

## **Adaptation of African students in a Chinese Higher Institution**

Felix Sarfo Manu, Master Candidate

Li Jiajun, Ph.D. Associate Professor

*School of Foreign Languages, Jiangsu University*

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**Abstract:** *The study explored African students' intercultural adaptation experiences while trying to adapt to the host culture within a new environment of a Chinese university. This study was conducted within the integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation theoretical framework. This study employed a qualitative methodology. Over thirty (30) students from different African countries were interviewed to share their intercultural adjustment experiences. Interview data analysis were presented and interpreted through narratives of interviewees. Students gave a sequential account of their encounters with the host culture. The findings revealed (1) Host interpersonal communication patterns in the host context (2) Academic adjustment of sojourners in the host context (3) Perceived discrimination in the host context, and (4) Host environmental influences on sojourners adaptation as persistent in African students intercultural adjustment encounters. The findings supported Kim's integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation especially host communication competence, host interpersonal communication, ethnic interpersonal communication, and host receptivity.*

**Keywords:** *sojourner, academic adjustment, cross-cultural adaptation, African students*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Globalization has led to a rise in global education worldwide (Rienties & Tempelaar, 2013). African students pursue higher education worldwide especially in Asian countries (Marginson, 2010), mainly in India, Korea, (mainland) China, Japan, Hong Kong (Special Administrative Region of China), and Malaysia, which draw higher number of international students to their universities and colleges (Cyranoski, 2010). Ethnic minorities face stereotypical challenges, making cross cultural contact and acculturative change difficult (Rudmin, 2009). Hofstede opined in 2009 that culture is the cause of conflict than a cohesion plus cultural difference which is irritating and catastrophic in nature. This means other reasons exist for the understanding of cultural differences. Research shows differences could be interpreted as outgroup, caution, and threat. In the early 1960s and after 1975, African students endured societal pressure to establish intercultural relationships with locals. African students' conduct seemed culturally substandard to the Chinese students and officials as they were thought of as dissolute. Society therefore may also play a major role in the successful adaptation of individuals. A multicultural oriented host society is optimistic about their immigrants stay for dual reasons ranging from discouraging assimilation to acceptance, (Murphy, 1973) then facilitating adaptation with the provision of an enabling environment in their various institutions. Certain groups may be well accepted than others. The way a group may be accepted determines the length of stay of those individuals. Poor long term adaptation are predicted by factors such as discrimination, hostility, and rejection of groups that are less well received, (Lebedeva & Tatarko, 2008). Encountering culture shock upon entering a new culture be it in education or commercial endeavor is a probable. Achieving equilibrium in the new culture hinges on their ability to adapt, (Kim, 2001). However, successfully adapting to a new university and country, according to (Brisset, Safdar, Lewis, & Sabatier, 2010), requires flexibility and effort.

Living and studying in a different cultural context is always challenging. International students from cultural districts beyond the host country experience acculturation stress (Desa, Yusoooff, & Kadir, 2012). Sociocultural difficulties contribute to making adaptation and cultural transition a hectic process (Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

Initially, one is filled with excitement in anticipation of a socially and culturally welcoming environment only to be met with disappointment. Reasons for this occurrence vary from language proficiency to

incompatibility in cultural values. Apart from cultural distance, linguistic competence can also lead to acculturative stress could also increase in relation to the level of English proficiency coupled with the experience of discrimination, (Yeh & Inose, 2013).

It becomes extra difficult for students who endure a lot in education and the social life.

Academic adaptation is a crucial issue of concern that demands adequate attention in empirical studies. The adjustment of international students experience a lot of challenges in the course of their adjustment. These include dealing the academic pressures as well as the daily tasks in a new environment (Wang & Hannes, 2014). Apart from a little independent and goal driven learners, majority of them lack the necessary understanding and expertise to utilize learning potentials and individually assess themselves. Even though most international students encounter minimal challenges after studying abroad, some harbor academic source of worries (Chen, Mallinckrodt, & Mobley, 2003). When international students first start taking academic classes, they experience several concerns related to understanding classroom instruction, participating in classroom discussions, or figuring out the lecturer's expectations (Desa et al., 2012).

Surprisingly, scholarly work done on adaptation of African students seem to be very low regardless of their huge presence in China (Bodomo, 2014). The purpose of this study is to identify the factors involved in the cross-cultural adaptation of African students in China. We attempt to contribute to existing knowledge by adding to the limited literature of African students study in China.

## **II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1 *Kim's Integrative Theory of Communication and Cross-cultural Adaption***

This study is situated in the integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation. The theory focuses on the individual's internalization struggles to privately make meaning of the host culture through interactions with the environment. Humans possess innate mechanisms that makes adaptation a natural process termed open systems. Individuals constantly experience and overcome psychological and physiological challenges in a process called stress and coping growth model. This occurs through acculturation (new culture gain) and deculturation (old culture loss).

Kim's Integrative Theory is therefore based on three key premises namely: 1. Humans have an innate self-organizing drive and a capacity to adapt to environmental challenges 2. Adaptation of an individual to a given cultural environment occurs in and through communication 3. Adaptation is a complex and dynamic process that brings about a qualitative transformation of the individual (Harvey, 2007).

Research places much emphasis on the significant role of communicative activities in adaptation processes. Communicative events can be conceptually categorized into two main dimensions namely; personal communication and social communication (Kim & McKay-Semmler, 2013). According to Ruben (1975), personal communication is "private symbolization and all the internal mental activities that occur in the individuals that dispose and prepare them to act and react in certain ways in actual social situations". Social communication can then be linked to personal communication when an accidental or un-accidental interaction occur between two or several people. Strangers unconsciously realize this phenomenon through the communication systems but also in the sphere of personal communication. The stranger's journey comprises of struggles and progress which is generally referred to as intercultural competence (Kim, 2001).

**Host Communication Competence:** Knowledge of host culture is needed for an identity flexibility in order to facilitate cohesion(Kim, 2001). The stranger builds capacity through the challenges in host society.

**Host Interpersonal Communication:** The theory stresses interpersonal communication activities between the host culture, strangers, and environment in social encounters (Kim & McKay-Semmler, 2013). Subsequently, social support networks, new culture's language, psychology, and accessing information is necessary for a successful adaptation.

**Ethnic Social Communication:** Ethnic social communication can equally affect adaptation as moderating it (Kim, 2001; Kim & McKay-Semmler, 2013). However, ethnic social communication aids strangers' initial stages(Kim, 2001).

**Environment:** The socio-cultural and natural factors of the host society also impacts adaptation.

**Host Receptivity:** Kim explains host receptivity as the type of welcome, acceptance or support strangers (Kim, 2001). It is obvious reception of people vary from group to group based on relationship.

**Host Conformity Pressure:** It is the host culture's anticipation of a specific communicative behaviors that strangers are supposed to exhibit in the new environment. Zajonc (1952) asserts that strangers undergo conformity pressure influences from the host environment.

This study is situated in the integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation. This current research observes students' interactions and challenges with the host culture and its environment while understanding the communicative instances.

### III. LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 3.1 *Acculturating in a new cultural milieu*

#### 3.2 *Concept of acculturation*

Works on acculturation began towards the middle part of the twentieth century. Acculturation is both preliminary and successive cultural changes that occur when individual members of a particular group touch base with a different one in an ongoing process which impacts either of them. Individuals upon contact with the new cultural setting undergo a series of changes in their search for a better way of living. A clear distinction is drawn between acculturation and culture change, though the latter is inclusive but just a part of this phenomena as well as assimilation which is a stage in acculturation. Acculturation was similarly defined by as the outcome of a constant encounter between two cultures that leads to change (Ward, 2006) . The social science research council for a preliminary purpose defined acculturation as a combination of two or more independent systems of cultures that leads to culture change (Barnett, Broom, Siegel, Vogt, & Watson, 1954). The strange part of this collaboration of cultures is the fact that irrespective of their differences both eventually come to some consensus even though it may not always be the case. Noteworthy, though the inconsistencies exist in the acculturative processes as large groups and individuals handle their encounters differently and therefore, results may not be the same (Berry, 2005).

It is undeniable that within the context of the dominant culture incorporating its cultural aspects is probable. Apart from cultural transmission's direct effect, other external factors influenced by the culture may indirectly cause acculturative change (Barnett et al., 1954).

Berry defined acculturation as a twofold change in psychological and cultural process that happens when individual members and two or more cultural groups have a close encounter with each other (Berry, 2005). The ability of individuals to work on their attitudes and behaviors would yield possible results in their current setting. Coming from an extremely different environment a lot of changes are necessary to achieve equilibrium in the new culture. The social organizations account for the cultural group aspect of acculturation as the behavioral store defines the individual. Sojourning for international study comprises of reasons leading to contact and change, (Berry, 2005). Individuals or groups may decide to move to other destinations for specific purposes. To successfully realize these purposes there is the need to figure out the tactics needed for a healthy stay.

#### 3.3 *Concept of adaptation*

Adaptation is the individual or group's reaction to outer pressures leading to comparatively steady changes (Berry, 2005). This means understanding that it is not obligatory for the minority to transform into predominant (Tsang, 2001) but capable of experimenting to find best alternative to fit in. Gudykunst and Kim (2003) view adaptation fundamentally as a personal journey of change into a different and unexperienced culture where enculturating individuals develop into another culture. Castro (2003) defined adaptation as the term given to skills that enhances strangers interaction with a new culture towards understanding of its beliefs and prohibitions (Akhtar, Pratt, & Bo, 2015). Research shows cross-cultural adaptation can be implicitly separated into psychological adaptation and sociocultural adaptation. The former refers to psychological adaptation which is linked to well-being or satisfaction and explained within a stress and coping framework. The ability to "fit in" the host culture defines the sociocultural adaptation which is best understood in terms of social learning (Ward & Rana-Deuba, 1999), and culture learning paradigm (Tsang, 2001; C. Ward & Rana-Deuba, 1999). Similarly, psychological adaptation largely centers on the individual's psychological and physical well-being, while sociocultural adaptation focuses on the ability of the individual to adjust to daily encounters in the new cultural context (Berry, 2005).

Predictors of good psychological adaptation include social support, personality variables, and life change events, while positive intergroup attitudes, degree of contact and cultural knowledge predicts good sociocultural adaptation. Much depends on the individual to participate in the new cultural environment where his local networks are unavailable. Versatility in personality traits is a necessity in interpersonal communication activities (Kim & McKay-Semmler, 2013) which facilitates cross-cultural adaptation process. Additionally, findings from McKay-Semmler & Kim (2014) reveals four pathways lead to cross-cultural adaptation that aids students cross-cultural adaptation. Key in these pathways are host communication competence and host social communication and how critical both are towards achieving intercultural transformation as well as effectively interconnected as the study discovered (Peng & Wu, 2019). The study also reaffirms Kim's 21 theorems of the cross-cultural adaptation process (Kim, 2001). Even though sociocultural and psychological adaptation are generally interconnected, they are empirically and conceptually diverse (Brisset et al., 2010) as they belong to different domains. Moreover, research proves cultural proximity and better integration impacts variability of both outcomes per the enormity of the relationship (Ward & Rana-Deuba, 1999) . Other studies similarly supports the influence

of regional destination in sociocultural adaptation (Tsang, 2001). Similarity can therefore be a prime factor in adaptation. Between original and host cultures, similarity or dissimilarity could have an impact on the process of adaptation (Ward & Kennedy, 1993). Studies show that similarities imply in group, safety and trust. A study in 2017 of 8 million Facebook users revealed that interactions are likely to occur between people who are alike. Thus, people are more likely to favor their kind in terms of association and socialization.

### **3.4 Academic adjustment**

China is steadily becoming popular for its academic engagement with the rest of the world (Li, 2005b). First and foremost, International students are clearly distinct from foreigners (Lee & Ciftci, 2014) for the latter represents the broader group which the former is a part of. Adjusting to academic life could be very difficult for sojourners as they have to combine several challenges that comes with entering a new culture. Moreover, China is not like the typical Western immigrant country and therefore social structures are different (An & Chiang, 2015). As Chinese educators realize the dissimilarities in education structure and practice (Huang, 2003) they try to support sojourning students during adaptation to Chinese sociocultural and educational training. As stated earlier personal and social aspects impact adjustment (Wang & Hannes, 2014) which in turn shapes the level of academic success, influence the student's integration into higher education. In a study, academic performed poorly due to African students Chinese-language proficiency levels (Akhtar, Pratt, & Bo, 2015). Majority of African students learn Chinese before applying for a scholarship and also study Chinese language course for a year after enrollment before taking a Chinese language proficiency test (Li, 2018). A study of Hispanic students in the U.S revealed, English Language Proficiency is positively linked with academic success in the context. Comparatively, these are language proficiencies from two different native languages or contexts but the common factor here is that language proficiency is a moderating factor towards academic success in a particular context.

African students raise concerns about Chinese teaching methods and their education policy (Li, 2018). Chinese teachers' English proficiency is questioned in terms of its credibility as it contributes to mediation of African students learning. Similarly, issues of African students dissatisfaction with the entirety of their education stands to affect the host nation's outlook. Language proficiency seem to be a recurring subject in academic adjustment. However, a study of Chinese students show less differences in teaching and learning is perceived when students move in group (Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping, & Todman, 2008). According to Haugen the success of Chinese policy goals is dependent on the value of education they grant to African students as displeasure with the learning encounter they obtain hinders their relationship (Li, 2018). Similarly, this is a move that could wreck the Chinese soft power in Africa as Bodomo (2014) criticized racist behavior towards African students. African students also question the medium of instruction, teachers' communication abilities, disparity between the level of advancement in infrastructure, competence of professors, as well as the entire preparedness of Chinese universities for international students (Bodomo, 2014). Host country, therefore, contributes to the processes of academic adjustment through support systems.

Among the challenges involved in academic adjustment is marginalization which comprises of student-supervisor marginalization and academic marginalization (McClure, 2007). The sort of student teacher relationship expected from both ends may vary. Students have an element of doubt in teacher's expertise. At times students may also be reluctant towards interest in research work. This could also be dependent on the mode of student movement as groups with pre-departure programs perceive less difficulties in terms of academic challenges (Zhou et al., 2008). On the contrary, individual students require much attention from teachers. Also, monitoring intervention programs periodically aids academic adjustment. Not only does students need to receive pre-departure training or soon after arrival programs but subsequent ones too. The same study reiterates that academic challenges are reduced in student groups than in individual students. Academic marginalization is the mood of anxiety evident prior to introduction to academic requirements of tertiary studies especially pressures posed by research work. There seem to be a lack of instructional misunderstanding of the new academic culture. A study in Singapore shows students perception of inadequacy in meetings discussing course structures which leads to a thorough understanding and solutions to research work (McClure, 2007). A good grasp of the research process is easily attainable but through a more transparent exposure of students to the basics.

The role of language proficiency in academic adjustment cannot be emphasized enough. Language proficiency might be challenging to cross-cultural sojourners in general but a little bit extremely important for foreign students' academic achievement (Chiang, 2009; Chiang & Mi, 2011; Li, 2015a). This can be linked to the teaching and learning in terms of teachers and students' performance as it has already been established that language proficiency is positively linked to academic adjustment.

### **3.5 The Current State of Adaptation of African Students**

Recent studies show certain attitudes and knowledge aid African students' academic adjustment. Previous cross-cultural understanding, extensive social group, writing assignments in English, and being mindful of cultural differences have substantial positive associations with contentment of the African students in China

(Akhtar et al., 2015). This seem to be true for most sojourning students especially those who previously used English as a medium of instruction. English proficiency has been linked to academic success for fresh Latin youth immigrants in the United States (Martinez, DeGarmo, & Eddy, 2004). This shows there exist a positive relationship between language proficiency and cross-cultural adaptation (Bodomo, 2014). As a minority group in China, African students' gain of such understanding will make their adaptation process quite fruitful one.

Other works have identified African students' adaptation as blocks for China-Africa Relationship Bridge. African students in China may be serving as the link between their academic and the Chinese education culture (Bodomo, 2014). This stems from the constant comparison of both systems of education as they experience daily academic challenges, questioning teaching methods, professors and preparedness of Chinese universities for international students.

There seem to be a disparity between perception of groups in terms of treatment of sojourners (Kim, 2019). Surprisingly there is little or no research conducted on perceived discrimination of African students. This does not, however, mean that perceived discrimination is not in existence in China (English & Zhang, 2019). In as far back as the 1960s, Emmanuel Hevi, a Ghanaian student who was among the first to write about African students in China condemned discrimination towards African students in the Chinese society. The issue of racial identities is identified as the mitigating factor of Chinese African student relationship (Haugen, 2013). Similarly, racial discrimination is negatively associated with international students (Jung, Hecht, & Wadsworth, 2007) and local students (Hurtado & Carter, 1997) well-being (Glass & Westmont, 2014; Sullivan, 1994). Discriminatory behaviors negatively affected protective factors such as belongingness and also impacted negatively on cross cultural encounters and academic achievement. In a more divergent view, generalizing this situation was not an entire reflection of the case as other African students found Chinese society satisfactory and training worthy (Akhtar et al., 2015; Bodomo, 2014). Moreover, there is no collective animosity by Chinese towards African migrants, regardless, the latter's concerns (Zhou, Shenasi, & Xu, 2016).

Based on this review language proficiency has a positive relationship with academic adjustment and cross cultural adaptation. Language plays a critical role in adaptation to a particular education culture. The success of student-supervisor relationship may also be partly determined by language. It is also established that positive dominant culture and ethnic minority relationship is associated with adaptation. Academic success may therefore be motivated by a healthy relationship between African students and Chinese students. Moreover, racial behaviors are negatively associated with cross cultural adaptation. It has also been established that China might need more than sponsorship to realize education soft power policy due to the lack of cordial relationship between African students and Chinese students, African students and Chinese societies, African student challenges with professors and university administration readiness. In contrast, other African students have also expressed satisfaction with their Chinese experience. This could be a positive sign of playing ambassadorial roles for China. Based on the review of related literature this study therefore seeks to answer these questions:

1. How do African students adapt academically in China?
2. How do African students adapt socio-culturally in China?
3. What can be done to facilitate the adaptation of African students in China?

## **IV. METHODOLOGY**

The aim of this study was to investigate the intercultural adjustment problems encountered by African students in the Chinese university context. With this research goal, a qualitative research approach was chosen to provide varied cultural viewpoints and specific-context based narratives.

### **4.1 Participants**

The sample consisted of 30 African students studying at a public university in Jiangsu. They represented different countries, ethnic and religious backgrounds. Students came from Ghana, Zimbabwe, Uganda, South Africa, Zambia, Ethiopia, Congo, Burundi, Nigeria, Somalia, and South Sudan. Overall, there were 18 male participants and 12 female participants. Participants ranged from 18 to 40 years of age. Twelve of the participants were post-graduate students, while the remaining eighteen were undergraduate students. The length of stay in China for the participants ranged from 3 months to over 4 years with most participants in the 6 months to 3year range.

The methodology chosen in this study is qualitative. The method of the study was used because it delves deeper into the intercultural adjustment of students. The analysis employed the snowballing (Lazaraton, 1995) and convenience sampling based on accessibility, allocation of time, expenditure, and effort (Kwon, 2013) in recruitment of subjects. The study used two criteria for participant selection. First, participants must have had at least between 3 months to a year of study experiences in the university and still a continuous student enrolled in

a program. The reason for this method was to record sequential encounters from the time of arrival to present. Secondly, participants should have good command of English language. The second criteria was due to their lack of fluency in the Chinese language. The researcher sort for assistance for the study by asking close friends and colleagues to recommend their African friends participants, using student groups on the WeChat platform to inform students, and personal interaction with strangers. Participants mediate for the researcher to connect him with their friends who take turns in the interview. Prospective participants called the researcher after hearing about the study from their friends. About 20 students provided their names, phone numbers, and we chat i.ds but, some of them later refused to participate in the study due to the lack of time. Out of the remaining respondents, the researcher selected twenty participants who had studied in China for at least one year prior to the interview, which allowed them to provide informative answers to the questions about their adjustment encounters. Speaking in English during the interview was required for participation in this study. Participants were able to articulate their thoughts even though some of them lived in Francophone countries. Establishing rapport was easy due to similarities in communication styles.

#### **4.2 Procedure and interview guide**

A qualitative in-depth interviewing method was used in order to discover the individual nature of the observations of African students' experiences and their intercultural adjustments. A good interviewer elicits elaboration and practical examples to reveal exhaustive accounts that make qualitative inquiry rich ( Rossman & Ralis, 2017). A set of open-ended and semi-structured interviews conducted between 2017 and 2019 were the primary means of data collection. On the average the interviews lasted 6 hours 33 minutes and 27 seconds representing an average of 13 minutes per participant. Interviews were conducted randomly at suitable locations such as dormitory receptions, rooms and around campus to encourage as many participation as possible. The researcher observed research ethics before the commencement of the pre-formulated list of open-ended interview questions in December 2017. Interviews started with an informal session about adjustment experiences, and interviewees asked explicatory questions on status as participant and researcher. Even though some demographic information was recorded such as age, undergraduate and post-graduate major, program, and length of stay it was not compulsory. For anonymity purposes, pseudonyms were used instead of participants' real names. The preferred medium of expression for the interview was English and permission was sought to be taped and transcribed for future analysis. Extra follow up was done over we chat for participants' convenience.

Each interview session opened with a general, unstructured question, ("To study in China in what aspects do you need to adapt to?) a way to uncover the subject of sociocultural adjustment and immediately disclose participants' experiences of the topic in their life.

Some of the predictive factors of cross-cultural adaptation inspired by (Kim, 2001) were inculcated in the interview questions. In terms of participants worldviews on sociocultural adaptation, Kim (2001) captured host communication competence which became evident in the questions "Do you think you have socially adapted well here? Why? What are the challenges?" These questions prompted participants to compare experiences in China and back home. Some of the questions were: "How would you assess your stay in China now? Do you think you have adapted academically well here? Why? What are the challenges? How are you practically dealing with these challenges? (Academic and social challenges) What really makes studying here challenging? What really makes your stay here challenging?"

What are the advantages of studying in a Chinese Higher Institution? What have you practically done to adapt?" Among these, clarification questions such as "What do you mean by that?" and "Could you elaborate on this statement?" were used. Demographic information was also included in the questions (see Appendix A for the interview protocol).

#### **4.3 Interview Data Analysis**

The audio recorded interviews were transcribed, categorized and reduced into themes. The first stage of the analysis begun with a general reading of interview transcripts to draw connections within concepts and research questions (Rossman & Ralis, 2017). The second stage focused on identifying segments and labelling them as codes. At the third stage the codes were critically analyzed and reduced into recurring themes.

For reliability purposes fellow researchers were involved in the analysis process to critique and to give a different perspective on the study as well as to make sure of the credibility of the data. Involving others in the research reveal "blind spots", suggest alternative perspectives on data, as well as questions your interpretation to make sure there is no omission of data that hints at intriguing counterexample. For further insight memos were shared with critical friends as well as scholarly audience (Rossman & Ralis, 2017). We made constant comparisons of concepts while important questions were being asked. The answers to these questions validated old concepts and served as basis for developing new ones (Corbin & Strauss, 2007).

## V. Results

Four themes emerged from 30 interview sessions with African students in a Chinese Universities.

### 5.1 *Interpersonal Communication patterns in the host context*

This theme refers to the various communication activities that occurred between sojourners and their host culture throughout the intercultural journey. Finding one's way around in a new environment for new comers is always a challenge (Kim, 2019). Among these challenges include communicating with locals. The improvement of interpersonal contact and the creation of connections with representatives of the host community are typically limited by physical and social circumstances (Harvey, 2007). Adjusting to the communication style of the native culture required several behavioral changes. In most instances misunderstandings and misinterpretation became normal. Language proficiency seem to play a huge role in the communication activities as was expressed by Diana:

*I also think I don't understand the language and they also don't understand mine so it was really hard to communicate with them. I had to do sign language with my hands but now it been a bit better because I am learning Chinese though sometimes it a bit hard. I began to learn the language and as I among the Chinese helped me a lot and sometimes use a translator. Sometimes it is very frustrating if you trying to speak the language with sign language and they don't understand you.*  
(Diana, Zambia)

Kia shared a mixed-feeling experience of her journey. She expressed her frustrations in dealing with natives as she tried to embark on basic routines:

*It was exciting though sometimes depressing. You know, you come across new people and far away from home. Let's say you lost and you can't communicate because you don't even understand the language.*  
(Kia, Zimbabwe)

Other forms of communication, however, ease the struggles of sojourners. Sojourners who encounter co-nationals have better chances of adapting to the new environment. Francis believed in guidance from close networks in terms of understanding the new environment. This projects the importance of communication with co-ethnics to enhance adaptation:

*I think you need the assistance of people who have lived here so they give you directions as to what to do and the things you have to know to make life a bit easy for you here since you are moving from a stage in your life to another stage and from a level in your life to a higher level so these people would smoothen the process for you. If we want to talk to them we use translators on our phones and sometimes through signs and actions and if you are fortunate to move with a foreigner who understands the language can assist you.*  
(Francis, Ghana)

Mukhtar, a bachelor student from Somalia elaborated more on the influence of his co-nationals on his adaptation process. He explains how his initial entrance and stay became somewhat smooth because of the presence of his co-nationals who were already in China. He also emphasized on language proficiency in communication encounters with Chinese people.

*Most of the Chinese don't understand the English language so it was very difficult for me. I went through it because my country mates were helping me though it was a bit rough. When I landed in China, two of my country mates were there waiting for me. I really have to learn the Chinese language well to be able to ease communication and be able to deal with them well. Chinese are really nice people but they are not sociable but there are cool people so I need to learn to speak the language fluently to associate myself with them.*  
(Mukhtar, Somalia)

### 5.2 *Academic adjustment of sojourners in the host context*

The theme of academic adjustment of sojourners in the host context is strangers overall teaching and learning outcomes in the new environment. Two sub-themes (a) The teaching language proficiency and (b) The technique of teaching and students' learning strategies, (answered Research Question 1. Persistent in their sentences were "Chinese teachers find it difficult to speak (English)," ... we really struggle with the teachers due

to the language (English)” ...causes taught in English language is very difficult ...” Andrews, a post-graduate student from Uganda who has been in China for seven years shed more light on his experience with Chinese teachers and the curriculum design as well as his Chinese colleagues and language proficiency:

*Academic wise I would like to say ... most of the Chinese teachers don't have a broad understanding of English so they don't teach that much because you'd realize when you talk to your Chinese counterparts in some courses we did, for example econometrics in my bachelor's, you find a student who is doing econometrics from the Chinese class is really so superb knows everything because the Chinese love, wishes to express themselves well. But for us foreign students I think they are afraid to, you know, express themselves in a certain kind of way. So the teachers just a little bit and it's only up to the students to study and compared to Africa, where of course you'd have to study so hard. I found it quite a little bit I would say easier to pass through education in China than back home  
(Andrews, Uganda)*

Similarly, Roki clearly drew a distinction between teaching delivery and teacher's language proficiency in host culture and back home. He thought a more intercultural approach during instructional period was needed. He also compared class sizes to his home country and realized there was a vast difference between the two. He spoke about the alternative solution used to manage the situation in order to achieve academic success:

*Academically, we really struggle with the teachers due to the language so we help ourselves. We do self-studies and that help is a lot in passing our examinations. I expected more elaboration in the class than what I received so I realized I as a student has to do my very best so I had to do more work than what the teachers gave out. But I am just happy that our classes are much smaller here in China thus 27 students than back home thus 170 students  
(Roki, Uganda)*

Francis from Ghana also expressed his displeasure with the teaching delivery due to the teacher's inability to speak fluent English. He described the situation as challenging for him to accomplish his academic requirements:

*Some of the courses taught in English language is very difficult to understand because some lecturers are not able to express themselves in the language  
(Francis, Ghana)*

Agyekum from Ghana, thought the teaching delivery was challenging for Chinese teachers even though they understood their content well enough. This he basically attributed to the language proficiency of the teachers:

*The person may know but how to deliver, language barrier is a problem so sometimes some of them are found wanting and they have to resort to google translator to translate and you know when you are translating you lose some of the meanings so these are some of the challenges. So scheduling is good but in terms of the delivery, content is a challenge.  
(Agyekum, Ghana)*

Diana from Zambia compared the education cultures of China and Zambia. She found her academic work in the host culture was not compelling enough as compared to back home. She partly, however, blamed it on the teacher's language proficiency:

*In Zambia, the education is very stressful but here the education is easy and that makes me a bit lazy, there is more competition back home than here. Teaching back home is very good and interesting because they can speak the English language as compared to some Chinese teachers who can't speak the English language and for that matter makes it boring.  
(Diana, Zambia)*

Like Diana, Abubkr an undergraduate student from Sudan had a problem adjusting to the teaching style and class schedules. He found the teaching delivery challenging partly due to the language. He also experienced some difficulties in attending classes due to the nature of the class schedules. He stressed the importance of time management in achieving academic success.



Many African students like Abubkr lamented on the cultural differences in their current academic setting. Most interviewed students stressed on the negative influence of their teacher's delivery style and warranty their own self-study.

### 5.3 Perceived discrimination

This theme refers to the stereotypical, generalization, and prejudicial treatment of people based on their race, ethnicity or identity. This seems to be one of the most prominent theme that is peculiar to RQ3. As reviewed in the integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation, the treatment of people are based on race or relative status, historical or current relationship. Nnaji from Nigeria had this to say:

*Uh, I'm friendly to many. Yeah, I'm friendly to many. Uh, I've had some who of course kind of came off as racist, but uh, I don't really mind that stuff. That's all. Someone once threw hate speech that you're black and all that and yeah, I was, I didn't really care about it and I moved on and I've noticed my life is happier that I moved on and didn't create a fight.*  
(Nnaji, Nigeria)

Similar to Nnaji's experience, Michael seem to understand the level of receptivity from the host culture towards him. He prepares psychologically to encounter challenges:

*It wasn't easy for people to accepts you, you would try to talk to them but they are not welcoming. You cannot engage into lots of activities to them. So at the end of the day I ignore those who are negative and move with those who are friendly and get along with those who are positive. Some of them are not ready to open up to meet half way with what you believe and they believe. Some of them think Foreigners are not good but with them who have good thoughts I link up with them and move on since I want to make my life flow well I get along with the open minded Chinese.*  
(Michael, South Africa)

Debuo from Ghana seem to be psychologically affected by treatment from host culture. But like Michael from South Africa, he appears to adopt a positive attitude in order not to be prejudicial or generalize his encounters with natives:

*I think sometimes they don't want to admit is racism, there is racism ...sometimes psychologically when you meet people and you want to make friends with them and they try to ignore you psychologically you think about it and it makes you have a different perception about the people but it's true but it will be wrong for me to generalize that all Chinese are racist*  
(Debuo, Ghana)

Laura from Burundi reaffirms both Michael and Debuo's experiences. She rather shares a contrary perception of discrimination:

*Chinese people are really weird, I put on my expensive perfume and when am in a bus, they cover their noses and this is really bad manners. Some Chinese discriminate because of my dark skin color. They definitely see you. You don't even smell, not even perfume, you didn't put anything, but you smell like you don't have any smell. (This is so funny) But if they see you they will cover their nose. It is because we have a dark skin.*  
(Laura, Burundi)

Each student who encountered discrimination had ways of dealing with it in order to maintain enjoy their stay. Nnaji realized ignoring distractions contributed positively to her adaptation experience. Michael felt awareness of host culture's behavior and reception gave him an advantage to attain daily fitness in the new environment. Debuo took consolation in the fact that there were equally receptive locals to welcome him. Laura on the contrary thought she was not accepted because of her appearance. All these encounters contributed to the meaning making of their journey towards adaptation.

### 5.4 Host environmental influences on sojourners adaptation

This theme refers to the natural and the sociocultural environments which centers on host receptivity, host conformity pressure and ethnic group strength. Navigation their new environment was an uphill task as most of the students were not used to maps in their countries. Almost all interviewees made reference to the natural

environment. Common among the phrases used to describe this theme were “it was cold”, “very cold,” “I wasn’t used to this kind of cold,” “it was winter”. Duna from Ethiopia shared her experience with the weather:

*My first two weeks it was very difficult because of the weather because it had changed drastically For me because I was from somehow warmer environment and I entered in coldness and the every day I enter in China too It rained and when we got to where we were supposed to sleep We passed through rain again whilst I was not in jacket too So I think and through that period in fact I didn't like my stay and my dormitory too was very cold.  
(Tony, Zimbabwe)*

Like Tony, Abdul from South Sudan recounts his experience with extreme weather conditions and how he was able to cope. He also shares his thoughts on Chinese food:

*... in my country the weather is not that cold maximum is maybe 20 is the coldest but since I came here I had really time to ... to get used to the weather ... well ... here in China well ... you just have to buy as much clothes as you can and wear as much clothes as you can and get warm even if you want to get warm in your apartment you just buy some heater in your dorm or your room. I was like just sitting all the day in front of the heater like my feet were freezing my hands were freezing ... it was messed up. We're not used to Chinese food they ... they have really weird food kind of dishes like octopus weird stuff we're not used to this stuff from back home you know.  
(Abdul, South Sudan)*

Similarly, Salomey also expressed her discomfort experiencing the weather for the first time and how she adjusted. She also compares the influence of weather on academic work in her home cultural context and the host cultural context:

*The weather was, was not so friendly ... So the time we have to wake up that's the time I wanted to sleep and the weather too it was too cold. So I found it difficult doing a lot of things.... in my country for instance, the weather can determine your output, but here it's not the same and it's like the time is like you can do anything at any time. Oh now is better. Now is better because initially when I came everything was so different. Everything was so new to me. But now it's like I'm getting used to, the weather too is ...I think I'm getting used to, ... I'm ok I'm ok, everything is ok now compared to when I came.  
(Salomey, Ghana)*

Likewise, Ruth expressed her thoughts on the extremeness of the climate in the host culture. She also compared food in both cultures and how she struggled to adapt:

*The food they don't have a lot of you know good food. You know that in Africa the meat ... the meat and just some ... yes so just yeah so the food. The weather. I really have problems with the weather. It's very extreme. Winter is extreme and summer is extreme.  
(Ruth, Congo)*

Unlike Ruth and Abdul, even though Ekem seem to have had challenges with the food at the initial stages, his taste buds eventually adjusted to suit Chinese food:

*...the food back home is very different from here. The first days you would be difficult because you would not know which one goes along with your tongue but with time I experimented lots of things and with the help of Chinese friends and some seniors they would assist you in trying new kinds of food and by trying lots of things it get easy with time so for now I can survive with their food  
(Ekem, Nigeria)*

With most of the African students coming from the tropics, the climatic conditions was definitely going to be a challenge. We cannot attribute the difficulty in food preference to weather but could a factor in food choices.

## **VI. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

Based on the Integrative Theory of Communication and Cross-cultural Adaptation (Kim, 2001) as a guiding theoretical framework, the current study aims to explore the perceptions of African students adaptation and also to capture the key aspects of the social and the cultural influences on their intercultural adaptation.

Moreover, it aims to tackle the possible explanations for their academic and sociocultural adjustment in the Chinese university.

The integrated communication theory and cross-cultural adaptation (Kim, 2001) has proved useful in this research. In general, three out of four themes that emerged from the in-depth interview completely embraced the theory of integrative communication theory and cross-cultural adaptation.

The four key themes are interpretations of the educational, social, and cultural perspectives that resulted from the interview sessions in their academic and sociocultural transitions. All of the results from this analysis were consistent with the theoretical framework of the integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation (Kim, 2001) with the exception of academic adjustment of sojourners in the host context. Students tried to also learn Chinese in order to perform basic functions but chances of practice was limited since Chinese students were not open and receptive to foreigners. They resorted to other forms of communication like the use of translators. Most of the students recounted that the presence of co-ethnics really eased their interactions with Chinese people as they served as mediators in facilitating adaptation to the environment (RQ2). This occurrence marked the stress-growth adaptation phase peculiar with adaptation and also the theoretical framework of the study. Another distinctive finding was Academic adjustment of sojourners in the host context. As reviewed in the literature, African students seem to have a history with Chinese teachers' methods of teaching (Li, 2018). Some of the students resorted to practicing extra self-study to grasp concepts better (RQ1). This study discovered different approaches of how students dealt with perceived discrimination in their host context (RQ3).

In as much as certain students were infuriated by such acts, some understood them while others chose to ignore perpetrators. Other students found it unnecessary to generalize discrimination. With time they understood they could not change host culture's attitude towards them. The belief that when people experience an issue that is beyond their control, acknowledging and reframing the problem helps to minimize its negative impact and can lead to better adjustment (Szabo et al., 2016).

The influence of the host environment undeniably played a key role in students' adaptation experience. Students in the host culture acknowledged host culture's response to academic work even in the midst of extreme weather conditions. This study demonstrated that the integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation (Kim, 2001) was beneficial for varied reasons. It also explained the psychological challenges attached to perceived discrimination through host receptivity in the context of this study and the utilization of ethnic interpersonal communication. As in the nature of qualitative research, the findings of these research cannot be generalized as being applicable to all students in Africa. The findings reflect the perspectives and narratives of thirty African students living at the University of Jiangsu. Finally, interviewing students at random at places on campus affected the outcome of this study. The findings of this qualitative study underscore the need for further study of adaptation of African students using a different approach. The results of this research provides meaningful implications for educators and University administrators. Future research in this context could delve into other dimensions of the integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation.

#### **Appendix A Interview Questions**

1. To study in China in what aspects do you need to adapt to?
2. Which of the aspects do you find key to your adaptation? Why?
3. How would you assess your stay in China now?
4. Do you think you have adapted academically well here? Why? What are the challenges?
5. Do you think you have adapted socially well here? Why? What are the challenges?
6. How are you practically dealing with these challenges? (Academic and social challenges)
7. What really makes studying here challenging?
8. What really makes your stay here challenging?
9. What are the advantages of studying in a Chinese Higher Institution?
10. What are the disadvantages of studying in a Chinese Higher Institution?
11. Do you think you have adapted well?
12. What have you practically done to adapt?

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