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Exploring the Anxiety State of the Science Majoring International Graduate Students with Conditional Acceptance in the United States

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Abstract

As the conditionally accepted students enroll in the graduate courses, not having met the English proficiency requirement in their program yet creates a vulnerable state of mind for them. This phenomenological study explores the anxiety state of the conditionally admitted international students at a US higher institution. Six science and engineering graduate students who have not yet met the English proficiency requirement participated in one-on-one and semi-structural interviews. Findings indicate that the students were at high risk of anxiety and depression, and less motivated than their peers because of the ongoing fear of being unsuccessful if they do not receive the required TOEFL score, or its equivalent, in the given time. The study findings help explore the severity of the anxiety and the depression the international students experience as they continue working to succeed in their career. Future implications and directions were discussed.

Introduction

The number of international students in science and engineering fields at higher institutions in the United States (US) is increasing. According to the National Science Foundation's recent report, the number of international graduate students who enrolled in science and engineering programs in the US increased 5.5% between fall 2013 and fall 2014 (National Science Foundation, 2016). This increase on the number of the international students in the United States leads scholars to involve the international students' life and issue in research. Lessons learned from research addressing the issues experienced by the international students are particularly important for the efforts to increase the quality of higher education and its endeavor in the US.

English language proficiency skills of international students have long been a concern for universities and educators. Research addressing international students has comprehensively focused on issues including aspects of cultural adaptation, social adjustment and learning difficulties (Benzie, 2010, Baker & Hawkins, 2006; Chalmers & Volet, 1997). These studies have reported that English language proficiency skills of international students are related to their academic achievement in their program (Slama, 2012), social adjustment (Baker & Hawkins, 2006), and cultural integration (Benzie, 2010).

Recently, a particular group of international students has come under the spotlight – the international students with low levels of English ability at higher institutions in the US. Understanding feeling and experiences of these students is valuable to be examined for two reasons: a) their low levels of English ability may negatively influence their adaptation and academic studies in their programs (Benzie, 2010; Slama, 2012), and b) little is known about these students' own feeling (Dooey, 2010; Terraschke & Wahid, 2011). Therefore, we believe it is important to be heard these students' impressions and experiences.

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the experience and feelings of international students with limited English skills. For this aim, the study focuses on the experience of a particular group of international students - those who are admitted with a conditional admission. The international students with conditional admission are those who failed to provide proof of English language proficiency and are required to meet the proof of English proficiency before completing their academic studies. In literature although experiences of international students have been comprehensively researched, few studies have focused on the impressions of the international students with conditional acceptance (Dooey, 2010; Terraschke & Wahid, 2011). Therefore, there is a need for more studies to fully explore these students' own impressions and experiences to increase the quality of American higher education.

Conditional Acceptance and English Language Proficiency

In general, conditional admission is a pathway for students who failed to meet academic criteria for the direct admission. Without lowering the admission criteria for the direct admission, now many universities in the US and other countries are offering conditional admissions for undergraduate and graduate students as an alternative. In the conditional admission, the students are required whether to participate in pre-requisite courses before starting their academic programs or to fully meet the admission criteria before completing their degree of study. The purpose and the scope of the conditional admission vary based on the admission criteria. In some cases, high school GPA score or ACT scores or high school prerequisite courses play a role in conditional admission. For example, a university located in central US offers conditional admissions for those who have high school GPA scores below 2.75 for non-residents and 2.5 for residents (Heaney & Fisher, 2011).

In other cases, just for international students, students' levels of English proficiency play a role in conditional admission. The increase on the number of international students has also brought a need for changes at curriculum and policy levels to integrate diverse culture and language backgrounds into academic life at higher institutions. Therefore, addition to meeting academic criteria, higher institutions in the US require all prospective international students whose native language is not English have to provide proof of English language proficiency, usually a minimum cut-off score on the Test of English as Foreign Language (TOEFL) or other proficiency tests. This minimum cut-off score is usually determined by departments. As an alternative, now many higher institutions offer conditional admission for international students who failed to meet English proficiency to make it more appealing to them. Some universities require these international students with conditional admission to enroll in English Language Programs (ELP) and successfully complete English language courses including writing, speaking, listening and reading. Such an example can be University of Denver (See http://www.du.edu/media/documents/graduates/toefl_ielts_table.pdf). In this example, international students who failed to meet a minimum 80 internet-based TOEFL or 6.0 IELTS score can be admitted with conditional admission.

One of difficulties that international students may encounter is academic language proficiency. Cummins and Man Yee Fun (2007) define academic language proficiency as the extent to which an individual's skills to understand and express the ideas and concepts that are related to her discipline of study in both oral and written forms. Researchers have reported that even students who have met a minimum score on the proficiency tests for the direct admission are mostly likely to face difficulties during their academic life and after graduation because of their English language skills. It is because that in academia students are exposed to the less frequently used vocabulary of English and expected to interpret the highly complex oral and written language. Therefore, researchers have claimed that students need to be exposed to at least five years of academic language to meet the native-speaker norms (Cummins & Man Yee Fun, 2007; Thomas, & Collier, 2002)

Addition to difficulties related to the field of study, research has demonstrated that international students with low levels of English skills are exposed to difficulties in the adjustment to the cultural life in the US. Research has revealed that adjustment to a new cultural life is reported to be the primary issue for the international students (Biggs, 2003; Hellsten, 2002; Klomegah, 2006; Liu & Winder, 2012; Novera, 2004; Tananuraksakul & Hall, 2011; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Adjustment to the role and requirement of the American culture is an important psychological process due to their effects on the performance and functioning of the individual. Since the adjustment involves linguistic and cultural disorientation which can be unpredictable and uncertain, it is a challenging experience for the international students (Tananuraksakul & Hall, 2011). This unpredictable and uncertain situation can lead to anxiety (Tananuraksakul & Hall, 2011). Therefore, students' English language skills play critical role on their adjustment process because it affects their academic performance and their adaptation level to the American culture (Poyrazli, Arbona, Bullington, & Pisecco, 2001).

Attending in a pathway program prior to taking graduate courses may positively influence on the impressions of international students with conditional admission. For example, Terraschke and Wahid (2011) reported that the students who attended in the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program seemed to have more confident and awareness of demands in written assignments, and more effectively speak of learning strategies than those who gained the direct admission. Nevertheless, some international students, especially graduate ones, appear to have difficulties and adjustment problems after attending in such programs. For instance, in her study with graduate and undergraduate students Dooley (2010) reported that participants seemed that, although they found an EAP program very useful, they still encountered some difficulties related to their English language proficiency including communicating with their mates including attending class or group discussions and not being able to articulate sophisticated ideas in English. Therefore, because post-graduate students seem to be

exposed to more pressure to succeed, studies should focus on the international graduate students' feeling and experience.

Research on international students has contributed to our understanding of the nature of issues experienced by international students to increase the quality of higher education in Western countries. Researchers have suggested that research on international students should be extended to the experience of international students with low levels of English language skills (Benzie, 2010; Dooney, 2010; Slama, 2012). To date, few studies have examined the experience of international students with conditional admission that requires students enrolled in a full-time EAP program before starting their degree of study in Western Universities. However, some universities do not require conditionally admitted students enrolled in a full-time EAP program. Instead, addition to taking an EAP course (e.g., speaking), these students are required to enroll full-time in courses in their degree of study. One such example is a university in the southern US which requires conditionally admitted students enroll in both courses in their degree of study and the EAP program. These students differ from other conditionally admitted international students on completion of their academic studies because they are also required to meet a minimum cut-off score on proficiency tests as studying in their degree of program. Not only are these students more likely to have issues highlighted in the previous studies with low levels of English language skills, pressure to complete the requirement for the direct admission. We believe that the feelings and anxiety states of these students is valuable to be explored. We haven't located a study in the literature involving the anxiety states of the international students who have been admitted with conditional admission in US higher institutions. This study will shed light on the nature of issues experienced by international graduate students to increase the quality of higher education in science-related fields and in general.

Methods

The Context of the Study

In this study, the focus was given on those who major in science and engineering fields and pursue graduate degree. Examining conditionally admitted international graduate students in science and engineering is important for two reasons. First, according to the previous studies, graduate students seem to be exposed to more pressure to succeed than undergraduate students (Dooney, 2010). Second, according to the 2015 report from Institute for International Education, almost to half (44%) of international students who pursue a degree in the US were in a science and engineering field. This study was carried out at a higher institution at the southern US. In that higher institution, all international students who have not graduated from a high school (or bachelor's degree for graduate programs) in an English-speaking country must provide a minimum cut-off score in English proficiency test. The minimum cut-off score is 80 for internet-based TOEFL, 6.0 for IELTS or 53 for PTE Academic. International students who fail to meet the minimum cut-off score are those with conditional admission. At the beginning of fall and spring semesters, all international students with conditional admission are required to take English language tests in four areas including speaking, listening, writing, and reading. If a student fails to take a minimum 80 out of 100 score in any test area, she is required to enroll in and successfully complete (80 out of 100) an English language course provided by English Language Institution (ELI) on the test area which she has failed. Conditionally admitted students are required to successfully complete all four test areas, either by passing the test or the ELI course, within one academic year as they must be enrolled full-time in the courses in their degree of study. If the student meets the minimum cut-off score on proficiency tests within one year, she will be waived from language courses. The students who fail to meet these conditions will be dismissed from their degree of study.

Methods Section

Phenomenological study is the organized attempt to describe the internal meaning, essence, of lived experience. Phenomenology is not interested whether something actually happened but interested in what is the nature of essence of the experience (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). The focus of a phenomenological study is to capture the essence of the lived experiences of multiple individuals who experienced the same phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Moustakas, 1994). The commonalities as well as the differences of the experiences are the units of study in a phenomenology. Therefore, phenomenology is a suitable approach to describe these international students' anxiety states for two reasons. First, it is concerned with lived experiences of individuals what they experienced and how they experienced it (Creswell, 2007). Second, phenomenology is the study of the *lifeworld*, defined as "what we know best, what is always taken for granted in all human life,

always familiar to us in its typology through experience” (Cilesiz, 2009). Because the previous studies reported that graduate students are more likely to be exposed to pressure (e.g., Dooley, 2010), the focus of this study was on graduate students. We have chosen a phenomenological approach to describe the essence of the lived experiences of the international students who failed to meet the proof of English proficiency in the TOEFL test yet admitted in their program of study and taking graduate courses.

Participant Selection Strategy

An English Language Institution (ELI) at a southern university in the US constituted as the participant pool. This institution was chosen because it provides English courses to the international students who failed to meet English proficiency. As a homogeneous group of participants is required for a phenomenological study (Creswell, 2007), we contacted the director of the institution to advertise our research invitation to the international students. Even though we had an approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), our request was rejected by the director. We consulted the IRB Office and we were told that we could conduct the study because our potential participants would be adult. Thus, we utilized convenience sampling strategy to save time and efforts and snow-ball sampling strategy to reach potential participants (Creswell, 2007). First, we contacted one potential participant who was the primary researcher’s classmates at graduate course and then asked him if he knew any other international student who had been conditionally admitted. Lastly, we contacted potential participants who the first participant suggested via the individual email. We followed the IRB requirements during the participant selection and data collection processes. After the snow-ball and convenience sampling strategies, we used the criterion sampling strategy (Creswell, 2007) to finalize the selection of the participants. As choosing potential participants, we looked for the students who have these criteria; (a) the one who did not get higher than 80 in TOEFL IBT test or 550 in paper version of TOEFL, and (b) the one who had been admitted to graduate school at the southern university.

Participants

We identified six students who; (a) did not receive a score higher than 80 in TOEFL IBT or 550 at its paper version, and (b) had been admitted to the graduate school in science and engineering programs at the university. 3 students were refused to participate in the study because of their schedule. Six one-on-one interviews were conducted with six students. The participants were four men (William, Gamma, Alpha, and Lee-- all pseudonyms), and two women (Beta and Lisa-- all pseudonyms), with ages ranging from 25 to 29 years. The participants were enrolled in a various science and engineering programs including mechanical engineering, physics, mathematics, mathematics education, and civil engineering. All participants’ most recent TOEFL scores were less than 80. Four participants were Turkish and two were Chinese.

Data Collection

We collected the primary data through one-on-one interviews with open-ended questions. Each interview took around 40-50 minutes. Interviews were conducted at a site chosen by the participants, in April 2012. We obtained internal review board approval through the Office of Research Compliance and used the consent forms in the data collection. Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim.

The following questions comprised the semi-structured interview protocol: (a) What is the meaning of learning a secondary language? This question was a general and a warm-up question that we aimed to hear the participants’ experience and feeling about learning English and help them warm-up for the conversation. (b) What did you feel when you heard that you failed the TOEFL test? This question allowed the participants to talk and express their feelings about the failure, which is a major part of the phenomenon being studied. (c) How does this affect your life in general and your motivation in your program of study? This question provided some essential about the impact of the phenomenon being lived through by the participants. (d) How do you cope with the frustration? This question allowed for more understanding of the participants’ feelings, and possible ways they have developed to cope with the frustration the requirement might have caused (this is an emerged question because literature and the participants reported the frustration). The interviewer asked several other emerging questions during the conversations that did not listed here but used in the data collection and analysis.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed through the procedures of phenomenological analysis, as described by Creswell (2007). In the first step, we read the transcripts for overall to understanding and listed every expression relevant to the phenomenon under study. This resulted in a list of 42 significant statements. Then, we took the significant statements and then group them into larger units of information to reduce and eliminate overlapping significant statements (See Table 1). We tried not to disrupt the original meaning but to distinguish the meaning by reflecting on the verbatim statements.

Table 1. Examples of invariant structure and their corresponding meaning units

Invariant Structure	Meaning Unit
I just want to pass it.	Compulsory requirements lead to a feeling of unwillingness
She was sorry for her pronunciation	Inability to pronounce correctly is experienced as a feeling of embarrassment
Most of them evaluate my performance on my writing	Inability to write well is a barrier for grade
It is difficult for me to express my feeling in English	Inability to speak well is experienced as a barrier for social life
The most difficult thing is to not express who you are	Difficulty of expressing self
I do not mind being alone	Isolation
I am away from my family and in type of strange atmosphere that very hard to be	Feeling strange

Next, we wrote a description of ‘what’ the participants experienced with phenomenon and ‘how’ the experience happened (See table 2). As creating themes, we considered the phenomenon would be the same if we changed or delete some themes. Finally, we wrote a composite description of the phenomenon incorporating both the textural and structural descriptions according to the description of analyzing data by Creswell (2007). An expert in the field analyzed 25% of data and agreement rate was 92%. Disagreement was solved with discussion.

Table 2. Samples of three emerging themes and corresponding meaning units

Theme	Meaning Units
Barrier	Limited word using on writing
	Trying to copy from the sources they read
	Inability to write well is a barrier for grade
Unwillingness	Conceded weakness
	Taking English course is a wasting time
	Difficulties to speak English leads to unwillingness to speak
Feeling isolated	Self-expression problem
	Negative effect on productivity and psychology

Findings

We created a set of themes, textual description, and an essence of the phenomenon from the significant statements and meaning units that can be understood as “what happened” surrounding the central experience of the international student who failed to meet the proficiency of English. As an essence of the phenomenon from the significant statements and meaning units, the following four themes emerged: (a) unwillingness, (b) barrier, (c) feeling isolated, and (d) what-if

Unwillingness

The compulsory requirement of universities for the international students’ language skills was the pervading image for participants with language courses. English courses that participants were taking were described as

“wasting time”. Although they believe English skill is a crucial factor on their success at graduate school, they are unwilling to take any English language course. One reason for this unwillingness is that English courses they are taking affect negatively their schedule at the graduate school. Gamma described his experience as following:

Gamma: “It takes my time. That affects my other courses, maybe schedule. Normally I have two face-to-face courses ... but because of that English language course, I have to go to school four days a week”

Another important reason why participants did not want to attend in any English language course is that they do not believe that courses would improve their English skills. Rather than attending the course and improving their language skills, they just want to pass the required course and test. This feeling was expressed by Lee as following:

Lee: “I just want to pass the course. The first time I did not attend in the class. Just hold it. It make a lot of time. I did not do any homework. Then I thought I need to pass the class and the exam.”

All participants stated their unwillingness to take course or tests related English proficiency. The words, “*just*”, and “*wasting time*”, can be the indicator of their low level of motivation towards learning English or taking tests. The students’ motivation towards learning English may negatively influence their learning process. If they have the low level of motivation, they are more like to fail the test and courses. That situation can lead them to feel more pressure and anxiety, and go through unpredictability about their future at the higher institution and in general. This unpredictable and uncertain situation can reverse with more anxiety (Samovar et al., 2007).

Barrier

The participants described their English language skill as a barrier to be admitted to graduate school, and to accomplish their studies at graduate school. They stated that their low scores from TOEFL test had prevented them from being admitted to a better university even if they were good at their program of study. Also, they stated that their English language skills had a negatively influence on their success at their graduate studies. They highlighted the difficulties they had in understanding academic lectures, idioms, and jokes. All six participants stated that their poor English proficiency had a negative impact on their communication with professors and peers. Addition to these, they underscored that they would not be admitted to graduate schools with their TOEFL scores. They believe that they were admitted because they were the sponsored students that their tuitions were paid by third person. Beta described his experience as following:

Beta: “For each class I have at least three or four presentations in front of the class, my classmates, and the professor. And most of them evaluate my performance based on my writing, speaking, and presenting skills. Because I am not good at English, I fear to get a low grade”

All six participants expressed their writing skill is the most challenging barrier to their success at graduate school. They believe the better they write the higher grade they take. The obstacle on writing English, they believe, is because the languages of academia and spoken are different. They have to use different words to describe the same meaning. Also, they admit that they have limited vocabulary knowledge, this forces them to copy another person’s writing or look for synonyms of words on the paper. That leads them not to express their thoughts, and accept another person’s. Linda and Gamma expressed their feeling as following:

Linda: “Our professors point out my writing for every time. After I submit, they give feedbacks about my writing. They said that I need to work hard to get a better writer. In feedback, sentences I wrote were highlighted with red. This makes me upset and I don’t think I will get a good score.”

Gamma: “It is difficult for me to write a very good discussion paper. I would like to articulate my ideas in my writing but because of limited vocabulary, I am not able to do it. So, I am forced to copy words from other people’s writing, not say what I want to say, and keep my writing short.”

Feeling Isolated

Communication with other peers is described as another challenge by the participants because of their poor speaking English skill. In their social life and in classroom, their speaking skill had a strong negative impact on communicating with others. The participants expressed that the most difficult in their life was expressing their ideas and who they were. Because of the poor English proficiency, they felt like they were always under

pressure and would never feel completely free as much as they wanted. While socializing with peers, they always felt like they were not reflecting their real personalities to other people and this made them hesitant in most social environments. Lee, for example, mentioned that these kinds of feelings and restrictions highly had a negative effect on his productivity and his psychology was also greatly affected. He said that these feelings were the biggest challenge on this campus. They expressed that sometimes not knowing the phase to respond to their partner forced them to be silent, and consequently they feel that they may seem rude. Lisa and Alpha expressed their feeling as following:

Lisa: "When I was in classroom, I prefer be silent. I do not want to add any comment because of my English skill."

Alpha: "Academia is different from our normal life. So, we have to learn both languages. Spoken language is very difficult for me. This prevents me get socialized with other peers. Thus, I prefer to stay at home, not hanging out"

The participant expressed to feel embarrassment because of being unable to speak English well. They mentioned that when they did not know how to pronounce the word, or mispronounced it, they felt sorry because of their pronunciation. They highlighted that sometimes people did not understand what they had said and they might have to repeat several times. We cannot expect all people tolerate the participants' pronunciation. And consequently this feeling led them to be kept away from social interaction with others. William and Gamma described that experience as following:

".. While I was doing my presentation, several times I had to say sorry because of my pronunciation."

"I usually go to the restaurant I am familiar. Sometimes I go to new restaurants with my friends. Ordering food makes me very nervous because I don't understand what the waiter says. So, I order what my friends order."

What-if

The periods of admission to graduate school and taking TOEFL test were defined as a period that is the full of "what-if" questions by the participants. Not taking the required score from TOEFL tests drove the participants into uncertainty situation about their future. The uncertainty for their future is described as a) being admitted to graduate school or b) coming to the end for educational career and returning to their home without managing to enter in graduate school. Of course, being unable to enter in graduate school is just to not enter graduate school for the international students. It has more meaning than this because they spend a lot of money and efforts by taking English courses, being adapted to different culture while doing what usual applicants do, and their parents have high expectation because of the fact that parents spend more money. This period that full of "what-if" questions led the international students to feel more stress. Not only does taking TOEFL test cause to that stress but also the uncertainty about the future, fearing from disappoint their family, and returning back their country with a failure trigger the stress. The students reported that they were good in their field of the study; however, they felt uncertainty about their future in field of study. Alpha, Beta and William described that experience as following:

Alpha: "And a lot of people have expectation about you. I think that this was not easy. Sometimes, I could not sleep. It leaded a lot of pain in my stomach and head because you think a lot of time "what-if"."

Beta: "Sometimes I fear what if I don't pass the TOEFL. It is very difficult for us to focus on my study program because if I don't pass the TOEFL, I will dismiss my program even if all my grades are A."

William: "I came from Turkey. I quitted my job for this sponsorship. If I lose it because of not passing TOEFL, that makes me very upset and disappointed."

Conclusion and Study Limitations

The problem that led the study for international graduate student was the adaptation to American culture and difficulties that are found in international student before admission and after it. An examination of the lived experience of students who not meet the proficiency of English followed. Since the voices of these students are often heard from afar and the literature just heard the people who met the proficiency of English, we chose a phenomenological approach, in which the experience of these people could be fully explored. In the process of developing the essence, the present study findings have important implications for the research in the issues of the international students and science and engineering programs.

Anxiety refers to an individual's perceptions of unpredictable and aversive events (Barlow, 2002; Kaya & Avci, 2016). In other words, anxiety is the response system to aversive events that are uncontrollable and threaten the individual. Analysis of the data revealed four themes regarding anxiety including barrier, unwillingness, what-if and feeling isolated. For instance, a special form of anxiety is the future anxiety which states that a state of uncertainty and worries about the future (Kaya & Avci, 2016). The theme, *what-if*, addresses the uncertainty and worry of international students with the conditional admission about their future. Findings of this study showed that not taking the required score from TOEFL tests put international students into uncertainty situation about their future. Similarly, the themes, barrier and unwillingness, address the thought that students' English language skills had a negative influence on their success at their graduate studies, which potentially lead to the state of text anxiety, which refers to extreme distress and anxiety in testing. Lastly, feeling isolated is most likely to have international students feel loneliness, which is an aversive experience of depression and anxiety.

Consistent with the previous research, the international students' language proficiency in English plays a role on their academic success (Abasi & Graves, 2008; Davis, 2013; Poyrazli et al., 2001; Sawir et al., 2009; Skyrme, 2010). In addition to this, we found that the international students prefer copying other people's studies because of their writing skills (Abasi & Graves, 2008). As their language skill is not enough to express their feeling in social interaction, on the academic studies international students incline to accept other opinions rather than expressing their opinion (Davis, 2013). Moreover, participants avoid speaking and interacting with other peers because of being embarrassed of pronunciation and miscommunication (Skyrme, 2010). While they interact with other peers, they do not feel that they belong to the conversation and consequently they avoid social interaction with the native speakers. They feel that they are not welcomed in the social environment, and they prefer speaking with the individuals who speak the same language (Skyrme, 2010).

An interesting finding of this study is that these students are different from other international students who are required to enroll in full-time EAP course. In addition to issues reported by the students who participated in Dooley (2010)'s and Terraschke and Wahid (2011)'s studies, the participants of this study indicated that they were experiencing the fear of being dismissed from their degree of study even if they were successful in their degree of study. This is important because these international students seem to be more vulnerable to anxiety and depression while taking a high level of courses in their degree of study. This finding demonstrates that these students were exposed to the fear of being unsuccessful at their program if they do not pass the proficiency tests in the given time.

Another important finding of this study is that the students reported that they were not ready and willing to take any courses from the ELI. Terraschke and Wahid (2011)'s study demonstrated international students with low levels of English skills got benefit from attending in pre-requisite language courses. The EAP students in their study showed having more confidence and awareness of demands in written assignments than non-EAP. However, the students in this study viewed the courses in ELI as a wasting time. The previous study reported international students need at least five years in their field of the study to catch up their native-speaker peers. However, these international students entered into graduate courses without taking any preparatory courses. Because they needed to spend much time for the graduate class assignments, they were not willing to take any language course. Therefore, these are more likely to miss benefits from courses in ELI.

The findings suggested that the international students should be prepared mentally, emotionally, and physically before enrolling in a higher institution in the US for graduate studies. Moreover, on the one hand, prospective students should be aware of these issues and problems they may face during their graduate studies and do whatever they can to prepare themselves; on the other hand, before they leave their homeland they should learn more about the differences between the homeland and North America by taking a course or workshop, which would be a great stepping block into the North American culture.

From the individual stories we heard, ELIs should create more opportunities for the international students to socialize with the native speakers. The language departments at the university should collaborate with each other to match American students who are interested in learning foreign language with the international students. This sort of collaboration can create a better learning environment for both language learners, and reduce the social anxiety on the international students.

As the English language proficiency levels of the international students have long been a concern in universities (Benzie, 2010), the higher institutions should reduce course works on the international students. Like all the participants mentioned, the additional course work for English proficiency create an overwhelmed schedule for the international students, especially science and engineering students, and may have a negative impact on the international students' success on two sides. For this purpose, before the international students begin their

departmental studies, they can enroll in some preparation courses, lasting one or two months, that focus on improving the students' language proficiency under the orientation. Addition to this, Dooey (2010) suggested that courses in EAP should be divided into two groups of students a) undergraduate students and b) graduate students because language requirements are different for each level. The findings of this study suggest that EAP courses also should be divided according to the field of study and the content of the courses should be designed accordingly. For instance, if the content of an EAP course is designed in such a way like including reading texts about engineering or speaking about engineering, international students who want to major in field of engineering may not see this sort of course as wasting time.

Our research experiences suggest that ELI programs should be more willing to understand the oppression and the anxiety the international students' experience, and allow the interested researchers to conduct their research on the issues of international students. As a sign of ELI programs oppressive power upon the international students, refusing any research involving the international students are problematic and need to be addressed more systematically.

To sum up, this study has provided substantial and detailed information on the lived experience of the international students who are not yet satisfied the English proficiency requirements, yet is admitted in the graduate programs. The results are valuable for both educators and international student organizations. Since the focus of the study was the lived experiences of the international students who did not meet the proficiency of English Language and we collected the study data in English, participants might have not well explained their feeling. This is the primary study limitation that needs to be noted. The researchers who speak the same language with the participants as to better understand their feelings and their lived experiences can conduct future studies. Additionally, participants were just China and Turkey. There is a need for further studies involving participants from other countries, especially from South Korea and Saudi Arabia, where are among the top five countries from which international students in the US come (Institute of International Education, 2015).

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