

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: The Process of Intercultural Adaptation of a Group of Egyptian Scholars in the United States: Issues of Adaptation and Intercultural Stress

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The result of intercultural interactions, in particular the case of individuals traveling to another country for a certain period of time, often leads to intercultural stress, commonly referred to as culture shock. This is due to the changes in the environment, the differences between the cultures involved in terms of customs, attitudes, beliefs, dimensions of culture, and cultural orientations, among other factors.

Intercultural stress is a common phenomenon that has been studied for several decades. The way culture shock is experienced varies from one situation to another based on one's own cultural tendencies, the level of preparedness (intercultural awareness and understanding), and the intercultural interactions that take place within the context of the host culture. Intercultural stress affects the individual's behavior, attitudes, performance (at school, work, and even within the family), and the development of his/her social networks. It is also part of the process of adaptation into a new cultural environment.

This study is focused on the experience of a group of Egyptian scholars in the United States. It is an ethnographic research focused on the description of the perceptions, types of interactions, effects of cultural differences, sources of intercultural stress, and the strategies used to adapt to the new environment. The analysis of the

process of adaptation of this group of Egyptians is based on Bennett's (1993) model of intercultural adaptation (from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism).

The data analysis is divided into four main phases based on the methods of data collection: *Phase 1*: ethnographic semi-structured interviews conducted one week upon the arrival of the Egyptian scholars in the United States; *Phase 2*: journal writing twice a month starting from the beginning of classes until the last week of classes; *Phase 3*: ethnographic semi-structured interviews at the end of the participants' stay in the country, and *Phase 4*: focus groups prior to the participants' return to their home country. The results of the study show that: 1) the Egyptian scholars experienced intercultural stress due to the differences in terms of the dimensions of culture, value orientations, disconfirmed expectations, and the changes in the environment and routines; 2) all of the participants experienced symptoms of culture shock, although these were different from one individual to another; 3) there were a series of strategies used to deal with the intercultural differences, which also allowed most individuals to advance in the process of adaptation; 4) most individuals in the study entered the host culture with a degree of ethnocentrism; however, the advancement in the process of adaptation was different from one individual to another; 5) the variables affecting the participants' advancement in the process of adaptation included time, opportunities for interactions, outcome of interactions, level of preparedness (in terms of intercultural awareness and understanding), and expectations (and attitudes) prior to entering the host culture.

The description of the experience of the Egyptian educators in the United States should provide administrators, international student advisers, and academics with practical information they may use to develop or modify the curricula in programs

offered to Egyptian or other international scholars. Furthermore, the information gathered throughout the study could be used for preparing an intercultural training program pre and post departure for other educators enrolled in this and in similar programs.