, who had socialized almost exclusively in his mother tongue, said that when he first arrived in the United States, *I was actually trying to translate my Urdu phrases and Urdu sentences when I was talking initially freshman year.* It was the social situations where *these certain phrases that people would tell me was so Americanized, that a response in a timely manner would be harder.* During his schooling, *that's not the case that we don't speak English, it's just that we don't fluently practice it.*

Friendships and relationships are often difficult for international students transitioning to attend university in the United States (Andrade, 2006). Academically, the students are successful - but this is only focused on their CALP skills. In order to be accepted socially, the student will have to develop English conversational skills. This is also supported by Sherry, Thomas, and Chui (2010), whose qualitative study in the Midwest United States found that the 110 participants,

“Emphasized spoken language barriers far more than written language problems. One of the most common suggestions they made was for a more formalized process of social interaction with American students which would enable them to acquire English language skills, including knowledge of slang, in a more relaxed environment.” (p. 37)

English speakers from the Outer Circle have possibly developed academic English before conversational English fluency. Adjustment cannot only be measured by their
academic success, but is more holistic. One recommendation for further research would be to study the development of BICS and CALP of students who have attended English-medium schools. The focus of the research could explore how the development of those types of language affect experience and success in the classroom as well as in social situations.

5.7.2 Benefits of Varying Orientation Procedures

The international foreign advisor is typically the very first person the international student has contact with at the university and often becomes a trusted confidant and cultural informant. Andrade (2006) found that the perception of foreign student advisors is that the international students are adjusting well, when in reality, “foreign students have greater adjustment difficulties than local students both academically and socially” (p. 142). Future research on the orientation for incoming international students and the relationship with the international foreign advisor is recommended.

This research should include the current benefits of various orientation procedures, especially orientations with specific conversations regarding classroom culture and expectations. There should be additional research looking at the difference between students who begin orientation pre-arrival in their home country and those who begin orientation at the host institution. A longitudinal study could look at the effects of orientation through the second or third year, as the adjustment process “appears to be gradual, but adjustment levels may plateau in the second year, suggesting that institutions must go beyond the first year in providing transitional support” (Andrade, 2010, p. 149).

International foreign advisors have a unique perspective and opportunity to speak with the international students and to create dialogue between international students, their classmates, and their professors, a suggestion from Holmes (2004), “knowledge is co-constructed through student-student and teacher-student communication” (p. 298). Canagarajah (2007) said, we would be stronger institutions if we could “appreciate how
language learning and usage have taken place in non-Western multilingual communities” (p. 294).

5.7.3 Effective Teaching Techniques

Faculty of international students have a challenging road as international students face a multitude of different adjustment challenges, with language and also with academic culture (Andrade, 2010; Holmes, 2004; Cheng et al., 2004). Andrade (2010) said, that “faculty assistance and sensitivity are valuable” (p. 143) and with the number of international students is increasing, especially for graduate schools, more insight to the professors approach to international student success could be extremely useful. For further research, would include effective teaching techniques, especially when teaching to a multicultural or multilingual classroom.

When a professor hears a student, such as one of the participants in this study, is verbally fluent in English, she likely assumes that the student is fluent in all aspects of the academic environment and all academic or classroom expectations. With more research focused on the population coming from English-medium education systems, more developed strategies can be disseminated to benefit the professors, advisors, and the international students themselves. Hopefully, with more information the international students will be more prepared for the environment they are entering. With time, these ideas and perspectives can create dialogues with international foreign advisors and faculty of international students to support the success of international students.

5.8 Final Thoughts

As is the case with many researchers, this thesis has not brought many answers, but rather only more questions. The process itself has opened my eyes to the value and excitement of qualitative research. With each new article, book, or chapter, I found myself enveloped into the scholarship of others. There were moments when I couldn’t express
myself because the research was racing through my head, weaving itself together.

Throughout the research and writing process, I loved what I was exploring. Certainly there were moments when I questioned, but each time I got back to the data I realized that there was a story to be told. As I write these final thoughts, I am proud of what I have accomplished. I am proud of the way I represented the participants of this study. My hope is that their voices, perceptions, and ideas can be heard and dialogues can continue on this topic.
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APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Consent Form (Generic)
Informed Consent Form  
MTSL 602

The Principle Investigator is Amy Wetterau (513-748-0774), Masters student, in the Masters of Teaching English as a Second Language Program at Gonzaga University. Dr. Martha Savage is the Advisor for the Thesis and is the Responsible Project Investigator.

Purpose and Benefits

This research is designed to explore the lived experience of international students at Gonzaga University.

Procedures

The principle research is looking at the lived experience of international students studying at the university. The research will be based on four interviews with each participant. The interviews will be semi-structured. The interviews will be recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Washington State law provides that private conversations may not be recorded, intercepted, or divulged without permission of the individuals involved. Interviews will be informal and should last about an hour in a mutually agreed upon location. The types of issues to be discussed with participants will include their attitudes and perspectives of his/her participation in the classroom at the university level in an English speaking country.

Risk, Stress, or Discomfort

While every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of participants, there is a minimal risk that participants could be identified.

Other Information

All information will be kept confidential. Pseudonyms will be used for all participants and for the institution. Participants are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. Participants will not receive any inducements. Participants can request a summary of the results and will have access to the completed paper.

Signature of Principal Investigator  
______________________________

Date  
______________

Participant’s Statement

The study described above has been explained to me and I voluntarily consent to participate in this research. I have had an opportunity to ask questions. I give permission to record and divulge conversations in which I participate during this research.

Signature of Subject  
______________________________

Date  
______________
Appendix 2: Interview Questions

Interview 1 Questions:

Goals:

• language spoke at home/other languages spoken
• language spoken in country’s education system
• age first spoke English
• learned or acquired English
• goal and purpose of university and USA

Questions:

• Tell me about yourself
  • growing up
  • family
  • schooling
• Tell me about your language experience
  • What languages do you speak?
  • Where do you speak those languages?
• With which language are you most comfortable?
  • …different in different contexts?
• Tell me about the education system in your country
  • what does the classroom look like
    • grade school
    • high school
    • university
  • what was/is the teacher’s role
  • what did assignments and group projects look like
• Where you successful in school?
• Tell me about why you code the USA and this university

Interview 2 Questions:

• Are you satisfied with your academic experience at the university?
• Have you become a different type of student in the US? Explain/expand. (“Just imagine tearing your whole existing lift into bits and pieces, and selling off 50% of it, packing 20% of it, and leaving behind the remaining 30%...it’s like a giant part of me just ripped away, you know?”)
• Did you feel prepared for (different classroom) assignments/environment?
• What are the differences between the classrooms here and there?
• How does the difference make you feel? Do you feel like you are learning?
What is the classroom culture like? Are your classmates interested in your life experiences? Do they play an important role in what you are studying?

What are the assignments like? What are the faculty expectations and feedback?

How would you describe your personality? Does this play a role in how you are accepted in your classrooms/program/university?

Did you feel your culture was understood and accepted at the university?

Do you connect with any of your classmates? Have group study sessions?

How would you define ESL? Do you identify with an ‘ESL’ label?

Did you feel your culture was understood and accepted at the university?

Do you connect with any of your classmates? Have group study sessions?

How would you define ESL? Do you identify with an ‘ESL’ label?

Deconstruct the classroom and assignments.

When you write essays or homework, are you corrected (by prof, peer editor, writing center) on grammatical things? On organizational pieces? Do you agree with these corrections? Do you find teachers are more forgiving of some of your language errors? Do you find that professors have lower expectations for you? Do you see yourselves as owners of the English language? Do you feel at a disadvantage because of your high school experience? Have you internalized these?

Do you feel like an outsider in class? What makes you feel this way?

Authoritative, impersonal approach to education vs. American system:

What kind of written course assignments and research proposals must the students complete? How do the students try to complete the written assignments?

What challenges do the students encounter?

Interview 3 / Focus Group Questions:

How would you compare your experience and your challenges (those back home and those here) in the following areas:

- grading policy
- role of textbook
- writing style
- reflection papers
- exams
- class discussions
- outside life effecting classroom life
- role of professor
- other

What did you predict your challenges would be?

Did you think that there would be trouble with classroom culture?

Are you successful in the US classroom? Where you always successful here?

When do you feel most like an international student?

What cultural differences do you notice?

What thoughts did you have before coming to the US?

If you figured it would be different, why do you think you were surprised?