INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS’ PERCEPTION OF SOCIO-COMMUNICATIVE, TEACHING, AND LEARNING STYLE IN UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA GRADUATE SCHOOL

By

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To my family
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<tr>
<td>Communication process</td>
<td>The process of interaction and feedback between two individuals (Shannon &amp; Weaver, 1949). In this case, international graduate students and faculty members</td>
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<td>Intercultural communication competence (IC C)</td>
<td>“The ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Deardoff, 2008, p. 33).</td>
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<td>International graduate students</td>
<td>Graduate students from countries other than the U.S.</td>
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<td>Learning expectation</td>
<td>The experiences that students look forward to have in a learning scenario (George, 1995).</td>
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<td>Learning style</td>
<td>The way that individuals begin to receive, concentrate on, process, and absorb new information (Dunn, 2000).</td>
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<td>Perception</td>
<td>The assessment of international graduate students of socio-communicative, teaching, and learning style adopted by faculty members.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Socio-communicative style</td>
<td>The way an individual or a group of people assesses the assertiveness and responsiveness behavior of another individual or a group of individuals (Richmond &amp; Martin, 1998). In this present study, it is defined as international graduate students’ assessment of the behaviors of faculty members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching style</td>
<td>The ideas and creativity that faculty members adopt in classrooms to ensure understanding among students (Cartney, 2000).</td>
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As the number of international graduate students in the United States continues to increase, the number of students that are multilingual increases as well. As diversity is encouraged in higher institutions, it is important for faculty members to have an understanding of the influence of cultural differences on the academic lives of international students. In order to understand the views of international graduate students on how well they adapt to their new learning environment, this qualitative study sought to explore and describe the perception of international graduate students on the socio-communicative style, teaching, and learning styles of instructors at the University of Florida (UF).

Interviews were used to investigate the perceptions of international graduate students of the difficulties they experienced at the onset of their learning. The data collection process also gave an opportunity to compare their perceptions of the teaching, learning, and communicative cultures in UF and universities in their home countries. A convenience sample of 13 participants was interviewed to describe their perceptions and thoughts.
Some findings in the study were similar to the findings in the literature. However, this study also contributes findings beyond the ones that exist in the literature. The results indicate the problems and difficulties that international graduate students face, their impressions of learning culture in the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS)/UF, and the coping mechanisms they found helpful in adjusting to their learning environment.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In 2008, the Institute of International Education reported that 623,805 international students were enrolled in higher education programs in the United States (U.S.). In an effort to embrace globalization, universities in the U.S. encourage diversity in enrollment. Universities comprise students from different countries with different cultures and backgrounds. An open-door report compiled by the Institute of International Education, reported a ten percent increase of international students in the 2014/2015 academic year in the U.S., leading to approximately one million international students in U.S. (IIE, 2015). This increased number shows that the U.S. is one of the leading countries in the world, admitting international students (Arthur, 2004; IIE, 2015). The desire to acquire knowledge and quality education in places with sufficient learning resources motivates international students to migrate to the U.S. to receive their higher education. Zikopoulos (1991) approximates that one-third of international students in the world prefer to study in the U.S.

Poor communication skills are a major barrier faced by non-native English speaking (NNS) international students in the learning process. The process of adjusting to the norms of the host country also contributes to the anxiety of international students in the classroom. Narratives used in the classroom for the purpose of teaching may also be found difficult by international graduate students (Benett, 1993). International graduate students also go through the rigor of conforming to the interactive teaching and learning styles adopted in U.S. classrooms while struggling to understand content knowledge, as described in their host country’s cultural context (Bennett, 1993).
The importance of effective communication in higher education cannot be over-emphasized. Non-native English speaking (NNS) and English speaking international students are inclusive in the population of graduate students in UF. Students are required to write a test to show how well they communicate using English language. A good level of understanding in the teacher-learner relationship will enhance the process of learning (Chen & Zimitat, 2006). Two individuals can speak the same language with no understanding of what either party says and, in this case, the purpose of communication in the learning process is defeated. However, the meaning of effective communication differs from one individual to another and it is also contingent on the subject matter being discussed (Ottenheimer, 2009).

Among these learning difficulties that international graduate students face, Bodycott and Walker (2000) explained the students’ expectations of their professors differs from one culture to another. This, in turn, means that international students’ expectation of their professors is likely to be different from the expectation of their host counterparts (George, 1995). Social and cultural distance are part of the factors responsible for the difference and, as such, impacted the students’ evaluation of faculty members negatively (Bodycott & Walker, 2000). International graduate students may not understand some instructions from professors as easily as their host counterparts (Simpson, 2008). As a result of the expectation differences, international graduate students’ perception of the assertiveness and responsiveness behavior of faculty members may differ from the perceptions of their counterparts. Their prior experiences with the teaching and learning process are transferred to their new learning environment and the expectation they have about learning in a classroom might be to primarily listen.
to professors without engaging them interactively (George, 1987). This expectation may be violated by what they experience in U.S. classrooms.

**Significance of the Study**

As the number of students in U.S. graduate schools continues to increase, it is important to understand the barriers these students face while studying in the U.S. Increased understanding of what international graduate students perceive as effective teaching will help faculty members to be conscious of the level of diversity in their classrooms. This study will also assist faculty members in accommodating the needs of international graduate students within their teaching styles. Faculty members will be able to incorporate culturally-sensitive instructions to their teaching in to ensure that no student is left behind. The results of this study will assist faculty members in improving their ability to teach and communicate with international graduate students. A conscious knowledge of the effect of communication styles on international students’ academic performance will inform faculty members on how to adopt styles that will help them engage properly in the classroom.

**Summary**

This chapter introduced the rationale behind the study. It comprised of the significance of the study, and the importance of effective communication in a diverse setting. It further explained the terms that are relevant to the focus of inquiry.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter 1 explained the importance of effective communication in a teacher-learner scenario and the academic situations of international students in their new environment of learning. Chapter 2 presents a literature review of intercultural teaching and learning styles in education, socio-communicative styles in various field of research, and their application in the context of this study.

**Shannon and Weaver Communication Model**

Shannon and Weaver (1949) designed a model of communication known as the Shannon-Weaver model of communication. The purpose of the design was to develop an effective communication process between a sender and a receiver. It has been vastly used in human communication and mass communication.

The Shannon and Weaver model encompasses the stages of message transfer and the noise which often interrupts message transmission. It explains the movement of a message from the source, through a channel to the intended destination (Lee & Baldwin, 2004). The model involves concepts like source, message, channel, and receiver. The source is known as the origin of the message; the originator of the message chooses the desired message to be sent.

The message is the piece of information passed to the receiver with the intent to get the receiver to understand its content. The message is transferred from the source to the receiver through a medium called channel. The intended target audience that the message is meant for is known as the receiver. However, Lee and Baldwin (2004) explained that during the message transfer process, a disruptive factor, known as noise,
may affect the communication flow between the sender and the receiver. This, in turn, sometimes leads to miscommunication and receiving incorrect messages.

The model was initially about signal transmission, designed to meet the needs of communication in engineering, but has been applied widely to the process of communication among humans. The analogy is that the brain of an individual talking is the source of information, the voice of the individual talking is the transmitter, and the ear of the individual that is being talked to is the receiver (Shannon & Weaver, 1949).

**Socio-Communicative Style**

Many communication researchers have examined sources of noise in the communication process. While some noise is mechanic, other types of noise are semantic in nature, having to do with different interpretations of meaning. One stream of research for understanding semantic differences relates to socio-communicative style. The socio-communicative style (SCS) is defined as the ability of an individual to initiate, adapt, and respond to how others communicate (Thomas et al., 1994). The effect of an instructor’s communicative behavior on the learning of students can be understood by examining the SCS and communication style of the instructor (Myers, 1998). SCS has two behavioral dimensions, assertiveness and responsiveness (Richmond & Martin, 1998). It is a variable used to assess how an individual relates and communicates with other people through assertiveness and responsiveness behaviors (Richmond, McCroskey, & Cayanias, 2005). Norton (1983) explained communication style as “the way one verbally or para verbally interacts to signal how literal meaning should be taken, interpreted, filtered, or understood” (p. 99).

Responsiveness explains how an individual is willing to pay attention to how others communicate, through the recognition of their needs (Klopf, 1991). Norton (1983)
explained responsiveness as a behavior that is concerned with being attentive, aware, and alert to a message. Norton identified that listening is a part of the responsive behavior that precedes the degree to which the learner understands, agrees or disagrees with a message.

Assertiveness is the second dimension of behavior identified with SCS. It is concerned with an individual’s “capacity to make requests, actively disagree, express positive or negative personal rights and feelings, initiate, maintain or disengage from conversations, and stand up for oneself without attacking another” (McCroskey & Richmond, 1996, p. 92). It is the tendency of an individual to exercise interpersonal dominance, ascendance, and forcefulness (Bolton, 1979; Infante, 1987). Assertiveness is a part of communication competence and has been considered by researchers in various contexts.

Based on varying degrees of assertiveness and responsiveness, individuals are categorized into one out of four SCS (Figure 2-1) (Richmond & McCroskey, 1995). Individuals that are high in assertiveness and responsiveness are regarded to be communicatively competent. In contrast, individuals that are low in assertiveness and responsiveness are regarded as non-competent individuals. Individuals high in assertiveness and low in responsiveness are classified to be aggressive while individuals low in assertiveness and high in responsiveness are classified into the submissive category.

SCS explains that competent communicators consider alternative styles and possess cognitive flexibility (Duran & Kelly, 1985; Duran & Kelly, 1994). Competent
communicators can adjust their communicative styles to whatever the situation demands (Knutson & Posirisuk, 2006).

Clark (2002) argued that the purpose of instruction is to enable learning among listeners. An instructor’s communication behaviors (responsiveness and assertiveness) have an influence on a student’s perception of learning (Myers, 1998; Wanzer & Frimier, 1999). The influence of responsive behaviors on teaching and learning in education have been identified by researchers (Ellis, 2000; Mottet, Beebe, & Fleuriet, 2006; Norton, 1983). Thomas (1994) reported that teachers with assertive behaviors are found to be more effective in the classroom. These types of teachers were rated high in immediate response and subsequently viewed to be more communicatively competent (Thomas, Richmond & McCroskey, 1994). A negative correlation was found between perceived instructor misbehaviors and instructor perceived assertiveness and responsiveness behaviors (Wanzer & McCroskey, 1998). Also, perceived instructor assertiveness and responsiveness behavior was reported to be positively correlated with perceived instructor nonverbal immediacy (Thomas, Richmond & McCroskey, 1994).

Several studies differentiated SCS in terms of verbal aggressive and argumentative behaviors (Martin & Anderson, 1996a; Martin & Anderson, 1996b; Anderson et al., 1997). Myers (1998) investigated the relationship between SCS, verbal aggressiveness, and argumentativeness in college classrooms, and found that competent and aggressive instructors were rated higher in argumentativeness than non-competent and less aggressive or submissive instructors. In addition, competent and submissive instructors were rated lower in verbal aggressiveness than non-competent
and aggressive instructors. Students that perceived their instructors to be high in assertive and responsive behaviors were likely to have interpersonal trust with their instructors (Wooten & McCroskey, 1996). Students that perceived themselves to be high in assertiveness had a higher level of interpersonal trust with their instructors than students who perceived themselves to be low in assertiveness (Wooten & McCroskey, 1996).

A study focused on the predictive power of SCS and teacher’s credibility on students’ affective learning (Henning, 2010). Affective learning explains the feeling that students have about the learning they receive in the classroom. The study found that the student’s perception of their instructor’s SCS predicted their perception of instructor’s competence. “Teachers who are perceived as being flexible and responsive will potentially allow students to learn more and see their instructors as more credible” (Henning 2010, p. 65). In the same context, Martin, Chesebro, and Mottet (1997) explained students that perceive their teachers as having high assertiveness and responsiveness behaviors are competent, caring, and higher in character. Additionally, Henning (2010) suggested that a competent instructor is one that recognizes the ability of students to understand what they are being taught, and then adapts to their situation.

Socio-communicative styles have also been examined in other fields. In the medical field, doctor’s assertiveness and responsiveness was found to predict the perception of patients on doctor’s competence (Richmond, Heisel, Smith, & McCroskey, 2002). A physician that is perceived by patients to be high in responsive behaviors is viewed to be more credible than one who is not, leading to patients’ high satisfaction
Their findings support the notion that the style of communication is strongly linked to communication competence.

There is no best socio-communicative style recommended for an individual. Instead, an individual should strive to adjust their communication styles and behaviors to every situation (Richmond & McCroskey, 1996). This leads to the third component of SCS. Versatility as the third dimension of SCS is explained as “the degree to which the individual is capable of adapting her or his style to varying situational constraints” (Richmond & Martin, 1998, p. 134). It is also commonly referred to as cognitive flexibility. It simply means that an individual has the awareness that there are alternative approaches to situations, and that the awareness will prepare the individual to readily exhibit an appropriate responsiveness and assertiveness behavior depending on the context and the audience (Richmond & McCroskey, 1996). Rubin and Martin (1994) found versatility to be a strong predictor of communication competence. However, Henning (2010) argued that versatility has been excluded from research that considered SCS. He later looked at the role of versatility plays in student learning and whether it can predict student’s perceptions of teacher credibility. He found that versatility indeed predicted the perception of students on teacher competence and student affective learning.

**Communication Competence**

Instructors’ competence involves educational competence, course content competence, and communication competence (Bjekic & Zlatic, 2006; Pantic & Wubbel, 2009). Researchers have not been able to reach a consensus on the definition of communication competence. Communication competence is the ability of an individual to match his or her style of communication to the situation or the diversity of the
audience. It is the ability of a person to employ the type of communication behavior that is suitable in order to achieve the goal of social relation (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989). Payne (2003) defined communication competence as “the judgement of successful communication where interactants’ goals are met using messages that are perceived as appropriate and effective” (p. 10). Wiemann (1977) explained communication competence as “the ability of an interactant to choose among available communicative behaviors in order that he may successfully accomplish his own interpersonal goals during an encounter while maintaining the face and line of his fellow interactants within the constraints of the situation” (p. 198). Bochner and Kelly (1974) defined communication competence as “the ability to relate effectively to self and others” (p. 280).

Communication competence is an individual’s accomplishment of communicative goals (Wiemann, 1977). It is the accomplishment of an interpersonal relationship goal in a situation, while choosing an appropriate communicative behavior in the situation (Wiemann, 1977). McCroskey and McCroskey (1988) had described communication competence as the ability of an individual to communicate well in different situations. They further explained that this perspective is effective when one is making inquiries about perception, its causes, and outcomes. All these different views of communication competence focus on the expectations of an effective interaction. However, some authors have explained communication competence in the context of one’s social environment. White (1959) explained communicative competence as the ability of an individual to socially interact effectively with his or her environment. Weiman and
Backlund (1980) suggested that it is “the ability to demonstrate knowledge of the socially appropriate communicative behavior in a given situation” (p. 26).

Byrum-Gaw (1981) listed the characteristics of competent communication as empathy, interaction management, affiliation support, social relaxation, and behavioral flexibility. Adler, Rosenfeld, and Towne (1992) listed adaptability, large repertoire of skills, involvement, empathy, cognitive complexity, self-monitoring, and ability to perform skillfully as characteristics of competent communication. The measure of an individual’s communication competence is how well the individual makes use of verbal and non-verbal communication in different contexts (Yum, 2012). To ensure effective interaction, an individual should strive to understand how different contexts affect communication (Trenholm & Rose, 1981).

Among the constraints to effective instructional communication is the cultural differences that exist in a group of individuals (Strang, 2009). For instance, the diverse population in graduate schools. Culture is the way of life, beliefs, values, and norms that connect some certain individuals as a group (Hofstede, 2001). Miller (2002) identified culture as an independent variable that influences communication. It explains how individuals should behave among themselves and to others (Miller, 2002). Samovar, Porter, and Jain (1981) stated that “culture and communication are inseparable because culture not only dictates who talks with whom, about what, and how the communication proceeds, it also helps to determine how people encode messages, the meanings they have for messages, and the conditions and circumstances under which various messages may or may not be sent, noticed, or interpreted” (p. 24). This explains that culture should be considered has a huge factor to effective communication and a
change in culture results in a change in communication practices (Samovar et al., 1981).

To be successful academically at the graduate level, communication skills are important. One must be able to develop the ability to share ideas and interests with others in a way they would understand. It is not only applicable to individuals of the same cultural origin, but to diverse cultures. Intercultural communicative competence is the ability to learn from how others talk, share points of view, and follow rules of communication in different contexts (Enright & Gitomer, 1989). Trudgill (2003) stated “the communicative competence implies not only knowing the grammar, phonology, and lexicon of a language, but also knowing how to use language effectively and appropriately, furthermore, participating in cross-cultural communication” (p. 24).

A communication competence model developed by Celce-Murcia, Dornyei, and Thurrell (1995) has been widely used because of its ease of comprehension (Hall, 1999).

The model consists of five important and intertwined components of communication competence, which are: sociocultural, discourse, linguistic, actional, and strategic. Hall (1999) explained that an individual should have some level of competence in the five areas. Furthermore, sociocultural, linguistic and actional competencies were explained to be interrelated such that, an individual’s linguistic and sociocultural competencies are connected to their action competencies. The individual can align his or her language elements into spoken words through the discourse competence, and then use the strategic competence to communicate easily (Hall, 1999). As a result of the interrelation of the elements of the model, the individual may
not be able to participate in the discussion of a subject matter if an individual is lacking in one or two of the competencies in the model. For example, an international student writing in the British way and lacking the American style of writing may not be able to convey messages appropriately to an American instructor. In this case, the student lacks the sociocultural and linguistic competencies of a typical American student and thus, may not be able to participate in the discourse of communication. This model, therefore, suggests that an individual must be able to satisfy the requirements of the elements, and gain competencies in the five elements to be a successful communicator.

**Communicative Competence of International Students**

Some NNS students speak well in English but do not apply it well in contexts (Bennet, 1993). Bennet (1993) referred to them as “fluent fools” (p. 16).

In general, international students are afraid of sharing their views in class, asking questions, and/or participating in discussions because of the communicative competencies they lack (Kim, 2006). Aside from participating in class discussions, international students that are teaching assistants find it difficult to relate with American students in the classrooms (Chiang & Mi, 2008). This difficulty is associated with the lack of all or some of the five elements of communicative competencies.

In order to overcome the difficulties, Bennett (1993) advised that international students should be willing and prepared to understand the sociocultural backgrounds of their host country, as well as understand the contexts in which their language is used.

Intercultural communication competence (ICC) is the ability of an individual to effectively and appropriately communicate with people from diverse cultural backgrounds (Spitzberg, 2000). Attempts have been made toward identifying the set of skills needed by an individual for ICC. However, there is no solid theoretical model that
explains the set of skills concisely (Paige, 2004). Chen (1990) identified four skills for intercultural communicative competence: personality strength, communication skills, psychological adjustment, and cultural awareness. Personality strength encompasses the personal traits of an individual that may affect their ICC level. These personal traits (self-concept, self-disclosure, self-monitoring, and social relaxation) helps an individual to portray themselves well, while exhibiting a positive attitude of communication towards others (Jandt, 2016). Bryam (1997) explained ICC as the skills of an individual to interpret what others are communicating in their cultural context, having knowledge of others and self, communicating with others as the situation demands, and acknowledging their values and beliefs. A competent intercultural communicator has the ability to hold off his or her own negative position on others’ cultural values and beliefs (Bryam, 1997). A communicator that is interculturally competent can relate incidences of other people’s culture to his or own culture with the aim of understanding it better.

Communication skills needed for an individual to be communicatively competent in intercultural contexts were identified by Jandt (2016). These include verbal and nonverbal behaviors. The set of communication skills are message skills, behavioral flexibility, interaction management, and social skills. Competent intercultural communicators are expected to be able to converse in the same language with their audience, initiate the conversation, be attentive and responsive, and respect others’ feelings (Jandt, 2016).

Psychological adjustment is also a necessary element of the ICC. Effective intercultural communicators are expected to be able to adjust quickly to a new environment, irrespective of cultural shock and alienation they may face (Jandt, 2016).
For example, international students face the cultural shock associated with adjusting to the cultures of their host country. Adaptation to the environment will occur through constant communication, generating information, sending messages to, and receiving messages from the environment (Geyer, 1980). In the process of adjusting to the new environment, international students start the journey of learning and practicing the cultures of their host countries. Shibutani and Kwan (1965) termed this process of learning other people’s culture as ‘acculturation’.

The acknowledgement of norms and values in cultures of others is referred to as intercultural awareness. This awareness reduces the stress an individual may go through during interaction with other individuals in a new environment (Kim, 1990). An individual that is interculturally aware will respect people’s views and opinions on issues that are interculturally relevant, giving them the benefit of doubt that their culture may be responsible for their different point of view. A competent intercultural communicator will be able to identify factors responsible for cultural variations which, in turn, affect the interaction process to engage in successful communication (Triandis & Albert, 1987).

**Teaching Styles**

Teaching style is the art of actively engaging students in their own learning process in or outside the classroom (Welsh, 2012). It has been viewed by several researchers to be different from teaching methods (Fischer & Fischer, 1979; Jarvis, 2002). These researchers stressed that teaching styles and methods are different, yet, related. There is a considerable amount of similarities between teaching styles and methods (Jarvis, 2002). Fischer and Fischer (1979) defined teaching styles as a “pervasive quality in the behavior of an individual, a quality that persists, though the content may change” (p. 245). In order to distinctively explain the difference between
teaching style and method, Jarvis (2002) explained that “teaching methods are about the science of teaching, whereas teaching styles are about the art of teaching” (p. 24). This simply explains that two teachers teaching the same course and content may differ in their style and art of teaching. For example, students seek perceptions of their colleagues about classes and the nature of teaching of instructors before registration. This may be due to their curiosity to know how an instructor interacts in class. Teaching styles entail all the resources used by an instructor in or out of the classroom to influence student’s learning (Cartney, 2000).

Although researchers have not reached a consensus on the appropriate teaching style, many agree with the active style of teaching. In order to improve learning, researchers suggested transitioning from passive to active learning (Muhammad et al., 2011).

**Learning Styles**

Although the concept of learning styles has not been accepted due to lack of theoretical basis (Felder & Brent, 2005), students still see themselves learning better under a specific condition and under the tutoring of a particular instructor. Campbell (1991) defined learning style as “the distinctive behaviors which serve as indicators of how a person learns from and adapts to his or her environment” (p. 234). Bowles (2004) explained learning styles as a behavioral feature of an individual “that serve as relatively stable indicators of how learners perceive, interact with, and respond to the learning environment” (p. 99). Individuals learn things using different learning style preferences, and are a function of their “personality type, educational specialization, career choice, and current job role and tasks” (Kolb & Kolb, 2005, p.4).
Experiential Learning Theory

The experiential learning theory (ELT) states that learning is the “process whereby knowledge is created through transformation of experience” (Kolb & Kolb, 2005, p. 2). The experiential learning model (ELM) embedded in the ELT explains the learning process (Figure 2-3). The ELM elements connect to one another, and thus, can be viewed as a learning cycle.

The four learning styles of the model are: (a) accommodative learning style, (b) diverging learning style, (c) assimilating learning style, and (d) convergent learning style. For each of these learning styles, there are combinations of the learning modes or behaviors. The learning modes are: (a) concrete experience (CE), (b) reflective observation (RO), (c) abstract conceptualization (AC), and (d) active experimentation (AE). Kolbs and Kolbs (2005) referred to the combination of AE and RO as the transforming dimension; combination of AC and CE as the grasping dimension.

Individuals with active experimentation (AE) and concrete experience (CE) modes are known as accommodators. These individuals prefer the hands-on approach to learning. They can welcome other people’s approach when solving a challenging problem instead of depending solely on their own ability (Di Muro & Terry, 2007).

The concrete experience (CE) and reflective observation (RO) type of individuals are referred to as divergers. Divergers are able to look at a problem from diverse standpoints. They make inquiries on the importance and application of what they learn. Di Muro & Terry (2007) explained that they have preference for learning using the hands-on approach alongside conversing.

Individuals that combine the abstract conceptualization (AC) style with the active experimentation (AE) style are called convergers. Convergers are lone learners. They
have preference for instructors that give them the opportunity of applying what they have been taught. Also, they prefer on-line based instructions as opposed to in-class lectures (Di Muro & Terry, 2007). The type of individuals that prefer the abstract conceptualization (AC) and reflective observation (RO) styles are known as assimilators. They give preference to structured lectures that lead to one another. They find abstract concepts intriguing. They like to be tested on what the instructor teaches them and nothing more. More like convergers, assimilators prefer to work alone as opposed to working in teams or groups (Di Muro & Terry, 2007). Teaching style is instructor-centered while learning style is student-centered. As a teacher gives preference to a teaching style, so also, a student has preference for a learning style. An increased diversity in student population will also increase learning styles. Learning styles of students may be evaluated based on their preference, in order to maximize their learning experience.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 2-4 explains the connections of factors that can influence international students’ perception of faculty members as conceptualized in this study. In conceptualizing the communicative behavior of faculty members, explanation of the SCS by Richmond and McCroskey (1995) was used. The study also drew upon the experiential learning model by Kolb (2005) to understand the learning styles of student and the explanation of ICC theory by Bryam (1997) served as the theoretical base for teaching styles.

Students’ perception of faculty members’ teaching and socio-communicative style may impact student engagement behaviors which influences cognitive learning. This study combines international students’ perception of faculty members’ in-class
behaviors and the learning styles of students. This was done to understand the quality of education international students receive from a communication perspective. Hence, the combination of the communication and educational constructs in the framework. The study seeks to simply describe international students’ perceptions of faculty members’ communicative behavior.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study includes the following: to understand the expectations that University of Florida (UF) international graduate students have of their professors and their perception of the teaching and learning styles in UF graduate faculty; to understand how well international graduate students respond to the new learning environment in relation to their host country’s cultural differences. The research questions guiding this study are the following:

1. What expectations and perceptions do international graduate students have of their professors regarding teaching and learning styles?

2. What are the challenges faced by international graduate students in the learning process?

3. What are the perceptions of international graduate students on the socio-communicative styles of faculty members?

4. What coping mechanisms do students report to have found helpful in adjusting to their new learning environment?

**Summary**

This chapter included a review of the relevant literature, theoretical framework of the study, and the conceptual framework. The literature review cut across books, journals, previous dissertations and thesis that studied teaching, learning, and socio-
communicative styles. It also included intercultural communication competence reviews from past research.
Figure 2-1. Socio-communicative styles (Richmond & McCroskey, 1995).
Figure 2-2. Communication competence model (Celce-Murcia et al., 1995).
Figure 2-3. Kolb’s Experiential Learning Model (Killian, 2009)
Figure 2-4. Connections of factors that can influence international students' perception of faculty members
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Chapter 2 considered several studies that have been conducted to determine socio-communicative style, teaching, and learning style of an individual. It further covered intercultural communication competence and communication competence skills. In this chapter, efforts were made to give detailed explanation and description of how the study was carried out, and how data were collected and analyzed.

Researcher’s Subjectivity

A qualitative investigator is somehow connected to the focus of inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is necessary for a qualitative researcher to use self-reflection to explain personal attitudes, feelings, and preferences that could have an influence on the data collection process and interpretation (Ary, Jacobs & Sorensen, 2010). In order to avoid imposing self-perspectives, it is expedient for the researcher to explain pre-conceived subjectivities that are related to the focus of inquiry.

This study was informed by my personal experience as an international graduate student at UF. Leaving my home country of Nigeria to study in the U.S. came with a lot of experiences. Developing myself academically to reach my professional goal has always been my dream. After completing a Bachelor of Science in Animal science in my home country, I applied and received admission into the Master of Science degree in the Department of Agricultural Education and Communication at UF with emphasis on agricultural communication. My choice of the program was fueled by my interest in understanding the process, methods, and theories of communication in agriculture.

While at UF, I worked with a team of researchers collaborating with USAID as a research assistant, on improving the quality of learning in colleges and universities of
agriculture in some developing countries. As a result of this experience, I learned about the work of USAID in helping students from these countries to come to the U.S. to study. I came in contact with diverse international graduate students on campus and graduate housing complexes, particularly those in the field of agriculture. This research experience influenced my interest in studying the perception of international graduate students on socio-communicative, teaching, and learning styles in UF. This was further ignited by how Richmond and McCroskey (1995) conceptualized SCS as the ability of a communicator to initiate, adapt, and respond to how others communicate. The elements of SCS are 1) assertiveness behavior and 2) responsiveness behavior (Thomas, Richmond, & McCroskey, 1994). Not only is it important to encourage globalization and multi-cultural diversity in higher education, it is quite important to explore measures that will help international students carry out their academic activities and responsibilities effectively.

I believe that attention should be drawn towards developing programs that will help understand the academic needs of international graduate students. Factors that negatively influence the perceptions of international students on the process of learning in higher education should be emphasized. As globalization is encouraged among graduate students, assessing the academic needs and developments of international graduate students will help to improve overall academic achievement. These experiences and views led me to pursue this research topic.

**Methodology**

This study employed a basic interpretative, qualitative methodology approach to have an in-depth understanding of the focus of inquiries of the study. According to Ary, Jacob and Sorensen (2010), “basic interpretative studies provide rich descriptive
accounts targeted to understanding a phenomenon, a process, or a particular point of view from the perspectives of those involved" (p. 484). The purpose of a basic interpretative study is to understand how processes, issues, and happenings are perceived by individuals. This qualitative approach was used to describe and interpret the perceptions of participants. Qualitative method of research helps researchers to have a deep understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Ary et al., 2010). This method has the capacity to reveal detailed information on an issue, thereby increasing depth of understanding (Patton, 2002). A researcher supports an approach that promotes the understanding of an issue through various perspectives (Hodson, 2002). This study was not targeted towards defining a theory or analyzing a content. Instead, it was directed towards describing the study objectives from the perspectives of the participants.

**Ethical Sensitivity**

Prior to collecting data from the individuals that showed interest to participate in the study, International Review Board (IRB) approval (Appendix A) was obtained. Afterwards, every participant of the study was administered a consent form (Appendix B) to show that their participation in the study was strictly voluntary. The study commenced after the collection of the informed consent form from the participants.

**Recruitment of Participants for the Study**

All international graduate students in UF/IFAS served as the eligible population for the study. However, a convenience sampling as a method of non-probability sampling method was employed to obtain sample from the population. The researcher selected a sample of participants that could provide information that pertained to the investigated topic. Qualitative researchers make “use of their experience and
knowledge to select a sample of participants that they believe can provide the relevant information about a topic" (Ary et al., 2010, p. 456). Convenience sampling was chosen because of availability, time, and ease of access (Ary et al., 2010). The researcher randomly asked international graduate students in meetings and in UF Maguire graduate housing, to voluntarily participate in the study. Out of the students that were contacted via emails and/or personal communication, 13 students agreed to voluntarily participate in the study. These students were included in the study based on the criteria that they were international graduate students in UF/IFAS at the time of the study. An introductory email of what the study entailed was sent out to the 13 individuals that agreed to participate in the study, and efforts were made to arrange conducive interview dates, times, and venues.

**Data Collection Process**

Interviews were used to gather data from the participants of the study. Questions that helped to guide the interview process and answer the research objectives were first developed. The elements of SCS, and the instrument used to measure them, served as the framework for the questions used for the interview conducted in the study. Also, the study was shaped by previous research in instructional communications and intercultural communication. Previous research studies have focused on how instructor’s SCS correlates with student’s learning (Thomas et al., 1994; Wanzer & McCroskey, 1998).

The interview questions (see Appendix C) focused on the perception of participants on socio-communicative and teaching styles of their professors, as well as their own learning styles. The questions centered on how the participants have been influenced positively or negatively in their academic experience. The questions were
open-ended so as to encourage participants to think and then express their thoughts on them.

The questions were reviewed by an expert and suggestions for improvement were made. The suggestions for improvement were examined by the researcher, and changes were made. Furthermore, a pilot test was conducted with 2 participants to determine the extent to which the questions provided answers to the objectives of the study. Additional corrections were made to the interview questions after the pilot test was conducted.

Demographic questions related to the study, such as age, field of study, gender, and country of origin were answered during the interview session by the participants. The researcher started each session with simple questions before asking questions related to the study. This was done to make the participants comfortable and to set the pace for an honest and free-minded discussion. The interview questions developed prior to data collection were used but the researcher initiated further discussions for the purpose of clarity (Ary et al., 2010). To control interviewer’s bias, the researcher avoided gestures that might suggest anything to the participants (Ary et al., 2010). The interview period for each participant took approximately thirty to sixty minutes. The interview session was audio-recorded for the purpose of transcription. The researcher also made notes of impressions and observations during the interview.

**Data Analysis**

Following the data collection, the researcher used constant comparative method to analyze the data while looking out to develop themes that are recurring. Preliminary data analysis began before the completion of the field interviews. The data were transcribed while paying close attention to the patterns found. The transcribing process
gave the researcher the opportunity to understand and identify themes that were related to the items used in measuring responsiveness and assertiveness behaviors.

The responses given to the interview questions directed to understand the perception of participants of the assertiveness and responsiveness behaviors (SCS) of faculty members were analyzed using the instrument designed by Richmond and McCroskey (1996) as a guide. The instrument was designed to measure SCS through 20 personality characteristics. Ten of the items measure the perceived assertiveness behavior of an individual by another individual and the other 10 items measure perceived responsiveness behavior. The participants did not fill the survey questions. Instead, their responses to questions were analyzed, looking for themes that match the items on the instrument used for measuring SCS. Also, the Merriam Webster dictionary was used as a guide to look for themes in the data that were synonymous to the items of the instruments used for measuring SCS. The instrument can be found in Appendix D.

**Limitations of the Study**

As in any study, there are limitations to the interpretation of this study. As a result of the basic qualitative nature of this study, the findings from the study cannot be transferred outside the sample of the study. Due to time and resources constraints, a purposeful, convenience sampling method was employed. Another limitation resulted from the interview. The participants might have had other views about the questions than I intended. Limitations due to the interpretation of questions were minimized by asking participants to clarify by points with follow-up questions. Also, the participants might have been careful of answering interview questions related to faculty members although the researcher constantly reminded the participants of the confidentiality
promise of the study. The study was also limited to international graduate students in UF/IFAS. This is not a representation of the population of international graduate students at UF, and generalization of the findings to other international graduate students in UF cannot be made. The small sample size also contributes to the limiting factor of the study.

**Summary**

The chapter focused on the methodology, data collection procedures, and how the data collected were analyzed to answer the research questions of this study. The credibility, transferability, and dependability measures taken in the study were discussed, as well as the limitations involved in the study.
Chapter 3 explained the research method employed in this study. It further clarified the process of data collection and analysis. In this chapter, the findings from the data collected were presented. Descriptive qualitative methodology was used to analyze the data. The findings were presented based on the objectives of the study and were categorized together by themes that emerged. The following research questions were the basis for the study.

**Research Questions**

1. What are the expectations and perceptions of international graduate students of the teaching styles of faculty members and their own learning styles?
2. What are the challenges faced by international graduate students in the learning process?
3. What are the perceptions of international graduate students on the socio-communicative styles of faculty members?
4. What coping mechanisms do students report to have found helpful in adjusting to their new learning environment?

**Demographic Findings**

Thirteen international graduate students from UF/IFAS participated in this study. The participants were asked demographic questions before the interview questions that focused on the purpose of the study. This was done to determine the basic information about their age, field of study, country of origin, and the year they were in their program (Table 4-1).

The participants of the study ranged between 23 - 37 years of age. All of the participants were born outside the U.S. Out of the total participants, eight were females and five were males. Participants were asked about their previous learning language of
instruction. Seven of the participants said English while six of the participants mentioned other languages. In order to ensure the confidentiality promise made to the participants, other descriptive characteristics of the participants were left out.

**Research Question 1.** What are perceptions of international graduate students of the teaching styles of faculty members and their own learning styles?

To recall from chapter two, four types of learning styles were identified in the Kolb’s experiential learning model: assimilators, convergers, divergers, and accommodators. The participants in this study exhibited different learning styles. Seven participants gave preference to online learning for different reasons. Only one participant showed a total dislike for online learning. The remaining five participants expressed their interest in learning in a structured manner based on course content and related applications only. These five participants also showed interests in out-of-class learning of using available resources to understand what they have been taught earlier in class.

Out of the seven participants that showed interest in online learning, participant M stated that “online learning gives me the freedom to learn at my pace without the interference of others.” In addition, participant L said, “I like that I can do it on my own and at my own convenience.” Participant D said, “I could do this at home at my convenience and I could spend an hour or two focusing on the content.” Participant C stated that she likes online learning and in her words, she said, “you can download and access material whenever you have time. It is also flexible for time.” “I have good experience with online learning. I do not feel I was taking class” stated, participant A. In the view of online learning, participant H stated, “I like online learning. You can listen
again and again to lectures.” The seventh participant that showed interest in online learning said, “you have the opportunity to go back to what has been taught previously in class.”

During the interview, a diverging learning style was identified in one participant. The participant explained by saying “I have preference for in-class teaching. I need to see the expression of the professors. I prefer the eye-to-eye teaching and learning. You get to enjoy the class together with other students through interactive sessions creatively set up by the professor. The professors provide opportunities to demonstrate ideas. We students then act them out like a real situation. I love that I will be able to read the expressions of my professors.” The participant explained her love for interactive, in-class learning by showing non-verbal expressions that depict excitement.

The other five participants expressed likeness for structured type of learning with little or no distractions as a result of class activities. They explained that they preferred listening to the explanation of course contents. Participant B said, “I do not like when there is too much to participate in, I don’t find it pleasant. It makes me feel miserable. I prefer going straight to content.” Participant E explained that “we spent a whole class talking about irrelevancies that were not associated with content. At the end of the class, I was not happy.” Participant F said, “I do not like that I am being forced to talk when I don’t want to because of class activities.” Participant G expressed that “I am used to when instructor teaches and speaks about the content. Classes here are full of discussions that are not related to the course content. I leave these classes thinking that
I have learnt nothing.” In addition, participant J explained that “I am completely lost in half of the classes with activities.”

Overall, 11 of the participants expressed their perception of the teaching styles of faculty members to be active teaching style. Only two of the participants shared a different view. They both indicated that faculty members follow a mixed method approach of teaching. They stressed that they used the appropriate method of teaching depending on the course content. All the participants (100%) perceived that faculty members in their home country follow the passive style of teaching. One participant felt a sense of this, saying, “teachers in my country just teach. We don’t ask questions and we don’t question them. Whatever they teach, we just learn.” Another said, “we rarely go to our instructors to ask for things.” Additionally, a participant went further by saying “here, instructors and students connect better than in my home country.” These findings explained that international students have diverse learning styles. It explains the need for faculty members to identify and match their teaching styles to the expectations of their international students.

**Research question 2:** What are the challenges faced by international graduate students in the learning process?

Most of the participants were excited to share the difficulties they encountered at the onset of their academic journey in UF. Language and cultural shock were mostly mentioned during the interview (Table 4-2). The participants that did not have English language as their prior language of instruction expressed language as the most difficult challenge they encountered. Participant A said “although I have been taking English courses in the past, the language remains the problem.” Another participant reported
that her advisor was patient with her in terms of language. The advisor was willing to give her time to process her thoughts.

Participants that had English language as their prior language of instruction rarely express language as a difficulty. Carter (1991) explained that international students from countries that follow the European academic standards experience less contrast in language, on getting to the U.S. A participant said she felt better in class than her fellow international students. She said “I felt better than the students who had their bachelors in their home language. I had mine in English language.” However, participant J who had English language as prior language of instruction said “I understand and can speak English but I do not hear professors in class because of their accent. They also speak too fast.”

Some participants were more concerned about how nervous they could be during class discussions. This is exemplified in a follow-up interview on a participant. The interview revealed her thoughts on how language as being a barrier to sharing her opinion in class. The participant said, “I don’t like to share my feelings about something discussed in class. I feel they won’t understand me.” The participant went further by expressing her dislike for presentations. Another participant mentioned something close. She said “Sometimes when I am trying to speak a word, my accent was challenging to others to hear me.” Overall, participants revealed about 10 challenges they had faced at the onset of their academic journey in UF. Some were quick to say that they were still in the process of overcoming the challenges and adapting to the norm.
**Research question 3.** What are the perceptions of international graduate students of the socio-communicative styles of faculty members?

This study explored perceptions to have a descriptive understanding of the opinions and views of the socio-communicative behavior of faculty members. This exploration revealed elements of assertiveness and responsiveness behaviors of faculty members. As discussed in Chapter 2, the degree of responsiveness and assertiveness predicts the perception of an individual’s communicative behavior. Henning (2010) explained that individuals that exhibit responsive behaviors have high levels of character. This explanation holds true for the participants of this study. During the interview, participants shared their perceptions of faculty members and they gave reasons for how they perceived them. They talked about the in-class and out-of-class experiences they had with faculty members. They also compared faculty members in UF/IFAS with faculty members in their home countries.

**Findings on Responsiveness Behavior**

The participants were asked about their perception of communicative behaviors of faculty members. An analysis of their responses revealed themes regarding the items of responsiveness behaviors as developed by Richmond and McCroskey (1995). Approximately 70% \( (n = 9) \) of the participants perceived most of the faculty members in UF to have high responsiveness behaviors. As revealed through the interviews, the participants stated that faculty members were “helpful, kind, patient, caring, friendly, nice, open, available, and responsible”. These elements recurred in all the 70% participants that perceived most faculty members to have high responsive behaviors. Some of the outstanding responsiveness behavior themes across the interviews, as self-reported by participants were: Participant B stated that “they are nice,” “they are
always patient,” and “if you do not understand something and you ask, they are always there for you.” Participant E stated that “they relate with you as friends.” Participant F stated that “they are available, they are willing to hear, and they are willing to meet with students and discuss their problems.” See Table 4-3 for more information on the synonymy of the themes and responsiveness behavior items.

**Findings on Assertiveness Behavior**

Out of the participants that were interviewed, about 29% (n = 4) perceived that faculty members exhibit assertiveness behaviors. Participant H said, “My advisor can be pushy, she keeps pushing me to do more.” Participant G explained this assertiveness behavior through an experience with a faculty member on grade issues. The participant reported that the faculty member was rigid and said “I can say an answer is right today and wrong tomorrow and you cannot do anything to change that.” See Table 4-4 for more information on the synonymy of the themes and assertiveness behavior items.

Overall, most participants perceived faculty members’ behavior at UF as responsive rather than assertive. In comparison to participants’ home countries, most participants perceived the communicative behaviors of faculty members in their home country to be assertive rather than responsive. Participant K said “Professors in my country are unapproachable and most of the time, controlling.” Participant M said “back home, professors act alone with little or no contribution from the students in terms of research.” The exhibition of responsiveness behavior more than assertiveness behavior by faculty members in UF categorized them as being submissive while the exhibition of assertiveness behavior more than responsiveness behavior by faculty members in some home countries of the participants categorized them as being aggressive. The findings align with the discussion in chapter 2 on how Richmond and McCroskey (1995)
categorized SCS of individuals based on varying degrees of assertiveness and responsiveness behaviors.

**Research Question 4.** What coping mechanisms do students report to have found helpful in adjusting to their new learning environment?

At the beginning of the interview, participants were asked about the challenges they faced at the beginning of their academic journey in UF. Some of the responses they gave toward the coping mechanisms they found helpful tied back to some of the challenges earlier mentioned. For example, they perceived the language barrier as a challenge that can be solved with time and so, they looked for means to overcome it. From their experiences, the coping mechanisms they found helpful were connected to cognitive, emotional, and social behaviors.

In relating the cognitive behaviors to the coping mechanisms reported, Participant I shared her tip. She said, “I found google helpful.” Some other participants also explained how they rely on the Internet and other international students to guide them through expectations. Participant H explained her own view on the coping mechanisms she found helpful. She stated, “I record classes in order to later digest it on my own. I had to do this because of the language barrier.”

When challenged with the stress of adapting to a new learning environment, some participants directed their coping mechanisms toward emotions. They said they remind themselves of the reason they left their country to study in the U.S. Instead of going through the feeling of how hard it could be for them to adapt in the U.S., some said they transferred their thoughts into the determination needed to succeed in their endeavors. In participant D’s self-reflection, she said “I go with the mindset that I have
to do what I have got to do." She tried not to focus her attention on the difficulties related with adaptation but instead, she drove her energy towards a positive self-motivational thought.

Nearly all the participants mentioned a social behavioral coping mechanism. About 38% (n = 5) of the participants stated that they found interaction with fellow international students helpful. Some mentioned that they got support from their advisors and other faculty members. These findings are consistent with the literature. Zhang and Goodson (2011) identified 13 studies from the literature that found social support as a predictor to the adaptation rate of international students to U.S. Lee (2012) also found that international students that had the support of faculty members and classmates adapted easily. In addition, a participant said, “I tried paying attention to others without judging them based on our cultural differences.” The view of this participant supports the literature on the type of behavior that is expected of an individual that is an intercultural competent communicator. Chen (1990) identified cultural awareness as part of the skills of an intercultural competent individual.

Summary

The findings from this study showed the admittance of participants about the stress of adapting to a new learning environment and the type of difficulty they go through in the process. It further elucidated their views of the SCS of faculty members, teaching styles of faculty members, and their self-perception of learning styles.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>AS</td>
<td>Doctoral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>AS</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>AS</td>
<td>Doctoral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>Trinidad</td>
<td>AEC</td>
<td>Doctoral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31-35</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>ENT</td>
<td>Doctoral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>Trinidad</td>
<td>AEC</td>
<td>Doctoral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>AMCB</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>AMCB</td>
<td>Doctoral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31-35</td>
<td>Middle East*</td>
<td>FRE</td>
<td>Doctoral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31-35</td>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>FRE</td>
<td>Doctoral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>31-35</td>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>NEM</td>
<td>Doctoral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>FRE</td>
<td>Doctoral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>Haiti</td>
<td>PP</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*A country from the Middle East. The name of the country was not included for confidentiality purpose.

AS = Animal Sciences; AEC = Agricultural Education and Communication; ENT = Entomology; AMCB = Animal Molecular and Cell Biology; FRE = Food and Resource Economics; PP = Plant Pathology; NEM = Nematology
Table 4-2. List of difficulties as mentioned by participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>No. of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of belonging</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusting to teaching style and content</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time management</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural shock and differences</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System and the norm in class</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronunciation and complexity of words</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjustment to work load</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active participation in class</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifestyle</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4-3. Recurring responsiveness items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsiveness behavior items</th>
<th>Synonymous and exact recurring themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helpful</td>
<td>Kind, supportive, accommodating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsive to others</td>
<td>Open, willing to hear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sympathetic</td>
<td>Caring, understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassionate</td>
<td>Kind,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitive to the needs of others</td>
<td>Willing to help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sincere</td>
<td>Fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gentle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly</td>
<td>Friendly, casual, approachable, informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertiveness behavior items</td>
<td>Synonymous and exact recurring themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defends own belief</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Not connected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forceful</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has strong personality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertive</td>
<td>Pushy, blunt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominant</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Willing to take a stand</td>
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<tr>
<td>Act as a leader</td>
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<tr>
<td>Competitive</td>
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CHAPTER 5
IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study described the perception of international graduate students in agricultural fields on socio-communicative, teaching, and learning style of UF and their home countries. Chapter 5 presents the implications and recommendations for future research. The implications of this study are for three audiences: International graduate students, host students and faculty members.

Faculty members, native students, and other staff members should create an emotional safe environment for international students. They can increase their openness and friendliness to help the international students settle well. Native students should be willing to interact with new international students. The findings of the study showed that some international students cope well with adaptation because of the kind of support they got from fellow students and faculty members. International students will easily pursue friendship with host students when the host students are receptive to diversity (Berry, 1997). Some of the experiences shared by international students on the experiences they had with faculty members were negative. Faculty members should make efforts toward showing positive attitudes to international graduate students. This will help to eradicate international students’ perception of discriminative behaviors from faculty members. There is a need for professors to identify and subsequently match their styles to meet the expectations of international students (Strang, 2009). All parts of the university population play a role in increasing diversity as globalization is being pursued.
International graduate students should be cognizant of the difficulties they may face in their new learning environment. They should be prepared to learn how to adapt to every situation in a timely manner. The responsibility of integrating to the host environment should also be on their shoulders. For example, a participant of the study advised that international students should be open to changes. The helpful coping mechanisms gained from the experiences of participants in this study can help to foster a positive academic experience for new international students. It is also important for international students to overcome the anxiety and fear of in-class discussions. They should worry less about whether their accents will impede the communication process. Instead, they should embrace the beauty of diversity in language from one culture to another. One participant said, “When you get to class, ensure that you voice your opinion on a topic. If you bring examples, people will be interested in discussing it”. Another participant said “discussion in class will help people to learn from your own cultural perspective”.

The study findings revealed that the participants have different learning styles. The view of the seven participants about their interests in online learning align with the explanation given by Kolb and Kolb (2005) of the convergent learning style. Convergers learn by themselves and they prefer online learning to in-class learning (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). One of the participant followed the diverging learning style by expressing her love for in-class interactive learning. Divergers love to learn by conversing and using opportunities provided to apply what has been learned (Di Murro & Terry, 2007). Five participants followed the assimilating learning style. This is consistent with the finding of a study that reflected the lesson learned about intercultural understanding for teachers.
in higher education. In the study, Strang (2009) found that students from cultural backgrounds other than their teacher expect the teacher to have an answer to every question. Di Murro and Terry (2007) explained that these types of students (assimilators) prefer the structured way of learning.

The adaptation of instruction to fit the learning styles can lead to improved learning. Faculty members teaching graduate students should be aware of the diversity they can encounter and be willing to adjust their teaching style gradually to meet the needs of the students. While most of the participants in this study were not enthusiastic about the active teaching style, some participants showed excitement for the style because of the opportunity for in-class application of content. The application of relevant content to everyday activities through class groupings and interactions can improve learning and also foster socialization among native and international students. Faculty members should also be willing to explain the importance of in-class discussions and interactions among students. The learning style of each participant combines two learning modes or behaviors (abstract conceptualization, active experimentation, concrete experience, and reflective observation) as explained by Kolb and Kolb (2005). However, this study did not found any theme reflecting the combination of active experimentation and concrete experience modes. An introduction of elements of each of the modes into lectures can be a way of integrating the four learning styles in one class.

The frequent challenges reported by the participants were language, cultural shock, and cultural differences. This finding is consistent with how Zhang (2010) found that factors like acculturation and English proficiency predict how quickly an international student adapts to the U.S.
Although this study did not directly observe the influence of international graduate students’ perception of faculty members’ SCS on learning, it looked at the perception of international graduate students of the SCS of faculty members and found that faculty members in IFAS/UF exhibited responsive behaviors. Henning (2010) found that instructors that are perceived to be flexible and responsive would have helped students to learn by such behaviors. The goal of instructional communication is to enhance learning (Clark, 2002).

**Recommendations for Application**

As universities encourage diversity and globalization, trainings that will help develop competencies in intercultural communication should be designed for faculty members teaching in a culturally diverse environment. These trainings may include and not limited to how to avoid a one size fits all approach in the classroom, how to adjust instructional communication to the needs of international students, and how to overcome the barriers to an effective intercultural communication. These trainings will help faculty members to control semantic noises imposed by cultural differences. Faculty members should also learn how to speak slowly and be cognizant of any difficulty an international student may have as a result of accent and language barriers.

The findings from this study categorized faculty members in IFAS/UF as submissive communicators because of their high responsiveness and low assertiveness behaviors. As much as this is a good category based on the explanation of Richmond and McCroskey (2005), a competent communicator is regarded as an individual with a high responsiveness and assertiveness behaviors. Therefore, trainings can be targeted toward helping faculty members to reach a considerable combination of the
assertiveness and responsiveness behaviors that will qualify them as competent communicators.

A good part of the orientation program conducted for international students should include information they will find helpful in relating to domestic students and faculty members in their various departments. This will hasten the rate of adaptation to a new learning environment. Also, it will reduce the stress and anxiety associated with the adaptation process. International students’ counselors available in the university should be trained on how they can successfully guide students to accept changes and challenges as part of education.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

In terms of research, this study should be replicated in different disciplines besides agriculture to determine if the findings are true for international students in other fields of study in the U.S. The perception of American students studying in other countries of faculty members can be explored. It will also be interesting to see if American students have similar experiences when they study in another country. A more detailed, longitudinal observation, on the life of international graduate students in agriculture in UF could be further looked into using a larger sample.

A need assessment research that will target issues of cultural diversity and intercultural communication competence can be conducted among faculty members in UF graduate school. This will help to inform the school administration on how to create and conduct trainings that would be beneficial to faculty members based on their needs. The trainings will help faculty members to adjust and carry out their responsibilities dutifully in the culturally diverse population they encounter in classrooms.
Findings of this study suggest that participants tend to get over the language barrier depending on the number of years spent in the U.S. However, the study did not gather specific information on the number of years the participants have spent in the U.S. A longitudinal study will help to elucidate the influence of years of study in the U.S. on the adaptation and adjustment rate of international students to the teaching style in U.S. The longitudinal study would create an avenue to share and compare stories of experiences at different times.

One of the research questions of this study was to understand and describe the perceptions of international graduate students of the barriers they encounter, as well as, coping mechanisms they reportedly found helpful. Interviews were conducted with thirteen international graduate students from different countries. Out of the thirteen students that were interviewed, seven had English language as a previous language of instruction and the remaining six had other languages except English as previous language of instruction. This study can be targeted at international students that had other languages except English as previous language of instruction. This might give information on the differences in the experiences of non-English speakers and English speakers.

Another purpose of the study was to understand the perceived degree of responsiveness and assertiveness behavior of faculty members by international graduate students. Versatility as the third component of SCS was not considered specifically in this study, although, some participants shared experiences in the area. In moving forward from the findings of this study, a research with a focus on the perceptions of international graduate students on the cognitive flexibility (versatility) of
faculty members should be conducted. This will contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between the three components of SCS.

Specific research can also be conducted to determine the impact of intercultural communication competencies on the adjustments process of international graduate students to U.S. The factors that affect and contribute to the difficulties encountered by international students can also be explored explicitly. A study that will observe the relationship between international students’ perception of instructional communication and cognitive, affective, and behavioral learning can be conducted to understand the impact of instructional communication in the U.S. on the learning of international students.

As a result of the non-generalizability nature of the study to a large population, a study that will be generalizable to all the international graduate students in UF should be conducted. The study can be carried out using the mixed method approach to allow for triangulation. Triangulation will help to reach a logical conclusion on the population, using different approach on the same sample observed in the study. This type of study, if considered, will better inform the decisions taken by school administration toward helping international students adapt and settle quickly into their host learning environment.
APPENDIX A
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

Institutional Review Board Approval

DATE: 2/9/2017
TO: Adeola Opude
FROM:

DATE: 08/28/2017
TITLE: International Graduate Students’ Perception of Social-Communicative, Teaching, and Learning Styles in UF

Approved as Exempt

You have received IRB approval to conduct the above-listed research project. Approval of this project was granted on 2/9/2017 by IRB-60. This project is approved as exempt because it poses minimal risk and is approved under the following exempt category/categories:

2. Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey or interview procedures, or the observation of public behavior, so long as confidentiality is maintained. If both of the following are true, exempt status cannot be granted: (a) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that the subject can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subject, and (b) subject's responses, if known outside the research, could reasonably place the subject at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subject's financial standing or employability or reputation.

Special notes to Investigator:

In the myIRB system, exempt approved studies will not have an approval stamp on the consents, forms, etc. However, the documents reviewed are the ones that should be used. So, when ATTACHMENTS you should find the document that has been reviewed and approved. If you need to modify the document(s) in anyone manner then you need to submit to our office for review and approval prior to implementation.

Principal Investigator Responsibilities:

The PI is responsible for the conduct of the study.

• Using currently approved consent form to enroll subjects (if applicable)
• Removing your study before expiration
• Obtaining approval for revisions before implementation
• Reporting adverse events
• Reconciliation of Research Records
• Obtaining approval to conduct research at the UF
• Notifying other parties about this project's approval status

If the nature of the study change or you need to revise the protocol in any manner please contact this office prior to implementation.

Study Teams:

Lisa Lomfel Study Coordinator

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APPENDIX B
CONSENT FORM

International Graduate Students’ Perception of Socio-Communicative, Teaching, and Learning Style in University of Florida Graduate School

Department of Agricultural Education and Communication
P.O. Box 110540
University of Florida
Gainesville, FL 32611

LETTER OF CONSENT

Greetings!
You are invited to participate in a research study. It is being conducted by Adeola Ogunade, who is an International graduate student in UF for a thesis.
The study is about how international graduate students perceive communicative behavior and teaching styles of faculty members in UF graduate school. You have been chosen to be part of the study because you are an international graduate student in UF.
If you will like to be part of the study, you will be asked to participate in an interview. The interview should last about 60 minutes and it will be conducted in a room on UF campus after I might have received a copy of this signed consent form from you. You will not have to answer any question you do not wish to answer. Your interview will be conducted in person or by phone at your convenience. If you permit, I will like to audiotape this interview. All your information and data collected from the audiotaped interview will be treated with utmost confidentiality and erased after I transcribe it. Only I will have access to the tape. You will not be linked to anything you say. Your participation in the study could help other international graduate students as well as faculty members to improve academic experiences.
There are no risks, compensation or other direct benefits to you as a participant. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate and may leave the interview room at any point without consequence.

If you have any questions about this research protocol, please contact me at (352) xxx-xxxx or my faculty supervisor, Dr. Lisa Lundy, at (352) xxx-xxxx. Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant rights may be directed to the IRB02 office, University of Florida, Box 112250, Gainesville, FL 32611; (352) xxx-xxxx.

I have read the above description for International Graduate Student’s Perception of Socio-communicative, Teaching, and Learning Style in University of Florida Graduate School. I have been informed about what is being asked of me. I voluntarily agree to participate in the interview and I have received a copy of the study description.

_________________________                                   __________________________
Participant’s Name                                   Participant’s Signature/date
APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What year are you in your current program?
2. What is your field of study?
3. Are you a masters or doctoral student?
4. What are the difficulties you encountered at the onset of your academic journey in UF?
5. What was your perception of your most recent instructor?
6. What is your general perspective on teaching styles in UF graduate school in comparison to your home country?
7. How will you describe faculty member's communicative behavior?
8. What are the differences in communicative behavior you noticed in faculty members in UF and in your home country?
9. What are the similarities?
10. What specific incidence do you remember from your most recent encounter with a faculty member?
11. How do you feel about the experience?

Active learning is a diverse teaching and learning style that engages students and instructors in discussions. No one is a silent spectator (Muhammad et al., 2011).

Passive learning is a type of teaching and learning style in which education is only transferred from the instructor to the students, with little or no questions raised by the students (Muhammad et al., 2011).

1. Based on the definition, how will you describe the teaching styles you have encountered in UF graduate school?
2. What do you enjoy about the method? Why?
3. What part of this method do you dislike? Why?
4. What is your view about online learning?
5. Explain your preference between active and passive teaching styles based on the definition given?

6. Do you perceive the method to influence your learning? How?
APPENDIX D
INSTRUMENT MEASURING SOCIO-COMMUNICATIVE STYLE (SCS)

Directions: This questionnaire lists 20 personality characteristics. Please indicate the degree to which you believe each of these characteristics applies to another individual, as that individual normally communicates with others, by marking whether you (5) strongly agree that it applies (4) agree that it applies, (3) are undecided, (2) disagree that it applies, or (1) strongly disagree that it applies. There are no right or wrong answers. Work quickly; record your first impression.

_________ 1. Helpful
_________ 2. Defends own beliefs
_________ 3. Independent
_________ 4. Responsive to others
_________ 5. Forceful
_________ 6. Has strong personality
_________ 7. Sympathetic
_________ 8. Compassionate
_________ 9. Assertive
_________ 10. Sensitive to the needs of others
_________ 11. Dominant
_________ 12. Sincere
_________ 13. Gentle
_________ 14. Willing to take a stand
_________ 15. Warm
_________ 16. Tender
17. friendly
18. Acts as a leader
19. aggressive
20. Competitive

Scoring:

For the assertiveness score, add responses to items 2, 3, 5, 6, 9, 11, 14, 18, and 20.

For the responsiveness score, add responses to items 1, 4, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17.

LIST OF REFERENCES


Adeola Ogunade is from Nigeria. Florida became her second home when she moved there with her family to study. She worked on this completed project while studying at the University of Florida. In the future, she hopes to direct her energy towards research that covers animal welfare and nutrition, consumer perceptions and behaviors, and instructional communication. She plans to further her education to the doctorate level and hopes to run a non-governmental organization that helps rural farmers later in her years.